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GRADUATE COLLEGE

THE ROLE OF METAPHYSICS, COMMON-SENSE, AND
INTERPRETATIONS OF CLASSICAL GREEK PHILOSOPHY
IN SIDGWICK'S UTILITARIANISM
AND WHITEHEAD'S VIRTUE ETHICS

A Dissertation

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

BY

KEVIN K. J. DURAND
Norman, Oklahoma
2000

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A Dissertation APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

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Table of Contents

Part I: The Project	1
Chapter 1. Introduction	1
Chapter 2. The Theorists in Summary: Henry Sidgwick. The Cambridge Moralists.	
Alfred North Whitehead	12
A. Henry Sidgwick	12
B. The Cambridge Moralists (Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Whewell, T. H. Green)	13
C. Whitehead's Positive View	13
Part II: Sidgwick and the Methods of Ethics	15
Chapter 1. Henry Sidgwick. Part One	15
A. Introduction	15
B. The Project	16
1. An Overview	16
2. <i>Methods of Ethics</i>	21
3. Aristotle and the Survey of "Common-sense"	26
4. The Good	32
5. Verification (Intuitive, Discursive, Social or Ecumenical)	38
6. Self-Evident Principles	40
7. The Argument in Outline	46
Chapter 2. The Utilitarian Enterprise (John Stuart Mill)	48
A. Mill's Anti-Platonism	48
B. Of What Sort of Proof the Principle of Utility is Susceptible	51
C. The Analogy Problem	66
D. The Quantity/Quality Problem	72
E. The Cambridge Moralists' Problem	77
F. The Whiteheadian Problem	80
Chapter 3. Henry Sidgwick. Part Two - The Dualism of Practical Reason	85
A. Comparison of Universal Hedonism, Ethical Egoism, and Intuitionism	87
1. Argument against Intuitionism	87
2. Argument for Universal Hedonism (Utilitarianism)	95
a. Hume on Sympathy	96
b. Sidgwick's Self-Evident Principles	102
c. The Self-Evident Principles and the Utility Doctrine	126
1) The Ultimate Good Principle	128
2) Against Virtue	129
3) Against Subjective Rightness of Will	129
4) The Principle of Ultimate Good	133
5) The Rational Beings Principle	135
6) The Principle of Utility	136
3. Ethical Egoism	136
a. The Ethical Egoist Argument	138
b. Intuitive and Social Verification of Ethical Egoism	143
c. Discursive Verification of Ethical Egoism	146
B. A Summary of the Dualism of Practical Reason	151
C. Objections	152
1. Gizycki	152
2. Sidgwick and the Ignobility of Ethical Egoism	155
3. C. D. Broad's Evaluation	156
D. Conclusion	159
Chapter 4. The Cambridge Moralists	159
A. Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Arguments Against Utilitarianism and in favor of the Cambridge Moralist Conclusion	161
B. William Whewell's Amended Coleridgian View	174
C. Thomas Hill Green and the Dualism of Practical Reason	182

D. Sidgwick and the Cambridge Moralists: On Intuitions as Indications of Humanity's Connection to the Divine	193
E. Whitehead and the Dualism of Practical Reason, Part One.	195
Part III: Whitehead Theory of Virtue	198
Chapter 1. Background	198
A. Summary of Whitehead's Negative Views	199
B. Background	202
C. Whitehead and the Greeks	207
1. The καλον	207
2. Final Causes	208
3. Harmony, Beauty, Freedom, and the 'End' of a Human Being	215
D. Guiding Metaphysical, Epistemological, and Ethical Principles	222
1. The Whitehead Quadrilateral	223
a. Coherence and Logical Consistency	223
b. Applicable and Adequate	225
c. Conclusion	227
2. The Method and Aim of Philosophy	228
3. Actual Entities, Eternal Objects, Prehensions, Societies, and the Self	241
4. "Mathematics and the Good", Whitehead and the Dualism of Practical Reason, Part Two	259
5. Relation between Metaphysics and Ethics	267
6. The Good	271
7. The Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness	276
Chapter 2. The Theory	283
A. Whitehead's Theory of Truth	283
B. Whitehead's Theory of Human Nature	303
C. The Constitution of Virtue	308
1. Wisdom and Intelligence	308
2. The Constitution and Acquisition of Virtue	312
a. Feeling and Insight	313
b. Feeling and Habituation	316
c. Subjective Aim and Foresight	317
d. Subjective Aim and Intention	323
e. Conclusion	325
D. Whitehead's Cardinal Virtues	326
1. Peace	327
2. Sympathy	330
3. Tolerance	333
4. Beauty	338
5. Wisdom	344
Chapter 3. Potential Problems	347
A. Introduction	347
1. Ideas	349
2. Ideas and Great Individuals	350
3. Example: Slavery to Freedom	352
B. Collective Action and Rational Choice	354
1. Rational Choice Theory	355
2. Collective Action Theory	357
3. The Whiteheadian Perspective	359
C. Johnson's Reading of Whitehead's View	361
D. Social Darwinism and the Myth of Progress	362
E. Education	367
Part IV: Conclusion	370

Abstract

Whitehead's metaphysical and ethical arguments accomplish two related goals. The first is a criticism of modern ethical theory - the Utilitarian views of Sidgwick and Mill and the Theistic Intuitionism of the Cambridge Moralists (itself founded on Kantian Deontological commitments). I argue that Whitehead's rejection of these views depends on a rejection of the subject/predicate substance metaphysics inherited by Sidgwick, et al, from Aristotle, a rejection of the method of philosophizing that is drawn from 19th-century interpretations of Aristotle, and an amended view of the role of common-sense in speculative philosophy. From these negative views, along with his positive metaphysical, ethical, and methodological commitments, I show that Whitehead provides a theory of virtue that replaces its Utilitarian and Intuitionist competitors and stands as a rival to generally Aristotelian virtue ethics.

The Role of Metaphysics, Common-Sense, and Interpretations of Classical Greek Philosophy in Sidgwick's Utilitarianism and Whitehead's Virtue Ethics

Part I: The Project

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Henry Sidgwick is one of the most influential and least remembered philosophers of the 19th and 20th centuries. His sphere of influence includes opponents - e.g., the Cambridge Moralists; commentators from a variety of philosophical schools - e.g., C.D. Broad, J. B. Schneewind, Terry Irwin, and Nicholas White; students - e.g., G.E. Moore; and later admirers - e.g., John Rawls. In the two latter cases (Moore and Rawls), it is perhaps easiest to measure the extent of Sidgwick's influence. Moore's Principia Ethica and Rawls' Theory of Justice make more references to Sidgwick's Methods of Ethics than to any other work; the two central themes of Principia Ethica are developments of themes explored in Methods of Ethics, and Rawls writes in the preface to the seventh and final edition of Methods that this "fundamental work is the clearest and most accessible formulation of what we may call 'the classical utilitarian doctrine.'" He continues:

What makes *The Methods of Ethics* so important is that Sidgwick is more aware than other classical authors of the many difficulties this doctrine faces, and he attempts to deal with them in a consistent and thorough way while never departing from the strict doctrine, as for example, did J. S. Mill. Sidgwick's book is the most philosophically profound of the strictly classical works and it may be said to bring to a close that period of the tradition.¹

¹ John Rawls, Preface to Sidgwick's The Methods of Ethics, 7th ed., (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1981), v.

Beyond these accolades, C. D. Broad adds that "Sidgwick's *Methods of Ethics* seems to me to be on the whole the best treatise on moral theory that has ever been written, and to be one of the English philosophical classics."² However, one needs do but little survey of the late 20th-century philosophical texts (from Introductions to Philosophy through graduate curricula through professional journals) to discover that except for the few mentioned above, Sidgwick himself is little remembered.

In both contemporary remembrance and influence, Alfred North Whitehead shares Sidgwick's fate. Whitehead's influence, like Sidgwick's, extends to opponents - e.g., W. V. O. Quine; commentators from a somewhat more narrow range of philosophical traditions though a somewhat broader range of academic ones³, e.g., Lewis Ford, Marjorie Suchocki, Charles Hartshorne, among others; students - e.g., Bertrand Russell; and later admirers - e.g., John Cobb, Quine and Schubert Ogden. As with Sidgwick, Whitehead's influence is clear - Quine, for example, has written that Whitehead is one of the foremost pioneers in the field of logic since Aristotle.⁴ Again, though, a brief survey of philosophical literature of the late 20th-century is illustrative of how little Whitehead is remembered.

While their respective influence and accomplishments are unquestionable, the causes of their unfortunate fate in philosophical memory are debatable. While I will not

² C. D. Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory*, (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1930), 143.

³ Whitehead is considerably more popular and more widely read in theological circles, mathematics, and education than in contemporary philosophical circles.

⁴ For a surprisingly detailed summary of Whitehead and Russell's *Principia Mathematica*, see W. V. O. Quine's "Whitehead and the Rise of Modern Logic", *The Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead*, Paul Arthur Schilpp, ed., Tudor Publishing

go into this overmuch, I suspect that, in at least Whitehead's case, his fate is largely attributable to style. Whitehead writes in an intricate style reminiscent of his mathematical training. Process and Reality begins with definitions, categories, relations, and postulates from which the fuller view, complete with schemes of implication that range over a tremendous breadth of subjects, is then developed. Structurally, Process and Reality is a stylistic cousin of Spinoza's Ethics. Because of his highly compressed style, reading Whitehead is very much like reading a mathematics text; one is best prepared if one approaches the task with pencil, pad, erasers, and patience at the ready to fully grasp the implications drawn from the fundamental concepts. To read Whitehead in a cursory way is to almost insure misunderstanding. Beyond this difficulty, Whitehead's "philosophical" works⁵ were mostly written in the latter part of the second decade of the 20th century through the 1930's. This, of course, coincides with the rise of the positivists, analysts, philosophers of science and logic, the Vienna Circle, and philosophers of language. In many ways, these trends exemplify a method that is antithetical to Whitehead's. These trends in 20th century philosophy accept as given philosophical commitments that are diametrically opposed to those advanced by Whitehead.

Company, New York. 125-164 (especially, 124, 130-135).

⁵ There is a commonplace division of Whitehead's works into mathematical and scientific on the one hand, and philosophical on the other. I find this division artificial at best and damaging to Whiteheadian scholarship at worst. Whitehead does not make a distinction between his efforts in the various fields in which he writes. Whether mathematics, philosophy of science, philosophy of education, metaphysics, epistemology or some other field, his self-professed aim is always philosophical. Or, in simpler terms, Whitehead's career does not divide easily into Mathematics (early) and Philosophy (late), though his teaching career is so divided. Rather, when writing mathematics, Whitehead understands himself to be also a philosopher; and when writing philosophy, he takes himself to be at the same time a mathematician. Reading Whitehead in this way makes his stylistic

This dissertation will, at various times, explore the question of philosophical method in considerably more detail. These first points hopefully serve to set the stage for what is to come. The discussions of philosophical method and historical ethical theory (Sidgwick, Hume, Mill, and the Cambridge Moralists William Whewell and T. H. Green) will be done in the service of arguing more broadly for three theses: (1) that the work of Sidgwick and Whitehead combine to dispatch Millian Utilitarianism, Ethical Egoism, and Theistic Intuitionism from the field, (2) that their work also makes quite clear the problems that a substance metaphysics roughly in the tradition of Aristotle cause for Modern approaches to “common-sense” ethical theory, and (3) that Whitehead’s philosophical views, while perhaps not as obviously amenable to “common-sense” at first, in fact suggest a set of ethical commitments that themselves support a view of ethics that a) can be contrasted with Aristotle’s views, b) can be shown to solve Sidgwick’s “Dualism of Practical Reason” dilemma, and c) exemplifies the proper relationship between speculative philosophy and common-sense intuitions.

This brings us to the questions that vexed Sidgwick: “Is common-sense morality consistent? Does it provide a basis for any particular ethical theory? If so, which one?” Thanks in large part to the work of Henry Sidgwick, these three questions were inescapable for those who sought to engage in ethical theorizing in the 19th and early 20th centuries. For Sidgwick, the answers are “No”, “Yes”, and “Both Utilitarianism and Ethical Egoism”. The answer to the first question depends on his answers to the second and third. Because practical reason can be shown to provide a basis for two contrary

“eccentricities” more accessible.

views, it must ultimately be inconsistent. Sidgwick takes practical reason to provide such a basis because he thinks he has shown that both theories are equally reasonable on a general survey of common-sense intuitions.⁶ Because of this “Dualism of Practical Reason,” the effort to impose some system on the ensemble of moral intuitions derived from common sense is doomed to failure.

Sidgwick’s argument is introduced into the ongoing debate between the Deontological theorists and Consequentialist theorists of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Similarities abound between the two camps. For example, two standard views of Aristotle’s work dominate the period: (1) Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics and Eudemian Ethics are works of “common-sense” ethical theorizing, and (2) Aristotelian “substance” metaphysics are acceptable without much comment. As a result, both camps tend to have a very similar approach to the data provided by common sense, though their conclusions are obviously at odds with one another. Some further elaboration is undoubtedly called for here. Generally speaking, it is accepted that the term “common sense” covers a

⁶ To avoid confusion, it should be noted that “common-sense” and “practical reason” are used interchangeably, for the most part. This is in keeping with Sidgwick’s use. This oddity will be addressed at length in various places later. Here, however, I will only point out that the rough equivalence should indicate that Sidgwick does not mean by “common-sense” what one might first expect, nor by “practical reason” what might be initially thought. “Common-sense” suffers from a host of meanings in common use. The person, who after driving around town, exits his car and reaches down to touch the tailpipe to see if it is hot is said to have displayed a lack of common sense. Common sense is contrasted with formal education, often to suggest that a correlation between the two does not exist or is rare. And common sense is used in a finer, more philosophical way by Sidgwick to denote two things: (1) that there exists a particular nature common to humans by which human beings perceive the world around them and (2) that one aspect of this nature is the capacity to reason about the presentations of sense experience. Common philosophical use of “practical reason” is more similar to (2) than to (1), to be sure. However, Sidgwick connects (1) and (2) as aspects of “common-sense” and

multitude of things, including “practical reason”. Indeed, the two phrases are often used interchangeably.⁷ “Common-sense” is understood in the following way – it is that sense that is available to all human beings (indeed, that is an inescapable part of being human). In other words, it is common in the sense that it is common to all human beings and fundamental to what it means to appropriately affix the label “human” to a being. “Sense” is similarly broadreaching in scope. It is understood in at least two ways; the first as referring to the faculty of sensory experience and the second as referring to the faculty of reason.⁸

While the moral philosophers of the period do at times differ with Aristotle (or their interpretation of Aristotle), they almost universally accept a version of Aristotelian “substance”, generally understood as “primary substance”.⁹ Three aspects of Aristotelian interpretation are of importance for this work. The first is that the actual world has ontological priority to any abstracted “world”. This is to say that the category “tree” is

“practical reason” and then uses these two terms interchangeably, for the most part.

⁷ This can quite obviously cause some difficulty in interpretation as “common sense” and “practical reason” generally stake out very distinct, and different, areas in philosophy of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. However, it is important to remember that, with some fairly minor exceptions, the major philosophical schools of the day – the Cambridge Moralists, consequentialists like Sidgwick, et al, – use the two terms interchangeably.

⁸ This latter is the reason that the two terms “common sense” and “practical reason” are often used synonymously. Whether or not such an understanding of “common sense” is truly Aristotelian is an open question. However, it is not completely relevant for this project. All that is pertinent is that this sort of view is both the standard use of the term “common sense” and that this use is attributed, almost universally, to Aristotle.

⁹ Again, scholars of ancient philosophy may very well cringe at the often less than critical use of the phrase “primary substance” by the schools of moral philosophy. There was some recognition that Aristotle’s work is not univocal on the matter of substance. Similar caveats must be lodged relative to the use of Aristotelian metaphysics by the thinkers of this period.

ontologically dependent on particular trees in the actual world from which the abstract idea “tree” is taken. The second aspect is that “substances” are static. The final aspect is that one philosophically important question concerns the manner and character of change of substances, recalling that substance is essentially static.

A final point of commonality between the various competing moral philosophers is that each takes his respective theories to form the true systematization of common sense morality. Almost without exception, the resurgent emphasis on the interpretation of classical greek philosophy (particularly Aristotle and Plato) is used in the service of championing one’s view. Surprisingly, given this resurgence, another trait shared by both camps is that Virtue theory was largely ignored.

The work of Alfred North Whitehead provides a helpful point of departure to examine these issues, in no small part because he departs in fundamental ways from these 19th- and early 20th-century philosophers at each of these three critical junctures: the role of common-sense, the method of analysis, and virtue. I will only briefly address these here in order to suggest the direction in which this project is going.

It may seem odd to assert that Whitehead found “common-sense” useful in an era where this view was almost universally accepted. All of the major philosophers of the period went to some length (some rather extensively so) to establish the relationship between their speculative efforts and the experience of common-sense. However, Whitehead is nearly unique in what he understands that relation to be. All of the philosophers discussed herein hold that common-sense provides the raw, prephilosophical data that their philosophical ruminations seek to interpret and explain.

Great attention is given to how this prephilosophical presentation of the experiential data is explained and systematized by schemes metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical. However, the finished philosophical product often bears little resemblance to the prephilosophical data or the questions that arose from them that the philosophical scheme was supposed to address, make clearer, or solve. Given the difficulty of the significant disjunction between beginning and conclusion, there are two avenues. One might suppose that the philosophical speculations and systematizations have gone awry; or that the data themselves were misleading, illusory, or corrupt. The task in this latter case is to render the data more amenable to the conclusions. This is the tack taken by many during the period, to one degree or another. In other words, the abstractions of philosophical reasoning are taken to be more informative and more revealing of the world than the concrete particulars which give rise to them. Whitehead finds such reasoning specious, coining the informal Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness to deal with precisely this problem.¹⁰ Of the philosophical outlook that leads to the fallacy, he writes:

[There exists] a false estimate of logical procedure in respect to certainty, and in respect to premises. Philosophy has been haunted by the unfortunate notion that its method is dogmatically to indicate premises which are severally clear, distinct, and certain; and to erect upon those

¹⁰ Whitehead argues that the “chief error in philosophy is overstatement.” (Process and Reality, 7) The Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness addresses this error. The fallacy is committed when one “neglects the degree of abstraction involved when an actual entity is considered merely so far as it exemplifies certain categories of thought.” (7-8). That is, when one limits the scope of investigation of an actual entity only to those of its features that fit into abstracted categories (and thus, ignore those features of the actual entity that do not fit nicely into those categories). It is also committed when one takes things like categories that are in reality abstractions from the actual world and assumes them to be concrete features of the actual world.

premises a deductive system of thought. ... Metaphysical categories are not dogmatic statements of the obvious; they are tentative formulations.¹¹

Given this, it is not surprising that Whitehead would take the alternative tack when confronted with a disconnect between original data and philosophical conclusions. Simply put, such a discrepancy can, and probably should, be seen as something that is so much the worse for the philosophical conclusions.¹² So, on Whitehead's view, common-sense is not merely the data of ethical theorizing, it is also a corrective of those theories.

Also common to the ethical mainstream of the period was a general acceptance, often quite naïvely, of a more or less developed view of Aristotelian substance metaphysics; particularly its subject-predicate form of propositions. However, Whitehead explicitly rejects such a form because it leaves out, on his view, a great deal of what actually matters in the actual world; namely the relations between 'individual substances'. He writes, "with this metaphysical presupposition [that the subject-predicate form of a statement conveys a truth which is metaphysically ultimate], the relations

¹¹ Whitehead, Process and Reality, (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 8.

¹² This should not be taken as some sort of anti-intellectual slant, nor should Whitehead be read as somehow advocating a position that could be characterized by naïve readings of "common-sense" as the final arbiter of philosophical systems. Rather, Whitehead is making the point that "in philosophical discussion, the merest hint of dogmatic certainty as to finality of statement is an exhibition of folly." Whitehead grasps "how shallow, puny, and imperfect are efforts to sound the depths in the nature of things," (Process and Reality, p. xiv.) and thus displays an attitude of humility before the facts of experience that he finds lacking in the philosophical circles of his day. For Whitehead, the experiences of "common-sense" are corrective of philosophical error, though philosophical reflection can at the same time make clearer the implications of those experiences. This relationship between the abstractions of philosophy and the concreteness of experience is dynamic, with each shaping the other; however, there remains, at the end of the day, the stubborn facts of the world that philosophical schemes ignore at their peril. It should also not be assumed that Whitehead is alone in recognizing this dynamic relationship. Rather, in Whitehead we see an attempt to incorporate this

between individual substances constitute metaphysical nuisances: there is no place for them.” It is precisely this “place” that Whitehead is trying to emphasize. On Whitehead’s view, the method of analysis that takes static substances as primitive and then seeks to explain change or relations between ‘substances’ gets the process exactly backwards. This is to say, according to Whitehead, one must take change (or process) as primitive.

The final point of departure is essentially a reiteration of the first. For Whitehead, the ethical theories that are in competition with his own fail the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness test, generally for two reasons - the misuse or ignoring of common-sense, inappropriate metaphysical commitments, or both. Whitehead advances a view of character and character development that takes quite seriously both functions of common-sense - its role as prephilosophical data to be analyzed and its role as a check against abstractions run amok. Though never formally finalized, his system takes virtue to be the central feature of an ethical theory that can interpret, analyze, and systematize the intuitions of common-sense and that can withstand the weight of their scrutiny. At the same time, it is a theory that presents itself as a competitor to roughly Aristotelian styles of virtue ethics because the metaphysical commitments on which the theory rests are fundamentally different.

These departures of Whitehead’s are also informative with respect to three important historical philosophical issues: (1) the development and criticism of ethical theory in the 19th and early 20th century, particularly with regard to the interpretation of

relationship and the difficulties that arise from it into his larger philosophical view.

classical greek philosophy, (2) the relationship between metaphysics and ethics in that development and critique, and (3) possible solutions to what Sidgwick called the Dualism of Practical Reason. For Whitehead, (a) one need not conclude that practical reason is inconsistent, much less incoherent,¹³ (b) the compartmentalization of ethics and metaphysics will fall victim to the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness, and (c) common-sense morality can best be incorporated into a systematized ethical theory only by a theory which takes character development and the virtues as central.

Whitehead understands his project to follow Aristotle in style but not Aristotelianism in substance. He is not unique in this approach; such methodologies were commonplace in the late 19th and early 20th century. Henry Sidgwick in his defense of Utilitarianism and the Cambridge Moralists (William Whewell, F.D. Maurice, et al) in their arguments against Utilitarianism and their defense of a Theistic Intuitionism proceed with the view that they are following Aristotle, stylistically, and replacing Aristotelianism, substantively, with an ethical theory divined from the common-sense rationality of Victorian England. As a successor to this debate, it is not surprising that a great deal of the Whiteheadian corpus is a response, both directly and indirectly, to the work of these noted moralists. Which is why it is somewhat odd that Whitehead is thought to have been strictly a metaphysician, philosopher of science, and epistemologist with little to say of ethics. Given his critical work on the utilitarianisms of Mill and Sidgwick, the deontology of Kant and Green, and the theological ruminations of the

¹³ In fact, this is precisely the wrong sort of question.

Cambridge Moralists, it is fairly safe to assume that Whitehead has a least critical things to say. I shall actually advance the stronger claim that he has a developed, positive view.

Chapter 2. The Theorists: Henry Sidgwick, The Cambridge Moralists, Alfred North Whitehead

A. Henry Sidgwick

Methodologically, Sidgwick takes his project to be the Victorian equivalent of Aristotle's ethical works. As both J. B. Schneewind and Terence Irwin have pointed out, Sidgwick sets out to analyze and systematize the intuitions of the common-sense morality of Victorian England. Sidgwick takes this effort to provide the same service for the Victorians that Aristotle provided for classical Greece; namely, an analysis and systematizing of the common-sense moral intuitions of the day. However, Sidgwick has a further end in mind. Sidgwick's end is to advance and defend a conception of Utilitarianism against two traditional rivals, Ethical Egoism and Intuitionism. Ultimately, he takes his effort to be a fruitful failure. On the one hand, he dismisses Intuitionism as less than viable and provides a positive argument in defense of Utilitarianism. On the other hand, he observes that his best argument for Utilitarianism does not eliminate all of the competitors. Ethical Egoism remains a "reasonable alternative" at the end of the day.

The positive contribution should not be underestimated. As John Rawls has pointed out, Sidgwick provides perhaps the best defense of Utilitarianism to date; far superior to that of John Stuart Mill. I agree with this conclusion. However, I will show that Sidgwick's argument depends at crucial moments on some of Mill's work. I will then show how Sidgwick avoids some of the pitfalls that bedevil Mill. Also crucial to

Sidgwick's positive argument is his reliance on Hume's concept of Sympathy. I show how he incorporates Hume's notion for his own ends. Finally, in this chapter I address two criticisms of the Dualism of Practical Reason. The first criticism combines criticisms made by Thomas Hill Green and Terence Irwin. The second draws together several Whiteheadian criticisms.

B. The Cambridge Moralists (Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Whewell, T. H. Green)

Sidgwick and Whitehead share a common foil - the Cambridge Moralists of the 19th century. The Moralists present a fairly united front both in their attacks on Utilitarianism and in their defense of an Intuitionist alternative. Simply put, the Moralists conclude that "morality provides the crucial evidence that the best explanation of the universe as we experience it is a theistic and probably Christian one."¹⁴ This conclusion comes at the end of a survey of common-sense morality. After discussing Coleridge's view (which the other two share in one respect or another), I will outline the views of William Whewell and Green, who argue against Sidgwick's Utilitarianism and the Dualism of Practical Reason, respectively. I will then turn to Sidgwick's criticisms of the Cambridge Moralists, especially Coleridge and Whewell. Finally, I argue that Whitehead's rejection of the Dualism of Practical Reason is quite similar to the position advanced by Green, albeit with some important amendments that save Whitehead's view from the criticism he levels at Sidgwick and the Cambridge Moralists, including Green.

C. Whitehead's positive view

¹⁴ J. B. Schneewind, "Sidgwick and the Cambridge Moralists", Essays on Henry

Having touched on Whitehead's negative view in the preceding sections, I turn to his positive views in Part III. Whitehead takes the work of the early Moderns ("that phase of philosophic thought which began with Descartes and ended with Hume") and the "two founders of all Western thought" (Plato and Aristotle) as central to this project. Like Sidgwick and the Cambridge Moralists before him, Whitehead takes his project to be Aristotelian in style. This similarity includes the recognition of a connection between metaphysical and ethical commitments. Ideally, for Whitehead, one's ethical theory will grow out of the fundamental notions one holds regarding human nature, the constitution of the universe, truth, etc. Whatever failures may have plagued Aristotle (and Plato), Whitehead thinks that they were right about this point. Certain modern philosophers, notably Sidgwick, fail to recognize this foundational commitment and as a result fall into error. Thus, we can interpret Whitehead's work (e.g., Process and Reality) as an effort to expound as clearly as possible the metaphysical assumptions that undergird his own ethical views.¹⁵ From his vantage point, Whitehead is able to argue that contrary to Sidgwick, practical reason is coherent.

Finally, I will show how Whitehead's interpretations of final causes, mathematics, "the Good," truth, harmony, beauty, and facts and values contribute to his view that the proper conception of ethical theory is a virtue approach. Having shown this, I will turn briefly to Whitehead's Cardinal Virtues: Peace, Fellow-feeling, Tolerance, Beauty, and

Sidgwick, Bart Schultz, ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 104.

¹⁵ Clearly he himself holds this view. He writes "one of the motives of a complete cosmology [is] to construct a system of ideas which brings the aesthetic, moral, and religious interests into relation with those concepts of the world which have their origin in natural science."

Wisdom. I will conclude the project by examining three potential objections to Whitehead's views; objections that seem to strike at the heart of the project rather than nibble on the periphery. Ultimately, I take these objections to fail, but they are nevertheless striking examples of the ways in which one might critique Whitehead in particular and any process ethics in general.

Part II: Sidgwick and the Methods of Ethics

Chapter 1: Henry Sidgwick, part one

A. Introduction

John Rawls claims that Henry Sidgwick provides the best argument for a classical Utilitarian system that has been advanced to date. He writes that it is "the clearest and most accessible formulation" of classical utilitarianism. At the same time, Sidgwick is "more aware than other classical authors of the difficulties this doctrine faces." Unlike Mill, he attempts "to deal with [the doctrine's many difficulties] in a consistent and thorough way while never departing from the strict doctrine." Whatever the case may be regarding Sidgwick's place in the pantheon of utilitarian theorists, Sidgwick himself takes the project of his Methods of Ethics ultimately to be a failure. In the first edition, his last paragraphs are a self-proclamation of his failure. In subsequent drafts he deleted these last lines and qualified his failure more narrowly, but he does not abandon the view that ultimately his attempt to establish utilitarianism as the sole view that coherently systematizes the intuitions of common-sense morality fails. It fails because the most thorough argument fails to rule out all of utilitarianism's competitors; and worse, fails to show how ethical egoism, as Sidgwick conceives this category, is any less plausible than

utilitarianism. However, this failure is merely symptomatic of a more insidious problem. Since there are two methods of ethics that explain and systematize the intuitions of common-sense morality equally well, and since they are mutually incompatible, Sidgwick concludes that practical reason itself is inconsistent in its moral recommendations. In this section, I examine Sidgwick's peculiar formulation of the Principle of Utility and his defense of utilitarianism.

B. The Project

1. An Overview

One of Sidgwick's primary goals in the *Methods of Ethics* is to

1. Establish Utilitarianism as the only ethical theory that adequately systematizes the intuitions of common-sense morality.

Sidgwick goes on to write that his object is "to expound as clearly and fully as my limits will allow the different methods of Ethics that I find implicit in our common moral reasoning; to point out their mutual relations; and where they seem to conflict, to define the issue as much as possible." In other words, the book is "an examination, at once expository and critical, of the different methods of obtaining reasoned convictions as to what ought to be done which are to be found - either explicit or implicit - in the moral consciousness of mankind generally: and which, from time to time, have developed, either singly or in combination, by individual thinkers, and worked up into systems now historical"

Sidgwick's other primary goal is to

2. Refute the Cambridge Moralists, particularly where theistic assumptions are required to complete an ethical theory.¹⁶

Sidgwick approaches the two primary goals simultaneously because the goals are closely interrelated. If Sidgwick were able to accomplish (1) in the way that he proposes, (2) would be accomplished along the way. As we shall see, however, accomplishing (2), where Sidgwick meets a great deal of success, does not accomplish (1), where he meets markedly less.

Sidgwick lumps all of the ethical theorizing that has gone before him (as well as that of his contemporaries) into three categories¹⁷, each of which is labeled a “Method of Ethics”. The three Methods are Ethical Egoism, Intuitional Morality (also known as Dogmatic Intuitional Morality), and Universal Hedonism. As noted above, the Cambridge Moralists are fitted into the Intuitional Morality category, along with Kant and Aristotle. That such disparate views can belong to the same category is enough to give one pause, and Sidgwick’s inclusion of Aristotle in the Intuitional Morality category has been one area in which he has been almost universally criticized.¹⁸

¹⁶ Sidgwick was a classics teacher who turned to philosophy, at least in large part, to make up his mind about Christianity and its claims about faith. In this, he shares a common career trajectory (encompassing many of the same questions) with T. H. Green, one of the more accomplished of the Cambridge Moralists and one of Sidgwick’s philosophical opponents.

¹⁷ I should note here that he does not include Psychological Egoism, at least as he conceives of it, in any of the three categories. Rather, he advances an argument against those who would hold some version of Psychological Egoism separately (and near the beginning of the work). We will deal with his Psychological Egoism argument a bit later.

¹⁸ See Bart Schultz, “Introduction”, Essays on Henry Sidgwick, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p13ff. for a very nice discussion of the criticism that has been leveled at Sidgwick for his inclusion of Aristotle in this category.

The category of Universal Hedonism is somewhat less disparate in its membership. Here, Sidgwick includes such thinkers as John Stuart Mill, Jeremy Bentham, James Mill, and John Austin, to name a few. Sidgwick, whose work is more closely aligned with Bentham than with J.S. Mill, includes his own work in this category.

More controversy attends the category of Ethical Egoism. Here Sidgwick includes the work of Thomas Hobbes as an example of Ethical Egoism. It is this inclusion that has drawn the most comment, at least in part because Hobbes is often categorized as being a psychological egoist (by David Hume, for example). Yet Sidgwick explicitly excludes psychological egoism from the category. Psychological Egoism is dismissed almost at the outset and not even granted status as a proper Method of Ethics. These issues will be addressed in somewhat more length later.

While Sidgwick eliminates Intuitional Morality as a competitor to Universal Hedonism and does not eliminate Ethical Egoism, not all of the varieties of Universal Hedonism or Ethical Egoism are left standing at the end of the day. For example, Sidgwick finds J.S. Mill's work untenable precisely because of Mill's inclusion of quality as a normative criterion. He also finds Bentham's work lacking because Bentham does not always take seriously the many difficulties that a purely quantitative account of Utilitarianism faces. Similar caveats can be offered relative to the varieties of Ethical Egoism.

If Sidgwick is to accomplish his two goals - establishing Utilitarianism as the only ethical theory that adequately systematizes the intuitions of common-sense morality and refuting the Cambridge Moralists - he thinks he must first establish some critical tools. The

first of these - categories or Methods - I have briefly mentioned above. Two others are a working understanding of “common-sense” and a set of evaluative principles that he calls “real self-evident principles.” These latter principles are Equity, Rational Prudence, and Rational Benevolence.

For Sidgwick, “really self-evident” principles are those which (a) can withstand careful reflection, (b) are clear and precise, (c) mutually consistent, and (d) capable of eliciting agreement from all competent judges.¹⁹ Each of the last three criteria are also given more formal monikers. The process of determining clarity and precision Sidgwick calls Intuitive Verification; the process of determining consistency is known as Discursive Verification; and the process of agreement is called Social or Ecumenical Verification.

For Sidgwick, Utilitarianism ultimately follows from these self-evident principles along with common-sense morality. Sidgwick viewed classical utilitarianism “as following from three principles each self-evident in its own right,” namely, the principles of equity, rational prudence, and rational benevolence. From these three principles, “when combined with the principle that, as reasonable beings, we are bound to aim at good generally and not at any particular part of it,” the principle of utility followed.²⁰

¹⁹ One might express surprise that Sidgwick lays out what amounts to an algorithmic process for determining “really self-evident” principles. It seems, at least on the surface, that if Principle A must undergo such rigorous testing, then it is not really self-evident at all but relies on the evidence marshalled in the course of the investigation. This is, of course, supposing that by “self-evident” one means “have need of no other evidence for its validity than itself”. However, it seems that what Sidgwick means to do here is to differentiate between those principles which seem to be self-evident given a cursory evaluation but are not when evaluated rigorously and those principles which actually are self-evident, though perhaps fairly complex and thus not immediately clear as self-evident.

²⁰ Schultz, 18

Given this, an understanding of the use of “common-sense” in 19th century ethical theory is clearly critical to Sidgwick’s arguments. Sidgwick writes of his objective in the *Methods* that it is “to expound as clearly and fully as my limits will allow the different methods of Ethics that I find implicit in our *common moral reasoning*, to point out their mutual relations; and where they seem to conflict, to define the issue as much as possible.”²¹ Thus, a grasp of what he takes to be the content of “common moral reasoning” is clearly of great importance.

Here Schneewind is helpful. He writes,

“the central thought of the *Methods of Ethics* is that morality is the embodiment of the demands reason makes on practice under the conditions of human life, and that the problems of philosophical ethics are the problems of showing how practical reason is articulated into these demands.”²²

This emphasis on “practical reason” is not unique to Sidgwick. While it is true that Sidgwick thought of himself as following Aristotle in certain respects, it is also true that such connections were drawn by a great many philosophers of the period. That is to say, a great many of Sidgwick’s contemporaries also thought of themselves as Aristotelians, systematizing the prephilosophical intuitions of their day. For his own part, Sidgwick felt that if Aristotle had given us “the Common-Sense Morality of Greece, reduced to consistency by careful comparison,” then why should we not do the “same for *our* morality

²¹ Emphasis mine. One also sees the application of the criteria for testing “real self-evidence” in this passage. The process of expounding “clearly and fully” is exemplary of the Intuitive Verification process and the discovery of mutual relations (both positive and negative) is exemplary of the Discursive Verification process.

²² Schultz, 11 and J. B. Schneewind, Sidgwick’s Ethics and Victorian Moral Philosophy, 229.

here and now, in the same manner of impartial reflection on current opinion”²³ We will investigate the lengths to which Sidgwick goes to make this comparison, including the places where the analogy clearly fails to achieve all that Sidgwick hopes for it.

Unfortunately for Sidgwick, he tries to reconcile utilitarianism with its traditional opponents, finds ethical egoism to be equally reasonable, and winds up arguing that, “because of this, no full reconciliation of the various rational methods for reaching moral decisions is possible and therefore that the realm of practical reason is probably incoherent.”²⁴ His self-professed failure to show that his Utility Doctrine is the ultimate ethical organizing principle notwithstanding, his allegiance remained fully in its camp. His difficulty is to demonstrate that this allegiance to rational benevolence is itself justified. To do so would have the effect of establishing utilitarianism as the only theory in the field. This he could not do.

2. Methods of Ethics

As we have seen, Sidgwick categorizes ethical theories into three Methods of Ethics - Ethical Egoism, Intuitionist Morality, and Universal Hedonism. But, how is a method different from a principle? For example, when is operating within the scope of Universal Hedonism different, in fact, from operating under the Utilitarian Principle (however that might be defined by a particular Utilitarian)?

The difficulty here is more a matter of a close relation between two concepts than anything detrimental to his project. Sidgwick states that a method is a rational procedure for determining what it is right to do. On this matter, I follow Schneewind who argues that

²³ *ibid.*, 24.

a principle asserts that some property which acts may or may not possess is an ultimate reason for the rightness of acts. A method is a regular practice of using some property of acts as the property from whose presence or absence one infers that specific acts are or are not right. Since a principle says nothing about a procedure for reaching such conclusions about the rightness of specific acts, and a method says nothing about the ultimate reason justifying the use of the property through which such conclusions are reached, each plainly requires the other.²⁵

Schneewind goes on to argue that

the relationship between a method and a principle ... is a direct, or logical one; the property appealed to by the method is not merely evidential or criterial but is the right-making property. Thus, if, say, the principle is that right acts are those which produce general happiness, the method must involve identifying the presence of that property, and not merely some indicator or it.²⁶

This is not the only difficulty for Sidgwick's "methods". On first glance, it may seem quite an audacious stretch to suppose that all of the ethical systematizing from the ancient greeks to the Victorians can be congregated under three heads. Historically this is one of the areas in which Sidgwick has drawn some well-founded criticism.

Sidgwick has been roundly criticized for the enormous scope of his category headings. Quite controversial is his inclusion of virtue ethics (or "perfectionist" ethics) under the heading Intuitional Morality. Sidgwick recognizes this difficulty because he offers a brief justification of it. He argues that what is at issue is moral excellence. Intuitional Morality, he argues, is "the view of ethics which regards as the practically ultimate end of moral actions their conformity to certain rules or dictates of Duty unconditionally prescribed [eg., veracity, promise keeping, justice, etc.]." He then goes on to suggest that this view of ethics holds that "we can discern certain general rules with really

²⁴ Schneewind, 121.

²⁵ Schneewind, 95.

²⁶ *ibid.*

clear and finally valid intuition". As Schultz points out, this description would entail that Intuitional Morality "would seem mostly to cover the deontological alternatives to consequentialism, egoistic or utilitarian"²⁷. This is precisely the result that Sidgwick is after. If he can show that the connecting principle that makes all of these quite disparate theories fit into a single heading is itself flawed, then he can eliminate a large number of Universal Hedonism's supposed competitors in one fell swoop.²⁸ However, confusion is spawned here, as Schultz goes on to say, "precisely because of his assimilation of perfectionism, surely a teleological theory, to this method." Which is to say that Kant and Aristotle both reside in this category; an uneasy marriage at best. Given the disparity between the population of Intuitional Morality, it seems likely that Sidgwick could have included Psychological Egoism and Ethical Egoism (which are closer thematically than the teleological, non-teleological, and deontological denizens of the Intuitional Morality heading) had he thought that Psychological Egoism expressed a coherent ethical principle. Given the exclusion of Psychological Egoism from membership in any of the categories, one is left to conclude that Sidgwick felt that it does not embody a proper ethical principle.

Against Psychological Egoism, Sidgwick invokes the work of David Hume and Bishop Butler with little further comment.²⁹ However, he takes some time to discuss

²⁷ Schultz, 13.

²⁸ As all of the Cambridge Moralists fall into this category, it is convenient that with a single argument he can dismiss them all, and thus accomplish his second primary goal.

²⁹ Again from Baier: "the available empirical evidence seems to refute even this psychological egoism of merely motivated behavior. Many normal people appear quite frequently to be concerned not with their own greatest good but with the attainment of something the pursuit of which they know or believe to be to their own detriment." 198.

Psychological **Hedonism**, which he takes to be a special case of Psychological Egoism.³⁰

This move is not without controversy. If C. D. Broad is right, and Psychological Hedonism is a species of Psychological Egoism, then the dismissal of Psychological Egoism will, necessarily, involve the dismissal of Psychological Hedonism, though the converse is not true. However, a slightly different interpretation may serve to make clear why Sidgwick takes this tack. In analyzing the group of theories that would fall under the head "Psychological Egoism", Sidgwick seems to find that one brand of Psychological Egoism almost seems to express a principle that is similar to the one expressed by his own brand of Universal Hedonism and to its surviving competitor, Ethical Egoism. The aim of Psychological Hedonism seems to be congruent with that of Ethical Egoism because in both cases the doctrine would claim that "it is my duty to aim at the greatest possible amount of happiness in my own life, and to treat all other objects as subservient to this end."³¹ However, it is odd to claim that it is "my duty" to aim at the greatest happiness for myself if it is at the same time psychologically impossible for me to do otherwise. It is this oddity on which Sidgwick trades. Sidgwick holds the view that no purely psychological theory

³⁰ C. D. Broad agrees with this view when he writes that Psychological Hedonism is "a particular species" of Psychological Egoism. He goes on to say that "it is not the only species; one might quite well be a Psychological Egoist without being a Psychological Hedonist." I think this is consistent with the interpretation of Sidgwick that I am advancing. Simply put, Sidgwick dismisses Psychological Egoism almost out of hand with the exception that he gives some attention to the species of Psychological Egoism known as Psychological Hedonism. However, even in this latter case, he does not include the view under one of the headings of methods of ethics. Further, given the failure of Psychological Hedonism to express a coherent ethical principle, which he thinks he has shown, this lends greater credibility to my interpretation. This is so because ~~even this lone possibility from the pantheon of theories that could fall under the heading Psychological Egoism fails to survive muster; and it does so precisely because the principle upon which it is founded turns out to be one that Sidgwick thinks incoherent.~~

(which he takes Psychological Egoism and Psychological Hedonism to be) can entail any purely ethical theory (which he takes all of the theories classed under the method headings to be.) At the same time, the history of Psychological Hedonism seems to be akin to that of Universal Hedonism. In fact, as both Sidgwick and Broad point out, Mill “professed to deduce Universalistic Hedonism from Psychological Hedonism.” However, Psychological Hedonism fails, in principle, to provide such a support, on Sidgwick’s view. The doctrine of Universal Hedonism is that it is the duty of each to aim at the maximum happiness of all, and to subordinate everything else to this end. But Psychological Hedonism (like Psychological Egoism) denies that any agent *can* desire anything beyond his or her own happiness or development. Thus, despite Mill’s belief that the doctrine of Universal Hedonism can be derived from or supported by Psychological Hedonism, the two theories are logically incompatible, on Sidgwick’s view.

The conclusion that can be drawn here, I think, is that Sidgwick is ruling out Psychological Egoism (along with its special case of psychological hedonism) on the basis that it is incompatible with any purely ethical theory. This is so not because Psychological Egoism is a mixed theory, involving psychology and ethics, but because it is not an ethical theory at all. Because it builds the ethical commitments on the basis of a psychology that could not be otherwise, the illusion of duties, for example, is just that an illusion. As such, on Sidgwick’s view, Psychological Egoism (and its variant, Psychological Hedonism) do not express a properly ethical foundation principle because they express no ethical principle at all. Thus, we can conclude that (b) is Sidgwick’s view.

³¹ Broad, 181.

3. Aristotle and the Survey of “Common Sense”

Given the wide scope of Sidgwick’s categories, it should not be too surprising to discover that the concept of “common-sense morality” has some play in it as well. In fact, Broad writes of Sidgwick’s project that he “assays no precise definition of common-sense morality, and it is actually dubious that a precise account can be given.”³² He writes that the improbability that great precision in definition could be obtained is “a reasonable inference from a prime maxim of common sense in ethics, which is not to demand more precision or certainty than the subject is capable of.”³³ Clearly, Broad here harkens back to Aristotle and his famous assertion in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that “Our discussion will be adequate if its degree of clarity fits the subject-matter; for we should not seek the same degree of exactness in all sorts of arguments alike, any more than in the products of different crafts.”³⁴

This connection is not merely coincidental. Sidgwick goes to great lengths to identify his work within the tradition of ethical theory that he sees Aristotle as perhaps the prime example - namely “common-sense” moral philosophy. On several occasions, Sidgwick makes clear the influence the ancients have on his own work; for example, he writes, “I am fully sensible of the peculiar interest and value of the ethical thought of ancient Greece. Indeed through a large part of the present work the influence of Plato

³² Broad, 77

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1094b12-14, Irwin, translator, 3.

and Aristotle on my treatment of this subject has been greater than that of any modern writer.”³⁵

Terry Irwin suggests that with this claim Sidgwick “probably has two main points in mind: (1) the discussion of questions in moral psychology in books 1 and 2 of *The Methods of Ethics*; and (2) the discussion of the different moral virtues in book 3.”³⁶ I suspect there is a third point, even more basic than these - Sidgwick seeks to establish his *bona fides* in the field of common-sense moral theory by drawing an analogy between his work and that of Aristotle. That such an attempt is necessary is in part a function of the philosophical climate in which Sidgwick wrote. Plato and Aristotle seem to function like touchstones for 19th century ethical theorizing. For example, Mill quotes liberally from Aristotle and advances several interpretations of Aristotelian metaphysics, logic, and ethics. Another example is Green, who tends to interpret large sections of Aristotle with a sort of Kantian twist. He does this, in part, to support his own ethical views. Thus, Mill and Green both make extensive use of Aristotle; in Mill’s case as a foil for his own view and in Green’s as a supporter of the view he is advancing.

Sidgwick sees an analogy between Aristotle and the ethical intuitions of ancient Greece on the one hand, and himself and the ethical intuitions of Victorian England on the other. As Aristotle and his ethical works stand as an investigation of the ethical intuitions of ancient Greece, so Sidgwick and The Methods of Ethics stand in a similar place with respect to Victorian England. He writes, “What he [Aristotle] gave us there

³⁵ Sidgwick, *Methods of Ethics*, 375 n.

³⁶ Terence Irwin, “Eminent Victorians and Greek ethics”, Essays on Henry Sidgwick, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p285.

was the Common Sense Morality of Greece, reduced to consistency by careful comparison. ... Might I not imitate this? ... Indeed *ought* I not to do this before deciding on the question whether I had or had not a system of moral intuitions.”³⁷ Of this position, Irwin goes on to say that “In a large part of The Methods of Ethics Sidgwick follows what he takes to be Aristotle’s example, reviewing common sense without trying to improve on it.”

I will address the connections between Aristotle and Sidgwick; first discussing briefly Aristotle’s rejection of demonstration in ethics.

“Moreover, what is fine and what is just, the topics of inquiry in political science, differ and vary so much that they seem to rest on convention only, not on nature. ... Since these, then, are the sorts of things we argue from and about, it will be satisfactory if we can indicate the truth roughly and in outline; since [that is to say] we argue from and about what holds good usually [but not universally], it will be satisfactory if we can draw conclusions of the same sort. Each of our claims ought to be accepted in the same way [as claiming to hold good usually], since the educated person seeks exactness in each area to the extent that the nature of the subject allows; for apparently it is just as mistaken to demand demonstrations from a rhetorician as to accept [merely] persuasive arguments from a mathematician.”³⁸

That one ought to restrict the expectation of exactness by the sort of subject matter investigated seems a fairly obvious principle. However, it can be fraught with peril. One possible difficulty is a slackening of effort on the part of the investigator. While one might not properly expect the same level of precision from an ethicist exploring the vagaries of common-sense moral intuitions that one would expect from a geometer purporting to show a new proof of the Pythagorean Theorem, at the same time one is

³⁷ Sidgwick, Methods of Ethics, xix-xx, his emphasis.

³⁸ Aristotle, 1094b15-17, 1094b19-27; *Nicomachean Ethics*, 3-4.

right to expect as much precision as the ethicist can muster. On this point, Sidgwick is extremely rigorous and suspects Aristotle of some laxity. On Sidgwick's view, Aristotle "records and articulates" the intuitions of common sense but he does not truly systematize or criticize them. According to Sidgwick, this failure is to be expected given Aristotle's nonhedonist conception of the good which is so indefinite that "it cannot be a basis for criticism of common sense."³⁹ Sidgwick, on the other hand, takes his work to be fundamentally an examination of common-sense to test whether or not it is founded on genuine intuitions or whether it rests on empirical assumptions that may be controversial and/or false. Further, Sidgwick is of the opinion that in some cases, common-sense simply has nothing to say on certain ethical matters. For all these reasons, as Irwin notes, it is Sidgwick's ultimate view that "the principles implicit in common sense cannot embody the intuitions [that are] necessary for any satisfactory first principle in an ethical system." If we accept the Utilitarian principle and conjoin it with the intuitions of common-sense morality, we then find that the Utilitarian Principle undergirds those intuitions and fills in the gaps that common-sense inevitably leaves

But what exactly is "common-sense" morality? Marcus Singer's work on Sidgwick is helpful here. On Singer's view, we should read "common-sense morality" as expressing or characterizing the morality that we all share. This "common-sense" is "prephilosophical, if anything is". Singer arrives at this conclusion based largely on Sidgwick's claim that the term "common-sense" is to be taken "quite empirically, as we

³⁹ Irwin, 289.

find it in the common thought expressed in the common language of mankind.”⁴⁰ The notion that there exists something that can be called “morality” and that is at the same time common to all of humankind is controversial, if anything is.⁴¹ I also suspect that Sidgwick does not have in mind anything quite as naïve as this statement would suggest. In fact, I think Sidgwick is trying to pick out two different things with the concept of “common-sense morality”. The first is a very simple empirical notion that human beings have a nature in common with one another that experiences the world in a particularly human way; which is to say, like a human being and not like a cat. The second is that given a general survey, there will be a certain set of intuitions that embody particular rules that make some claim about moral truth.

The first of these things seems to emphasize the “common-sense” part of the concept. The second seems to focus on the “morality” part. Even this analysis of “common-sense” seems likely to be controversial, so perhaps more clarification is needed, if not to dispel the controversy then at least to make the position as clear as possible. Even though Sidgwick is a product of Victorian England with relatively little exposure to the world beyond the United Kingdom, he should not be interpreted as suggesting that there is in fact a “morality” that is shared by residents of Fiji and denizens of Cambridge. It is not the “morality” that is ultimately common, rather it is the experience of the world, in the most simple way. That is, human beings experience the

⁴⁰ Marcus Singer, “Sidgwick and nineteenth-century ethical thought”, Essays on Henry Sidgwick, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 77. The Sidgwick quote is from Methods of Ethics, 229.

⁴¹ For example, this is the field in which relativists like to play; developing from the empirical hypotheses of cultural relativism to some sort of view that ethical norms are,

world in a way peculiar to our species and thus we can be said to have a “common-sense” of the world. The “morality” part of “common sense morality” seems to draw a distinction between a morality that is imposed by public opinion, say, on the one hand and “rules that make claims to moral truth, thought to be warranted by a human consensus, not merely the traditions and usages of a given community.” In the first instance, the code imposed by public opinion brings with it an enforcement procedure dependent upon social sanctions. The sanction of “common-sense morality”, on Sidgwick’s view, transcends any particular community or social setting, and depends on the “common-sense” of the world. Here, the warrant is human consensus (which is as unchanging, presumably, as human nature) not public opinion (which is notoriously capricious). That Sidgwick has something like this in mind seems fairly clear. Schneewind summarizes Sidgwick’s claims about common-sense, writing that common-sense is “the rational and moral manifestation of a common human nature experiencing a common world.”⁴² Again, the connection to Aristotle here is fairly strong, and without the criticism of the earlier one. Aristotle claims that

With us, though presumably not at all with the gods, there is such a thing as what is natural, but still all is changeable; despite the change there is such a thing as what is natural and what is not. What sort of thing that [is changeable and hence] admits of being otherwise is natural, and what sort is not natural, but legal and conventional, if both natural and legal are changeable? It is clear in other cases also, and the same distinction [between the natural and the unchangeable] will apply. ... The things that are just by human [enactment] and not by nature differ

and ought to be, culture-specific.

⁴² Schneewind, Sidgwick’s Ethics and Victorian Moral Philosophy, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 226. Sidgwick discusses his conception of “common-sense” and the connection between common-sense and the morality of common-sense in The Methods of Ethics principally on pages 85, 215-6, 218-9, 337-361, and 423-457.

from place to place, since political systems also differ; still, only one system is by nature the best everywhere.”⁴³

As Irwin takes pains to note here that, “human communities can survive under many sorts of laws and conceptions of justice, but it remains true that human nature and the human good make one conception of justice the correct one.”⁴⁴ It is this sense of the nature of “common-sense” and its relation to ethics that Sidgwick is expressing by his notion of “common-sense morality.”

4. The Good

Each of the methods of ethics involves at least one fundamental principle that purports to specify what the “good” or the “right” is. Within the history of ethical theory, some philosophers, e.g., Kant, have sought to demonstrate a logical relationship between the actual world, or the “is”, and the claims about duty, responsibility, and good, or the “ought”. Kant’s most famous expression on this matter is the logical principle that “ought implies can”; or that to say that someone is obligated to do X implies that the actual state of affairs is such that the person can do X. Other philosophers, e.g., hard determinists of various stripes, have thought to divine within metaphysical ruminations on freedom and determinism a strict restriction on the “ought” of moral philosophy. That is, given that the physical universe is in fact deterministic, it makes no sense to say that someone **ought** to have done other than in fact he did.

Sidgwick, however, places very rigid walls between the branches of philosophy, especially between metaphysics and ethics. He writes, “Morality is unique and

⁴³ Aristotle, 1134b28-1135a6.

⁴⁴ Terence Irwin, “Notes on the Nicomachean Ethics”, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 336

irreducible to any descriptive propositions derived from other disciplines.”⁴⁵ Then, echoing David Hume, he goes on to assert that “Morality is *sui generis*; it is a fundamental mistake to derive ‘ought’ from ‘is’.”⁴⁶ However, this is clearly not to say that one cannot speak at all of “the good” or “the right”, merely that inferences from the realm of metaphysics will be of little help in grasping the purely ethical notion.

As it turns out, on Sidgwick’s account, “right” and “ought” are the simple and basic concepts out of which ethical theory is developed. As such, they are undefined in terms of anything more basic. As Schultz writes, “According to Sidgwick, there is an absolutely simple, fundamental notion common to such ideas as ‘right’ and ‘ought,’ one which ‘is too elementary to admit of any formal definition.’”⁴⁷ ‘Right’ acts are those actions that an agent has the most reason to do. Because of this connection to rationality, Sidgwick understands ‘right’ acts to be objectively right. Further, for Sidgwick, an action is not judged to be right because it possesses some property inherent in it. Rather, a right act is right because right acts are rational acts. The rationality that is related to ‘right’-ness here is discussed a bit later in the section “Self-Evident Principles”. There, the foundation in objectivity is filled out a bit as well. The connection is this: because Sidgwick holds a solely quantitative doctrine of Utilitarianism, goodness and rightness both can be quantified, theoretically at least. Beyond that, the Principles of Equity, Rational Prudence, and Rational Benevolence spell out the parameters within which actions can be weighed in a measured and reasonable way. Further, from our discussion

⁴⁵ Sidgwick, Methods of Ethics, 78, 509.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷ Schultz, 32.

of common-sense above, we have that human beings possess a common humanity, expressed in part in a common rationality. From the application of these principles, Sidgwick can be interpreted as connecting 'the right' and 'the good' to the common rationality of our common humanity, which is purely a natural human trait, and thus objective.

Sidgwick approaches the working definition for 'good' in much the same way as he approaches the one for 'right'. Ultimately, Sidgwick maintains that good "is what it is reasonable to seek to keep, or aim at getting; and Evil is what it is reasonable to seek to get rid of or avoid."⁴⁸ Having spelled out the 'good' for an individual agent, the Utilitarian in Sidgwick goes on to express a working definition of the general, or ultimate good. He writes that the general or ultimate good "is what one would desire if one's desires were in harmony with reason and one took oneself to have an equal concern for all existence."⁴⁹ When Sidgwick claims that the good of the agent is what it is reasonable to seek to keep or to aim at getting, the end of that action is, in the final analysis, pleasure. He fills out this notion a bit more when he writes that "the [utilitarian] statement that 'Pleasure is the Ultimate Good' will only mean that nothing is ultimately desirable except desirable feeling, apprehended as desirable by the sentient individual at the time of feeling it."⁵⁰

Having claimed that the 'right' and the 'good' are intimately connected to rationality, Sidgwick then goes on to show how the two admittedly similar notions differ

⁴⁸ Sidgwick, The Ethics of Green, Spencer, and Martineau, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1902), 331.

⁴⁹ Sidgwick, The Methods of Ethics, 112

from each other. He writes that “the concepts of goodness and rightness then represent differentiations of the demands of our own rationality as it applies to our sentient and our active powers.”⁵¹ Goodness is connected to our sentient powers; rightness to our active powers. The “sentient” individual is the feeling individual and the notion of ‘goodness’ is tied to those feelings. So, while goodness is tied to rationality, it is also tied to the subjective agent who feels in particular ways about particular things and actions. Suppose some agent feels great desire and receives great pleasure from gratuitous cruelty, for example. There can be no external judgment that he does not indeed possess these pleasurable feelings and because of the pleasure they convey, that he finds them desirable. One need not conclude, however, that these feelings are good feelings, desired though they may be. This is so because these feelings and desires are not congruent with human reasonableness or rationality. And this is because the feelings and desires are not congruent with the ultimate good, of which the individual good is a species. They are not congruent with the ultimate good, because the ultimate good is, by definition, related to a concern for all of existence, including that part on the receiving end of the gratuitous cruelty. Thus, because the agent is not acting rationally, on Sidgwick’s view, the feelings, while pleasurable, are not good.

In a similar way, the notion of ‘rightness’ serves as a rational check on the active powers, or the actions of agents. Consider again the case of the gratuitously cruel agent. Supposing that he carries through and expresses his desires, the actions will be gratuitously cruel. However, those actions can be publicly decried in a way that the

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, 129.

private feelings cannot. But, Sidgwick means something other than public outcry (supposing of course the public in question is behaving rationally). The rational agent, possessed of cruel desires, can and will (in virtue of his rationality) refrain from acting upon those desires. This is so because though the feelings may very well be outside the control of the rational agent - one feels what one feels - the actions, on Sidgwick's view, are not. The agent will understand that the gratuitously cruel actions that his heart desires are not the actions that he has the most reason to do. And, in acting rationally, he will refrain from doing them.

From this discussion, it is clear that the differentiation between 'good' and 'right' leads to a further distinction within the set of moral notions. As Schulz points out, for Sidgwick, "sometimes moral notions involve the constraints of reason on the active side of human nature, and sometimes they involve constraints of reason on the sentient or feeling side of human nature." However, all of these moral notions have their origins in the common-sense of humanity. The following diagram demonstrates Sidgwick's description of these distinctions.

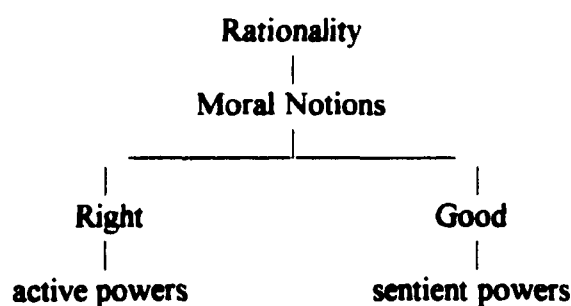


figure 1

⁵¹ *ibid.*

In light of the three definitions - the 'right', the 'good' and the 'general good', Sidgwick wants to show what I call the Rational Beings Principle.

Rational Beings Principle: We are bound to aim at good generally, and not at any particular part of it.

The success of his entire project hangs on the demonstration of this principle. To show this, it might be best to set out the working definitions again.

Right actions: Actions that we have the most reason to do.

The Good: What it is reasonable to seek to keep or aim at getting.

The General Good: What one would desire if one's desires were in harmony with reason and one took oneself to have an equal concern for all existence.

From these, we can begin to get a handle on Sidgwick's view. On Sidgwick's account, if a human being is rational, she will seek to keep or aim at getting the ultimate good. This is so because 'the Good' is what it is **reasonable** to seek to keep or aim at getting. To act in contradiction to the dictates of reason is to suggest that the agent is in fact behaving unreasonably. In addition to seeking the Good, if the agent is rational she will also seek the General Good. Thus, the rational agent will aim at the good in general. This is because (1) this will more express the equal concern for all existence, rather than a particular part of the good, which could be personal good or even the good of another, and (2) concern for the good of **all** is necessary for an agent's desires to be completely in harmony with reason.

5. Verification (Intuitive, Discursive, Social or Ecumenical)

Given the foregoing discussions, it should not be surprising that Sidgwick maintains a fallibilist conception of ethical knowledge. While certain ethical propositions may be true of necessity, it is also clear that he holds that certainty is ultimately beyond human grasp.

In an important later work, the appendix to “The Criteria of Truth and Error,” Sidgwick explains that he rejects the claims of both rationalism and empiricism to put forth a simple infallible criterion for determining ultimately valid, foundational knowledge. As Schultz writes, “instead, he settles for humbler, fallible, methods of verification - that is, methods for excluding error.” These methods, when taken together, reduce the risk of error, though they do not eliminate it. The methods are Intuitive Verification, Discursive Verification, and Social or Ecumenical Verification. I address each of these in order.

Intuitive Verification essentially involves a careful investigation of a belief to determine whether or not the belief is “clear and distinct”. By “clear and distinct”, Sidgwick means much the same thing Descartes does: with the following proviso - most beliefs are beyond the ability of even the best analysis to be rendered clear and distinct. Most ethical beliefs fall victim to this proviso. Intuitive Verification is an approach used to best effect in fields like mathematics, where clarity and distinct-ness are matters of logical demonstrations of necessity. This is not to say that Intuitive Verification is limited to these fields, only that it achieves its best results there.

Discursive Verification, on the other hand, is a process of comparing beliefs with one another, especially beliefs that seem to conflict. The aim is to discover if a system can be imposed on the ensemble, thus rendering the two apparently conflicting beliefs

compatible. This method of investigation is common to ethical discourse; indeed, the entirety of The Methods of Ethics is a lengthy examination of just this type. The systems of ethical beliefs that comprise the various methods of ethics are painstakingly compared alongside one another and, through a process of attempted systematization, some methods are eliminated. At the conclusion of the investigation, Sidgwick hopes to have either shown that only one method remains at the end of the eliminative process or that each of the methods can be reduced, finally, to a single one; his hope is Universal Hedonism, of course.

Sidgwick's conception of Social or Ecumenical Verification (I will refer to it only as Social Verification from here on)⁵² could as easily be called Qualified Experts Verification because on his account, Social Verification amounts to the agreement of relevant experts. In one sense, this is reminiscent of one of Mill's criteria for discriminating between higher and lower pleasures. Given two possible actions or pleasures, the experience of both would give the "expert" a better handle on the relative values of the two and thus insure that the "expert" is more likely to choose correctly between them. This heart of Sidgwick's notion of Social Verification is the agreement of the relevant experts, "those qualified to judge". This qualification would seem to be aimed at those who would misread the method as somehow entailing that an unsavory character who perpetrated both good and evil actions would be more likely to be able to judge which of the two is the fine action and which is the vicious one.

⁵² Sidgwick uses both "Social" and "Empirical" separately to identify this method of verification and at times uses "Social and Empirical". It is common practice to use the latter term. However, I find it a bit cumbersome and so will use only "Social" to identify the method.

For Sidgwick, each of these methods is to be employed when examining an ethical belief. The procedure will not always produce the correct result. But, as Schultz notes, for Sidgwick,

if we find that an intuitive belief appears clear and certain to ourselves contemplating it, that it is in harmony with our other beliefs relating to the same subject, and does not conflict with the beliefs of other persons competent to judge, we have reduced the risk of error with regard to it as low as it is possible to reduce it.⁵³

From this we can conclude that all three methods are important, since none is completely free from error.

6. Self-Evident principles

One of the central components of Sidgwick's argument is the notion of "real self-evident principles". What is odd is that Sidgwick then launches into arguments designed to demonstrate that the principles of Equity, Rational Prudence, and Rational Benevolence are, in fact, self-evident. Indeed, more than a few academic eyebrows have been raised by the description of these self-evident principles as "real" self-evident principles, as if "real" somehow distinguishes them from "false self-evident principles". But this is precisely one of the things that Sidgwick means to do with "real"; the other is to distinguish them from principles that, while expressing true propositions, are not self-evident even though they may appear to be so on cursory examination. At the same time, it is a contradiction to claim that a self-evident principle is false; or if true, not self-evident.⁵⁴

⁵³ Schultz, 29.

⁵⁴ Given that the data under investigation are common-sense moral intuitions and not Euclidean Geometry, for example, it is perhaps easier to see how such a circumstance

Sidgwick uses “real self-evident principles” to pick out three features of the principles under investigation. In the first place, the principle truly has only itself for evidence. In the second place, he means to distinguish it from those principles that are either not self-evident or are false. Finally, he seems to want to communicate the fact that a “real self-evident principle” may not seem self-evident, or even true, at first examination. He writes,

we are thus enabled to see that a proposition may be self-evident, i.e., may be properly cognisable without being viewed in connexion with any other propositions; though in order that its truth may be apparent to some particular mind, there is still required some rational process connecting it with propositions previously accepted by that mind.⁵⁵

As Schneewind points out, Sidgwick here employs an Aristotelian distinction; the naturally prior and the prior for human beings. For Aristotle, certain facts obtain in nature of necessity but are only discovered after careful analysis, and then become known to humankind. For example, Galileo, after careful investigation, can demonstrate that the earth revolves around the sun and not vice versa. This fact is a truth known in nature but discovered by a person and then not accepted by the majority for some time. As Galileo left upon recanting his “heresy” he uttered the immortal *E pur si muove*; expressing that the truth known in nature was true regardless of the confident counterclaims of his inquisitors. With his “real self-evident principles”, Sidgwick suggests this sort of phenomena exists within common-sense moral philosophy as well.

might come about. In the moral intuition case, principles are fallibly drawn from common experience, and thus can amount to much less or much more than they appear on first glance.

⁵⁵ Sidgwick, “The Establishment of Ethical First Principles”; Schultz, 16.

Turning now to the principles that Sidgwick takes to be “really self-evident” ones, I will address them in this order: Equity, Rational Prudence, and Rational Benevolence. Rawls’ reduces Sidgwick’s understanding of the Principle of Equity into very simple terms. Under the Principle of Equity, two persons should not be treated differently merely because they are different persons.⁵⁶ Sidgwick himself recognizes this Kantian echo, writing that he “certainly could will it to be a universal law that men should act in such a way as to promote universal happiness.”⁵⁷ Thus, Sidgwick has taken his own Principle of Equity, and because of its formal nature, shown that it is compatible with the Kantian deontological universalizability principle.

The kinship that Sidgwick’s Principle of Equity has with Kant’s Universalizability Principle lies mostly in its formality. The Principle of Equity simply governs action as a principle of generalizability would, and says nothing, necessarily, about the content of the action or situations, or the treatment of the individuals covered. For example, suppose two philosophy faculty members are hired by a university to teach the same number of courses over essentially the same topics. Consider further that in all relevant respects, the two new faculty members are the same. All that the Principle of Equity maintains is that they should receive the same compensation. It does not maintain that they ought to be paid a living wage or even that they should be compensated at all. It merely holds that whatever is done to one ought to be done to the other and whatever is

⁵⁶ Schultz, 25.

⁵⁷ Sidgwick, Methods of Ethics, xx.; See Marcus Singer (*Sidgwick and nineteenth-century ethical thought*) for a very thorough discussion of Sidgwick’s Kantian scholarship. Singer notes that Sidgwick is one of the few British philosophers of the late 19th century to have paid close and careful attention to Kant’s work.

given to one ought to be given to the other. The next two principles bear somewhat more content, though they too are highly formalized.

On Schneewind's view, Sidgwick's Principle of Rational Prudence expresses the claim that "mere temporal difference should not matter in considering one's good".⁵⁸ The Principle of Rational Prudence has to do with the good of the agent making a decision between two things that are perceived by the agent as of benefit to him or her. The Principle of Rational Prudence maintains that rationality requires us to forego a short-term good that conflicts with a greater or higher later good in favor of the later good. Temporality, the long-term or short-term proximity of goods in question, can not rationally be a factor in deciding between two goods. Which is not to say that it cannot be or a factor or that the later good necessarily trumps the shorter-term one. Consider two examples. First is the example of a student with a test upcoming. Given that it is a beautiful warm day and the college is quite close to a sparkling blue lake, the student has the option of studying or swimming. The immediate but lesser good is a cooling dip in the lake, refreshing and relaxing. The future but far greater term good is directly tied to the test results - passing the class, a better transcript, better job prospects, etc. The nearer-term good is both closer and more certain. However, it is more prudent to study, aiming at the much greater good that is admittedly more distant but only a little less certain. The Principle of Rational Prudence merely acknowledges the common-sense intuition that it may in fact be more beneficial to await long-term goods than a nearer-

⁵⁸ Schneewind, 110.

term one; and that, the rational agent will not select the short-term good simply on the basis of proximity.

For the second example, consider again the student. Suppose that upon graduation, she is offered a multi-year contract and signing bonus to play professional basketball. She is also offered an assistant coaching position at her hometown junior high school. Given effort, commitment, and luck, she could work her way up to head high school basketball coach and potentially even coach in college. Or she could make tremendous money and play professionally (and perhaps even coach upon retirement). Given that this is both more lucrative and more certain, this is obviously the more prudent choice.

According to Sidgwick, the Principle of Rational Benevolence “aims at the happiness of other human beings generally, and therefore necessarily takes into consideration even remote effects of actions.”⁵⁹ This principle is at the very core of Sidgwick’s project. Indeed, even on Sidgwick’s view, unless he is able to not merely establish the Principle of Rational Benevolence as “really self-evident” but also justify his allegiance to the principle on the basis of the data supplied by common-sense moral intuitions, the project of establishing Universal Hedonism as the most plausible (or only plausible) method of ethics fails.

The Principle of Rational Benevolence is an outward-looking principle, rather than an introspective one. In this way, it stands as a complement to the Principle of Rational Prudence which, for the most part, looks inward toward the good(s) of a

⁵⁹ Sidgwick, Methods of Ethics, 96.

particular agent. The Principle of Rational Benevolence maintains that goods are not isolated and discrete but rather have consequences beyond the individual agent; consequences that can, and inevitably do, affect other goods (and ills) within the social structure. As such, this principle is other-focused rather than agent-focused.

Both the Principle of Rational Prudence and the Principle of Rational Benevolence are related to the Principle of Equity. The Principle of Equity provides that two individuals in relevantly similar circumstances ought to be treated in relevantly similar ways. The Principle of Rational Prudence requires the agent to maximize her own good. The Principle of Rational Benevolence requires the agent to maximize the others' good. The Principles of Rational Prudence and Rational Benevolence are thus opposites (though they can also be understood as complements).

To illustrate the three principles, let us return to our new philosophy faculty example. Under the Principle of Equity, one could be paid a pittance for her labors, as long as the other was also paid a pittance. The Principle of Rational Prudence, however, would maintain that the first new philosophy faculty, call him Socrates, ought to seriously consider (and probably accept) the tenured position at the major university that pays philosophers on par with the head football and basketball coaches. It does not tell Socrates that he should even let his colleague, call him Isocrates, know about the opening.

In a similar way, the Principle of Rational Benevolence would require the administration to take into consideration the effects of the decision to beggar their philosophy professors; including the effects on student learning and student morale.

7. The Argument in Outline

The rather extensive foregoing discussion has enumerated the many concepts and motivations that Sidgwick brings to bear in the Methods of Ethics. Before turning to the work of John Stuart Mill (which is an interlude before returning to the conclusion of Sidgwick's argument) it might be helpful to spell out fairly simply what Sidgwick takes his argument structure to be. We can represent his argument in the following form:

- a. There exist three self-evident principles (shown to be self-evident as described above). These are (1) Equity, (2) Rational Prudence, and (3) Rational Benevolence.
- b. The Ultimate Good Principle: The ultimate good is what one would desire if one's desires were in harmony with reason and one took oneself to have an equal concern for all existence.
- c. Reasonable Beings Principle: We are bound to aim at good generally, and not at any particular part of it.
- d. Therefore, the Principle of Utility is true.

We will accept, for now, that (d) does indeed follow from (a), (b), and (c). The argument for this is fairly straightforward, on Sidgwick's view, and has already been anticipated in much of the foregoing discussion. However, the final product belongs later in our discussion. Accepting that the line of implication holds, provided the premises do, reveals some rather glaring difficulties for Sidgwick. Obviously, one difficulty will be in establishing that three such "self-evident" principles (Equity, Rational Benevolence, and Rational Prudence) exist. Beyond that, however, lies the demonstration of the

Reasonable Beings Principle. This seems to me to be the most contentious of the principles. And as it turns out, it is the one that Sidgwick ultimately takes himself to fail at showing. It seems that the Ethical Egoist could hold a version of the Reasonable Beings Principle, call it RBP* that went something like this: We are bound to aim at the particular part of good that is represented by our interests, and only secondarily at good generally (if at all). This new principle does not seem incoherent and thus, with some amendment to (b) in keeping with this new principle RBP*, the principle at bottom of the Ethical Egoism category is supported.

The other thing that Sidgwick must do is eliminate Intuitional Morality from the field of competition. His argument against Intuitional Morality and his strategy against Ethical Egoism depend in large measure on some of the work of John Stuart Mill, particularly some of the work he did as background to his own arguments. As we have already seen in brief, Sidgwick mostly rejects the arguments. However, the background conditions Mill constructs prove quite helpful for Sidgwick's own aims. Given this fact, I turn now to a discussion of John Stuart Mill and his argument for his Utility Doctrine. The following section will be instructive in at least two ways: first, as a setting for Sidgwick's own argument (in counterpoint to Mill's), and second, in providing some working principles that Sidgwick will use in his own argument. To provide an appropriate setting in which to investigate Sidgwick's responses to Mill, I have provided what I take to be the most charitable reading of Mill's proof of the principle of utility that I could possibly muster.

Chapter 2. The Utilitarian Enterprise (John Stuart Mill)

A. Mill's Anti-Platonism

John Stuart Mill was a great admirer of Plato. On Mill's view, no other philosopher of antiquity so influenced his own philosophic endeavors as Plato. However, Mill regards all of Plato's positive moral arguments as wholly unsuccessful. He writes,

all valid arguments in favour of virtue, presuppose that we already desire virtue, or desire some of its ends and objects. ... But no arguments which Plato urges have power to make those love or desire virtue, who do not already: nor is this ever to be effected through the intellect.⁶⁰

From this sentiment, it should be clear that from the first and the last clause of the quoted material that Mill's objection is not simply directed at Plato, but to any who would advance any positive argument on behalf of virtue. Irwin points this out when he says, "He [Mill] finds Plato's arguments unsuccessful, not simply because Plato overlooked some good arguments, but because no good argument can be given."⁶¹

Mill considers himself a Platonist but only in the sense that he adopts Plato's "Socratic method". Here, Mill focuses on the critical element in Platonic philosophy, almost to the exclusion of all else, especially (for example) the Platonic Theory of Forms. On Mill's view, the Platonic *elenchus* is perhaps the most powerful tool available to critical philosophy. He writes,

The Socratic method, of which the Platonic dialogues are the chief example, is unsurpassed as a discipline for correcting the errors, and clearing up the confusions incident in the *intellectus sibi permissus*, the understanding which has made up all its bundles of associations under the guidance of popular

⁶⁰ John Stuart Mill, *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, XI:150

⁶¹ T. H. Irwin, "The Classical World", *The Cambridge Companion to Mill*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 444

phraseology. The close, searching *elenchus* by which the man of vague generalities is constrained either to express his meaning to himself in definite terms, or to confess that he does not know what he is talking about; the perpetual testing of all general statements by particular instances; the siege in form which is laid to the meaning of large abstract terms, by fixing upon some still larger class-name which includes that and more, and dividing down to the thing sought – marking out its limits and definition by a series of accurately drawn distinctions between it and each of the cognate objects which are successively parted off from it – all this, as an education for precise thinking, is inestimable.⁶²

However great a tool Mill takes the Platonic *elenchus* to be, it also seems a two-edged sword. On Mill's view, the "close, searching *elenchus*" vanquishes generalities, tests all general statements by reference to particulars, and lays siege to "the meaning of large abstracted terms." Here again we encounter Mill's dismissal of positive Platonic doctrines, especially those which seem at odds with Mill's own rigorous empiricism. He writes,

I have felt ever since that the title of Platonist belongs by far better right to those who have been nourished in, and have endeavored to practise Plato's mode of investigation, than to those who are distinguished only by the adoption of certain dogmatical conclusions, drawn mostly from the least intelligible of his works, and which the character of his mind and writings makes it uncertain whether he himself regarded as anything more than poetic fancies, or philosophic conjectures.⁶³

Among these poetic fancies and philosophic conjectures, one finds Plato's Forms. As Irwin has pointed out, Mill follows John Grote in rejecting "any search for an answer to the objections that the Parmenides raises to the theory of Forms, claiming that we

⁶² Mill, *Autobiography, The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, I:25. I leave the question of the possibility that the Platonic *elenchus* might or might not advance Plato's positive philosophic views, noting only that Mill focuses his attention, and his praise, on its critical power.

⁶³ *ibid.*

ought not to be surprised that Plato raises objections that he does not answer.⁶⁴ Here again, Irwin points out a very telling moment in Mill's own translations of the Platonic corpus noting that in the preface Mill "suggests that it is hopeless to attribute definite positive views to Plato, except on issues of philosophical method."⁶⁵

Suffice it to say, Mill clearly sees a need to distance himself from those aspects of Platonic philosophy that might give aid and comfort to the ontological status of abstract ideas. From what has been said in the foregoing discussion, it should be clear that, for Mill, the particular has ontological priority to any general idea that might be drawn from it. This point is of such importance for Mill to communicate that in the course of his demonstration of the Principle of Utility in his Utilitarianism, he takes a moment to assure the reader that "happiness" of the individual and the general happiness, though composites or aggregates, are not abstract ideas, but concrete wholes.⁶⁶ In his discussion of Plato, Mill goes so far as to discount the value or use of abstract objects at all, relegating them to the role of spurious props of religious and philosophical dogma.

Ultimately, he concludes that there are two Platos; not in the sense that there were two ancient philosophers who together penned the Platonic corpus, but in the sense that one can distinguish two competing views in the works of one man. He writes,

There are thus, independently of minor discrepancies, two complete Platos in Plato – the Sokratist and the Dogmatist – of whom the former is by far the more valuable to mankind, but the latter has obtained from them much the greater honour. And no wonder; for the one was capable of being a useful prop to many a

⁶⁴ Irwin, Cambridge Companion to Mill, 447

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, 446.

⁶⁶ Mill, Utilitarianism, 83

man's moral and religious dogmas, while the other could only clear and invigorate the human understanding.⁶⁷

Thus, we can conclude that Mill, though quite taken with the critical work to be done by the "Socratic method", was almost entirely dismissive of Plato's positive solutions to the questions that arose from his use of the *elenchus*. Hence, judging from Mill's own assertions about himself, we can conclude further that there are two accurate, though limited, self-descriptions of Mill's philosophy; on the one hand we have Mill, the critical Platonist, and on the other we have Mill, the doctrinal anti-Platonist – especially as regards the theory of Forms or abstract objects.

B. Of What Sort of Proof the Principle of Utility is Susceptible

John Stuart Mill's "proof" of the Principle of Utility is often readily dismissed as flawed, perhaps fatally so. Even those of Mill's admirers who are convinced that something like the Principle of Utility actually captures the "sole criterion" for judging conduct seem to believe that Mill's "proof" in chapter four of Utilitarianism is "famously, indeed disastrously, rudimentary" (John Skorupski), or have offered pseudo-justifications for it by suggesting that "Mill's Utilitarianism was not written as a scholarly treatise but ... for a popular audience" (Wendy Donner). Those otherwise convinced that the Principle of Utility is the most plausible explanation of moral sentiments and the conduct which arises from them (e.g., John Skorupski and Wendy Donner, to name but two) often try to prop up the proof from Chapter Four of Mill's Utilitarianism with interpretations that import premises from elsewhere in the Millian corpus.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ *CW*, XI:415

⁶⁸ Donner, for example, addresses the critique that Mill abandons true utilitarianism by

Mill's detractors tend not to be quite so careful in their explication of Mill's proof or in their search for the most plausible reading of it. Samuel Taylor Coleridge dismisses the proof almost at its outset by simply pointing to what he takes to be a blatant equivocation on "desirable". Certain other of Mill's critics (and some of his harshest) claim that he abandons the utilitarian doctrine altogether with his introduction of quality as a summable feature alongside quantity in the utilitarian calculus. The later Cambridge Moralists join the fray by arguing from theological premises that Utilitarianism must be false and as a result fail to appreciate the finer points of Mill's argument which they take as a threat to the theological ends they wish to advance. Here, Sidgwick is again important for the care he takes is outlining his own view of utilitarianism; a view that differs at significant points from Mill's but one which utilizes those parts of Mill's argument that Sidgwick finds helpful. For this reason, Sidgwick - supporter and detractor - can be seen as one of the most significant reformers of pre-20th century utilitarian theory.

In this section, I outline the proof Mill offers for the Principle of Utility in chapter four of Utilitarianism. In the course of that explication, I indicate where difficulties have

adding quality as a factor in the utility calculus by arguing that quality, like quantity, is an empirically discoverable, natural element and thus that while Mill's calculus is more complex than his predecessor Bentham's, it nevertheless remains an empirical enterprise. In a similar fashion, Skorupski offers an informative defense of Mill's warrant for the analogies (e.g., visible:seen :: desirable:desired) that revolves around his apparent criteria for Primitively Normative Dispositions. Briefly, the argument is that the analogies from visible:seen and audible:heard to desirable:desired hold because the relationship expressed in each pair of relata satisfies the Primitively Normative Dispositions criteria. Sidgwick joins this restoration project, and indeed could plausibly be considered to be the one who started it, by explicating with some care those "self-evident" principles that must obtain as antecedents to Mill's final conclusion.

been seen to arise and where the argument has been shored up by subsequent utilitarian theorists sympathetic to Mill. I will turn to address the difficulties in more depth. Finally, I will turn to two final criticisms that I find to fatally compromise Mill's proof even taking into account the work of subsequent apologists. Whitehead, for example, calls into question two essential arithmetic operations within the calculus and in so doing, calls into question the very naturalism that Mill understands to underpin his theory.

Mill begins by claiming that the "questions of ultimate ends do not admit of proof." This claim is taken to cover both the first principles of knowledge and the first principles of conduct. Knowledge and conduct, being *prima facie* different things, Mill questions whether the same faculties that human beings naturally possess apply to supporting claims of first principles in both. He notes that claims about first principles are claims about matters of fact, and as such, the plausibility of those claims can be judged by a direct appeal to those faculties that "judge of fact." The question then becomes, what human faculty addresses the question of conduct? On Mill's view, it is the mind that addresses claims about first principles, whether of knowledge or of conduct. Both knowledge and conduct reflect states of mind. The difference is the manner in which appeal is made relative to proof procedure. With matters of fact, the first principle under examination may be subject to direct appeal to faculties of the mind. With "questions of practical ends", the appeal is always indirect. However, Mill argues this is all that is required.

If questions of first principles of conduct are questions of ends, then they are questions about what things are desirable, on Mill's view. That is to say,

[1] "Questions about ends are questions about what things are desirable."

This, then, is the framework into which Mill introduces the thesis to be defended. The framework can be illustrated as follows:

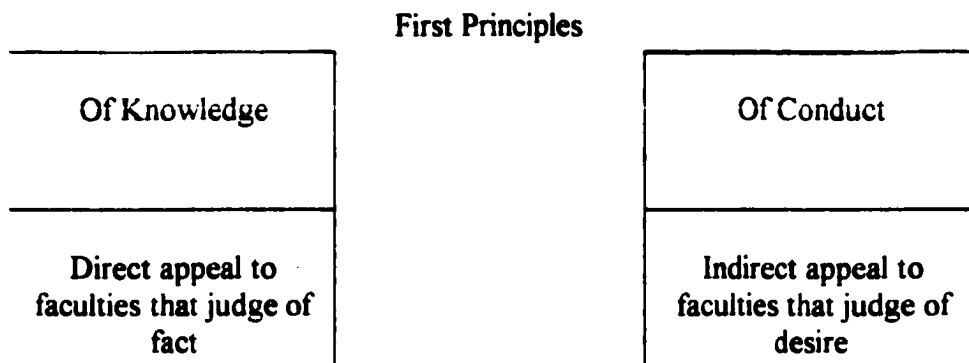


Figure 2

Mill's thesis is that the Principle of Utility is not only a first principle of conduct but that it is **the** first principle of conduct.

Since first principles of conduct do not admit of direct demonstration, the Principle of Utility will not admit of direct demonstration. Further, at issue in the indirect demonstration of the Principle of Utility is its plausibility.⁶⁹

We come now to the thesis:

[Thesis] The utilitarian doctrine is that happiness is desirable, and the only thing desirable, as an end.

It must be noted at the outset that Mill has two things to demonstrate here, and not one. The thesis can be subdivided into Mill's two conclusions as follows:

⁶⁹ This last can be called the Believability Criterion since Mill claims that, given the impossibility of direct, deductive demonstration, we must then ask what is required "of

[Thesis 1] Happiness is desirable as an end, and

[Thesis 2] Happiness is the only thing desirable as an end.

Mill argues for [Thesis 1] before turning to argue for [Thesis 2]. One of the infamous sections of Mill's proof greets the reader at the very outset. The proof depends on an analogy that goes like this: "The only proof capable of being given that an object is visible is that people actually see it. The only proof that a sound is audible is that people hear it; ... the sole evidence it is possible to produce that anything is desirable is that people do actually desire it." This analogy can be represented as follows:

visible : seen
::
audible : heard
::
desirable : desired

To avoid confusion, I will separate what I take to be the two premises that Mill incorporates into this single passage. For Mill, there are two analogies, though both are of the same type.

[2] (Analogy 1) visible : seen :: desirable : desired, and

[3] (Analogy 2) audible : heard :: desirable : desired

It does not seem prudent to assume that Mill is doing anything other than adding a second analogy for emphasis. "Audible" and "visible" clearly seem to refer to the same sort of thing; that is, bodily sensual experience. Further, if this is the case, then Mill has given two analogies, either of which would suffice for his purposes.

this doctrine ... to make good its claim to be believed."

It is also appears that Mill has suggested how one might move from one category of First Principles to the other. Notice that both visible and audible are instances of sense perception, the faculty which judges of matters of fact. Instances of audibility and visibility fall under First Principles of Knowledge. So, Mill can be interpreted as providing a foundation for his efforts to establish the Principle of Utility as the First Principle of Conduct. This relationship can be illustrated as follows:

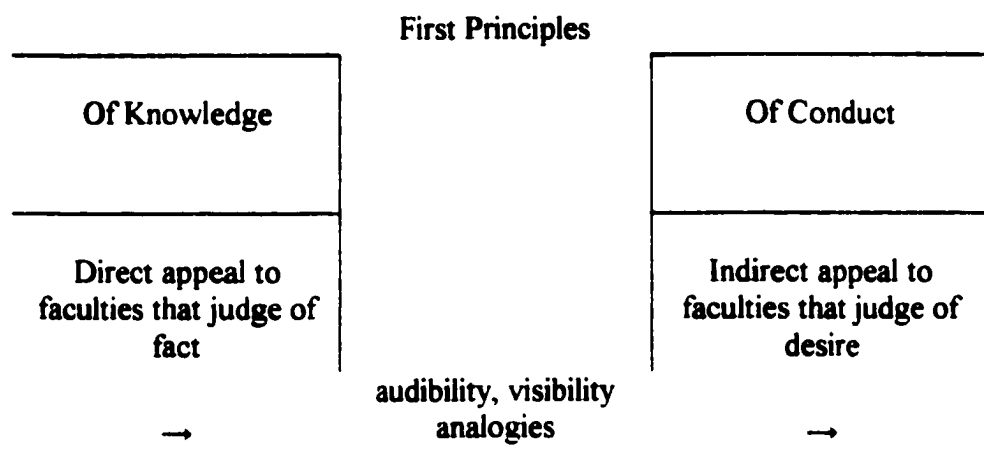


figure 3

Of course, it is precisely at this point in the argument that criticism begins in earnest. And it is because of this crossover work that the analogies are doing that Coleridge and G. E. Moore each advance their criticisms of Mill's project. Coleridge's argument can be put rather simply - he argues that the analogy does not hold; at least it does not hold for the purpose that Mill needs for it to. Coleridge argues that Mill equivocates on "desirable", in one instance meaning "actually desired or capable of being desired" and in another meaning "worthy of being desired". This dilemma for Mill is similar to the dilemma that Moore identifies. Moore argues that Mill commits a Naturalistic Fallacy by positing an analogous relation between natural goods - hearing, sight - and non-natural

goods - desirability. In both cases, Mill must either show that both are natural goods or that no equivocation has occurred from audibility and visibility on the one hand to desirability on the other. Here, John Skorupski's work is helpful.

One possible defense of Mill is to argue that his critics, especially Coleridge and Moore, misread the analogies. On this sort of view, one might argue that it is clear that the connection between desirability and desire is not as close a connection as the one between audibility and hearing or visibility and seeing.⁷⁰ Suppose all that Mill needs for the argument to go through is that each of the pairs offered in the analogy satisfy certain criteria to enable the proposition expressed to properly be called a Primitively Normative Disposition. On Skorupski's view, one can find in Mill "three criteria of the primitively normative". He writes, "Primitively normative dispositions are those which:

- (a) are discovered by careful examination of our consciousness and practice to play a normative role in our thinking;
- (b) cannot be derived from, and can be reflectively harmonised with, other such dispositions; and
- (c) are *not* subversively explicable."⁷¹

If we suppose (1) that Mill is trying to point out the primitively normative character of the dispositions captured by the analogies, (2) that this is **all** that Mill needs for his

⁷⁰ Of course, this does not address a further problem with the Millian view. Presumably there are countless visible things that will never in fact be seen. Here we understand "visible" to mean "capable of being seen". If this is the case, then it is simply false that the only evidence that something is visible is that people actually see it. My thanks to Dr. Kenneth Merrill for his guidance here.

⁷¹ John Skorupski, "Introduction: The fortunes of liberal naturalism", The Cambridge Companion to Mill, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 12-13.

argument to go through, and (3) that the dispositions captured in the analogies actually are primitively normative, then we will have succeeded in showing that Mill neither equivocates, as Coleridge charges, nor confuses different types of goods, as Moore suggests.

Mill follows the analogies with a formal conditional that elaborates further the categories of First Principles defined earlier while at the same time advancing the argument to its next step. Mill writes,

Conditional: If the end which the utilitarian doctrine proposes to itself were not, in theory and in practice, acknowledged to be an end, nothing could ever convince any person that it was so.

The perhaps more substantive aspect of this conditional is that to meet Mill's own Believability (or plausibility) Criterion, he must satisfy two conditions. They are,

[4] If the end (which the utilitarian doctrine proposes to itself) were not an end in theory nothing could ever convince any person that it was so, and

[5] If the end were not an end in practice nothing could ever convince any person that it was so.

These can be rewritten more helpfully as,

[4'] If convinced, then the "end" is an actual end in theory, and

[5'] If convinced, then the "end" is an actual end in practice.

So, we now we have that if both [4] and [5], or alternatively [4'] and [5'], can be shown, then the end "which the utilitarian doctrine proposes to itself" is an actual end. This is the approach that Mill takes to the next stage in the demonstration.

Mill restates his argument, recalling both the assumption that First Principles do not admit of direct proof and the analogies with which he began by claiming that “no reason can be given why the general happiness is desirable, except that each person desires his own happiness.” So, the reason that the Utilitarian Doctrine is supposed to be plausible is that each person desires his or her **own happiness**. This Mill takes to be a matter of fact; and if it is a matter of fact then it belongs under the first principle category “Of Knowledge”, and “we have not only all the proof which the case admits of, but all which it is possible to require.” For the sake of clarity, let us add as a premise Mill’s claim that,

[6] Each person desires his or her own happiness.

Mill seems to think that [6] is sufficient to satisfy both [4] and [5]. That each person desires his or her own happiness, Mill takes as fact. This “fact” applies both to theory and practice. That is to say, each person desires his own happiness in practice and each person desires her own happiness in theory. If [6] indeed satisfies both conditionals, then Mill takes the following conclusions to follow straightaway:

[7] Happiness is a good,

[8] Each person’s happiness is a good to that person, and

[9] Therefore, the general happiness is a good to the aggregate of all persons.

Now, it seems clear enough that Mill takes [7] and [8] to follow from [6]. This is so because he claims that

No reason can be given ... except that each person desires his own happiness. This being a fact, we have all the proof it is possible to require that happiness is a good, that each person’s happiness is a good to that person, and the general happiness, *therefore*, a good to the aggregate of all persons. (Emphasis mine)

The antecedent of the emphasized “this” is linked directly to the reason expressed in [6] “Each person desires his or her own happiness”. What is not as clear is from which of the previous statements [9] is supposed to follow; from [6], [7], and [8] or from [6] alone. Because [9] concludes the listing that began with [7] and [8], one could be led to think that [9] follows directly from [6]. However, Mill inserts the “therefore” (emphasized above) into this clause, suggesting that [9] follows from [6], [7], and [8] conjointly.

I take it that the former is the case; [9] follows from [6] directly and that Mill does not appeal to the intervening [7] and [8] to argue for [9]. This is so because Mill opens this section of the demonstration by stating that “No reason can be given why the general happiness is desirable, except that each person desires his own happiness.” The second clause is [6] and offered as the sole reason to suppose that the general happiness is desirable. Thus, it would seem that [9] follows from [6] alone.

Having now waded through this section of the proof we come to Mill’s intermediate conclusion, namely [10] “Happiness has made out its title as *one* of the ends of conduct and, consequently, one of the criteria of morality.” (Emphasis his) In other words, we have satisfied Thesis 1 - “Happiness is desirable as an end”. This, however, has not satisfied Thesis 2 - “Happiness is the only thing desirable as an end”.

Before turning to Thesis 2, I will discuss the problem with the notion of the “aggregate of all persons”. There are two troubling aspects of this concern, both illustrated by Whitehead. The first has to do with the ontological status of this “aggregate”. The second with the actual summing of happinesses. Simply put, how do dissimilar happinesses become additive into one sum of general happiness? And, is the

“aggregate” something that can “have” a Happiness? Or, in another way, presumably it makes sense to speak of the happiness that an Olympic athlete experiences when she triumphs in her sport and it makes sense to speak of the happiness that a graduate student feels upon the completion of his degree. But, is there a “happiness” that is the sum of these two individual happinesses that then the aggregate (in this case two) of persons can experience? Further, there is the question about the status of the aggregate made up of the two people. Is it something that can have a happiness?⁷²

On Mill’s account, the thing that must be shown if it is to be demonstrated that happiness is more than merely a good, but rather is the good, is to show that people never desire anything other than happiness. The goal, then, is to show that happiness is the sole criterion of morality. We can formalize the condition that Mill takes to be necessary, and sufficient for this demonstration. The actual expression of the conditional is that “it [is] necessary to show that [people] never desire anything else.” From this we have:

[11] Desire for nothing other than happiness → happiness is the sole criterion of morality,

However, Mill also uses the following formulation at times

[12] Desire for other things → happiness is not the sole criterion of morality.

⁷² Whitehead argues briefly that the Utility Doctrine ignores the grave problem with summing dissimilar happinesses. Indeed, he suggests that such a sum is actually impossible and very likely meaningless as a concept. However, even if it be granted that such disparate happinesses could be summed up into a general happiness, he argues that the supposition that there is an aggregate that could be said to have this general happiness requires Mill to violate his own denial of abstract objects, be they Platonic or not. Mill, at least, recognizes this potential “aggregate” objection himself. As he turns from showing that happiness is a good to showing that it is the good, he briefly addresses the concern. However, since this recognition and address happens a bit further into the

It is this second formulation that Mill sets out to use to demonstrate Thesis 2. While Mill is not explicit about [11] and [12] being biconditionals, it seems that they must be in order for the demonstration to go through and avoid circularity. For example, if in [11] we discover that happiness is not the sole criterion of morality, then by contraposition, we discover that there must be a desire for something other than happiness. Since Mill uses [12] to advance his argument as well, then we have that if we discover that happiness is not the sole criterion of morality then there must be a desire for something other than happiness; and on account of this, we discover (by [12]) that happiness is not the sole criterion of morality. However, if [11] and [12] taken together form a biconditional, then it is appropriate for Mill to appeal at one time to the assumption that happiness is not the sole criterion of morality (the negation of the consequent of [12]), at other times to appeal to the antecedent of [11], and at still others to assume the antecedent of [12] in order to force a *reductio*.

The argument proceeds apace with the assumption that perhaps happiness is not the only thing that is desired. His example is virtue. Perhaps virtue is desired. If virtue is desired, then virtue is an end. To Mill's credit, he does not assume simply that virtue is desired, but that it is "desired disinterestedly, for itself." In this way, virtue is an actual competitor with happiness and if shown to be an end equivalent to happiness, then happiness will fail to be the sole criterion of morality. Mill then makes virtue an even stronger competitor. He adds that if one does not love virtue as a thing desirable in itself, then "the mind is not in a right state, ... not in the state most conducive to the general

demonstration of the second thesis, I will deal with it more fully there.

happiness.” Thus, if one does not love virtue as an end in itself, then one is actually failing to exemplify the Utilitarian Doctrine. However, Mill does not take this strong position regarding the status of virtue to indicate a “departure from the happiness principle, in the smallest degree.”

Mill quickly introduces a distinction between ends that involves the whole/part relation and the means/end relation - those ends that occur as both means to and parts of another end and those ends are neither means to nor parts of another end. Virtue, according to Mill, is not naturally and originally part of the end, happiness. Given that it now occupies the lofty position as a “desired and cherished” part of happiness, it must have been able to become a part, though it did not have this position originally. Thus, according to Mill, virtue must originally have been associated with happiness as a means. This is so because Mill holds that if *X* were not originally a means, then it “would be and [would] remain indifferent.” This is not the case with virtue. Virtue is now part of the end, so it could never have been indifferent to it. Therefore, it must always have been associated with happiness, first as means and now as part. Upon becoming a part of the end it is to be expected that virtue should come “to be desired for itself, and that too with the utmost intensity.” Thus, the desire for virtue is not a desire for a different thing than happiness, but is as much the desire for happiness as is “the desire for health.” In this way, Mill takes himself to have eliminated all possible competitors to happiness for the title of sole criterion of morality. Happiness is a composite end, made up of all those things that are properly desired for themselves but which are in fact parts of happiness. Thus, any desire for one of those composite parts, e.g., virtue, is a desire for happiness.

It is at this point that Mill addresses the aggregation concern. However, rather than address the notion of an “aggregate” as it relates to a group of people, he discusses it as it concerns the collected parts of the general happiness. Presumably he supposes that *mutatis mutandis*, the things he says here will cover the difficulties that attend the concept when relating it to people. He begins with the following claim:

[13] Happiness is not an abstract idea but a concrete whole.

In support of this claim, Mill offers the following statement of his naturalism:

Life would be a poor thing, very ill provided with sources of happiness, if there were not this provision of nature by which things originally indifferent, but conducive to, or otherwise associated with, the satisfaction of our primitive desires, become in themselves sources of pleasure more valuable than the primitive pleasures, both in permanency, in the space of human existence that they are capable of covering, and even in intensity.⁷³

What we have here is in many ways a recapitulation of what we have seen to this point. Mill’s example of virtue is instructive here. We have seen how virtue, though originally indifferent to happiness, has become a part of it. According to Mill, this happens because although virtue and happiness were originally and naturally distinct, they were related or associated with one another in the relationship of means and ends. Though virtue itself was and is an end, it was an end conducive to the further end of happiness and is now a part of that end. This metaphysical structure of means and ends is a happy provision of nature, on Mill’s view; else “life would be a poor thing, very ill provided with sources of happiness.” So, from this we can assume that Mill’s naturalism, though mentioned only sporadically within the proof of the principle of utility, is at the same time a critical foundation assumption.

Having reasoned to this point, Mill concludes that from all of the preceding considerations, we have arrived at our destination; namely that “there is in reality nothing desired except happiness.” Thus, Mill takes it that he has shown not only Thesis 1 - “Happiness is desirable as an end,” but also, Thesis 2 - “Happiness is the only thing desirable as an end”. He helpfully recapitulates his demonstration in the form of conditionals that are satisfied in turn. In the first case, [a] if human nature is constituted as to desire nothing which is not either part of happiness or a means of happiness”, then we know that these things are the only things desired. From there we have [b] If [a] is the case, “happiness is the sole end of human action, and the promotion of it the test by which to judge of all human conduct.” And finally, [c] it follows from [b] that happiness “must be the criterion of morality, since a part is included in the whole.” Since Mill thinks we have all the proof we can get, and all the proof required in virtue of the fact that human beings desire happiness, then [a] follows, and from [a], [b] and then [c].

While at first glance, this may look like only a restatement of the case that Mill had made earlier, a subtle addition has been made to it. Earlier we were concerned with the “aggregation of people” that culminated the demonstration of Thesis 1. After Mill has discussed the provision of nature in his discussion of the composite of aggregates that comprises happiness in Thesis 2, we might still be left to wonder how in fact such a provision of nature might function in the case of the aggregate of people from Thesis 1. However, in this restatement of the proof, Mill makes an important addition that sheds light on that question. Just as there was an analogy from audibility to desirability to open

⁷³ Mill, 86.

the proof, so to an analogy concludes it. The analogy in the latter case is a part/whole analogy that can be represented as follows:

Analogy
the parts of happiness : the whole of happiness
∴
the individuals experiencing happiness : the aggregate of individuals

This, then, is the way in which I suspect Mill might answer the earlier potential objection. The question remains, however, whether this final analogy holds. Since I find this objection to be one of the most problematic for Mill, I will leave it for last. Now, I turn to elaborate on those portions of the argument where Mill's detractors have weighed in against him and where Mill's apologists have attempted to shore up his argument. The obvious place to begin is with the analogies from the outset of the proof.

C. The Analogy Problem

Let us return to that earliest part of the argument where criticism has historically begun in earnest; the opening analogies of audibility and visibility to desirability; Coleridge's charges of equivocation and Moore's Naturalistic Fallacy. Hopefully, it has become somewhat more obvious why these analogies are so important for Mill's project. Having divided the category of First Principles into two subcategories - Of Knowledge and Of Conduct, Mill has to reunite the two to establish that the Greatest Good is an end in theory and in practice.⁷⁴ Further, by founding his demonstration on the solidly empirical matters of fact that are the objects of First Principles of Knowledge, Mill takes himself to have introduced a measure of demonstrability into questions of First Principles of Conduct. Or, Mill has answered the question he posed at the outset, "Can an appeal be

made to the same faculties (as for First Principles of Knowledge) on questions of practical ends?" with a "Yes." If the analogies between audibility/being heard, visibility/being seen and desirability/being desired hold, then Mill can argue, for the moment at least, that First Principles of Conduct have the same firmly empirical basis as First Principles of Knowledge are acknowledged to have.⁷⁵ Thus, when Coleridge and, in a different way Moore, call into question the analogies, they are striking at the heart of the Millian project. Should either Coleridge or Moore succeed in their efforts, Mill's project fails.

Coleridge argues that to say that *X* is "desirable" is to say something other than that *X* is in fact desired by some or even all people; that is, that it is worthy of being desired. He writes of Mill's project,

there is an equivocation in the main word of the definition, viz., *desirable*, by means of which you assume all that ought to be proved. ... For *desirable* means either that which actually I do desire, or that which I know I ought to desire. ... You preassume, I say, that *Good* is nothing more than a reflex idea of the mind after a survey and calculation of agreeable or delightful sensations.⁷⁶

So, Coleridge is pointing out that there seem to be two senses of "desired" that could be employed here. The first is an empirical claim - *X* is desirable just means that

⁷⁴ See Figure 3.

⁷⁵ This may be one of Mill's most elegant arguments. Recall that the audibility and visibility analogues are subject the First Principles of Knowledge and as such are Matters of Fact admitting of direct demonstration. Recall also that the desirability analogue is under the First Principles of Conduct heading and is so not accessible by direct appeal. But, if the analogies hold, it follows that desirability is subject to the same certainty of demonstration because it has the same status as audibility and visibility. Though desirability (a Matter of Conduct) is inaccessible of its own, by means of carefully selected Matters of Fact (audibility, visibility), it has the same level of accessibility as they.

⁷⁶ S.T. Coleridge, *Philosophical Lectures*, 152-3

someone actually desires X , or that X is capable of being desired by someone. The second, on Coleridge's view, is a normative claim - X is desirable means that X is worthy of being desired by some moral agent. On Coleridge's account, the empirical claim is not equivalent to the normative claim and it would have to be for the analogy to hold. Or, put in another way, each of the analogies above would need to be recast in the following form:

[Coleridge 2'] visible : seen :: desirable (e) : desired (e) :: desirable (n) : desired (n), where (e) represents the meaning of "desirable" in the empirical claim and (n) represents the meaning of "desirable" in the normative claim.

The adjustment to make [3] into [Coleridge 3'] should be obvious.

[Coleridge 3'] audible : heard :: desirable (e) : desired (e) :: desirable (n) : desired (n)

If the analogy held from (e) to (n), then the proof would be able to proceed. However, Coleridge argues that it fails because it fails to hold from (e) to (n) and this it does because for something to be "desirable (n)" it must be inherently desirable or worthy of being desired. In the former case, Mill cannot appeal to desirability inherent in the thing desired because this would clearly invalidate the analogy. In the latter, it would seem that to argue that X is desirable because it is desired and that means that X is worthy of being desired serves only to skip the (e) step in the analogy. If one were then to answer the question why X is worthy of being desired with the statement that X is desired, it would seem that a very neat circle has appeared.

For Coleridge, Mill must be able to argue for [Coleridge 2']. This is so because, on Coleridge's view, Mill must be able to bridge the gap between the "empirical" use of "desirable" and its normative use. That Mill does not offer such an argument is clear from a survey of the Millian corpus. However, the anti-utilitarian Coleridge ultimately argues that the argument cannot be made.

On the other hand, if we cast Coleridge's critique in these terms, we can see how Moore's distinction between types of goods can be seen as closely connected with that critique. In fact, it seems that Moore's critique may be seen as a special case of Coleridge's. However, reminding ourselves of Moore's distinction between natural goods and non-natural goods may be of some help in assessing Mill's alleged failure. We can ignore the distinction "natural" and "non-natural" for the moment and grant simply that there are two types of goods, whatever they may be.⁷⁷ Let's call them Good₁ and Good₂. This would still appear to cause difficulties for Mill's analogies. However, if those things that could be classed under the heading Good₁ satisfy the conditions of being Primitively Normative Dispositions and those things classed under the heading Good₂ similarly satisfy the conditions, then one could analogize between them, provided that the relationship between relata that one is trying to illuminate is the fact of being Primitively Normative Dispositions. Now, if we reinstate our "natural" and "non-natural" distinction from earlier, we are confronted with a type of Good₁ and Good₂ situation. Here again,

⁷⁷ One reason for ignoring the "natural/non-natural" distinction is that nomenclaturally, it is not at all clear that Mill means the same thing by "natural" as Moore. For Mill, it seems sufficient to label "natural" those normative things that are properly Primitively Normative Dispositions. Mill would not accept, I suspect, that the normative "desire/desirability" picks out anything other than a natural good, in Moore's sense.

recognizing both classes of things as goods, we are left to ask if they reflect **Primitively Normative Dispositions**. If so, the analogy is sound, at least insofar as Moore's criticism is concerned. This is why I mentioned earlier that we can take Moore's critique to be a special case of Coleridge's. For Coleridge, the issue is an equivocation, whether natural/non-natural or empirical/normative, or whatever, on the word "desirable", as it is related to "audible" and "visible". This is just to say that Coleridge's critique seems broader; and broad enough to include at least the important part of Moore's. Thus, if Mill can meet Coleridge's criticism, then it would appear that he has met Moore's as well.

To show that Mill can meet Coleridge's critique is also to show that Coleridge misreads Mill in one very important way. This is not because Coleridge mistook Mill's use of "desirable" as used only in the "empirical" sense, but because he mistook audibility and visibility to be simply empirical matters when in fact they embody a normative quality as well. However, the question would seem to be, "Can it be shown that both audibility and visibility on the one hand and desirability on the other hand are **Primitively Normative Dispositions**?"

Recall the criteria for a disposition to be **Primitively Normative** for Mill. Those criteria are that **Primitively Normative Dispositions**

- (a) are discovered by careful examination of our consciousness and practice to play a normative role in our thinking;
- (b) cannot be derived from, and can be reflectively harmonised with, other such dispositions; and
- (c) are *not* subversively explicable.

At this point it is helpful that Mill included two analogies for us to work with. On Mill's view, it seems fairly straightforward (if not painfully obvious), that through examination of our consciousness and practices we discover that audibility and being heard and visibility and being seen play normative roles in thought. In one respect, they pick out human faculties that carry the normative value "good". That is, it is with respect to these particular abilities that the appellation "good" is affixed. If this is so, then (a) is satisfied for both audibility/being heard and visibility/being seen.

Though the two analogues do not form an exhaustive list of sensory perception, they do compose a sufficient set of qualities with which to test (b). Clearly, audibility and visibility cannot be derived from each other. Further, it seems just as clear that with careful reflection (and oftentimes not so careful reflection) that audibility/being heard can be harmonised with visibility/being seen and vice versa. Again, this conclusion is reached from a survey of common practice and behavior. For example, suppose one happened upon a small town on March 17 of some year and decided to tour the downtown shops. Upon leaving one of the shops, one notices a large group of men, women, and youth, all dressed in green and holding various instruments. Upon hearing the music they are playing, seeing the floats upon which they ride, and feeling the impact from the cabbages and potatoes that are thrown from the floats, one concludes that one has happened upon a St. Patrick's Day parade. While careful reflection is probably not required, the harmonization of the ability to see and the ability to hear undoubtedly harmonize to facilitate the conclusion that a St. Patrick's Day parade is in progress. So, it would seem as if (b) is satisfied as well.

Finally, when Skorupski uses the phrase “subversively explicable”, he seems to mean simply that it is very implausible that one should discover some further fact of the matter that, of its own, would explain both audibility and visibility. This is just to say that audibility and visibility are distinct faculties and instances of seeing indicate brain-states that are different from those states indicated by instances of hearing. Again, audibility and visibility seem to satisfy (c). So, because audibility and visibility both satisfy the criteria required to be classed as Primitively Normative Dispositions, it becomes more plausible to assume that Mill has not mangled his analogies nearly as badly as Coleridge would have us believe. In fact, it seems that Mill has everything that he needs to meet Coleridge’s critique, and *mutatis mutandis*, Moore’s as well..

D. The Quantity/Quality Problem

One of the more renowned and widely discussed difficulties for Mill, apart from the Analogy Problem, is the Quantity/Quality Problem. For Mill’s predecessor, Jeremy Bentham, and for Bentham’s followers and apologists (including J.S. Mill’s father, James Mill), the quantity of a pleasure measured in intensity, duration, and propinquity (proximity) was all that could be, or need be, summed in the utilitarian calculus. Not so on J. S. Mill’s view.

Bentham’s detractors labeled the utilitarian doctrine a “swinish doctrine” as it could not discriminate between the pleasure of poetry and the pleasure of pushpin. One of Mill’s aims is to demonstrate how it is that the utility doctrine can and ought to take the quality of pleasures into account when making utility calculations. Mill writes,

It is quite compatible with the principle of utility to recognize the fact, that some *kinds* of pleasure are more desirable and more valuable than others. It would be

absurd that while, in estimating all other things, quality is considered as well as quantity, the estimation of pleasures should be supposed to depend on quantity alone.⁷⁸

Mill takes the fact that the experience of a great aria is experienced by at least some people to be a much higher pleasure than that of a ballpark hotdog (or vice versa) as important. Suppose for a moment that one experienced a magnificent performance of one of Henry Purcell's many trumpet voluntaries. Suppose further that one had experienced a street vendor hotdog before entering the concert hall. And suppose still further that one experienced the former as finer pleasure than the latter. Mill is making the point that the experience of one as a higher pleasure than the other is *itself* an experience that must be taken into account in the utility calculus.

On the basis of this claim, and Mill's inclusion of quality in his utility calculus, some more recent critics have accused Mill of placing "quantity (intensity and duration) on one side as a straightforward empirical property and quality on the other side as a mysterious, obscure, normative property."⁷⁹ This criticism seems to suggest that Mill has in fact abandoned his empiricist foundations. Whether this is the case or not, perhaps Mill's harshest critic on this score is F. H. Bradley. Bradley accuses Mill of abandoning utilitarianism altogether with his inclusion of quality. He writes, "If you are to prefer a higher pleasure to a lower without reference to quantity – then there is an end altogether of the principle which puts the measure in the surplus of pleasure to the whole sentient

⁷⁸ Mill, Utilitarianism, 38.

⁷⁹ Donner, "Mill's Utilitarianism", Cambridge Companion to Mill, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 217.

creation.”⁸⁰ The crux of this criticism seems to be that because quality and quantity are radically different things, they cannot be properly summed; reminiscent of the impossibility of adding apples and oranges. In both of these cases, the criticism seems to be that Mill has abandoned his **naturalism**, in the first instance because “quality” is not a “straightforward empirical property”, and in the second because “quality” is an altogether different sort of thing than “quantity”.

In her paper “Mill’s Utilitarianism”, Wendy Donner takes each of these critiques in turn and shows why, on her interpretation of Mill, they fall short of the mark. I find Donner’s work on this particular problem quite convincing. She dismisses those “false friends” who would argue that for Mill, quality is reducible, in some sense or other, to quantity and those who would suggest that quality and quantity, while distinct, are nevertheless correlated; that is, as one varies, the other varies in precisely the same sort of way. In both these cases, Donner rightly points out that the defender of Mill actually supports his critic. In the reductionism case, if it is shown that quality is reducible to quantity, then Mill has played false by dwelling so intently on quality as a separate thing from quantity. In the latter case where quality and quantity are distinct but vary precisely with one another, then quality serves only as an indication of quantity and is actually used only when it is more accessible to experience than the quantity to which it is correlated. One might imagine that in the course of calculating the utility of some particular act or another that one has quite a good handle on the quantity of pleasure to be expected and very little grasp on the quality. However, if one can be assured that the two variables are

⁸⁰ F. H. Bradley, Ethical Studies, 1876

precisely correlated, then one need not be concerned that one is adding two wholly distinct (and perhaps incommensurable) things. Here again, the advocates of a correlationist interpretation of the quality/quantity distinction are in fact arguing that Mill uses only quantity as the grist for the utility calculus mill and that the quality of a particular pleasure is instrumental in picking out those quantities that might otherwise be elusive. This view, too, does not seem to take seriously Mill's own assertion that "some *kinds* of pleasure are more valuable than others" and that pleasures are not to be evaluated on quantity alone, but quality as well. The challenge for Millian apologists is to show how quality, as a distinctly different thing from quantity, can be added to the utilitarian calculus without introducing a mysterious, normative element or abandoning the doctrine altogether.

One thing that must be recalled is that Mill holds that pleasures (whether measured by "quantity" or "quality") reflect particular mental states. As Donner points out, the things that are valuable for Mill are pleasurable mental states. The good-making properties of these pleasurable mental states are complexes of sense experience. Mill writes,

When many impressions or ideas are operating in the mind together, there sometimes takes place a process of a similar kind to chemical combination. When impressions have been so often experienced in conjunction, that each of them calls up readily and instantaneously the ideas of the whole group, those ideas sometimes melt and coalesce into one another, and appear not several ideas, but one.

This "one" is a complex of those impressions and ideas which are created out of the basic data of sense experience. Donner writes that "many mistaken or misguided objections to

Mill's position arise from the failure ... to keep separate the things that are valuable" and the properties that are their good-making properties.⁸¹

If the mental life is constructed from first basic sense experiences and then from complexes, then it is these basic experiences and complexes of experiences that are the bearers of value. Or, as Donner puts it, "The things that have value are complex mental states with pleasure as a component."⁸² Among those good making things are intensity and duration, which together comprise quantity. However, Mill takes quality to be just another ordinary (empirical) property that is a component of any pleasurable experience. Accordingly, it contributes to the pleasure of that experience as a whole. This can be represented as I have in the diagram below:

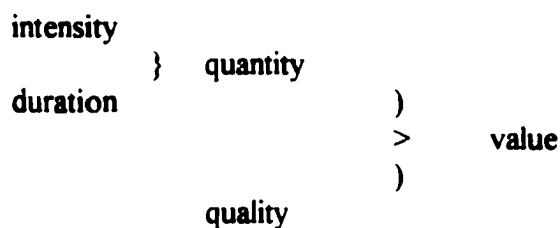


figure 4

Thus, for Mill, the utility calculus is admittedly more complex than Bentham's which would include only the upper half of the diagram. But to assume that Mill's calculus is any less empirical, naturalistic, nor utilitarian than his predecessor's is wrongheaded. Instead, Mill recognizes that quality of pleasure, if it is the real experience that it certainly seems to be, is a component of happiness, and as such must be included in the calculus if one is to ever hope to accurately calculate either individual or general

⁸¹ Donner, 219.

⁸² *ibid.*, 261.

happiness. Further, it is not a mysterious, obscure element, but rather a concrete moment of sense experience just as the taste of a hotdog or the hearing of a melody is a moment of sense experience. Thus, for Mill, there are two basic good-making characteristics of pleasurable mental states – quantity and quality. So, we need not assume that Mill has either abandoned the utility doctrine or empiricism or naturalism or any combination of the three simply because he includes quality as a good-making property of pleasurable experiences.

E. The Cambridge Moralists' Problem

I will discuss the Cambridge Moralists at considerably more length later. I mention their criticisms of Mill here because they apply both directly to Mill and indirectly to Sidgwick. It would be somewhat out of place to discuss Sidgwick's full response here since it follows from particular parts of his argument which have yet to be reached. Thus, a discussion of the particular views of the Cambridge Moralists (including their criticism of Utilitarianism) and Sidgwick's dismissal of those critiques will follow later. However, for the sake of clarity with regards to Mill's utilitarianism, I will briefly outline their critique and Sidgwick's response. Simply put, the Cambridge Moralists think that the utilitarian project just gets it wrong.

The term "Cambridge Moralist" is attached to a group of 19th century philosophers who were, not surprisingly, faculty members at Cambridge. The make-up of the group is a subject of some debate. Certain philosophers – F. D. Maurice, Whewell, and Grote – are always included. Green is at times included and at other times not,

though his views of utilitarianism certainly fit with those of the core group.⁸³ At times Coleridge is included, though he was not a faculty member but rather a quite formidable student at Cambridge. Whitehead includes Sidgwick. This latter is clearly a mistake as Sidgwick fits neither the philosophical commitments nor theological influences of the group. Whatever the peripheral make-up of the group, a composite of the core commitments of this group can be fashioned. Central to that composite is the view that the utilitarian doctrine is of limited use at best and simply wrongheaded at worst.

J. B. Schneewind, in a number of his works, has done a remarkable job of sketching both a composite of the Cambridge Moralists and showing how the views of these philosophers shape much of the debate concerning moral philosophy in the 19th century. Crudely put, the Cambridge Moralists were convinced that the utilitarian doctrine was, part and parcel, incompatible with Christian doctrine (and on Mill's view, dogma). For the Moralists, the fact of common-sense intuitions about morality provides the evidence that supports the view that the best explanation for the universe as experienced by human beings is theistic. Beyond that, the best explanation is most likely a Christian explanation. The basis for this view lies in human intuition, which, however imperfect it may be, nevertheless seems to enable human beings to grasp moral truths. On the Cambridge Moralists' view, common-sense morality "shows the growth of an increasingly clear and penetrating grasp of the morality taught by the best religious leaders, and consummately by Christ." However, this ever more clear and penetrating grasp is not

⁸³ Green was an Oxford man and Coleridge was a student who predated the Cambridge Moralists mentioned above. However, Green's sympathies clearly lie with his Cambridge counterparts and Coleridge was a tremendous influence on the philosophical

deducible from “worldly considerations”; that is to say, from empirical observation and generalization. That Mill, and Bentham before him, advance a view that is dependent wholly on empirical observation and generalization is an example of defending a “one-sided and partial view of morality”.⁸⁴

The views of the Moralists and the Utilitarians are so incompatible about the nature of common-sense and common-sense morality that it would seem there is little way to judge between them. If the Moralists are right about utilitarianism, it seems that it would be very difficult to establish that without begging important questions. Similarly, the utilitarian wishing to rebut the Moralists is faced with a similar dilemma. Mill’s requisite “plausibility” argument – namely that the utilitarian doctrine is plausible, and more plausible than its competitors – seems faced with quite a hurdle given the apparent incommensurability of the two positions. Sidgwick, however, does a very nice job of rendering the basic assumptions of the Moralists as at best suspect and at worst implausible. This he does by bringing into question the very intuitions upon which the Moralists conclusions rest.

Sidgwick acknowledges that intuitions play an incalculably valuable role in morality; indeed, intuitions are required for any sort of reasoning or knowledge at all, not just moral reasoning and/or knowledge. However, Sidgwick denies that the proper inference from the possession of moral intuitions and necessity of intuitions for moral reasoning is that human beings possess a divine nature. Since intuitions are required for any knowledge whatever, the Moralists must be willing to say that intuitions regarding

bent at Cambridge long after his departure.

mathematics or logic or natural science are also indications of the divinity of human nature; moral intuitions would have no special status. However, the Moralists maintain that moral intuitions are revelatory of the divine, perhaps not to the exclusion of intuitions connected to “matter of fact knowledge,” but at least superior to them. On Sidgwick’s view, this position is not justified; and thus, the inference to a theistic, and probably Christian, best explanation of the world is at least suspect.

F. The Whiteheadian Problem

Whitehead rarely mentions Mill. Indeed, Mill shows up only once in Process and Reality, and then only in the context of an example of the inadequacy of language in general and propositions in particular to fully express events in the world. However, on those rare occasions when Whitehead does turn his attention to the utilitarian scheme Mill advances (primarily in Adventures of Ideas), the result is a very telling indictment of the Millian project.

As is not at all unusual with Whitehead, we first need to clarify some of his terminology and the distinctions in the actual world that these different terms are thought to refer. With regard to the Millian argument, the distinction is between “things that occur”, “things that recur”, and “things that endure”. Some examples are surely needed to make these distinctions clear. Something is said to be an example of an “endurance” when it is a “true and real thing that endures”.⁸⁴ By “true and real thing”, Whitehead simply means something in the actual world as opposed to an abstract idea. One of Whitehead’s examples of endurance is a piece of rock.

⁸⁴ Schneewind, 107.

An example of an “occurrence” is a “true and real thing that occurs”. Again, by “true and real”, Whitehead is locating the instance of an occurrence in the actual world and asserting that it is ontologically distinct from any abstraction from the actual world. Here, an example is any happening, any event that takes place; e.g., the falling of a rock. These happenings, or actual occasions, have ontological priority for Whitehead. We will return to a more elaborate discussion of actual occasions later. For the purpose of addressing his criticism of Mill, however, it is sufficient to note the difference between the three sorts of things without worrying about the devilish details.

Finally, Whitehead uses the phrase “things that recur” to pick out abstract objects. His example, in keeping with the rock theme, is the shape of the rock. For Whitehead, the abstract object in this case is very much like an Aristotelian form – that is, the form of a chair, for example, is to be found in the chair, not floating about in Plato’s heaven. Further, abstract objects are ontologically dependent on the true and real things that endure and the true and real things that occur. Later, we will discuss Whitehead’s view of abstract objects (or more properly “eternal objects”) and the ontological relationship between actual occasions and eternal objects; the former has priority over the latter. Here, we need only keep in mind that abstract objects are ontologically secondary to and dependent on things that occur. One of Whitehead’s arguments is that Mill does not keep this distinction straight.

Before turning to this argument that depends on the distinction between things that endure, things that occur, and abstract objects, we ought first examine a telling

⁸⁵ Whitehead, Adventures of Ideas, 164.

critique that Whitehead does not make but suggests. Whitehead grants, for the sake of argument, that a utilitarian calculus is possible. That is to say, that one might actually be able to add the pleasures of different people together to amass a sum of pleasures that could be labeled “the general happiness”. That Whitehead grants this possibility should not be taken as an endorsement of it. Indeed, Whitehead is quite skeptical that one might be able to accomplish such a task. One recent Millian apologist has picked up on this concern and notes that Mill’s project is indeed endangered by it. Skorupski writes,

Utilitarianism ... is an abstract ethical thesis about what has intrinsic ethical value. Mill did not think hard enough about its content. He did think hard about the claim that happiness is the only thing that has ethical value, and he said wise things about it. ... But about the distributive content of the utilitarian thesis he hardly thought at all. ... I am thinking about the content of the thesis itself, about how it proposes to measure overall ethical value, or general good, as a function of the good of individuals.⁸⁶

Skorupski may in fact be overly generous. It seems hardly plausible that individual happinesses are additive at all. If we assume for the moment that the things that are pleasurable are indeed mental states, then we are left to wonder how it is that one might add the pleasurable mental state of John Stuart Mill to the pleasurable mental state of the Queen of England and come up with a sum. These happinesses seem very highly individualized; as individualized as the people who have them. It does not seem that Mill has developed this side of the doctrine well enough; indeed, the additive problem (or the problem of distributive content) may very well prove insurmountable for utilitarian theorists, including Mill. Indeed, from Whitehead’s remarks at the outset of his critique

⁸⁶ Skorupski, 20

of utilitarianism, he suggests that the problem of distributive content is in fact potentially fatal to the utilitarian project.

However, for the sake of argument, Whitehead grants that individual happinesses are additive. An instance of an individual happiness, say the pleasure of eating a ballpark hotdog, is an occurrence of happiness. That is to say, the pleasure of eating the hotdog is something that happens in the real world and as such is an actual occasion. Further, the pleasure of attending the opera is also an occurrence of happiness. However, the most that can be said is that the pleasure of one occurrence is the pleasure of *that* occurrence. It is not transferable to another occurrence, and the pleasure of eating the hotdog and the pleasure of attending the opera are occurrences which are tied to their happenings, and to their happenings alone.

Now, suppose that these pleasures are additive in the way that would be required for Mill's utilitarianism to work. The question is whether the general happiness that is the sum of these pleasures is also an occurrence. This is the question of importance to Mill's project because happiness does not seem to be an occurrence at all, but rather a recurrence. Note that in this paragraph and in the one preceding, I use "pleasure" to pick out the particular instance and "happiness" to pick out the additive sum. This is simply for the sake of clarity to signify that the sum and the parts are distinct things. On Whitehead's view, "happiness" is a recurrent. That is to say, happiness is an abstract object that recurs each time a particular occurrence of pleasure occurs. Further, the "general happiness" of which Mill speaks must also be a recurrent, and thus an abstract object, despite Mill's protests to the contrary. This is so for the following reason.

If we grant that individual occurrences of pleasure are additive into what Mill calls “the general happiness”, then there must be some actual occurrence whose pleasure this “general happiness” is. However, there is no thing in the actual world that possesses or experiences the “general happiness”. For example, suppose we could place a mathematical value on the eating of a hotdog by person A and another value on the attendance of an opera by person B. Supposing these values to be additive, the sum of the value must be possessed by something on Mill’s account. This something, presumably, is the “aggregate of all persons”, in this example, two. But (person A + person B) seems quite a meaningless expression. The only way to make sense of this summing and possessing, on Whitehead’s view, is to include within the principle itself that the “aggregate of all persons” is an “occurrence with the happiness of this additive sum”. However, such a move is itself doomed at the outset because to posit that the “aggregate” is itself an occurrence is to suppose that there is some thing in the actual world that is that “aggregate”. On Whitehead’s view, that way lies the very positive doctrines of Plato from which Mill has so consistently tried to distance himself.

In summary, Whitehead argues that Mill either fails to recognize the difference between an actual occasion of pleasure and the “general happiness” which is not an occasion of pleasure but rather a recurrent (that is, an abstract object – despite Mill’s protestations to the contrary) or that Mill fails to recognize that the “general happiness” does not attach to any actual occasion whose pleasure the “general happiness” would be. This is, of course, after Whitehead has granted that highly individualized instances of pleasure might plausibly be summed together to make the additive sum that is the

“general happiness”. However, like Whitehead, I do not find such a sum that plausible to begin with, nor do I find it plausible that this “general happiness” could then be thought to be an instance of pleasure for any thing in the actual world. If Whitehead is right about the distributive content problem or the conflation and confusion of occurrent things and recurrent things (and I take him to be right about both), then Mill’s argument in support of the principle of utility fails.

Chapter 3. Henry Sidgwick, Part Two: The Dualism of Practical Reason

Despite their differences Sidgwick picks out at least three strands of thought from Mill: (1) The Principle of Plausibility, (2) Primitive Notions, and (3) an explication of the utility doctrine that includes quality as a normative criterion distinct from quantity, a position that Sidgwick rejects. Recall from the first stages of the discussion of Mill’s argument that the Principle of Plausibility amounts to a method of judging between two competing views. This sort of method is useful in ethical theory because of the difficulty of giving deductive demonstrations concerning most ethical matters. Mill relies on the Plausibility criterion, claiming that, given the impossibility of direct, deductive demonstration, we must ask what is required “of this doctrine ... to make good its claim to be believed.” So, the Principle of Plausibility may be expressed as follows:

Principle of Plausibility: Given two competing theories, the theory that is, on balance, more plausible is the one that ought to be provisionally accepted.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ I suggest that the acceptance ought to be provisional (an amendment of Mill’s view) simply because of the fluidity of evidence. For example, suppose Theory A is taken to be, on balance, more plausible than Theory B. If in the future a considerable body of evidence should be uncovered that tips the balance in favor of Theory B, then the earlier

A corollary to the Principle of Plausibility is Mill's Believability Criterion.

Believability Criterion: The most that one can require of an ethical theory is an argument that it is worthy of rational belief. This is also the least that ought to be required.

The difference between the two principles is fairly obvious and quite simple. In the first case, one is comparing two theories that each lay claim to be true. The aim here is to discriminate between the two theories. The second case is a requirement leveled at an individual theory; namely that Theory A, for example, must be able to be shown to be rationally believable. Suppose Theory A cited the phases of the moon and the tracks of the stars through the zodiac as explanatory principles for human behavior. Suppose also that Theory B made claims about human motivations and desires to explain the same behavior. Neither theory is without difficulty. Yet one, Theory B, is much more believable. So, Theory B might very well be found to be preferred to Theory A, but that ought not be the end of the argument. Some sort of argument about why a rational person ought to believe Theory B to be the case is also necessary. Sidgwick adopts these principles, utilizing the Principle of Plausibility to eliminate Intuitionism and utilizing the Believability Criterion as the standard for his argument for Universal Hedonism.

Another inheritance from Mill is the set of Primitive Notions.

Primitively normative dispositions are those which are discovered by careful examination of our consciousness and practice to play a normative role in our thinking; cannot be derived from, and can be reflectively harmonised with, other such dispositions; and are *not* subversively explicable.⁸⁸

acceptance of Theory A should be reassessed.

⁸⁸ Skorupski, 12-13.

While Sidgwick uses the Principle of Plausibility to argue against Intuitionism, he uses two different arguments to actually subvert the view. One depends almost entirely on something very similar to Mill's set of Primitively Normative Dispositions.

Finally, Sidgwick takes Mill's explication of the Utility Doctrine as one way to deal with the difficulties that attend Bentham's first formulation of the view. One of Mill's amendments to Benthamite Utilitarianism is the Quality Criterion. Sidgwick rejects this amendment, though this would seem to leave Sidgwick to face some of the difficulties that the Quality Criterion sought to address. As Rawls has pointed out, Sidgwick takes great pains to address each of the objections with which a Quantity Utilitarian Doctrine is met. Against the backdrop of Millian Utilitarianism, Sidgwick can advance his own view in much the same way we will see Whitehead's Virtue view advanced against the backdrop of its closest theoretical kin, the Virtue ethics of Aristotle. I turn now to Sidgwick's arguments comparing the three methods of ethics.

A. Comparison of Universal Hedonism, Ethical Egoism, Intuitionism

1. Argument against Intuitionism

On Sidgwick's view, Intuitionism makes the following claim about common-sense:

Intuitionism: Common-sense claims to be able to see by inspection that certain types of action are necessarily right (or wrong) without regard to the goodness or badness of their consequences.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Broad, 216.

Sidgwick has two arguments to level against the Intuitionist view. I first examine the notion Primitively Normative Dispositions and then move to Sidgwick's own original argument.

As we have already seen with Mill, there is a formal inference that is used with the Primitively Normative Dispositions to make claims about an ethical theory.⁹⁰ It is formalized as follows:

Theory Verification Inference: If an ethical view is coherent, then it will be founded on dispositions that are primitively normative.

On Sidgwick's view, with only the quickest examination of our consciousness, it is quite clear that certain dispositions play normative roles in our moral thinking. For example, the famous "Lying is wrong" may be taken to be necessarily true in virtue of what it means to lie. Thus, principles like "Lying is wrong" that are intuitively grasped as clear and distinct meet the first criterion required to be considered true primitively normative disposition.⁹¹ The difficulty lies in the investigation relative to the second requirement. It seem fine to say that "Lying is wrong" is irreducible.⁹² Sidgwick does not take it to harmonize with other dispositions that also meet the first requirement. For example, the disposition "Be kind to your neighbor" seems to play a normative role in human society. Yet, the "Lying is wrong" disposition is not always compatible with the "Be kind to your

⁹⁰ See section C. Analogy Problem for the earlier discussion of Primitively Normative Dispositions.

⁹¹ This does not entail the coherence of the ethical view that includes "Lying is wrong" because the Inference is not a biconditional.

⁹² The only way in which it might be thought to be reducible is as the negation of the "Truth telling is always right" claim. However, for the moment consider it to be irreducible.

neighbor” disposition; at least it is not clearly compatible. This example suggests an entire class of dispositions that meet the first criterion but are at the same time incompatible with one another. The problem is that there is no way to simply appeal to intuitions to settle the matter. Settling disputes between dispositions looks as if it requires a principle by which the disputes are settled; a principle that, as suggested here, cannot be wholly intuitive. Thus, Intuitionism seems to falter on this point. The founding dispositions of Intuitionism fail to be primitively normative and thus the view fails to be coherent.

For all that this would seem to get Sidgwick everything he needs to dismiss Intuitionism, it is not the argument he spends the most time developing. The argument against Intuitionism that he takes to be his finest, while similar to the Primitively Normative Dispositions argument, is finally different in some important ways. Recall again the Intuitionist claim with which we began this section:

Intuitionism: Common-sense claims to be able to see by inspection that certain types of action are necessarily right (or wrong) without regard to the goodness or badness of their consequences.

One example of the clearly deontological slant in his conception of this category is his use of the Kantian example of lying and truth telling. Simply put, Kant asserts that telling a lie is wrong and inherently so, rather than because of the consequences that might follow from it.⁹³ On Kant’s view, one can presumably examine the proposition “In

⁹³ Note here that I have not addressed Kant’s infamous article “On an alleged right to lie from altruism”. In this article, Kant makes an argument that almost every scholar since has recognized as a departure from his own ethical views as advanced in the *Groundwork*

thus and so a predicament, I should tell a lie” and see that it is necessarily wrong.⁹⁴ Thus by inspecting the proposition itself, a rational agent can tell that the action expressed is a bad one, even if the consequences to the agent, the situation, and the general good of humankind would be uniformly better than truth telling. Or in another way, certain characteristics of the action itself are **sufficient** to make the action right or wrong independent of the consequences. Other actions, truth telling, for example, are immediately right. This is what leads Sidgwick to sometimes label the category “Dogmatic Intuitionism”; a moniker that he uses interchangeably, for the most part, with Intuitionism when addressing his comments to this particular method of ethics.

However problematic Intuitionism may sound on its face, it is as clear now as it was to Sidgwick that a survey of “common-sense” will reveal precisely these sorts of

and the *Metaphysics of Morals*. Kant here argues that his own view that lying is always wrong can be supported by an examination of the consequences lying will have, both on society and on the character of the liar. However, if lying is wrong, on Kant’s view from the *Groundwork*, it is so because the moral law has a universal character that bears a certain sort of necessity. That is, to say that one “ought” to do X means that X bears a particular formal logical relationship to the perfect will. If the perfect will would will X to be the case given the particular circumstances, then the imperfect agent who has authored the moral law within herself ought, on the basis of that self-authorship of the moral law, to will X to be the case. The consequences of X are irrelevant, as X has a particular ontological status as inherently good. This is not the view Kant defends or depends upon in the “Alleged Right”; he advances a consequentialist argument to support his view that one ought not lie. For the purposes of this project, however, we will focus only on those passages where Kant’s work seems to be internally consistent and expressive of his deontological views; views I take to express his true considered philosophical commitments.

⁹⁴ I use “necessarily” here to pick out a particular kind of ontological necessity that Kant feels that the moral law expresses. Kant’s deontic logic uses the operators of “ought” and “can” to express, in the arena of moral claims, a similar logical relationship within the metaphysical or mathematical arena captured by the operators “necessary” and “probable”. For a very helpful discussion of deontic logics, see Georg von Wright, Deontic Logic.

principles (e.g., not lying, being kind, etc.) to be present in the ethical discussions of people. Beyond this, a simple survey also reveals that principles of this sort are immediately and intuitively grasped by those who hold them. For example, suppose a child has uprooted his aunt's petunias. When asked about the petunias he lies to avert blame. His subterfuge is uncovered and when the child is told that lying about the petunias was wrong, he responds with the question, "Why?". He is often met with the response, "Lying is wrong." But this response ought not be thought of as a response to the particular instance, necessarily. Suppose the parent is asked further whether it is ever okay to lie. The response then is likely to be "No," and the reason given that "Lying is wrong." Sidgwick maintains that on the survey of common sense, the respondents seem to hold that the "Lying is wrong" proposition is true not because of social ills that might attend its falsity but rather it possesses what is taken to be intuitive clarity. Lying is simply wrong, and that settles the matter.

For the Dogmatic Intuitionist, the set of "real self-evident" principles will be quite large, encompassing "Lying is wrong", "Truth telling is right", and a host of other principles that resonate with the sort of intuitive clarity that these principles seem to possess. The difficulty facing this method is immediately obvious; this sort of Intuitionism holds only in the most simple of cases. It does not seem to hold very long even in the case of lying. Consider again the child who asks if lying is ever okay. While one likely response is "no", another is "well, sometimes, maybe" followed with a prephilosophical discussion about how all lies are not necessarily created equal. Here, one might imagine lies told to preserve another's feelings or, in extreme cases, to

preserve another's life. But, if this is even plausibly the case, then the "Lying is wrong" intuition is in for some modifications. This is Sidgwick's complaint against the Intuitionist method of ethics.

Critique: The principles thought to be self-evident on the Intuitionist model turn out not to be.

Sidgwick's critique seems to consist in three parts. If any of the three parts of the critique is successful, then the critique is successful. It appears that in the case of Dogmatic Intuitionism all three are successful.

The first focuses on the breadth of the set of principles that this method is liable to produce. It seems fairly obvious that this critique is supported by more than the specific case of lying versus truth telling. As suggested above, the Intuitionist method could potentially harbor a vast host of seemingly self-evident principles of varying complexities. Perhaps the "Lying is wrong" principle is removed in favor of what could be a multitude of principles expressed in the following form, "Lying is wrong, except when X is the case". The competitors for X are clearly legion, some of which will likely seem more clear and distinct than others. However, the more conditions that are added, the less clear and distinct the principles seem to become. Thus, this case would seem to fail to meet Sidgwick's Intuitive Verification requirement for self-evident principles. Beyond this, the case also suggests that there seems to be little hope of consensus among the relevant experts; hence the method fails at Social Verification as well. In fact, on further reflection it seems that the only times that the Intuitionist method meets the criteria of clarity and distinctness and of general consensus are in unambiguous simple

cases that deal mostly with vague generalities.⁹⁵ Consider the following example. One morning after prayer, a young novitiate (a “monk-in-training”) approached Abba Alonius (an elderly monk renowned for wisdom) and put forward the proposition that “Lying is always wrong” (actually, he said “Lying is always sin”).⁹⁶ Abba Alonius then asked what the young monk would do in the following situation. A person has come running into his cell and hidden behind a barrel of pickles. Soldiers from the town come to the cell and tell the youngster that a prisoner has escaped and they are looking for him for the purpose of his execution. Abba Alonius asks the youngster what he ought to say in response to the question from the soldiers concerning whether or not he had seen the escapee. If “Lying is always wrong” is clear and distinct, then the answer should be equally so. However, Abba Alonius held that the proper response was to lie to the soldiers and that the young monk should meditate on the question further.

From the examples, we can see that while the principle “Lying is wrong” appeared to be clear and precise, it is not so. Beyond its ultimate failure at the tests Intuitive and Social Verification, it would seem that this scenario causes a potential failure in Discursive Verification as well. The more “self-evident” principles there are, the more likely it is that two of these principles will conflict in irreconcilable ways; for example, “Lying is wrong” and “Be kind to one’s neighbor”. So Sidgwick’s first line of critique is that Intuitionism fails to yield principles that are truly self-evident.

⁹⁵ One example might be the case of gratuitous cruelty. It would seem that the proposition “Acts of gratuitous cruelty are always wrong” meets the demands of clarity and precision and would receive a favorable review from the relevant experts.

⁹⁶ Benedicta Ward, translator, Sayings of the Desert Fathers, (London: Mowbray Publishers, 1975), 35.

The second focus of the critique is a recognition that human beings are emotional creatures, often motivated to action (or to assent to principles) not through reasoned consideration of the details but through oratory or circumstance. Sidgwick notes that human beings often confuse strong impulses with “genuine intellectual insight”. In so doing, we are apt to label a principle self-evident when it is in fact far from it. History is rife with examples of “principle” from the Crusades to the Salem Witch Trials to the McCarthy hearings; all done in the name of principles taken to be clear and distinct. However, a moment’s reflection demonstrates that the principles held so dear in the heat of passion are impossible to defend in the cold light of reason.

The third part of the critique is focused more on the deontological “rules” that arise out of the principles. On Sidgwick’s view, these “rules” often rest on custom and habit and because of this have gained the appearance of “moral axioms” when in fact they are not. C. D. Broad uses the Victorian example of the gentleman who seems to know intuitively what the “dictates of politeness or honor hold or forbid.” However, Sidgwick is rightly concerned about the “intuitiveness” of this knowledge. It seems that the intuitions here arise not as self-evident principles, but rather have been cultivated by the society in which this gentleman exists. There is a lack of “internal rational justification” of these principles. That is to say, the dictates of honor, for example, have been the subject of a number of rather pointed debates, often involving blades of one sort or another. This is not the sort of Social Verification of self-evident principles that Sidgwick has in mind. Again, these sorts of principles do not seem to meet the criteria of Intuitive, Discursive, or Social Verification, and accordingly are not to be seen as

really self-evident principles. Or, as Broad puts it, “careful examination of the ‘alleged axioms’ of common-sense intuitionism fail to answer [Sidgwick’s] conditions.”

It is not only in the complicated cases (e.g., lying) that the problems arise, but even in simple ones. For example, there exists a general proscription against murder. But almost immediately the question arises concerning the content of “murder”. Suppose it to be defined as “unjustified killing”. Then the question arises about the standard of justice being used to determine which killings are justified and which are unjustified. Thus, situations seem to play havoc with the interpretation of the principles and, it seems unlikely that the principle will meet the requirements of self-evidence. Into this dilemma, “common-sense either suggests no principle of reconciliation, or one so complex and qualified as to be no longer self-evident.”⁹⁷ For this reason, Sidgwick argues that Intuitionism is forced to incorporate a teleological principle, of one sort or another. Thus, the method is not ultimately complete on its own, but must depend on some foundational principle from outside its scope in order for its own intuitional principles to be made consistent. Sidgwick thinks the best candidate for this outside principle is the Utility Doctrine.

2. Argument for Universal Hedonism (Utilitarianism)

On Sidgwick’s view, it is not enough to have shown that the Intuitionist method fails to be complete. Nor is it enough to suggest that one principle that would fill in the gaps is the Utility Doctrine. Instead, he understands that he must make an argument in

⁹⁷ Broad, 217.

favor of his own view and that this argument must meet the criteria expressed in the Principle of Plausibility and the Believability Criterion.

First he tries to show that Intuitional morality is “unconsciously” utilitarian. He does not do this, it seems, to show that the Intuitional method is flawed (he thinks this has already been established). Instead, showing that Intuitional morality is “unconsciously” utilitarian will provide support for Universal Hedonism. This is so because if the foundational principle of Universal Hedonism can be shown to complete the Intuitional model, then this will provide some support for its own plausibility.

The second thing Sidgwick wants to show is that Universal Hedonism meets the “really self-evident” criteria along with the verification requirements. From these, Sidgwick argues that Universal Hedonism straightforwardly follows.

The first argument is in the form of a hypothesis confirmation. Sidgwick begins with the following hypothesis about the “Moral Sense”, which can be understood to refer to the moral intuitions of common-sense that we have been investigating all along.

Hypothesis: The Moral Sense is ‘unconsciously utilitarian’.

To support this hypothesis, Sidgwick first considers whence the Moral Sense arises. On his view, the Moral Sense is derived from sympathy. Here, he explicitly depends on the work of Hume. I will briefly digress to examine Hume’s derivation of the Moral Sense from sympathy.

a. Hume on Sympathy

On Hume’s view, all human perception is of two kinds - impressions and ideas. Impressions, which have primacy over ideas, are, on the whole, more intense, more vivid,

and more forceful than ideas. This is quite elementary Humean material, and while it is a distinction that is important to keep in mind, I will not elaborate further on these basic issues. Instead, I will focus on the issue of Sympathy and the Moral Sense. Sympathy is an element of human nature and, as such, is part of the mechanism underlying human experience. Perhaps this accounts for its quite interesting effects. Hume writes, “no quality of human nature is more remarkable, both in itself and in its consequences, than that propensity we have to sympathize with others, and to receive by communication their inclinations and sentiments.”⁹⁸ Sympathy is thus responsible for some of our strong impressions.

Hume then goes on to argue that the Moral Sense arises from this human capacity. He famously claims in the *Treatise* that morality is more properly felt than judged of.⁹⁹ The upshot of this claim is that the elements of the Moral Sense begin with a sense impression, not with an idea (say, of Justice or Courage, etc.). That impression is then combined with the natural human capacity for sympathy, which transmutes the correspondent idea into an impression, say, of duty to alleviate need. Hume writes,

When any affection is infus'd by sympathy, it is at first known only by its effects ... which convey an idea of it. This idea is presently converted into an impression, and acquires such a degree of force and vivacity, as to become the very passion itself, and produce an equal emotion, as any original impression.¹⁰⁰

The actual mechanism of admixing sense impressions with human sympathy to ultimately produce the features of the moral sense is rather straightforward, on Hume's

⁹⁸ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, P.H. Nidditch, ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 316.

⁹⁹ *ibid.*, 470.

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*, 317.

account. To begin with, we always have an impression of ourselves and this impression is “intimately present with us.” So, take for example a case where we hear of someone on his way to the dentist for a lengthy root canal, and we see the effects of the passion that grips the victim. Hume says that “when I see the *effects* of passion in the voice and gesture of any person, my mind immediately passes from these effects to their causes, and forms such a lively idea of the passion, as is presently converted into the passion itself.”¹⁰¹ Thus, when met with the person on his way to the root canal, the cringe we experience is an instance of the phenomena of the idea of a passion in another converting itself into a passion within us. The mechanism of this communication is sympathy. Sympathy “enlivens the idea” of another’s sentiment or passion to the point that it has the intensity of an impression within us. So, though the experience of the dentist drill is not one that we personally experience on this occasion, we vicariously experience the dread of the other, at least in part because our imagination holds before us the idea of the drill, the chair, the nitrous-oxide, and we ourselves in the chair.

Another important thing to notice is that Hume makes the scope of this idea quite large. It is not only upon meeting a family member or friend with the impending visit to the dentist’s chair that human sympathy activates within the human breast. Hume states that this capacity is activated when we see the effect of passion in the voice and gesture of **any person**. Hume’s view of the process by which this scope develops is also rather simple. From the fact that we always have an impression of ourselves, Hume moves to the claim that the mind passes from the idea of oneself to that of another person or of

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*, 576.

another object. In the case of the dentist's patient, the sympathy arises in the agent who then shudders with the dread experienced by the patient. Perhaps this is on account of having experienced the dentist drill firsthand. However, this is really not relevant. What is relevant is the experience of the shudder of dread and that we are connected to other human beings beyond our immediate social relationships and familial connections.

However, those familial connections and social relationships play a very important role in the extension of sympathy to those beyond our immediate social groupings. Hume notes that there is, generally speaking, a close connection between parents and children; a more distant, but still intense connection between children and more distant relations (e.g., uncles, aunts, etc.); and a still more distant connection to friends of relations. Similarly, there is a quite strong connection between close friends; a more distant connection between casual friends; and a still more distant connection between mere acquaintances. Hume writes,

whoever is united to us by any connexion is always sure of a share of our love, proportion'd to the connexion, without enquiring into his other qualities. Thus the relation of blood produces the strongest tie the mind is capable of in the love of parents for their children, and a lesser degree of the same affection, as the relation lessens. Nor has consanguinity alone this effect, but any other relation without exemption. We love our country-men, our neighbours, those of the same trade, profession, and even name with ourselves. Every one of these relations is esteemed some tie, and gives a title to a share of our affection.¹⁰²

The connection, immediately and forcefully felt in the case of close relations and friends and more faintly experienced in the case of distant relations and acquaintances, is the experience of sympathy. As Nidditch writes of Hume's view, in practice 'the mind

¹⁰² *ibid.*, 352

extends to others beyond close kin” in ever widening concentric circles until the whole of humanity is included.

To be sure, the more distant the relation or acquaintance (or enemy or stranger, for that matter), the more difficult it is for the agent to feel sympathy for the plight of that individual. But here reason steps in to extend our feelings. For example, suppose that one finds Courage admirable in a friend. On Hume’s account, the recognition of the virtue in a friend reasonably requires the same recognition of the character trait in an enemy. That is not to say that this is an easy matter at all. Hume recognizes that the passions are an unreasonable lot, not easily corrected or reined in by cool and calculated judgment, and surely not directly influenced by reason. It may be very well to say that one ought find the courage of an enemy as praiseworthy as the courage in a friend, but it is an entirely different thing to actually **feel** this. However, reason can indirectly shape and mold the feelings, though some will always be recalcitrant. That indirect influence is of the form already suggested - showing that one who feels in one way toward a particular subject ought, in all consistency, to feel towards other subjects in relevantly similar situations.

That widening of scope arises from the gradual application of experience within the ever-wider concentric circles of experience - family, friends, acquaintances, and then by imagination and the use of reason, strangers, and even enemies. The actual mechanism by which this widening of scope occurs is the experience of sympathy in all its intensity in the closer proximity relationships; an experience that is extended by imagination in ever broader ways. The idea of connection that arises from this exercise is

itself mixed with sympathy and this generates yet another impression - though one that is likely weaker as the distance of the subject from the agent is greater.

The connection born of Sympathy is all that there is to bind humanity to itself. As L. A. Selby-Bigge writes of Hume's view, "we have no extensive concern for society except by sympathy."¹⁰³ But, for Hume, it is sufficient.

Sidgwick also uses this conception of virtue and so I will briefly discuss it here. According to Hume, virtues are those qualities of character that prove beneficial and receive approval on a general survey. Natural Virtues (e.g., Benevolence, Gratitude, etc.) elicit feelings of approval on every occasion they are observed. On the other hand, Artificial Virtues (e.g., Justice, Promise-keeping, etc.) are approved at times and not at others. They elicit approval on the basis of their benefits to society and societal order. The impression of sympathy will cause people to approve of qualities that are beneficial to the possessors, just as they approve those qualities that are beneficial to themselves. On Hume's view, these qualities are called virtues. Or as Broad writes of Hume, "virtues are felicitic qualities of character."

Thus, we have seen how the natural human capacity of Sympathy through direct and indirect associations of impressions and ideas gives rise to the recognition of virtue in oneself and in others. Sidgwick appropriates Hume's view with little emendation. Thus, we have working definitions of virtue and Sympathy that Sidgwick appropriates for the most part:

Sympathy: The natural human capacity from which the moral sense is derived.

¹⁰³ Selby-Bigge, *Analytical Index*, Hume's Treatise of Human Nature, (New York:

Virtues: Felicitic qualities of character.

b. Sidgwick's Self-Evident Principles

Given this conception of virtues as felicitic qualities of character, Sidgwick thinks he can then show that there exists a complicated coincidence between the morality of common-sense (or the Moral Sense) and Utilitarianism. In the negative prong of his argument, Sidgwick must address claims that Intuitionism actually covers a broader range of moral intuitions than Utilitarianism.¹⁰⁴ If this is the case, there are particular conflicts that are better addressed from the Intuitionist method. Thus, the criticism is that Utilitarianism is too spare a notion to supplant Intuitionism, whatever difficulties Intuitionism might have. There are two conflicts that receive particular attention in Sidgwick's negative argument. The first conflict involves the empirical observation that some actions that arise from a virtuous state of character may fail to promote utility. At the same time, there exists within common-sense a moral intuition to praise worthy characters. For example, suppose a person with a courageous character strides into a situation for which courage is called but the actual result of the immediate courageous act is to prolong a conflict that will be more harmful than if it ended quickly. It seems right to suppose that we would still want to call the act a courageous one, especially since *ex hypothesi* it arises from a courageous character. Yet the immediate consequences and the longer-range consequences turn out to be negative. Sidgwick recognizes that actions in the actual world often present these sorts of difficulties for a Utilitarian view. After all, if

Clarendon Press, 1985), 739.

¹⁰⁴ Recall that the negative prong of the argument is an effort to show that Utilitarianism is a plausible alternative to Intuitionism.

one is a strict Utilitarian, ought one not condemn the courageous act (and perhaps the person) on the basis of the negative consequences that obtain on account of that act, and the character from which it arose? Sidgwick answers this difficulty with the following claim:

- (a) Dispositions may be admired as generally felicific even when special acts resulting from these dispositions are infelicitic.

In addition to handling the apparent critique of the negative consequences of a virtuous act, this view also accounts for the dogmatic intuition that certain acts are right regardless of consequence. For example, some Intuitionists have held that it is always right and universally morally obligatory to tell the truth (or at least not to lie), regardless of the consequences. The intuition is that some actions (e.g., truthtelling) and character (e.g., Honesty) are inherently right and there is nothing more to be said about the matter. On Sidgwick's view, this expression of the intuition is partly right. On Sidgwick's view, this intuition can be explained apart from supposing that the character (or action) is inherently good. A Utilitarian can explain this apparent conflict by arguing that certain sorts of character generally produce actions the results of which are usually felicific. Those sorts of character can be admired and fostered because of this general felicity apart from the occasional instances of infelicity.

On the other hand, Sidgwick goes on to write that,

- (b) An act a Utilitarian must condemn as likely to do more harm than good may yet show a disposition or tendency that will on the whole produce more good than harm.

On the face of it, this would seem to argue against the interpretation of Sidgwick's view that I have advanced for (a). This is so because given the occurrence of an action that brings about ill consequences, even if it arises from a virtuous character, would require condemnation. This problem would seem to be aggravated by the following Sidgwickian addition:

(c) Only the useful is praiseworthy.

Thus, from (b) we have that any action that brings about harmful consequences, even if it arises from a virtuous character, must be condemned and from (c) we have that which is useful should be praised. One could argue that praise for a virtuous character would seem to be jeopardized by (b) and (c) and their consequences. And this would seem to stand in stark contrast to the intuition to praise worthy characters and to affix the label "good" to people and not just to actions.

Two issues ought to be addressed here. The first is that even on this less than charitable reading of Sidgwick's view, the case for Intuitionism is not given aid. Sidgwick contends that (b) is "eminently the case with scrupulously conscientious acts." For example, the common-sense of the day elevated conscientiousness (understood as "carefulness in conforming to accepted moral rules") to the level of a virtue. To express a truly good character was to be a conscientious person (along with other attributes). But Sidgwick goes on to point out that "unenlightened conscientiousness has impelled men to fanatical cruelty, mistaken asceticism¹⁰⁵, and other infelicitic conduct." However, he also recognizes that "no Intuitionist would maintain that carefulness in conforming to

¹⁰⁵ Here Sidgwick is referring to the same phenomena that Hume excoriates as "monkish

accepted moral rules has not, on the whole, a tendency to promote happiness. ... [In the negative or infelicitic cases] we speak of 'over-scrupulousness' or 'fanaticism'."¹⁰⁶ Thus, in response to the claim that the real-world examples of the courageous act that results in harm or the conscientious character that results in infelicity bear no real criticism against Utilitarianism that they do not also bear against Intuitionism as well.

The second issue is more important. While the first simply results in the observation that neither Intuitionism nor Utilitarianism is harmed more than the other by the criticism posed by the real-world examples, the second goes to why it is that Utilitarianism is not harmed at all. Sidgwick writes, in keeping with (a), (b), and (c) above, that "it may be observed that when we perceive the effects of a disposition generally felicitic to be in any particular case adverse to happiness, we often apply to it, as so operating, some term of condemnation." However, this does not entail that actions are worthy of praise in proportion as they are immediately useful. The Utilitarian, on Sidgwick's view, must not consider only the usefulness of the action or character, but the usefulness of the praise. If, for example, by praising an action we would encourage dispositions that are generally infelicitic, but that happened to be useful occasionally or even just in the particular case, then we ought not offer that praise; or if we do, offer it only with great qualification. And in those cases when the character is generally felicitic but the special action that arises from the character is not, then the condemnation ought to be apportioned to the action only with great qualification. This is so because in the

virtue".

¹⁰⁶ Sidgwick, 428.

greater picture, the character will produce more benefit than harm and undue criticism¹⁰⁷ might very well damage the character, thus producing more harm than benefit.¹⁰⁸

Consider the following example. The experience of resentment and the act of resenting a particular action done to one by another may very well be in harmony with the Utility view that Sidgwick advances. As P. J. Strawson has pointed out, the experience of resentment (and other reactive attitudes) may very well be necessary for the existence of society and human interaction as we know it.¹⁰⁹ However necessary resentment may be to society, it is quite in harmony with Utilitarianism, on Sidgwick's view, that it should not be recognized as a virtue by common-sense. This is because, in the particular instances of the experience, resentment may produce more benefit than harm. Indeed, the experience of particular instances of resentment may even be necessary for the existence of society. However, if every action, or even a great number of actions, are done from feelings of resentment, the character of those actions is likely to produce more harm than good. So, it is in keeping with Sidgwick's view that the experience of resentment is to be recognized as of benefit to society and yet not to be praised.

¹⁰⁷ Note that by "undue criticism" I do not mean to suggest that no criticism be forthcoming. This would seem directly in contradiction to (b). But the criticism must likewise be useful [by (c)] on a Utilitarian view and so to the extent that it is useful, should be offered; to the extent to which it is harmful, or at least less helpful than some other course of action, this circumstance is sufficient reason to lessen the intensity of the criticism.

¹⁰⁸ We should note a course Sidgwick does not take. He could simply dismiss the difficulty by arguing that any action that produces ill consequences could not have arisen from a virtuous character. This would simply beg the question against the Intuitionist.

¹⁰⁹ For Strawson's complete treatment of this issue, see his "Freedom and Resentment" in "Freedom and Resentment" and Other Essays, Methuen, London, 1974.

Having addressed the character/act distinction criticism of his view, Sidgwick goes on to address the notion of Benevolence. The moral intuitions of common-sense have been taken to suppose that Benevolence largely comprises the demands of distribution of kindness. He notes that while the Intuitionists would claim that it is the Good for one's fellow creatures that is at stake and the Utilitarian would claim that it is Happiness, we should not assume that the two views do not converge simply because of this distinction.

On Sidgwick's view, the investigation of this apparent difficulty must begin with a survey of common-sense; in this case, the common-sense views concerning how people actually interact with one another, particularly as these interactions express the distribution of kindness throughout society. Common-sense morality regards this as the "love my neighbor as myself" principle. The criticism amounts to this. Suppose we admire someone as virtuous who gives up her own happiness for the happiness of others and that the exchange is not even; that is, the one who sacrifices experiences greater harm than the benefit received by the one for whom the sacrifice is made. It would seem that the Utilitarian must regard this self-sacrificial action as likely beyond the pale of admiration and virtue because the utilities simply do not work out. Sidgwick goes on to make the case even harder by asking the reader to suppose that in this surrender of happiness for another the total happiness is diminished. Clearly, it would seem that the Utilitarian observer must hold that the character is not virtuous or that the admiration is misplaced. Yet a quite common common-sense moral intuition is that the person is to be admired and regarded as virtuous.

About this case, Sidgwick has a number of less than helpful things to say before finally addressing the Utilitarian justification. In the first place, Sidgwick argues that it is doubtful that such a character is actually admired. That is, it is doubtful that in the case where such a disproportion between sacrifice and gain is as clear and striking as he has portrayed it that a spectator would actually admire the sacrificial lamb. This seems to straightforwardly beg the question.

His second approach is to suggest that the spectator gets it wrong when observing such a scene. For example, the spectator may not be able to tell “whether happiness is lost on the whole” and may not be able to judge whether future consequences will merit the apparently unequal exchange in the present. This, also, seems a question-begging response.

However, his third approach does seem to address the critique. Suppose, he argues, that there is a loss in this case and that the loss is as bad as above (that is, the sacrifice actually diminishes happiness on the whole). “Our admiration of self-sacrifice will [still] admit of a certain Utilitarian justification.” This is so because the self-sacrificial action flows from a particular sort of disposition, one which is generally felicitous, even though this particular instance of self-sacrifice is not. So, while the Utilitarian might very well be required to condemn the particular action, she would not have to question the admiration or the character of the self-sacrificing person. This is so because, on Sidgwick’s view, “such conduct shows a disposition far above the average in

its general tendency to promote happiness, and it is perhaps this disposition that we admire rather than the particular act.”¹¹⁰

For Sidgwick, at issue here is the distribution of kindness - that is to say, in what ways and to whom ought our kindness be extended. Or, in another way, when is the volition toward doing good for others to be commended and when, if ever, is it to be condemned. He notes that Utilitarianism and common-sense may very well agree that all right actions are conducive to someone's happiness, either that of the agent or that of whoever receives the benefit. In this way, they are in agreement as to the beneficence of actions. The issue is the distribution of that beneficence, since it seems as if this is where the two views will diverge. On Sidgwick's view, the distribution of kindness in accordance with normal promptings of family affections, friendships, gratitude, and pity have a firm utilitarian base. If he is able to demonstrate this claim, then he will have shown that insofar as there exists a divergence regarding the distribution of beneficence between Intuitionism and Utilitarianism, then that divergence is so much the worse for Intuitionism.

Sidgwick notes that common-sense outlines a set of rules which govern the distribution of beneficence. The dictates of common-sense are that the agent give her immediate relations greater consideration than strangers. This set of closer relations includes “consanguinity, friendship, previous kindnesses, and special needs”. This is not a difficulty for Utilitarians as some (e.g., J. Grote) have supposed. This is so because Sidgwick claims that these close relations tend to be the locus of our most intense

¹¹⁰ Sidgwick, 432.

emotional experiences. He writes, "the most intense and highly valued of our pleasures are derived from such affections". This emotion, he notes, is highly pleasurable. So, the acts of beneficence between close relations are likely to be more productive of benefit for the recipient. Beyond this, actions which flow from a disposition filled with affection for one's fellows are more likely to be received without objection and with reciprocity than those that flow from a disposition that is clearly egoistic. Beyond this, it is likely to strengthen the connection between giver and receiver and thus increase the later emotional exchanges between them. If, however, the same act of beneficence is performed for someone unknown to the giver, the act is as likely to arouse suspicion of motive as it is to arouse gratitude or to inspire an "echo" of the kindness.¹¹¹ These phenomena are clearly known to common-sense. Thus, it would seem that the Utilitarian response to the phenomenon of self-sacrifice functionally reproduces the distribution rules for beneficence that common-sense moral intuitions suggest. Thus, there is no functional divergence between common-sense and Utilitarianism. For this reason, one can plausibly assume that the best explanation (at least between Utilitarianism and Intuitionism) for the distribution rules is a Utilitarian one, at least 'unconsciously', because Utilitarianism more aptly fits the data of common-sense.

In summary, the character/act distinction seems to provide more support for the view that common-sense is 'unconsciously utilitarian' than that it is Intuitionist. In the course of this discussion, we have seen that the coincidence between the demands of the Utility Doctrine and the demands of common-sense is explained and the praise and blame

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, 433.

accorded particular actions that are beneficial and harmful demonstrate a coincidence, though not strictly one-to-one relationship, with the expected application of the Utility Doctrine. Further, the attribution of felicity to dispositions even when a particular act issuing from that disposition is infelicitous is not ruled out by Sidgwick's view; in fact, Sidgwick's Utility Doctrine seems to demand just that sort of attribution. This is consistent with what one might expect common-sense moral intuitions to demand.

So it has been shown that Universal Hedonism provides a basic principle that Intuitionism can be understood to rely on for its own completeness. This reliance is clearly not of a conscious sort. So, it appears that Sidgwick has produced at least some confirmation of the hypothesis that "The Moral Sense is 'unconsciously utilitarian'." Sidgwick has argued for the confirmation of the hypothesis that common-sense moral intuitions are 'unconsciously utilitarian'. He has done this by showing the incompleteness of Intuitionism and by showing that the gaps can be overcome with the Utility Doctrine; namely that as rational beings we aim at the good in general as opposed to any particular part of it. Sidgwick must now show that the Utility Principle is a "clear and certain" moral principle. Further, he must show this to be the case within the fairly strict parameters he has set forth: really self-evident and verifiable. I will approach his arguments for self-evidence first before turning to his verifiability claims.

Sidgwick's pattern of argument is to advance three principles that he takes to be self-evident and to show that they are so by applying the verifiability criteria to each of them in turn. Then he takes the three principles, conjoined with the Utility Doctrine, and investigates whether this set of principles is still "really self-evident." The method for

determining self-evidence in the case of the set of principles is the same as for determining self-evidence in the case of a single principle; the philosopher must examine the set by applying the verifiability criteria to see if the set will survive such an investigation.

The argument for self-evidence begins with a statement of the quandary facing the Intuitionist who fails to recognize the 'unconsciously utilitarian' basis for his view. The dilemma of the Intuitionist, on Sidgwick's view, is that there is no way to steer a middle course between a sort of absolutism and dogmatism on the one hand, and relativism on the other. He writes, that on the one hand, we have a "strong instinct of Common Sense that points to the existence of such principles, and the deliberate convictions of the long line of moralists who have enunciated them." Here, we encounter again the intuitions that certain actions are right, and unquestionably so, in virtue of the character of the action itself. That is, we know, for example, that truth telling is right without needing to examine the consequences. The difficulty lies on the other hand. He notes

the more we extend our knowledge of man and his environment, the more we realise the vast variety of human natures and circumstances that have existed in different ages and countries, the less disposed we are to believe that there is any definite code of absolute rules, applicable to all human beings without exception.¹¹²

The solution to this dilemma, at least for Dogmatic Intuitionism, has been to assert the "strong instinct", albeit with greater and greater abstraction. This presents a new set of problems, though perhaps we can see it as a maturing of the dilemma. As Sidgwick states,

¹¹² *ibid.*, 379.

there are certain absolute practical principles, the truth of which, when they are explicitly stated, is manifest; but they are of too abstract a nature, and too universal in their scope, to enable us to ascertain by immediate application of them what we ought to do in any particular case; particular duties have still to be determined by some other method.¹¹³

In a sense, all but the final clause are a statement of the more mature dilemma - in an effort to address the experience of a much wider world than Victorian England (or even Northern and Western Europe), the “absolute principles” become more and more abstract in order to include the “vast variety” of human experience. The final clause recasts the quote because it reveals Sidgwick’s own view. In the first place, Sidgwick continues to hold that there is a common human nature that experiences a common world. Second, this is compatible with that fact that the experience is highly varied. And third, this new breadth of experiential data serves to further suggest the inadequacy of an Intuitionism born of experience in Victorian England.

Sidgwick then argues that there exists a middle way between the Scylla and Charybdis that form the Intuitionist dilemma. There exist three principles that certainly seem “absolute”, though at first glance appear too universal and too abstract to do much work. However, if these principles are then conjoined with the Utility Doctrine, they will together form a method that can determine particular duties and actions in the particular case as well as in the abstract. The first of these is the Principle of Equity.

The Principle of Equity certainly seems self-evident. The principle can be stated in a number of ways, some more useful than others. For example, it can be stated positively or negatively. That is, the Principle of Equity can be formulated as a command

¹¹³ *ibid.*, 379.

to do such and such an action or it can be formulated as a prohibition of action. It can be formulated in such a way as to emphasize those occasions when one treats two individuals differently. Sidgwick supposes that this formulation will be something of the form “if a kind of conduct that is right (or wrong) for me is not right (or wrong) for some one else, it must be on the ground of some difference between the two cases, other than the fact that I and he are different persons.” On this view, obviously, simply being two different people does not allow for different treatment; for a difference to matter in judging rightness or wrongness of action that difference must be morally relevant.

He notes that yet another formulation could involve actions that are done *to* (rather than *by*) individuals. For example, given two relevantly similar professors in relevantly similar disciplines with relevantly similar working environments, the administration should compensate them similarly (that is, the administration to *do to* them things that are relevantly similar). Here, Sidgwick notes the common formulation of this equity or fairness principle is normally as the Golden Rule – “Do to others as you would have them do to you.” He also recognizes that this is not the best formulation. For example, consider person A who wants person B to participate with him in some vicious action and is more than willing to reciprocate. This would meet the rather imprecise formulation of the equity principle as expressed by the Golden Rule. There are other difficulties with this positive formulation of the principle. For example, consider A and B again. Given differences in circumstance, it may very well be the case that it would be wrong of A to treat B in a particular manner, but it would be right of B to treat A in that way. For example, suppose a coach gives instruction to one of her players in the midst of

a soccer match. The coach and the player are different in relevant ways, and hence it would not be right for the player to instruct the coach. The Golden Rule formulation of the Equity Principle does not really address this sort of case. This is because the player (following the Golden Rule) ought to do that which she would want done to her. Hence, if she would want instruction, she ought to give it. The coach is, *mutatis mutandis*, in a similar position.¹¹⁴ Thus, the Golden Rule formulation is not clear and precise in the way that Sidgwick thinks principles must be. Ultimately, this is not a difficulty for the Principle of Equity, though it does point out that the principle must be stated negatively to insure clarity and precision. He thinks that any positive formulation will succumb to the same sorts of difficulties that plague the Golden Rule formulation. With this in mind, Sidgwick states the Principle in the negative:

Principle of Equity: It cannot be right for A to treat B in a manner in which it would be wrong for B to treat A, merely on the ground that they are two different individuals, and without there being any difference between the natures or circumstances of the two which can be stated as a reasonable ground for difference of treatment.¹¹⁵

However difficult this formulation may be in terms of practical application, Sidgwick takes it to capture the intuition behind such moral commands as the Golden Rule. It simply restricts the sorts of actions in which one might engage. It is the practical importance of this maxim of prohibition that common-sense “has amply recognised”.

¹¹⁴ While one might suggest that the Golden Rule is not actually this naïve and that it implicitly takes into account the difference in circumstances, Sidgwick will argue that this may indeed so, but nevertheless it does not explicitly take this into account.

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*, 380.

And Sidgwick adds that the truth of the maxim (negatively stated), "so far as it goes, appears to me self-evident."¹¹⁶

What should be noted here is that Sidgwick has addressed all of the criteria for "real self-evidence", though he has combined some in places. In the first case, the Principle of Equity certainly appears clear and distinct. Admittedly, the negative formulation is somewhat less clear at first glance, but it is clearly more distinct than are many of the positive formulations, which might seem much more clear.¹¹⁷ One further benefit of the abstract, negative formulation is that it is more likely to harmonize with other principles that may also be shown to pass the clear and distinct test. Because common-sense has amply recognised this maxim (albeit in a number of forms that must be refined into this negative formulation) and because a long line of moralists have judged it to be true, the Equity Principle is taken by Sidgwick to have passed the test of Social Verification. Since the Equity Principle passes each of the Verification criteria, it is taken to be the first of that set of principles that lies between absolutism on the one hand and relativism on the other.

The second of the principles that Sidgwick takes to be really self-evident is the Principle of Rational Prudence. Like the Principle of Equity, there is some difficulty in precisely how this principle should be formulated. For example, one might suppose that the formulation be something like "one ought to aim at one's own good". The difficulty

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Recall, from the discussion of the Intuitive Verification criterion that the goal is to discover those principles that are actually clear and distinct as opposed to those that merely appear to be. Sidgwick takes this negative formulation to meet the clear and distinct criteria of Intuitive Verification while other positive formulations, e.g., the

here, as Sidgwick points out, is that this formulation runs the very real risk of being tautological. For example, suppose we define the “good” as “that at which one ought to aim”. Thus, we are left with the principle actually being “one ought to aim at that which one ought to aim.” While this is clearly true, it is also quite clearly less than helpful. So, Sidgwick claims that the proper formulation of the principle is as follows:

Principle of Rational Prudence: One ought to aim at one’s good, on the whole.¹¹⁸

The addition of this latter clause at least removes the tautology complaint. As I mentioned in the general discussion of self-evident principles above, Sidgwick takes this clause to focus on the temporality of goods. That is, the agent who employs the Principle of Rational Prudence will have his entire life in mind when making decisions about his good. Thus, it is not surprising that Sidgwick alternatively refers to the following formulation of the principle from time to time:

Principle of Rational Prudence (alternative form): Hereafter *as such* is to be regarded neither less nor more than Now.¹¹⁹

Sidgwick takes this Principle to accomplish at least two things. The first is to rebut a rather naïve criticism of Bentham. Given that certainty of a pleasure is part of

Golden Rule, ultimately do not.

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*, 381.

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*, 124 note 1. Here, Sidgwick is addressing Bentham’s method of calculating pleasures. Bentham’s four quanta are Intensity, Duration, Proximity, and Certainty. Sidgwick argues that it is “reasonable to disregard” proximity as a factor, except where it is related to Certainty. He writes that “My feelings a year hence should be just as important to me as my feelings next minute, if only I could make an equally sure forecast of them. ... This equal and impartial concern for all parts of one’s conscious life is perhaps the most prominent element in the common notion of the *rational* - as opposed to

Bentham's Hedonic Calculus (and Sidgwick's for that matter), it was asserted (again by Grote) that a consequence of the view is that given two pleasures, one certain and close and of little intensity and the other less certain, more distant and of greater intensity, the Utilitarian is compelled to choose the former. Sidgwick argues, however, that in the first place, certainty need not trump proximity and in the second, nearness need not trump distance. The criticism, on Sidgwick's view, essentially reflects a misunderstanding of Bentham's project; and a potential misunderstanding of his own that Sidgwick hopes to forestall.

The second thing Sidgwick seems to accomplish in making these claims is to point out that the Hedonic Calculus, either Bentham's or his own, is a much more fluid and variable sort of thing than is often portrayed. The importance of this demonstration of variability is rather obvious. Grote's naïve criticism suggests a deeper problem that Utilitarians may face. If it is true that the Hedonic Calculus produces a rigid method of judging pleasures and a method that diverges from common-sense in important ways, then Sidgwick's project is seriously compromised. Suppose that a Utilitarian is committed to give significant priority to closeness of pleasure over intensity on the basis of small levels of difference in certainty; for example to choose Pleasure A that is close, less intense and slightly more certain rather than Pleasure B, which is distant, more intense and slightly less certain. It is clear that such a commitment will cause the Utilitarian to make decisions that are considerably at odds with the common moral sense. Recall the example of the student with the choice of studying for a test or going to the

the merely *impulsive* - pursuit of pleasure."

lake. Recall also that it is a beautiful, warm day and the college is quite close to a sparkling, blue lake. The present good is a cooling dip in the lake, refreshing and relaxing. The longer-term good is directly tied to the test results - passing the class, a better transcript, better job prospects, etc. The nearer-term good is both closer and more certain. Clearly, Grote's "utilitarian" would be compelled to choose the dip in the lake. A more charitable view that still held certainty to be the more important factor in judgment might still result in this Grotian conclusion. Common-sense, on the other hand, would hold that the student ought study, even though the results of studying may very well be considerably less certain. Sidgwick answers this difficulty with the Principle of Rational Prudence expanded beyond tautological simplicity.

It remains an open issue whether this principle is really self-evident. In the first place, it certainly seems clear and distinct. Admittedly, it is not as immediately clear as its tautological cousin (the principle without the "on the whole" clause). However, the addition does not really affect the clarity or precision of the principle. Sidgwick writes that this additional clause "affirms that the mere difference of priority and posteriority in time is not a reasonable ground for having more regard" for one pleasure against another. Given the convergence this amended principle has with the intuitions of common-sense, Sidgwick regards it as meeting the requirement of Intuitive Verification.

The question of whether or not the Principle of Rational Prudence can be harmonized with the Principle of Equity is a question of Discursive Verification. At first glance, the principles do not seem to have any conflicting consequences. In fact, the Principle of Equity would seem to be quite congruent with the added "on the whole"

clause. This is so because this clause makes clear that one ought address one's own future selves with the same regard that one has for one's immediate self. However, the Principle of Equity does not imply that one ought regard those future selves with exactly the same concern as one's immediate self. This is so because the future self and the current self are, potentially, in relevantly different circumstances. If some future self and my current self are in relevantly different circumstances, then according to the Principle of Equity, I am justified in treating them differently. According to the Principle of Rational Prudence, I am justified in treating those future opportunities more favorably than my current opportunity - that is, I may forsake a current good for the sake of a later one. At the same time, the Principle of Rational Prudence does not demand that I must treat that future opportunity with more regard than a current one. So, it seems clear that while the Principle of Rational Prudence and the Principle of Equity would each have something to say about how I treat current and future opportunities, they do not produce conflicting commitments. Beyond this, in those instances when they cover different areas of judgment, those instances do not conflict. By this I mean that when the Principle of Equity says that I am justified in treating my distantly future self differently than my only slightly future one, it does not encroach on the purview of the Principle of Rational Prudence. Likewise, the Principle of Rational Prudence, while suggesting in one case that I ought to favor the distantly future self over the immediately future one, or vice versa, does not contradict the Principle of Equity in those instances. Thus, the two principles jointly meet the criterion of Discursive Verification.

I have already dealt fairly extensively with the question of Social Verification of the Principle of Rational Prudence in discussing the potential concerns that Sidgwick means to address with his formulation of the Principle. As shown, Sidgwick's formulation of the Principle of Rational Prudence brings the Utilitarian judgments in line with those expected by the relevant experts of common-sense. Thus, the principle meets the criterion of Social Verification. Since the Principle of Rational Prudence meets each of the three verification criteria, it can be regarded as "really self-evident."

The third abstract principle that Sidgwick takes to be really self-evident is the Principle of Rational Benevolence. The principle is deduced from evidence provided by two rational intuitions. In the foregoing discussion, the good "on the whole" referred to an individual's overall good, Sidgwick now extends the concept of the good "on the whole" to all of humankind. By examination of this "universal good", we soon discover that if we consider any two of its constituent parts, we find that no part is of more importance than the other. In the case of the exploration of the Principle of Rational Prudence, we considered two instances and their respective goods within a single human life. In the case of this investigation, we again consider two instances and the goods respective to them. However, there is one immediate difficulty with this analogy. In the former case, the two goods under examination differed in that they were temporally distinct - that is, one was earlier than the other, necessarily. In this case, two goods may be simultaneous. For example, Person A may experience Good Y and Person B may experience Good Z at the same time, while Person A, in the former case, experienced Good Y at time T_1 and Good X at time T_2 , where the two times are different.

To address this difficulty, Sidgwick amends the investigation in the following way. Given any two individuals, neither should be considered of more importance than the other **unless** there are morally relevant differences between them. Sidgwick has some method for weighing simultaneous goods; a method which will take into account all of the variability in the case of the “universal whole” that we have already seen to be at work in the case of the individual “whole”. So, the first rational intuition used to deduce the Principle of Rational Benevolence is this part/whole analogy concerning goods that Sidgwick extends to an analogy from individuals to the universe.

Even taking into account this method urged by Sidgwick, one difficulty that arises fairly quickly is the problem of perspective. While it may be possible (albeit with difficulty) to judge between two goods (a present one and a future one) for an individual, it is significantly more problematic to judge between two goods for separate individuals. This difficulty is exacerbated if one of the individuals involved is also doing the judging. Sidgwick proposes a theoretical solution to the difficulty, amending the principle further to stipulate that the good of one individual is of no more importance than the good of another *from the point of view of the Universe*.

Clearly, this solves the partiality problem. Unfortunately, it adds the very practical difficulty that no individual possesses the “point of view of the Universe”. However, Sidgwick is not immediately concerned with applicability in special cases at this point. Rather, he is concerned with the deduction of a formal, abstract principle that will meet the verification criteria. He takes this principle to do so. With all of the amendments he has added, the principle is rendered as the following:

Principle of Rational Benevolence: As a rational being, I am bound to aim at good generally, not merely at a particular part of it.¹²⁰

In a flourish reminiscent of Hume, Sidgwick states that this principle ‘tis evident’. The argument for its self-evidence is only a little more instructive. First of all, the principle has been deduced from other principles already shown to be self-evident. This deduction, however, should not be thought of as a demonstration or as a derivation. The Principle of Rational Benevolence is clearly different in scope from the Principles of Equity and Rational Prudence, though it is also quite clearly connected to them. If it were the product of an inference from these already established principles, it would obviously be an ampliative inference. However, that content can be explained by the amendments already discussed; and these amendments each represent direct intuitions, on Sidgwick’s view. Thus, the principle is itself a clear and distinct intuition, even if it must be discovered to be so after an examination of each of the pieces of the principles. Hence, the principle meets the first criterion, Intuitive Verification.

As we have also seen in the deduction of the principle it is consistent with the other two, at least insofar as those principles have aided in the deduction process. The only remaining potential trouble-spots are the additions. Rotating the point of view from that of an individual person to that of the Universe does not cause any apparent inconsistencies. The Principle of Equity can be interpreted to express just this sort of universal scope just as easily as it can be seen to cover the scope an entire individual life, so nothing in the Principle of Rational Benevolence seems to be inconsistent with the

¹²⁰ *ibid.*, 382.

demands of Equity. Similarly, the place at which Rational Prudence differs immediately from Benevolence is the arena of temporality. The Principle of Rational Benevolence certainly does not seem to conflict with the commitment that pleasures of some future moment can be rationally preferred to pleasures of a more immediate present, whether the agent of those pleasures is a single individual or a group of individuals. So, the principles are interconnected in some very important ways and in those areas where they differ in scope, those differences are not contradictory. Thus, the Principle of Rational Benevolence meets the second criterion, Discursive Verification.

By approaching the argument in this way, Sidgwick has already settled the question of whether the set of principles taken as a whole meet the first two criteria. The satisfaction is fairly straightforward because it is exactly the same argument used to show that Rational Benevolence and Rational Prudence satisfied the Discursive Verification criterion. In showing that Prudence met the demands of Discursive Verification, it was shown that Equity and Prudence were consistent. In showing that Benevolence met the demands of Discursive Verification, it was shown that Benevolence was consistent with both Prudence and Equity. By transitivity, then, each of the principles has been shown to be consistent with the others.

Whether the set is Intuitively Verifiable is a bit more obscure; but all that is necessary has already been done. For Sidgwick, if one discovers three different clear and distinct propositions, then the conjunction of those propositions will also be clear and distinct. Thus, in showing that each of the principles is clear and distinct severally, it follows from this view of the conjunction of self-evident principles that the set will be

clear and distinct as well. Hence, the set of principles satisfies the first criterion. All that is left is to show that Rational Benevolence satisfies the criterion of Social Verification and that the ensemble of principles satisfies this criterion as well.

With respect to Rational Benevolence, Sidgwick offers a brief caveat. It may be the case that all the relevant experts will not agree that Rational Benevolence holds. However, Sidgwick writes that “it may be fairly urged ... that *practically* each man ... ought chiefly to concern himself with promoting the good of a limited number of human beings, and generally in proportion to the closeness of their connexion with him.”¹²¹ In support of this assertion, Sidgwick urges the reader to consider the “‘plain man’ in a modern civilised society”. Consider also that this ‘plain man’ is asked the hypothetical question “whether it would be morally right for him to seek his own happiness on any occasion if it involved a certain sacrifice of the greater happiness of some other human being - without any counterbalancing gain to any one else.” In this hypothetical situation, Sidgwick thinks it is clear (and clear to all the relevant judges) that the ‘plain man’ would answer negatively and would do so without hesitation.¹²² On my view, this is an open question and it is not at all clear to me that the answer Sidgwick urges is actually the answer that would be forthcoming (and ultimately, it is an open question even to

¹²¹ *ibid.*

¹²² *ibid.* One difficulty attends this example. It may be that it is too abstract to be of much use. As Dr. Merrill has suggested to me, we would want to know more about the details. Suppose, for instance, that the person to be harmed had made himself vulnerable through foolish or evil decisions. It would seem that the “plain man” might very well answer differently in these circumstances. However, to alleviate this problem, let us stipulate that the harmed person is in fact innocent of both foolhardiness and evil and comes to harm purely on the basis of the greater happiness of the one benefited. In this case, it seems more clear than the “plain man” would answer as Sidgwick suggests.

Sidgwick's mind). However, to be fair, it is important to note how the question is actually presented. The question is not whether one ought to sacrifice oneself and one's happiness for the happiness of another, but rather whether it would be right for a person to seek one's own happiness at the expense of another; and beyond that, at greater expense to that other than the benefit one would personally receive. If the question were of the self-sacrifice form, it is more likely that the answer would be one that Sidgwick would find unhelpful for his cause. However, asking the question in the way that he does actually brings the Principle of Equity to play in the deliberation; namely, is it fair to demand sacrifice of others for one's own happiness. In this case, especially in the abstract, the answer is likely to be "no", and a fairly widespread "no" at that. Thus, Sidgwick takes Rational Benevolence to satisfy the third criterion, Social Verification.

The question then is whether the ensemble satisfies Social Verification. Again, Sidgwick can employ the part/whole argument. That is, if two propositions are severally verified and have been shown to be consistent with one another, then they are jointly verified. Both of the antecedent conditions have been met in the foregoing discussion. Each of the three propositions has been jointly verified (except possibly the last, on my view) and each has been shown to be consistent with one another and each has been shown to be clear and distinct. Thus, they are jointly verified as well.

c. The Self-Evident Principles plus the Utility Doctrine

Having shown that the set of principles (Equity, Prudence, and Benevolence) are "really self-evident", Sidgwick needs now to show that the conjunction of these

principles plus the Utility Doctrine is consistent. Note that he need not show that the Principle of Utility is self-evident. Recall Sidgwick's statement at the outset:

there are certain absolute practical principles, the truth of which, when they are explicitly stated, is manifest; but they are of too abstract a nature, and too universal in their scope, to enable us to ascertain by immediate application of them what we ought to do in any particular case; particular duties have still to be determined by some other method.¹²³

The foregoing discussion has been a demonstration of the first part of this claim - showing that there exist certain absolute practical principles. It has also been seen that these principles are abstract to varying degrees, though in almost all cases too abstract to "enable us to ascertain" what ought be done in any particular case. Overcoming this difficulty is left to a method and a properly basic principle. This principle, on Sidgwick's view, is the Principle of Utility.

Sidgwick attempts to show that the Principle of Utility follows from the conjunction of the three self-evident principles along with a proposition about the aims of rationality. Recall the structure of Sidgwick's argument outlined earlier.

- e. There exist three self-evident principles. These are (1) Equity, (2) Rational Prudence, and (3) Rational Benevolence.
- f. The Ultimate Good Principle: The ultimate good is what one would desire if one's desires were in harmony with reason and one took oneself to have an equal concern for all existence.
- g. Reasonable Beings Principle: We are bound to aim at good generally, and not at any particular part of it.

¹²³ *ibid.*, 379.

h. Therefore, the Principle of Utility follows from (e), (f), and (g).

1) The Ultimate Good Principle

As we saw quite early in this project (in “The Good” section of this chapter), Sidgwick supposes a distinction between Right and Good that reflects a distinction within rationality; namely, a person’s active powers (related to Right) and her sentient powers (related to Good). I will restate that distinction briefly here. Goodness serves as a rational check on the sentient powers of an agent; rightness as a rational check on the active powers.

Whatever the distinction may entail, it is also clear that the two powers are intimately related (as they are both powers of human rationality) and, thus, that good and right are related as well. Sidgwick notes that in common parlance, this connection is fairly difficult to grasp with any sort of certainty. The Ultimate Good for human beings is related to right action. However, the Good is “frequently conceived as supernatural and so beyond the range of independent ethical speculation.”¹²⁴ Clearly, Sidgwick is not content with such a view.

On Sidgwick’s view, “the practical determination of Right Conduct depends on the determination of Ultimate Good.” This emphasis on “practical determination” will necessarily eliminate recourses to the supernatural or epicycle-like invocations of the Deity to preserve otherwise inconsistent moral demands. The determination of the

¹²⁴ Here Sidgwick has in mind at least the work of the Cambridge Moralists. Their conception of the Good for humankind involves obedience to duty (and those duties conceived very theocentrically). As I suggested at the outset of the project, Sidgwick has two goals, one of which is a rebuttal (and perhaps refutation) of the Cambridge Moralists and their ethics of religious commitment. Since I will explore that connection in more

Ultimate Good depends on an elimination of possible alternatives – (1) Virtue and (2) Subjective Rightness of Will. The remaining alternative, on Sidgwick's view, is happiness (or, as he often puts it, desirable consciousness or pleasure).

2) Against Virtue

On Sidgwick's view, to suppose that virtue comprises the General or Ultimate Good will inevitably lead us into a vicious circle in fairly short order. By "virtue", Sidgwick means "conformity to such prescriptions and prohibitions as make up the main part of the morality of Common Sense."¹²⁵ If Virtue is the Ultimate Good, and virtue is right actions as specified by prescriptions and prohibitions of common sense, and right conduct depends on the Ultimate Good, then right conduct depends on right conduct. Thus, Virtue is eliminated as a possible formulation of the Ultimate Good.

3) Against Subjective Rightness of Will

depth in the next section of this chapter, I will not dwell on it further here.

¹²⁵ Obviously, this is a potentially controversial definition. For example, one alternative definition has very little to do with the prescriptions and prohibitions of Common Sense but rather involves states of character and the like. However, these sorts of conceptions of virtue have already been dismissed as part of the Intuitionist method, so the understanding of Virtue here must be limited to those possible understandings that have not been dismissed. So, the criticism that Sidgwick's argument here does not rule out ethics of character of an Aristotelian sort, for example, are misguided because Sidgwick does not mean, with this argument, to address those sorts of virtue at all. Sidgwick does propose a brief argument against admitting the character conception of Virtue as the Ultimate Good. On Sidgwick's view, a disposition or character "can only be defined as a tendency to act or feel in a certain way under certain circumstances." However, the tendency does not seem to be valuable, of itself. Rather, it is valuable because of the acts and feelings it tends to produce. Hence, the circle is upon us again.

Taking “rightness of will” as the Ultimate Good is no better. The very notion of subjective rightness or goodness implies an objective standard that the concept does not provide. His argument goes something like this.

- (1) In deliberating with a view to immediate action, the agent cannot distinguish between doing what is objectively right, and realizing the agent’s own subjective conception of rightness.

For Sidgwick, this premise is supported by the view that “whatever action any of us judges to be right for himself, he implicitly judges to be right for all similar persons in similar circumstances.”¹²⁶ This was employed in the argument showing the Equity was a really self-evident principle and it is an assertion that he takes to be true of Common Sense moral thought. Here, however, there is a slightly different slant to the claim. What Sidgwick seems to be saying is that in the moment of decision faced by an agent, she will take what she thinks to be the right thing to do (“the agent’s own subjective conception of rightness”) and implicitly judge that it is what it would be right to do for any agent similarly situated (“what is objectively right”). If this is the case, then Sidgwick is right that in the face of a decision about an immediate action, the agent is likely to confuse subjective valuations about rightness of action with the objective ones. This seems even more likely to be Sidgwick’s view given his next assertion:

- (2) No rule can be recognized as more authoritative than the rule of doing what she judges to be right.

¹²⁶ Sidgwick, 379.

Supposing that the agent is rational and deliberative, the subjective rule of “do what you judge to be right” will have authoritative priority for the agent to some external rule of “do what someone outside oneself judges to be right”. Here, Sidgwick’s view is quite similar to Kant’s concerning the authority of moral rules; namely that the truly autonomous agent is herself the author of the moral law for herself and that this self-authored moral law is authoritative in a way that outside, heteronomous rules are not. However, the confusion between subjective evaluations of rightness and objective ones is doubly troublesome, on Sidgwick’s view, because:

- (3) We are continually forced to make the distinction in (1) as regards the actions of others and to judge that conduct may be objectively wrong though subjectively right.

Since access to motive and intent is clearly privileged, outside observers of action have no direct evidentiary grounds for judging actions to be right or wrong other than the consequences of those actions. Thus, our ground for judging the actions of others to be right or wrong very rarely takes the form of a questioning of motive; at least not in the first glance at a situation.¹²⁷ Instead, Sidgwick argues that

¹²⁷ This is not to say that Sidgwick thinks that estimation of motive or intent plays no part in judging the rightness or wrongness of action. However, Sidgwick does think that access to those motives is quite privileged and the only external access will ultimately be based on observation of past actions of the agent whose actions are being evaluated. Thus, even when suppositions about intent are used to militate judgments of wrongness, for example, those suppositions will themselves be the product of observation of consequences of action.

- (4) Conduct is judged to be objectively wrong because it tends to cause pain and loss of happiness to others (apart from any effect on the subjective rightness of their volitions – which are beyond our grasp).

It is true that observers may moderate their judgments of wrongness on the basis of some estimation of motive or intent on the part of the acting agent. However, to be rational those moderating impulses must have some basis in past observation. Further, those past observations, as well as the current ones, will be observations of consequences; specifically whether pain or pleasure has been the result of an action. Thus, whatever else may be involved in judgments, it seems clear that at least (4) is the case as well. All of which leads Sidgwick to an example that he thinks points to the difficulty of this particular conception for the Ultimate Good.

- (5) We commonly recognise the mischief and danger of fanaticism: - meaning by a fanatic a man who resolutely and unswervingly carries out his own conception of rightness, when it is a plainly mistaken concept.

Here as we have seen, Sidgwick emphasizes the well-recognized difficulty with judging of subjective motives in others. Thus, the difficulty has been seen to exist for outside observers of action [(3), (4), and (5)] and for the agent himself [(1), (2), and (5)]. Beyond these difficulties, Sidgwick suggests that if we conceive the Ultimate Good as Subjective Rightness of Will (and rule out the use of consequences in the evaluation of rightness either for ourselves or others) then we will also be left with the following paradox.

Paradox: There is no ultimate end except right-seeking itself and no effects of right volition can be good except the subjective rightness of future volitions.

This is to say that the agent is incapable of using the effects of volitions as evidence that the volitions are themselves right. All that is available to the agent are future volitions and the feeling of their subjective rightness, though the rightness of those volitions admits of no confirmation beyond other future volitions, and so forth. The “plain man” of Sidgwick’s Victorian common-sense will find this a “palpable and violent paradox”.

4) The Principle of Ultimate Good

Having ruled out Virtue and Subjective Will as candidates for the Ultimate Good, Sidgwick argues that the Ultimate Good is a good consciousness (or a desirable consciousness, or the sentient [feeling] life, or pleasure). He writes, “this seems in harmony with Common Sense”.¹²⁸ Because this view is in harmony with common-sense, and he has shown that the other two options fail to meet this criterion, the Ultimate Good is to be understood as desirable consciousness. However, this is not taken to eliminate virtue or subjective will as elements of the Ultimate Good. His argument from analogy goes something like the following:

- (1) The virtues and subjective will are valued as means to ulterior good.
- (2) Nutrition, physical action, and sleep are all valued as indispensable elements of the maintenance of animal life.

¹²⁸ Sidgwick, 396.

(3) The virtues and subjective motives are to the psychical life as nutrition, etc., are to physical life.

(4) Therefore, the virtues and subjective motives are valued as indispensable elements of desirable consciousness.¹²⁹

However, even if this view is “in harmony with Common Sense”, it does not address the question of whether it is in harmony with his arguments elsewhere in the *Methods* about the Good; arguments we investigated in the section of this chapter entitled “The Good.” There, we arrived at a conception of the General Good by first demonstrating the distinction between the sentient and active powers of rationality, next coming to a conception of the Good (“what it is reasonable to seek to keep or aim at getting”), and finally expanding that concept to the notion of the General Good.

This principle does not specify what the Ultimate Good is, rather it picks out the conditions that the Ultimate Good must satisfy. Similarly, to specify that the Good is “what it is reasonable to seek to keep or to aim at getting” likewise sets the conditions for any competitors for the office of “the Good”. Sidgwick thinks he has shown that desirability satisfies these conditions in ways that Virtue and Subjective Will do not (and cannot). For example, while virtue and subjective motive are goods - that is to say, they are reasonable to seek to keep or aim at getting - they are not the Ultimate Good because they are elements of it [from (4) above]. Beyond this, having demonstrated the inaccessibility of subjective will, and for that matter, the content of another’s character, the thing to be desired if one’s desires were in harmony with reason, etc., is the products

¹²⁹ *ibid.*

or effects of that will or those states of character. That is to say, we actually desire the positive consequences and abhor the negative ones. So, on Sidgwick's view, it is more in keeping with the facts of experience that we should want for ourselves (and for others) desirable consciousness (or pleasure) which is the supposed effect of these other goods. On Sidgwick's view, to desire pleasure is perfectly reasonable, given the foregoing discussion. Thus, his utility doctrine meets the criteria set forth in the principle of the Ultimate Good.

5) The Rational Beings Principle

The last piece of the Sidgwickian puzzle is the Rational Beings Principle. On Sidgwick's account, if a human being is rational, she will seek to keep or aim at getting the ultimate good. This is so because 'the Good' is what it is **reasonable** to seek to keep or aim at getting. To act in contradiction to the dictates of reason is to suggest that the agent is in fact behaving unreasonably, which would militate against labeling the agent, at the outset, as rational. In addition to seeking the Good, the agent, if rational, will also seek the General Good. Recall that the ultimate good is, "what one would desire if one's desires were in harmony with reason and one took oneself to have an equal concern for all existence." Thus, the rational agent will aim at the good in general. This is because (1) this will more likely preserve the equal concern for all existence, rather than a particular part of the good, which could be personal good or even the good of another, and (2) for the rational agent's desires to be completely in harmony with reason will entail that the agent will have a concern for the good of all.

6) The Principle of Utility

Sidgwick's conclusion is that the Utility Doctrine follows from the conjunction of the three self-evident principles (Equity, Rational Prudence, Rational Benevolence), the Ultimate Good Principle, and the Reasonable Beings Principle. From the Rational Beings principle we have that a rational agent will aim at the General Good. Thus, the rational agent will aim at those desires that are in harmony with reason and express equal concern for all existence (from the Ultimate Good Principle). Similarly, the rational agent will aim at desirable consciousness or pleasure because this is the desire that harmonizes with reason and expresses that equal concern. This aim will be directed beyond the agent herself (application of the Rational Benevolence and Equity Principles) but will include the good of the agent as well (application of the Rational Prudence and Equity Principles).¹³⁰

3. Ethical Egoism

Within common-sense there is a moral intuition toward self-preservation and even self-love. Sidgwick recognizes this intuition and incorporates it extensively into his own view. However, incorporation is not the full extent to which these intuitions to self-love can be extended. Rather, they form the basis for the third method of ethics Sidgwick addresses, namely Ethical Egoism (also referred to by Sidgwick as Egoistic Hedonism).

The fundamental difference between Universal Hedonism and Ethical Egoism is captured nicely in differing propositions that the two would affirm. The Universal

¹³⁰ The Utility calculus itself is another matter entirely, though it too is a product of the applications of these principles to actual cases.

Hedonist will affirm that "If a state of consciousness having a certain quality (e.g., pleasantness) would, for that reason, be intrinsically good, then its occurrence *in any mind* is a fitting object of desire *to any mind*." The Egoist, however, would affirm the following proposition, "If a state of consciousness having a certain quality (e.g., pleasantness) would, for that reason, be intrinsically good, then its occurrence in any mind is a fitting object of desire *to that mind* and to that mind *only*."¹³¹

As Broad points out, if stated in this way the position is not susceptible to claims of internal inconsistency or arbitrariness. For example, the Egoist does not make any affirmation about his own Ego that he is not prepared to allow to be the case for any other Ego. Or, in another way, suppose that Fred is an Ethical Egoist. Suppose further that some object of desire, say a caramel apple, is likely to induce a consciousness of pleasure in Fred. At the same time, another caramel apple would induce a similar consciousness of pleasure in Jane. Fred, the Ethical Egoist, is entirely prepared to say "Good for Jane". That is, it is nice that such a desirable consciousness is present in Jane in the presence of the caramel apple. However, that such a desirable consciousness is present in Jane does not lay any obligation on him (and that such a desirable consciousness is present in him does not lay any obligation on her).

The reason Fred is able to hold this position is that he holds two distinct propositions to be true. As a hedonist, he holds that "all equally pleasant states of mind are equally good things." This is true without regard to whose state of mind is in question. However, he also holds that "each agent is only properly concerned with a

¹³¹ Broad, 243.

particularly restricted class of these equally good things, namely those that are the states of the agent's mind." As such, the agent (Fred, in this case) will have a duty to do only those things that are a part of that class specified by the second proposition. Clearly, the same will be true if the agent in question is Jane. If Ethical Egoism is stated in this way I can see no inconsistency nor arbitrariness in the view.

The difficulty in being unable to dismiss Ethical Egoism is that at the end of the day, Sidgwick is left with two mutually inconsistent ethical methods, each of which makes claim to foundation in the moral sense. This introduction has suggested the dilemma. However, the presence of an apparently competitive principle is not itself sufficient to generate the Dualism of Practical Reason. Sidgwick takes some care to show that, unfortunately for his project, Ethical Egoism cannot be dismissed nearly as easily as Intuitionism (and perhaps cannot be rejected at all).

Given that such intuitions to self-love exist, Sidgwick applies the same criteria to the principles deduced from such intuitions that he applied when examining the foundational principles of Utilitarianism and Intuitionism. I will address the verification criteria in reverse order, beginning with Social before turning to Discursive and Intuitive. Prior to this discussion of Verification, I will outline the Ethical Egoist Argument that Sidgwick takes to be his primary foil.

a. The Ethical Egoist Argument

The argument that Sidgwick takes to be the best expression of the Ethical Egoist's position is quite simple (and in many ways simpler than the argument for Universal Hedonism). Generally, commentators on Sidgwick suppose that the argument involves

first a rejection of the Ultimate Good Principle and the addition of two new principles that replace the Principles of Rational Benevolence and Equity. Since, as we have already seen, the Ultimate Good Principle depends on the Principles of Equity, Benevolence, and Prudence, it is sufficient to show that the Principles of Benevolence and Equity (or just the former) are amended to show that the Ultimate Good Principle no longer holds, at least not in its Utilitarian form. One principle that can remain unchanged is the Principle of Rational Prudence.

I introduced one of the altered principles in the Introductory part of this project; it is an amended form of the Reasonable (or Rational) Beings Principle. Recall, that for Sidgwick the Reasonable Beings Principle amounts to the following:

Reasonable Beings Principle: We are bound to aim at good generally, and not at any particular part of it.

The amended principle could be stated as follows:

Reasonable Beings Principle We are bound to aim at the particular part of good that is represented by our interests, and only secondarily at good generally (if at all).

The second new principle we can call the Principle of Self-Interest. Sidgwick casts this principle in the language of the utility calculus. The Egoist is one who “when two or more courses of action are open to him ... chooses the one which he thinks will yield him the greatest surplus of pleasure over pain”.

Principle of Self-Interest: Given two courses of action, an agent ought choose the greater surplus of pleasure over pain for himself.

This choice is based on an assessment of the two courses of action and that assessment is of the amounts of pleasure (or pain) each of the courses will bring. This principle replaces the Principle of Rational Benevolence from the Universal Hedonism argument. If the Principles of Equity and Rational Prudence are maintained intact and we further maintain the understanding of the Good as that which is reasonable to aim at getting or seek to keep and that this end is pleasure or desirable consciousness, then on Sidgwick's view, the Maximum Pleasure Principle follows:

Maximum Pleasure Principle: One ought maximize one's own pleasure or happiness.

Sidgwick notes that each of these new principles is part of the moral sense, just as the earlier principles that he used in support of Universal Hedonism were. If this is the case, then Ethical Egoism follows properly from the moral common-sense. Further, if each of the new principles survives the verification process, then Ethical Egoism will have the same status as Universal Hedonism.

Before turning to the verification portion of the discussion, I will propose an alternative interpretation of the Ethical Egoist argument; one to which Sidgwick seems to allude at times but does not develop.

It does not seem at all clear to me that the Ethical Egoist must accept the Principle of Equity. Recall that the Principle of Equity is:

Principle of Equity: It cannot be right for A to treat B in a manner in which it would be wrong for B to treat A, merely on the ground that they are two different individuals, and without there being any difference between the natures or circumstances of the two which can be stated as a reasonable ground for difference of treatment.¹³²

It seems that the Ethical Egoist could simply deny this principle outright, because he could consistently suppose that it is right for A to treat B in a manner in which it would be wrong for B to treat A. Consider the following example. Ann is an Ethical Egoist. As an Egoist, she might very well hold that it is right for her to expect preferential treatment from the waitstaff at a restaurant because this would provide the greater surplus of pleasure over pain for herself. She also might hold this view even if in receiving preferential treatment, one of the consequences was that Alfred was forced to wait an inordinate amount of time for service. Thus, his pleasure was actually lessened. Clearly this circumstance violates the Principle of Equity, but it seems that an Ethical Egoist might hold that Ann acted rightly (or at least did not act wrongly) in the scenario.

We can make sense of this sort of result by altering the argument. If one denies the Principle of Equity, one can still advance the argument in favor of Ethical Egoism. However, an alteration will need to be made to the Principle of Self-Interest to make the argument work. I call the amended Principle of Self-Interest, the Principle of Enlightened Self-Interest.

Principle of Enlightened Self-Interest: An agent ought to abide by a Principle of Equity only insofar as the principle tends to promote the agent's own good.

¹³² *ibid.*, 380.

The reason I have formulated the principle in this way is that the Principle of Equity (as formulated in the negative by Sidgwick) carries with it a level of moral necessity that cannot be preserved in the Principle of Enlightened Self-Interest. However, if we use one of the positive formulations of the Principle of Equity available to us, we can overcome this concern. For example, suppose we appropriate one of Sidgwick's intermediate positive formulations - "if a kind of conduct that is right (or wrong) for me is not right (or wrong) for some one else, it must be on the ground of some difference between the two cases, other than the fact that I and he are different persons". We can amend it as follows:

Principle of Equity*: If a kind of conduct that is right (or wrong) for me is not right (or wrong) for some one else, it must be on the ground of some difference between the two cases.

By eliminating the final clause in Sidgwick's formulation, we can now preserve the argument. The Ethical Egoist can maintain that Ann acted rightly (or at least, not wrongly) in receiving preferential treatment because it was she who received it and she differs from Alfred in that she is not Alfred. Further, an Egoist might be able to criticize Ann's actions as well. For example, if in receiving preferential treatment on this occasion, she has made an intractable enemy of Alfred, who will do her ill turns for years to come, then the Egoist can claim that the action was actually in violation of the Principle of Enlightened Self-Interest. This is simply to say, sometimes it is in the agent's interest to surrender a bit of pleasure now for the sake of greater pleasure later (or significantly less pain later). And at times, this surrender in the present will look very

much like an instance of adhering to the Principle of Equity when in reality it is adherence to the Principle of Enlightened Self-Interest. Seen in this way, Enlightened Self-Interest replaces Benevolence just as Self-Interest does. However, it also replaces Equity. Just as in the earlier case (that is, Sidgwick's argument), the Maximum Pleasure Principle follows. The conjunction of the Maximum Pleasure Principle with the foregoing principles comprise the core of Ethical Egoism.

Once again, these new principles seem to be straightforwardly lifted from the moral common-sense, so that requirement is satisfied. In both cases, it is clear that Ethical Egoism amounts to an affirmation of Rational Prudence to the exclusion of Rational Benevolence (and in my amended version, to the exclusion of Equity, as well). All that remains is to show that Sidgwick's argument for Ethical Egoism and my amended argument, call it Sidgwick*, survive the verification process.

b. Intuitive and Social Verification of Ethical Egoism

Instead of treating each of these separately. I will address them together. The Fundamental Principle of Ethical Egoism or Maximum Pleasure Principle is widely accepted in one form or another across a broad spectrum of philosophical traditions. Sidgwick himself notes this when he lists a diverse selection of thinkers who have, to one degree or another, endorsed the principle: Jeremy Bentham, Bishop Butler, and Samuel Clarke, among others. Citing Bentham's work, Sidgwick writes that even though Bentham advances the Utility doctrine, he also claims that "that each individual should aim at his own greatest happiness."¹³³

¹³³ Sidgwick, 119.

Bishop Butler, whose arguments against Egoism find supporters in both Hume and Sidgwick, also holds that an individual has some vested interest in his own happiness. In Sermon XI, Butler writes,

our ideas of happiness and misery are of all our ideas the nearest and most important to us...that, though virtue and moral rectitude does indeed consist in affection to and pursuit of what is right and good and such; yet, when we sit down in a cool hour, we can neither justify to ourselves this or any other pursuit till we are convinced that it will be for our happiness, or at least not contrary to it.¹³⁴

Here, in one of the staunchest opponents to the position that Sidgwick describes as the Ethical Egoist view, we have a straightforward assertion that justification for virtue and moral rectitude is, at least partly, the happiness that is to be gained from virtue and moral rectitude. Butler goes further, making the stronger claim that without being convinced of the happiness to be gained in virtue, we cannot justify that virtue to ourselves. We note that he does not make the weaker claim that virtue can be partially justified in the absence of this happiness. Rather, he seems to make the stronger one that virtue cannot be justified in the absence of this happiness. However, whether he is making the weaker or the stronger claim is irrelevant to this discussion. In either case, weaker or stronger, justification for virtue depends, to one degree or another, on the Pleasure Principle.

This position is echoed by Clarke, who writes that “Virtue truly deserves to be chosen for its own sake and Vice to be avoided”. However, he goes on to write that it is “not truly reasonable that men by adhering to Virtue should part with their lives, if thereby they eternally deprived themselves of all possibility of receiving any advantage

¹³⁴ Joseph Butler, “Sermon XI”, Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel and A Dissertation Upon the Nature of Virtue, (London: G. Bell, 1953), 96.

from that adherence.”¹³⁵ So, even in this case, some benefit must accrue to the agent in the practice of virtue for that practice to be “truly reasonable”. Thus, Clarke, too, holds that, to one degree or another, the principle of aiming at one’s own good is involved in a proper notion of virtue.

This wide-ranging, albeit brief, survey of the philosophical terrain serves two functions in Sidgwick’s exposition of the Ethical Egoism method of ethics. In the first place, it serves to show that the principles involved satisfy the requirements of Social Verification. Though Sidgwick does not take notice of the fact, this satisfaction may be even more true for Ethical Egoism than for Universal Hedonism. Universal Hedonism met with widespread disdain as an ethical theory. While it is true that Ethical Egoism shares this fate, it is also true that even on Sidgwick’s own view, the fundamental principle of Ethical Egoism is far more widely shared than that of Universal Hedonism. Philosophers from Bentham to Butler to Clarke (as well as most of the Cambridge Moralists) hold that some form of the fundamental principle of Ethical Egoism is the case. Very little else in the way of further argument is necessary to show this to be true. On the other hand, Sidgwick was compelled to work quite hard to show that Universal Hedonism satisfied the requirements of Social Verification.¹³⁶

The second function of this exposition is to show that the fundamental principle of Ethical Egoism satisfies the requirements of Intuitive Verification. What is important

¹³⁵ Samuel Clarke, Boyle Lectures, (London: Knapton, 1725), 87.

¹³⁶ There is a potential criticism of Sidgwick’s account at this point. It seems clear enough that Butler and Clarke and a host of others could very well accept that personal happiness and/or self-interest are of significant moral relevance without accepting the Principles of Self-Interest.

to note here is the lack of further argumentation by Bentham, Butler, or Clarke, for example, as concerns the principle. Each of the thinkers simply accepts that something like the principle of self-interest is the case, to one degree or another. It is accepted straightaway by each as intuitively given. The challenge, at least for Butler and Clarke, is to then show how the principle fits into a wider theory that serves to limit the scope of the principle. The principle is not open to question; rather its further function in a full ethical view is at issue. Thus, on a survey of the common moral sense, Sidgwick thinks that it is clear that Ethical Egoism satisfies the requirements of Intuitive Verification.

c. Discursive Verification of Ethical Egoism

This leaves only Discursive Verification. At issue here, though, is whether or not, in the specific case of Ethical Egoism, the Maximum Pleasure Principle can be harmonized with the other principles (Self-Interest, etc.). First, I will examine whether or not an Ethical Egoist must accept Sidgwick's Rational Prudence, which states that "One ought to aim at one's good, on the whole." In showing that the Ethical Egoist need not accept Rational Prudence, we will see that the Ethical Egoist can also reasonably deny Rational Benevolence while at the same time holding the principles that conjunctively support the Egoist position. The first investigation will utilize Sidgwick's argument in which it he supposes that the Ethical Egoist will hold the Principle of Equity in addition to Self-Interest, Maximum Pleasure, etc. Second, I will examine whether or not an Ethical Egoist must accept the Principle of Equity. In showing that he need not, I will show that the Ethical Egoist can reasonably reject Equity (and along with it Rational Prudence and Rational Benevolence) while at the same time holding the principles that

conjunctively support the Egoist position. This second investigation utilizes my own Ethical Egoist argument adapted from allusions Sidgwick makes but does not develop. The result of these two investigations will be to show that the principles of Ethical Egoism are independent in the relevant ways that the principles of Universal Hedonism have already been shown to be. A secondary result is that neither Ethical Egoism nor Universal Hedonism is reducible to the other. These results will entail that they (the principles of Ethical Egoism) can be held together without inconsistency. This further entails that they satisfy the requirement of Discursive Verification. The conclusion, then, will be that since the principles of Ethical Egoism satisfy all three verification criteria, Ethical Egoism has the same status as Universal Hedonism. Since this is the case, the Ethical Egoist can consistently hold that

Ethical Egoist Conclusion #1: It is not the duty of the Egoist to aim at the
General Good, and

Ethical Egoist Conclusion #2: It is his duty to aim only at his own good states
of mind.

Since these are contradictories of the conclusions concerning “ought” and “right” reached by the Universal Hedonism argument, then we are left with the Dualism of Practical Reason; namely that the two surviving ethical methods entail contradictory conclusions. Since both are developed step by step from the data of the common moral sense, we can conclude, with Sidgwick, that the data of common moral sense is dualistic. If this is the case, then the common moral sense is inconsistent, and potentially incoherent.

The Maximum Pleasure Principle is the base intuition that is expressed in Rational Prudence, but it surfaces at other times as well. However, Sidgwick recognizes that the Ethical Egoist can accept Rational Prudence and little else of the Utilitarian method. Beyond this, Sidgwick recognizes that the Ethical Egoist need not accept even his formulation of the Principle.

For example, suppose that we accept that a person is made up of a successive series of conscious moments and that one ought consider the entirety, as far as one can, when deliberating immediate action. This is the picture of the self that Sidgwick uses to explain why the Principles of Equity, Rational Prudence, and Rational Benevolence hold. If we suppose that a person is a serially ordered set of conscious moments and that the agent should consider the entirety of this set (or at least the elements of it that comprise the present and the future) when deliberating action, then we have essentially a complete acceptance of the Principle of Rational Prudence. However, Sidgwick then uses this principle, along with the principle of Equity, to suggest an analogy between the series of consciousnesses that comprise an individual and the group of individuals that comprise the population. The Ethical Egoist can reject the claim that such an analogy holds in anything like the way that Sidgwick needs it to. For example, there is the phenomenon of simultaneity in the group of individuals that will not be present in the serially order set of conscious moments. Note that the Principle of Rational Prudence addresses primarily the concerns of an individual agent who faces a choice about two potential goods - one in the near term and another later - that are mutually incompatible. That is, choosing one eliminates the possibility of choosing the other. Sidgwick holds that the agent ought to

consider each of his conscious moments to be more or less equal. Thus, it is rational to forego an immediate pleasure, or even suffer an immediate pain, in order to experience a later pleasure of greater magnitude, intensity, fecundity, or duration. He then analogizes from the serially ordered set of conscious moments to the aggregate of all people over which the General Good ranges.

The Ethical Egoist can simply deny that the analogy holds. It is quite different to suppose that an agent should choose a later pleasure over an immediate one **for himself** and to suppose that an agent should choose a pleasure **for someone else** over a contemporaneous pleasure for himself. This is just to point out that in the aggregate of all people, there are many conscious moments at any given time while in the single agent there is but one. And it is conceivable to imagine that, in the case of the aggregate, many people could experience no moments of desirable consciousness (nor the promise of future ones) while the General Good is preserved. This situation would clearly violate the pleasure principle on the Egoist account. The only way to overcome a circumstance of this sort is for each agent to pursue her own pleasure first (and perhaps foremost). This is a straightforward denial of the Principle of Rational Benevolence. However it involves a denial of the Principle of Rational Prudence as well.

Consider this further example – the Ethical Egoist need not accept Rational Prudence at all. The principle suggests that when Certainty is relatively negligible that future possibilities with great intensity can reasonably be chosen over near-term possibilities with lesser intensity. However, the principle also entails that future possibilities can be reasonably chosen over near-term ones even when the certainty

differential is fairly great; that is, if the near-term experience is much more certain than the more distant term one. It is reasonable to choose the future experience even though it is less certain, if it is of sufficiently great intensity to make the cost/benefit calculus work out. The Ethical Egoist can reject this implication, even if he accepts the reasonability of choosing future experiences over near-term ones if the certainty level is negligible. The rejection of this conclusion entails a rejection of the Principle itself.

However, it should be noted that at no time have the Principles of Self-Interest, Maximum Pleasure, or the altered Reasonable Beings Principle been brought into question. Neither has the Principle of Equity. During the course of this discussion, in fact, those principles have been used in concert to deny Rational Benevolence and Rational Prudence. This suggests that the principles harmonize in the way Sidgwick requires for satisfaction of the Discursive Verification criterion.

I have already alluded to the fact that the Ethical Egoist may deny Equity as well. This is so, at least in part, on the ground of a differential in certainty. Equity requires that an agent treat any two people in similar circumstances in similar ways. This is the requirement even if both of the people are the agent herself. This is a special case of applying Equity that demonstrates how closely connected it can be to Rational Prudence. According to Equity, an agent should treat her current self and her future selves in relevantly similar ways. However, as we have just seen above, an Ethical Egoist can reasonably hold that the nearer, less intense, and more certain pleasures are to be chosen over the more distant, more intense, and less certain ones. "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush."

If, however, Sidgwick means something even more general by the Principle of Equity; say that from an objective perspective, the egoist must maintain that the good of any particular individual not himself is equal to the good of any other individual not himself, then the egoist could reply that it is not this sort of Principle that he rejects. As Broad writes:

He could admit that ‘the good of any one individual is of no more importance, from the point of view of the Universe, than the equal good of another.’ He would merely remark that, after all, he is not the Universe, and therefore it is not obvious that he ought to take the Universe’s point of view.¹³⁷

Thus, the Ethical Egoist can reject Rational Prudence and Rational Benevolence in favor of a Principle of Self-Interest and replace Equity with Equity* and still maintain a system of consistent principles, each of which is “really self-evident” in just the ways Sidgwick argues that his own principles are. Similarly, the Ethical Egoist can reject all three of Sidgwick’s core principles (Equity, Rational Prudence, and Rational Benevolence) in favor of Equity* and the Enlightened Self-Interest. This new set of principles is again internally consistent and “really self-evident”. In either case, the Ethical Egoist Conclusions #s 1 and 2 above have been shown to follow.

B. A summary of the Dualism of Practical Reason

The process of argument that leads to the Dualism of Practical Reason can be represented quite simply, now that we have seen the intricacies of the arguments for the competing theories. On Sidgwick’s view, both the Universal Hedonist and the Ethical Egoist will agree to the following claim:

S1: A person’s good is her self-satisfaction.

S2: Self-satisfaction consists in maximizing pleasure for the agent, or (to avoid begging any questions) in the realization of pleasure by the agent.

I have reframed the first two premises of the argument in this way because they seem to capture claims to which both the Universal Hedonist and the Ethical Egoist will agree.¹³⁷ I have also put it in this way because it helps to crystallize the concern that is raised by the Dualism of Practical Reason. This is so because from S1 and S2 both of the following claims receive equal support (or lack thereof):

S3: The agent has a duty toward the general good.

S3*: The agent has no duty toward the general good.

Obviously S3 is Sidgwick's view of Universal Hedonism while S3* is his approximation of Ethical Egoism. It is also clear that S3 and S3* are incompatible claims. Yet, as we have seen, both seem to be supported by the moral common-sense. Thus, Sidgwick, at the end of the day, holds that the moral common-sense is inconsistent.

C. Objections (Sidgwick's and Others)

1. Georg von Gizycki

One way out of the Dualism of Practical Reason may be to get a clearer understanding of what is properly to be considered a "method" of ethics. Perhaps, one would discover, in the course of such an investigation, that Ethical Egoism is itself not a

¹³⁷ Broad, 245.

¹³⁸ I have also reframed the issue in this way because it will allow the reader to see the connection between Sidgwick's arguments that conclude in the Dualism of Practical Reason and Green's argument that the difficulty can be overcome. In the Cambridge Moralists subsection on T. H. Green, I will return to this formulation of the argument. This is also why the premises and conclusions are labeled with an "s". This will help to

method of ethics. Clearly, this cannot happen in the same way that Psychological Egoism was eliminated, or presumably Sidgwick would have done so.¹³⁹ However, this does not rule out the possibility that Ethical Egoism might fail to be a method of ethics for some other reason. This is precisely the solution that Gizycki argues Sidgwick should have taken. On Gizycki's view, Sidgwick can simply argue that Ethical Egoism is not a method of *ethics*, at all.

The crux of Gizycki's argument is that if the principle on which egoism rests is not a moral principle, then there can be no contradiction between egoism and morality, no matter how widely their dictates may diverge.¹⁴⁰ However, Sidgwick himself considers just this sort of move. Consider the following statement:

It may be doubted whether this [Ethical Egoism] ought to be included among received 'methods of *Ethics*'; since there are strong grounds for holding that a system of morality, satisfactory to the moral consciousness of mankind in general, cannot be constructed on the basis of simple Egoism.¹⁴¹

On Gizycki's account, to call a theory an "ethical" theory is just to say that it is a theory that involves a concern for the good of all human beings. That is, Gizycki suggests the following definition for an "ethical theory":

Ethical Theory Definition: A theory of conduct, *X*, is properly called a moral theory only if *X* involves a concern for the good of everyone alike.

differentiate them from Green's premises that will be labeled with a "g".

¹³⁹ All that I mean to imply here is that Sidgwick has already treated Psychological Egoism in considerable depth. Given his care as a philosopher, his obvious desire to have Universal Hedonism take the day, and that he revised the Methods of Ethics no fewer than seven times, it would be plausible to assume that if, on his view, Ethical Egoism suffered the same defects as Psychological Egoism that he would exploit those defects to their fullest potential.

¹⁴⁰ Schneewind, 116-7.

Further, Gizycki gives a different definition for theories of conduct commonly called “prudential” or “egoist”.

Egoist Theory Definition. A theory of conduct, λ , is called an egoist or prudential theory if it involves only concern for the agent.

On this view Ethical Egoism fails to satisfy the Ethical Theory Definition. If it is not an ethical theory, then it is not a Method of Ethics. Since the Dualism of Practical Reason depends on the acceptance of both Universal Hedonism and Ethical Egoism to be proper Methods of Ethics, if one of the two is shown to not be a method of ethics, the Dualism is thwarted. On Gizycki’s view, Ethical Egoism fails and thus, the Dualism of Practical Reason is overcome.

We might suppose that Sidgwick has something like this possibility in mind given his foregoing statement about the doubt that seems to attend including Ethical Egoism as a ‘method of *Ethics*’. Schneewind interprets this passage as an indication that Sidgwick is very hesitant about suggesting that Egoism systematizes “the plain man’s *moral* convictions”. Further, Sidgwick might also agree with Gizycki’s definitions. But, such a move apparently seems to Sidgwick to be nomenclatural sleight of hand that does not actually solve the Dualism of Practical Reason and actually exacerbates the situation because it obscures the problem.

In addition, we can also suspect that Sidgwick does not agree with the definitions. This is so because on Sidgwick’s view the authority of morality is dependent entirely on the rationality it expresses. It is this rationality that he thinks both Universal Hedonism and

¹⁴¹ Sidgwick, 119.

Ethical Egoism express. Thus, since they express rationality in ethically relevant ways, they are equally methods of *ethics* or equally not methods of ethics. Thus, the inclusion of one will force the inclusion of the other. Since Universal Hedonism is included, so too is Egoism.

2. Sidgwick and the Ignobility of Ethical Egoism

The foregoing discussion should not be taken to suggest that Sidgwick finally believes that Ethical Egoism is the right ethical theory or that it is the equal of Universal Hedonism. Instead, as I have maintained throughout, Sidgwick remains a Utilitarian. He is simply not able to dismiss Ethical Egoism. Indeed, he laments that the Dualism of Practical Reason remains intractable, because in practice he thinks “the offence which Egoism in the abstract gives to our sympathetic and social nature adds force to the recoil from it caused by the perception of its occasional practical conflict with common notions of duty.”¹⁴² So, Sidgwick’s disdain for Ethical Egoism ought not to be thought to wane simply because the method cannot be dismissed. However, the refutation of Ethical Egoism is a different matter entirely from whether or not it is a noble or ignoble view. On this score, Sidgwick takes it to be ignoble, both to common-sense and to more abstract theorizing. However, ignobility (or the impression of ignobility) is little argument against a view. To Sidgwick’s credit, he recognizes this fact and does not allow his sense of revulsion (or the revulsion that he takes to be the reaction of the “plain man” to Ethical Egoism) to count against the logical force of the view. However, perhaps he should allow the ignobility of the view to affect his judgment about it. Or at

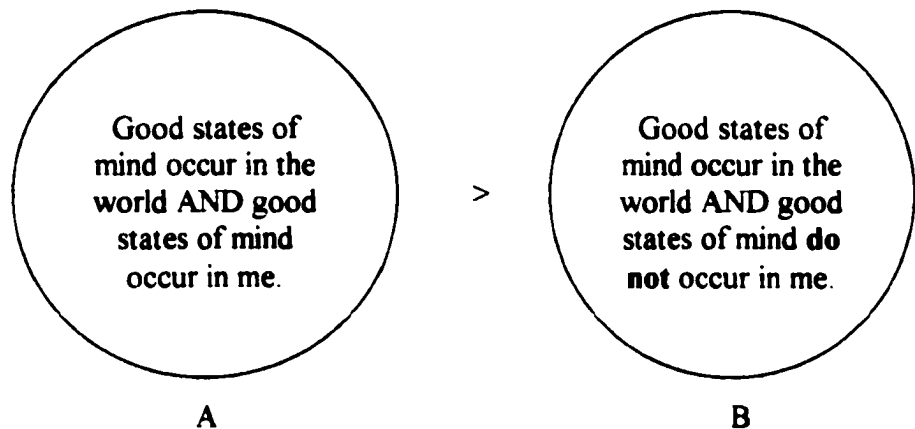
¹⁴² *ibid.*, 199.

least explore the sentiment that inspires the judgment under which Ethical Egoism suffers.

3. C. D. Broad's Evaluation

This seems to be exactly what Broad's does. Broad suggests that Egoism, as conceived by Sidgwick, inspires the revulsion on the part of common-sense at least in part because it is false. He writes, "the doctrine that I ought not to desire to any degree as an end the occurrence of good states of mind in anyone but myself, seems plainly false".¹⁴³ Lest this seem purely an expression of dogmatism, Broad goes on to write that "it does seem to me conceivable that I ought to desire *more strongly* the occurrence of a good state of mind in myself than the occurrence of an equally good state of mind in anyone else." The virtue of this amendment is that it recognizes that it may be the case that human beings will be quite self-interested. But this does not help the Ethical Egoist. Although this proposition has a certain degree of plausibility, it does not seem self-evident at all. On the other hand, it does seem self-evident to Broad that "I ought to desire *to some degree* its [a good state of mind] occurrence anywhere." The conjunction of these propositions that preserves Broad's intuition would seem to be that, it seems self-evident that one ought to desire that good states of mind occur in the world (from the latter proposition [both A and B below]) and that it is conceivable that I should desire at least some of those good states of mind to occur in me [A], perhaps more strongly than I should desire them to occur in the world and occur always elsewhere [B].

¹⁴³ Broad, 245.



Two things strike me about Broad's suggestion. The first is that the first proposition is more self-evident to me than perhaps he takes it to be. For the most part, I suspect that agents, given a choice, would prefer that they experience good states of mind rather than for those good states of mind to occur elsewhere, all other things being equal. So, if the Principle of Equality is "really self-evident", then it would seem that this simple desire to experience the good states of mind that occur in the world is also. What is left out of this proposition is that the agent would desire that good states of mind occur in her instead of elsewhere, even supposing that those good states of mind would be more fruitful elsewhere. This is the commitment that the Sidgwickian Ethical Egoist is going to maintain. That is, even if the good states of mind elsewhere in the world might bring about more good states of mind than if those good states occur to the agent, the agent will still prefer that she experience them. However, the proposition that Broad suggests is plausible is the weaker "desire more strongly that they occur to me, all things being equal" than this stronger principle. The former of these seems much more self-evident (in a Sidgwickian way) to me than it does, apparently to Broad.

The second thing that strikes me about Broad's suggestion is that Sidgwick would refuse the "hidden sentiment". That is to say, suppose that there is a sentiment hidden in the revulsion of common-sense expressed toward Ethical Egoism. Further, suppose that sentiment is the intuition that Ethical Egoism is false. Sidgwick, in fairness, would likely say that such an intuition exists in the moral sense about Universal Hedonism as well. Utilitarianism evoked vitriol as well. If, on the basis of the revulsion of common-sense, Ethical Egoism is thought to evoke an intuition of falsity, then since Utilitarianism also evokes revulsion, the hidden intuition in its case is likely to be similar. We need to avoid overstating the issue, however. If Mill and Sidgwick are right about the adverse reaction against Utilitarianism, that reaction is at least in part because the view is largely misunderstood. But it can also be attributed, in part, to the "hidden intuition". Thus, while Ethical Egoism is met with revulsion on the basis of a deep intuition, Universal Hedonism is rejected on the basis of a deep intuition and a misunderstanding. The point is that if the misunderstanding is removed, the deep intuition might be dissolved.¹⁴⁴ Broad seems to think this is not the case, and I tend to agree with him. The Cambridge Moralists, particularly Whewell and Green, seem to have a very clear grasp of the Universal Hedonist view. In addition, they both seem to retain the deep intuition opposed to the view. So, while revulsion may doom Ethical Egoism and not Utilitarianism, at the same time, the deep intuition of revulsion seems to at least cast doubt on Universal Hedonism. Thus, the two theories will vary in similar ways with respect to these deep

¹⁴⁴ This dissolution could be as follows. In overcoming the misunderstanding, it is discovered that the intuition was directed at the misunderstood view rather than the clarified view. If the intuition was directed at the misunderstood view, then the

intuitions (though one may be the subject of greater revulsion than the other). Thus, to eliminate one on the basis of revulsion does not help to solve the Dualism of Practical Reason; instead, it muddies the waters further as common-sense is now seen to support no moral theory rather than supporting two incompatible theories. This latter eventuality seems a much worse position than having to deal with the Dualism of Practical Reason, so Broad's cure may indeed be worse than the disease.

D. Conclusion

Thus, Sidgwick believes he has shown that Ethical Egoism satisfies the same criteria that Universal Hedonism does. Given that the Plausibility Principle is dependent on those criteria, Sidgwick is left with the conclusion that Ethical Egoism is as plausible as Universal Hedonism. Thus, the two are equally supported from the moral intuitions of common-sense. In the course of the discussion, it should have become obvious that each of the methods developed some of the same intuitions from the moral sense, but that each also exploited different ones. Because the differences conclude in the intractable Dualism of Practical Reason, Sidgwick concludes that common-sense morality is inconsistent.

Chapter 4. The Cambridge Moralism Conclusion

The Cambridge Moralists provide Sidgwick with perhaps his primary foil. For this reason it is important to take a bit of time to investigate those views against which Sidgwick argues and in opposition to which he sees his own positive views. First, I will outline what is commonly taken to be the framework of the Cambridge arguments

elimination of that view undercuts the intuition as well.

about the moral sense. Here, the work of Schneewind is again significant. However, his sketch of the Cantabridgian view needs further elaboration. This elaboration is the second issue I will approach; first by examining the work of Coleridge, whose work receives significant treatment by the other Cambridge Moralists and then by examining the work of two of the Cambridge Moralists who make significant contributions to the framework. Finally, I will propose what I take to be Sidgwick's critique of the Cambridge Moralists (again depending partially on the work of Schneewind and partially on a development of my own interpretation of the Cantabridgian position).

Schneewind summarizes the Cantabridgian view as follows. The conclusion to which the Moralists argue is:

Cambridge Moralist Conclusion: The best explanation of the universe as it is experienced by human beings is a theistic, and probably Christian, one.¹⁴⁵

To argue for this conclusion, we must begin with the data. Within these facts of experience, we encounter what are commonly taken to be moral truths. Those moral truths are grasped imperfectly, to be sure, but are obtained nevertheless. Further, these moral truths are grasped only by intuition and could not be obtained from other knowledge. One of the moral truths that is obtained by intuition is that human beings are free agents. Schneewind here notes that the Cantabridgians take a straightforward Kantian line and argue that we know that we are free because we have moral obligations and duties which is possible only if we are free ("ought implies can"). Finally, these

¹⁴⁵ Schneewind, 107.

intuitions “testify to our unique status in the universe and to our having contact with a divine being.”

Or, in outlined form:

- (I) Human beings can grasp facts about the world by intuition
- (II) Those facts include moral facts (or moral truths)
- (III) Among those moral facts is that human beings have moral obligations and duties
- (IV) “Ought implies can”, and so human beings are free agents
- (V) Being free is distinctively human {supplied}
- (VI) Our intuitions show the human connection to a divine being.
- (VII) Therefore, the best explanation of the universe as it is experienced by human beings is a theistic, and probably Christian, one.

A. Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Arguments against Utilitarianism and in favor of the Cambridge Moralism Conclusion

Coleridge is the first of the Cambridge Moralists to provide a full account of how the conclusion about the best explanation of the universe is to be attained. He supposes that there are three first principles that can be divined from the moral common-sense, which in turn is rooted in common human experience. The first of these is that:

- A. Human beings have a conscience and that conscience is the root of all consciousness.

Coleridge takes it as a given that generally speaking human beings have experienced both the pangs and the pleasures of conscience. The pangs of conscience arise when we “know” what we ought to do and do not do it. The pleasures of conscience arise when

we “know” what is right, that we ought not violate the dictates of conscience, and do what is right. This common experience is captured in Coleridge’s next principle:

B. The dictates of conscience are the origin of moral terms like “right” and “ought”.

Finally, Coleridge holds that conscience is not dependent on outside factors; as for instance, whether an action will bring about a greater portion of pleasure or pain. That is to say, conscience is not consequentialist. It is primitive and directly intuitive. Thus, we have Coleridge’s third principle:

C. Conscience is intuitive.

Coleridge draws two implications from (A)-(C). These are:

D. Only the religious person - who presumably admits the intuitive abilities of conscience - can use moral terms in their proper sense, and

E. The dictates of conscience are opposed to hedonism, utilitarianism, and generally all forms of consequentialism.¹⁴⁶

The importance of these implications is not found in themselves as much as in the further conclusion that they serve to support. As mentioned in the prologue to this section, the Cantabridgians were quite concerned to demonstrate the existence of a connection between the ordinary moral intuitions of common-sense and the Cantabridgian theological commitments. The Cambridge Moralists go further than arguing for a connection, however. Beginning with Coleridge, they argue that “Morality provides the crucial evidence for the view that the best explanation of the universe as we

¹⁴⁶ S. T. Coleridge, “Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit”, Aids to Reflection, (London,

experience it is a theistic, and very probably a Christian, one.” I will outline Coleridge’s position with a minimum of exegetical commentary before turning to demonstrate (1) how he argues for his conclusion (E), and (2) how his conclusion and its supporting argumentation serve to advance his broader theological conclusion.

The broad conclusion, as I have called it, depends in part on establishing that human beings have a place within the universe from which to recognize that the best explanation for the universe is a theistic one. Not surprisingly, this place is somewhat privileged relative to the rest of the experiencing subjects in the world, e.g., dogs, cats, mules, etc. Coleridge accepts an Aristotelian essentialist notion that human beings have a particular quality that distinguishes them from all other life (that is, something that makes a human a human and not a chimpanzee); and further, that this distinguishing capacity is rationality. Thus, one would not expect a horse to recognize that the best explanation for the universe is a Christian one; but one could expect that a human being, behaving rationally, would arrive at precisely this conclusion.

Coleridge begins with a claim that can be construed as a simple recognition of the scope of the data to be considered.

- a. The data of moral experience form a substantial part of the evidence to which we must appeal to test hypotheses about the universe and the place of human beings in it.

Simply put, Coleridge takes the existence of moral experience as a given of human existence. Beyond this, moral experience comprises a considerable portion of the

1913), 296. Schneewind, 108.

experiences that humans have. The second of these points is less controversial than the first. For example, one might easily suppose that moral experiences (like resentment, say) make up a considerable proportion of the experiences that human beings have, without supposing that there is no further interpretive explanation for them, say, for example, the habituation of those attitudes that tend to promote happiness, either positively (as in the production of pleasure) or negatively (in their likelihood to reduce pain). Whatever the source of moral experience, Coleridge claims that the instances of moral experience are themselves data; and further, are data that human beings can (and must) use to test hypotheses about the universe.

Coleridge's next claim follows from (C) above. On Coleridge's (and Sidgwick's) view, those things that are self-evident are directly intuited. This is not to say that all intuitions, moral or otherwise, are self-evident. Rather, the line of inference is unidirectional; that is, if some moral judgment is self-evident, then it is directly intuited. However, if a moral judgment is directly intuited, then there is no further account to be given of its origin. That is, it will be irreducible to any further fact. Thus, for Coleridge:

b. There are unique, irreducible moral judgments.

It is not clear to me that (b) can be rejected.¹⁴⁷ Whether it can or cannot, it seems fairly clear that Sidgwick cannot reject it. For example: suppose that there are no unique, irreducible moral judgments. In other words, suppose $\sim b$. On this supposition, we have that no moral judgment is directly intuited. Further, from this, we would have that no

¹⁴⁷ For example, the moral judgment that "It is always wrong to inflict gratuitous pain on a sentient creature" certainly seems unique and irreducible. My thanks to Dr. Merrill for the example.

moral judgment is self-evident. However, this latter proposition would cause problems for Sidgwick because he holds that some moral judgments are self-evident. Thus, while it may be that (b) could be rejected by some moral theorist yet unknown, it is clear that Sidgwick cannot suppose its contradiction.

At this point, it might be helpful to provide a bit of religious background for this argument. On Coleridge's view, human beings have some hypotheses about the universe and the place of human beings in it. Further, human beings are not so privileged as to have direct and objective access to the data that might verify or falsify those hypotheses. This is simply to say that human beings have neither the perspective nor the mind of God. However, on Coleridge's view, humans do have some basis from which to test hypotheses. What is at issue for him is whether or not the hypotheses are divinely inspired. For example, because human beings have neither the perspective nor the mind of the infinite, hypotheses about the infinite must originate somewhere other than within the finite minds and perspective of human beings.¹⁴⁸ Yet human beings have the hypotheses. So, the issue is whether those hypotheses about the universe are truly inspired by God, or not. For Coleridge the moral judgments of common-sense moral intuition are hypotheses about the universe. For example, the judgment that lying is always wrong is simply a statement given by God about the character of the universe that arises within the conscience of individual human beings.

This brings the conversation to the first of two commitments that I have called Religious Points. Coleridge employs these in the course of his argument primarily as

¹⁴⁸ Here, Coleridge simply appropriates some of the reasoning of St. Thomas rather

illustrations that serve to illuminate his claims. However, as one might suspect from the “given by God” clause relative to moral judgments, the claims are not inconsequential to the argument. The first Religious Point is:

Religious Point #1: The hypotheses are given first in revelation and then confirmed through testing; showing them either to be truly inspired (that is, of God) or not.

This Religious Point was obviously used in the foregoing discussion of the irreducibility of moral judgments. However, the point does not play a particularly important role in the argument. Here, it serves merely as illustration. Coleridge seems to simply be making a claim about the “from whence” of the judgments noted by (b). It seems to be Coleridge’s view that after the argument has reached its denouement, Religious Point #1 will be confirmed. Thus, since he has offered it before the argument has reached its conclusion, we are led, on my view, to suppose that it serves as a touchstone to remind the reader of the destination. Any other interpretation, it seems, would have the unfortunate result of supposing that Coleridge falls victim to a rather immediate and obvious circle.

Having reminded the reader of the destination, Coleridge sets out to investigate the “place” or status of human beings in the universe. Thus, he puts forward three successive conclusions [c - d below].

- c. Confirmation of our place in the universe is partly provided by (b)
- d. Those judgments suggest that the human place is that of possessors of powers of intuition (by which God is known - from the religious point) and free will (which is one of the unique, irreducible moral judgments; that is, the judgment that human beings have free will).

directly.

- e. Confirmation of place is partly provided by content of dictates of conscience (ex. Commands to act against certain desires, stressing inner worth [intent, motives, etc.] of agents as opposed to the values of consequences.)¹⁴⁹

The dictates of conscience take into account the motives of the agent performing one act or another. That is, it is supposed within the common Moral Sense that intentions and motives matter on questions of blameworthiness and praiseworthiness (both by outside observers of actions and by the acting agent herself). Only the acting agent is privy to the dictates of *her* conscience, but the **experience** of conscience is, on Coleridge's view, common to all people.¹⁵⁰ Having each experienced the dictates of conscience, however privately, people tend to suppose that others experience conscience as well.¹⁵¹

Those dictates (e.g., that lying is wrong and that one ought not lie) are presented to the agent as directions to action and as feelings of guilt or self-praise after the action;

¹⁴⁹ It is important to note that (e) follows from (a), (b), and Implications D and E above (which in turn followed from A, B, and C). That is,

- (a) The data of moral experience form a substantial part of the evidence to which we must appeal to test hypotheses about the universe and the place of human beings in it.
- (b) There are unique, irreducible moral judgments.
- (D) Only the religious person – who presumably admits the intuitive abilities of conscience – can use moral terms in their proper sense.
- (E) The dictates of conscience are opposed to hedonism, utilitarianism, and generally all forms of consequentialism.

Therefore,

- (e) Confirmation of place is partly provided by content of dictates of conscience (ex. Commands to act against certain desires, stressing inner worth [intent, motives, etc.] of agents as opposed to the values of consequences).

¹⁵⁰ Coleridge does take the time, albeit briefly, to exempt what would commonly be called sociopathic personalities from the "all people".

¹⁵¹ This is not to say that all people experience conscience in the same way. That is beyond verification and represents a stronger view than Coleridge seems to need.

guilt if the directives of conscience are violated (say, the agent lies) or self-praise when they are upheld. This is, on Coleridge's view, a generally universal human experience. From this common experience, the moral sense tells us that the motives and intentions of an agent are morally relevant to assessing praise and blame. The Universal Hedonist, say, cannot simply dismiss this supposition as flawed common sense because for Sidgwick, at any rate, the data of the common moral sense have temporary priority to moral judgment.

Since the intuitions of moral common-sense are the data from which the arguments are launched, they stand as facts to theories; that is, as the things to be explained rather than questioned. If a theory is incompatible with the facts, so much the worse for the theory. Thus, the Universal Hedonist cannot simply dismiss intentions and motives in favor of consequentialist constructions. Rather, she must show how those intuitions and motives are not basic but the result of those consequentialist commitments themselves. This, as we have seen, is one of the things that Sidgwick has done in his own dismissal of Intuitionism. We now return to Coleridge's argument from that brief digression into method.

An intuitionist like Coleridge will hold that there simply are the intentions and motives, that they are understood by common-sense to be morally relevant in assigning praise and blame, and that they are a given of human experience; that is, they are stubborn facts, irreducible to further facts. Thus, we have that the dictates of conscience take into account the motives and intentions behind an action and that the intuitions that motives and intentions are morally significant are irreducible.

The ability to form both the intentions to act and to take into account the motives of another when assessing praise and blame are, on Coleridge's view, peculiar to the human animal, and I call these intentions and the intuitions about them the Moral Intuitions. These capacities separate human beings from the other forms of life in the world. If this is so, then the content of these intentions and intuitions toward intentions will also be unique to human beings. For Coleridge, this is a straightforward implication shown as follows:

(1) To be human is to have moral intuitions and vice versa.

Or, alternatively,

(1) X is human if and only if X has moral intuitions.

This, however, represents only part of Coleridge's view on this point. To complete it, we need the following statement about moral intuitions.

(2) Moral Intuitions supply content peculiar to Moral Intuitions; where "peculiar" here means that the content can be supplied **only by Moral Intuitions** and by no other form of Intuitions.

Or, alternatively,

(2) X is a Moral Intuition if and only if the content of X is the content of a Moral Intuition.

Moral Intuitions will of necessity give rise to truths about human beings. That is, suppose X is a moral intuition and that the content of X is that "lying is wrong". In this case, the fact that one has the feeling that "lying is wrong" means that the individual experiencing the feeling is experiencing a moral intuition and further that the individual

experiencing the moral intuition is a human being. Further, if a person is a human being, then that person will have certain moral intuitions. And those moral intuitions will supply information about the world that can be gleaned only from moral intuitions. Thus, certain intuitions, namely the Moral Intuitions, will, of necessity, reveal truths about the nature of human beings.

One of those truths revealed, on Coleridge's view, is contained as an implication of the intuition that praise and blame can be meaningfully assigned. The line of implication for this argument is straightforwardly Kantian in flavor. If praise and blame can be reasonably assigned for actions of agents, then the agents must have moral responsibility for the actions that they commit or omit. But, if agents possess moral responsibility for action, then they must have moral freedom to choose to act or to not act. But moral freedom entails that there exists actual freedom. Thus, human beings are free agents and this is known intuitively.

So, we now have that the presence of Moral Intuitions is distinctively human and that the intuition of freedom is distinctively human. That is, both of these designate the unique "place" within the universe occupied by human beings.

Thus, the "place" of human beings involves the possession of (1) the powers of intuition [or (d) above] and (2) the content of conscience. This latter stresses the intentions and the motives of the agent. That is, conscience confirms or denies the rightness or wrongness of an action internally to the agent, and independently of the consequences of the action itself. But these moral judgments of "right" or "ought" involve the assigning of moral responsibility to the agent which in turn requires the

assigning of freedom to the agent. Thus part of the content of conscience is the entailment that human beings possess freedom of will. The powers of intuition and free will define human place in the universe because they are distinctively human..

However, even if all of this be accepted, one still need not conclude that the best explanation of the universe is theistic, much less Christian. This conclusion follows from the conjunction of the foregoing principles along with a second Religious Point.

Religious Point #2 The dictates of conscience confirm the teachings of the Bible (particularly the teachings of Christ).

The expression of this Religious Point is quite important. One notes that the Religious Point is itself founded on an intuition - namely the dictates of conscience - in precisely the same way in which the principle concerning freedom is. Coleridge goes on to express the intuition at the bottom of this Religious Point by writing that,

There is more that *finds* me than I have experienced in all other books put together...the words of the Bible find me at greater depths of my being; and ... whatever finds me brings with it an irresistible evidence of its having proceeded from the Holy Spirit.¹⁵²

This direct confirmation of the principle expressed in Religious Point #2 shows, for Coleridge, that the point is founded on self-evident intuition beyond which there is no further fact of the matter. Religious Point #2 is an expression of a moral intuition in the same way that the freedom principle is. Thus, it is not question-begging on Coleridge's part to introduce it at this stage of the argument. And if this Religious Point #2 bears the same status as the freedom principle does, then it is distinctively human in the same way. Further, since it has this same status, it too must express a Moral Intuition [from (1) and

(2) above] that in turn expresses a unique and irreducible Moral Judgment [from (b) above]. Since Religious Point #2 expresses a unique and irreducible Moral Judgment, it is itself unique and irreducible. Thus, Coleridge concludes about moral experience or moral common-sense that:

- f. Moral experiences (the Moral Sense, Common-sense morality) generally (1) shows these features (c, d, and e) and (2) shows that morality of common-sense is explicable in terms of a religious outlook, to the extent that it is explicable at all.

And if (f) holds, then there is at least support for the Coleridgian (and Cantabridgian) conclusion about the best explanation of the universe. This is so because the best explanation for the moral sense is completely explicable only in terms of a religious outlook.

There are many reasons to suppose that this argument fails. For one thing, accepting it at each point does not accomplish everything that Coleridge wants. At most, it shows that the best explanation for the data of the moral common-sense is a theistic explanation. It does not show the stronger claim that the best explanation for the universe is a theistic one. For example, it is conceivable that the best explanation for the set of moral intuitions is theistic, but that the best explanation for other intuitions minus is rigidly mechanistic. The argument simply does not supply the justification for the stronger claim.

However, Coleridge's weaker claim is quite enough to make the argument problematic for Sidgwick. It seems that there are only three avenues open to someone

¹⁵² Coleridge, 296.

sympathetic to Sidgwick, given the way I have interpreted the argument's structure. That is, there are three avenues that do not immediately beg the question against Coleridge's Religious Points by simply denying them outright at the outset. The first is to argue against the possession of intuition as a marker of human "place" in the universe. The second is to argue against the actual existence of free will. The third is to suppose that while there exists direct intuition of moral judgments, that these moral judgments do not support the conclusion Coleridge draws.

Sidgwick himself cannot take the first avenue because it is a view he himself holds, at least in part. That is, Sidgwick seems to hold that moral intuitions are peculiarly human. While he clearly does suppose that the Religious Points follow from those intuitions or that the intuitions say anything special about human place relative to the divine, he does take moral intuitions to be uniquely human and to say something about human "place" relative to the rest of the world. The second avenue is likewise unavailable to Sidgwick because of his strict compartmentalization of metaphysical investigations on the one hand and ethical inquiry on the other. For good or ill, he excludes questions about freedom and determinism from his ethical theorizing. Whether this is an appropriate sort of distinction is not relevant here because all that it is necessary to show is that the avenue is not actually open to Sidgwick. So, without the first or second avenues available, he must attack the Cambridge Moralism argument as expressed by Coleridge along the third avenue. I will come to this at the end of this section. Before that it is important to investigate how this basic form of the Cantabridgian argument

receives further treatment by later Cambridge Moralists. For this, I have chosen two of the more notable Moralists; namely Whewell and Green.

B. William Whewell's Amended Coleridgian View

As already noted, one of the key concerns of the Cambridge Moralists is providing an argument against Utilitarianism, first against Bentham and then Mill. The former case was often the easier, as Bentham clearly sets himself up for parody with some of his more outrageous statements about the comparability of certain pleasures - poetry and pushpin, for example. Sidgwick, as we have seen, is in Bentham's camp rather than Mill's; though Sidgwick has by all accounts the more considered and measured view. The genius of Whewell is, in part, that his critique of Bentham applies to Mill and to Sidgwick

Against the Utility Doctrine, Whewell argues that, in the first place, the intuition at bottom is perfectly reconcilable with his own intuitionist leanings (and those of the other Cambridge Moralists), but that in the second, the principle cannot do all that its advocates suppose. The inference drawn is that Utilitarianism is an incomplete view of morality; thus, while it apprehends the truth to some degree, it finally falls short of being a full ethical theory.

Whewell's negative argument is rather straightforward. Simply put, Bentham in particular (and the Utilitarians in general) get it backwards - happiness depends on morality, not the converse. To demonstrate his view, Whewell begins with a question:

Question: "Why should a person be truthful?"

His answer is crafted to anticipate what he expects would be a Utilitarian response. Presumably, the Utilitarian answer would be that, on balance, the utility calculus works out in such a way that greater good attends truth telling. If pressed, he supposes that the Utilitarian would ultimately give the following response:

Supposed Utilitarian Answer: Because acts of veracity, even if they do not produce immediate gratification to him and his friends in other ways at least produce pleasure in this way; - that they procure him his own approval and that of all good men.

It is important to note that Whewell has not supposed a strawy utilitarian response. He has taken care to note that the agent need not receive any external benefit at all from his act of truth telling. Indeed, no pleasure at all is alleged to accrue to the agent, save one - he would be pleased by his own approval to have told the truth (and perhaps to have told the truth in order to advance the greater good). The answer still assumes a bit too much, on my view. For example, the act of truth telling (and advancing the greater good) may very well "procure [the agent's] own approval", but I see no reason to assume that it will procure "that of all good men." Indeed, it may be the case that the particular act of truth telling will procure nothing but the scorn of "all good men". For example, due to a mistake, "all good men" observing the act of truth telling might think it is instead an act of lying, and thus condemn it. However, even in such a case, if the act of truth telling would result in greater happiness for the aggregate of people, then the agent ought to tell the truth. In such a case, the final clause of the answer Whewell puts in the mouth of his utilitarian agent fails. An amended answer might be something like the following:

Amended Utilitarian Answer: Because acts of veracity, even if they do not produce immediate gratification to him and his friends in other ways at

least produce pleasure in this way; - that they procure him his own approval.

Far from compromising Whewell's argument, however, I suspect that this amended answer strengthens his point. This is because it makes quite clear that any pleasure the agent may experience as a result of the truth telling is entirely from the self-approval that attends it. Since I take the amended answer to be the stronger of the two positions, I will outline Whewell's argument in light of this stronger position. It should be clear that the argument is consistent with either the weaker or stronger version.

On Whewell's view, the Answer is "intelligible and significant", but Bentham (and utilitarians of Bentham's ilk) cannot merely advance this answer without further analysis of the action itself. That analysis would reveal that the act is approved (by the agent or by the agent and a few good men) because it is thought to be the right or virtuous thing to do. By "the right" or "virtuous" thing to do, I do not mean to imply that "rightness" is in anyway independent of whatever utility calculations might support it. The reason for the agent's belief that truth telling, in the particular instance, is the "right" thing to do may very well be that he has done precisely the most stringent sort of utilitarian calculations possible. Thus, the act is thought to be virtuous or right precisely because it gives pleasure. So, Whewell's first point is that:

Required Benthamite Analysis: if an act is approved because it is thought virtuous, it is thought to be virtuous because it gives pleasure.¹⁵³

¹⁵³ William Whewell, Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy in England and Additional Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy, Thoemmes Antiquarian Books, Ltd., Bristol (original printing: Cambridge University Press, 1852 and 1862), p216

It is at this point that it becomes apparent that Sidgwick is also susceptible to this argument. Like Bentham, Sidgwick holds that acts thought to be virtuous are assigned this lofty title precisely because they are the source of pleasure. As we have already seen, Sidgwick argues that certain states of character are more likely to be productive of pleasure, both individual good and the General Good. These states of character are called virtues on account of the consequences that they usually produce. Thus, whatever Whewell's criticism of Bentham is on this point, it will be similarly applicable to Sidgwick.

The crucial point in Whewell's critique lies in the reason for the agent experiencing his own approval. The agent receives the pleasure of his own approval in his moment of truth telling because it is thought to be virtuous. That is to say, the agent thinks that his action is virtuous and receives the pleasure of self-approval on the basis of that. So, we now have the crux of Whewell's critique:

Whewell's Analysis: an act gives pleasure precisely because it is thought [by the agent] to be virtuous.

So, on the one hand we have the Benthamite Analysis - that an act is approved because it is thought to be virtuous and thought to be virtuous because it gives pleasure - and on the other hand we have the Whewell Analysis of the Utilitarian position - that an act gives pleasure because it is thought (by the agent, at least) to be virtuous. As Whewell writes, this is a "palpable" circle.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.*, 216.

On Whewell's view, the universe of ethical theories can be divided into two classes, rather than a Sidgwickian three. On the one hand, there will be those theories that succumb to this palpable circle, and on the other, there will be those who do not. The former group are all tokens of Dependent morality; the latter, Independent. Note that this is not to say that all of the moral theories that fall into the Independent morality category will be equally good theories. It is simply to designate those theories that will survive the circle test as he has specified it. Within this Independent morality category, any number of theories may fail for one reason or another. However, if a moral theory is to triumph as the ultimate expression of common-sense morality, it must be of the Independent type as opposed to the Dependent.

On Whewell's account, all of the theories of the Dependent Morality type will "assert it to be the law of human action to aim at some external object ... to be the true end of human action". This way of putting the claim is a bit obscure, though given his examples, its meaning is clear enough. The examples that Whewell lists as tokens of the Dependent Morality type include "those which in ancient or modern times have asserted Pleasure, or Utility, or the Greatest Happiness for the Greatest Number".¹⁵⁵ So we can now recognize what the principle that differentiates Dependent Morality from Independent Morality is supposed to involve. For clarity's sake, it is important to note that Whewell takes the relevant "law of human action" to involve "the true end of human action"; and then to note that the thrust of the law is that this end is an external object of some sort at which human beings will aim. Or, perhaps we can put it a different way:

¹⁵⁵ Whewell, ix.

Human nature is such that human beings will aim at external objects as an expression of the deepest human fulfillment or the truest end of human action. The paradigm examples of this sort of morality will be those that Bentham, Mill, and Sidgwick (whatever their own differences) advocate.

An interesting aspect of this view is that according to Whewell, this characteristic of Dependent Morality is compatible with his own Independent Morality view. This is in quite a limited way but it is instructive nevertheless. It is reconcilable, to a point, with his own view because it does capture at least one intuition - pleasure is a good. It is just a secondary, and not a primary, good.

Independent Morality, on the other hand, will include those theories that “would regulate human action by an internal principle or relation, as Conscience, or a Moral Faculty, or Duty, or Rectitude, or the Superiority of Reason to Desire”. Two important examples of this type of Morality are Coleridge’s “conscience” view and Kant’s deontological view. I have discussed Coleridge’s view in outline earlier and will discuss Green’s adaptation of Coleridge to Kant (and vice versa) in the next section. Here I want only to spell out the conditions an Independent Morality must satisfy, on Whewell’s account, if it is to be succeed where Dependent Morality fails. Whewell identifies three characteristic commitments that ethical views of the Independent Morality type must hold, namely that:

1. Reason has a natural and rightful authority over desire and affection
2. There is a difference of kind in our principles of action, and
3. Our obligation is to do “what is right at whatever cost of pain and loss.”

I will address these in sequence.

1. Reason has a natural and rightful authority over desire and affection

“Rightful authority” must be defined before it can be shown that “rightful authority” has priority over desire.

The following maxim is taken as “proceeding from the general voice” of humankind - we must do what is right regardless of cost. This is to say, certain actions are right and this rightness is sufficient reason for doing those actions. The rightness of an action, on Whewell’s view, outweighs any other considerations - pleasure/pain calculus, cost/benefit analysis, or any other consequentialist scheme of judging of action. He demonstrates his view with a rhetorical flourish: “It is painful: but it is right; therefore we must do it. It is a loss: but it is right; therefore we must do it. It is unkind: but it is right; therefore we must do it.” Each of these propositions, he takes to be self-evident. He claims “That a thing is right, is a *supreme* reason for doing it.” This is apparently so because of the moral weight that “right” is thought to carry. “Right”, and “right” alone, is thought by Whewell to imply “supreme, unconquerable reason”. Given this impressive weight, “right” is connected intimately to “ought”. “Should” and “ought” are dependent upon “right”. If some action X is right, then we ought to do X, simply because it is the right thing to do. There is no appeal to any other feature of the action than its rightness. Clearly if this is the sort of thing to which “rightness” refers, then we have already entered the moral realm as soon as we have invoked “rightness”. This is not so of desire or feeling.

We may very well feel that an action is undesirable or we may have no feelings at all or we may feel that we do not want to do X because it will surely bring us pain or ruin. All these considerations are secondary, and as such, not “supreme reasons” for doing X or not doing it. This being the case, reason (by which we come to grasp “right” and “ought”) has priority over feeling, by which we know desire.

The connection between “right” and reason is even closer than this might suggest. On this analysis, it looks like one can separate the two; examining first one and then the other. Not so, on Whewell’s account. For Whewell, “the supreme reason of human actions and the moral nature of them cannot be separated.” The result is a view that human reason, functioning properly and without undue influence by the passions, will inevitably render true judgments about the “right” things to do. He writes that “the two [human reason and “rightness” of actions] come into our thoughts together, and are in our conceptions identical.”¹⁵⁶ This brings us to the second claim:

2. There is a difference of kind in our principles of action

This claim follows fairly quickly from the foregoing discussion. If “rightness” and reason are bound up together in the way that Whewell suggests, then it is obvious that principles of action that have their basis in this “rightness” will be different in kind from those principles of action that have their basis in something other than “rightness”. For example, principles like the Principle of Utility, which has its basis in pleasures and pains (and likely human psychology) is at least at one remove from those principles founded on “rightness” of action.

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*, xi.

3. Our obligation is to do “what is right at whatever cost of pain and loss.”

This principle follows directly from the Whewellian conception of “rightness”. Given that the supreme example of human reason is inseparably connected with “rightness” and that obligation is defined in terms of the “rightness” of an action, (3) follows. Suppose we assume that (3) is not the case. The only way that (3) could be false [given that (1) and (2) are true] is if (a) we are not obligated to do what is right, or (b) we are not obligated to do what is right provided the cost is higher than the benefit to be gained in the action. To begin, (a) will clearly not hold because obligation is defined in terms of “rightness”. That is to say, if we are obligated to do X, it is precisely (and only) because X is right. If X is right, then we are obligated to do X. Similarly, (b) cannot be the case because of the connection of obligation and “rightness”. However, (b) also fails because doing the cost/benefit analysis of an action is irrelevant. Any principle that arose from such an analysis would necessarily be of a different (and inferior) kind to the direct principle of “ought” that arises from the inherent “rightness” and the act. Since neither (a) nor (b) holds, (3) cannot be false. Therefore, (3) must be the case [provided, of course, the acceptance of (1) and (2)].

C. T. H. Green and the Dualism of Practical Reason

T. H. Green, though not always recognized as one of the Cambridge Moralists by many, is a highly underrated philosopher rightly counted among their number.¹⁵⁷ In the majority of the literature that makes reference to this group in the middle and late 19th

¹⁵⁷ I should note that as an Oxford scholar, he very likely would not have appreciated the moniker “Cambridge” moralist. Schneewind suggests that Green be included in their number because of the affinities in philosophical outlook. I have followed this here,

century, it is understood that the group consisted of Maurice, Grote, and Whewell. This is because the three had more in common than philosophical commitments; they each served as Knightbridge Professor of Moral Philosophy - beginning with Whewell, then Grote, and finally Maurice. Almost immediately Coleridge became included as a Cambridge Moralist; in 1854 James Martineau began to include Coleridge whenever he wrote of the Cambridge Moralists. Along with Whewell, Grote, Maurice, and Coleridge, Schneewind suggests the inclusion of Green. I agree. I think Green is rightly considered one of the Cambridge Moralists for two reasons. First, Coleridge was not recognized as a Cambridge Moralist initially because he was not a colleague, but a student. Further, he was a student long before the others were professors (he died two years before Green was born). However, his influence on the group is without dispute and because of his explicit inclusion by Martineau and his successors, I have followed their lead. Like Coleridge, Green was not recognized initially as one of the group, though he also interacted with them and contributed greatly to their body of theistic moral apologetics. Further, he was a professional colleague, although a quite late contemporary, in a way Coleridge was not. Additionally, the label "Cambridge Moralist" is not strictly contemporaneous with the activities of those commonly numbered among the group. It is applied later by James Martineau, who wrote that "no one talks of a 'Cambridge Theology' [but] there is such a thing, nevertheless." He goes on to name Maurice, Grote, and Whewell as the ones who advanced a "theology, perfectly distinct and characteristic of the age".¹⁵⁸ Sidgwick,

although I recognize the potential criticism from Green himself.

¹⁵⁸ James Martineau, "Personal Influences on Our Present Theology," Essays, Reviews, and Addresses, (London: Oxford Press, 1890, vol. I.), 224.

Whitehead, and other late 19th- and early 20th-century commentators have broadened the use of the term to designate a particular school of thought more than a set group of philosophers.¹⁵⁹ For this reason also, Green belongs in their company.

Moving on to Green's contribution to this discussion, it is interesting to note that he supposes that the Dualism of Practical Reason is a pseudo-problem. In Green's view, the dualism of practical reason

“is a conclusion which, once clearly faced, every inquirer would gladly escape, as repugnant both to the philosophic craving for unity, and to that ideal of ‘singleness of heart’ which we have been accustomed to associate with the highest virtue.”¹⁶⁰

Green thinks the escape is possible because he argues, in a sense, that one need not believe that there exists the sort of intractable divide between what he labels “duty” (which represents the demands of Universal Hedonism) and “interest” (which represents the constraints of Ethical Egoism).

It should be noted here that Green does not think that solving the Dualism of Practical Reason will, in any way, give aid and comfort to Utilitarianism. He, like Whewell before him, is an Intuitionist in the line of Coleridge. While Green is an Intuitionist, he is the most closely connected of the Cambridge Moralists to the work of Immanuel Kant.

¹⁵⁹ Whitehead even numbers Sidgwick among the group. He uses “Cambridge Moralists” to designate the philosophical conclusions that mark the work of Whewell, et al, not so much to designate the method that they had in common. Further, Sidgwick succeeded Maurice as Knightbridge Professor of Moral Philosophy, and so has this in common with the others as well. However, only the commonality in method is philosophically relevant, and so I think that my interpretation of Whitehead's appellation “Cambridge Moralists” accentuates that similarity rather than simply an order of professorial succession. Further, speaking philosophically, only on this interpretation does it make sense to number Sidgwick among the Moralists.

¹⁶⁰ T. H. Green, Prolegomena to Ethics, ed. A. C. Bradley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1883), 221.

Thus it should not be surprising that his own version of the Coleridgian argument from earlier takes on an even greater deontological bent. Because of this, the concept of “duty” plays a central role. However, if the Dualism of Practical Reason holds, then it holds whether the duty is conceived in a Utilitarian way or in a Deontological way. This is so because “duty” is, on Green’s view, other-directed. That is, “duty” involves obligation toward others. For the Universal Hedonist, that duty is established in terms of the General Good; for the Kantians like Green, that duty is established in terms of the moral law. However, that “duty” involves obligation toward others holds in either account. To rescue his own view, Green advances an argument that he thinks will satisfy a Utilitarian as well.

On Green’s view, the key to solving the problem of the Dualism of Practical Reason lies in a correct conception of a person’s “good”. He turns to Greek ethics, particularly Aristotle, to develop what he takes to be the proper conception of a person’s “good”. In this, Green bears striking similarity to Sidgwick, though their differences are substantive. Recall that Sidgwick, too, looked to ancient Greece for a notion of the common-sense and a comparison model for his own method of ethical investigation. However, that is as far as Sidgwick goes. Sidgwick, perhaps influenced by Darwin and surely so by Herbert Spencer, maintains a view of human evolutionary development that includes ethical theory and the moral common-sense from which ethical theory properly arises. On Sidgwick’s view, just as surely as the technological advances of Victorian England have surpassed those of their ancient Greek counterparts, so too has the moral common-sense surpassed that of the ancient Greeks. In short, the Greek culture has been superseded by the Victorian one; a view quite common in the period and notably

advanced by Spencer, among others.¹⁶¹ This English chauvinism colors Sidgwick's appropriation of Aristotelian concepts. Green, on the other hand, takes an opposing view. On Green's view, the work of Aristotle (and Plato, to a lesser degree) is particularly relevant for addressing the Dualism of Practical Reason, for example. Green holds that in reading Aristotle, one discovers that the virtues ultimately require "an expression of a will to be good, which has no object but its own fulfillment."¹⁶² Supposing Aristotle to find a person's good in this sort of will, Green takes it that he is in agreement with Aristotle in supposing that duty (the expression of the will to be good) and self-interest are ultimately compatible.¹⁶³

Recall from an earlier discussion the argument summary that gives rise to the Dualism of Practical Reason.

S1: A person's good is her self-satisfaction.

S2: Self-satisfaction consists in maximizing pleasure for the agent, or (to avoid begging any questions) in the realization of pleasure by the agent.

¹⁶¹ And a view not particularly uncommon in the late 20th century either. One recent paper which makes a similar argument (except it is the late 20th century United States playing the role of Victorian England) is Mark Schmidt's, "The Idea of Human Nature and Mid-Twentieth Century Political Theory".

¹⁶² Here it seems that Green is putting a slightly Kantian slant on the Aristotelian notion of the highest good as something that is desired for its own sake and not desired for the sake of anything further. (Nicomachean Ethics 1094a17-18) The reason I use the phrase "Kantian slant" is two-fold. First, Green is perhaps the best Kant scholar among the Cambridge Moralists, to the extent that he has been called "little more than a parrot" by later commentators. Indeed, C. D. Broad labels Green as "a thoroughly second-rate thinker" (Broad, 144). While this is extreme, on my view (and Irwin's), it does capture a kernel of truth - namely that the reading of Kant had a considerable influence on Green's own ethical views. This leads to the second of the "two-fold" reasons. It seems unlikely that Aristotle has a Kantian conception of the will operative in his own view. Green, however, seems to read Aristotle, at least in part, through a Kantian interpretive lens.

S3 and S3* are both compatible with S1 and S2.

S3: The agent has a duty toward the general good.

S3*: The agent has no duty toward the general good.

But, S3 expresses the moral commitment of the Universal Hedonist and S3* expresses the commitment of the Ethical Egoist. Since S3* and S3 cannot be true together, yet are equally supported from the common moral sense, the Dualism of Practical Reason results.

S2 is an expansion of the definition of “good”. The individual (a composite entity) and the individual good are analogous to the general populace (also a composite) and the general good. However, Green argues that a proper expansion of that notion will solve the Dualism of Practical Reason (or more accurately, show that no problem existed in the first place). Green recasts the argument as follows:

G1: An agent has a duty toward the general good.

G2: Self-satisfaction consists in the full realization of a rational agent’s capacities.

G3: The full realization of one person’s capacities requires him to will the good of other people for their own sake.

From G1, G2, and G3 we have

G4: Ethical Egoism, as Sidgwick conceives it, is defeated.

¹⁶³ Irwin, 280.

Obviously Green has to argue for G2 and G3 to show that G4 follows. To do this, he turns to the ancient Greeks. Green argues that the Greek moralists found the true principle of morality:

Once for all they conceived and expressed the conception of a free or pure morality, as resting on what we may venture to call a disinterested interest in the good; of the several virtues as so many applications of that interest to the main relations of social life; of the good itself not as anything external to the capacities virtuously exercised in its pursuit, but as their full realization.¹⁶⁴

Green is intrigued, not only by the view that virtue involves this “disinterested interest”¹⁶⁵, but by the Aristotelian restrictions on the virtues. For example, courage is displayed when fighting a naval battle, say, but not when one struggles only against the sea. Generosity, for another example, is displayed only in the giving of material to others, but not, say, in giving time or support. Green takes the presence of society to be a necessary condition for the acquisition of virtue. This is because people must be present for an agent to habituate the virtues and, ultimately, to develop the steady state of character that marks acquisition of the virtues. The restrictions that Aristotle places on the virtues are instructive here. Irwin writes that “Aristotle's restrictions reflect his views about what promotes the common good, and each virtue is a state of character that expresses the agent's identification of his own good with the common good.”¹⁶⁶

Green and Sidgwick differ substantively on another point that Green sees as advancing the view that the good of the agent and the common good are connected. For

¹⁶⁴ Green, *Prolegomena*, 253.

¹⁶⁵ By “disinterested interest”, Green seems to be designating the same thing Aristotle picks out by the good that is desired for its own sake and not for the sake of anything further.

¹⁶⁶ Irwin, 292.

Aristotle, it is quite clear that virtue and the fine (καλόν) are at least related concepts. However, Sidgwick and Green differ greatly on the implications to be drawn from Aristotle's discussions of virtue and the fine or the good. On Green's view, the connection suggests that Aristotle is right, for the most part, about the character of moral intuitions about intention and motive. However, more important for this discussion, Green takes Aristotle's conceptual connection between virtue and the fine to suggest that Aristotle is basically right about the connection between the good of any particular agent and the good of others. That is, in Aristotle's connection between virtue and the fine, Green sees the support for his move from G2 (self-satisfaction consists in the full realization of a rational agent's capacities) to G3 (full realization of one person's capacities requires him to will the good of other people for their own sake).

Sidgwick, on the other hand, takes Aristotle's connection between virtue and fineness to imply an opposing conclusion. On Sidgwick's view, the fact that Aristotle references the fine when writing of virtue is evidence that he does not distinguish those judgments that are strictly moral judgments from those that are purely aesthetic. Unlike his view that Victorian culture (with its attendant moral common-sense) supersedes ancient Greek culture, we ought not suppose that this conclusion is the result of some Spencerian Victorian chauvinism. Instead, this is further evidence of Sidgwick's overarching principle of separation of disciplines within philosophy. As we noted in the section on Sidgwick's method, he strictly compartmentalizes ethical investigations from those inquiries that are commonly grouped under the headings of metaphysics, epistemology, anthropology, etc. Aesthetics is no exception. Again, Sidgwick brackets

out aesthetic judgments from bearing upon strictly ethical investigations. Judgments of beauty have no direct bearing on judgments of “right” or “wrong”, “good” or “evil”, and the like. Only those judgments that arise from moral intuitions are data for ethical inquiry. This rigid compartmentalization, perhaps tinged with the chauvinism mentioned previously, makes it somewhat clearer that Sidgwick would suppose that Aristotle had fallen into error by assuming that judgments of fineness (or beauty) might have some role to play in ethical theorizing.

I think Sidgwick errs in assuming a rigid compartmentalization of the intuitions and judgments that arise from common-sense. It seems clear that there is at least some permeability of the dividing wall between areas of discourse in philosophy. Whether or not Sidgwick gets Aristotle right, it seems fairly clear that the Cambridge Moralists are right to suppose that there is a connection between moral responsibility (which surely arises from moral intuitions) and questions concerning freedom and determinism (which Sidgwick himself notes are not moral questions, *per se*, but metaphysical ones). Here the common philosophical view (Kant, et al) that the two are connected seems to me to be the more apt one.

Sidgwick misinterprets Aristotle. As Irwin points out, “it is true that the Greek term that Aristotle uses, *καλον*, is often appropriately translated as ‘beautiful.’ But there are good reasons for denying that aesthetic beauty is what he primarily intends when he mentions the *kalon* in connection with the virtues.”¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ *ibid.*, 295.

As Irwin notes, this is consistent with Green's conclusion. Green does not substantiate his argument beyond its simple assertion. Fortunately, however, Irwin develops an argument from various Aristotelian sources that does support the conclusion. I have reproduced it here with some editing for space.

1. What is fine is both intrinsically good and praiseworthy.¹⁶⁸
2. Actions that are praiseworthy must be voluntary¹⁶⁹ and actions displaying great virtue especially deserve praise.¹⁷⁰
3. Actions display great virtue insofar as they especially benefit others.¹⁷¹
4. Hence, concern for the fine is contrasted with narrow and exclusive concern for one's own interest¹⁷² and when everyone concentrates on fine action, we can expect that to promote the common good.¹⁷³

Thus, Irwin argues that Green has some support for his assertion that Aristotle holds that the good of the individual is tied to the good of the community in which the individual lives. Another result of this argument is that it becomes clear that Sidgwick gets Aristotle wrong. The *καλον* is not merely an aesthetic notion. It is connected with moral value. Since it captures a moral intuition and moral judgment, it is a proper datum for ethical investigation. So, even if Sidgwick maintains a rigid barrier between ethical inquiry and other philosophical inquiries, the barrier does not prevent consideration of the fine in ethical

¹⁶⁸ *Eudemian Ethics* 1248b17-25; cf. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1101b31-2, 1155a28-31, and *Rhetoric* 1366a33-6)

¹⁶⁹ *Nicomachean Ethics* 1109b31; *Eudemian Ethics* 1223a9-15)

¹⁷⁰ *Rhetoric* 1367b28

¹⁷¹ *Rhetoric* 1366b3-4; *Nicomachean Ethics* 1120a11, 1121a27-30, 1123a31-2; *Eudemian Ethics* 1231a24

¹⁷² *Rhetoric* 1358b38, 1389a32-5, 1389b35; *Nicomachean Ethics* 1104b31, 1169a6

investigation. This is because the fine is either connected with moral value (in which case it also must encompass some moral intuition of its own) or it expresses a moral intuition of its own. In either case, Green is right in his interpretation of Aristotelian ethical commitments and Sidgwick is not.

Beyond this interpretive point we can see now that Green has some justification for G3 ("The full realization of one person's capacities requires him to will the good of other people for their own sake"). If the good of the agent is necessarily connected to the common good in such a way that for the promotion of the good of the agent, the agent must also at least take the common good into consideration, then G2 ("Self-satisfaction consists in the full realization of a rational agent's capacities") holds. Further, if G2 holds in this way, G3 is a straightforward consequence. And from G1, G2, and G3, G4 follows. Thus, it is at least plausible to suppose that the Dualism of Practical Reason need not equally indict a deontological view like Green's and a utilitarian view like Sidgwick's. Indeed, we have reason to suppose that the Dualism of Practical Reason is a pseudo-problem because Green's argument stays within the strict parameters that Sidgwick establishes for ethical theory. Beyond this, it draws from moral intuitions of common-sense a notion of duty that includes, necessarily, the concern for the agent's own well-being. Thus, Green (with some 20th-century help from Irwin) has shown a way to solve the supposedly intractable Dualism of Practical Reason.

¹⁷³ *Nicomachean Ethics* 1169a6-11

However, Green has other problems that may defeat his view. Chief among these is his allegiance to the Coleridgian argument explicated above. It is at this juncture that Sidgwick's argument against the Intuitionists as a group bears against Green as well.

D. Sidgwick and the Cambridge Moralists: On Intuitions as Indications of Humanity's Connection to the Divine

Sidgwick's secondary argument against the Cambridge Moralists is quite simple. He argues that there is no reason to suppose that moral intuitions suggest anything special about the human place in the universe, much less some unique connection to the divine. On Sidgwick's view, one encounters intuitions about a great many things and belonging to a great many fields of inquiry. Not all intuitions are moral ones. Since this is the case, it should not be surprising to discover that there are also judgments arising from these non-moral intuitions that are themselves "really self-evident". If they are "really self-evident" they will satisfy the demands of Intuitive Verification. However, merely satisfying Intuitive Verification is not sufficient for attaining the label "really self-evident." Sidgwick writes:

One may say generally that as the intuitive verification cannot be made entirely trustworthy, it requires to be supplemented by a discursive verification - which consists generally in ascertaining the harmony between the proposition regarded as intuitively certain and other propositions belonging to the same department of fact, and of which the Baconian verification [by survey of particulars] is the most important, but by no means the only species.¹⁷⁴

That is, intuition is simply a requirement for any sort of knowledge or reasoning at all. For example, the judgment that the Euclidean Parallel Postulate is not derivable from the other nine Euclidean Elements and thus is independent of them arises first from intuitions about

¹⁷⁴ Sidgwick, 82.

lines, planes, and etc. These base intuitions are severally clear and distinct, and thus they fulfill the requirement of Intuitive Verification. Upon investigation, the Parallel Postulate is discovered to have the same status as the other nine Elements and thus is also clear and distinct (though not immediately or obviously so). The point is that even these judgments about geometric first principles require intuitions. If this is the case then the mere fact that we have *moral* intuitions is not a special mark of our divine nature. Since intuitions are required for matter-of-fact knowledge, for mathematics, for logic, and for science as well as for morality, we have little reason to suppose that moral intuitions convey any further information about the human “place” in the universe than the intuitions about the first principles of geometry. Of course, this argument works against the Cambridge Moralists because they assume this special property of moral intuitions; that they and only they are intuitions that provide insight into the human connection with the divine. However, it appears to me that the argument works even if the Cantabridgian position is presented more broadly.

It is not generally supposed that human intuition in geometry is some indication of human connection to the divine. However, suppose that the Cambridge Moralists accepted the obvious implication of Sidgwick’s argument against them - namely that either all intuitions that are “really self-evident” testify to a human connection to the divine or that none of them do. These seem to be the only alternatives available after showing that all intuitions have the same status. Clearly the Cambridge Moralists will not take the latter option since it would result in the collapse of their foundational Coleridgian argument. Thus, they must swallow the former. However, it proves to be a bitter pill. Given that they

assume at the outset that no non-moral intuitions have this divine feature, conceding that they do (after the Sidgwickian argument) appears to be *ad hoc*. Beyond this, if it should be accepted at the outset that all intuitions have this sort of divine property, this acceptance itself constitutes a judgment that will fail the verification process. This is so because it will not receive assent from the relevant experts. Geometers, for instance, do not suppose that the intuitions at bottom of the proof of the Pythagorean Theorem carry with them some proof of a connection between humanity and the divine. Hence, since the latter option fails the test for Social Verifiability, it fails to be “really self-evident”. So, both of the Cambridge Moralists alternatives prove unpalatable.

The result of the foregoing argument is that intuition is required for any sort of knowledge. Thus, to suppose that it should thus be required for moral insight is not strange nor does it do anything special to support a theistic view. Moral insight is thus no more a mark of a divine nature than a particularly penetrating grasp of Euclidean geometry.

E. Whitehead and the Dualism of Practical Reason, Part One

We have reason to think that Whitehead has a view similar to Green’s, rooted in his own peculiar interpretation of Aristotle. Whitehead is often the subject of the same sort of accusation that Sidgwick levels against Aristotle - namely that he holds a purely aesthetic conception of the good, that he does not distinguish between the strictly moral and the purely aesthetic. However, that he holds something like the view that Irwin attributes to both Green and Aristotle can be shown in two parts. The simple portion of this argument is the direct textual evidence that Whitehead denies the existence of the Dualism of Practical Reason. The second, and less simple, portion has to do with the

ways in which Whitehead treats the concept of the καλον. I will show that if Whitehead falls victim to the charge of holding a solely aesthetic conception of the good, so too do Aristotle and Plato. However, since neither of these do, neither then does Whitehead.¹⁷⁵

In a rather lengthy statement that encompasses clues to Whitehead's conception of the proper philosophic method as well as the connection between individual and corporate good, he writes that

Philosophy is the self-correction by consciousness of its own initial excess of subjectivity. Each actual occasion contributes to the circumstances of its origin additional formative elements deepening its own peculiar individuality. Consciousness is only the last and greatest of such elements by which the selective character of the individual obscures the external totality from which it originates and which it embodies. An actual individual, of such higher grade, has truck with the totality of things by reason of its sheer actuality; but it has attained its individual depth of being by a selective emphasis limited to its own purposes. The task of philosophy is to recover the totality obscured by the selection. It replaces in rational experience what has been submerged in the higher sensitive experience and has been sunk yet deeper by the initial operations of consciousness itself. The selectiveness of individual experience is moral so far as it conforms to the balance of importance disclosed in the rational vision; and conversely the conversion of the intellectual insight into an emotional force corrects the sensitive experience in the direction of morality. The correction is in proportion to the rationality of the insight.

Morality of outlook is inseparably conjoined with generality of outlook. The antithesis between the general good and the individual interest can be abolished only when the individual is such that its interest is the general good, thus exemplifying the loss of the minor intensities in order to find them again with finer composition in the wider sweep of interest.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ Since this portion of the argument has direct ramifications for Whitehead's positive view, I reserve the full argument for the appropriate section of Chapter Three. Here, though, I will suggest that it is at least plausible to assume that Whitehead sides with Green on this point purely on the basis of textual evidence in which Whitehead treats the Dualism of Practical Reason explicitly.

¹⁷⁶ Whitehead, Process and Reality, 15.

Here, it is clear that Whitehead is echoing the argument that we have already seen advanced by Green (and substantiated by Irwin). On Whitehead's view the individual interest and the general good are linked of necessity. Philosophy, according to Whitehead, is the method by which this connection is divined. Initially, human beings are completely self-interested. This is both a theoretical point as well as a coldly practical one. For instance, anyone who has encountered a small child knows how self-interested the child is. With time, the child discovers that she is not the only creature in the universe. That discovery begins to lead to an understanding of connectedness to a wider world; a world that she can influence and one that influences her. As the agent gathers insight into the world of which she is a part, the correction made to the initial excess of subjectivity (or self-interest, in this case) is proportional to the rationality of the insight, on Whitehead's view. One of the functions of reason is to correct excessive self-interest in agents. This it does by demonstrating that the individual interest and the general good are inherently connected.

Thus, we can suppose, based on the foregoing textual evidence, that Whitehead holds something like Green's view. I take it that Whitehead does indeed hold something that is almost identical with Green's view, though I will argue that unlike Green, Whitehead provides his own support for the view. This second phase of the argument is contained in the following chapter, in the section entitled "Mathematics and the Good."

Part III. Whitehead's Theory of Virtue

Chapter 1. Background

Considerable attention has rightly been given to Whitehead's metaphysical schemes. A not inconsiderable amount of attention has also attended his epistemological schemes. Relatively scant attention has greeted his ethics. All too little notice has been taken of the moral component of Whitehead's work.¹⁷⁷ This is a grave oversight.¹⁷⁸ Surely part of the reason for this oversight lies in the fact that Whitehead is one of the truly brilliant logicians and systematic metaphysicians of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. No less than W.V.O. Quine remarks that Whitehead is one of the foremost "pioneers in the field" of modern logic.¹⁷⁹ And from A.H. Johnson; "Whitehead's pre-eminence in logic, the philosophy of science, and metaphysics has tended to distract attention from his genuine achievements in other fields."¹⁸⁰ Whitehead himself, at the outset of Process and Reality, states that "one of

¹⁷⁷ As Paul Arthur Schilpp set out to write his essay "Whitehead's Moral Philosophy" for the Whitehead volume of the Library of Living Philosophers, he was advised by a colleague who was himself "an ardent disciple of Whitehead" that "I suggest you take as a model for your essay on 'Whitehead's Moral Philosophy' a well-known treatise on the Snakes of Ireland." Schilpp, "Whitehead's Moral Philosophy", The Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, 593, n131.

¹⁷⁸ It is also quite strange. To ignore the ethical intuitions and commitments that color each of his works is akin to studying only Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics while paying no attention to the rest of the corpus. There is a rather pronounced kinship between the works of Aristotle and Whitehead that Whitehead himself notes on several occasions. This could come as a surprise to many with only cursory background in Whitehead's work since he has such a self-proclaimed affection for Plato. However, in Adventures of Ideas, Whitehead accords Aristotle similar status, especially in his discussion of the Hellenic epoch contrasted with the Hellenistic and Scholastic epochs. Indeed, the careful reader of Whitehead soon comes to see that Whitehead is decidedly more aristotelian than platonic.

¹⁷⁹ W.V.O. Quine, "Whitehead and the Rise of Modern Logic", The Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, Paul Arthur Schilpp, ed., (New York: Tudor Publishing, 1951), 127.

¹⁸⁰ A. H. Johnson, "Whitehead's Philosophy of Civilization", Whitehead and the Modern

the motives of a complete cosmology [is] to construct a system of ideas which brings the aesthetic, moral, and religious interests into relation with those concepts of the world which have their origin in natural science.”¹⁸¹

Johnson is one of the few first-generation Whitehead scholars to recognize that Whitehead’s three most important books (Process and Reality, Science and the Modern World, and Adventures of Ideas) are concerned with the topics of civilization and the development of individual character required for civilization to rise and flourish. Whitehead writes, “The book [Adventures of Ideas] is in fact a study of the concept of civilization, and an endeavor to understand how it is that civilized beings arise.”¹⁸² For Whitehead, civilization is dependent on civilized beings. Without the latter, the former does not arise. This section addresses what it means to be civilized. For Whitehead, a civilized character is a morally good character and vice versa. Because this is definitional, I will not dwell on it other than to point out that, given the equivalence, the question of being civilized just is the question of having good character. Since character and its development are questions of virtue and vice, I will examine Whitehead’s view of the constitution of virtue and show how agents acquire virtue. However, because of the close connection between Whitehead’s ethical views and his other philosophical speculations, a number of foundational historical, metaphysical, and epistemological points need to be made first.

A. Summary of the Negative Views

World, A. Cornelius Benjamin, ed., (Boston: Beacon Press, 1950), 42.

¹⁸¹ Whitehead, Process and Reality, xii. (emphasis added)

¹⁸² Whitehead, Adventures of Ideas, (New York: MacMillan Publishing, 1933), 7.

An important preliminary consideration is locating Whitehead's thoughts on ethics in the spectrum of ethical theories. This can be done rather briefly. James Gray argues unconvincingly that Whitehead is a Utilitarian.¹⁸³ John Hick simply assumes that it is obvious that Whitehead is a Utilitarian.¹⁸⁴ Richard Davis takes a more limited approach, stating that Whitehead's ethics can be interpreted as resembling utilitarianism.¹⁸⁵ Davis defends this claim partly by making the historical point that Whitehead's views of morality bear some resemblance to Sidgwick's. But we have seen, Whitehead explicitly rejects utilitarianism as a tenable view.

On the other hand, Whitehead has a great many positive things to say about both duty¹⁸⁶ and the development of character. What is important to note here is that he takes the former to be dependent on the latter. He writes

the factor in human life provocative of noble discontent is the gradual emergence into prominence of a sense of criticism, founded upon appreciations of beauty, and of intellectual distinction and of duty. The moral element is derivative from the other factors in experience. For otherwise there is no content for duty to operate upon. There can be no morality in a vacuum.¹⁸⁷

At first reading, it might appear that Whitehead makes "duty" primitive.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸³ James S. Gray, Process Ethics, (New York: University Press of America, 1984). An interesting sidenote, Gray is one of the many philosophers who have made the claim, in print, that "Whitehead never wrote an ethics". Gray, however, is the only one to marry this claim with the stronger claim that "Whitehead never wrote a theology". I find both of these to be false. Only my claim that the first is false is contentious within Process scholarship.

¹⁸⁴ John Hick, Philosophy of Religion, 4th ed, (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1990), 131.

¹⁸⁵ Richard S. Davis, "Whitehead's Moral Philosophy", Process Studies, (Summer 1973), 75-90.

¹⁸⁶ In this, Whitehead's view bears some resemblance to another 19th century Cambridge moralist, T. H. Green.

¹⁸⁷ Whitehead, Adventures of Ideas, 18.

¹⁸⁸ While it is ultimately clear that Whitehead does not think duty is primitive, the less

However, this is not so. Rather, for Whitehead, experience or “common-sense” is foundational. Experience is taken as primitive. In this way, Whitehead resembles Sidgwick. Common-sense, of which the Moral Sense is a part, refers to a common humanity experiencing a common world. The moral element (along with the sense of criticism and appreciations of beauty) arises from experience through direct intuitions. Then intellectual distinctions can be made and duty has content upon which to work. That Whitehead has this sort of progression in mind becomes clearer when he claims that “all knowledge is derived from, and verified by, direct intuitive observation.”¹⁸⁹ Thus, there is an ebb and flow relationship between duty and direct moral intuitions. Duty and intellectual distinctions arise from intuitions, and those distinctions and conceptions of duty are then confirmed (or not) by further intuitions. Or, as Whitehead says in another place,

Civilization did not start with a social contract determining modes of behavior. Its earliest effort was the slow introduction of ideas explanatory of modes of behavior and of inrushes of emotion which already dominated their lives. Undoubtedly ideas modified practice. But in the main practice precedes thought.¹⁹⁰

than careful reader might suppose that the phrase “founded upon appreciations of beauty ... and of duty” suggests that duty is somehow basic. I argue that this would be a mistaken reading of the passage.

¹⁸⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 114. For a very nice discussion of Whitehead’s rejection of contractarian models of ethical theory, see, among others George Allen, “No Common Goods without Common Natures”, Society for the Study of Process Philosophies, 1998 Conference. The point here is not to investigate Whitehead’s arguments against contractarianism, as these form a particularly small subset of the ethical arguments more generally. Rather, it is simply to suggest that should one’s interpretation of Whitehead’s ethical commitments conclude by placing his thought within Utilitarian, Deontological, or Contractarian models, then that interpretation has the further onus of harmonizing Whitehead’s clearly negative arguments against these views.

As we have already seen, Whitehead's reception of utilitarian schemes (both Millian and Sidgwickian) and deontological schemes (particularly the Cambridge Moralists variety) tends to be rather negative.

B. Background

In this section I run the very real risk of presenting an argument that might seem to be a welter of proof-texts. However, the point is to demonstrate that not only does Whitehead's system have ethical implications, but that the system from which those implications arise is intended to be seen as inherently ethical. That is, Whitehead's concern with human conduct and character development provides the motivation for his more popularly debated work. The implication of this claim is that without the ethical dimension of Whitehead's work, the work itself loses meaning because it loses the end for which the work is done.

It is part of the received opinion concerning the Whiteheadian corpus that Process and Reality is a work in systematic metaphysics and epistemology along with a critique of many of the systems of Whitehead's modern predecessors (Kant, Hume, Locke, et al); that Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect is a work exploring a particular aspect of Whitehead's doctrine of truth along with criticisms of preceding truth doctrines; that The Function of Reason is concerned with the human faculty of Reason; and so on. What this received opinion omits, however, is the startling consistency in Whitehead's assertions concerning the "why?" of his philosophical investigations. It may come as a surprise to those philosophers who uncritically accept the "Whitehead never wrote an ethics" dogma, but Whitehead

claims without exception that his work is directed to the understanding of human experience and, within that, human conduct.

In some of Whitehead's work, the emphasis on ethical concerns is straightforwardly apparent. For example, in Symbolism, the third and final chapter of the book is dedicated to "Uses of Symbolism." At the outset of this chapter, Whitehead turns his attention to the inextricable link between human civilization and symbolism. And while "humanity can be overwhelmed by its symbolic accessories," symbolism and criticism of received symbols are necessary elements in the "promotion of a wholesome civilization."¹⁹¹ The segue into this final chapter is found in the conclusion of the preceding one:

In this chapter, and in the former chapter, the general characterization of symbolism has been discussed. It plays a dominant part in the way in which all higher organisms conduct their lives. It is the cause of progress, and the cause of error. The higher animals have gained a faculty of great power, by means of which they can define with some accuracy those distant features in the immediate world by which their future lives are to be determined. ... It is the purpose of the next chapter to illustrate this doctrine by an analysis of the part played by this habit of symbolism in promoting the cohesion, the progress, and the dissolution of human societies.¹⁹²

In a quite straightforward fashion, Whitehead has specified the reason for the exploration of symbolism. In the first place, it is to clarify and critically evaluate the general character of symbols. Secondly, it is an investigation of the conduct of life; its progress, its failings, and its prospects for satisfaction in the future. Third, and finally, it is an explanation of the function of symbolism within society, specifically the ways in which it functions to bind individuals to one another in society, to educate the members of society, and to shape the character both of the individuals who are the constituent parts of the society

¹⁹¹ Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect. (New York: Putnam-Capricorn Books, 1959), 60-61.

and the character of the society itself. In each of these, it is apparent that the living of human life is the overriding concern that motivates the work.

Another example in support of my thesis is Adventures of Ideas, where some of Whitehead's most explicit ethical formulations are located. This book has been likened to Plato's *Republic* because of its place and function within the Whiteheadian corpus. On Davis' view, just as Plato set out to describe the construction of the ideal state and the states of character of its citizens in the *Republic*, so Whitehead set out to examine human civilization in Adventures of Ideas.¹⁹³ Although this is grossly oversimplified, as Davis himself notes, the similarities between the two works and their placement in the respective bodies of work are striking. The similarities become even clearer when the *Republic* is interpreted as something other than a work of political philosophy and is seen more strictly as an exploration into the development of character which focuses on the acquisition of virtue. For example, beginning with a question concerning the nature of justice, Plato turns his attention to the development of the ideal state on the view that in finding justice there it can then be found in the individual. In that development, considerable attention is given (notably in Book VI) to the education and training of the citizens and rulers of the state with the express intent of developing in them the proper characters that will make the ideal state possible. The focus is always directed ultimately at finding the virtue justice in the individual. In a similar way, Whitehead is striving to identify and clarify those things by virtue of which a society is called civilized. He states at the outset that civilization, in whatever epoch, is driven by two agencies - brute necessity and "articulated beliefs issuing

¹⁹² *ibid.*, 59.

from aspirations and issuing into aspirations.”¹⁹⁴ From there, Whitehead sets out to discuss the three types of character which partake in the “highest ideal of satisfaction possible.” Central to the advance of civilization, at least within this epoch, are the images of graciousness, kindness, freedom, and mercy inherited from the “interim ethics” of the founders of Christianity.¹⁹⁵ Whitehead then goes on to advance his theory of civilization but it is the character of the individual as she progresses from acting on instinct, to acting with intelligence, to developing an abiding wisdom that assesses and criticizes both instinct and intelligence with which he is ultimately concerned. It is this concern with the development of character that marks the deepest connection with the Socrates of the *Republic*. The political theory is but a secondary similarity.

The one seeming departure from this concern with human conduct and character development is his *magnum opus*, Process and Reality. A critic of my view could rightly point out that Whitehead does not set out human conduct as the target of his investigations at the beginning of the work. Rather, it is labeled a systematic examination of “speculative philosophy.”¹⁹⁶ Similar to Spinoza’s geometric method, Whitehead’s work also proceeds to set out definitions, categories, logical connections and required relations in an effort to overcome many of the difficulties of “nineteenth-century philosophy [which] excludes itself from relevance to the ordinary stubborn facts of daily life.” Simply put, Process and Reality certainly seems to be a work in metaphysics and not ethics.

¹⁹³ Davis, 79.

¹⁹⁴ Whitehead, Adventures of Ideas, (New York: MacMillan, 1933), 12-13.

¹⁹⁵ Of these, Whitehead writes, “So long as the Galilean images are but the dreams of an unrealized world, so long must they spread the infection of an uneasy spirit.” Adventures of Ideas, 24-5)

So does Spinoza's *Ethics*. That is, until one sees what is done with the definitions, categories and the rest. Only then does it become apparent that Spinoza is concerned with what is commonly labeled "ethics". The same is true for Whitehead.

In the preface, Whitehead makes only a brief statement of the final destination of this work. "The fifth part is concerned with the final interpretation of the ultimate way in which the cosmological problem is to be conceived. It answers the question, "What does it all come to?"¹⁹⁷ Sure enough, in part five the discussion turns to questions of evil, the character of God, greatness in action, and the "various contrasted qualities of temperament, which control the formation of the mentalities of different epochs."¹⁹⁸ This final section of Process and Reality can be overlooked by those concerned with only the metaphysics. Robert Mesle in his Process Theology argues that the fifth section can be read completely independently of the first four. He argues further that one need not read or try to understand the Final Interpretation to grasp Whitehead's meaning in the preceding chapters. This seems odd. It is perhaps understandable because the final section of Process and Reality explores questions not explicitly mentioned in the preceding sections. However, I am at a loss to grasp how one might understand that final section without making extensive use of the definitions, categories, presuppositions, and the argumentation of the earlier sections. Further, whether or not the two sections of the text are separable, it seems clear from the text that Whitehead did not see them as such. Thus, while one might advance a process model that did not have the two pieces as part and parcel of each other, that model would not be a

¹⁹⁶ Whitehead, Process and Reality, 3.

¹⁹⁷ *ibid.*, xiii.

¹⁹⁸ *ibid.*, 338.

Whiteheadian model. For Whitehead, it seems that the connection between the fairly fundamental questions about character - of God, of individuals, and of the world - is the point of the investigations in Process and Reality.

C. Whitehead and the Greeks

1. The καλον

It is important to bear in mind the role that Whitehead assigns to his interpretation of classical Greek philosophy. Here, too, is a deceptive similarity to Sidgwick. Sidgwick, relying on his interpretations of Plato and Aristotle, advances a view that the “Good” is the ultimate qualification in moral theory. For Sidgwick, however, this qualification is affixed to things based on some sort of utilitarian analysis. That is, to call something “Good” is to say something about the benefits to the general good (understood in a utilitarian way) that the thing provides. Whitehead also sees “Good” as the “ultimate qualification” but not as something to be affixed to a thing based on utilitarian calculations. Rather “Good” is ascribed to something based on its excellence. For example, a good toaster is called “good” because it toasts bread excellently.¹⁹⁹ Whitehead recognizes that this strategy is not without problems, noting that the question of ascribing the qualification “Good” to something on the basis of that thing’s particular “excellence” raises some thorny problems both for the Greeks and their successors. He writes

This notion of excellence, partly attained and partly missed, raises another problem which greatly exercised Greek thought at the time of Plato. The problem can take many special forms. In what does beauty consist, for example, the beauty of a

¹⁹⁹ I am indebted to Hugh Benson for this example. While he and I recognize that using a toaster to talk about virtue is problematic (since a toaster is an artifact), it is a nice example of ways in which “good” might be affixed to something.

musical melody, the beauty of a statue, or of a building such as the Parthenon? Also, there is that other form of beauty, which is rightness of conduct. Probably, in this naïve shape, the question has no answer, since 'The Good' is an ultimate qualification not to be analysed in terms of any things more final than itself. But an analogous question can be asked, to which Greek thought was unanimous as to its answer. To what sort of things does the concept [the Good] apply, and in particular what sort of conditions are requisite for its evocation? The Greek answer to this latter pair of questions was that beauty belonged to composite things, and that the composition is beautiful when the many components have obtained in some sense their proper proportions. This was the Greek doctrine of Harmony, in respect to which neither Plato nor Aristotle ever wavers.²⁰⁰

This notion of Harmony plays a central role in Whitehead's account of virtue. As such, we will return to it later. First, it would be of help to discuss Whitehead's view of his kinship with the ancients, particularly with regards to the topics of final causes, mathematics, Harmony, Beauty, and the "end" of a human being. Each of these is intimately connected with Whitehead's notion of 'the Good'.

2. Final Causes

The *Nicomachean Ethics* may be the most read part of the Aristotelian corpus, so it might seem strange to say that a likeness exists between the works of Aristotle and Whitehead. While Aristotle's work is clearly a work in ethics, the point that Whitehead never wrote an ethics has been belabored in scholarly circles. So at the outset, it appears a daunting task to compare the work of the two favorably. However, the comparisons are quite strong.

Careful examination of the *Nicomachean Ethics* reveals that Aristotle relies on other of his writings to complete the arguments. That arguments in the *Nicomachean Ethics* are compressed is relatively uncontroversial. The example Irwin cites is Aristotle's

²⁰⁰ Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 152.

criticism of the Platonic Theory of Forms.²⁰¹ At 1096a12-1097a12, Aristotle raises no fewer than eleven objections to the Theory, on Irwin's view.²⁰² These objections are, for the most part, claims made with little supporting argument. Fortunately, he has much stronger support for these objections. Unfortunately for those who want to read the *Ethics* separately from the rest of the corpus, that support is not found in the *Ethics*.

This lack of support is particularly striking with respect to Aristotle's "objections to the Form as separated."²⁰³ For Plato, the form of a thing is separable from the ordinary things that participate in the form. Irwin's example is helpful. He writes, "In the Platonic view the Form of the Just is perfectly just and is separable from sensible just things."²⁰⁴ These claims as simple statements of Aristotle's view that Plato is wrong-headed about the doctrine come perilously close to question-begging if taken in isolation from the rest of the Aristotelian corpus. However, by reading the *Nicomachean Ethics* as part of a broader philosophical project, one then has available Aristotle's arguments at *Metaphysics* 987a32ff, 1078b9-1079a4, and 1086a24-b13 for support of the conclusions Aristotle draws.²⁰⁵

²⁰¹ Irwin, "Introduction" to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, xxi.

²⁰² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1097b25ff.

²⁰³ Irwin, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, 10. Note that when referring to Irwin's headings in his translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, I have elected to use the page on which the heading is found.

²⁰⁴ *ibid.*, Notes, 303. This view is extended to cover the other Forms as well. For a further example of the problem Irwin (and Aristotle) have in mind here, see Constance Meinwald's "Good-bye to the Third Man" in Kraut's The Cambridge Companion to Plato, 365-397.

²⁰⁵ At *Metaphysics* 987a32ff, Aristotle expands on his assertion that "One might be puzzled about what [the believers in Ideas] really mean in speaking of The So-and-So Itself, since Man Itself and man have one and the same account of man; for in so far as each is man, they will not differ at all. *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1096a34ff. Aristotle's disagreement with Plato about the Form doctrine is perhaps clearest with respect to their views on numbers and the One. For Plato, numbers are derived from the Form of the

The point of this discussion is to demonstrate briefly that without a working understanding of the Aristotelian material (metaphysics, epistemology, anthropology, etc.)

"Great and Small" and are distinct or separable from ordinary objects or sensible things. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle writes as an objection to Plato's view that "the Pythagoreans seemingly have a more plausible view" (1096b5). However, this view is expanded helpfully at *Metaphysics* 987b20-988a19,

Accordingly the material principle is the "Great and Small," and the essence or formal principle is the One, since the numbers are derived from the "Great and Small" by participation in the One. In treating the One as a substance instead of a predicate of some other entity, his teaching resembles that of the Pythagoreans, and also agrees with it in stating that the numbers are the causes of Being in everything else; but it is peculiar to him to posit a duality instead of the single Unlimited, and to make the Unlimited consist of the "Great and Small." He is also peculiar in regarding the numbers as distinct from sensible things, whereas they hold that things themselves are numbers, nor do they posit an intermediate class of mathematical objects. His distinction of the One and the numbers from ordinary things (in which he differed from the Pythagoreans) and his introduction of the Forms were due to his investigation of logic (the earlier thinkers were strangers to Dialectic); his conception of the other principle as a duality to the belief that numbers other than primes can be readily generated from it, as from a matrix. The fact, however, is just the reverse, and the theory is illogical; for whereas the Platonists derive multiplicity from matter although their Form generates only once, it is obvious that only one table can be made from one piece of timber, and yet he who imposes the form upon it, although he is but one, can make many tables. Such too is the relation of male to female: the female is impregnated in one coition, but one male can impregnate many females. And these relations are analogues of the principles referred to. This, then, is Plato's verdict upon the question which we are investigating. From this account it is clear that he only employed two causes: that of the essence, and the material cause; for the Forms are the cause of the essence in everything else, and the One is the cause of it in the Forms. He also tells us what the material substrate is of which the Forms are predicated in the case of sensible things, and the One in that of the Forms--that it is this the duality, the "Great and Small." Further, he assigned to these two elements respectively the causation of good and of evil; a problem which, as we have said,⁴ had also been considered by some of the earlier philosophers, e.g. Empedocles and Anaxagoras. (Hugh Tredennick, translator, *Aristotle in 23 Volumes*, Harvard University Press, 1933)

This is but a single illustration of the use of material outside the *Nicomachean Ethics* to support claims Aristotle makes within it, but it should be sufficient evidence that the *Ethics* is dependent, to a certain degree, on this outside help. Clearly, without the passages from the *Metaphysics*, the claim in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is completely without support.

developed in other works, one is hard pressed to make complete use of the arguments in the *Ethics*. Just as one needs to read the broader Aristotelian corpus to grasp all the subtleties of the *Ethics*, so one needs to pay special attention to Whitehead's ethical concerns and commitments to grasp the subtleties of his metaphysics. I will offer only a brief example here, though fuller examples follow in the next sections. In Adventures of Ideas, Whitehead develops a controversial theory of truth. On his view, "Truth" has many gradations, from stronger to weaker forms. The strongest gradation is connected with direct intuitions; the weakest is symbolism, including the symbolism of language and propositional statements. The Theory of Truth is developed in support of his notion of Harmony. Harmony is at the pinnacle of his conception of the virtues. He goes on in Part Three of Adventures of Ideas to develop the notions of phraseology, prehension, individuality, knowledge, sense perception, perceptive function, objects, creativity, perception, non-sensuous perception, energy flux, mind and nature, personality, space and time, body, and dualism to the end of making clear his understanding of civilization and the character development of the individual human beings.²⁰⁶ But the understandings of the essence of civilization are

²⁰⁶ That Whitehead has character development in mind will be demonstrated later. It will suffice here to point out that Whitehead describes the essence of civilization, its growth and decay, in terms of human character and with an eye to the proper sort of character development that will promote the growth of civilization. Note especially the following description of modern nations, "In modern states, there is a complex problem. There are many types of character. Freedom means that within each type the requisite coordination should be possible without the destruction of the general ends of the whole community. ... In this way individuality gains the effectiveness which issues from coordination and freedom obtains power necessary for its perfection." (Adventures of Ideas, Part I, Chapter 4, Section VIII). Or from his description of the human soul, "All three types of character partake in the highest ideal of satisfaction possible for actual realization, and in this sense can be termed that beauty which provides the final contentment for the Eros of the universe." (Part I, Chapter 2)

presented both prior (in Part I) and posterior (in Part IV) to these discussions, providing the framework into which each of these metaphysical, epistemological, and psychological concepts is placed. Thus, without taking careful note of the work Whitehead intends for these metaphysical, epistemological, and psychological components to do, one runs the very real risk of failing to fully understand the components themselves. And he intends the components to make clear the nature of civilization and the essence of human character development.

My view is this: just as Aristotle's non-ethical works serve to provide support for his ethical views, so Whitehead's ethical commitments provide a context within which he advances his so-called "non-ethical" views. It is somewhat easier to divide the one from the other with Aristotle since he seems to do so himself. In Whitehead's case, it is considerably more difficult as the two are interwoven.²⁰⁷ Another important similarity is their reliance on "Final Causes" to make the arguments for their ethical commitments.

Aristotle's Final Cause doctrine is one of his more controversial doctrines. It raises more troubling questions more quickly than any of the other three "causes" - efficient, formal, or material. This is in part because of a lack of clarity regarding "cause"; particularly as it relates to the Final Cause. For example, is the Final Cause a reason, an explanation, or some indication of design by an outside agent?²⁰⁸ Yet there is little

²⁰⁷ In the final section of Process and Reality, Whitehead again makes reference to the work of Aristotle, noting that Aristotelian commitments have colored a great deal of thought about the character of God and the world. The placement of the comment along with the overall structure of Process and Reality should again remind us of the comparison of the two philosophers.

²⁰⁸ Tanweer Akram argues that on account of this latter possible interpretation, Aristotle ought not be interpreted as having applied the Final Cause doctrine to anything other than

disagreement that the notion plays a critical role in the development of the doctrine of Natural Teleology. Whitehead's Final Cause doctrine is somewhat less controversial.²⁰⁹ For Whitehead Final Causes express intentions of living entities. For example, when asked why the New Orleans Saints would sign three quarterbacks, their presumed response would be "To win the Super Bowl." However misguided the action (the signing of the three mediocre quarterbacks), the intention that motivated the action is the Final Cause of that action. Should, by some miraculous happening, the Saints win the Super Bowl, management would point to the earlier action and attribute the performance of the action to the desire to win.²¹⁰

artifacts and certainly not to human beings or to the cosmos. (*The New Nation*, Spring 1988) This is a wrongheaded position, on my view, because if Final Causes designate functions, as it seems that they do, then it seems quite clear that Aristotle attributes Final Causes to human beings. More informative is Thomas of Aquinas' use of the Aristotelian doctrine of Final Causes to "prove" the existence of God as the agent of the order in the world. Thomas' "fifth way" of proof runs in this way.

We see that things which lack knowledge, such as natural bodies, act for an end, and this is evident from their acting always, or nearly always, in the same way, so as to obtain the best result. Hence it is plain that they achieve their end, not fortuitously, but designedly. Now whatever lacks knowledge cannot move towards an end, unless it be directed by some being endowed with knowledge and intelligence; as the arrow is directed by the archer. Therefore some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are directed to their end; and this being we call God. (St. Thomas of Aquinas, *Whether God Exists?*, Anton Pegis, translator, in his chapter *Five Ways to Prove the Existence of God*, Classical and Contemporary Readings in the Philosophy of Religion, John Hick, editor, (Indianapolis: Prentice Hall, 1990), 42.

²⁰⁹ This is for two reasons. (1) there are fewer combatants and (2) Whitehead is clearer about what he means by Final Cause.

²¹⁰ This discussion has some rather direct implications for attributing an ethical scheme to Whitehead. Indeed, if the discussion were to end at this stage, the case would have been made that his system has some ethical import. Fortunately, Whitehead's discussion does not end at this stage. In The Function of Reason, Whitehead makes several more assertions that could easily have been included in the discussion above. However, it is one of the places in which his concept of Final Cause is best developed. Thus, the treatment of it in this section.

For Whitehead, the function of reason is “to promote the art of life.”²¹¹ The art of life is then characterized as first, “to be alive, secondly to be alive in a satisfactory way, and thirdly to acquire an increase in satisfaction.”²¹² That is, to live, to live well, and to live better.²¹³ On Whitehead's view, this commitment is, for all intents and purposes, equivalent to the thesis, “Reason is a factor in experience which directs and criticizes the urge towards the attainment of an end realized in imagination but not in fact.”²¹⁴ Which is to say, reason is that factor which directs one toward an end that one desires and has not yet attained. However, to attain such a “good life” requires that individuals develop their characters in such ways as to make civilized existence possible.

The Function of Reason is not the only place where these commitments are made. In Adventures of Ideas, for example, Whitehead states that “Life can only be understood as an aim at that perfection the conditions of its environment allow.”²¹⁵ In his criticism of much of modern scholarship and science, he writes that they

reproduce the same limitations as dominated the bygone Hellenistic epoch and the bygone Scholastic epoch. They canalize thought and observation within predetermined limits, based upon inadequate metaphysical assumptions dogmatically assumed. The modern assumptions differ from the older assumptions, not wholly for the better. They exclude from rationalistic thought more of the final values of existence.²¹⁶

Simply put, it is the character of civilization and the individuals that comprise civilized societies that Whitehead seeks to understand and explain. From Symbolism, which

²¹¹ Whitehead, Function of Reason, 4.

²¹² *ibid.*, 8.

²¹³ *ibid.*

²¹⁴ *ibid.*, 9.

²¹⁵ Whitehead, Adventures of Ideas, 87.

²¹⁶ *ibid.*, 122.

precedes Process and Reality, to The Function of Reason, which is contemporaneous with it, to Adventures of Ideas which follows it, Whitehead consistently spells out the Final Cause of his philosophical ruminations. It is, first, to live, to live well, and to live better, and second, to systematize those requirements which explain experience and make the character of the “to live, to live well, and to live better” accessible. In short, his is a profoundly ethical endeavor, and one that seeks to correct modern errors by mining the classical past.²¹⁷

3. Harmony, Beauty, and Freedom

It is perhaps odd to lump these three concepts together into a single discussion. However, Whitehead’s scheme presents these as intimately interrelated in such a way that it seems best to address them together rather than severally. In the notion of Harmony, Whitehead thinks the Greeks hit upon a solution to the problem of relating the Good to virtues, or excellences. “Excellences” are excellent in virtue of the Harmony they express. Now whether Plato or Aristotle ever held this sort of view in the way Whitehead characterizes it is an open issue. Of philosophical interest here is Whitehead’s conception of Harmony and its relation to Beauty and Freedom. Harmony characterizes the condition of any complex system in which the components are in proper proportion and where in the development of that system, the proper proportional relationship between the components is preserved. Whitehead’s view is something like this. Since

²¹⁷ With such an affinity for Aristotle and Plato, it should come as no surprise that Whitehead has his own catalogue of virtues, the acquisition of which serve the development of individual and societal character. It is a different catalogue to be sure, but it is a different metaphysics which serves as the underpinning and a different epistemology which serves as the method of coming to know them. Whitehead’s catalogue includes Tolerance, Peace, Persuasion, Wisdom, and Harmony. These are developed most explicitly in Adventures of Ideas, though they appear in each of the other works mentioned.

Harmony has two foci - (1) the proper proportion of the components within a system and (2) the maintenance of proper proportion of the components during the development of it - both of these criteria must be met for Harmony to obtain.²¹⁸

One example Whitehead uses to illustrate this notion is the discovery by Archytas that there is a direct mathematical relationship between the length of a string in a musical instrument and the note it produces. By varying the length of the string, in half or in quarter for example, one will vary the tones by octaves or double octaves, respectively. Obviously the addition of more strings of varying lengths to the instrument will create a progressively more complex instrument in much the way that a twelve-string guitar is more complex than its six-string cousin. Throughout the addition of complexity, the strict mathematical relations between length of string and tone remain. Should strings be out of tune, for example, disharmony will result. This disharmony is due to the failure to maintain the proper proportions.

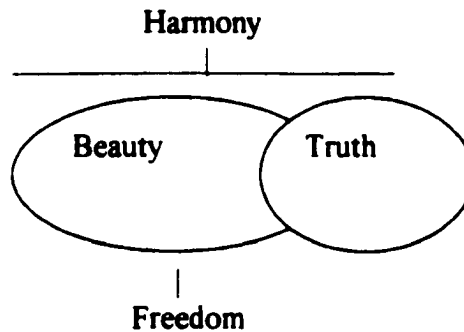
Were we to shift our focus from musical instruments to architecture or painting, we would discover again that preservation of proportion in dimension underlies beauty. Whitehead holds that all qualitative elements in the world depend on mathematical relations.²¹⁹ Turning to a human being, we are again met with a complex system. For virtue to be expressed by that system, Harmony must be a true description of it.

²¹⁸ Beyond this, one of the aspects that Harmony shares with Beauty is the absence of “painful clash” between the elements within a complex system. This is perhaps because Beauty is one of the Cardinal Virtues and because the “end” of a human being is to develop a virtuous character.

²¹⁹ Significantly, this means that for Whitehead, Picasso’s *Guernica* is not a beautiful or harmonious painting. But this seems to be precisely the sort of result we would want (or at least that Picasso wanted). Whitehead, Adventures of Ideas, 153; see also,

Whitehead also recognized that one problem with “excellences” is that they may be partly attained and partly missed. Take, for example, the toaster oven of our earlier discussion. It will be considered an excellent toaster if it possesses the excellence proper to it; that is, if it toasts bread well. But it seems clear that there are many states in which a toaster could be. It may toast almost perfectly, but blacken the edges a bit too much. Or it may burn the bread to a cinder. Or it may do something in between. This sort of situation may be difficult to explain if there is only ‘The Excellent’ and ‘The Not Excellent’; that is, if virtue were an all-or-nothing proposition. For Whitehead, it is not. Things can be more or less excellent. In an analogous way, character can be more or less excellent. Further, if it is Harmony that determines excellence, then one can account for the gradations in the excellence of things in a very straightforward way.

Another example may help to clarify the view. The Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, under the conduction of Sir Neville Marriner, may perform Brahms’ *First Symphony* magnificently, missing but a single note during the performance. It seems counterintuitive not to call this an excellent performance, indeed a virtuoso performance. The Podunk High School Marching Band may play the same piece and butcher it, though it may still be recognizable as *Brahms’ First*. In both cases, excellence is only partly attained. Yet Whitehead’s view can still pronounce the Academy’s performance virtuous and Podunk’s less so because excellence is determined by Harmony.



On Whitehead's view, Harmony is related to both Beauty and Truth. The discussion of the relationship between Harmony and Truth is explored in greater detail in the section on Whitehead's Theory of Truth. The relationship between Beauty and Truth is explored further in the section on Beauty. Suffice it to say that while there is some overlap, Truth and Beauty are different, that Truth is a more narrow concept than Beauty, and that both are defined in terms of the Harmony expressed. The point of the graphic here is to illustrate how each expresses an excellence that is related to Harmony. In the case of the Academy and Podunk, one's performance is clearly more beautiful than the other. The analysis is made on the basis of the Harmony expressed.

A curious feature of Whitehead's scheme is the inclusion of the notion of Freedom. Freedom is intimately related to Harmony (though not necessarily to Beauty or Truth). Freedom, as Whitehead uses the term relative to Harmony, is the contrary of Slavery. He writes that "Freedom is the presupposition of political theorists now. ... Freedom and Equality constitute an inevitable presupposition for modern political thought."²²⁰

²²⁰ Whitehead, Adventures of Ideas, 15. For more on this connection, see the "Relation between Metaphysics and Ethics" section below. Clearly, Whitehead is not referring to metaphysical freedom, (though the view has implications for the metaphysical question

He notes that in 20th-century discussions of Freedom, “we are apt to confine ourselves to freedom of thought, freedom of the press, freedom for religious opinions.”²²¹ If this is the limit of the discussion of Freedom, then the notion can be conceived in purely negative terms. Freedom described in this way is a “freedom from” something. Freedom of the press is actually the freedom *from* censorship by authorities of one sort or another; freedom for religious opinions is actually the freedom *from* the enforcement of church or state belief systems on the governed. As Whitehead puts it, Freedom thus

of freedom and determinism). Instead, he is considering the general common-sense intuitions of the general population of his day and contrasting it with the ancients. Plato, Cicero, Pericles, and Aristotle all occupy a world in which the general common-sense intuitions of the general population were at odds with what Whitehead takes to be the modern view. They lived in a time when the presupposition of theorists and common folks alike was slavery and inequality. Freedom, in the sense of absence of servitude, is considered by Whitehead to be inviolable for an ethical theory. This is because it is one of the presuppositions of common-sense. It is also because he sees Freedom as a necessary component of any system that could promote Harmony.

To the extent that Whitehead is a progressivist, it is on this point. I use “progressivist” to denote that he thinks it is an indication that human society has progressed from the time of the ancients to the time of the moderns, at least on the issue of Freedom/Slavery. Too often, those of this period who suggest that society has “progressed” are immediately labeled as some sort of “Spencerian Social Darwinist.” This is not the case where Whitehead is concerned. I go to some lengths in the “Potential Problems” section at the conclusion of this chapter to show this result. He often uses the phrase “the discovery of freedom” (*Adventures of Ideas*, 62, 84) to suggest that prior to the more modern era, slavery was simply assumed to be the norm. There is certainly some support for this view. Aristotle, for example, seems to hold that some people are slaves by nature and so not fit for true virtue. Whitehead gives the Methodist movement of the 18th century tremendous credit for its advocacy of abolition. However, it is also of some importance to note that in so doing, the movement went counter to the accepted teachings of 1700 years of Christian history, dating to the apostle Paul. Indeed, even in the culture of the 1800s, the notion that slavery was an acceptable institution was quite prevalent. Whitehead takes it to be a sign of the progression of civilization that Freedom rather than Slavery is the fundamental presupposition of society.

²²¹ Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 84

conceived involves only “the antagonisms of our fellow men.”²²² This sort of “freedom” is a species of Freedom, to be sure, but it is not to be confused with Freedom. Freedom of action is the true conception of Freedom on Whitehead’s view. He means the Freedom to become; to become something that one is not yet and to open to oneself and to one’s community possibilities that were not there before. It is the Freedom to create.

His example is that of Prometheus, the fire-giver. Prometheus, he notes, “did not bring mankind freedom of the press”. But the taming of fire opens up to humanity vistas of possibilities that did not exist prior to its taming. This aspect is not completely captured in the negative construction as I have proposed it. Rather, it seems to capture something of Freedom *for* rather than freedom *from*.²²³ It stretches beyond the notion of an absence of coercion because the subject of the freedom is fairly broad - including press, thought, and religion to be sure, but including more than that.

Whitehead then gives us an idea of the importance of Freedom to humanity (and by extension the importance of the notion of Freedom to his own ethical speculations). He writes, “Freedom of action is a primary human need.”²²⁴ If virtue entails a level of Harmony in the individual, then virtue requires the existence of this sort of Freedom; a Freedom to create oneself. Thus, this fairly broad notion of Freedom is a necessary condition for virtue.

Perhaps another example would be helpful. Suppose that one founded a genteel society built on the backs of slaves (for example, the romanticized view of the Old South

²²² *ibid.*

²²³ Note that this is the contrast in Isaiah Berlin’s “Two Concepts of Liberty”.

²²⁴ Whitehead, Adventures of Ideas, 153.

in the antebellum United States). Such a system is predicated on the systematic and often brutal suppression of a large portion of the population. The clash between the oppressor and oppressed characterizes a relationship to which Harmony cannot in any way be ascribed. Even if the system appears harmonious from the point of view of an outside observer, such an appearance would be misleading. The reasons for this should be clear. Such a system (indeed, any system that involves slavery), necessarily cannot be harmonious because it violates both criteria of Harmony, the criteria of Beauty, and also stands in direct opposition to Freedom. The opposition of Slavery to Freedom can be seen simply in Slavery's destruction (or at least severe limitation) of the possibility for creativity. For the enslaved, the Freedom to self-create is curtailed or eliminated altogether. Thus, virtue is arbitrarily denied to an entire class of human beings.²²⁵ Thus, if Harmony entails virtue and virtue entails Freedom, the negation of Freedom will necessarily result in the negation of Harmony.²²⁶

²²⁵ Obviously Slavery stands in opposition to Freedom even where Freedom is conceived negatively, as a freedom from oppression or subjugation. However, as suggested earlier, these negative conceptions do not necessarily carry with them the intuition of Freedom as freedom to create and to self-create.

²²⁶ Common-sensically, it seems rather straightforward to suppose that to acquire virtue one must possess not merely the moral freedom to pursue virtue but the actual political freedom to do so as well. More than simply an appeal to the presumption of the day, it seems likely that Whitehead is right on the necessity of Freedom point. This is so for the following reason. Harmony in the general society is dependent on Harmony in the particulars. Without Harmony at the level of actual entities, then groupings of actual entities will not display the trait. Now, I should note that this claim does not commit Whitehead to the Fallacy of Composition. This is because the general society has a dependence relative to component parts. Disharmony in an actual entity is transmitted to each other actual entity. This is because, as Whitehead has pointed out, every actual entity is intimately related to every other one in the society. Thus, disharmony in one will resonate throughout the group. Thus, without harmony in the particular actual entities, there will not be Harmony in the society. And since the institution of Slavery

D. Guiding Metaphysical, Epistemological, and Ethical Principles

Heraclitus was right. All the world is a process. I will first examine some of the guiding metaphysical and epistemological principles that inform Whitehead's speculative philosophical method: "coherence", "logic", "adequacy" and "applicability". I will then turn to some of the more peculiar concepts that populate Whitehead's "philosophy of organism". Among these are "actual entities", "eternal objects", "prehensions", "coherence", etc.²²⁷ The reason for this rather lengthy discussion of metaphysical, epistemological, and historical topics in the context of ethics is that Whitehead certainly takes each of these to be interconnected. I will take up this "interconnectedness" later in this section. First, the principles.

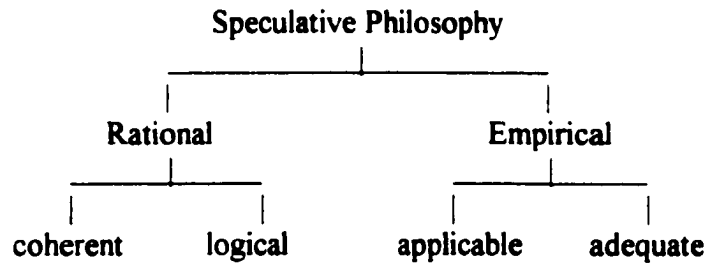
On Whitehead's view, it is reasonable to demand that any philosophical effort satisfy four framework criteria: coherence, logical consistency, applicability, and adequacy. Whitehead equates the attempt to formulate a "Speculative Philosophy" with "the endeavor to frame a coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted."²²⁸ Some two paragraphs later, he restates this position in more common-sensical way. He asserts that, given his formulation, it should be noted that philosophy has both a rational AND an empirical side. Coherence and logical consistency comprise the rational side, while applicability

surely makes its slaves experience disharmony, then so too will the society which includes such an institution. So, once again, Freedom is required for Harmony and for virtue

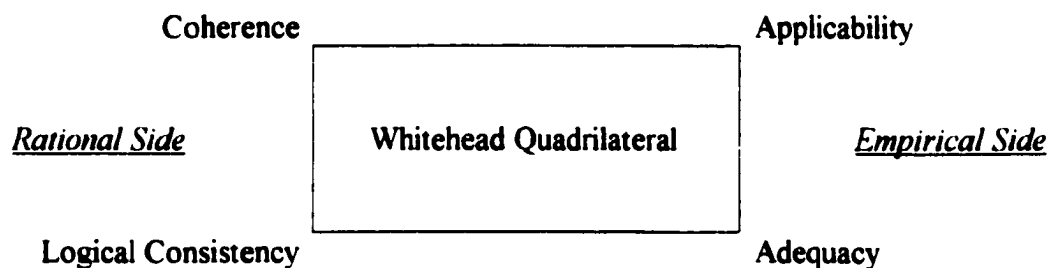
²²⁷ Since we have already discussed Whitehead's grounding of his philosophy in his interpretations of classical greek philosophy, I will point out the ways in which the concepts are taken to supersede, supplement, or replace those of his predecessors.

²²⁸ Whitehead, Process and Reality, 3.

and adequacy comprise the empirical.



While the branching diagram may be sufficiently clear to demonstrate Whitehead's web of framework concepts, I prefer another example. I label this example the Whiteheadian Quadrilateral to illustrate that each of the four criteria is at work in each moment of philosophical investigation, properly done.



1. The Whitehead Quadrilateral

a. Coherence and Logical Consistency

Whitehead introduces the framework criteria in reverse order of his treatment of them. The second pair of conditions for the success of any philosophical construction “is unflinching pursuit of the two rationalistic ideals, coherence and logical perfection.”²²⁹

²²⁹ *ibid.*, 6.

Though his treatment of these notions begins with applicability and adequacy, I treat them in the order of his initial outline.

Coherence and logical consistency are quite straightforward notions that bring with them little deviation from the generally accepted understandings of the terms. He writes that “logical perfection does not ... require any detailed explanation.” However, as one pole of the Rationalistic side of the Whiteheadian quadrilateral it bears some discussion. Mathematics forms a nice example of the sort of consistency (and interconnectedness) that Whitehead is trying to suggest exists in any proper philosophical investigation. He writes, “The history of mathematics exhibits the generalization of special notions observed in particular instances. In any branch of mathematics, the notions presuppose each other.”²³⁰ Philosophical speculations, properly done, will exhibit the same sort of presupposition and interdependence.

It is not at all surprising that the other pole of this Rational side of the quadrilateral is coherence. Logical inconsistency, for the most part, is trivial on Whitehead’s view. Given the immediately foregoing discussion, this charge of “triviality” is clearly not an attempt to say that a philosophical system that exhibits logical inconsistency can be somehow absolved of responsibility for those inconsistencies. Nor is Whitehead trying to exclude logical consistency as a proper demand that must be satisfied by philosophers in their ruminations. Rather, Whitehead seems intent on emphasizing the interconnectedness of philosophical concepts in any Rational speculative scheme. He writes, “the fundamental ideas, in terms of which the

²³⁰ *ibid.*

scheme is developed, presuppose each other so that in isolation they are meaningless.”²³¹ Just as “logical” has “its ordinary meaning”, so “coherence” seems to have the standard philosophical meaning. That is, the fundamental ideas form a tapestry of interrelated and interdependent concepts. Taken in isolation, the threads lose much of their relevance; taken together, they form a coherent whole.²³²

b. Applicable and Adequate

Before moving to applicability and adequacy, I need first to set out what Whitehead means by an “interpretation”. He defines an “interpretation” as the notion “that everything of which we are conscious, as enjoyed, perceived, willed, or thought, shall have the character of a particular instance of the general scheme.”²³³ Here, he assumes that interim philosophical investigations have yielded some abstract concepts that have begun to coalesce into a general philosophical view. He uses these qualifications to show that one need not have arrived at a fully systematized view before one can examine the applicability of the view.

Interpretations are presented before the mind as a combination of a particular experience - say, seeing the color red - and an evaluation of the analysis of that color within the general philosophical scheme. For example, a Newtonian scheme will analyze the experience of perceiving the color red in a way very different from a Scholastic

²³¹ *ibid.*, p. 3.

²³² At least, this is the idea. Whitehead holds an even stronger view than that the fundamental notions are in fact inseparable and indefinable in abstraction from the others. Ideally, the notions will not even exhibit the appearance of independence. He writes, “It is the ideal of speculative philosophy that its fundamental notions *shall not seem capable* of abstraction from each other.”, Process and Reality, p. 3, *emphasis added*.

²³³ *ibid.*

scheme. While the Schoolmen suggest that the color is actually in the world, independent of the perceiver, a Newtonian philosopher might interpret the experience of the color red as a particular instance of external stimuli that causes the mind to perceive a color within the mind. That is, red is in the eye of the beholder, not existing independently in the world. In both systems, however, there is an interpretation of the experienced event, and that interpretation is not outside of the boundaries allowed by the general scheme; that is, it is an instance of the scheme.

Whitehead then defines 'applicable' to mean that some items of experience are interpretable within the logical and coherent set of beliefs. That is, given a set of items of experience, at least one must be interpretable within the philosophical scheme. Perfect applicability (or adequacy) is understood to mean that no items are incapable of interpretation. However, no philosophical scheme attains perfect applicability. Thus, to the extent that a system of beliefs does not provide an interpretation for a particular experience, that theory cannot claim absolute adequacy. On this view absolute certainty is not a criterion for justification of the philosophical view.²³⁴ Applicability is. He writes that "the first requisite is to proceed by the method of generalization so that certainly there is some application; and the test of some success is application beyond the immediate origin."²³⁵ The point here is a simple one. A philosophical investigation

²³⁴ One great benefit of this sort of view is that it recognizes the ongoing development of and fluidity in a system of beliefs about the world that is attempting to correspond as accurately as possible to the world. Another related benefit of this view is that it recognizes, and perhaps requires, a place for mathematics (including probability theory), scientific inquiry (including scientific inference), and maybe the social sciences as well, from which these sciences can both inform and refine schemes of belief.

²³⁵ Whitehead, Process and Reality, 5.

begins with particular data presented by experience. Some of the data are selected for further analysis and some are de-selected. From the selected data, general notions are developed. Those general notions are thought to be properly applicable if they can then be applied to the de-selected data. Thus, the charge of “inapplicability” is not just a claim that the general scheme leaves out elements of experience, but that after having developed abstract notions, those notions do not apply to the excluded elements.

Applicability relates to the particular de-selected elements of experience as they are subjected to analysis in light of the general principles of the philosophical scheme. Adequacy relates to the scope of those elements. A theory satisfies applicability if it includes some elements beyond those from which the theory itself was developed. Adequacy is a harder test. A theory is perfectly adequate if and only if it applies to all data, the initially included, initially excluded, and initially unthought of. However, since perfect adequacy is beyond the bounds of possibility, on Whitehead’s view, we adopt a different stance toward philosophical schemes and the data presented by the actual world - that of varying adequacy. A theory is said to be more or less adequate based on the scope of the experience it includes and for which it provides an interpretation.

c. Conclusion

These four criteria are relatively uncontroversial. One might even go so far as to wonder at their explicit inclusion within this project because they certainly seem to be widely accepted philosophical background conditions. It seems that the vast majority of philosophers, when advancing arguments for their own positive views, are in essence arguing that their view is internally consistent, coherent, adequate in explanatory power,

and applicable. Further, in raising criticisms of other views, philosophers appeal directly to arguments that purport to show inconsistency, incoherence, inadequacy, and/or uselessness, individually or in some combination, in the competing view. Far fewer is the number of philosophers who explicitly and intentionally set out the criteria at the outset of their work; pointing out to the reader that these criteria must be satisfied. While it may be argued that these framework criteria form simply the background for any philosophical argument, it is also true that they are applied unevenly. Of this phenomenon, Whitehead writes, "If we consider philosophical controversies, we shall find that disputants tend to require coherence [and the other criteria as well] from their adversaries, and to grant dispensations to themselves."²³⁶ Whitehead is concerned to make it as clear as possible to the reader that these conditions apply universally to any speculative efforts in philosophy, his own included.

2. The Method and Aim of Philosophy

The 'philosophy of organism', Whitehead's term for what has become popularly known as process philosophy, begins from an examination of the whole or the one before examining its constituent parts. The individual, whether a rock or a human being, is an organism, composed of actual entities, prehending either positively or negatively the many of the universe. Although much of his discussion concerns constituent parts (actual entities, prehension relations, etc.), Whitehead approaches the discussion beginning with the superject or the individual as a whole. Only then can the constituent parts be

²³⁶ Whitehead, Process and Reality, 6.

examined, and then only in the context of the whole.²³⁷

Whitehead rightly believes this approach to be somewhat different from that of traditional metaphysics. Generally, the approach has been to analyze the constituent parts of the subject under investigation. Whether that subject be a rock or a person or any entity in between, the metaphysical concentration has been on the things that make it up. From the speculative schemes of the pre-Socratic cosmologists like Thales and Democritus to more modern philosophers like Leibniz, discussion has focused on the “building blocks”, however those blocks are conceived (e.g. water, atoms, monads). One shortcoming of these approaches is that analysis of constituent parts can never provide access to the complete picture. No matter how many pieces are examined independently, the dynamic of the whole eludes grasp. Or, let us examine a more readily grasped if more highly fanciful example. Humpty Dumpty, it is said, once sat on a wall. Humpty Dumpty had a great fall. When all the kings’ horses and all the kings’ men arrived on the scene, they were faced with a scattered Humpty Dumpty, reduced to constituent parts by his untimely tumble. No matter how intently the pieces are examined, ultimately Humpty Dumpty remains in pieces. One of the most common renderings of the nursery rhyme pictures the protagonist as a giant egg. Now, imagining for a moment a giant egg shattered on the ground before us. We can say easily enough that it is an egg and we can identify the shape it most likely had before the accident. However, our powers of analysis cannot help us to reassemble the egg into its **precise** pre-tumble state. Whitehead seems to be suggesting that the state of most philosophical investigations

²³⁷ *ibid.*, 23.

begins in precisely the position of all the kings' horses and men, with one pernicious additional fact - these investigations do not know how the pieces are supposed to fit back together. The impossibility of constructing an adequate explanatory metaphysic is in part a function of the analysis of constituent parts without proper attention to relations between them and relations of part to whole.

I do not mean to suggest that Whitehead's own method of investigation overcomes all of the problems that attend the formulation of an adequate explanatory metaphysic. As he himself writes, "There remains the final reflection, how shallow, puny, and imperfect are efforts to sound the depths in the nature of things. In philosophical discussion, the merest hint of dogmatic certainty as to finality of statement is an exhibition of folly."²³⁸ Whitehead's humility is not an exhibition of false modesty. He knows that his philosophical views are not the final word on all matters of philosophy. However, this in no way militates against the contribution. And one of the most telling contributions Whitehead makes is in the suggestion that the traditional method of philosophical analysis simply obscures certain aspects of nature that his own method illuminates. Nor ought one to read Whitehead's criticism of centuries of metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical discussions as indicating a superficial reading of the texts on his part. As Charles Hartshorne writes about Whitehead's metaphysics in particular and his philosophical method in general:

On all these issues and many others, Whitehead is more aware than his predecessors of the alternatives that may (with greater or less coherence and consistency) be held. If he asserts that events and experiences are the ultimate subjects of predication, it is not because it has never occurred to him to regard

²³⁸ Whitehead, Process and Reality, xiv.

“things” and “persons” in this light; but because he believes he sees that two thousand years of persistent effort to achieve rational coherence by this method have failed and were bound to fail.²³⁹

It is not at all difficult to discern the ultimate target of this criticism; namely the philosopher who preceded Whitehead by some two thousand years - Aristotle. As we have already seen in a foregoing section (“Final Causes”), Whitehead juxtaposes his own notions of ethical concepts with Aristotle’s, departing in some rather important ways. Those points of departure can ultimately be traced to his departure from Aristotle at the fundamental level of ontology and philosophical method. From the difference in method (analysis on the one hand and organism on the other), to the concept of proper subject of predication (things versus events), to the view of virtue, we can trace a parallel development of concepts within the work of both philosophers.

If one analyzes the approach at a level deeper than a simple comparison of the philosophical views, it becomes clear that Whitehead takes his conception of the proper aim of a method of philosophy to be the same as Aristotle’s. Whitehead writes, “The true method of philosophical construction is to frame a scheme of ideas, the best that one can, and unflinchingly to explore the interpretation of experience in terms of that scheme.”²⁴⁰ There are at least two important implications of this brief assertion. First, whatever the differences between Whitehead and Aristotele, it seems that Whitehead takes their views of the aim of philosophy to be the same. This is so because Whitehead accepts, for the most part, the 19th-century analysis of common-sense, although he rejects the associated

²³⁹ Charles Hartshorne, “Whitehead’s Metaphysics”, Whitehead and the Modern World, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1950), 27.

²⁴⁰ Whitehead, Process and Reality, xiv.

philosophical scheme. Part of that analysis is the quite common-sensical notion that philosophy is concerned with interpretation of experiences had by a common humanity experiencing a common world. Given this approach to common-sense (an approach that Aristotle was universally thought to have shared), it is safe to suppose that Whitehead is justified in holding the first implication I have drawn from his assertion.

The second important implication to be drawn from Whitehead's assertion about the "true method of philosophical construction" is that Whitehead is a fallibilist. It is rare that the clause "the best that one can" is included in a statement of purpose without the recognition that one might get it wrong. Further, this simple little clause should remind the reader of Whitehead's stronger claim; namely that "In philosophical discussion, the merest hint of dogmatic certainty as to finality of statement is an exhibition of folly."²⁴¹ Whitehead resorts to a vivid example to clarify further what he takes to be the method of philosophy; a clarification that preserves this fallibilist commitment. He writes, "The true method of discovery is like the flight of an aeroplane. It starts from the ground of particular observation; it makes a flight in the thin air of imaginative generalization; and it again lands for renewed observation rendered acute by rational interpretation."²⁴² What is striking about this passage is that it so succinctly captures the tenor of Whitehead's philosophy. Philosophy is a living discipline that is alive in the interplay between experience, on the one hand, and abstract reasoning and interpretation of that experience, on the other; between empiricism and rationalism. In short, philosophy itself is a process.

²⁴¹ *ibid.*

²⁴² *ibid.*, 4.

It will be productive to explore this fallibilist commitment a little further. While it is not unusual for an ethicist to advance his positive view with some caution as to “finality of statement”, it is somewhat less common for a metaphysician to do the same. Two notable examples come to mind: Aristotle and Descartes. Aristotle makes the quite famous assertion in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that one ought not expect more precision from a field of study than that field admits of. Ethics does not allow of the same precision as mathematics. Aristotle makes no such claims in the *Categories* or the *Metaphysics*, the *Physics*, or *De Anima*. Neither does such an exception apply, apparently, to investigations of logical syllogisms and the like. Thus, a level of certainty seems to exist (or be thought to) in these metaphysical investigations in a way that it does not in the ethical ones. Similarly, the Cartesian metaphysics seems to admit of little imprecision. Despite the method of doubt exemplified in the Dream Hypothesis and Evil Demon Hypothesis of the *First Meditation*, the Cartesian metaphysics is ultimately founded on clarity and distinctness which provide sure foundations for his arguments for the existence of God (*Third and Fifth Meditations*), the distinction of the Mind and the Body (explicitly in the *Second and Sixth Meditations*) and for the establishment of the Primitive Notions of Mind, Body and the Substantial Union of the Mind and the Body. Further support for the view that Descartes holds that philosophical investigations can exemplify startling precision is his reliance on the example of mathematics as a paradigm. In his *Letter of Dedication* that precedes the *Meditations*, he goes so far as to

claim that “the arguments I use here do, in my opinion, equal or even surpass those of geometry in certitude and obviousness.”²⁴³

Clearly, Whitehead parts company with both Aristotle and Descartes. He writes, “Metaphysical categories are not dogmatic statements of the obvious; they are tentative formulations of the ultimate generalities.”²⁴⁴ The disagreement with Descartes is particularly striking because of the significant role that mathematics plays in Whitehead’s own philosophical development and positive views. However, Whitehead claims that “Philosophy has been misled by the example of mathematics; and even in mathematics the statement of the ultimate logical principles is beset with difficulties, as yet insuperable.”²⁴⁵ This difficulty is of particular relevance as it relates to philosophical method. On this point, Whitehead claims that “the primary method of mathematics is deduction; the primary method of philosophy is descriptive generalization.”²⁴⁶ Clearly, the former of these two claims is true. The second is what differentiates Whitehead from Descartes.

This position coincides nicely with his description of the general project. The philosophy of organism, as we have already seen, is concerned not merely with component parts but with relations between those parts; relations which are intrinsic to the larger organism and without which the investigation of both the parts and the whole is fatally limited. Given Whitehead’s fundamental claim that process and not stasis is the

²⁴³ Rene Descartes, *Letter of Dedication, Meditations on First Philosophy*, Donald Cress, ed., (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 3rd edition, 1993), 3.

²⁴⁴ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 8.

²⁴⁵ *ibid.*

²⁴⁶ *ibid.*, 10.

fundamental characteristic of the universe, it is obvious that one must be able to differentiate between a method of inquiry that works from static first principles in a deductive fashion (mathematics) and a method of inquiry that is rooted in first experiencing the world as a series of processes and generalizing from particulars to categories of particulars and from categories of particulars to categories of components and relations (philosophy). This latter inquiry will be rife with ampliative inferences, inferences that tend to provoke suspicion. Given Whitehead's conception of philosophic method, then, his recognition of the ultimate fallibility of the endeavor is not surprising.

For Sidgwick, the moral intuitions of common-sense play a singular role in his philosophical investigations. One begins with the intuitions of moral sense and examines them to discover those that are "really self-evident". Upon arriving at the "really self-evident" principles, one then constructs a philosophical method that incorporates them. The principles that turn out to be "really self-evident" are those that have satisfied the Verification Criteria, one of which is the Social Verification criterion. However, at the end of the day, Sidgwick is left with two methods of ethics that both satisfy all of his criteria. He does not allow a further appeal to the moral intuitions of common-sense to decide between them. Nor does he allow an evaluation of the conclusions of Ethical Egoism on the basis of further intuitions. The conclusions are deductively reached from first principles that have been shown to be "clear and distinct". Here, Sidgwick is much more similar to Aristotle and Descartes than to Whitehead.

However, suppose that one began with a set of intuitions and from that set arrived at a series of conclusions that seemed to contradict some of the original set. It would

seem an intuition of common-sense to infer from the contradiction a difficulty in the conclusions and the reasoning that gave rise to them. Sidgwick concludes that common-sense is intractably divided upon itself.

Whitehead supposes at the outset that the direct intuitions of common-sense are both the starting point of philosophical investigations and the evaluator of those investigations.²⁴⁷ Arriving at conclusions at variance with direct intuitions of common-sense is problematic for the investigations as the intuitions are simply given. This methodological structure is in keeping with Whitehead's airplane example. Recall the example:

The true method of discovery is like the flight of an aeroplane. It starts from the ground of particular observation; it makes a flight in the thin air of imaginative generalization; and it again lands for renewed observation rendered acute by rational interpretation.²⁴⁸

That "renewed observation" is both the wellspring of further data for future flights and also the checking procedure that keeps the generalizations grounded. The connection this bears to Whitehead's rejection of Social Verification becomes clearer at this point for two reasons. The first concerns the methods with which Sidgwick is left at the conclusion of his investigations. For example, Broad, among others, argues that Ethical Egoism does not commend itself to the intuitions of the moral sense directly. Further, he agrees with Sidgwick that Ethical Egoism is an ignoble doctrine that is met with little agreement in the minds and hearts of reasonable people. This would seem to suggest that the

²⁴⁷ This is an application of the Quadrilateral. Recall that philosophical schemes are required to meet the criterion of adequacy. Adequacy is measured in part by evaluation on the basis of the intuitions of common-sense.

²⁴⁸ *ibid.*, 4.

principles of Ethical Egoism do not ultimately satisfy Social Verification. Whitehead seems to be claiming, however, that even the Social Verification criterion is to be doubted on the basis of a further appeal to common-sense. Given the progression (and perhaps the “evolution”) of knowledge it is reasonable, even common-sensical, to hold that the views of the “relevant experts” may very well be wrong. Social Verification involves an appeal to authority without a strict evaluation of the authority itself to determine whether or not it is worthy of the authority it is accorded. Thus, Social Verification seems to fail the “renewed observation” suggested by the airplane example and suggested by common-sense itself.²⁴⁹

Having examined Whitehead’s method at some length, I turn now to the aims of philosophy as Whitehead sees them. Arthur Murphy has helpfully pointed out that among Whitehead’s aims is the attempt to defend a position opposed to turn-of-the-century “analysts” and “positivists”.²⁵⁰ The arguments against Auguste Comte and his successors are of some historical interest, but of little contemporary importance. Accordingly, I will address only the “anti-analyst” position. Whitehead states explicitly that the task he has set for himself in Process and Reality is to repudiate some “myths and

²⁴⁹ It should be noted that if it is true that Social Verification can be safely excluded as a criterion for “real self-evidence” (or at least held as a much weaker test than Sidgwick allows it to be), then the discussion of the Dualism of Practical Reason is for the most part over. If Social Verification is denied, it might seem that Ethical Egoism still survives as it satisfies the other criteria. However, given that Whitehead’s method reasonably includes the intuitions of common-sense both at the outset and the end of an investigation, the intuitions of the masses (and the experts) still militate against its claim to “real self-evidence”. This is not Whitehead’s line of argument here, but it seems like one that is available to him given the admittedly underdeveloped comment under examination.

²⁵⁰ Arthur Murphy, “Whitehead and the Method of Speculative Philosophy”, The

fallacious procedures” that are accepted by 19th-century philosophers without question, for the most part. Among these are “the trust in language as an adequate expression of propositions [and] the subject-predicate form of expression.”²⁵¹ As I have already noted in the methodology subsection of this section on Aim and Method, Whitehead’s approach is not that of analyzing the component parts of an organism in isolation from the other components or the relations between them. In this vein, Whitehead writes that the “study of philosophy is a voyage towards the larger generalities.”²⁵² For Whitehead, this means in part that one of the most important aims of philosophy is to bring to mind those elements that are most often excluded from philosophical analysis - namely relations and the change or dynamism in the world. These are commonly obscured in Aristotelian and Cartesian substance-metaphysics, to the detriment of their speculative schemes.

Whitehead thinks those who restrict philosophical investigations to an analysis of component parts of a given organism or who suppose that the proper way to understand the world is to first grasp the atomic elements and then construct upward are going about the philosophical process precisely backwards. This is because this method of philosophy runs counter to the experience human beings have when presented with the world. Our most basic experience of the world is the experience of organisms and relations, not static components. Thus, one of the aims of philosophy is to make sense of the component parts of the organism *in light of* their relation to the organism taken as a

Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, Schilpp, ed., 353.

²⁵¹ Whitehead, Process and Reality, xiii.

²⁵² *ibid.*, 10.

whole and through the lens of change rather than stasis. He writes “The elucidation of meaning involved in the phrase ‘all things flow’ is one chief task of metaphysics.”²⁵³

Continuing the discussion of this aim of philosophy, Whitehead writes that “the task of philosophy is to recover the totality obscured by the selection,” i.e., by the perceptions from which general conclusions about the world are drawn. In another place, he writes, “The philosophic attitude is a resolute attempt to enlarge the understanding of the scope of application of every notion which enters into our current thought.”²⁵⁴ The elements of the world that are most commonly de-selected are relations and dynamism. The point is a shift in view of the world. Rather than assume a static, fractured reality, Whitehead suggests that the fundamental metaphysical assumption must be the assumption of a dynamic, organic reality, the components of which cannot be adequately understood without a grasp of the whole. Hence, another aim of philosophy is the instigation of thought to ever broader scope rather than ever narrower scope.

So, two of Whitehead’s aims are the broadening of scope relative to the items taken as data for philosophical investigation and a change in the perspective of the investigation itself. But these aims are in the service of a further aim. The practice of “speculative philosophy” fell into disfavor during the early part of the twentieth century, and Whitehead is clearly trying to recover the art and defend it as a proper line of philosophical inquiry. Another of the attitudes repudiated in Process and Reality is “the distrust of speculative philosophy”.²⁵⁵ And Whitehead understands Speculative

²⁵³ *ibid.*, 208

²⁵⁴ Whitehead, Modes of Thought, 172.

²⁵⁵ Whitehead, Process and Reality, xiii.

Philosophy to be “the endeavor to frame a coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted.”²⁵⁶ On this point, Whitehead takes himself to be of a mind with Aristotle and Descartes, though he clearly disagrees with their conclusions and methods.

However, these three aims are in the service of a final aim, one with particularly meaningful implications for those interested in Whiteheadian ethical views. He writes that “it must be one of the motives of a complete cosmology to construct a system of ideas which brings the aesthetic, moral, and religious interests into relation with those concepts of the world which have their origin in natural science.”²⁵⁷ The aim, then, can be stated as the attempt to describe what sort of things must be true about the world given our moral intuitions. Put another way, the aim is to answer the question, “What sort of world must it be given that moral principle X is true?” That this is the proper question will become clear after the discussion of Whitehead’s Theory of Truth. Suffice it to say here that Whitehead takes the highest level of relation between the actual world and its appearance in perception to be that of direct intuition. Given that some moral intuitions are themselves direct intuitions, the goal must be to infer from the truth of those intuitions to a structure of the world in which those intuitions can be true.

In summary, Whitehead’s aims of philosophy can be seen as stepwise progressions. He is first concerned with broadening scope and changing perspective. Then, given these aims, his next goal is to defend the practice of speculative philosophy.

²⁵⁶ *ibid.*, 3.

²⁵⁷ *ibid.*, xii.

And he engages in speculative philosophy as a necessary tool to discern the structure of the world given that certain intuitions, including moral intuitions, hold.

3. Actual Entities, Eternal Objects, Prehensions, Societies, and the Self

One of the easiest mistakes in approaching Whitehead's philosophy of organism is to lose oneself in the minutiae of the definitions and categories and principles which he develops in the first section of his most influential and systematic work, *Process and Reality*. In his speculative enterprise, Whitehead attempts to provide as much detail as possible. He adapts a wealth of common, if perhaps underused terms (e.g. "prehension", "concrescence"), gleaned from them new importance of a particularly philosophical sort, and adapts more familiar ones (e.g. "actuality", "entity"). This makes it easy to get lost. Paradoxically, without close attention to the details of those definitions and categories and principles it is difficult to see the relationships upon which Whitehead's entire philosophical construct is based. As I develop these conceptions I will strive to show their interrelatedness and I will include examples to provide as much clarity as possible.

Among Whitehead's less complex concepts is that of 'actuality', which he uses in much the same way Aristotle did. " '*Actuality*' means nothing more than (the) ultimate entry into the concrete, in abstraction from which there is mere nonentity."²⁵⁸ Thus, 'actuality' can be seen as contrasted with 'potentiality'. For Whitehead, the concept universe denotes an infinitude of entities, of which there are two fundamental types, *eternal objects* and *actual entities* which will be discussed a bit later. He makes a further

logical distinction between the 'universe disjunctively' and the 'universe conjunctively'. The 'universe disjunctively' is all of the entities discrete from one another. The 'universe disjunctively' can be represented logically as the set of all entities such that each is independent of each; that is, a set in which no element is causally related to any other and of which every possible contemporary entity is a member. By contrast, the 'universe conjunctively' refers to the real unity of those actual entities. The distinction Whitehead makes here is between the unified superject - an actual occasion - and the several entities which comprise it and which can be analyzed separately. He writes, "An actual occasion is a novel entity diverse from any entity in the 'many' which it unifies."²⁵⁹ The 'universe disjunctively' emphasizes the diverse 'many' while the 'universe conjunctively' picks out the entity itself. This distinction carries more than mere difference in emphasis, however. The 'universe conjunctively' is a *novel* entity. That is, it is a new entity, different from each of several entities that comprise it. Further, this novel entity is not identical to the sum of those entities or any combination of subsets of those entities. This is simply to say that the 'universe conjunctively' is not reducible to the 'universe disjunctively'. Within the 'universe conjunctively' we find all of the complex entities that are constituted by being related to simpler elements within the universe while remaining independent of others. For example, a rock is constituted of certain entities, a plant is constituted of others, and a dog is constituted of still others.

Whitehead goes to great lengths to explain how the 'universe disjunctively' gives rise to discrete conjunctions of entities. "*Concrescence*" is the name for the process in

²⁵⁸ Whitehead, Process and Reality, 21.

which the universe of many things acquires an individual unity in a determinate relegation of each item of the 'many' to its subordination in the constitution of the novel 'one'.²⁶⁰ More simply, 'concrescence' means *becoming* concrete, or a coming together of the many discrete entities that comprise the new complex one. It is the actual joining of simple and complex entities to form more complex entities. "An instance of concrescence is termed an 'actual entity'."²⁶¹

The concept of '*becoming*' applies only to actual entities that are one of the eight types of existence that constitute the universe disjunctively and the universe conjunctively. In the "*becoming* of an actual entity, the *potential* unity of many entities in disjunctive diversity acquires the *real* unity of the one actual entity. The actual entity is the real concrescence of many potentials."²⁶² 'Becoming' refers to the "transformation of incoherence into coherence."²⁶³ That is, at each instant the discrete entities which comprise a thing come together and in doing so they provide a coherent unity which is possessed by none of the discrete entities alone. This is perhaps clearer in analogy. A molecule of salt is comprised of two atoms, Sodium and Chlorine. In turn, these are comprised of electrons, neutrons and chemical bonds along with many other subatomic particles. But none of the constituent parts can be identified with the whole. Looking only at an electron, without knowing the context of relationships within which it exists, one cannot even tell if it belongs to the Chlorine atom or the Sodium atom. Thus, one

²⁵⁹ *ibid.*

²⁶⁰ *ibid.*

²⁶¹ *ibid.*

²⁶² *ibid.*, 22. Emphasis his.

²⁶³ *ibid.*, 25.

surely cannot extrapolate to a total picture of the atom containing the electron, much less the molecule containing the atom, simply from the examination of the extracted electron. In the moment of the coming together of all the constituents, the molecule of salt possesses a coherent unity that cannot be attributed to any of its constituent parts.

Whitehead's conception also differs radically from a conception of 'stasis' or 'static unity' because the discrete entities which comprise the complex entity over time do not remain fixed.²⁶⁴ In each successive concrescence some heretofore unincorporated entities are conjoined while some incorporated entities are excluded. This understanding grasps the Heraclitean intuition about the changing river. From moment to moment the river becomes a new thing, a novel entity. It is no longer the same river even from the moment the big toe enters it until the heel enters. With each successive moment, each successive concrescence, the river has become a new river, while retaining its coherent unity.

For Whitehead, there are two fundamental types of entity, actual entities and eternal objects. All simple and complex entities within the world are merely expressions of these two fundamental types of entity functioning together in the actual world. There is but one way to describe *eternal objects*; as potentiality for ingression into the becoming of actual entities. Eternal objects are pure potential, and 'ingression' is the mode by which the potentiality of the eternal object is realized in a particular actual

²⁶⁴ Here, Whitehead stakes out the Heraclitean position against the rival Parmenidean construction. It seems to be the case that a metaphysical scheme based upon a static view of the world ignores the intuition of movement and flux within the world. Whitehead totally rejects the perspective of Parmenides and all those who have followed who have posited similar static understandings of the world.

entity. As such, the eternal object contributes definiteness to that actual entity. Here Whitehead echoes Plato. For Whitehead, the Platonic world of Forms constitutes something like the eternal objects. There is one very important difference, however. On Whitehead's account, actual entities have ontological priority with respect to eternal objects.²⁶⁵ Eternal objects, in contrast to actual entities, are not in process themselves but are incorporated into the actual entities of the temporal world.²⁶⁶ It is in the discussion of the types of entities, then, that the distinction between actuality and potentiality becomes more clear. As Cobb and Griffin have argued, "Anything which is not a process is an abstraction from process, not a full-fledged actuality."²⁶⁷ Eternal objects are the prime examples of those abstractions.

An actual entity and concrescence are defined in terms of one another. An actual

²⁶⁵ This is one place where the careful reader can recognize that Whitehead has a greater affinity for Aristotle than Plato. Simply put, actual entities are more real than eternal objects because actual entities are actual as opposed to potential. The similarity with Plato is Whitehead's assertion that, "any entity whose conceptual recognition does not involve a necessary reference to any definite actual entities of the actual world is called an eternal object." Process and Reality, 44. Forms are rejected as ultimate, however, because they are not agents. That is, they do not do anything. In a related matter, Whitehead argues that there is no such thing as "vacuous actuality"; one case of which would be an eternal object with no referent to an actual entity in the actual world. Thus, for Whitehead, there are no Empty Forms.

²⁶⁶ Whitehead divides Eternal Objects into two classes: objective and subjective. By "subjective", Whitehead means forms of feeling. For example, "an emotion, or an intensity, or an adversion, or an aversion, or a pleasure, or a pain." (Process and Reality, 291) Whitehead goes on to write, "A₁ may be that component of A's constitution through which A is objectified for B. Thus when B feels A₁, it feels 'A with *that* feeling.'" Suppose there are two actual entities, A and B. B prehends A in a particular way, fixing upon or feeling A₁ which is a component of A. So, in one sense, A₁ is a private element for B - B feels A by prehending its component A₁ - and as such exemplifies a subjective eternal object. However, A₁ is also an example of an objective eternal object. This is so because it is a part of A that serves as a lure for feeling for subjects like B. It does not itselfprehend or grasp some component of B; instead it is grasped by B.

entity is the unity that is ascribed to a particular instance of concrescence.²⁶⁸ The concrescence is simply the “real internal constitution” of the actual occasion in question.²⁶⁹ The Heraclitean river at any instant is a nexus of actual entities, or actual occasions, and as such it is a particular instantiation of the coming together or concrescence of the discrete entities (drops of water, dissolved molecules of salt, etc.) that constitute it at that moment. These constitutive discrete entities are themselves complexes of still other entities and so on. The fundamental entity is an actual entity or occasion, beyond which no further explanation is possible. This is simply to say, in the analysis of an organism, one will discover that it is a composite (though complexity varies). These actual entities can be analyzed further, revealing that each is a composite of prehensions, phases, eternal objects, etc.²⁷⁰ However, qua actual thing, there is nothing more basic than the simplest actual entities by which those entities can be explained. Simply put, no further analysis is possible. Whitehead says two very compelling things about these actual entities that are quite revealing about his speculative philosophy in general. First, he claims that the “ultimate metaphysical truth is atomism.”²⁷¹ About the final, simple actual entities which he takes to be these ultimate atoms, he writes, the “Category of the Ultimate [of which actual entities are a part] replaces Aristotle’s category of ‘primary substance’.”²⁷²

²⁶⁷ Cobb and Griffin, Process Theology, 14.

²⁶⁸ Whitehead also uses the terms ‘actual entity’ and ‘actual occasion’ interchangeably for the most part

²⁶⁹ Whitehead, Process and Reality, 212.

²⁷⁰ Recall, these components of actual entities are not themselves actual.

²⁷¹ *ibid.*, 35.

²⁷² *ibid.*, 31.

Actual entities can be simple or complex. For Whitehead, *how* an actual entity *becomes* constitutes *what* that actual entity is. That is, as the actual entities are conjoined from moment to moment, the simple actual entities form more and more complex ones until the drops of experience form Heraclitus' river, which is itself a society of actual entities. When one conducts an analysis of a complex society, it is this coming together or concrescence of constituent actual entities that one discovers.

A key concept in Whitehead's scheme is that of a "society". "Society" refers to a group of actual entities. However, it does not refer to simply any group, but rather a very particular sort. Any group of actual entities is a "nexus", where "nexus" has its common meaning. A society is a particular sort of nexus of actual entities; it is a nexus with social order. Whitehead writes,

A nexus enjoys "social order" where (i) there is a common element of form illustrated by the definiteness of each of its included actual entities, and (ii) this common element of form arises in each member of the nexus by reason of the conditions imposed upon it by its prehensions of some other members of the nexus, and (iii) these prehensions impose that condition of reproduction by reason of their inclusion of positive feelings of that common form. Such a nexus is called a "society," and the common form is the "defining characteristic" of the society. The notion of "defining characteristic" is allied to the Aristotelian notion of "substantial form".

Whitehead's view may be more accessible by way of examples that emphasize the different aspects of this society. Consider a set of atomic particles. A hydrogen atom is comprised of tremendous numbers of subatomic particles, but we will limit this discussion to three – the proton, neutron, and electron. When in proper relation these three subatomic particles comprise an atom of hydrogen. The relationships between the three particles are of considerable importance. If the three particles are outside of the

magnetic fields generated by each, then there is no atom of hydrogen. Only when the neutron and proton are part of a nucleus around which the electron revolves can we properly call the three particles an atom of hydrogen. The three particles are analogous to actual entities and the atom of hydrogen to a society.

Consider a second example, if we have two atoms of hydrogen and a single atom of oxygen, we do not have water, necessarily. The three atoms could be separated from each other such that they cannot bind together to form a molecule of water. When the three atoms are brought together, a molecule of water is formed. However, it is more complicated than this. When the three atoms form a molecule of water, it is impossible to say which electron belongs to which atom. In fact, the three atoms share the electrons equally, for the most part, and the electrons orbit the three nuclei in a pattern referred to as an electron cloud. The three atoms are analogous to actual entities and the molecule of water to a society.

These examples suggest how societies satisfy Whitehead's criteria. In the first place, there is a common element of form. To say that the subatomic particles of the first example and the atoms of the second are definite is to say that they are actual and not theoretical. The same is true for actual entities. Further, a society is determined, in one sense, by the elements that comprise it. That is, it is constituted by these elements and no others. Thus, those constitutive elements share a common form. In the second place, the form of the society is established by the constituent members of the nexus. That is, a proton, neutron, and electronprehend one another in particular, determined ways. The electron cannot fulfill the role of the proton and vice versa. The characteristics of the

several subatomic particles and the relations between them are the conditions from which the form of the society arises. In the third place, the elements of the atom impose a structure on the atom's successor in time. That is, without intervention by some other society (another atom, say), the atom of hydrogen will reproduce itself in the next moment as an atom of hydrogen. In other words, the atom of hydrogen will not, in the next moment, become a covey of quail.²⁷³

Whitehead concludes his set of criteria by writing of the set that "the common form is the 'defining characteristic' of the society. The notion of 'defining characteristic' is allied to the Aristotelian notion of 'substantial form.'"²⁷⁴ So, the "common form" is an analogue of Aristotle's "Formal Cause". Consider the following example. Suppose we

²⁷³ It should be evident from this discussion that Whitehead's notion of personal identity is rather similar to that of Derek Parfit. On Whitehead's view, a person, for example, is a serially order society of actual entities. That is, the actual entities that comprise Harold in one moment perish and give rise to the actual entities that comprise Harold in the next. There is no strict identity over time, whether that time be a second or a lifetime. What determines personal identity over time is the positive prehensions of the actual entities that comprise the person. When the actual entities that comprise Harold perish, they become objective data for prehension by the actual entities that comprise Harold in the next moment. When those perish, they provide the data for prehension by the actual entities that comprise Harold at the next moment, and so on. Here is another way to look at this view. Harold, the person over time, is comprised of several harolds – each harold conceived of as a person-slice or person-stage. For more on theories of person-slices and person-stages, see Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, Oxford 1986; Bernard Williams, "The Self and the Future," *Philosophical Review* 79 (1970) and reprinted in *Personal Identity*, John Perry, University of California, 1975. On Whitehead's view, harold(1) is a society of actual entities that perishes and harold(2) is the successor of harold(1) with the actual entities that comprised harold(1) as the objects of prehension by the actual entities of harold(2). The person, Harold, is a serially ordered set of harolds. Whitehead writes, "An animal body is a society involving a vast number of occasions, spatially and temporally co-ordinated. ... Each living body is a society. ..." *Adventures of Ideas*, 256f. For further discussion of this notion, see Chapter XIII "The Grouping of Occasions" in *Adventures of Ideas*.

²⁷⁴ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 34.

have a dog, Bandit. Bandit is a particular dog and no other, and as such is a primary substance on Aristotle's view and an ordinary object comprised of actual entities on Whitehead's. As a primary substance, Bandit has a particular substantial form; namely Dog. That substantial form is metaphysically dependent on the primary substance. As an ordinary object, Bandit is actually a series of societies, "spatially and temporally coordinated". That is, Bandit is a series of bandit-stages or bandit-slices. Each of those individual stages is a particular society in the life of Bandit and is comprised of actual entities. The actual entities and their prehensions in any particular society give rise to the order of that society (or, in this case, bandit-slice). The actual entities have ontological priority here and the society is roughly equivalent to the substantial form; namely Dog. However, just as Dog does not pick out any particular dog for Aristotle, neither does Dog pick out any particular dog for Whitehead. Further, "Bandit" picks out only a serially ordered set of societies, and no particular constitutive actual entity.

Whitehead argues that analysis of actual entities finally depends on analysis of *prehensions*.²⁷⁵ The concept of a "prehension" is one of Whitehead's most important metaphysical tools. It is certainly one of his most fundamental, and fundamentally misunderstood. Much of the misunderstanding can be traced to the concept's complexity.²⁷⁶ In this section, I will outline the formal concept of "prehension" before

²⁷⁵ *ibid.*, 23.

²⁷⁶ Unfortunately, some can also be attributed to Whitehead's use of the term which can be misleading. This is not to say that Whitehead uses the term inconsistently. Instead, sometimes he refers to the entirety of the tripartite relationship between subject, object, and feeling between them as a prehension relation and at others he labels the subject a "prehending subject", the object a "prehended object", and so on. Care must be taken to remember that the tripartite relationship is presupposed when he uses the shorter forms.

turning to two uses that begin to show the ways that the formal prehension relation is provided content.

Whitehead uses the word “prehension” to capture the dynamic tripartite relationship between a given subject and the object the subject experiences. The prehension consists in three parts - the experiencing subject, the datum experienced, and the manner of the experience (which Whitehead calls the “subjective form”). Consider the following analogy: Wile E. Coyote, an Acme anvil, and the anvil falling upon his head. Wile E. Coyote is the experiencing subject and the Acme anvil is datum to be experienced. The manner of the experience, or the “how experienced”, is fairly complex and expresses a particular sort of character or feel. Even with this fanciful example, the “how experienced” part of the relation is too complex for simple or immediate explication. However, a few aspects of the “how experienced” can be illustrated and that should suffice for our purposes of coming to have a feel for this particular concept. In the Wile E. Coyote and the Acme anvil example, Wile E. experiences dread, the awful knowledge of impending doom, the certainty that the experience of the datum of this prehension is going to leave a mark. Beyond the emotional tenor of the experience, there is the physical counterpoint - in this case, pain. These are but a few of the aspects that go to comprise the character of the experience. Many others could be imagined. However, it should be noticed that I have not mentioned the emotional or physical feelings that might be experienced by the anvil. This is not because I, or Whitehead, assume that the anvil does not have experiences. Rather, there are two interconnected reasons. The first is that the “how experienced” of the prehension is the “how experienced” for the

subject. Accordingly, the emotional and/or physical feelings of the anvil (the “how” for the anvil), should any exist, do not enter into the formal structure of this prehension (unless they enter in an attenuated form; e.g., the subject, Wile E. Coyote, in his experience of the anvil, imagines how the anvil might be feeling at the moment.) The second is connected to the first. As an object of the prehension, the anvil exists in the causal past of Wile E. and so is not properly a subject of this prehension relation, because it has ceased to be a subject at all. Also, I have not mentioned the Roadrunner who certainly had a role to play in this little saga. This is because the only reason Wile E. Coyote is experiencing the anvil in this way is that he had plans to use it on the Roadrunner and was outwitted again. However, this is again at least two removes from the “how experienced” felt by the Coyote and would only enter into the experience as regret on the part of Wile E. that yet another plan has gone awry. In short, then, a prehension has three parts - the subject who experiences, the datum that is experienced, and the manner in which the subject experiences the datum.

Whitehead, and his disciples, apologists, and detractors, often use the following shorthand to express the prehension of the earlier example: “Wile E. Coyote prehended the anvil.” They will say also that the Coyote is the “prehending subject” and the anvil the “prehended object”. This is a cause of much of the misunderstanding of the concept. “Prehension” covers the entirety of the relationship in all its splendor. However, if one selects the actual entity that is to be the subject, one is picking a particular prehension relation. For example, when we selected Wile E. Coyote to be the subject, we immediately selected that prehension where Wile E. is the subject and the anvil, the

object. The tenor of the “how experienced” was also selected because it is the “how experienced” for the subject. Had we chosen the anvil as the subject and Wile E. Coyote as the object (a perfectly reasonable possibility on Whitehead’s view), we would have selected a different prehension. So, in the example used to demonstrate the formal character of a prehension, along with rudimentary content supplied by actually filling in the relata of the relation, there are actually two particular prehensions. The formal character is simply (a) subject, (b) object, and (c) “how experienced”. The two individual and independent prehensions can be analyzed as follows: (Prehending Subject) Wile E. Coyote, (Prehended Object) the anvil, and (Positive Prehension) “how experienced” for Wile E. Coyote and (Prehending Subject) anvil, (Prehended Object) the Coyote, and (Positive Prehension) “how experienced” for the anvil. Thus, it is of some importance to use care when discussing the concept of a “prehension”.

Another reason for the difficulty with the concept of a “prehension” is that Whitehead uses the much more commonplace word “feeling” interchangeably with one sort of prehension - positive prehensions. It is helpful to remember that when Whitehead uses the term “feeling” he is almost never restricting himself to the more ordinary use of the word to refer to emotions (anger, love, etc.) or sense impressions (pain, pleasure, etc.) These are included in his use, to be sure, but “feeling” is not restricted to these. Rather, Whitehead follows Friedrich Schleiermacher, to name one, in using “feeling” to express a much wider range of experience than simply emotional or physical.²⁷⁷ Included in that

²⁷⁷ There is an important distinction between Schleiermacher and Whitehead on this topic. For Schleiermacher, feelings are almost always conscious, though they need not always be. For example, one can have a feel for a subject and this feel not be represented

range of expression is the notion of “feeling” captured in the following sentence: “That chef certainly has a feel for the kitchen.” Or, another example: an excellent mechanic is said to have a feel for automotive maintenance or an artist may be said to have a feel for conveying the angst of life. In both cases, each could be said to have a strong emotional attachment to their subjects, but that attachment is not necessary to have a feel for the subject. To sum up, Whitehead uses “prehension” and “feeling” interchangeably for the most part and “prehension” formally refers to the entire dynamic of a relationship between an experiencing subject, and object experienced, and the manner in which the subject experiences the object.

Whitehead divides prehensions into three classes - physical, conceptual, and propositional. I will deal with the former two in this section and the latter in the section on Whitehead’s Theory of Truth that follows. I should begin by noting that the experiencing subject in any prehension relation is always an actual entity. This is just to say that neither eternal objects nor propositions can be experiencing subjects. Indeed, the only part of the formal structure that either eternal objects or propositions can occupy is as a datum of experience or the object experienced. Similarly, actual entities can also occupy this part of the formal structure. When an actual entity is the datum of experience, Whitehead terms the prehension relation that results a “physical prehension”.

by an occurrent belief. However, his primary example of a feeling is the feeling of absolute dependence upon God; a most definitely conscious experience. Indeed, conscious awareness is a necessary condition of the feeling of absolute dependence. For a more elaborate treatment of this, see Gene Tucker’s Canon, Theology, and Old Testament Interpretation, Fortress Press and Keith Clements’ Friedrich Schleiermacher: Pioneer of Modern Theology, Fortress Press, 1997. For Whitehead, feelings need not be conscious, and most often are not.

One example of a fairly simply physical prehension is that of the smelling of a particular odor. In Whitehead's example, one is encouraged to imagine oneself in a green woodland in spring. Perhaps one then catches a whiff of some noxious odor or another (e.g., that famous cartoon skunk, Pepe Le Peu). At that moment, the

intellect fastens on [the] smell as a datum ... Our developed consciousness fastens on the sensum as datum: our basic animal experience entertains it as a type of subjective feeling. The experience starts as that smelly feeling, and is developed by mentality into the feeling of that smell.²⁷⁸

The experience of the smelly feeling is one that is not captured completely by any elaborate retelling of the event, and the experience of a skunk is rarely dismissed lightly. It has affective power on the one who experiences the skunk firsthand. And if one has truly encountered a skunk, then it is clear that "that smelly feeling" is accompanied by activation of tastebuds, watering of eyes, churning of stomach; and as such is significantly more than "just a smell".

In a not completely dissimilar way, the "how experienced" aspect of a prehension where the subject and object are both actual entities may be characterized as love, for example.²⁷⁹ Presumably, as Romeo stood beneath the balcony gazing up at Juliet's

²⁷⁸ Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 245.

²⁷⁹ Some clarification is needed here. On Whitehead's view, the prehended object is not an actual entity *for the prehending subject*. That is, the prehended object is dead *for* the prehending subject because it is in the past *of* the prehending subject; albeit perhaps in the very recent past – say a half second or so. Romeo (the subject) prehends the Juliet of his past. As he stands at the windowsill, it is not the Juliet contemporaneous with him who utters "Wherefore art thou" but the Juliet of his immediate past. Thus, that past Juliet (dead in the sense of being completely objectified) is incorporated into the subject Romeo or is actualized in the subject Romeo. As Whitehead writes, the process of actualization is the "appropriation of the dead by the living." (*Process and Reality*, xiii.) This is not to say that Juliet, herself, is merely object. For Juliet *qua* prehending subject, Romeo is an object of her immediate past and is incorporated into her self-actualization

window, he did not imagine it to be the East and Juliet the Sun. However, it was a physical (and in this case, quite emotional) prehension. Again, that emotion need not be reciprocated, any more than the anvil need reciprocate the feeling of impending doom experienced by Wile E. Coyote. Juliet need not love Romeo for him to experience the emotion. So, in every case where one actual entity experiences another, the relationship is termed a “physical prehension”. As a result of this definition of a “physical prehension”, the commonplace uses of feeling (e.g., emotional or sensual) are grouped into the same category of prehension relation. This grouping, too, can cause the reader of Whitehead to misunderstand his use of “prehension” and “feeling”.

A “conceptual prehension” is different. It is generally less complex than a physical prehension. This is the case for a number of reasons, the most fundamental of which is that the “object experienced” is an eternal object and not an actual entity. As a result, the experiencing subject has an experience that has somewhat less intensity than with a physical prehension. Whitehead describes the conceptual feeling this way: “From each physical feeling there is the derivation of a purely conceptual feeling whose datum is the eternal object determinant of the definiteness of the actual entity ... physically felt.”²⁸⁰ Consider the following illustration. Suppose one encounters a basketball. Holding the ball, one experiences a physical feeling - that of holding a basketball. From the physical experience, a conceptual experience is derived. An idea of “ball” arises from the experience of the ball. The eternal object is something like the concept “ball”.

as a datum.

²⁸⁰ Whitehead, Process and Reality, 26.

Since a conceptual prehension has an eternal object as the “object experienced” relatum, it should be fairly obvious why the “how experienced” is somewhat more diffuse than in the case of the physical prehension. In the physical prehension, the object relatum is an actual entity and as such is a fully determined particular. In the conceptual prehension, the object relatum is an eternal object that may apply more or less to a wide range of particulars than can properly be picked out by the concept. One of Whitehead's own examples is the color Red. He writes, “an eternal object evades any selection among actualities. You cannot know what is red by merely thinking of redness. You can only find red things by adventuring amid physical experiences in *this* actual world.”²⁸¹ His point here is that epistemologically, conceptual prehensions depend upon antecedent physical prehensions and that from physical prehensions arise concepts; especially those concepts that pick out characteristics shared by several actual entities, e.g., the color red. Those generalized concepts, or eternal objects, then can themselves be experienced by the experiencing subject in a prehension. This happens, for example, when I think about redness. From such a thought alone, I would not know what, if anything, in the world was red. The concept follows from and arises from the physical prehension, not vice versa. In this conceptual prehension (me thinking about the color red), the object experienced is at least one remove from *this* actual world. As such, it lacks some of the definiteness that characterizes actual entities; or in Humean terms, is apt to lack the force and vivacity of the experience of a physical prehension. Note too, that having come to have a concept of redness, I can now imaginatively attach that concept to others. For

²⁸¹ Whitehead, Process and Reality, 256. Emphasis his.

example, I can imaginatively adjoin red and elephant; or white, tall, suit-coated, rabbit, and gold-watch with a chain to imagine the “dreadfully late” rabbit of Alice in Wonderland. Should I at some point in the future have occasion to experience such a beast as an actual entity, so much the better for my imaginative powers. But, even in such a case, the prehension relation will be different from the one where I experienced concepts and joined them together imaginatively. If I experienced an actual rabbit, it would be a physical prehension and significantly more definite than even Lewis Carroll’s most experienced imagination could posit. Such is the difference between a physical prehension and a conceptual prehension in Whitehead’s scheme.

Before moving on, it might be helpful to discuss briefly the concept of an ‘individual’. In common philosophical parlance, a person or an individual is understood to be an entity which endures through time. Obviously this is not an uncontroversial notion. It is certainly not Whitehead’s conception of an individual. In Whitehead’s view, an *individual* is a momentary experience or concrescence. That is, if one were to be able to take a snapshot of the river or a human being at a single instant in time, the snapshot would depict an individual. This is crude and somewhat artificial. The snapshot conveys a stasis, not a process, and so is inaccurate in a fairly fundamental way. However, it does serve to distinguish the Whiteheadian view from some of the more popular notions of an individual. From this, it is then easy to see that the referent of the traditional concept of an ‘individual’ as a being that exists through time comes to be understood in the Whiteheadian sense as a society of individuals.²⁸² Or as Cobb and Griffin put it,

²⁸² A couple of notable thinkers have views that bear a family resemblance to

“personal human existence is serially ordered society of such” individuals.²⁸³ Put another way, for Whitehead, individual existence is defined in the particular moment and what is traditionally defined as an individual is a connected, linear series of these moments.

4. “Mathematics and the Good”: Whitehead and the Dualism of Practical Reason, Part Two

It will be recalled from a foregoing discussion [“Whitehead and the Dualism of Practical Reason - Part One”] that I suggested that Whitehead and Green have a similar position regarding the Good. Their position has the benefit of rendering the Dualism of Practical Reason impotent. Green does not defend his view so much as simply assert it. It was left to Irwin to show why Green’s view can be defended on the Aristotelian grounds that Green simply assumes support his view. Whitehead, happily, does not wait for later philosophers to demonstrate that his conception of the Good can be defended; he does it himself. However, unlike Green (with help from Irwin), Whitehead does not look to Aristotle for support. Rather, he uses the work of Plato to launch his own defense of his conception of the Good. In this section of the project, I turn my attention to Whitehead’s paper, “Mathematics and the Good,” to show two things: (1) that Whitehead argues for a conception of the Good that involves, necessarily, concern for others, (2) as a result of (1), Whitehead, like Green, defangs the Dualism of Practical Reason.

Whitehead’s view here. Quine, for example, holds that physical objects have temporal parts (or stages) and are, accordingly, like events in an important way. Similarly, Derek Parfit views the “self” insofar as such a thing exists, to be a connected series of events.

²⁸³ Cobb and Griffin, Process Theology, 15.

The gist of the paper is that there exists an analogous relationship between the study of mathematics (and its object) and the study of the Good (and its object). That analogy can be framed as follows, with the particular discipline of Geometry representing the various disciplines of mathematics:

Analogy 1

Geometry	:	Triangles and Spatial Theory
	∴	
Philosophy (Ethics)	:	The Good

The reason for the double object as one of the relata in the Analogy 1 illustrates a further Whiteheadian point. At first glance, the analogy looks likely to fail because this double object in the first pair of relata seems to differ, at least in number, from its counterpart in the second pair. However, as we shall see, Whitehead supposes that the object of study in the second pair of relata is also a double object. Though he is not explicit that the analogy itself can be framed as follows, I think it is his view. So, we have a new analogy. Or, more properly, we have a new expression of Analogy 1 in which the relatum designated by “the Good” is expanded into its constituent parts. Thus, we have Analogy 2.

Analogy 2

Geometry	:	Triangles and Spatial Theory
	∴	
Philosophy (Ethics)	:	Individual Good and the General Good

It is important to note that Whitehead is arguing for this analogy rather than assuming the analogous relationship to show something further. Thus, Whitehead does not beg the question against Sidgwick on this point. If Whitehead is capable of showing that the analogy holds and if his argument also satisfies the Plausibility and Believability principles that Sidgwick establishes as benchmarks, then we will be able to conclude that the Dualism of Practical Reason is overcome.

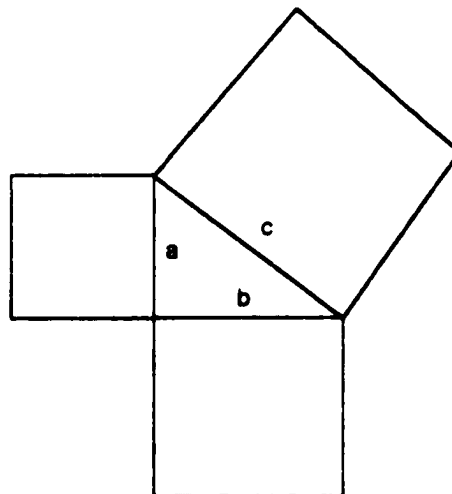
Whitehead casts the argument in the context of a discussion of historical philosophical and scientific developments. In a number of places within the dialogues, Plato makes connections between a conception of the Good and Mathematics. For example, in the *Meno* we encounter the connection between mathematics and the Good.²⁸⁴ In an argument whose conclusions are hotly debated by scholars of ancient philosophy, there is one point of consensus; namely that the use of geometry to guide the slaveboy to “recollect” what he did not know at the outset of the *elenchus* is of central importance as a tool, analogous to the process by which one might come to “recollect” the virtues. Plato also makes the connection quite famously in the *Republic* where he outlines the course of study of those who will be the philosopher-rulers of the city. To attain the lofty station of philosopher and possess wisdom they must first study arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and harmony. The connection comes up again in the discussion of the Divided Line. Notoriously, Plato leaves the reader to puzzle out what precisely the objects of the penultimate section of the example are supposed to be.²⁸⁵

²⁸⁴ And in the *Meno* we encounter the connection in much the same way that Whitehead himself uses it.

²⁸⁵ Among others, see Julia Annas' Introduction to Plato's Republic for a nice discussion

Aristotle claims that the object of this section of the Line are “mathematicals”; though it is not completely clear what these are supposed to be. At any rate, mathematics and virtue are intimately connected on Plato’s view. Whitehead claims that Plato is exactly right in this regard, though later philosophers have not always been quick to pick up the importance of the connection.

Whitehead illustrates this connection by examining the way in which a child learns geometry. After mastering some arithmetic (addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, simple fractions, decimal notation, and so on), the child is introduced to geometry. In due course she encounters a right-triangle and her instructor provides a proof of the Pythagorean Theorem. One way of demonstrating the truth of the Pythagorean Theorem is to draw a right-triangle and then from each of the sides, construct a square that has dimensions defined by the side of the triangle from which it originates. The figure below illustrates this:



of the Line and this “omission”. Also, J. T. Bedo-Addo, “A Theory of Mental Development: Plato’s *Republic* V-VII”, *Platon* 28 (1976), “Mathematics, Dialectic, and the Good in the *Republic* VI-VII”, *Platon* 30 (1978), and “Dianoia and the Images of

However, **before** the demonstration is given and the squares are added to the figure, the child can easily note that the triangle itself forms a definite pattern. But this pattern of lines and angles “does not disclose its various intricacies to immediate consciousness”. This is quite clearly the case. Further, Whitehead is right in claiming that “the child knew what his teacher was talking about, namely, the right-angled triangle quite evidently suggested on the board by the thick chalk lines. And yet the child did not know the infinitude of properties which were implicitly involved.”²⁸⁶ What the child perceives are lines, angles, points, etc. However, none of these particular notions has any meaning “apart from the reference to all-enveloping space”. Again, this is uncontroversial.

What is controversial, however, is the conclusion that Whitehead then draws about the practice of philosophy, especially as it relates to analysis. While one does not see all of the intricacies of the figure when it is first presented, one can rather quickly begin to analyze its individual parts. One can manipulate the line segments (a, b, and c), lining them beside each other to note the difference in length. One can isolate particular angles and examine their differences. However, the analysis of the individual parts is not an analysis of the triangle itself. The right-triangle exemplifies a particular set of relationships that each of the points, lines, and angles bears to each other. Abstracting from any particular one of these to a general statement about the triangle is an exhibition of folly. And a discussion of the triangle apart from the spatial system to which it refers

Forms in Plato's *Republic* VI-VII”, *Platon* 31 (1979).

²⁸⁶ Whitehead, “Mathematics and the Good”, *The Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead*, Library of Living Philosophers Collection, Paul Arthur Schilpp, ed., (New York: Tudor

is likewise problematic. Whitehead calls it “meaningless”. While this may be a bit extreme, it surely has merit. This is because the Pythagorean Theorem with its reference to Euclidean Space is a “glorious mistake” if one supposes that it can be universalized across all geometries.²⁸⁷ The Pythagorean Theorem refers to a particular understanding of spatial dimensions. Riemannian Geometry refers to a different one; Lobachevskian Geometry still another. And the background spatial theory is inseparable, in principle, from the data under study in the discipline. The particulars are inseparable from the generalities to which they refer.

In hindsight, mathematicians recognize the progression. Whitehead calls this the “Now we know” reaction. Now we know that the Pythagorean Theorem, for example, is not truly independent of background conditions.²⁸⁸ If one is working in non-Euclidean space, the Theorem is likely false. However, in the time of Plato (or for that matter, Descartes, Hume and Kant), the Theorem (and Euclidean Geometry more generally) was taken to be absolute. Of this sort of attitude, Whitehead writes “The notion of the complete self-sufficiency of any item of finite knowledge is the fundamental error of

Publishing Company, 1951), 668.

²⁸⁷ Whitehead labels it a glorious mistake because Euclidean Geometry provides a very simple and largely practical way of examining the world and making scientific predictions based on rather elementary calculations. However, as science advanced in the latter part of the 18th and 19th centuries, the error contained in the simplicity begins to cause difficulties for the advance of science. Whitehead writes that “Luckily the mathematicians - at least some of them - had got ahead of the sober thoughts of sensible men of science, and had invented all sorts of fantastic variations from orthodox geometry.” These inventions were critical to the continued advance of scientific discovery.

²⁸⁸ In fact, it is likely meaningless.

dogmatism. Every such item derives its truth and its very meaning from its unanalyzed relevance to the background which is the unbounded universe.”

Here, then, we can see the beginning of Whitehead’s strategy. He goes on to write

not even the simplest notion of arithmetic escapes this inescapable condition for existence. Every scrap of our knowledge derives its meaning from the fact that we are factors in the universe, and are dependent on the universe for every detail of our experience.²⁸⁹

If not even the simplest notion of arithmetic is immune to **essential** relatedness, why ought one suppose that a human being, considerably more complex, is immune? Recall Broad’s imagined Ethical Egoist, who responds to the suggestion that from the perspective of the Universe the Principle of Equality holds, by stating quite rightly that he is not the Universe. While Broad’s Ethical Egoist might rightfully assert that as one who is not the Universe he need not take the perspective of it, Whitehead here points out that he cannot coherently deny his connection to the rest of the Universe, nor that his own existence is completely dependent on others. So, contrary to Sidgwick, Whitehead has demonstrated that it is plausible to suppose that an agent must take into account the generality of which he is a part.

There are two important things of note here. The first is that one might subscribe to a Sidgwickian style Universal Hedonism and still maintain this conclusion about essential relatedness. The second is that one might subscribe to a sort of self-interest theory that is clearly involved with Ethical Egoism and still maintain this conclusion about essential relatedness. The former case is clear and has been discussed in the course

of the explication of Sidgwick's positive argument in favor of Universal Hedonism so I will not dwell on it here. The latter bears some further discussion.

Suppose I am motivated by pure self-interest. Suppose that, like Broad's imagined Ethical Egoist, I claim that I am not the Universe and therefore need not take the perspective of the Universe and apply the Principle of Equity in my dealings with others. These two suppositions, it seems, come rather quickly into conflict. Given that I am ontologically connected with every other actual entity in the Universe, my actions will have repercussions beyond myself. True, the more distant the entity to which I am related, the less influence my actions have on it and its actions on me. For example, my typing at a keyboard in my study has little influence on political debate within Indonesia, not does that debate have much influence, necessarily, on my typing at a keyboard. However, actions very near to me may have quite immediate consequences. So, it begins to look as if it is in my self-interest to apply the Principle of Equity in my dealings with others because my actions affect them. Further, because I am connected to them, my actions necessarily affect me (though perhaps in a diffuse fashion). Thus, by appeal to a metaphysical doctrine of essential relatedness with help from examples from Plato and mathematics, Whitehead has shown Green's G3 - "The full realization of one person's capacities requires him to will the good of other people for their own sake" - to be the case.

As noted above, if G3 is so (along with G2 and G1), then the Dualism of Practical Reason is overcome rather quickly. However, Whitehead does violate one of Sidgwick's

²⁸⁹ *ibid.*, 670.

cardinal rules in this demonstration. He mixes metaphysical, epistemological, and historical investigations and principles with normative principles. This clearly violates Sidgwick's doctrine of compartmentalization. And this violation brings our discussion to the next section.

5. Relation between Metaphysics and Ethics

As we have already seen, Sidgwick (and his disciple G. E. Moore) constructs rigid firewalls between the several branches of philosophy, and especially between metaphysics and ethics. Whitehead does not. One of the areas of Whitehead's philosophy where this is clearest is his discussion of propositions. I must note that I will discuss the status of propositions in Whitehead's speculative scheme in general and in his Theory of Truth in particular in the Theory of Truth section that follows. Suffice it to say here that moral principles of the sort Sidgwick takes to be "really self-evident" would count as propositions on Whitehead's view as well. The statement " $2 + 2 = 4$ " and the statement of Principle of Equity,²⁹⁰ are both propositions, though with perhaps different truth-values and expressive of different truth-relations.

On Whitehead's view, any proposition "refers to a universe exhibiting some general systematic metaphysical character. ... Thus every proposition proposing a fact must, in its complete analysis, propose the general character of the universe required for

²⁹⁰ Recall that Sidgwick's Principle of Equity is: "It cannot be right for A to treat B in a manner in which it would be wrong for B to treat A, merely on the ground that they are two different individuals, and without there being any difference between the natures or circumstances of the two which can be stated as a reasonable ground for difference of treatment."

that fact.”²⁹¹ The meaning of this claim is quite straightforward. Suppose we take the proposition that “the sum of the squares of the shorter legs of a right triangle is equal to the square of the longer side”. This proposition is true only if a certain general system of geometry is supposed; namely Euclidean Geometry. In Riemannian Geometry, the proposition is false. Thus, at least this proposition refers to the background conditions beyond itself though it does not explicitly specify in its formulation. Whitehead extends this relationship to all propositions. This seems reasonable. It would seem quite odd to suppose that some proposition referred only to itself and to nothing beyond itself. For Whitehead, every proposition involves the rest of the universe, either explicitly or implicitly. Whitehead’s stance is captured in the following: given some proposition, “What must the universe be like for that proposition to be true?”

Clearly, such an approach will apply to ethical theories as well. For example, suppose that the proposition is that Sidgwick’s Principle of Equity is true. That proposition is true only if the world/universe is a certain way. Now, presumably there could be a set of worlds such that each provides the proper background for the proposition to be true. But this does not affect Whitehead’s claim. Notice that the emphasis is on the “general systematic metaphysical character” of the universe. Thus, while many possible worlds might very well provide the proper background for the proposition to be true, those worlds can be grouped together as a set because they have the same general systematic metaphysical character **relative to** the proposition. Suppose there are three possible worlds, in two of which the proposition expressed by the

²⁹¹ Whitehead, Process and Reality, 11.

Principle of Equity is true. Further suppose that those two worlds are quite different; so different in fact that there is no identity across worlds (actual identity, counterpart identity or otherwise). However, each of the worlds could still be structured in such a way as to make the proposition true. Thus, though they differ greatly, **relative to the proposition** they have the same metaphysical character. Relative to some other proposition, they may yield different results, but relative to the proposition expressed by the Principle of Equity they yield the same result. The gist of this discussion is that it is reasonable to suppose that metaphysics and ethics are related in some way. Whitehead sees the two as intimately intertwined. Before moving to discuss precisely what that relationship is, I first want to discuss why it seems that such a position is to be preferred to the one Sidgwick holds.

One benefit this sort of view has over one like Sidgwick's is that it seems more in line with common-sense. Even in fairly common and philosophically naïve conversations, the difficulty for the ascription of praise and blame that is posed by the question of determinism, if it is true, is recognized. That is, even in common parlance, it is generally recognized that the answer to the question of determinism has direct implications on freedom of choice, moral freedom, and praise and blame. Sidgwick dismisses this aspect of common-sense with little in the way of argument. On Sidgwick's view, the investigation of metaphysical questions must proceed from principles that are distinctly metaphysical in structure and scope. Similarly, ethical investigation must proceed from ethical principles. Hybrid principles are dismissed as improper foundation for exploration of either field. Since the question of determinism certainly appears to be

a metaphysical one and the question of moral praise and blame an ethical one, then given the restriction, the question of determinism is excluded from investigations of moral praise and blame.

There are some difficulties with Sidgwick's restriction beyond its departure from the views of common-sense. The restriction does not seem to meet his own Verification criteria, especially in the arena of Social Verification. For example, Kant and a host of others who seem quite qualified to judge in this arena have demonstrated the difficulty of assigning moral praise and blame absent moral freedom and the difficulty of ascribing moral freedom absent real freedom. Thus, failing to satisfy Social Verification should be sufficient cause for Sidgwick to question his ready acceptance of the restriction. It does not, however.

Whitehead does not fall victim to this particular difficulty. For Whitehead, metaphysical truths have direct influence on moral reasoning. This is because metaphysical principles define the scope within which ethical principles can operate. If it were to be shown that a particularly odd determinist thesis holds (say, that every third action was determined by a causal link to past actions and all the others were caused solely by agent choice), then the scope of ethical principles would be limited by this thesis. That is, it would only make sense, for example, to assign moral praise and blame to those events that the agent actually had freedom to control. So, it seems reasonable to suppose that metaphysical principles influence the scope of ethical ones.

For Whitehead, ethical principles (particularly those divined by direct intuition) have some influence on the way in which one investigates metaphysical principles. This

is not to say that ethical principles determine metaphysical ones or even the scope of metaphysical principles. The relationship between the two sets of principles does not seem to be reciprocal.²⁹² However, it may be that we can come to have insight into the structure of the world by first examining the ethical principles that appear true. This is a return to the question, “what sort of world must it be for such and such an ethical principle to be true?” The set of metaphysical schemes that would allow for the Principle of Equity to be true is probably quite large (or at least plural). The point is that ethical investigations provide a starting point for metaphysical investigations and metaphysical principles provide limits within which ethical principles can be found to operate. For Whitehead’s philosophy of organism, such a relationship is inescapable.

6. The Good

Having already discussed in some depth the relationship Whitehead sees between mathematics and “the Good”, it should come as no surprise that the topic of mathematics resurfaces here as we turn our attention to the Good again. The example Whitehead uses here is Algebra, rather than Geometry (though the choice of subject matter is of little substantive difference). The fundamental notion of the Good, on Whitehead’s view, is similar to the fundamental notion of Algebra. He writes, “What is the fundamental

²⁹² The reason that the relationship between metaphysical principles and ethical principles does not seem reciprocal is this. Metaphysical principles seem to determine the scope within which ethical principles can operate. For example, if the hard determinist thesis is true, it limits the things one can rationally say about what one ought or ought not do in a given situation. The scope of the ethical principles is constrained by the metaphysical ones. However, ethical principles do not seem to have the same status. To know that an ethical principle is true is to know that there exists a metaphysical structure that allows the principle to be true; it does not determine the metaphysical scheme in every particular. Thus, it seems that metaphysical principles have some causal influence over

notion of Algebra? It is the notion of ‘any example of a given sort, in abstraction from some particular exemplification of the example or of the sort.’”²⁹³ For example, let us assume that we have a line described by the equation “ $f(x) = x$ ”. This function describes the relationship between elements in the domain of the function $[x]$ and elements in the range of the function $[f(x)]$. Suppose we take a particular element in the domain, say 3. Then, $f(3) = 3$. Thus, the element in the range is 3. This is a particular exemplification of the function. The function, though, is an abstraction from an infinite series of ordered pairs of the form $(x, f(x))$ each of which represents a discrete point along the line. Thus, we have a point on the line (which is a particular example) and the statement “ $f(x) = x$ ” that describes the line and is an abstraction. That is to say, it is not identical to any particular discrete moment along the line.

Similarly, “the Good” is not identical with any particular instance of a good action. In a way analogous to the example of Algebra, there is a relationship between particular, discrete instances of good (namely, good actions), and the abstraction from those instances that is not identical to any particular exemplification of them, namely “The Good”. Further, on Whitehead’s account, “Good” is related to Harmony. Simply put, those things are good that promote Harmony. The “Good” is the abstraction or the qualification by which those individual good things are denoted. However, it is different from any particular instance of the Good because good actions are concrete events within the actual world and the Good is an abstraction.

ethical ones while ethical principles play an heuristic role relative to metaphysical ones.

²⁹³ Whitehead, “Mathematics and the Good”, 668.

Beyond this concrete particular/abstract notion aspect, “the Good” refers to those ideals “which stretch beyond any immediate realization”. This is to say, “Good” has two components - the immediate action that can be labeled “good,” and the ideal or future realization of an aim that is embodied in that action. On Whitehead’s view, an action that is properly labeled “good” has two features. The first is that the action itself promotes Harmony. The second is that the action expresses an abstract ideal or aim the realization of which would promote Harmony in the future. Perhaps an example will help to clarify. Suppose a group of people gather together and commit themselves to walking with a dying AIDS patient through the last days, weeks, or perhaps months of his life. Suppose, further, that they provide all manner of emotional and financial support for the patient who, after not much time at all, becomes close friends with many in the group. It seems fairly clear that the actions of this group would be called good actions by common moral sense. How the good action promotes Harmony is a bit more complicated. The death of the young man is indeed tragic. While tragedy has its place in the actual world, it is disruptive of harmony.²⁹⁴ But the group’s actions make the end of life a better experience than it would have been otherwise, providing a sense of company and comfort to one facing a dreaded disease. The dying person experiences a level of harmony that would be absent without the efforts of the group. Thus, the particular action(s) promote harmony in the immediate setting.

²⁹⁴ For a comprehensive discussion of tragedy in Whitehead’s thought (and in Process thought more generally), see Marjorie Suchocki’s Fall to Violence: Original Sin in Relational Theology (New York: Continuum Press, 1995) and/or Joseph Grange’s Nature: An Environmental Cosmology (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997) and The City: An Urban Cosmology (Albany: State University of New York Press,

They also fulfill the second feature. I selected this example because of the social stigma that is often attached to AIDS (and was more so during the mid-1980s and early 1990s). The concerted efforts of some and the blatant ignorance of many made the disease and its effects on individuals and families much worse than it would have been. The instances of hatred and intolerance directed at people, especially men, who were suffering from the disease are well documented. The attitudes and actions (by individuals and legislatures) that exemplified the intolerance are in somewhat less evidence as we enter the 21st century. This is in part because of actions like the group in the example above. This is because through particular acts they exemplified ideals or aims that, if realized, would promote greater Harmony. As those ideals were realized, Harmony was served. Thus, the actions of the group were good in the particular instance and good in the exemplified ideal.

That Whitehead has something like this in mind is clear from a pair of claims that he makes in relation to actions and future implications of ideals exemplified in those actions. He writes that “whenever we attempt to express the matter of immediate experience, we find that its understanding leads us beyond itself, to its contemporaries, to its past, [and] to its future.”²⁹⁵ This actually suggests a stronger position than I have advanced. On this stronger view, every present action necessarily points beyond itself to future actions. Thus, it is not a matter of supposing that an agent’s action *may* have ramifications for good or ill beyond the particular moment of its commission, but rather a view that claims that the agent’s action *will* have ramifications beyond itself. Thus,

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actions that express an ideal that, if realized, would promote harmony are to be preferred over those that express an ideal that, if realized, would promote disharmony.

He connects this view of actions in general to moral actions in particular by claiming that “the greater part of morality hinges on the determination of relevance in the future.”²⁹⁶ That is to say, although the particular action is good insofar as it promotes harmony in the immediate term, it is more important that the action express an ideal that has relevance for future harmony. Thus, for Whitehead, although we can specify two features of actions that ought to bear the label “good”, the future-facing feature is of more importance than the immediate feature.

This view has at least two obvious benefits. The first is a distinction that allows for an analysis of action in the following way. Suppose Action A promotes harmony in the immediate term but expresses an ideal that promotes disharmony in the longer term. One example could be Benito Mussolini’s rule in fascist Italy. The trains ran on time, but the disharmony far outweighed any immediate benefits that might have accrued to society by the keeping of a train schedule. Suppose Action B promotes disharmony in the immediate term but expresses an ideal that promote greater harmony in the future. One example might be a case that Sidgwick would employ - forsaking a pleasure or a benefit in the present in the hopes of a greater one in the future. Suppose that Action C promotes disharmony in the immediate term and expresses an ideal that promotes disharmony in the future as well. This action can be dismissed without further comment. And finally, suppose Action D promotes harmony in the immediate moment and expresses an ideal

²⁹⁵ Whitehead, Process and Reality, 14.

that promotes greater harmony in the future. The above example of the caring group should suffice here. Clearly we have four sorts of actions and we can specify the ways in which they differ given Whitehead's analysis of "the Good". The first action, Action A, is not given the label "good" because it fails miserably to exemplify the second feature of good actions. The final action, Action D, is given the label "good" for reasons already discussed. Action C is rightly dismissed. Only Action B seems problematic. Whitehead, it seems, is more likely to call this action "good" because it is more important to bring about harmony in the future than in the present. This is because "the greater part of morality hinges on the determination of relevance for the future." However, it seems important to be able to distinguish between those actions that promote harmony in the immediate term and the future from those that promote disharmony in the immediate term and harmony in the future. It also seems that we would want to be able to analyze actions on the basis of both features to begin to distinguish gradations in both the immediate term and the longer term. Whitehead's scheme allows us to do both of these.

7. Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness

Since the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness is one of the chief tools that Whitehead uses both to critique other philosophical systems and to test his own for coherence, logical consistency, adequacy, and applicability, it is important to spend a bit of time discussing it. As examples, I will recall some of Whitehead's criticisms of 19th-century ethical theory (especially Mill's, Sidgwick's, and Green's) to show how this informal fallacy is capable of serving as a criticism of each. I have not mentioned it in

²⁹⁶ *ibid.*, 27.

the foregoing discussions, because it is not Whitehead's only critical tool and I have wanted to show that he could and did critique a great many of these theories without resort to the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness. However, having shown those lengthier critiques, it is now possible to show how the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness makes the same points, only much more directly. The point of introducing it, though, is not just to stump for its inclusion in the logician's toolbox. It is important to keep in mind that Whitehead is applying this same check on his own work. Accordingly, it will be good to have a brief examination of it handy as we move into his positive ethical views. Recall that Whitehead writes that "the success of a philosophy is to be measured by its comparative avoidance of this fallacy [Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness], when thought is restricted within its categories."²⁹⁷

Simply put, the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness is exemplified in the act of assuming that a general concept, abstracted from the actual world, is itself actual. For example, there are a many, many oak trees, each distinct one from another and each a society of actual entities in the actual world. The name "oak tree" is applied to the set of all societies that satisfy the condition of being an oak tree. However, "oak tree", when referring to the class and not a particular tree is a notion abstracted from actual trees. It is not itself an actual entity, but rather an abstract notion. Now, if we assumed that the abstract notion itself had the properties that any individual oak tree possessed, we would have committed the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness. That is, we would have taken as concrete in the actual world something that is actually abstract. As Whitehead writes,

²⁹⁷ Whitehead, Process and Reality, 8.

“the fallacy consists in neglecting the degree of abstraction involved when an actual entity is considered merely so far as it exemplifies certain categories of thought.”²⁹⁸

Consider one of Whitehead’s own examples. On Whitehead’s view, Sir Isaac Newton’s Scholium is one of the “statements of cosmological theory” that has had significant influence on Western thought. He writes that it can “within certain limits be thoroughly trusted for the deduction of truths at the same level of abstraction as itself.” Despite this profound influence, the Scholium suffers at least one major defect. Its inadequacy lies in that it does not suggest its own limitations with respect to its application. The effect of this inadequacy is to lure readers to commit the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness. One example is space/time. Whitehead writes, “space and time, with all their current mathematical properties, are ready-made for the material masses; the material masses are ready-made for the ‘forces’ which constitute their action and reaction; and space, and time, and material masses, and forces, are alike ready-made for the initial motions which the Deity impresses throughout the universe.”²⁹⁹ Newton describes the work in this way: “When I wrote my treatise about our system, I had an eye upon such principles as might work with considering men for the belief of a Deity.”³⁰⁰ The following problem arises. The Scholium is insufficient basis for theological ruminations.³⁰¹ Simply put, transcendent divinity is at a level of abstraction far removed

²⁹⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

²⁹⁹ *ibid.*, 94.

³⁰⁰ *ibid.*, 93. The quotation is from Jebb’s Life of Bentley, chapter 2.

³⁰¹ Hume’s criticism of the Argument from Design in Part V of his Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion provides a helpful example. Essentially, the argument from design rests on an analogy from the order found in an artifact (e.g., a watch) and its designer (e.g., a watchmaker) on the one hand and the world and its “designer”, presumed to be God.

from Newtonian mechanics, yet is treated as no more abstract than the rest of the principles at work in the theory. This is a fairly straightforward commission of the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness.³⁰²

I turn now to address Mill and Sidgwick and, by extension, Utilitarianism as a doctrine. In his analysis of Mill's proof of the principle of utility, Whitehead allows for the sake of argument that there may exist something like the "aggregate of all people". He takes this to be necessary for the principle of utility - the greatest good for the greatest number - to make sense. That is, there must be an entity that is the "greatest number" or else trying to locate the greatest good for the "greatest number" does not make sense. Whitehead's criticism then focuses on the first element of the principle, namely the "greatest good" or the "general happiness." Happiness is comprehensible as an individual experience. That is, it makes sense to say that "John is happy" if it is John that is happy. But, if it is Mary that is happy, and not John, it is false that "John is happy."

Further, it does not look like even if the "greatest number" existed that it could possess a "greatest good" or "general happiness" because it does not seem that individual instances of happiness can be added up to something that could be called the "general happiness". If individual happinesses are not additive, then there does not exist a

However, the analogy fails because three of the relata are more closely related to one another than any of the three is to the fourth. The watch, watchmaker, and world are all finite creatures. The analogy purports to demonstrate the existence of an infinite creator. Such an attribution of infinitude is at a level of abstraction beyond what the analogy will support. As Philo points out to his interlocutors, the most that can be said about the "designer" of the cosmos, based on the analogy, is that the "designer" is finite.

³⁰² Beyond this problem is another. As Whitehead could attest from first-hand participation, "physics itself has now reached a stage of experimental knowledge inexplicable in terms of the categories of the Scholium." 94

“general happiness”. If there does not exist a “general happiness”, then the principle fails even if one assumes that the “greatest number” exists. However, Whitehead sees no need to grant even the first assumption. The “greatest number” or the “aggregate of all people” is an abstraction. It has no counterpart in the actual world to which it refers. To assume that it does is to take an abstract concept and mistakenly suppose it to be concrete. That is, to commit the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness. The same can be said for the “general happiness”, *mutatis mutandis*.

This criticism applies directly to Mill (to whom Whitehead directs it) and to Sidgwick who goes unmentioned in Whitehead’s critique. It is applicable to Sidgwick’s scheme in the same way it is applicable to Mill’s, because Sidgwick assumes that something like the “aggregate of all people” or the “general happiness” exists and exists in the actual world. Further, it looks as if the critique is applicable to any Utilitarian theory that supposes that the “general good” or “general happiness” or “aggregate of all people” is an entity that exists as something other than an abstraction from individual people.

Turning now to Green. It will be recalled that I argued that Whitehead’s response to Sidgwick’s Dualism of Practical Reason is quite similar to Green’s. The Dualism is motivated by the following:

S1: A person’s good is her self-satisfaction.

S2: Self-satisfaction consists in maximizing pleasure for the agent, or (to avoid begging any questions) in the realization of pleasure by the agent.

From S1 and S2, both S3 and S3* follow.

S3: The agent has a duty toward the general good.

S3*: The agent has no duty toward the general good.

But, S3 expresses the moral commitment of the Universal Hedonist and S3* expresses the commitment of the Ethical Egoist. Since S3* and S3 cannot be true together, yet are equally supported from the common moral sense, the Dualism of Practical Reason results.

Green argues that a proper expansion of that notion will solve the Dualism of Practical Reason (or more accurately, show that no problem existed in the first place). Green recasts the argument as follows:

G1: An agent has a duty to the general good.

G2: Self-satisfaction consists in the full realization of a rational agent's capacities.

G3: The full realization of one person's capacities requires him to will the good of other people for their own sake.

From G1, G2, and G3 we have

G4: Ethical Egoism, as Sidgwick conceives it, is defeated.

After describing the differences, I then argued that Whitehead could be interpreted as holding versions of G2 and G3 and thus overcoming the Dualism. However, G1 is somewhat more problematic. If my interpretation of Whitehead's critique of Mill and Sidgwick is right, then Whitehead cannot accept G1 because G1 involves an abstraction, "the general good". Clearly, Whitehead would argue that Green's argument, whatever the benefits relative to answering the Dualism of Practical Reason may be,

cannot be supported because it falls victim to the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness. However, an argument that preserves Whitehead's Green-like rejection of the Dualism of Practical Reason while avoiding the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness can be developed by modifying G1 with S1. The new argument would be something like the following:

W1: A person's good is her self-satisfaction.

W2: Self-satisfaction consists in the full realization of a rational agent's capacities.

W3: The full realization of one person's capacities requires him to will the good of other people for their own sake.

From W1, W2, and W3 we get W4:

W4: A person's good requires him to will the good of other people for their own sake.

This argument has a number of benefits. For one, it avoids both the Dualism of Practical Reason and the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness. More importantly, in avoiding the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness it focuses the duties of morality on the proper objects of morality; namely, actual entities in the actual world, whether they be the agent herself or other actual entities. Further, it provides further support for the view that Whitehead's ethical views are character-driven. By casting the agent's self-satisfaction in terms of the realization of rational capacities, one can easily see how that self-satisfaction and realization can be understood as virtue. Thus, the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness provides critical power to Whitehead's theory while at the same time giving

interpreters of Whitehead a good reason to suppose that he is about the work of proposing a virtue theory of ethics.

Chapter 2. The Theory

A. Whitehead's Theory of Truth

"Logic, conceived as an adequate analysis of the advance of thought, is a fake." This would be quite a serious claim within the halls of epistemology even if it had been uttered by a philosopher with minimal background in the philosophies of mathematics, the sciences, and metaphysics. That it is one of the final written views of Whitehead, a well respected mathematician and philosopher, and called "a pioneer"³⁰³ in the field of modern logic by none other than W.V.O. Quine serves only to redouble the appearance of scandal. This view is, however, a clue to Whitehead's theory of Truth.

The "Logic ... is a fake" claim takes place within the lecture "Immortality." However, despite the religious connotations that this title would imply, the concern within the lecture is to demonstrate an imprecision of language in corresponding to facts about the world. In the course of this lecture Whitehead does not depart from his metaphysical views concerning the universe, though one change in wording is of some note. In this last essay, he states that all things are "relevant" to one another. In his earlier work, principally Process and Reality, the word he uses is "relative". I will not dwell on this distinction here because I find no evidence that his view has changed.³⁰⁴

³⁰³ W.V. Quine, "Whitehead and the Rise of Modern Logic", The Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, 127.

³⁰⁴ Since Whitehead is not abandoning his earlier constructions, what new work does this essay do? Perhaps nothing. Whitehead could simply be reiterating earlier positions to a

Having said this, I turn now to the question, "What epistemic principle is it that the claim 'Logic ... is a fake' refines?" It is found in his conclusion to the Preface to Process and Reality. There Whitehead states that "In philosophical discussion, the merest hint of dogmatic certainty as to finality of statement is an exhibition of folly."³⁰⁵ Or, in another place, Whitehead writes that "The position of metaphysics in the development of culture cannot be understood without remembering that *no verbal statement is the adequate expression of a proposition*."³⁰⁶ This assertion is very similar to the conclusion of his essay, "Immortality," where he concludes, "the final outlook of Philosophic thought cannot be based on the exact statements which form the basis of the special sciences."³⁰⁷ The similarity of the two assertions would seem to indicate that a similar position is held, though in the one case it is directed at the whole of the philosophic endeavor (as the statement comes in the preface to his one attempt at a comprehensive and systematic philosophy) while the other is made within a critique of the claims of religious dogmatism. The final line of his final essay is a rephrasing of the seemingly scandalous "Logic ... is a fake" claim. "The exactness is a fake."³⁰⁸ This later assertion provides the proper qualification of the earlier claim. At the same time it demonstrates

new audience. However, I think this reading is unlikely. Such a reading would leave the interpreter of Whitehead in the unenviable position of being forced to explain the jarring discontinuity between the forceful indictment of logic, "Logic ... is a fake", and Whitehead's earlier use and support of the very logic which this statement indicts to construct his metaphysical system. Given that "logic" is one of the guiding metaphysical principles that Whitehead sets out for his speculative scheme at the very outset, it seems that such an interpretation is the way to go.

³⁰⁵ Whitehead, Process and Reality, xiv.

³⁰⁶ *ibid.*, 13. (emphasis added) For a more complete discussion of Whitehead's Fallacy of the Perfect Dictionary, see his Modes of Thought, 173.

³⁰⁷ Whitehead, "Immortality," 700.

that the claim is not a departure from the systematized view Whitehead's espoused earlier. Hence, the epistemic principle that the "Logic ... is a fake" claim refines is something like "In the realm of knowledge, absolute certainty is not possible."

However, there is more to the claim than simply a moment's advocacy of epistemological humility. Given his claim regarding the impossibility of a verbal statement to adequately express a proposition, we can even further refine the view. For Whitehead, it is quite impossible to express the whole truth exactly in any sort of symbolic way. Whitehead is also connecting this epistemological principle to his views about the aim and method of philosophy, the role of common-sense, Truth, and ethics. Indeed, his analysis of formal logic, in particular, and mathematics, in general, provides a helpful starting point not only to discuss the connections between the disciplines, but also a launchpoint to discuss Whitehead's Theory of Truth; a theory he utilizes at several points in the development of his positive general ethical views and in the descriptions of the several particular virtues.

In addition to the epistemological principle, it is also important to know what sorts of propositions can be true. There exists an important distinction between linguistic propositions or verbal phrases and what I will call Whiteheadian propositions (hereafter W-propositions). The full scope of this distinction will become clearer as this section progresses. However, a brief clarification is necessary here. By "linguistic proposition" I mean those sentences of a language that are commonly called "propositions" in the philosophic literature. For example, "All bachelors are unmarried." This sentence is

³⁰⁸ *ibid.*

often given as an example of an analytically true proposition; one whose truth is apparent given analysis of the terms and independent of the rest of the world. However, Whitehead does not hold that such verbal phrases are helpful. He writes, “the language of literature breaks down precisely at the task of expressing in explicit form the larger generalities – the very generalities which metaphysics seeks to express.”³⁰⁹ This is so, in part, because of the supposed independence of the “fact” that is expressed in the proposition. W-propositions are different. Whitehead writes,

Every proposition proposing a fact must, in its complete analysis, propose the general character of the universe required for that fact. ... The distinction between verbal phrases and complete propositions is one of the reasons why the logicians’ rigid alternative, ‘true or false,’ is also largely irrelevant for the pursuit of knowledge.³¹⁰

Metaphysically speaking, the distinction between linguistic propositions and W-propositions is this: A complete proposition (W-proposition) insofar as it proposes a fact, must “propose the *general* character of the universe required for that fact” and W-propositions can be true, false, or partially true. (emphasis added) In this sense, W-propositions are backward looking. That is, they refer to the universal background conditions required for the proposition to arise. However, they are also forward-looking. W-propositions reflect not only the state of affairs as they are, but also various states of affairs that can be. This is one of the reasons for the emphasis above on “general”. The general character of the universe, on Whitehead’s view, is open to many different avenues of development. For example, suppose that the general character of the universe is such that peaches and pears both exist. If a peach and a pear are both lying on the

³⁰⁹ Whitehead, Process and Reality, 11.

³¹⁰ *ibid.*

table, then I can eat one or the other or both. Further, I could eat the peach and then the pear; or the pear and then the peach; or alternate bites of each. The point is that a W-proposition that describes the state of affairs as it currently is would also suggest possible avenues of action in the future. Here, Whitehead's more well-known comments about the function of propositions becomes clearer. For Whitehead, propositions function as lures for feeling, where "feeling" is as we have been using it to this point. That is, they present potentialities that can be actualized in future moments. In this way, propositions become the data for proposals – as statements of what is and suggestions of what could be, they present potentialities for future actualizations.

If W-propositions suggest the general character of the universe, then they also suggest, generally, what options are not available. Presumably certain features of the universe make others impossible to realize. For example, the speed of light is faster than the speed of sound. Thus, something traveling below the speed of sound could not be traveling faster than the speed of light.

Commonly, linguistic propositions are thought to have one of two logical values – "true" or "false." This is not so for W-propositions. While I will explore this feature of W-propositions at greater length later, it is important, at the outset, to point out that Whitehead holds that W-propositions can express partial truth. The notion of partial truth is a critical feature of his view. He writes,

A proposition can embody partial truth because it only demands a certain type of systematic environment, which is presupposed in its meaning. It does not refer to the universe in all its detail.³¹¹

³¹¹ *ibid.*

The last sentence of this passage is informative. A proposition might propose the general character of the universe, but fail to refer to the universe in all of its *specific* detail. Indeed, this is likely to be true of any W-proposition. To the extent that a W-proposition succeeds in its detailed reference, it is a true proposition. Thus, “partial truth” refers to partial successful reference. Thus, Whitehead’s view of propositions entails that he holds a gradation view of truth.

Given the epistemological principle and the gradation view in mind, we can see how Whitehead clarifies the “Logic ... is a fake” sentence beyond the appeal for epistemological humility by writing that “It (Logic) is a superb instrument, but it requires a background of common sense.”³¹² This echoes his assertions in another place where he writes that “Philosophy has been misled by the example of mathematics.”³¹³ The “misleading” has two faces. The first Whitehead clearly states in the discussion of this statement in Process and Reality. In the arena of mathematical proof, one proceeds deductively from premises that are “severally clear, distinct, and certain” to reason to conclusions. Should those conclusions prove false, one looks immediately to the train of reasoning or the premises to discern the culprit. In mathematics, Whitehead argues, it is often quite easy or at least clear after some thought which premise is the problematic one. However, “in the absence of a well-defined categoreal scheme of entities, issuing in a satisfactory metaphysical system, every premise in a philosophical argument is under suspicion.”³¹⁴

³¹² Whitehead, “Immortality,” 700.

³¹³ Whitehead, Process and Reality, 8.

³¹⁴ *ibid.*

The second face of the “misleading” is a bit less apparent, though perhaps more important. Leaving aside the suspicion of premises in philosophical arguments, we are still left with the underlying assumption that one might be able to state, clearly and distinctly, the philosophical first principles from which the deductive reasoning could proceed, much as one states clearly and distinctly the geometric first principles of Euclidean Geometry. Whitehead notes that here assumptions about both mathematics and philosophy go astray, though in more problematic ways for philosophy. Even in mathematics, he writes, “the statement of the ultimate logical principles is beset with difficulties, as yet insuperable.”³¹⁵ The problem in philosophy is fairly clear, though a bit more complicated. Centuries after Euclid, it was discovered that there is reason to suspect that space is indeed not Euclidean. However, for the most part, geometry students familiar with the Elements can make calculations and produce results that by and large resemble the actual world. Only at a fairly sophisticated level do the inadequacies of Euclidean geometry become problematic for investigative purposes. Though the first principles (the Elements) of Euclidean Geometry turn out not to accurately correspond with the actual world, they are for the most part workable. Many philosophers, especially Descartes and Spinoza, have taken the example of the Elements and Euclidean Geometry as a model for their own work. However, it turns out that philosophical first principles have even less purchase on the actual world than do the Elements. At the very least, alleged philosophical first principles (whatever they have been thought to consist in) have failed to approximate the intuitions of common-sense views about ethics, metaphysics,

³¹⁵ *ibid.*

and epistemology in ways that Euclidean Geometry, and other mathematical systems, have not. For Whitehead, philosophical generalizations are the *goal*, rather than the starting point. By supposing that philosophers ought to take mathematical investigations as its primary paradigm for philosophical investigations, we go astray.

It should be noted that Whitehead comes to both of these conclusions by an appeal to the intuitions of common-sense and the role that he takes common-sense to play in any investigation, but particularly in philosophical ones. In the first case, there is no “well-defined categoreal scheme” in which to locate the premises of deductive philosophical argument, and in the second, it is perhaps impossible to ever even develop such a well-defined scheme with anything like finality or certainty. For that matter, “if we consider any scheme of philosophic categories as one complex assertion, and apply to it the logician’s alternative, true or false, the answer must be that the scheme is false.”³¹⁶ However, there is an interim solution: development of categoreal schemes that hopefully reflect the actual world and common-sense intuitions of the actual world ever more closely - asymptotically approaching the reality of the actual world. Part of that scheme is a Theory of Truth.

We can already suspect that Whitehead’s Theory of Truth is unconventional in some very controversial ways. For one thing, Whitehead rejects the possibility that ordinary language has the capacity accurately to express truths about the world. Yet ordinary language propositions are the truth-bearers of most theories of truth. This is not so for Whitehead. Or more precisely, while linguistic propositions are truth-bearers, they

³¹⁶ *ibid.*

are not the only ones, or even the best ones. Instead, on Whitehead's view, "philosophic truth is to be sought in the presuppositions of language rather than in the express statements themselves."³¹⁷ The obvious implication of this view is that Truth is not to be located terms of linguistic propositions, or sentences, or atomic elements of linguistic propositions or sentences. The more obscure, though perhaps more important, implication is that the analysis of Truth will involve the pre-philosophical intuitions that populate common-sense.

We now move from background and conditions to a definition of Truth. This is perhaps the easiest of the steps in the investigation of the Theory of Truth because the definition is what Whitehead takes to be a very common-sensical notion of what things are true. Truth refers to a conformity of appearance to reality.³¹⁸ It is important to note that Truth qualifies only one side of this relationship; namely, appearance. He writes, "Reality is just itself, it is nonsense to ask whether it be true or false." That is, Reality simply is; the actual world is the way the actual world is. Since Truth qualifies appearance, then, we can say that an appearance is true if and only if the content of that appearance conforms to the real world that the appearance purports to represent. For example, suppose an observer is shown a circular blue disk. The disk appears to the person to be blue and circular. Thus, the appearance is said to be true. However, there are at least two interpretations of this definition - a stronger and a weaker - and both of which are supported by the text. So, let us begin with an interim definition as follows:

³¹⁷ Whitehead, Modes of Thought, vii. Note that Whitehead here is contrasting the linguistic statements of a philosophy with the presuppositions of that philosophy (which may or may not be recognized).

Stronger Definition of Truth: “X” is true if and only “X” conforms to X.

Here “X” refers to “the appearance of X” and X refers to the object in the real world. This is the stronger version. Let us consider another example: A is said to be a true friend of B if in fact A is a friend of B. Suppose that B is ingratiating himself to A in hopes of gaining some favor but upon gaining it will cease to try to appear a friend. In this case, B is not a true friend, but a false one.

These examples indicate the genius of Whitehead’s Theory of Truth. “Conformity of appearance to reality” certainly seems to be what is commonly meant by Truth, at least in common-sense parlance. Thus, in the case of the blue disk and in the case of the friend, Whitehead is able to give an account of how the word “true” can be meaningfully and consistently applied in both cases. Or take an example from mathematics, say the proposition “ $2 + 2 = 4$ ”. The proposition “ $2 + 2 = 4$ ” is true if and only if $2 + 2$ actually equals 4. Thus, on Whitehead’s account, the use of the word “true” when referring to a true friend, a true appearance, or a true proposition is not an equivocation but a meaningful representation of the same sort in each instance.

Another controversial aspect of Whitehead’s notion of Truth is that there are distinct levels or gradations of truth. As he writes, “In the realm of truth there are many mansions.”³¹⁹ Some things are more true and some less. Further, on Whitehead’s account, the access to reality (and hence likelihood of conformity with reality) is divided into three distinct levels. Now, given the stronger interpretation of the definition, such a result would be surprising. Clearly, the interim definition above is too strong to admit of

³¹⁸ Whitehead, Adventures of Ideas, 309.

gradations and levels. If “X” is true if and only if “X” conforms to X, then it seems that “X” is either true or it is false, with no wiggle-room between the two. So we examine the weaker interpretation of the definition to discover if it satisfies not only the things Whitehead says explicitly about how Truth is defined but also whether it satisfies the other Whiteheadian notions about Truth.

Weaker Definition of Truth: “X” is said to be true insofar as “X” conforms to X.

Clearly this is a weaker interpretation than the earlier one. On this account, “X” can be said to be more or less true. Its truth-value varies as the conformity relation between “X” and X varies. That is, the more “X” conforms to X, the truer “X” is said to be. And, in the same way, the less “X” conforms to X, the less true “X” is said to be. The benefit of this sort of view is that it captures the rough and tumble common-sense use of the word “true”. The course of a ship is said to be “true” insofar as the course projection conforms to the navigation geometry that defines the course between the ship and the harbor. A person is placed on the scale of “true friendship” - “friend” - “acquaintance” - “stranger” - “false friend” - “enemy” based on the actions and intentions of the person and how those correspond to the actions of the ideal “true friend”.

The weakness of the view is rather apparent. Whitehead will have to supplement the view with a way of discriminating between things that have relatively the same conformity quotient. That is, suppose A and B are both mostly in conformity with the actual world, but in different ways. What sort of analysis is available to decide which is

³¹⁹ *ibid.*, 314.

the more true? Given Whitehead's fallibilism, which we have already discussed at some length, this is not overly problematic for his scheme. The level of precision is not at all exact and that is the best that can be expected, especially in the realm of ethical considerations. However, it is not a hit or miss exercise. There is a mechanism for deciding at least some of the hard cases. The solution rests in the levels of access to Truth.

In Adventures of Ideas, Whitehead seems to be saying that there are in fact differing types of Truth. I think that though this is the most straightforward reading of the text, it is in fact, wrong. An interpretation that harmonizes Whitehead's statements about Truth in Adventures of Ideas, Process and Reality, and Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect is that, instead of claiming that there are different levels of truth, he is actually claiming that there are different modes of access to the truth, some of which are better than others. That is, some truth-bearers express a better truth-relation; or they express a closer fit between Appearance and Reality. These levels, from lowest to highest, are (1) symbolic truth, (2) healthy sense-perception, and (3) direct intuition or blunt truth. I have assigned these names myself, since Whitehead provides a name for only the first, ("symbolic truth"), and the third, ("blunt truth").

The lowest level of truth Whitehead calls Symbolic Truth.³²⁰ His description of this level is the most extensive, covering a few pages in Adventures of Ideas and the entirety of Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect, to name but two places in which he takes

³²⁰ I designate Symbolic Truth the "lowest level" simply because the correlation between appearance and Reality is most tenuous here. In another sense, it is the highest level as only a fairly small set of extremely complex entities have access to it at all. In this sense,

up the subject. Appearance, at this level, has the least firm grasp of Reality. His primary example of a mode of thought that occupies this level of access is language, particularly as words are assembled to form linguistic propositions.³²¹ The very act of making a propositional statement is an act of selecting certain features of the world to which to give particular attention and de-selecting others. For example, the linguistic proposition “The sum of the squares of the two shorter sides of a right triangle is equal to the square of the hypotenuse,” selects particular features of the world and assumes a particular set of background conditions but de-selects other features. For example, if we take the proposition to be true, then it has been assumed that we are limiting the discussion to Euclidean Geometry. But the Appearance expressed by Euclidean Geometry does not unqualifiedly conform to Reality. Certain features of the actual world are de-selected by the assertion of the proposition - e.g., curvature of space in gravity wells.

Propositions of mathematics are some of the least problematic of the symbolic statements. This is because they prescribe a particular and readily identifiable set of conditions under which they are true. Propositions of common speech are much less likely to be so helpful. The meanings of words, syntax, and grammar are all much less strictly defined. Language can be extremely vague. One example of this vagueness is captured in the following oft-repeated example. Suppose four people witness an

it is higher than all the others.

³²¹ I make a distinction between linguistic propositions and Whiteheadian propositions. The full scope of this distinction will become clearer as this section progresses. However, I feel a brief clarification is necessary here. By “linguistic proposition” I mean those sentences of a language that are commonly called “propositions”. For example, “All bachelors are unmarried.” Whiteheadian propositions are different. A Whiteheadian proposition can best be described as a “lure for feeling”, where “feeling” is

accident. Suppose further that they are all standing beside each other so that each has roughly the same perspective on the event. If questioned separately to determine what occurred, it is likely that there will be four different statements, that each conflict with the others in some particular or another. Now suppose that for person A, all of her statements are combined with “and” operators to form a complex proposition. It will be readily agreed that if our only alternatives are “true” and “false” then the truth-value of the proposition is “false”. But a further problem lies beyond this fairly apparent one. Whatever she says about the event will necessarily be incomplete. Some features will be emphasized in her account and some will be de-emphasized and perhaps ignored. While this may be a case of faulty memory, it also demonstrates the inadequacies of language to accurately and completely express the Reality of the event. This is Whitehead’s point when he says that this type of truth relation is “even vaguer and more indirect” than the others. There is, he claims, an “indirect truth-relation of the sounds or of the visual marks on paper to the propositions conveyed”³²² as well as a further disjunction between the proposition conveyed and the totality of the event as it occurs.

I turn now to the level of truth-relation that I have called “healthy sense-perception”. This moniker is an uncomfortable fit with the way Whitehead describes this level, but I hope that it also captures the kernel of his point. Whitehead claims that “for animals, sense-perception is the culmination of Appearance.”³²³ Of this level, Whitehead writes that “the sense-perception may result from the normal functioning of the healthy

as we have been using it to this point.

³²² *ibid.*, 318-9

³²³ *ibid.*, 314.

animal body.”³²⁴ By “sense-perception” Whitehead seems to mean that the relation between Appearance and Reality is contained in the actual moment of sensation experienced by a percipient. The difference between this level and the preceding, lower level can be captured in a very simple example. Suppose that while walking through the park, I step on a nail that pierces shoe and foot. While I may very eloquently and in the King’s English express the pain experienced, that expression will fail to capture the full experience of the nail in my foot. At the same time, I have a quite accurate grasp of the situation at hand when I step on the nail. I feel its point, I experience its sharpness, and my instantaneous impression of the experience is actually identical with experience itself.

There are two curious things about Whitehead’s description of this level of truth-relation. The first is that he claims that “sense-perception is the culmination of Appearance” and so it might be expected that this level should represent the highest type of truth-relation - “blunt truth”. The fact that this is not the case can be shown by an analysis of the second curious thing about this level of truth-relation; namely that he assigns these sense-perceptions to the “normal functioning of the healthy animal body”. This seems odd for the following reason. Suppose the foregoing example of the nail in the park remains the same with the further addition that I am suffering from walking pneumonia at the time. It seems that the experience is much the same - I still feel the piercing pain in my foot, it is still the nail that is doing the piercing and the facts that my body is not at the moment functioning completely normally nor is it healthy seem of little consequence. In one respect, however, this restriction makes a great deal of sense. It

³²⁴ *ibid.*, 316

seems clear enough that certain conditions will cause the percipient to have an experience that in no way conforms to Reality. A quite obvious example is the well-documented experience of “phantom pain” that often occurs in people who have lost a limb. The individual is in pain, the locus of the pain is identified in the area where a limb would be if it were not missing, and the limb is missing. Clearly, the Appearance is not in conformation with reality. So, it makes sense to include the “normal functioning of the healthy animal body” restriction at this level of truth-relation.

However, this level of truth-relation is not the highest, on Whitehead’s account. Whitehead holds this view because he claims that the truth-relation expressed by “healthy sense-perception” is more indirect than the highest level; it is “wider, vaguer, and more diffuse in its reference.”³²⁵ Consider again the nail in the park. The experience that I have when I step on the nail is one of pain. But that experience is an incomplete representation of the event. While it is true that the pain is not vague at all, in the moment that I step on the nail I do not know that it is a nail; nor do I know much else in the way of details of the event. I know only that I am in pain and that the cause is something quite sharp. However, I may say to myself, “Self, you have just stepped on a nail.” And I may be mistaken. Perhaps I have actually stepped on a long shard of glass from a broken bottle. My thought that I stepped on a nail is not in conformity with Reality.

Consider a further example. Suppose I have been drinking coke with dinner at a restaurant. After I have finished my drink, the waiter comes by and refills my drink, only

³²⁵ *ibid.*, 317

he makes the mistake of filling it with tea. Not noticing the switch, I take a drink. Expecting the sharp taste of carbonation I am instead greeted with a taste of sweet smoothness. However, sometimes the first sip that hits my palate is interpreted not as tea but as coke, perhaps that has gone flat. My tastebuds are functioning perfectly well, but I have a particular expectation that shifts the way my mind interprets the unexpected taste. So, if I interpret the taste as that of a flat coke, my experience of the event (the Appearance) does not coincide with the Reality of the event (I drank tea instead of coke). So, while the truth-relation here is better than the preceding one and represents the “culmination of Appearance”, it still is incomplete and liable to error.

This brings us to the highest level of truth-relation. Whitehead labels this level “direct intuition”. Three implications about this level can be drawn from the foregoing discussions. The first is that this level cannot represent any higher level of Appearance than the “healthy sense-perception” level. That is clear enough since Whitehead states that the “healthy sense-perception” level is the “culmination of Appearance”. The second is that such a statement does not rule out that the level of Appearance expressed at this level of truth-relation is also the “culmination”. That is, both levels could (and I suspect do) maintain the same level of Appearance. Since the world simply is the way the world is, its status is constant through all three levels of truth-relation. Therefore, the higher status accorded this level can not be on account of a grasp of Appearance or a grasp of a different level of Reality. We can thus conclude that this level is accorded its higher status because of the tightness of the conformity between Appearance and Reality. This is the third implication to be drawn from the foregoing discussions.

It is this conclusion (the third implication) that I will explore at greater length. Whitehead offers two examples to illustrate this level - 1) the development of "that smelly feeling" into the "feeling of that smell", and 2) the experience of a nursing infant. The first example concerns the way in which animal experience takes the sensum as a type of subjective feeling and consciousness turns it into a datum. The second, and much more telling and much more difficult, example concerns the qualifications of moods that are just beyond the realm of sensa (he calls this "hovering at the verge of becoming sensa") that actually function as sensa for the infant. I will deal with these in direct order.

Whitehead describes the "tone" of the perception that a percipient has when viewing a green woodland in the spring. He notes that the tone generally carries with it a strong aesthetic quality. The percipient is connected with the perceived object in a direct, immediate manner that is conveyed through the emotional tone of the event. For example, the smell of the green woodland immediately following a sudden spring shower is a singular experience. The human consciousness then grasps that scent as a datum for experience. Several things may be communicated in that moment (e.g., propositions may be coined to describe it, the sense-perception of the scent may be exactly what the "normal and healthy" person would perceive). But whatever else may be communicated in that moment, the experience is also a qualification of subjective feeling. That is, it affects the percipient in an intimate way. As Whitehead says, "The experience starts as that smelly feeling, and is developed by mentality into the feeling of that smell." The percipient has an intimate grasp of Reality or a "direct intuition" of Reality.

This is perhaps more explicitly captured in Whitehead's next example. The experience of nursing a child is quite an intimate one. However, Whitehead is not approaching this example from the perspective of the nursing mother; instead it is from the infant's perspective. He writes,

the emotional moods of love, or gaiety, or depression, or irritation, are directly perceived on the mother's face by the infant, and are responded to. . . . The infant feels its mother's cheerfulness as a datum, and feels it conformally, with that affective tone. . . . For the infant, the Appearance includes the qualification of cheerfulness.³²⁶

Whatever the infant feels, he clearly cannot express as a linguistic proposition; and the event of receiving milk from the mother's breast carries particular sensations of taste, tactility, etc., but is still an incomplete description of the experience. But there is a qualification of mood that "hovers on the verge of becoming sensa" that is different from either of these two things. It has to do with the affective tone of the experience. The mood of the mother is perceived directly by the infant and responded to. This is said to convey a truth-relation "in the fullest sense of the term 'truth'".

Clearly this sort of theory has some difficulties. For one thing, linguistic propositions are truth-bearers, but they are not the only ones. Sense-experience and direct intuitions that are incapable of being adequately expressed as linguistic propositions are bearers of truth as well; and what is more, are considered better truth-bearers than linguistic propositions. They are better for two reasons: 1) they more accurately convey reality and 2) they are more effective lures for feeling. The downside of this view is that analysis becomes somewhat unwieldy. For example, it does not seem

³²⁶ *ibid.*, 315-6.

to make much sense to use the logical connective “and” to conjoin two direct intuitions. Even if one could create such a hybrid, it seems rather straightforwardly true that the resulting hybrid [direct intuition]“and”[direct intuition] is not itself a direct intuition. Consider a direct intuition with the affective tone cheerfulness and another intuition with the affective tone depression. Conjoining these two, even if possible, leaves open the question what sort of affective tone the hybrid would have or if it would have one at all.

A second difficulty is that much of what is commonly considered knowledge seems to rest not on direct intuitions as much as it does on propositional statements. Even Whitehead acknowledges this difficulty when, in the course of the nursing-infant example, he writes “It certainly is in the highest degree improbable that the subtle trains of thought by which our epistemologists obtain their knowledge should have occurred to speechless infants.”³²⁷ Beyond this, if Whitehead’s theory of truth be accepted, we would necessarily consign the “knowledge” of the epistemologists to the lowest level of what would properly be Knowledge.³²⁸ Whitehead seems ready to accept such a result.

The reason for Whitehead’s acceptance of the difficulties that his theory of truth seems to entail is that the theory conforms to common-sense better than its competitors. Logical truth is clearly not what is meant when one lover says to another “I love you,” and the recipient of the amorous profession takes the statement to be true. Indeed, in common parlance, logical truth seems to account for only a slight fraction of the ways in which the word “true” is assigned. Yet, it would be strange indeed to assume that those

³²⁷ *ibid.*, 316.

³²⁸ Note that this means that the lowest level of what would properly be Knowledge is at the highest level of abstraction.

who assign “true” to various things - friendship (a “true” friend), love (“true” love), trajectories (a “true” course), etc., - are simply mistaken or incoherent. As we have already noted in the discussion of Whitehead’s method, the role that common-sense plays in his philosophical speculations is two-fold: first, as the data to be utilized in reasoning and second, as the check on the scheme itself. Whitehead’s theory of truth can be seen as an expression of that checking procedure. It seems that he is striving for an equilibrium between these two poles rather than simply taking common-sense as a point of departure. Thus, one strength of Whitehead’s Theory of Truth is that we can begin to recognize a common thread in the many uses of “true”. Another is that his Theory of Truth is consistent with his philosophical method and aim and with his theory of human nature. The levels of truth-relation have a sort of correspondence with the levels of human intellectual development. I explore this in some detail in the following section.

B. Whitehead’s Theory of Human Nature

Human beings are not necessarily rational beings but rather are beings that are “liable to rationality”. This is so, for Whitehead, because “our consciousness does not initiate our modes of functioning. We awake to find ourselves engaged in process.”³²⁹ This primary type of human state is termed Instinct. For Whitehead, Instinct is a surd of animal existence. It is a drive for food, shelter, and protection. These are the sorts of satisfactions and dissatisfactions in which “we awake”. Instinct is also foundational in another way; it is never wrong. He writes, “there is no sense in which pure instinct can

³²⁹ Whitehead, Adventures of Ideas, 53.

be wrong”.³³⁰ It is important to note that by the same token it is not “right” either. It simply is. In this sense, Instinct can be understood to be something like a natural ground state.

Intelligence is a state that arises from Instinct. This, indeed, is one of the “effects” of symbolism, on Whitehead’s view. He writes “symbolic expression affords a foothold for reason by its delineation of the particular instinct which it expresses.”³³¹ Thus, for Whitehead, intelligence delineates particular instincts and classifies and communicates these classifications by use of symbols – language, etc. Which is to say that symbolism (language, etc.) makes it possible to communicate and thus for intelligence to arise from the foundation of instinct. Intelligence integrates and develops modes of communication, literature, critical thought, systematic thought, mathematical symbolism, and improved technology. In short, intelligence is a coming to understand ways in which we can shape the environment within which we have awakened.

Whitehead’s tripartite description of human nature can be summarized in the following way:

- (1) There is brute Instinct, which is never wrong.
- (2) Symbolism facilitates the movement from Instinct to Intelligence.
- (3) Intelligence differentiates the particular instincts with symbolic analysis.

This should not be understood to be infallible. While “pure instinct” can never be wrong, the analysis can be faulty, which is to say that “symbolically conditioned action

³³⁰ Whitehead, Symbolism, 81.

³³¹ *ibid.*, 70.

can be wrong".³³² If brute Instinct provides the foundation and Intelligence delineates the particular instincts, then it is Wisdom that discriminates between the particular instincts that are partitioned by intelligence. Wisdom, which involves the persistent pursuit of deeper understanding, ever confronting intellectual systems with the importance of its omissions, is the culmination of character. That is, the wise person recognizes the fallibility of human reasoning, that "symbolically conditioned action can be wrong." As a result, she is not content with superficial analysis. She understands that speculative schemes, however rooted in observation, always omit facts (and with those facts, values). Further, she recognizes that such omissions are ultimately fatal to the complete adequacy of an intellectual system, whether it be quantum mechanics or moral theory. The wise person pursues ever-deeper penetration of understanding in the forward-looking service of Harmony.

In summary, on Whitehead's view, human nature has three character states: Instinct, Intelligence, and Wisdom. The wise person will possess all three as actualities and the intelligent person will possess two actually and one potentially. Instinct is the ground state of all human beings; Intelligence arises from Instinct; and Wisdom can develop from these.

Whitehead introduces another distinction that will be helpful; the distinction between a 'subject' and a 'superject'. This distinction is made in conjunction with a fairly traditional conception of 'object'. The 'subject' is the actual entity that is actually experiencing. An 'object' is an entity, either eternal object, actual entity or proposition,

³³² *ibid.*, 81.

that is internally distinct from the subject but which is experienced, either positively or negatively, by the subject. It is the ‘datum’ which the subject experiences. It is, in a sense, the correlation to the conception of the ‘individual that endures through time.’³³³ The actual entity concresces or comes to be and then perishes. Upon perishing, it becomes an object for all subsequent actual entities. Whitehead uses “superject” to call attention to the *objective* character of the actual entity after it has come to be.

It should be noted that the internal constitution of the society in question plays a role in determining which possibilities can actually be prehended positively within each succeeding concrescence. For example, the society that is a dog cannot select to incorporate into its internal constitution the eternal object ‘wall’. This selection would be inconsistent with the conjunctions of actual entities and eternal objects that compose the dog. At the same time, the dog can choose to relate itself more closely to one or the other of the couple whose dog it is. This selection will in some sense determine the society of actual occasions which comprise the dog, but in no way does it preclude the dog from de-selecting the selection in favor of another at some point in the future. This *self-creative* process belongs to the superject of the subject’s experiences.³³⁴

From this perspective, what then is the *Self*? In the Process model that Whitehead develops, the Self is constantly in flux, never fixed or complete. It is a continual process

³³³ Whitehead, Process and Reality, 29ff.

³³⁴ Although much of Whitehead’s formulation concerns constituent parts, he actually approaches the discussion beginning with the superject of the experiences, that is, with the completed actual entity. **Only then** can the constituent parts be examined, and then **only** in the context of the whole. (Whitehead, Process and Reality, 23) Indeed, the very name that Whitehead gives to his speculative scheme, the “philosophy of organism”, gives this method of examination away. For Whitehead, proper analysis always begins

of becoming. Or, as Young puts it, the Self is “a manifestation of emerging possibilities, continually being born and perishing.”³³⁵ It is not possible for a Self to be completely distinct from the world around it. Indeed, “to exist as a self is always to be related, first of all, to the intimate world constituted by one’s own body.”³³⁶ A self is a particular temporally ordered society of individuals that is in the process of becoming by creating itself anew each moment. The approach to understanding the self is reversed from the more traditional view of beginning with component parts and constructing the whole.

Whitehead’s system, within which is his conception of the Self, is not without controversy. The change in perspective from analysis of constituent parts to analysis in terms of the constituted whole is actually a fairly radical shift. But, as Hartshorne has noted, Whitehead did not choose this paradigm shift because he was ignorant of other options or because he was “inattentive to its alternatives.”³³⁷ Rather, he chose it precisely because those alternatives, attempted almost exclusively from Parmenides forward, have failed to account for basic intuitions about the human condition and reality. Whitehead believes, and I think rightly so, that the paradigm shift which he advocates suggests a profitable way of exploring questions of personhood and freedom which is unavailable in the more traditional approaches. Having explored the background, we can now turn to Whitehead’s view of the constitution of virtue.

with the organism as a whole before exploring the constituent parts, if any..

³³⁵ Henry Young, Hope in Process, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 57.

³³⁶ Schubert Ogden, The Reality of God, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977), 57.

³³⁷ Charles Hartshorne, “Whitehead’s Metaphysics”, Whitehead and the Modern World, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1950) 27, 38-40.

C. The Constitution of Virtue

To summarize, Whitehead takes experience to be primitive and moral tenor to arise from experience by direct intuition. Duty, then, operates on the content provided by experience and the attendant intuitions and is in turn confirmed and verified by further experience and intuition. Moral virtue, like all excellences, will be excellent relative to the Harmony it expresses. Further, the development of character involves the development or acquisition of virtue and the virtuous person is the one whose character expresses Harmony to a high degree. Some of the conditions necessary for character development are Truth and Freedom which are themselves defined, or “bounded,” by Harmony. Harmony itself is not a virtue; neither are Truth or Freedom. This is not to say that Truth and Freedom are not good, but simply that they do not refer to states of character.

Whitehead thinks that there is a virtue that is directly related to Harmony and promotes Freedom. Wisdom is that virtue and it is the highest virtue. Indeed, for Whitehead, Wisdom is “that virtue directly derived from the source of all harmony.”³³⁸ Wisdom is the excellence that marks the pinnacle of human nature. As already noted, Whitehead takes that nature to be tripartite, consisting of Instinct, Intelligence, and Wisdom.

1. Wisdom and Intelligence

That Instinct, Intelligence and Wisdom are states of character is apparent from Whitehead’s treatment of the three examples: the Wise person, the Sceptic, and the

Intolerant person. Each possesses both of the first two states. The first state of character is clearly not a virtue because it is not an excellence. The second state of character is not a virtue, though it is beneficial to its possessor and necessary for virtue. Only Wisdom is a state of character expressing virtue, on Whitehead's view. This is because Wisdom is the culmination of human nature. I will first show the distinction between Intelligence and Wisdom and then turn to an analysis of Whitehead's account of the constitution of virtue. This distinction will be important later.

Whitehead writes that people "are driven by their thoughts as well as by the molecules in their bodies, by intelligence and by senseless forces."³³⁹ He also makes a stronger claim. On his view, "The worth of men consists in their liability to persuasion. They can persuade and can be persuaded by the disclosure of alternatives, the better and

³³⁸ Whitehead, Adventures of Ideas, 75.

³³⁹ Ibid., 53. For the purposes of this paper, we can understand Whitehead as using "reason" and "intelligence" interchangeably here. In the main, this is not true, or at least not completely without controversy. For Whitehead, Reason has two aspects. That is to say, there is the Reason "shared with the Gods" and the reason "shared with the foxes". (Whitehead, The Function of Reason) For a full treatment of this aspect of Whitehead's thought, see "Reason and the Claim of Ulysses: A Comparative Study of Two Rationalists, Blanshard and Whitehead" by Donald Sherburne, and Brand Blanshard's Reason and Goodness. It will suffice here to give a brief analysis. Reason "shared with the Gods" is directed at ends and ideals that are beyond the necessities requisite for survival. The reason "shared with the foxes" is exemplified, for Whitehead, by Odysseus as he cagily contends with the gods to survive and complete his journey home. A. H. Johnson, in "Whitehead's Philosophy of Civilization" has argued that the two "reasons" are different and that intelligence is a third thing that is descriptive in nature. That is, it amounts to knowledge of some subject matter or other. It is my view (and Sherburne's and Kenneth Merrill's) that there is only one Reason, which has two poles that are inseparable. Further, it seems that intelligence (or perhaps more properly "insight", though Whitehead does not use that word) is the descriptive function of reason and foresight is the normative one. Overall, this seems more consistent with Whiteheadian usage of the terms, in my opinion.

the worse.”³⁴⁰ One issue, then, is the use of that intelligence. He writes that “the folly of intelligent people has precipitated many catastrophes.”³⁴¹

A reminder of Whitehead’s view of Freedom will be useful at this point. We have seen that Freedom, particularly the freedom of individuals, is necessary for the development of civilized societies. Civilized individuals also are required for civilization. This is so because they possess a state of character (Wisdom) that is related to Harmony and that promotes Freedom. The question to be asked now is “Is Intelligence also a state of character that promotes Freedom?” For Whitehead, the answer is “not necessarily”. In showing how he arrives at this answer, we will see how the two (Wisdom and Intelligence) are distinct, one virtuous and the other not.

We have the following, so far:

- (1) At least one type of character (the type directly related to Harmony) promotes Freedom.
- (2) Wisdom is directly related to Harmony.

On Whitehead’s view, two types of character fail to promote freedom. These two are the Sceptic and the Intolerant person. The Sceptic fails to promote freedom because he despairs of “attaining any measure of truth”.³⁴² The Sceptic referred to here is the extreme sceptic who holds that “the order and connection of ideas” is very radically different from “the order and connection of things.”³⁴³ Rightly or not, Whitehead takes

³⁴⁰ Whitehead, Adventures of Ideas, 90.

³⁴¹ *ibid.*, 55.

³⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 59.

³⁴³ A.D. Ritchie, “Defence of Speculative Reason”, The Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, Paul Arthur Schilpp, ed., (New York: Tudor Publishing, 1951), 341.

Hume to be a sceptic of this sort. For Whitehead, such scepticism will not promote freedom precisely because it despairs of ideas (like Freedom) having any relationship to the world.

The Intolerant person fails because he is immune to persuasion when presented with counterevidence to his own view. Here, Whitehead thinks that a character of Intolerance will detract from freedom rather than promote it because the Intolerant person will not recognize even the freedom of others to disagree with him. While this looks a bit strawy at first, Whitehead suggests that a case of such a person is John Milton who despite "all his equipment of imagination, learning, and literary magnificence in defence of freedom," probably does "as much to retard the cause as to advance it. He promotes a frame of mind of which the issue is intolerance." Not surprisingly, Whitehead also finds the Intolerant character all too prevalent in institutions like the Church.

Now, there is no reason to suppose that Whitehead holds the Sceptic and the Intolerant person to be lacking in intelligence. Indeed, at least the Sceptic may be quite intelligent. Though Whitehead is very critical of Hume for his scepticism, he at no time denigrates his intelligence. So, we now add the following:

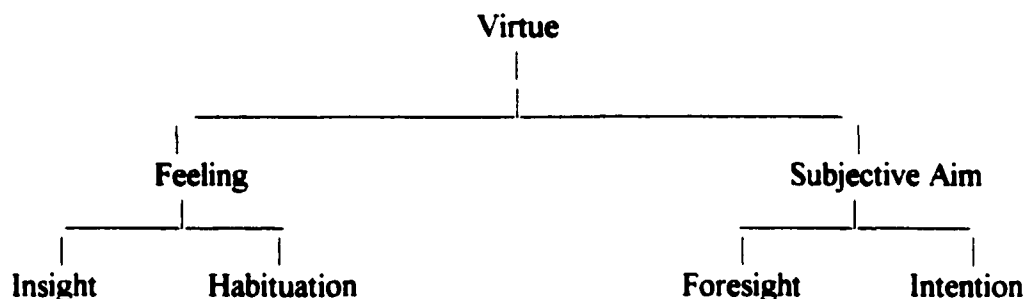
- (3) The Sceptical and the Intolerant characters do not produce Freedom.
- (4) Failure to promote Freedom is not a deficiency in intelligence (at least the Sceptic is intelligent) but a deficiency in character.
- (5) Thus, Wisdom promotes Freedom [from (2)] while Intelligence need not [from (3) and (4)].

(6) Thus, of the two states of character (Wisdom and Intelligence), Wisdom is the virtue.

Intelligence a necessary condition of Wisdom. With this distinction in mind, we turn now to the analysis of the constitution of virtue.

2. The Constitution and Acquisition of Virtue

There is no place within the corpus where Whitehead specifically delineates the constitution of a virtue, per se. However, what he says about the various necessary aspects of virtue at various places in the corpus can be collected to provide a more complete picture of what it is for a trait to be a virtue and how one goes about acquiring it. In general, I take it to be Whitehead's view that a virtue is constituted by two aspects. The first aspect, I will call "Feeling" and the second, "Subjective Aim" and I will address these in this order. Each of the two aspects has two components - a descriptive, backward-looking element and an active, forward-looking one. Feeling is constituted by the descriptive component, "Insight", and the active one, "Habituation"; Subjective Aim by its descriptive aspect, "Foresight", and its active one, "Intention".



a. Feeling and Insight

One of the difficulties students of Whitehead encounter when they first begin to explore Whitehead's thought is his daunting and often highly technical vocabulary. Another related difficulty is his use of the secondary meanings for terms. An example of this latter difficulty concerns the word "feeling". The word "feeling" is not meant to convey the somewhat hazy sense of emotions of love or hatred which are often popularly associated with the use of "feeling". Instead, for Whitehead, one use of "feeling" is to convey the sense of "having a feel **for** something." For example, an excellent mechanic is said to have a feel for automotive maintenance or an artist may be said to have a feel for conveying the angst of life. In both cases, the possibility of a strong emotional attachment to the object of study may be present. However, in Whitehead's sense, such an attachment is not necessary to have a feel **for** the object. This use of the word "feeling", though clearly a secondary sense of the word in popular parlance, does bring out a common understanding of what it means to have insight. For example, the painting *Guernica* is a reflection of the deep insight Pablo Picasso had into the fear, death, and destruction during and following Franco's bombing of the town. It is such insight that forms one aspect of "feeling".³⁴⁴

Whitehead rarely uses the word "insight" but he uses similar words to describe the experience. One of those we have already encountered, "intelligence". This he uses

³⁴⁴ One danger in focusing too heavily on the use of feeling as having a "feel" for something is that this use tends to suggest a level of consciousness on the part of the feeling agent that Whitehead does not intend. For Whitehead, "feeling" need not involve consciousness at all. In fact, it usually does not. For example, the mercury in the thermometer feels the ambient air. Thanks to Dr. Merrill for the example.

most often in The Function of Reason. Another that he uses more often in Process and Reality and Symbolism captures the descriptive function of insight more readily. There Whitehead uses “penetration” to express the grasp of the student of the data of sense perception or of experience. A student of a particular subject, say mathematics, may have only superficial acquaintance with the subject matter. Such a student is not the person to ask for an explanation of the importance of the differences between Riemannian and Euclidean geometries. The student will not know the relevant options available or what selections should be taken from the data presented him as background, or how to present the correct selections even if he were lucky enough to stumble upon them. However, a student with great penetration of the subject will be exactly the person to ask such questions.³⁴⁵ Whitehead extends this metaphor to the whole of the

³⁴⁵ It would be interesting to the character of the reflection that is necessary for penetration of the subject matter. I suspect that Whitehead has something like what I will anachronistically call a Modified Flanagan View in mind. (See Owen Flanagan’s Self-Expression. Suffice it to say here that Flanagan holds that agents need not always possess the ability to describe their motives or the virtue in question with high levels of articulacy; although it may be necessary in some cases.) That is to say, some disciplines will require considerable ability on the part of the student to articulate the most minute of details. Geometry, for example, would be one of these. On the other hand, a mechanic may very well have a feel for her work but not know the equations that govern the chemical reactions of a catalytic converter, for example. Further, it does not look like she would need to know such things to be able to know why the engine does not work and what it will take to make it purr like a kitten. Further still, it does not seem that she would need to be able to articulate her feel for the ins and outs of automobile maintenance and repair. Still, that feel is surely the product of practice and considerable insight into the object of her study. I call this a Modified Flanagan because Taylor-like articulacy is not necessary, in principle, for all virtues. (For a discussion of Charles Taylor’s view of articulation, see his Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity). Suffice it to say here that Taylor holds that the agent, to possess any virtue, must be able to articulate their motive desires and the character of the virtue at a fairly high level of sophistication.) It may be necessary in some cases and not necessary at others. But this is precisely the view that I think Whitehead would want to have because

educational process in The Aims of Education. In Process and Reality, Whitehead connects this conception of penetration or insight to morality.

The selectiveness of individual experience is moral so far as it conforms to the balance of importance disclosed in the rational vision; and conversely the conversion of the intellectual insight into an emotional force corrects the sensitive experience in the direction of morality. The correction is in proportion to the rationality of the insight.³⁴⁶

Here, the student has as data to be selected her own individual experiences. The student with insight will be closer to mastery of knowledge for she will know the relevant experiences to incorporate into a decision about action.³⁴⁷

of his views about Harmony. There is no reason to suppose that articulacy could not also be part of the proportionality to be preserved. That is, Whitehead could say that the level of articulacy required for virtue is that level which stands in a proper proportion relationship to the virtue itself. There is then no reason to assume *a priori* that a high level of articulacy is required for each and every virtue.

³⁴⁶ Whitehead, Process and Reality, 15.

³⁴⁷ Whitehead here endorses a traditional Platonic and Aristotelian sort of view about the relationship between knowledge and virtue. Since Insight is a necessary condition for virtue and since Insight is closely related to intelligence, it is impossible for one to acquire a virtue without having first the relevant knowledge. Indeed, for Whitehead, even virtues like Humility or Tolerance are rooted in knowledge. In the first case, humility is something like epistemological humility before the fact of human fallibility. It is not the self-negating sort of humility against which I have argued strenuously, if not always well, in the past. In fact, it does not look like humility is possible without knowledge. Suppose that a person appears humble but does not know why he possesses the attitude that he does (perhaps he possesses a state of character that issues in actions that resemble humble actions in all the relevant particulars but his state of character was acquired as a defense mechanism or as a way in which he can get by in the world or as a result of abuse and further that he does not know the difference between the humble character and the character he possesses). Such a case is not humility. Instead, it is a product of Instinct that has not been reflected on. It looks like for humility to be a virtue, it must involve an accurate assessment of the facts and a recognition that even with strenuous analysis, human beings sometimes get things wrong. It is precisely this sort of recognition that also gives rise to Tolerance, which Whitehead also counts as a virtue, but which is limited by that very sort of strenuous assessment of the facts in any given case.

b. Feeling and Habituation

The dependence of virtue on habituation is yet another place where Whitehead's view seems reminiscent of Aristotle. For Whitehead, a person gains initial insight into a situation merely by having experiences. However, this type of "insight" would be highly superficial and so not productive of virtue. Thus, it would seem that insight must come in degrees, which is consistent with his contention that insight can correct sense experience "in proportion to the rationality of the insight". One deepens insight by practice and habituation.

On Whitehead's view, there are no brute matters of fact that can be understood "apart from interpretation as an element of experience."³⁴⁸ This is true of all experience and as noted above, there is no guarantee that the interpretation of the experience will be accurate. Indeed, even in the natural sciences, human beings experience failure and success in the "enterprise of interpretation". Indeed, Whitehead says that "our habitual experience is a complex" of just such success and failures.³⁴⁹ If this is so in matters of science and interpretation of data, it is just as surely true in matters of virtue. Whitehead writes,

The condition for excellence is a thorough training in technique. Sheer skill must pass out of the sphere of conscious exercise, and must have assumed the character of unconscious habit. The first, the second, and the third condition for high achievement is scholarship, in that enlarged sense including knowledge and acquired instinct controlling action.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁸ Whitehead, Process and Reality, 14.

³⁴⁹ *ibid.*, 15.

³⁵⁰ *ibid.*, 338.

Thus, it is clear that on Whitehead's view of the first aspect of virtue (the Feeling aspect), both "insight" and "habituation" are necessary.

c. Subjective Aim and Foresight

The concept of a Subjective Aim is one step removed from Whitehead's ontological primitives of subject and object. Every actual entity is a subject of experience. Here again, an analogy might be of help. Suppose a person has the experience of tasting a blueberry, it is that person and no other who is the subject of that discrete experience and no other. Further, that blueberry in question and no other has the experience of being eaten by that person in that instant and as such is the subject of the experience of being eaten. Every actual entity is also an object in experience; that is to say, the blueberry is the object experienced by the person and the person is an object experienced by the blueberry. Every actual entity is both subject and object.³⁵¹

³⁵¹ There is one grave difficulty with this analogy - it does not capture a key component of Whitehead's view. For Whitehead, blueberries and people are not actual entities, but rather are enduring objects. Whitehead is not always extremely careful with the distinction, but it is an important one. The danger with using ordinary objects to stand in the places of actual entities in the analogy is that one loses the temporal element of the relationship. That is, actual entity A experiences actual entity B, first as a subjective prehension and then as a conceptual one (as described above). However, A experiences B always as an object. Thus, B is in the causal past of A. Similarly, the A experienced by B is an object, and thus in the causal past of B. So, to say that every actual entity is both subject and object is right in a sense. However, the further comment needs to be added, every actual entity is both subject and object, but not at the same time and/or in the same respect. The problem with glossing temporality, as the above analogy does, is that by "actual entity" Whitehead means to emphasize the *acting* of the entity; that is, its becoming and its temporality as an event. "Actual entity" is a theoretical notion that is intended to help make sense of our experience in the world. However, we do not encounter actual entities themselves, but objects in our causal past. With the analogy, I mean to convey something of a Whiteheadian spirit, though it is not strictly an example to which he would give approval.

Subjective aim is at the next level of analysis. In a move that looks much like Aristotle's natural teleology, every actual entity has a goal or end. One thing that distinguishes this view from Aristotle's is that the end or aim is not construed by Whitehead as a cause in the same way that it is for Aristotle. For Whitehead, every actual entity possesses a subjective aim (an end) in virtue of being a subject. This is so because every actual entity is a subject, for itself, which holds the world external to itself, including its own past, as object. Given foregoing discussions, it should suffice here to make two brief points: (1) at the higher levels of mentality, e.g., the level of human beings, the subjective aim looks very much like what is commonly called "intention", and (2) every society has a subjective aim. (2) is equally true for a blueberry or a human being.³⁵² However, the quality of the subjective aim is quite different. The subjective aim of a blueberry is to be a blueberry. The individual human being, however, has some say into what her subjective aim will be. This is within limits. For example, the gourmet chef cannot decide that she will become a moonrock, at least not intelligibly. However, the gourmet chef may very well decide that her goal in life is to become a great novelist.

Subjective aim in human beings can be analyzed in two ways; foresight and intention. Both are necessary for a person to attain the highest virtue. Knowledge is gained through the exercise of Feeling (Insight and Habituation). But mastery of

³⁵² Once again, I use a set of enduring objects as analogues to actual entities. The reason I use it here is that in the case of ordinary objects like human beings, the ordinary object is a society of actual entities with a personal order. While the actual entities that comprise the society each have ends - namely, their own satisfaction or completion - so do societies like human beings and blueberries. As it is human virtue in which we are interested, using the analogy in a Whiteheadian spirit is more helpful to the overall cause of the project.

knowledge is only gained through the enhancement of Subjective Aim (Foresight and Intention). That the two, Wisdom and Knowledge, are not co-extensive is clear enough on Whitehead's view. He writes,

though knowledge is one chief aim of intellectual education, there is another ingredient, vaguer but greater, and more dominating in its importance. The ancients called it 'wisdom'. You cannot be wise without some basis of knowledge: but you may easily acquire knowledge and remain bare of wisdom.³⁵³

I turn now to the first aspect of the Subjective Aim. On Whitehead's view, human beings are ignorant of the future; ignorant of cosmic happenings, ignorant of the future of life on earth, ignorant of the "term set for our own life". However, this ignorance is not complete. It is not the ignorance of "blank absence of knowledge". People can and do make accurate predictions about the future based on past and present experience. This is clearly the case in science, where progress depends, in large part, upon the appropriate use of scientific induction and predictions to advance and test hypotheses, respectively. On Whitehead's view, it is no less true in the arena of human interaction that an analogue of scientific induction is both appropriate and required.³⁵⁴

Infallibility of foresight is as unavailable to human beings in personal conduct as infallibility of scientific knowledge. In short, Whitehead's view is that LaPlace was wrong regarding the natural order and analogously, any sort of Hari Seldon-like knowledge of the future of human conduct is impossible.³⁵⁵ What is possible is a much

³⁵³ Whitehead, Aims of Education, 30.

³⁵⁴ Whitehead, Adventures of Ideas, 94.

³⁵⁵ LaPlace, of course, is the great 19th-century French mathematician and pioneer of probability theory who held the view that the world is absolutely determined by laws of nature which can be known, in theory if not in practice. He held the view that should someone know every bit of data, the direction of force vectors, and the complete concept

more limited activity. Human beings can, in fact, predict some future events with fairly reliable accuracy. For example, the husband who knows that his wife's favorite dish is jambalaya can reasonably predict the reaction that his wife will have when she arrives home to find that he has prepared the dish to surprise her. Will his prediction be right every time? Of course not and Whitehead does not suppose that it will. He writes that the basis for the "defect in foresight is our scant knowledge of the relevant detailed facts in past and present."³⁵⁶ This is a defect that can only be partially overcome. Thus, he is committed to the much more limited claim that people can and do make predictions and that those predictions can be and often are correct.

The question then becomes, what sort of conditions are required to explain this phenomenon. Whitehead notes that "our ignorance is suffused with Foresight". The basis of this foresight is both Insight and selection. The first of these has been addressed above, though I will say a bit more here. On Whitehead's view, Insight is the easier of the tasks. Collection of past and present data is considerably easier than knowing which of these data are relevant to any given situation at hand. For Whitehead, the fact that Foresight is dependent on Insight is obvious and incontrovertible. The assumption that

of every substance, one could predict infallibly the entirety of the future. He also supposed that it was not theoretically impossible for finite, temporal beings to have such grasp. Hari Seldon, Isaac Asimov's central character in the Foundation trilogy, is modeled after LaPlace's superhuman calculator. Seldon is a "psychological-historian" who has a complete understanding of the physical and psychological forces that drive human beings to action. With this knowledge, he predicts correctly the actions of people hundreds of years into the future. Seldon exemplifies what might be termed absolute foresight. For LaPlace, such foresight is possible. It is unclear whether Asimov holds that such foresight is possible or not, though Seldon is clearly the hero of the Trilogy. That such foresight could be possessed is the sort of view that Whitehead takes pains to deny is possible.

anyone, devoid of personal experience, might provide detailed and useful suggestions for conduct is foolish. He writes, “there is no substitute for first-hand practice.”³⁵⁷

Of the second of the tasks, Whitehead is committed to the view that Foresight requires the “due emphasis on relevant facts from which the future is to emerge”.³⁵⁸ Thus, foresight is not just the possession of the right information for addressing the right situation at the right time, it is also the ability to determine the right way of selecting from the data so as to bring about the right outcome. The habitual selection of the relevant data in experience results from a practiced character that has come to understand human conduct, one’s own and others’. That is, foresight is a habit.

Here, Whitehead carves out a niche for philosophy. The role of philosophy, for Whitehead, is to hone the habit; or as Whitehead writes, it is “an attempt to clarify those fundamental beliefs which finally determine the emphasis of attention that lies at the base of character.”³⁵⁹ He expands this view by claiming that “In philosophy, the fact, the theory, the alternatives, and the ideal, are weighed together. Its [philosophy’s] gifts are insight and foresight, and a sense of the worth of life, in short, that sense of importance which nerves all civilized effort.”³⁶⁰

The next question that we should ask “How is foresight possible?” Whitehead writes:

Foresight depends upon understanding. In practical affairs it is a habit. But the habit of foreseeing is elicited by the habit of understanding. To a large extent,

³⁵⁶ Whitehead, Adventures of Ideas, 94.

³⁵⁷ *ibid.*

³⁵⁸ *ibid.*

³⁵⁹ *ibid.*, 105.

³⁶⁰ *ibid.*

understanding can be acquired by a conscious effort and it can be taught. Thus the training of Foresight is by the medium of Understanding. Foresight is the product of Insight.³⁶¹

This begins to address the question, but is somewhat incomplete. It seems that the “How possible?” question goes beyond the fact that foresight is a habit to ask how it is that such a habit can be acquired. Here, Whitehead depends on an understanding of human interest. People can be forced to do something or they can be coaxed into doing it. On Whitehead's view, interest can be stimulated by “birch rods or pleasurable activity”. Or, in other words, one can be forced or persuaded. As we have already noted, the value of a human being lies in her ability to persuade and be persuaded. Given this view, it should not be surprising that Whitehead sides with the persuasiveness of coaxing over the coercion of the birch rod. Indeed, Whitehead holds that “the natural mode” toward self-development is enjoyment, not coercion. Whitehead then explicates the extent to which he understands the natural mode to be operative.

The infant is lured to adapt itself to its environment by its love of its mother and its nurse; we eat because we like a good dinner; we subdue the forces of nature because we have been lured to discovery by an insatiable curiosity; we enjoy exercise; and we enjoy the unchristian passion of hating our dangerous enemies. Undoubtedly pain is one subordinate means of arousing an organism to action. But it only supervenes on the failure of pleasure. Joy is the normal healthy spur for the *élan vital*. I am not maintaining that we can safely abandon ourselves to the allurements of the greater immediate joys. What I do mean is that we should seek to arrange the development of character along a path of natural activity, in itself pleasurable.³⁶²

Here, then, we see that for Whitehead, foresight has its roots in the most primitive lures that draw individuals into the future - the lure of love, of discovery, or joy. How the lure

³⁶¹ *ibid.*, 95.

³⁶² Whitehead, Aims of Education, 31.

is then accepted is of central concern. Just any old “abandonment” of self to alluring alternatives is not appropriate. Rather, foresight requires selectiveness of the proper lures at the proper times and in the proper ways. These “lures” are then understood to be proper insofar as they play a role in the development of the character of the individual.³⁶³ So, foresight is a matter of character.

Whitehead’s conception of Foresight begins to shade into what we have called Wisdom, though there remains one final aspect to be discussed. It is to Intention that I now turn.

d. Subjective Aim and Intention

It is a bit artificial to separate Foresight and Intention completely. This is so because they are fairly closely bound up together. But, while both are forward looking and both are required for wisdom, in particular, and for virtue, in general, it is also clear that they play distinct roles in Whitehead’s analysis.

Foresight, like its counterpart, Insight, is descriptive. The latter involves keen analysis of the past and present; the former involves competent, if fallible, selection of the options in the present for future exemplification. Habituation and Intention are active. The former cultivates Insight. The latter provides direction for Foresight. By

³⁶³ One thing that Whitehead seems to have in mind here is close to the distinction that Frankfurt makes between the person who is a robust self and the wanton. [Frankfurt, “Freedom of the will and the concept of a person”, The importance of what we care about, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 11-25.] The wanton, in Whiteheadian terms, would not be able to discriminate, in any effective second-order way, between the different alluring aspects of his surroundings. The person who possesses a robust self would be able to discriminate between the things which lure but are either not promotive of self-development or are only of limited value and those things which would promote full self-development.

Intention, Whitehead does not mean anything particularly different from more contemporary philosophical usage. For Whitehead, Intention amounts to the “directive agency” of the individual agent.³⁶⁴ That is, Intention is the cognitively held desire to become what the agent presently is not and to bring about that which is not yet actual.

The difference between Foresight and Intention becomes clearer by examining their influence on virtue. Suppose there are three people, Ralph, Dick, and Jane. Ralph possesses the first aspect of virtue (Feeling) but does not have the ability to figure out which of the options available to him will bring about the right outcome. This is, he does not possess adequate Foresight. Dick and Jane possess both Feeling (in both its aspects) and Foresight (possession of the right information for addressing the right situation at the right time, along with the ability to determine the right way of selecting from the data so as to bring about the right outcome).

Ralph is not virtuous on Whitehead’s account. When Ralph acts, those outcomes which happen to be the right ones for the given situation will be the result of luck, not of Foresight.

Let us assume that Dick acts intentionally to bring about the right outcome and Jane acts intentionally to thwart it or to bring about some evil end. That Dick is virtuous is already established by hypothesis (she possesses all of the aspects of virtue). Jane is the more difficult case. I claim that Jane is not virtuous because, for some reason or other, she does not possess the proper intent. We might suppose that she is quite good at analyzing a given situation; so good, in fact, that no relevant option escapes her notice.

³⁶⁴ Whitehead, Process and Reality, 108.

Clearly, such adeptness at analysis can only be the product of habituation. To this point, Dick and Jane are identical. They differ in intent. Dick intends to bring about those outcomes that will tend toward Harmony, and Jane intends those outcomes which will tend toward Disharmony. Indeed, Jane will be able to select those options which will result in ever greater disharmony, characterized by Whitehead first as tragedy and then as evil.

That such a scenario is possible follows from Whitehead's insistence that both positive **and** negative outcomes are presented to the agent as persuasive lures. In addition to experiencing the enjoyment of love and curiosity, we also experience the lure of the "unchristian passion" of hatred. If then Jane's intentions are evil and she has Foresight, she will be more capable of bringing her evil intentions to fruition. Indeed, Jane may very well be quite clever and adept at bringing about those consequences that her desires. But Jane is clearly not virtuous even though she possesses Insight that has been honed through Habituation and Foresight.

On this account the importance of proper Intention for attaining virtue becomes clearer. Virtue is Intention, fully supported by keen Insight and Foresight, and directed at Harmony. The fully integrated state of character that expresses Harmony is called Wisdom, the highest virtue.

e. Conclusion

In conclusion, Whitehead's conception of virtue intimately involves his views of Harmony and human nature. Virtue is an excellence, and in human beings is an excellence of character. Further, that excellence of character will be excellent in virtue of

its expression of Harmony. Virtue has four components: Feeling and Insight, Foresight and Intention. This constellation of connected views allows Whitehead to account for the gradations of states of character, from vicious to virtuous. It also allows Whitehead to distinguish between Wisdom and Intelligence. In short, Whitehead seems to have a coherent account of virtue and how it is that agents become virtuous agents.

D. Whitehead's Cardinal Virtues

Having discussed the constitution and acquisition of virtue, the theory of human nature underlying the theory of the constitution and acquisition of virtue, and the theory of truth that underpins the entire exercise, it is time now to examine briefly some of the virtues themselves. Unfortunately, Whitehead never enumerates the states of character he considered virtues. This means we are left to construct a catalogue of virtues from arguments, fragments, and comments scattered throughout the corpus. One of the virtues, obviously, is Wisdom, and Intelligence is the pre-virtuous state of character that precedes it.³⁶⁵ The remainder of Whitehead's catalogue of Cardinal Virtues is as follows: Peace, Sympathy, Tolerance, and Beauty. I will treat these in this order, paying particular attention to the rather unorthodox construction of each of the virtue concepts and considering how the particular conception fits into Whitehead's larger ethical scheme.³⁶⁶

³⁶⁵ The inclusion of Wisdom is not at all surprising since those Whitehead follows (e.g., Plato, Aristotle) include some notion of Wisdom as not only a virtue, but a Cardinal virtue - a class of virtues at the pinnacle of a hierarchy of virtue. Whitehead, too, places Wisdom at the summit of virtue. However, this is also where he parts company with his ancient counterparts.

³⁶⁶ In the foregoing discussion of the Constitution and Acquisition of Virtue I used the ultimate virtue, Wisdom, as my example and so will not treat it extensively here.

1. Peace

One of the more obscure virtues is in fact one of the most important in the overall development of character. Whitehead's discussion of Peace is obscure not because of a lack of clarity, but because the analysis focuses on Peace as a description of a state of character and not as a description of a relation between individuals, states, or nations. Commonly, "peace" is used to denote a lack of hostility between two discrete entities, say India and Pakistan. This use, however common, brings with it some disquiet because it seems that "peace" ought to refer to something beyond a mere absence of violence. Martin Luther King, Jr., echoing the Hebrew prophet Amos, points out the difficulty of conceiving "peace" in purely negative terms. On his account, "peace is not the absence of violence, it is the presence of justice." Whatever the merits of his conception, there seem to be underlying aspects of the view that are more generally recognized - 1) it is not possible to adequately capture what is meant by "peace" in purely negative terms and 2) "peace" is properly used to describe relations between two or more entities, whether they be governments and governments, governments and citizens, and/or citizens and citizens, etc. Both of these commitments express fairly common intuitions.

Whitehead mines a more obscure intuition; namely that "peace" can properly refer to a state of character without reference to any person or relation external to the individual under consideration. For example, a person may be said to be a peaceful individual. Whitehead further suggests that the same two intuitions to which "peace" refers in external relations can, *mutatis mutandis*, be maintained on his view of Peace within an individual. In his explication of this virtue, Whitehead follows Plato. In the

Republic, there is the famous Platonic example of the charioteer with two horses, one light, the other dark.³⁶⁷ In the example, destruction of the self is the result when any element of the team other than the charioteer controls the team. Plato uses the example to connect intuitions about the proper functioning of the ideal city with the functioning of the soul of the virtuous person.

For Whitehead, Peace is the self-control exemplified by the virtuous charioteer, but it is only a start. One element of Peace is indeed the reining in of heretofore unbridled passions and desires. However, were the analysis to end at this point, at least two sorts of character could be supposed to exemplify the virtue that do not. The first I call the Tranquilized Soul; the second the Authoritarian Soul. The Tranquilized Soul is calm, to be sure. It is under control with no desires pulling it in competing directions. However, there seem to be no desires at all. The Tranquilized Soul will tend to remain at rest, unmotivated to adventure, novelty, or exploration. In a sense, it is the most inwardly focused of the three (Tranquilized Soul, Authoritarian Soul, Peaceful Soul) as the external world does not intrude at all on its self-contemplative tranquility. The Tranquilized Soul is unaffected and undisturbed. It is narrow to the point of simply not engaging the world around it. Such a character is to be excluded from the set of virtuous characters.

³⁶⁷ A similar example appears in the *Phaedrus*, but for the sake of brevity, I make use only of the one. There are some interesting differences between the two examples, but those differences have no impact here and so I have not explored them in this project. For a brief discussion of the two examples, see Charles Griswold's Self-Knowledge in Plato's *Phaedrus*.

The Authoritarian Soul is similarly to be excluded. In Plato's example, the Authoritarian Soul, exercises rigid control, inhibiting severely the desires of the individual. The Authoritarian Soul seeks to control all aspects that in some way might affect it. Hence, the Authoritarian Soul is also quite narrow in focus, imposing control on desires and seeking to control external influence that might in some way undermine the rigid control imposed on desires. In both cases (Tranquilized Soul and Authoritarian Soul), the self is narrowly focused inward upon itself. While the condition of self-control is satisfied, Whitehead would not call either of these souls virtuous.

Whitehead conceives Peace as a barrier against the narrowness exemplified by the Tranquilized Soul and the Authoritarian Soul. This is because it involves more than simple self-control. Peace is self-control "at its widest; at the width where 'self' has been lost." This is not to say that the individual has dissolved into some homogenized aggregate of the greatest number. Instead, the field of attention has been enlarged so that the individual sees herself as one of many, but also recognizes the many. The Tranquilized Soul is unflappable in the face of the external world; exhibiting an attitude that explicitly ignores the value to be found there. The Authoritarian Soul recognizes the many as a source of danger to be avoided and controlled. And the Peaceful Soul supposes the many to be a locus of value (or, in fact, a widely diverse field of many individual values). Thus, Peace involves the removal of inhibitions that the Authoritarian Soul would impose on the self and guards against the narrowness of ennui that

characterizes the Tranquilized Soul. Simply put, Peace is the “removal of the stress of acquisitive feeling arising from the soul’s preoccupation with itself.”³⁶⁸

Overcoming the preoccupation with self (or destructive selfishness) allows the self to participate in creative advance, to develop character, and to affect and be affected by others. Peace is the control of self-interest (not its elimination) that moves the soul toward harmony within the self and greater harmony in participation in the world.

2. Sympathy

In his discussion of Sympathy, or “the love of humankind as such”, Whitehead makes one of his most obvious mistakes in historical interpretation. He concludes, with very little preamble, that Hume’s philosophy does not include such a concept. This is quite clearly a mistake; made even worse by the fact that Whitehead’s own conception of the virtue is quite akin to a Humean version.³⁶⁹

Since I have treated Hume’s views in a preceding section, I will not treat it again here. Instead, I will merely point out similarities between the two views as I proceed through Whitehead’s view.

³⁶⁸ Whitehead, Adventures of Ideas, 367.

³⁶⁹ Whitehead writes “One of the fruits [of Peace] is that passion whose existence Hume denied, the love of mankind as such.” He comes to this conclusion by making but one reference to the Humean corpus - Book III, Part II, Section I of the Treatise, where Hume writes, “In general, it may be affirm’d that there is no such passion in human minds, as the love of mankind, merely as such, independent of personal qualities, or services, or of relation to ourself.” However, from this it does not follow that such a passion does not exist. Our earlier discussion of Humean Sympathy should be sufficient to dispel this apparent difficulty. I do not think that more needs to be said here regarding the interpretive mistake. The mistake itself has no implication for Whitehead’s own positive view, and so is safely ignored with respect to his positive construction. However, I would have been remiss in my treatment of this notion had I not at least indicated the glaring misstep on Whitehead’s part with respect to his critique of Hume.

Whitehead's view of Sympathy is most substantially developed in Adventures of Ideas. In this work he develops the notion as a fundamental element in the development of civilization. The recognition of the "brotherhood of man" is a necessary condition for civilization to arise. By "recognition of the 'brotherhood of man'", Whitehead means to designate two features of the world. The first is that all human beings share a common humanity. This is a straightforward appropriation of one feature of the concept of common-sense that Whitehead shares with Sidgwick and Hume. If "common-sense" is essentially a notion of a common humanity experiencing a common world, then the 'brotherhood of man' picks out the first element of the notion. "Recognition" of that common humanity, however, is much less common. Adventures of Ideas, published initially in 1933, appeared in a world in which large groups of people were routinely denied the status "human". Further, it had been less than a century since human beings had been regularly bought and sold as chattel³⁷⁰ and defined legally as three-fifths human in the United States. In the interim, much of the rhetoric of Social Darwinism was routinely employed to classify races and genders as more or less human depending on their proximity to a supposed ideal - often Victorian, male aristocrat. This background serves only as an example of the divide between the ascription of common humanity generally and the recognition of that common humanity in a particular individual.

Whitehead appropriates the phrase "brotherhood of man" from John Wesley and the Methodists of 18th-century England (who had appropriated it elsewhere) and uses as his paradigm example of sympathy the concerted effort by the Methodists against the

³⁷⁰ A practice that continues in many places (e.g., Sudan, parts of Indonesia, Thailand).

slave trade. Given the prevailing legal and popular opinion of the day, it is odd that a group of generally privileged and fairly well-to-do Englishmen should take the stand the Wesleys did against slavery. What John and Charles Wesley possessed, it seems, was a direct intuition of the humanity of the enslaved. However, the direct intuition was insufficient of its own to account for the position taken. Others, presumably, had similar intuitions but acted contrary to them and either kept slaves themselves, participated in the slave trade, or studiously ignored the practice.³⁷¹ So, beyond the direct intuition of a common humanity in the person of the slave, there is the further intuition that actions contrary to the direct intuition are in fact wrong. This is where Whitehead's Theory of Truth can be seen playing a role. If direct intuitions are the ultimate truth bearers (fallible though they may be), then those actions and propositions contradictory or contrary to the content of the direct intuition must be false. But willingly trading in falsehoods and presenting them as truth is anathema to the true aim of philosophy, at least since Socrates refuted the charges of sophism brought against him by Meletus. So, it seems appropriate to interpret Sympathy (or the "love of humankind as such") as involving the direct intuition of common humanity, the incorporation of that direct intuition as a critique of contrary views held, and as a foundation for positive views of the world. In the case of slavery, the direct intuition serves to show that the view that slaves are less than fully human is false and as a prod to conceptualize the world in such a way that this direct

³⁷¹ Evidence that such is the case is rather substantial in the journals and writings of the period. One particularly dissonant case is that of Bishop McKendree, one of the Methodist bishops of Georgia during the early part of the 19th century. He not only kept slaves but was instrumental in removing anti-slavery language from the Methodist Church's governing document - The Book of Discipline.

intuition is incorporated - that is, to ask the question, "what must the world actually be like for the direct intuition to be true?". The virtue of Sympathy would thus seem to involve, necessarily, the way in which one conducts oneself in relation to one's fellow human beings. Behaving in a method consistent with the direct intuition is to behave sympathetically. Incorporating the direct intuition into one's character (and thus acting in conformity with the direct intuition of the actual world) is to possess the virtue of Sympathy.

3. Tolerance

Peace and Sympathy give rise rather straightforwardly to the next Whiteheadian virtue - Tolerance. Given the developments of the preceding virtues, it should be clear that Tolerance follows directly.

As with Peace and Sympathy, Tolerance begins with a recognition; in this case two-fold. The first is that the actual world is awash in possibilities to be realized in a future moment, either near or longer-term. The second is that the agent herself is fallible, may get things wrong, and that, consequently, can have no assurance that she possesses the totality of the Truth either in herself, her tribe, or her race. I shall treat these two in reverse order.

Whitehead writes that "intolerance is the besetting sin of moral fervours."³⁷² He notes some examples of intolerance, notable not only for the fact of their intolerance but for its breathtaking scope. Among these are the Roman Catholic Church of the Inquisition and the Crusades (to name but two of many ignoble moments in church

³⁷² Whitehead, Adventures of Ideas, 57.

history) and the Protestant Reformers Luther and Calvin. Intolerance is to be condemned for a number of reasons that these two examples make abundantly clear - 1) it limits freedom, 2) it retards social progress, and 3) it reveals in the intolerant one the commission of the Dogmatic Fallacy, which suggests a variance from the Truth. Again, I shall treat these in reverse order. It will be recalled from the discussion of Whitehead's Theory of Truth that Truth is most simply defined as conformity of appearance to reality.³⁷³

On Whitehead's view, the intolerant person not only holds his own opinions (or those of his self-identified group) to be in conformity with reality, he thinks his opinions are infallible, unlike those of others. The presence of such infallibility would entail a LaPlacian-like grasp of all actual entities and the interrelations among them. Since this is clearly beyond the scope of human grasp, the claim to infallibility is false. So, epistemic humility ought to be at least a check against intolerance. That it is not, in the case of the intolerant person, is an indication that he has failed to grasp the impossibility of his own infallibility. Thus, the position of the intolerant man is at variance with the Truth.

³⁷³ The Dogmatic Fallacy is not strictly an informal fallacy in that its commission automatically renders an argument invalid (although the correlation between the commission of the fallacy and the failure of arguments that commit it is one-to-one). The Dogmatic Fallacy is related to the Fallacy of the Perfect Dictionary. It seems that the Dogmatic Fallacy can be extended to include application to the attitude one brings to philosophical investigation. Accordingly, it would apply to method. Whitehead writes, "The combined influences of mathematics and religion, which have greatly contributed to the rise of philosophy, have also had the unfortunate effect of yoking it with static dogmatism." (*Process and Reality*, 9) And in another place, "In philosophical discussion, the merest hint of dogmatic certainty as to finality of statement is an exhibition of folly." (*Process and Reality*, xiv) Thus, the extended fallacy is committed in the act of assuming that one's statement (whether ethical, metaphysical, epistemological, etc.) is immune to critique.

On Whitehead's view, Intolerance retards social progress because it arbitrarily omits certain possibilities from actualization; possibilities that might actually be of benefit. For example, the intolerant view of African-Americans by many in American society has retarded the development of the society as a whole. For example, during World War II, the Tuskegee Airmen were refused the opportunity to serve as pilots in combat and other vital activities in support of the war effort purely on the basis of skin-color. In other instances, African-Americans were refused the opportunity for service as seamen, officers in charge of non-black units, and field officers. In the two former instances, judgments made on the basis of skin color retarded American (and Allied) efforts to fully staff ships and flight wings in the middle of combat. The instances of intolerance and its effects on American society are simply too numerous to list. From Selma, Alabama to the Little Rock Nine at Central High to the Birmingham jail, the cancer of intolerance has stunted the growth of the American experiment.

The foregoing discussion makes it obvious how Whitehead can conclude that intolerance limits freedom. The ones discriminated against are excluded from schools, jobs, and professional advancement. The intolerant themselves suffer the loss of interaction, potential growth, creative involvement, etc. In either case, the arbitrary limitation of possibilities is a restriction of freedom that limits the possibility of novel outcomes and the creative advance of human society.

This brings us to the first recognition with which Tolerance begins: that the actual world is awash in possibilities to be realized in the future. The intolerant person arbitrarily restricts those possibilities. That arbitrary restriction is a *de facto* denial that

the rejected possibilities are actually possible. Let us take a rather frivolous example. Suppose I go to a restaurant and before arriving arbitrarily restrict those things from which I might select. Perhaps I decide that I will not eat anything that is fish or fowl and that I will only eat beef. Now the outside observer who does not know that I have made this restriction might suppose that I could choose from the chicken special, the seafood menu, or the steak selections. However, these first two are not available to me as possibilities, at least not in the same way the third option is, simply because of an arbitrary decision on my part. I have in fact denied that these options (fish, chicken) are real possibilities for me. Similarly, the intolerant person makes such arbitrary decisions about the wider possibilities presented to him by the world. Thus, Tolerance begins with a two-fold recognition: that the actual world is awash in possibilities to be realized in a future moment, that the agent himself is fallible, and as such can have no assurance that he possesses the totality of the Truth either in himself, his tribe, or his race. Or, as Whitehead writes, "The duty of tolerance is our finite homage to the abundance of inexhaustible novelty which is awaiting the future, and to the complexity of accomplished fact which exceeds our stretch of insight."³⁷⁴

A naïve view of Tolerance might suppose that it implies an endorsement of relativism. Indeed, the counterpart of the Intolerant Soul seems to be the Permissive Soul. For example, practices like female genital mutilation and denial of education to women are often defended as mere outgrowths of particular cultural customs and religious practices and, as such, beyond the pale of criticism by those who profess to be

³⁷⁴ *ibid.*, 59.

tolerant. That is, the argument has been made that since certain practices are perceived as valuable to a culture or grow out of religious commitment, they are to be tolerated, regardless of the harm they may cause, on pain of intolerance. Whitehead's view labels this a false dichotomy. Nowhere in the corpus does Whitehead ever come close to suggesting that Tolerance is, or ought, to be unbounded. That is, the Tolerant Soul is not the Permissive Soul.

Whitehead makes a very important distinction that goes to the structure of character and the boundaries of Tolerance. A character that issues in intolerance is to be deplored. One that exemplifies Tolerance is effective in promoting freedom, a result we have seen intolerance incapable of producing. However, this does not mean tolerance of every particular. Tolerance seems to be bounded by at least three factors: first, Freedom; then, Truth; and ultimately, Harmony.

In the first instance, a necessary condition of Tolerance is the promotion of freedom. Given the virtues of Peace and Sympathy which were preliminary to Tolerance, certain actions are restricted necessarily. These are those actions which deny the full and common humanity of all persons. Slavery or the forced denial of education of women are not to be tolerated because they deny the common humanity of the slave or women.³⁷⁵

Beyond this restriction of freedom, by which we note the actions that are beyond the pale

³⁷⁵ Some, for example the Taliban of Afghanistan, may answer that women simply do not share in a common human nature - that is, that women are by nature restricted to certain arenas and from others. To such views, I would simply refer to Mill's quite damning arguments in Subjection of Women. If it is truly women's nature that restricts her, there is no need of law (written and unwritten) and gun to do so; and if there is the need of law (written and unwritten) and gun to restrict her, then it is not nature that does so. We can safely conclude that these odious restrictions are thus arbitrary and at variance with the

of Tolerance, we also note that such actions are not in conformity with reality. If there is a common humanity, then actions which deny this are themselves false.³⁷⁶ So, Tolerance is bounded by Truth.³⁷⁷ Finally, and not surprisingly, Tolerance is bounded by Harmony. This is not so much because direct appeal to Harmony can be made when examining any particular practice but because Harmony is the foundational concept from which the definition of Truth is gleaned. To say that Truth is the conformity of appearance to reality is to say that appearance harmonizes with reality. Tolerance is thus bounded first by freedom, then by Truth, and ultimately by Harmony.

4. Beauty

The inclusion of Beauty as a virtue is one of the more controversial aspects of Whitehead's theory of virtue. When Whitehead's theory receives much recognition at all, it is often in the form of questioning this virtue. Indeed, Whitehead's ethical theory has been dismissed as an aestheticist conception only. Criticisms like the one leveled by

Truth.

³⁷⁶ Recall that on Whitehead's Theory of Truth, linguistic propositions are not the only or even the primary bearers of truth. Whiteheadian Propositions (lures for expression in the actualization of an entity) are the bearers of truth. Thus, truth and falsity are realized in actions, intuitions, emotions, etc., because actions, etc., convey some appearance that may or may not conform to reality. That is, they reflect a lure for feeling, which may or may not be veridical. To say that the action is false, then, is to say that the lure for feeling to which the actual entity succumbs in the action is not in conformity with Reality.

³⁷⁷ Note that Whitehead's fallibilism is in play here as well. The Tolerant character is also restricted from dogmatism as to those appearances that are in conformity with reality. However, if the case is made that an action denies, for example, common humanity then the onus shifts to the one desiring to perpetuate such actions to show why the action does not indeed deny common humanity and is not at variance with the Truth.

Sidgwick against Aristotle are commonly leveled at Whitehead as well. The claim is that he does not sufficiently distinguish between moral beauty and aesthetic beauty.³⁷⁸

It is true that Whitehead sees something of a fine distinction between moral beauty and aesthetic beauty, though two things are important to keep in mind. First, the distinction is a substantive distinction (that is, there is a real distinction between beauty in the two cases) and second, there is a definite similarity. The similarity is due to the fact that moral beauty and aesthetic beauty are both instances of beauty, more generally. Just as Whitehead strives to develop a theory of truth by which the several uses of the word “true” can be understood under a single head, so he does with his explication of the virtue Beauty.

Beauty is related to both the Good and Harmony. The concept of “the Good” is developed in terms of patterned contrast. The concept of Harmony involves the relations that the elements of the patterned contrast express. Beauty, not unexpectedly, has to do with the proportions exemplified in the patterned contrast. Whitehead writes “Beauty is the mutual adaptation of the several factors in an occasion of experience.”³⁷⁹ This is an important statement. First of all, it supports my interpretation of the role of Beauty in Whitehead’s scheme. “Mutual adaptation” involves the ways in which the elements of a particular entity are joined together; and the emphasis on “occasions of experience” suggests a generality of application that allows Whitehead to assess aesthetics and morals under the same general head, while investigating them particularly under different ones.

³⁷⁸ For a prime example of this approach, see William Garland, “What is Whitehead’s Highest Good?”, Third International Whitehead Conference, Claremont University, Claremont, CA., 1998.

That is, given that an occasion of experience - say the viewing of a painting - brings a particularly aesthetic pleasure, Whitehead can analyze the experience as one of aesthetic beauty. Suppose that an occasion of experience - say the character of an individual - exemplifies moral beauty, Whitehead can analyze the experience as one of virtue.³⁸⁰ Suppose that an occasion of experience evokes both - for example, a painting that stirs both the aesthetic sense of the observer and also tugs at her character - Whitehead can analyze the experience under both heads separately and under the more general heading of Beauty. I have mentioned previously an example that seems to apply here as well. Take for instance Picasso's *Guernica*. The painting, with its odd and disturbing imagery, may not be at all what one would consider "beautiful" aesthetically. However, it is renowned for its ability to stir the soul, to communicate something of the horror of war, and thus to strike particularly moral chords within observers. In this case, Whitehead's scheme can easily distinguish between the two sorts of beauty.

It seems safe to conclude that Whitehead is not subject to the criticism that he fails to distinguish between aesthetic beauty and moral beauty, at least the criticism that has been leveled by those philosophers who have followed him. However, it may be that he is guilty of something like the mistake that Sidgwick attributes to Aristotle. This is so because Whitehead's view of moral beauty is strikingly similar to Aristotle's doctrine of the mean, in some very important ways. Now, we must distinguish between the way in

³⁷⁹ Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 324.

³⁸⁰ By "exemplifies moral beauty", I mean to say that moral beauty is the *object* of the experience.

which Harmony is similar to the Aristotelian mean and the way in which Beauty is. This will be helpful in further clarifying the virtue Beauty.

On Aristotle's view, the virtue exists at the mean between deficiency and excess. For example, generosity exists between miserliness on the one hand and wastefulness on the other. In this way, Harmony is similar to the doctrine of the mean. The generous character is one who exists at a point of equilibrium (or harmony) between the endpoints. The generous person is the one who knows when money, for example, ought to be given away and when it ought not. Presumably, the desire to give money and the desire to keep it exist simultaneously within the generous agent. However, the generous agent harmonizes the two desires and performs the actions that spring from a generous character.

Beauty is different from Harmony in the following way. One of the common mistakes in estimating the mean is to assume that it represents some sort of average of the extremes. Aristotle is quite careful to rule out this possibility. For example, it is not good for a person to go without water; in fact, it is fatal. However, it is also not recommended that a person drink 100 gallons of water in a single day. It would be erroneous to conclude that the virtuous mean between these extremes is 50 gallons of water daily. Instead, the proper mean is that amount of water that is best suited to the organism under consideration, in this case a human being. The character of the mean is one of proper proportion. It is this aspect of the doctrine of the mean that Whitehead seems to be emphasizing with his notion of Beauty. Moral Beauty is not simply the presence of equilibrium between competing desires, but a proper proportionality of those

desires. An example that is markedly aesthetic in nature may make this clearer. Suppose we view a great painting that is strikingly beautiful, e.g., the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Now, suppose that all of the lighter colors, instead of being where they are, were gathered on one side of the room and all the darker colors on the other. Clearly, the painting is destroyed, though a point of equilibrium is maintained. The person whose character is beautiful, is the person whose desires and intentions are in equilibrium, or in Harmony.

On Whitehead's account, there are two levels or components of Beauty. The first level or component is similar to the first level of Peace. The "minor form" of Beauty occurs when the competition between the various elements of an actual occasion (e.g., a person) has been ameliorated to the point where painful clash between the elements is eliminated. The "absence of painful clash" or the "absence of vulgarity" Whitehead takes to be the minor form of beauty. An example of a painful clash: Suppose one sees a beautiful, historic Victorian-style home with turrets and a wrap-around porch and elegant, delicate carving in the framing woodwork. Now consider that the house is painted orange, black, neon-green, and flame-red with occasional fuschia and purple polka-dots. I suspect the result is quite painful to consider. Now, a proper sort of color scheme, applied by knowledgeable craftspeople could undoubtedly render the house less obnoxious. There will still be quite different elements, competing lines of sight and perhaps quite baroque woodwork. But the painful clash of elements has been removed. For Whitehead, this is the first step toward Beauty.

The second component of Beauty goes beyond simply the absence of conflict. Beauty, at this level, provides new content, new feelings to be enjoyed by the perceiving

subject. The difference between this level and the preceding one is the difference between the artwork of a new art student who is copying the techniques of the masters and thus re-plowing old ground and the work of the masters themselves that evoke in the viewer new experiences and new insights. A similarity between Beauty and Harmony might have been noticed at this stage. That similarity is not accidental. Indeed, Whitehead claims that “the perfection of Beauty is defined as being the perfection of Harmony.”³⁸¹

Thus, the question could arise - “How, in fact, are Beauty and Harmony different?” A good question and one that requires a distinction and a comparison. The distinction is between Truth and Beauty and the comparison is of these concepts. Whitehead notes that on his view, “Truth is a narrower concept than Beauty.” This claim begins to give a clue to the distinction Whitehead draws between the two concepts. Both Truth and Beauty are adaptations of Harmony. Truth, it will be recalled, is a harmonious relationship between Appearance and Reality. Beauty is, first, the harmonious relationship between the elements of an actual entity or occasion and, second, the harmonious relationship that itself is productive of new insights for the observer or for the actual entity itself. Whitehead takes Truth to be narrower than Beauty in part because the relata impose certain restrictions on the truth-relation itself. For example, Reality simply is, on Whitehead’s view. Now, whether the propositions, sense-experience, or direct intuitions express the truth-relation, one side of the relationship is fixed. This is not necessarily the case with Beauty. Take another example from the art world.

³⁸¹ *ibid.*, 325.

Consider some of the later, more abstract work of Picasso. Clearly, the relationships between the various elements of one of his works bear little further resemblance to Reality. So, from these two examples, it should be obvious that the set of harmonious relationships that constitutes the scope of Beauty differs from the set that constitutes the scope of Truth. From this discussion we can see that Beautiful things need not be True and that Truth is narrower than Beauty.

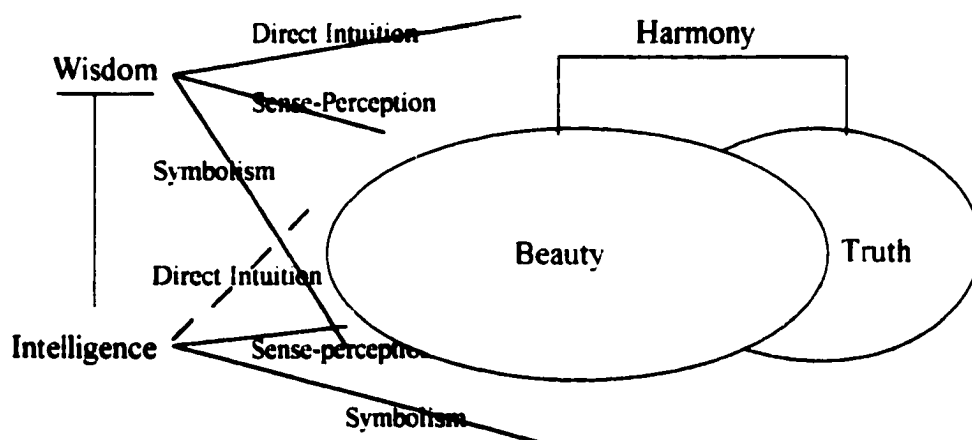
The final issue relevant to demonstrating this distinction is to show that Truth is not a subset of Beauty. This is fairly simple to show with an example. Millions of Jews were executed by the Nazis during World War II. This can be captured in the proposition, "Millions of Jews were killed by the Nazis during World War II." This proposition picks out a particular truth-relation; namely, the one between this proposition itself and the fact in the world. This truth relation, though quite close and harmonious in the sense of expressing a close relationship between Appearance and Reality, is also quite clearly not a beautiful relation. So, we now have that True things are not necessarily Beautiful, that Beautiful things are not necessarily True, and that Truth is a narrower concept than Beauty since one of the relata in the Truth relation is fixed while neither relata in the Beauty relationship is.

5. Wisdom

We have explored Whitehead's concept of Wisdom at some length already. In this section, I will summarize some of the foregoing investigation, particularly his conception of Wisdom as a virtue. It is clear that Wisdom is the highest of Whitehead's Cardinal Virtues. We have already seen how Peace precedes Sympathy and how the

combination of the two can further develop into Tolerance. We have also seen how Tolerance is not an unlimited virtue but rather is bounded by Truth and Beauty. Wisdom, then, must be interpreted as bounding Beauty and Truth. Such a result is not surprising, given that Whitehead himself describes Wisdom as that “virtue that proceeds from the source of all Harmony.”

We have also examined Whitehead’s analysis of intellectual development which has its highest and best exemplification in Wisdom. Combining these two results (the analysis of Virtue and the analysis of human intellectual development), we now have that Wisdom is the pinnacle of intellectual development and connected with the highest good. An illustration of the relationship may help.



The illustration shows how the evaluative faculties available to the Wise person and the Intelligent person can be compared and contrasted. Whether the Appearance be one of a painting or a moral conundrum requiring a decision, the relationships expressed in the illustration hold. This illustration has two applications. The first is to the experience of

Insight. Insight operates on information available at the moment of the presentation of the experience. It reveals to the agent, to one degree or another, the character of the situation and the options available. Given a particular Appearance, Wisdom has at its disposal the truth-relations expressed by Direct Intuition, Sense-Perception, and Symbolism. Insight is the use of these evaluative tools to understand as fully as possible the immediate situation. Foresight is the use of these evaluative tools to guide action. Foresight is the ability to extrapolate from the present situation to the results of the exercise of the options discerned by Insight. The dashed line extending from Intelligence to the Harmony, Beauty, Truth triad is one indication of the difference between Wisdom and Intelligence. While Wisdom employs all of the various methods of perception and holds them in their proper alignment, Intelligence does not. It does not involve the complete grasp of the methods of assessing Truth and/or Beauty. Essentially, Wisdom is the insight that allows the agent to understand the situation presented along with the ability to discern the right thing to do at the right time and in the right way. "Right", then, is in part a function of Truth. That is, it is true that one action will support the advance of Harmony more than another. On Whitehead's view, that Truth exemplifies a truth-relation that has as one of its relata a fact about the world; namely that Action A will in fact advance Harmony more than Action B. Thus, through foresight, the Wise person better understands both the aim of human life (virtue and Harmony) and, through insight, the present situation in which she finds herself. So, we have seen how Wisdom is related to Harmony and how, by investigating his theory of Truth, Whitehead relates virtue to the actual world.

Chapter 3. Potential Problems

A. Introduction

“Nowadays, to be intelligible is to be found out.”³⁸² Whitehead’s work, with its dense, technical vocabulary and sometimes forbidding language often seems to exemplify this sentiment. Surprisingly, Whitehead’s philosophy of civilization is his clearest work. Paradoxically, it is the work for which he is least known. However, as A.H. Johnson put it, “those who had personal contact with Professor Whitehead quickly became aware of his great interest in the problems of civilized living, not only in the area of theory, but also in the realm of practice.”³⁸³ This is not to say that there are not some opaque passages and highly technical vocabulary, but in his discussions of civilization, Whitehead makes perhaps his most extensive use of examples to illustrate and give substance to the attempts at definition.³⁸⁴ There are at least three potential criticisms of a Whiteheadian view: (1) Collective Action problems, (2) A naive [Johnsonian] reading of Whitehead’s view, and (3) Social Darwinism, or the Myth of Progress. I will argue for the plausibility of Whitehead’s view by addressing these potential criticisms. Within those discussions, the general view will take on more definition.

I will limit the scope of this section to three facets of Whitehead’s view of civilization: Ideas, Great Individuals, and Education. The first two are decisive factors

³⁸² Oscar Wilde, *Lady Windermere’s Fan*

³⁸³ A. H. Johnson, “Whitehead’s Philosophy of Civilization”, Whitehead and the Modern World, (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1950), 43. It is also clear to those who bothered to read Adventures of Ideas.

³⁸⁴ *ibid.* I suspect this contributes to Johnson’s assertion (unargued) that Whitehead views of civilization are quite plausible.

that Whitehead thinks are jointly necessary for a society to become “civilized”³⁸⁵ In the case of Ideas and Great Individuals, it is easier to note the interplay of relations that is most reflective of Whitehead’s larger view. This will make critique and response more clear. I will address briefly Whitehead’s definition of civilization before turning to potential criticisms in sections C, D, and E. I will finally conclude with some thoughts about Whitehead’s view of Education in F.

There are some remarks that need to be made in the way of preliminary assumptions about Whitehead’s overall project. One distinguishing characteristic of Whitehead’s work is the two-fold analysis of the world and/or topic under examination. As we have already noted, Whitehead advances theories about both the micro and macro levels of reality, but is ultimately committed to causal explanations at both, neither of which is strictly identical with the other. That is to say, he develops causal theories at the macro level that are not ultimately reducible to the causal theories which he understands to be operative at the micro level, and vice versa. This is none too controversial.³⁸⁶

³⁸⁵ The other two are Economic Activity and the Inanimate World. I will not address the former because it is subject to the same sort of analysis as Ideas and Great Individuals. I will not say much in the latter case because this is fairly well-plowed ground. If nothing else, Whitehead is considered a first-rate philosopher of science and logician. For example, see Robert Palter, Whitehead’s Philosophy of Science, University of Chicago Press, 1960, and/or Filmer S.C. Northrop, “Whitehead’s Philosophy of Science”; Evander Bradley McGilvary, “Space-Time, Simple Location, and Prehension”; Joseph Needham, “A Biologist’s View of Whitehead’s Philosophy”; William Ernest Hocking, “Whitehead on Mind and Nature”; Roy Wood Sellars, “Philosophy of Organism and Physical Realism”; and W.V.O. Quine, “Whitehead and the Rise of Modern Logic” all in The Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, P.A. Schilpp, ed.

³⁸⁶ Indicative of this position is perhaps Whitehead’s second most famous apophthegm - “the many become one and are increased by one.” [The most famous being the oft-misquoted “The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato.” (Process and Reality, 39)] This saying

Whitehead's Method proceeds at two levels. This is another reason that his work seems less than completely penetrable at times. This will be especially true in this section and the following section concerning Rational Choice Theory and Collective Action. Having said this, there is a final assumption that needs to be addressed before moving on. Given his process metaphysics, it is not at all odd that Whitehead should hold something like the following:

Civilized Society Principle: If civilized societies exist (or have existed) at all, they have developed from societies to which the moniker "civilized" could not appropriately be applied and they have ceased (or will cease) to exist.

Or, more simply put, civilizations rise and fall, come to be and perish.

1. Ideas

Despite the complex language, Whitehead's notion of "idea", at least as it is relevant to this section, is fairly straightforward. That is not to suggest that it is uncontroversial. For the most part, Whitehead equates "idea" with "ideal", reflecting a very platonistic sort of twist. Controversies about ontology aside, it should suffice to say that when Whitehead uses "idea", he tends to mean those ideas of a grand sort, e.g., Justice, Freedom, etc. This differentiates "idea" from its more vulgar usage; e.g., the idea

concludes a discussion of the ontology of compositional objects whose penultimate sentence summarizes the foregoing discussion. Whitehead writes, "The novel entity is at once the togetherness of the 'many' which it finds, and also it is one among the disjunctive 'many' which it leaves; it is a novel entity, disjunctively among the many entities which it synthesizes." Or, put in another way, an object, M , is a composite of smaller objects, $m_1, m_2, m_3, \dots, m_n$, which can be examined separately, with little or no reference to the whole. But when the "disjunctive 'many'", $m_1, m_2, m_3, \dots, m_n$, are conjoined into the "novel entity", M , the new object is a separate object from the "disjunctive many". Which is to say, M is not reducible to its parts. Thus, any explanation must proceed at both the micro level - examining the "disjunctive many" - and at the macro level - examining the "novel entity". Note that the micro/macro distinction could also have the

of half-priced hamburgers after 5:00 p.m. on Tuesdays. The primary characteristic of any idea, whether it be grand or vulgar, is the persuasive power which it possesses. This can be expressed as follows:

Persuasive Ideas Principle: Any idea possesses a persuasive power.

This should not be understood as some sort of magical power inherent in the idea. Rather, the Persuasive Ideas Principle expresses an empirical claim that arises from Whitehead's observations of the efficacy of ideas in the realm of science. In Science and the Modern World, Whitehead goes to great lengths to show how many of the great ideas of science can be traced from humble beginnings to the profound influence they have had on the human community. As Johnson puts it, "[Whitehead] contends that as we think, so we live."³⁸⁷ Thus, as the ideas with which a society identifies change, so will the character of the society. Whitehead is merely expressing the observation that ideas, great and small, have within them the power to move people. Or in language that would be more congenial to Whitehead, ideas are lures that attract people to the ideals that they represent. What then differentiates the great from the small is the sort of attraction. In the case of Freedom, the lure is a stirring of the intellect - permanent and quite persuasive. In the case of the half-priced burgers, to the extent that there is a stirring at all, it is of the belly - transient and for the most part ineffectual.

2. Ideas and Great Individuals

Ideas on their own and in abstraction from the world are largely ineffectual even if they are great ideas. For ideas to be actualized in any real way, there must be

following counterparts - actual entity/society of actual entities (ordinary objects).

individuals who put them into practice.³⁸⁸ Thus, the role of individuals is indispensable in the development and actualization of great ideas. Yet the question that arises from these remarks would seem to be “How is it that great individuals cause ideas to be actualized in human society and thus advance a society towards civilization?”

Simply put, great individuals give expression to ideas and, through persuasion, lure societies of people to understand, accept, and apply them. So, what does it mean to give expression to ideas? On Whitehead’s view, “expression” means “to introduce novelty”.³⁸⁹ Or, in another way, the introduction of novelty that marks the expression of an idea is the drawing out of possibilities for the society that heretofore have been unexpressed. This becomes somewhat clearer in the example that Whitehead takes to be a paradigm case of the expression of a great idea by great individuals: the movement from society’s presupposition of slavery to the presupposition of freedom. He writes, “the growth of the idea of the essential rights of human beings, arising from their sheer humanity, affords a striking example in the history of ideas.”³⁹⁰

Because the subject matter is civilization and the lives of individuals living in communities, it is not surprising that such supremely ethical notions as Freedom and Justice make up the majority of those ideas that Whitehead classifies as ideals. It is also not surprising that ethical notions are at the center of what Whitehead takes to be the development of civilization. He sums up the interplay between ideas, individuals, and the

³⁸⁷ Johnson, 46.

³⁸⁸ Or, as Johnson puts it, “The ideas must be understood, accepted, and applied by human beings.” *ibid.*, 47.

³⁸⁹ Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, 26.

³⁹⁰ Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 21.

social change that the former two can introduce in this way, “In ethical ideas, we find the supreme example of consciously formulated ideas acting as a driving force effecting transitions from social state to social state. Such ideas are at once gadflies irritating, and beacons luring, the victims among whom they dwell.”³⁹¹

Thus, for Whitehead, ideas and great individuals play a causal role in social change and the development of civilization. Ideas represent ideals for which individuals and societies can strive. Individuals sense those possibilities, especially those that introduce novelty into the society, and strive to actualize them. An example, not used by Whitehead, but entirely consistent with his own, is Harriet Tubman - a woman lured by the ideal of Freedom who envisioned possibilities for her people who had themselves, to varying degrees, dreamed of the ideal, and then sought, through the Underground Railroad and at great personal peril, to actualize that ideal in society, one life at a time. The following Whiteheadian example of social change brought about through the interplay between great individuals and ideas will hopefully illuminate these topics further.

3. Example: Slavery to Freedom

Human rights, including the individual right to self-determination, have not always been recognized. Indeed, Lincoln’s “peculiar institution” - slavery - is one of the more pervasive features of societies from ancient Greece (and earlier) through the 19th-century United States (and later). Today, it is considered to be one of the more odious features of our ancestors’ legacy, though slavery and other denials of human rights still

³⁹¹ *ibid.*, 25.

exist in much of the world. Clearly significant social change has occurred in some places though clearly not all. This is indeed Whitehead's paradigm example of positive social change.

It should be noted that the change did not take place overnight nor is it the product of any one individual. Whitehead notes that the Methodist³⁹² movement in England in the middle 18th-century and then in England and the United States from the late 18th century throughout the 19th played perhaps the largest single role in eradicating slavery in Europe and America. Indeed, it was during the Christmas Conference of 1787, that the Methodist Church in the United States became the first denomination to incorporate into the order of the church a prohibition on the owning and trading in slaves. The church was not univocal in this and eventually split in half (a northern and a southern) in 1844 over the question of slavery. It was not re-united until 1939. However, the struggles within this church are a microcosm of the struggles over slavery by the larger society.

As Whitehead notes, the overcoming of slavery and the embracing of freedom was the culmination of thousands of years of fits and starts. Questions about the appropriateness of slave-holding date to ancient Greece, a society in which slavery was widely accepted if not as widely practiced. But those questions did not issue in the overthrow of slavery. That would be many years later, when, as Whitehead writes, the "right time" had arrived. He notes that, "it is true that the Methodists produced the final

³⁹² Methodism is a religious movement begun by John and Charles Wesley, who were priests in the Church of England. Following the Revolutionary War, the Methodists in America were no longer considered part of the Church of England and became a separate church. Throughout the 19th century, Methodism was the largest protestant denomination in the United States. Currently, it is the second largest.

wave of popular feeling which drove the anti-slavery movement to success. But the Methodist movement succeeded because it came at the right time.”³⁹³

By this, Whitehead is not saying that the overthrow of slavery was somehow prescribed to occur at a particular time in history. Rather, by the “right time” he means to suggest that society had become sufficiently persuaded of the virtue of freedom and the vice of servitude for the change to occur. Great individuals, driven by high aims, brought the particular idea of freedom to expression. Whitehead concludes his example of this developmental feature of civilization in this way:

Thus in the evolution of the strands of thought which constituted the final stage in the destruction of the iniquitous slave-foundation of civilization, there are interwoven the insights and the heroisms of sceptical humanitarians, of Catholics, of Methodists, of Quakers. But the intellectual origin of the movement is to be traced back for more than two thousand years to the speculations of the philosophical Greeks upon functions of the human soul, and its status in the world of flux.³⁹⁴

Thus, by way of summary, the idea of Freedom gains expression in a society in which Slavery had previously been seen as foundational through the efforts of widely varied individuals to whom the moniker “hero” is properly attached. Social change is brought about by great individuals, lured by a grand ideas, seeking to express previously unexpressed possibilities.

B. Collective Action and Rational Choice

From the foregoing discussion, it is clear that there is a criticism to which Whitehead may be particularly susceptible. Given the reliance upon ideas and great individuals, beneficial outcomes are even more dependent upon the rationality of agents

³⁹³ Whitehead, Adventures of Ideas, 31.

and those agents' choices for the good of themselves and the classes to which they belong. On Whitehead's picture, Great Individuals need not (and often do not) consider themselves first and foremost in their decision making. Or, put another way, given Whitehead's picture, there needs to be a way of addressing the Collective Action problem of Rational Choice Theory (hereafter RCT). At the same time, it would seem that more than great individuals, drawn by grand ideas, are necessary for social change of the sort necessary for widespread expression of ideas like Freedom, for example. Within this section I will take what I see to be his solution to this problem; that is, given that what is good for a class or a civilization may require such actions and risks that are not good for any of its particular members, some explanation of individual action in accordance with the good for society over his/her particular good is necessary.

1. Rational Choice Theory

Daniel Little and Jon Elster offer two different conceptions of what is at stake in Rational Choice Theory. In both cases, individual rational agents are the building blocks of a society and explanations of the choices of those rational agents is given in terms of utility. On Little's version, there are three basic logical requirements for RCT:

(Little 1) Utility is a function that takes goods as a variable and specifies the value of the good to the agent as a result.

(Little 2) A rational agent always prefers the outcomes with great utility, and

(Little 3) The utility scale is continuous.³⁹⁵

³⁹⁴ *ibid.*

³⁹⁵ Daniel Little, Varieties of Social Explanation, (San Francisco: Westview Press, 1991) 45.

Jon Elster offers his own, somewhat different, formulations of the requirements for RCT:

(Elster 1) The person must be able to compare any two options with each other.

He/she must prefer the one, or prefer the other, or think them equally good.

(Elster 2) The person must be consistent in his/her preferences: if he/she prefers an orange to an apple and an apple to a pear, he/she must also prefer the orange to the pear.

(Elster 3) The person must be able to trade off values against each other.³⁹⁶

Little's formulation differs in some significant ways from Elster's. On Little's view, the utility scale must be continuous. This allows the agent to make measurements of the utility of particular options with which she is presented and to choose on the basis of those measures. For Elster, however, the scale need not be continuous. Rather, what is necessary is that the agent be consistent and that his preference assignments be transitive (from Elster 2). Thus, all that is required is that the agent be able to say that he prefers an orange to an apple and an apple to a pear and thus it should follow that he prefers an orange to a pear.

At the same time, both accounts have difficulty explaining why it is that social change in which there is no significant utility, or even fairly significant disutility, for the individual agents involved can and does occur. One might suspect that this is a difficulty to which Whitehead's view will be susceptible as well since one of the integral features of his explanation is the presumably rational actions of agents. Little and Elster

³⁹⁶ Jon Elster, Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences, (Cambridge: Cambridge University

recognize this problem with RCT and both have treatments of the theory of Collective Action.

2. Collective Action Theory

Put in overly simple terms: RCT will not account for social change for a class or perhaps even a society as a whole in which no individual in the class has a rational reason to anticipate a reward for acting to bring it about. That is, there is a problem between private rationality and collective action. Suppose that some class of individuals would be better off, as a class, in opposing slavery, for example. Yet, suppose that no individual of that class (or only a very few) has the potential for personal utility in acting to overthrow slavery. Suppose in fact that there is even potentially great disutility in acting to overthrow the status quo. In such a case, it would not be rational for the individuals to oppose slavery (because Little 2 fails to obtain). Thus, it would seem that RCT cannot explain certain valuable social change. Indeed, as Little points out, the theory of collective action provides a ready explanation of social phenomena like “worker passivity in the face of opportunities for revolutionary action.”³⁹⁷ That is, it explains why large groups of people will not act in order to advance the good of the group when the individual utility is sufficiently low or there is in fact disutility in acting.

Consider the following example: Upton Sinclair’s great novel The Jungle, which is a call to unionize packing plants in Chicago (among other things). In Sinclair’s example, the conditions of the plants are so horrific that anyone who would want to initiate unionization can rationally expect the results of his efforts to result in death and

Press, 1989), 23.

the addition of his carcass to the sausage line. Suffice it to say that disutility for individual action is considerable. Thus, we have something like the following:

(Union 1) The disutility for every individual, taken separately as rational agents, is higher than the utility for acting to unionize.

On RCT and Collective Action, we would then expect that there would be no unionization effort. Or, in other words,

(Union 2) No individual acts to initiate unionization.

From Union 1 and Union 2 we get the prediction that

(Union 3) The unionization does not occur.

Yet, we also have the empirically observable fact that

(Union 4) Unionization occurs.

It does not seem that RCT or Collective Action have available to them the appeals to the greater future good, at least in the cases where the individual agent has little reason to think that she will be a part of that brighter future. Attempts to solve the problem with appeals to ordinal rather than cardinal utility frameworks fail as well. This is so because the intensity of desire (for a particular gain for the rational agent) still does not affect Union 1. Even accepting that the agent will want X much more than Y still does not give us an ability to say what happens when X is not in the individual agent's interest and the agent knows that it is not. Mancur Olson notes that even when the several agents have a common interest in obtaining a particular benefit, "they have no common interest in paying the cost of providing that collective good. Each would prefer that the others pay

³⁹⁷ Little, 62.

the entire cost, and ordinarily would get any benefit provided whether he had borne part of the cost or not."³⁹⁸

3. The Whiteheadian perspective

Whitehead's view does not succumb to this difficulty. While the discussion in the *Slavery to Freedom* section did not settle this question completely, with a little enhancement it will. On the Persuasive Ideas Principle, ideas themselves possess a motive power - they are lures. Great ideas, e.g., Freedom, are greater lures than small ideas, e.g., half-priced burgers every Tuesday night. Further, ideas are interwoven in the fabric of any particular society at any particular time. Slavery and Freedom are both ethical ideas that are present in past societies, first one in ascendancy and then the other. And these ethical ideas come to be expressed by human agents whose understanding and acceptance of the idea in question leads to their expression of it in the life of the society, even when the expression of the idea may entail disutility for the agent. For example, the idea of Freedom was such a compelling lure that many sacrificed their freedom to express the idea. Because Whitehead seems to have something like this as his view, then he can accept that:

(W1) Social change happens

without succumbing to the difficulties of RCT and Collective Action.

It follows from the discussion in *Slavery to Freedom* section that

(W2) Social change does not begin with a single spark.

³⁹⁸ Mancur Olson, The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 60.

For example, it is inappropriate to point solely to the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand of Austria as the “cause” of World War I. Admittedly, the reactions of and interactions between nations following that event led directly to the hostilities. But, the seeds of war had been sown years before (ideas of Nation-building, Empire, and Nationalism) and the assassination came at the “right” time to foment attempts to express those ideas.

Thus, Whitehead’s view is that social change has at least two necessary conditions (bracketing out “time” for the moment):

(W3) Social change requires ideas and individuals to occur.

As trivial as that might appear at first glance, we must remember that what differentiates this view from RCT is the notion that ideas possess motive power.

In a sense, it would seem that Whitehead has something like an ordinal scale in mind. That is, the idea of Freedom is so much to be desired and the idea of Slavery so much to be despised that a rational agent would select the former. However, RCT would take note that the disutility associated with the former for individual agents makes it unlikely that any will select it. Whitehead must deny (and I think that he does) the notion that an agent must act to bring about utility for herself. The idea of Freedom is itself so compelling that many rational agents will choose to express it even in the face of significant disutility. This view has the happy consequences of providing an explanation that seems to fit with the empirical observations of social scientists and of not succumbing to the problem of Collective Action.

C. Johnson's Reading of Whitehead's View

After claiming that Whitehead's view is a plausible one, Johnson then advocates a troubling interpretation of the view. It is troubling because it is a reading that Whitehead himself explicitly rejects.

On Johnson's view, all that has been said of Whitehead's view heretofore holds. The place where his view diverges from Whitehead is in the relationship between ideas and great individuals. Johnson recognizes that individuals and ideas do not "function in a vacuum."³⁹⁹ There are the features of the inanimate world and economic activity that form a context within which ideas and individuals are related. All this is quite consistent with Whitehead's view. The difficulty comes in Johnson's treatment of ideas. On his view, ideas are quite passive. The resulting position is that the great ideas linger on the margins of a society until there are enough people to actualize them and bring them to the center of society's life.⁴⁰⁰

The difficulty is that it seems to reduce the plausibility of the picture of civilization and its development that Whitehead himself has been arguing. Indeed, he explicitly denies that the Johnsonian interpretation is his view:

The final introduction of a reform does not necessarily prove the moral superiority of the reforming generation. It certainly does require that that generation exhibits reforming energy. But conditions may have changed, so that what is possible now may not have been possible then. A great idea is not to be conceived as merely waiting for enough good men to carry it into practical effect. That is a childish view of the history of ideas.⁴⁰¹

³⁹⁹ Johnson, 47.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁰¹ Whitehead, Adventures of Ideas, 29.

Since this is surely a passage with which Johnson is familiar and since so much of Johnson's exposition of Whitehead's view seems in concert with Whitehead, one is frankly perplexed by the view that he attributes to Whitehead at this point. Perhaps it is a momentary lapse in his understanding.

D. Social Darwinism and the Myth of Progress

Whitehead's broad philosophical position (not just his philosophy of civilization) has been criticized from time to time for its seeming consequence of viewing human beings as fallible, and yet ever-evolving, entities. That is to say, Whitehead has been accused of being a Social Darwinist of the Spencerian sort. This is not surprising in itself. The process model lends itself to such misrepresentations. Given that the world is in process and that Whitehead uses a number of very positive metaphors to describe the process, one can easily be tempted to equate process with progress. Indeed, the slavery/freedom example above would seem to lend itself to such an understanding; that is, that things are getting better and better, that "culture" is evolving. This sort of view was common in 19th-century Victorian England. It was advanced, in England, by individuals like Spencer who appealed to a Darwinian evolutionary model to argue that more advanced societies are more intelligent and more productive; and James Hutton, a geologist, who saw the very structure of the terrain as beneficial to the development of humanity. And it is not completely uncommon to interpret Whitehead this way. As Johnson recounts, Whitehead states that "Geography is half of character" and that "civilization haunts the borders of waterways."⁴⁰² Further, given the emphasis that

⁴⁰² Whitehead, "Harvard: The Future", *The Atlantic Monthly*, 1938 and "The Education

Whitehead places upon the role of ideas, one might be tempted to associate him with a sort of Spencerian view. Indeed, one of those who sees Whitehead as being committed to a Darwinistic view of civilization's evolution is actually one of his supporters, Richard S. Davis.

In his treatment of what he takes to be Whitehead's moral intuitions, Davis turns to Whitehead's understanding of the development and decay of civilizations. From this position, Davis argues that Whitehead is committed to the view that morality, in a very practical sense, is really a concern with the future. He elaborates this a bit to show that practical morality, for Whitehead, is particularly concerned with "the usefulness of the present to the future."⁴⁰³ From this he then argues to a conclusion that we have already seen is a critical aspect of Whitehead's view. That is that moral interests are self-transcending.⁴⁰⁴ Or, in another way, great individuals can and often do rationally choose to express certain ideas which entail some measure of disutility for themselves precisely because of the future benefit to society.

However, Davis also takes this to commit Whitehead to something of a Social Darwinian position. The key passage in Davis' analysis is, "this great fact of progressiveness, be it from worse to better, or from better to worse, has become of greater and greater importance in Western Civilization as we come to modern times."⁴⁰⁵

of an Englishman", *The Atlantic Monthly*, 1943. I should note here that Johnson is not one of those who attribute the Social Evolutionary view to Whitehead. Indeed, he argues against it quite explicitly when he writes that "It is to be noted that Whitehead is not guilty of fuzzy optimism." [Johnson, 47]

⁴⁰³ Davis, 79.

⁴⁰⁴ *ibid.*, p. 80.

⁴⁰⁵ Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 98.

From this passage, Davis infers that Whitehead is “speaking of the preparation of a social environment for gradual attainment of the humanitarian ideal.”⁴⁰⁶ It is this overarching humanitarian ideal that Davis takes to be Whitehead’s view of the future culmination of civilization and the human species.

Where Davis’ argument is concerned, I suspect that he has simply not given the clause “or from better to worse” its due while at the same time reading too much into the “fact of progressiveness”. But it points to the broader question about Whitehead’s view; namely whether his process paradigm necessitates a commitment to progress. It is to this broader question of whether Whitehead is committed to the Spencerian sort of world view in general that I now turn.

If Whitehead is a Social Darwinist, with a rosy picture of the human animal, his view has some rather significant explanatory troubles. Two instances that spring to mind are The Troubles between his native England and the five counties of Northern Ireland and the Holocaust. The latter is generally presumed by most philosophers and theologians of the twentieth century to have finally nailed the coffin of Social Darwinism shut once and for all.⁴⁰⁷ If Whitehead has a Social Darwinist view of cultural evolution, then the view is subject to the same coffin. I do not see Whitehead’s philosophy of civilization ultimately committing him to such a view, however.

⁴⁰⁶ Davis, 81.

⁴⁰⁷ For example, the existentialists of this century (e.g., Paul Tillich, Martin Buber, Elie Wiesel). However, Social Darwinism is nothing if not resilient, reappearing in barely warmed-over versions like Evolutionary Psychology, to name one late 20th-century incarnation. A current descendent of Spencer is Mark Schmidt. His “The Idea of Human Nature and Mid-Twentieth Century Political Theory” [Arkansas Philosophical Association, October 1999] is a contemporary defense of the Social Darwinist views of Spencer, et al.

It does seem to be true that Whitehead's characterization of civilization is not entirely removed from the stereotypical late-19th-century, British landed-gentry version. Indeed, he takes civilization to be marked by five features without which a society cannot be called "civilized": art, beauty, truth, peace, and adventure. This seems, *prima facie*, to be similar to Edward Tylor's view that "civilization" is to be defined as the "complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."⁴⁰⁸

However suspiciously Spencerian Whitehead's view may initially sound, he is not in the thrall of the inherited view. The terms are typically Whiteheadian, which is to say overly technical at times. But his mature view has been forged in the aftermath of one world war and in the looming shadow of another. So it should not be seen as odd to interpret the mature view that Whitehead advances as being very far from a naïve Victorian picture. Indeed, Whitehead has some rather explicit things to say about the Myth of Progress and goes to great lengths to separate his own views from the view that humankind necessarily is progressing toward a better future for itself and its world. For Whitehead, process does not necessitate progress.

Two indications that this is the case have already been marshalled in the discussion of Johnson's limited reading of Whitehead's view. One will recall from that

⁴⁰⁸ What is at issue is not so much the explicit content of the linguistic statements that are themselves similar, but rather the preconceptions and commitments that are not. Tylor, Spencer, and Hutton all seem to see an equivalence of sorts between process and progress, to the point of considering the age of Victoria the qualitative culmination of all the preceding ages. Whitehead does not explicitly draw this conclusion, nor do I think he does so implicitly. To do so would be to fall victim to what I have labeled the "Myth of Progress".

discussion that Whitehead explicitly states that “the final introduction of a reform does not necessarily prove the moral superiority of the reforming generation.”⁴⁰⁹ Also, from the *Sketch of the View*, it will be recalled that Whitehead allows for the destruction of a civilization. Indeed, he spends a great deal of time outlining those conditions under which it is inevitable that a civilization will perish. For example, when a society loses creative initiative or when, as he notes in the preface to Process and Reality, a society becomes convinced of its world view and advances it with dogmatic certainty. Such a civilization is in danger of the stagnation that precedes decay. On Whitehead’s view, such dogmatic certainty is an “exhibition of folly”.⁴¹⁰

Further evidence that Whitehead’s view does not succumb to the Myth of Progress is to be found in the very place from which the accusation could arise in the first place: his treatment of ideas. As noted, there are great ideas and small ideas, each with persuasive lure. Some progress toward civilization does take place when the great ideas like Freedom and Justice are expressed and the small ones like half-priced burgers are kept in proper (that is to say, extremely limited) perspective. But great and small ideas are not the only ideas available to humanity, on Whitehead’s view. It is precisely because vicious ideas are part of the tapestry of society that any progress that is made is made only with fits and starts and over great lengths of time. He notes that along with ideals (great ideas) has been interwoven the concept of “Divine Despot and a slavish universe,”⁴¹¹ for example; so, too, the notions of slavery, intolerance, force, and “blind

⁴⁰⁹ Whitehead, Adventures of Ideas, 29.

⁴¹⁰ Whitehead, Process and Reality, xiv.

⁴¹¹ Whitehead, Adventures of Ideas, 33.

worship of the good old days” are (or have been) present.⁴¹² Thus, on the basis of this evidence, it is difficult to see how Whitehead’s view could be ultimately construed as Social Darwinist.

F. Education

Finally, and in brief, I will turn to what Whitehead takes to be the necessary condition upon which the decisive factors depend: Education. Whitehead believes that without the proper educational system the attempt at civilization will ultimately be futile. This should be unsurprising given his assertions concerning ideas and the ways in which ideas take hold of a particular society. If it is a necessary condition for civilization that ideas must be understood, accepted, and applied, then the educational system must facilitate understanding, acceptance, and application. It should be noted that Whitehead construes the “educational system” to be something considerably larger than K-12, college, and university. Educators need not be connected with the formal educational system of a civilization at all. Indeed, some of the educators to whom Whitehead points as exemplars of this dissemination of ideas are Socrates, Jesus, and Hume. The important fact is that ideas are disseminated. And as Johnson notes, it is Whitehead’s view that these are men who through the expression of ideas “manifest the ideals [and] serve as a stimulus to others.” Thus, it would seem that in addition to the inherent persuasive lure of an idea there is also the personal example of a great teacher to stimulate interest, understanding, acceptance, and application.

⁴¹² Johnson, 44.

Given Whitehead's view that understanding and application are two poles of an idea's expression, the education process should provide the mechanism by which the earlier discussed problems of RCT are overcome. And this seems to be the case. As Johnson describes Whitehead's view, "There must be a fruitful balance of theory and practice, fact and ideal. It must be the type of education which issues in 'insight and foresight and a sense of the worth of life.'"⁴¹³ On Whitehead's view, such Insight and Foresight along with the sense of worth of life will enable the rational agent to choose those moments when it is acceptable, or perhaps required, to accept great personal disutility in the interest of great ideas.

This is a view that is consistent with one advanced by Thomas Nagel in his discussions of economic rationality. As Little notes, Nagel argues that rationality requires altruism. He then defines altruism as "recognition of the reality of the interests of others and a direct willingness to act out of regard for those interests."⁴¹⁴ Whitehead would accept this with little in the way of amendment. Indeed, he writes,

In any human society, one fundamental idea tingeing [sic] every detail of activity is the general conception of the status of the individual members of that group, considered apart from any special preeminence. In such societies as they emerge into civilizations, the members recognize each other as individual exercising the enjoyment of emotions, passions, comforts and discomforts, perceptions, hopes, fears, and purposes.⁴¹⁵

Nagel goes on to argue that it is "perfectly consistent" to reject an egoist line in favor of a view in which individuals are understood to define several sets of goals - "from narrow self-interest to the interests of the family to the interests of more encompassing

⁴¹³ Johnson, 46; Whitehead, Adventures of Ideas, 125.

⁴¹⁴ Little, 64.

groups, and choose their actions according to the degree to which various alternatives serve this ensemble of interests."⁴¹⁶ Thus, it could very well be the case, on Nagel's view, that in assessing the ensemble of interests, some personal disutility is to be rationally preferred by agents.

This is consistent with Whitehead's picture. If it is perfectly consistent to define a range of goals, then it is also consistent to expect that those goals could be broadened given a fruitful balance of theory and practice in which one is exposed to the novel possibilities that great ideas express. Indeed, the educational process that Whitehead advocates is one that broadens the narrow circles of self-interest and family interest to include ever-larger groups. For example, in the Slavery/Freedom example, it is through one pole of the education process - that is, understanding - that the circle of humanity is broadened to include people of color where they had been considered only 3/5ths of a person before (when people bothered to grant even that much). It is through the other pole - that is, application - that Freedom actually is experienced by those now included in the circle.⁴¹⁷ Another pertinent example is that of Women's Suffrage. It is only through a torturous process that the circle of humanity is broadened to include women. And, consistent with Whitehead's view that certain progress once attained is not somehow inviolate, the struggle to raise consciousness continues in things as mundane as insistence

⁴¹⁵ Whitehead, Adventures of Ideas, 17.

⁴¹⁶ Little, 64.

⁴¹⁷ It seems that Johnson's suggestion that education involves understanding, acceptance and application causes one small problem. In Whitehead's treatment of education, as Johnson elsewhere recognizes, he posits two poles - theory and practice or, in philosophy, rationalism and empiricism. [Whitehead, Process and Reality, 3] My reading of Whitehead suggests that "understanding" and "acceptance" form something like the theoretical pole

upon inclusive language so that the very language we use to speak of the human animal reflects the full humanity of women. Thus, education is an ongoing and necessary process in any society which is moving toward attainment of the moniker "civilized".

Part IV. Conclusion

In the foregoing pages, I have sketched Whitehead's general view of metaphysics, ethics, and civilization and argued that it is a plausible view. The strongest non-virtue competitor to a Whiteheadian ethical theory is the Universal Hedonism of Sidgwick. Sidgwick has demonstrated why it is reasonable to reject the theistic deontological schemes of the Cambridge Moralists. There is no reason to suppose that Whitehead would disagree with Sidgwick's conclusions and those conclusions are congenial to Whitehead's own. The downside of Sidgwick's quite detailed argument is that ultimately both Universal Hedonism and Ethical Egoism are left at the end of the day. Given the incompatibility of these views, Sidgwick concludes that Practical Reason is divided on itself.

Green has a very nice argument that one need not conclude that Practical Reason is dualistic, and Whitehead can be seen following Green's lead to a certain degree. Green's argument depends on a particular interpretation of Aristotle and Aristotle's concept of the Good. Though Green does not present the Aristotelian argument necessary for Green's purposes, Irwin shows that such an argument can be developed. The difficulty here is that even if Green is right about the Dualism of Practical Reason, his broader view is plausibly rejected by Sidgwick. So, while a part of the view is quite

while "application" is the practical.

helpful, the full view falls victim to Sidgwick's criticism. Fortunately, Whitehead's view, as I have presented it, avoids the pitfalls that bedevil Green (and the rest of the Moralists as well). Whitehead is able to reject the Dualism of Practical Reason, as I have shown above.

To present Whitehead's ethical views required the discussion of his metaphysical ones. To discuss his metaphysics, it was necessary to demonstrate his affinity for first Plato and then Aristotle. It was also necessary to discuss Whitehead's methodology at some length. In investigating methodology, metaphysics, and Whitehead's interpretations of ancient Greek philosophy, I have shown how Whitehead's approach is radically different from Plato's and Aristotle's in one sense, although it is strikingly similar in another. Whitehead's conclusions about ethics bear resemblance to the ancients in that his position is best categorized as a virtue theory. Like Plato and Aristotle, he develops a catalogue of Cardinal Virtues. And like Aristotle, those ethical commitments are intimately related to the metaphysical ones. Beyond these similarities, however, lies considerable difference. Whitehead rejects Aristotelian substance metaphysics in favor of his own process view. Because of the intimate connection between the metaphysical foundations and the ethical conclusions, those conclusions also differ from Aristotle's.

The view that metaphysics and ethics are connected in informative ways illustrates a further difference between Whitehead and Sidgwick. Sidgwick constructs rigid walls between the various disciplines within philosophy. This causes some difficulties for his view because he is unable to appeal to potential help from

metaphysical or epistemological arguments to address the Dualism of Practical Reason. I showed why Whitehead rightly rejects such strict compartmentalization of disciplines.

Beyond their differences about the relationship between metaphysics and ethics and the Dualism of Practical Reason, Whitehead and Sidgwick obviously differ in their larger ethical theories. I have shown how Whitehead criticizes utilitarian views from Bentham to Mill to Sidgwick. I have done this in two ways, one longer and one shorter. The first involved in-depth analyses of the views of Mill and Sidgwick, and to a lesser extent Bentham. The second involved the informal Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness. Having shown how Utilitarianism is rejected by Whitehead, I also showed how he rejects Ethical Egoism as well. With the rejections of Universal Hedonism, Ethical Egoism, Theistic Intuitionism, and the Dualism of Practical Reason, I turned to argue Whitehead's positive ethical views.

I conclude that Whitehead has a sophisticated ethical system that has character development as its chief component and virtue as the goal of that development. I have also examined at some length the constitution of virtue in general and the character of the several Cardinal Virtues in particular; demonstrating how they fit together and how they are related to Whitehead's larger philosophical concerns. To address potential criticisms of Whitehead's views, I have analyzed Rational Choice Theory and Collective Action Theory as well as a potential charge that Whitehead was a Social Darwinist. Having shown the plausibility of Whitehead's view, I hope that I have not, at the same time, compromised its intelligibility.

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