

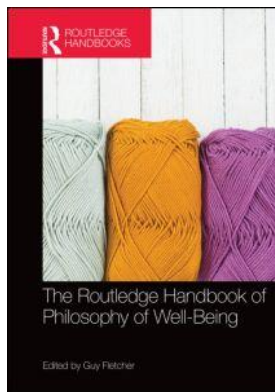
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8

THE LATER BRITISH MORALISTS

Robert Shaver

Sidgwick gives an analysis of “good for me” and argues that only pleasure is good. In the first part of this chapter, I set out Sidgwick’s analysis: to say that *x* is good for me is to say that I ought to desire *x* when considering myself alone. In the second part, I consider objections. In the third part, I consider his arguments for pleasure as the only ultimate good, highlighting objections by Moore and Broad. In the fourth part, I argue that while Sidgwick does not rely on an account of well-being in the sense current now, he does have this concept. In the last part, I consider how, given his account of pleasure, he can reply to Broad’s objection that the order in which pleasures come, and not just the total amount of pleasure, matters. I concentrate on Sidgwick, because he says by far the most about well-being, but I place him in the sequence of philosophers that runs through Moore, Prichard, Ross, Carritt, Broad, and Ewing.¹

Sidgwick’s analysis

Sidgwick considers whether “good for me” means “what I desire for its own sake.” He thinks not: I might desire something that is not so good when I get it, a “Dead Sea apple, mere dust and ashes in the eating.” I might suppress my desire for something that I believe I cannot do anything to get, such as fine weather, but that does not change its goodness (ME 109–110).²

In response, Sidgwick offers a modification to the desire account: “good for me” might be identified

not with the actually *desired*, but rather with the *desirable*:—meaning by “desirable” not necessarily “what *ought* to be desired” but what would be desired, with strength proportioned to the degree of desirability, if it were judged attainable by voluntary action, supposing the desirer to possess a perfect forecast, emotional as well as intellectual, of the state of attainment or fruition.

Since something might be desired in this sense but not be good for me on the whole, given its consequences and given the alternatives, a more complex account is needed for “good for me on the whole”: what one “would now desire and seek on the whole if all the consequences of all the different lines of conduct open to him were accurately foreseen and adequately realised in imagination at the present point of time” (ME 110–112).

Sidgwick comments that this is too elaborate to be “what we commonly *mean*,” but the account “supplies an intelligible and admissible interpretation of the terms ‘good’ (substantive) and ‘desirable,’ as giving philosophical precision to the vaguer meaning with which they are used in ordinary discourse.” A “desire for ‘good’ conceived somewhat in this way, though more vaguely, is normally produced by intellectual comparison and experience in a reflective mind,” and so is not so far from ordinary life. Finally, he comments that the

notion of “Good” thus attained has an ideal element: it is something that *is* not always actually desired . . . but the ideal element is entirely interpretable in terms of *fact*, actual or hypothetical, and does not introduce any judgment of value, fundamentally distinct from judgments relating to existence;—still less any “dictate of Reason.”

(ME 112)

Sidgwick then argues for a different account, on which “good for me” should be analyzed as “what I should practically desire if my desires were in harmony with reason, assuming my own existence alone to be considered,” or what I ought then to desire.³ It is

more in accordance with common sense to recognise—as Butler does—that the calm desire for my “good on the whole” is *authoritative*; and therefore carries with it implicitly a rational dictate to aim at this end, if in any case a conflicting desire urges the will in an opposite direction.

(ME 112)⁴

(Similarly, in the second edition, after giving the hypothetical desire view, he writes that acting on these desires is “an ideal which we think [one] ‘ought’ to try to realise; such an effort therefore is ‘prescribed’ or ‘dictated’ by reason” (ME (2) 33).) The point seems to be that identifying what is good for me with what I would desire does not explain why it is a mistake to act on an opposed desire. Say I would, when informed, desire A, but in fact desire B. All that can be said is that I do not pursue what is good for me, or I do not act on a different desire. It does not follow from my desiring B that I have made a mistake. Sidgwick wants to build the rational dictate to pursue what is good for me into the concept of what is good for me.⁵

This makes it unlikely that Sidgwick’s worry is that the hypothetical desire account picks out the wrong things as good.⁶ The account gives an “intelligible and admissible interpretation.” In the third through fifth editions his only objection to it is that it is too complex to be what we mean by “good for me” (ME (3) 108; ME (4) 112; ME (5) 112; also ME (2) 32–33). (Indeed, it is unclear there whether he finally rejects it: after noting that he is “not prepared to deny” the analysis, he makes the complexity point, then simply moves on to endorse taking one’s good to be what one ought to desire.) Sidgwick’s concern in the final edition seems to be that it does not follow from the account that I ought to pursue what is good for me, rather than that the account makes a mistake about what is good for me.

Although the hypothetical desire account is “admissible,” Sidgwick does not appeal, in arguing for ultimate goods, to what I would desire if informed.⁷ Judgments about the good are to be settled by “the same . . . procedure that I . . . employ[ed] in considering the absolute and independent validity of common moral precepts,” which include an “appeal . . . to . . . intuitive judgment” (ME 400). Similarly, in the first and second editions, after rejecting an analysis of “good” in terms of pleasure, Sidgwick writes that “if the scale in which actions . . . are arranged in respect of goodness . . . is not finally determined by direct intuition, the proper method for determining it has yet to be ascertained” (ME (2) 99; also ME (1) 98).

One advantage of not appealing to informed desires is that Sidgwick avoids the worry that some, when informed, would not, when considering themselves alone, desire only pleasure. He admits that “several cultivated persons do habitually judge that knowledge, art, etc.—not to speak of Virtue—are ends independently of the pleasure derived from them” (ME 401). Sidgwick thinks these people are wrong. It seems more plausible to say that the error concerns what one ought to desire than what one would desire when informed; I seem the best judge of what I would desire when informed.

Before leaving the hypothetical desire account, another possible reason for rejecting it should be considered: perhaps Sidgwick rejects it because of open-question worries. He notes that Spencer thinks that “good (substantive)” means “pleasure.” Sidgwick objects that “pleasure is the ultimate good” is now a tautology. He then gives his account of “good” as what one ought to desire and adds that “that is required for a non-tautological principle” (GSM 145). Whether Sidgwick thinks one must go to his ought-to-desire account, or just not define “good” as “pleasure,” is not clear. On the one hand, his argument could be generated against a hypothetical desire account: “what I would desire given full information is the ultimate good” would be a tautology if “good” means “what I would desire given full information.” On the other hand, after giving the same tautology objection to defining “good” as “pleasure” in the *Methods*, Sidgwick immediately turns to consider desire accounts, and does not offer the tautology objection to them (ME 109).

I do not think that open-question worries should be stressed. Sidgwick admits informative analyses. The hypothetical desire account is too elaborate to be “what we commonly mean,” but the account “supplies an intelligible and admissible interpretation of the terms ‘good’ (substantive) and ‘desirable,’ as giving philosophical precision to the vaguer meaning with which they are used in ordinary discourse” (ME 112). Presumably Sidgwick claims the same for his own account: he does not worry that “the good is what I ought to desire” becomes “what I ought to desire is what I ought to desire.” Similarly, “the uninstructed majority of mankind could not define a circle as a figure bounded by a line of which every point is equidistant from the centre: but nevertheless, when the definition is explained to them, they will accept it as expressing the perfect type of that notion of roundness which they have long had in their minds” (ME 353). The real problem with analyzing “good” as “pleasure” is that when the definition is explained, we do not accept it as expressing what we had in mind by “good.”⁸

Sidgwick’s view is a “fitting attitude” account: “good for me” is analyzed in terms of a fitting desire. He does not, however, give the usual motivations for such an account. Consider the motivations given by Ewing (concerning “good” rather than “good for”): “good” is more puzzling than “ought;” it is a virtue to have one unanalyzable concept rather than two; the analysis removes disagreement between deontologists and ideal utilitarians; the analysis gives a more defensible form of non-naturalism; the analysis explains why claims about goodness cannot be analyzed in non-normative terms; the goodness of a state of affairs plays no role because in justifying a choice we cite only non-normative properties (Ewing 1939; 1947: ch. 5; 1959: ch. 3). Sidgwick says none of this. His motivation seems to be simply that he thinks common sense holds that it follows from A’s being good for me that I ought to desire A. Nor does Sidgwick consider some of the standard issues that arise for fitting attitude accounts. Unlike Ewing, he does not consider whether different attitudes might be appropriate for different goods—he always writes of desire, aim, or choice—nor does he consider the now-popular “wrong kind of reasons” objection or the objection that fitting attitude accounts reverse the correct order of explanation (I ought to desire A because A is good for me, rather than vice versa).

Objections to Sidgwick's analysis

I turn to objections.

Synthetic connection

One question is why Sidgwick wants to build the rational dictate into the concept, rather than add it as an independent claim about what I ought to do. Broad notes that one could hold that

the purely positive, though ideal, definition of “my greatest good on the whole” is adequate; but that it is a *synthetic* and necessary proposition that I *ought* to desire my greatest good on the whole, thus defined . . . It is surely possible that both “good” and “right” are indefinable, as both “shape” and “size” are, and yet there is a synthetic, necessary and mutual relation between them, as there is between shape and size.

(Broad 1930: 176, 177)⁹

Broad is right to think this possible. Sidgwick could give two replies.

First, he could note that his analysis explains why I ought to desire my good.

Second, shape and size do not seem plausibly analyzed in terms of one another. It is at least plausible that “my good” can be analyzed as “what I ought to desire, considering myself alone”—hence the continued popularity of fitting attitude analyses.

Depression and self-loathing

Stephen Darwall objects that I can hold, without conceptual error, that I have no reason to desire what is good for me—say I am depressed, or loathe myself. If so, “A is good for me” cannot be analyzed as “A is what I have reason to desire considering myself alone” (Darwall 2002: 5–6).

Darwall thinks of the depressive and self-loather as making desert claims: the depressive claims that he does not deserve to be better off; the self-loather claims he deserves to be worse off. Presumably both think that if they did deserve some benefit, or if desert were silent, they would have a reason to desire A. This suggests that Sidgwick's analysis could be modified to meet the objection: “A is good for me” can be analyzed as “A is what (given the absence of a defeater such as a desert claim) I have reason to desire when considering myself alone.”¹⁰ This allows the depressive or self-loather to say, without conceptual confusion, “A is good for me but I have no reason to desire A” and for Sidgwick to say that both have reason to desire A (since Sidgwick thinks they are wrong in making desert claims).

“Ought” and “can”

Sidgwick thinks “ought” has two senses: the “narrow” or “ethical” sense implies “can”; the “wider” sense does not. The wide sense is needed because we say things like “I ought to feel as a better man would feel” “though I may know that I could not directly produce in myself such . . . feeling by any effort of will.” The wide “ought” “merely implies an ideal or pattern which I ‘ought’—in the stricter sense—to seek to imitate as far as possible” (ME 33). The objection, raised by Tom Hurka, is a dilemma (Hurka 2003: 604; Hurka 2014: 53). Say the “ought” used to analyze “good for me” implies “can.” It follows that if I cannot desire some state of myself, it is not good for me. But that is false. As Sidgwick notes,

since irrational desires cannot always be dismissed at once by voluntary effort . . . we can not say [that what is good for me is what I ought to desire] in the strictly ethical sense of “ought.” We can only say it in the wider sense, in which it merely connotes an ideal or standard, divergence from which it is our duty to avoid as far as possible.

(ME (4) 110–111; also ME (3) 107, ME (5) 111)¹¹

But now the worry is that the analysis is pointless: there is no difference between saying “that state of myself is good for me” and “that state of myself is an ideal.” Ross notes, against Broad’s example of the wider sense “sorrow ought to have been felt by a certain man at the death of a certain relation, though it was not in his power to feel sorrow at will,” that “all we are entitled to say is, not that he ought to have felt sorrow now, but that his not feeling it is a bad thing” (Ross 1939: 45; Broad 1930: 161).¹²

Sidgwick has a reply. Say the “ought” is the wide sense, and that, as he suggests, the wide sense can be understood in terms of the narrow sense. To say that I ought, in the wide sense, to desire x, is to say that I ought, in the narrow sense, to desire x “as far as possible.” “I ought, in the narrow sense, to desire x” is made false by my inability to desire x. But “I ought, in the narrow sense, to desire x as far as possible” is not made false by my inability to desire x. It would be made false by my inability to desire x as far as possible—but I am *always* able to desire x as far as I can, since that is to say that I can do what I can do.¹³ Put another way: the first horn of the dilemma depends on thinking that there can be states of myself that I cannot desire (and which are good). Once the claim becomes “there can be states of myself that I cannot desire as far as possible (and which are good),” one sees that there can be no such states.

The scope problem

If “good for me” is identified simply with something I ought to desire, many things will be wrongly included. I ought to desire the pleasure of a deserving stranger, but her getting this pleasure need not be good for me.¹⁴ Sidgwick avoids this by adding “assuming my own existence alone to be considered” (ME 112). Sidgwick also adds that the issue is “what a man desires . . . for himself—not benevolently for others” (ME 109) and often associates egoism with “self-love” (e.g., HUG 31, 33, ME xx–xxi, 89, 93).¹⁵ But both additions face problems.

One might worry, against the first, that if I ought to desire that people get what they non-comparatively deserve, and I am bad, then “assuming my own existence alone to be considered” does not exclude the conclusion that my pain is good for me (Kagan 1992: 185).¹⁶

Perhaps, however, Sidgwick intends “assuming my own existence alone to be considered” to exclude what he thinks of as “relations” to something beyond my consciousness.¹⁷ Sidgwick thinks of virtues as states of consciousness that “correspon[d] to an ideal” (ME 400). The ideal is not part of my consciousness. Similarly, a just distribution of pain is not part of my consciousness. This reading makes sense of Sidgwick’s claim that “when any one hypothetically concentrates his attention on himself, Good is naturally and almost inevitably conceived to be Pleasure” (ME 405). Concentrating my attention on myself, in the sense of thinking of what is located in me rather than others, would not exclude thinking of my virtue or knowledge as good for me—unlike concentrating my attention on myself in the sense of excluding relations to anything beyond consciousness.

This is not, however, the natural reading of “assuming my own existence to be considered.” Sidgwick contrasts this with having “an equal concern for *all* existence,” not with relations to something outside consciousness (ME 112). And the reading seems to build too much into the notion of well-being: virtue and knowledge are trivially excluded from contributing to well-being.

There is a variant on this reply.¹⁸ The problem arises because there seem to be goods, located in me, that are not good for me. But Sidgwick, holding that only pleasure is good, would deny this. For him, the only good located in me does benefit me. This reply has the drawback that the acceptability of the analysis depends on controversial arguments about what is good. That, however, may be inevitable, since whether there is a counter-example to the analysis depends on what is good.

The second addition limits the ought-claims to those I make when loving myself, or being (as it were) benevolent to myself. One worry is that, although Sidgwick thinks “the promotion of Happiness is practically the chief part of what Common Sense considers to be prescribed as the external duty of Benevolence,” he is unwilling to rule out the promotion of virtue as also prescribed by benevolence (ME 240; also ME 9, 392, Ross 1930: 21).¹⁹ A second worry is that the analysis seems unhelpful, since, as Sidgwick himself notes, “Benevolence . . . manifestly involve[s] this notion of Good” (ME 393).²⁰ But perhaps here Sidgwick can reply that since his motivation for giving a fitting attitude analysis is to make an analytic connection between “A is good for me” and “I ought to desire A,” this does not matter to him.²¹ Say that “A is good for me” is analyzed as “A is what I ought to desire when I am benevolent to myself.” The circularity makes the analysis unhelpful in one way, since benevolence involves the notion of one’s good. But the analysis is helpful in another way: it connects what is good for me and what I ought to desire, something Sidgwick thinks is needed.²²

Sidgwick’s arguments for pleasure as the only ultimate good

Sidgwick gives two arguments for pleasure as the only ultimate good.²³

The first argument is that

to me at least it seems clear after reflection that these objective relations of the conscious subject, when distinguished from the consciousness accompanying and resulting from them, are not ultimately and intrinsically desirable; any more than material or other objects are, when considered apart from any relation to conscious existence.

(ME 400–401)

This appears terribly inconclusive—Sidgwick is aware that the reflection of others gives a different verdict. But I think he can say *a bit* more.

By “objective relations,” Sidgwick means “relations of the conscious mind which are not included in its consciousness” (LE 126n1). For example, when I know that *p*, I (on most accounts) have a belief, and the belief stands in a certain relation to a state of affairs—it is (at least) true. That the belief is true is not a fact included in consciousness (though my belief that *p* is true is included in consciousness). Sidgwick is thinking of a case like this: compare two worlds that are alike except that in W_1 my belief that *p* is true and in W_2 my belief is false. Say this difference makes no difference to me in any way other than making it the case that I know that *p* in one world and do not know that *p* in the other. Sidgwick thinks the worlds are equal in goodness.

Sidgwick notes that material objects, such as beautiful objects or mere physical processes, are not ultimate goods. The obvious explanation is that they do not affect consciousness. In the case of physical processes,

so long as we confine our attention to their corporeal aspect,—regarding them merely as complex movements of certain particles of organised matter—it seems impossible to attribute to these movements . . . either goodness or badness . . . [I]f a certain quality of human Life is that which is ultimately desirable, it must belong to . . . Consciousness.

(ME 396)

But if knowledge is an ultimate good, that explanation cannot be sufficient: in the case above, knowledge does not affect consciousness. The defender of knowledge must say, then, that the explanation for why mere physical processes are not ultimate goods is not just that their existence does not by itself affect consciousness—but that seemed a sufficient explanation.

Moore objects that

from the fact that no value resides in one part of a whole, considered by itself, we cannot infer that all the value belonging to the whole does reside in the other part, considered by itself. . . Sidgwick's argument here depends upon the neglect of . . . the principle of "organic relations." The argument is calculated to mislead, because it supposes that, if we see a whole state to be valuable, and also see that one element of that state has no value *by itself*, then the other element, *by itself*, must have all the value which belongs to the whole state.

(Moore 1903: 92–93; also Bradley 1877: 25, 27; Seth 1896: 422; Hayward 1901: 189, 200–201, 225, 231; Broad 1930: 235–237; Irwin 2009: 459–461, 548–549; Hurka 2014: 200)

But it is not clear that Sidgwick makes this argument. When he writes that "these objective relations of the conscious subject, when distinguished from the consciousness accompanying and resulting from them, are not ultimately and intrinsically desirable," he need not be read as *inferring* from (i) knowledge has no value by itself to (ii) knowledge contributes no value to the whole. Rather, the point is that when consciousness is held fixed, there is no difference in value, so knowledge cannot be contributing any value. Sidgwick's case rests on our direct intuition about a case like W_1 and W_2 , rather than an argument from the value of parts and wholes.²⁴

Sidgwick's second argument for pleasure is that knowledge, beauty, etc. are "not only . . . productive of pleasure . . . but also . . . they seem to obtain the commendation of Common Sense, roughly speaking, in proportion to the degree of this productiveness" (ME 401). Sidgwick's explanation is that they are only instrumentally valuable.

Moore objects that, even granted the proportionality claim, Sidgwick "leave[s] open the alternative that the greatest quantity of pleasure was as a matter of fact, *under actual conditions*, generally accompanied by the greatest quantity of *other goods*, and that it therefore was *not* the sole good" (Moore 1903: 91–92). Broad objects that Sidgwick cannot conclude

that the hedonic quality of an experience is *sufficient* as well as *necessary* to give intrinsic value. Even if the *variations* in intrinsic value were dependent on variations in hedonic quality and totally independent of variations in any non-hedonic characteristic, it might still be the case that intrinsic value would not be *present at all* unless there were some non-hedonic characteristic in addition to the hedonic quality.

(Broad 1930: 236–237)

Moore and Broad show that Sidgwick's argument, even granting the proportionality claim, is inconclusive. But Sidgwick starts the argument by noting that it "cannot be made completely cogent" (ME 401). Presumably his thought is that his explanation of proportionality is more plausible than the possibilities suggested by Moore and Broad. Moore admits that the explanation that he suggests "might indeed seem to be a strange coincidence" (Moore 1903: 92; also Moore 1965 [1912]: 101).

One might instead attack Sidgwick's argument for the proportionality claim. In *Principia*, Moore does, briefly: he charges that Sidgwick's "detailed illustrations only tend to shew the very

different proposition that a thing is not held to be good, unless it gives a balance of pleasure; not that the degree of commendation is in proportion to the quantity of pleasure” (Moore 1903: 92). Moore is right that Sidgwick sometimes claims only that (for example) “it is paradoxical to maintain that . . . any form of social order, would still be commonly regarded as desirable even if we were certain that it had no tendency to promote the general happiness” (ME 401). But Sidgwick also claims, of a “fruitless” branch of science which nonetheless gives “the inquirer the refined and innocent pleasures of curiosity,” that “Common Sense is somewhat disposed to complain of the misdirection of valuable effort.” He concludes that “the meed of honour commonly paid to Science seems to be graduated, though perhaps unconsciously, by a tolerably exact utilitarian scale” (ME 401–402). The fruitless inquirer, producing a small amount of pleasure, is less commended than a fruitful inquirer. This is a proportionality claim, rather than a claim about pleasure production as a necessary condition for commendation.²⁵

Moore and Broad also attack the proportionality claim by giving counter-examples. Moore claims that, in cases like W_1 and W_2 above, we think W_2 is better (especially when there is a great deal more knowledge or virtue or appreciation of beauty in W_2) (Moore 1965 [1912]: 102; see also Ross 1930: 134, 138–139, Ewing 1965 [1953]: 43–44). Broad notes that pleasure in the undeserved pain of another is bad, and “*worse* in proportion as the pleasantness is more intense,” even when the malice is “impotent” (Broad 1930: 234; see also Ewing 1965 [1953]: 44–45). This is well-trodden territory, in which Sidgwick makes no special contribution. Like many in the recent empirically informed literature, Sidgwick is more willing to explain away intuitions than his opponents are; but obviously this is inconclusive.

Well-being

One question is whether, when Sidgwick argues for pleasure as the ultimate good, he is arguing for it as what well-being consists in or as what is good.

Sidgwick sometimes suggests that his concern is well-being (Crisp 2011: 27n4). In the chapter on ultimate good, his target is “Good or Well-being” (ME 391, 392), the “Ultimate good for man” (ME 392), “well-being or welfare” (ME 396), “well-being” (ME 397), what is “desirable for the . . . agent” and “good for the . . . agent” (ME 397; 404, also 397). He thinks the debate over ultimate good replays the egoistic Greek debate (ME 392). He takes the Greeks to be concerned with what is “good for himself,” “his own true good” (HUG 28, 31). His concern is “the end which a prudent man, as such, has in view” (HUG 29), “one’s own good” (HUG 33; also ME 405). Pleasure is offered as one specification of “Well-being or Welfare” (HUG 33).

But there are two reasons for thinking this is misleading.

First, Sidgwick concludes the discussion of ultimate good by noting that he has arrived at utilitarianism (ME 407; also 388). This is false if he has established only that well-being consists in pleasure. If he has established only that, further arguments would be needed to dismiss goods that are not part of well-being.

This is not decisive. For perhaps Sidgwick thinks he has, before the discussion, ruled out goods that are not good for anyone. In that case, by his lights he does arrive at utilitarianism by arguing that only pleasure is good for me. And Sidgwick might be thought to have ruled out goods that are not good for anyone. Against the possibility (endorsed, briefly, by Moore 1903: 83–84) that beautiful objects are good, he argues that “no one would consider it rational to aim at the production of beauty in external nature, apart from any possible contemplation of it by human beings” (ME 114).

However, this is not the best description of what Sidgwick does. Sidgwick assumes that what is good must “exist . . . in minds” or not “exist out of relation to . . . minds” (ME 114). This

does not limit him to considering well-being, at least in the sense that makes it plausible to say that knowledge is not part of my well-being. Sidgwick concludes that “beauty, knowledge, and other ideal goods, as well as all external material things, are only reasonably to be sought by men in so far as they conduce either (1) to Happiness or (2) to the Perfection or Excellence of human existence” (ME 114; also 10n5). Existence (at least partly) in a mind is a necessary condition for being good, but the distinction between things that exist and things that do not exist in a mind is not the distinction between well-being and a wider class of good things. Thus later Moore and Ross agree with Sidgwick that existence in a mind is a necessary condition for being good, but not that well-being is the only good (Ross 1930: 140; Moore 1965 [1912]: 70, 103–104, 107 (also 1903: 202, 203)).

Second, Sidgwick’s arguments for pleasure do not turn on noting that some feature of well-being favours pleasure and disfavors, say, knowledge or beauty. Here it is useful to contrast current writers. Wayne Sumner writes that what

distinguishes welfare from all other modes of value is its reference to the proprietor of the life in question: although your life may be going well in many respects, it is prudentially valuable only if it is going well *for you* . . . Since objective theories exclude all reference to the subject’s attitudes or concerns . . . the subject-relativity of welfare constitutes a deep problem for any objective theory.

(Sumner 1996: 42–43; see also 20–25 and ch. 3)

Fred Feldman writes that

[s]uppose some pluralist tells me that knowledge and virtue will make my life better. Suppose I dutifully go about gaining knowledge and virtue. After a tedious and exhausting period of training, I become knowledgeable. I behave virtuously. I find the whole thing utterly unsatisfying. The pluralist now tells me that my life is going well for me. I dispute it. I think I might be better off *intellectually* and *morally*, but my welfare is, if anything, going downhill.

(Feldman 2004: 19; see also 2004: 8–12, 2010: 161–170).

Similarly, it is popular to defend hedonism from the experience machine objection by explaining the anti-hedonist intuition as resting on the view that, say, achievement is good (but not good for one). This leaves hedonism unscathed as an account of well-being (e.g., Railton 1989: 170; Goldsworthy 1992: 18–20; Sumner 1996: 96; Kawall 1999: 385–386; Silverstein 2000: 290–293; Crisp 2006: 116, 122; Heathwood 2006: 553).

This is not Sidgwick’s strategy. He says simply that knowledge and virtue “are not ultimately and intrinsically desirable” or not “ends independently of the pleasure derived from them” (ME 400–401). They are valued in proportion to the pleasure they produce, and the best explanation for this is that they are only instrumentally valuable (ME 401–402). These arguments do not rely on special features of well-being such as “subject-relativity” or on restrictions such as excluding relations or being benevolent to oneself.²⁶ And if, like Sidgwick, one is arguing for pleasure as the only good, there is no point to the current taxonomic move, which admits other goods.

One might go further. Hurka argues that Sidgwick (and the rest of the school) *lacked* the “present-day concept of welfare” (Hurka 2014: 36; see 34–38 and 2003: 610–612). Sidgwick (and Moore) had the different concept, noted above, of a good located in oneself.

Whether Hurka is right depends on the content of the “present-day concept.” What seems crucial is that (a) well-being is a good that, unlike some other putative goods, benefits me;

(b) well-being is a good constituted by other goods, such as pleasure, desire-satisfaction, life-satisfaction, or elements from an “objective list” such as virtue and knowledge. For (a), Sidgwick certainly thinks I can be morally good without that benefiting me. For (b), “good for” is a good that is constituted by other goods—Sidgwick thinks that the concept is “what I ought to desire considering myself alone” and that what I ought to desire considering myself alone is pleasure. In a note on why he translates *eudaimonia* “by the more unfamiliar ‘well-being’ or ‘welfare’” rather than “happiness,” Sidgwick argues that “happiness” “signifies a state of feeling” and so is false to Aristotle. “Well-being” is another term for “our being’s end and aim,” a term that Sidgwick introduces in order to include goods such as virtue (OHE 56n2; also 48). We “may still argue with the Stoics, that virtuous or excellent activities and not pleasures are the elements of which true human Well-being is composed” (ME 92).

Perhaps Hurka thinks “what I ought to desire considering myself alone” is so clearly different from well-being that Sidgwick must have something else in mind. But that seems wrong. (i) Counter-examples to “what I ought to desire considering myself alone” as an analysis of well-being rely on goods such as my getting what I deserve. Sidgwick does not see these as goods, so they are not evidence that Sidgwick must have had something other than well-being in mind. (ii) “Considering myself alone” does seem at least a plausible way to distinguish between goods that benefit me and those that do not. “Good located in me” can be defended as part of an analysis of well-being (Fletcher 2012a). Indeed, it is not clear why the location of a good matters unless one thinks location in me is necessary for me to benefit. (iii) Even if Sidgwick’s analysis is unsatisfactory, one might conclude that Sidgwick gave a failed analysis rather than had a different concept in mind. Compare one who, pre-Gettier, analyzed knowledge as justified true belief. We do not think that accepting this analysis, pre-Gettier, shows that the target concept was not what we mean by knowledge.

Order

Sidgwick writes of one’s good as a “mathematical whole, of which the integrant parts are realised in different parts or moments of a lifetime,” and that “a smaller present good is not to be preferred to a greater future good” (ME 381). He thinks of egoists as aiming at “a total” of pleasure and pain “which we are to seek to make as great as possible” (e.g., ME 123).

Broad notes against Sidgwick that “[m]ost people would be inclined to think that a life which began unhappily and ended happily was to be preferred to one, containing the same balance of happiness, which began happily and ended unhappily.” Broad goes on to raise doubts, since “secondary” pleasures and pains of memory and anticipation might alter the totals (Broad 1930: 225–226). But many others are confident that order matters as well as the total amount of pleasure.²⁷

Sidgwick’s account of pleasure gives him a reply.²⁸

For Sidgwick, a pleasure is a “feeling which . . . is at least implicitly apprehended as desirable or—in cases of comparison—preferable,” “when considered merely as feeling” (ME 127, 131). Pleasures vary in intensity and duration. Intensity is set by preferability: if, say, I find one minute of feeling *x* preferable to two minutes of feeling *y*, and find either *x* or *y* preferable to “hedonistic zero,” then *x* is more than twice as intense a pleasure as *y*.

If so, Broad’s case is misdescribed. If I find {*x* intensity of pain followed by *y* intensity of pleasure} for a given duration preferable to {*x* intensity of pleasure followed by *y* intensity of pain} for the same duration, *y* must be greater than *x* just in virtue of my judgment of preferability, and so I find preferable the greater total.²⁹

One might object, as Jamie Mayerfeld has, that it seems possible to make a judgment of preferability between the same totals. This is avoided only by keeping judgments of intensity

independent of (global) preferability. I think this shows that we have a notion of intensity that is independent of (global) preferability.³⁰ But Sidgwick can reply that intensity understood in this way—call it “local” intensity—is normatively irrelevant when one makes a global judgment of preferability about the experiences. Say X finds pain first preferable, Y finds pleasure first preferable, and the totals of the local intensities are the same. (Say the pains and pleasures derive their local intensities from one’s judgments of preferability at the time of feeling them.) A benevolent person would not be indifferent to which life X and Y get; she would give pain–first to X and pleasure–first to Y. This does not show that local intensity in the presence of a judgment of global preferability is irrelevant—perhaps here it creates a tie broken by the judgment of global preferability. But even if the totals of the local intensities are different, a benevolent person would follow global preferability rather than these totals. She would not, for example, give me pleasure–first, even if it had a higher total of local intensities, if I found pain–first preferable.³¹

After Sidgwick, Moore suggests that “good for me” means “the thing I get is good” (Moore 1903: 98; also 99, 170).³² As Hurka notes, this is close to Sidgwick’s analysis, with “good” replacing “ought to be desired” and “I get” replacing “considering myself alone” (Hurka 2003: 611; Hurka 2014: 34–35). Since Moore thinks many things are good other than pleasure, he might seem especially vulnerable to the possibility that a good might be mine without that being good for me in the sense that it benefits me. But Moore is tempted to think that pleasure is a part of any good whole, and so perhaps avoids the objection (Moore 1903: 213, 1965 [1912]: 103–104, 107).

Prichard analyzes “good to me” as what “excites” either “a feeling of satisfaction” or “enjoyment” (a feeling that, unlike satisfaction, does not require a preceding desire) (Prichard 2002 [around 1937]: 174; see Hurka 2014: 35). Prichard does not give this as an analysis of “good,” and so avoids the objection that he makes “pleasure is the ultimate good” a tautology. He must think, however, that “pleasure is my ultimate good” is a tautology. In the *Methods* version of the tautology argument, Sidgwick writes that the (objectionable) tautology is “Pleasure . . . of human beings is their Good or Ultimate Good” (ME 109).

Carritt holds that to say that x is good for me is to say that x is “excellently suited to satisfy desire” (Carritt also writes of “advantage,” “interest,” and “satisfaction”) (Carritt 1947: 48; see Carritt 1937: 59, 60, 65, 69–71, 74).

After Sidgwick, hedonism is rejected. Various of the analyses of “my good” that he considers are adopted, without much argument. But then, Sidgwick himself does not argue for his preferred analysis in anything like the depth of accounts now—perhaps because the category of well-being was not so important to him.

Appendix: Changes in Sidgwick’s analysis of “good”

In the first and second editions, after rejecting the view that “good” means “pleasure,” Sidgwick does not explicitly give any positive view. He writes only that “if the scale in which actions . . . are arranged in respect of goodness . . . is not finally determined by direct intuition, the proper method of determining it has yet to be ascertained” (ME (2) 99; also ME (1) 98).

In the third and fourth editions, he claims that “good,” like “right,” does not admit “of being analyzed into more elementary notions. We can only make it clearer by determining its relations.” As an example of these relations, he notes a relation to desire: “What I recognize as on the whole good . . . for me I either do desire (if absent), or think that I should desire if my

impulses were in harmony with my reason,—assuming my own existence alone to be considered.” He then gives the hypothetical desire account as an alternative, and, after noting that it is too elaborate to be what we mean, concludes with the “ought to desire” view (ME (4) 110–112; also ME (3) 106–108). “Assuming my own existence alone to be considered” is added in the fourth edition (though it is present earlier elsewhere, e.g., ME (1) 360; ME (3) 402; see Hurka 2014: 35). There is no initial argument given for the “ought to desire” view: it is just asserted as specifying the relation between “good” and “desire.” (It is also odd that Sidgwick denies an analysis of “good”: one would think “what I ought to desire” just *is* an analysis into more elementary notions. And if the connection between “good” and “what I ought to desire” is not analytic, Sidgwick denies exactly the claim he seems to insist on in the final edition.)

In the fifth edition, after noting that things are not good in proportion to my actual desires—since “we often desire intensely, and even seek to realize, a result that we know to be bad in preference to another that we judge to be good”—Sidgwick writes that “[b]ut I may say that what I regard as on the whole ‘good’ for me, I regard as ‘desirable’ if not ‘desired’: *i.e.* I think that I should desire it if my impulses were in harmony with my reason—assuming my own existence alone to be considered” (ME (5) 110–111). Here “ought to desire” is introduced to avoid a problem for actual desires. Sidgwick goes on to suggest the hypothetical desire account as a different way of avoiding this problem, again notes that it is too elaborate, and again repeats the “ought to desire” view (ME (5) 111–112).³³

Notes

- 1 For this sequence as part of a “school,” see Hurka (2011, 2014).
- 2 ME = Sidgwick (1981/1907); ME (1) (the first edition of the *Methods*) = Sidgwick (1874); ME (2) = Sidgwick (1877c); ME (3) = Sidgwick (1884); ME (4) = Sidgwick (1890); ME (5) = Sidgwick (1893); HUG = Sidgwick (1877a); B = Sidgwick (1877b); FC = Sidgwick (1889); OHE = Sidgwick (1902a); GSM = Sidgwick (1902b).
- 3 Elsewhere he holds that “good” should be defined as “that at which it is reasonable to aim” (ME 92n1), “what one ought to aim at” (ME 381), “what it is reasonable to seek to keep, or aim at getting” (GSM 331), “what all rational beings, as such, ought to aim at realising” (B 411), “the right and proper end of human action” (FC 482), “desirable, choice-worthy, preferable, to be sought” (GSM 145, italics eliminated). He rejects Martineau’s (apparent) view of “the judgment of good and ill as non-ethical” (GSM 331).
- 4 Thus we “do not all look with simple indifference on a man who declines to take the right means to attain his own happiness, on no other ground than that he does not care about happiness. Most men would regard such a refusal as irrational, with a certain disapprobation; they would thus implicitly assent to Butler’s statement that ‘interest, one’s own happiness, is a manifest obligation.’ In other words, they would think that a man *ought* to care for his own happiness” (ME 7). This is put in terms of one’s own happiness, rather than one’s own good, but presumably it is true for one’s happiness because happiness is at least part of one’s good.
- 5 For a similar interpretation, see de Lazari-Radek and Singer (2014: 203).
- 6 Parfit suggests that Sidgwick writes “in harmony with reason” “to exclude the cases where . . . someone’s desires are irrational. He assumes that there are some things that we have good reason to desire . . . These might be things which are held to be good . . . for us by Objective List Theories” (Parfit 1984: 500; see also Parfit 2011: 496–497, Darwall 2002: 35–36). I once suggested that Sidgwick’s worry is that I might with full information desire A but from weakness of will form a stronger desire for B. If the hypothetical desire account identifies what is good for me with whatever I desire with full information, it would then pick out the wrong thing as good (Shaver 1997). Since Sidgwick’s concern does not seem to be about picking out the wrong things, both interpretations are dubious.
- 7 I owe this point, as well as the reference to ME 400 below, to Tom Hurka; see also Adams (1999: 87n7).
- 8 For the same take on the open-question argument, see Ross (1930: 92–93) and Broad (1930: 173–174).
- 9 Broad has in mind “‘anything that has shape must have size’” (1930: 236, 266).
- 10 For a similar suggestion for the goodness of pleasure, see Ross (1930: 137–138).
- 11 For an example of worrying that an “ought” that implies “can” fails for this reason, see Fletcher (2012b: 86).

- 12 Ross does think “it would have been right to have felt sorrow” is true here, although “sorrow ought to have been felt” is false (1939: 55). Like Broad and Ewing, Ross thinks there is a sense of “fitting” that does not imply “can” (as does Moore 1922: 319 for “ought”) and so can be used in a fitting attitude analysis of “good” (though Ross accepts such an account only for one sense of “good”). It is again not clear, however, how this sense differs from “it would have been good to have felt sorrow.”
- 13 Thus Sidgwick, after noting that “it cannot be a strict duty to feel an emotion, so far as it is not directly within the power of the Will to produce it at any given time,” concludes that “it will be a duty to cultivate the affection so far as it is possible to do so” (ME 239).
- 14 Oddly, Michael Zimmerman seems to give this as an objection to Sidgwick, omitting the “assuming my own existence alone to be considered” qualification (Zimmerman 2009: 430, 434–436). (Zimmerman suggests that Sidgwick should restrict the “ought” to a “prudential” “ought.”) For the objection pressed against other fitting-attitude accounts, see (for example) Fletcher (2012b: 79–84). Carritt gives the reverse objection: my escaping prison, or getting wealth, might be good for me but not good (Carritt 1937: 59). But here there is something good—for example, the pleasure that the escape or wealth brings (see Fletcher 2012a: 17–18).
- 15 In the fourth and fifth editions, Sidgwick writes that what is good for me is what I ought to desire “[p]utting aside the conceivable case of its being my duty to sacrifice my own good, to realise some greater good outside my own existence” (ME (4) 110; ME (5) 111). This is presumably directed at the worry that, although I ought to desire the pleasure of the deserving stranger, her getting the pleasure is not good for me if I must sacrifice my pleasure to produce it. But it does not meet the worry that, even when I need not sacrifice pleasure to produce her pleasure, her getting the pleasure is not good for me. It also includes “my own good” in the analysis of “good for me” (though Sidgwick might not mind—see below).
- 16 For further objections along these lines, see Sumner (1996: 50–53). For replies different than mine, see Fletcher (2012a). Adams objects that my desire that I be of service to others is a desire for myself but “not a desire for one’s own good as such; and in fulfilling it one might be willing to sacrifice one’s own good.” But he then notes that it “does not seem unreasonable to count it a great blessing to be able really to help other people” (Adams 1999: 88). Sidgwick could reply that, if so, my desire that I help others is a desire for (part of) my good; if acting on this desire is a sacrifice, that is because (in this case) it causes the frustration of other more important desires for myself.
- 17 I owe this suggestion to Joyce Jenkins; see also Adams (1999: 88–9).
- 18 I also owe this suggestion to Joyce Jenkins.
- 19 For use of the similar “sympathy test” against virtue, see Hooker (1996: sec. 5).
- 20 This is a standard theme in the literature on Darwall (2002) and Rønnow-Rasmussen (2011), who restrict the desires to those “insofar as one cares about the person” or “for the person’s sake.” It is also raised by Adams (1999: 88–91).
- 21 For a related reply to the circularity charge, see Darwall (2006: 651–655). In the third and fourth editions, Sidgwick seems to deny giving an analysis (see Appendix).
- 22 If “A is good for me” is analyzed as “A is what I ought to desire when being benevolent to myself,” it no longer follows, from A’s being good for me, that I ought to desire A. That follows only if I am (or perhaps ought to be) benevolent to myself (see Darwall 2000: 303–306). The same goes for “A is what I ought to desire when considering myself alone”: unless I am (or perhaps ought to be) considering myself alone, it does not follow, from A’s being good for me, that I ought to desire A.
- 23 For a reconstruction of *Methods* III.XIV prior to these arguments, see Shaver (2008). By an “ultimate good,” Sidgwick means something good as an end.
- 24 In *Ethics*, Moore thinks Sidgwick’s judgment about a case like W_1 and W_2 is so obviously wrong that he offers the inference as an explanation of why anyone would make that judgment (Moore 1965/1912: 102–106); he does not mention Sidgwick by name.
- 25 For evidence of a proportionality claim in the case of virtue, see Shaver (2008: 226).
- 26 In Feldman’s terminology, Sidgwick is concerned with the value of “worlds” rather than “lives” (Feldman 2004: 195–198).
- 27 For a guide to those who make the order objection, see Feldman (2004: 124–126). Since Feldman wrote, Irwin (2009: 510) and Temkin (2012: 109–125) have directed the objection against Sidgwick.
- 28 For a somewhat different (excellent) reply, see Feldman (2004: Chapter 6). For a very different treatment of Sidgwick on pleasure, see Crisp (2011).
- 29 Temkin briefly considers measuring intensity in this way. He says that this is not how he measures intensity. He does not explicitly note the bad consequences for his argument if this method of measurement

is adopted (2012: 136n4). Temkin might note, however, that my strategy for defending Sidgwick has a limitation. Sidgwick's claims about mathematical wholes and preferring the greater good are meant to apply to all goods in one's life, not just pleasure (ME 381). If, say, knowledge is part of what is good for me, and I prefer a life in which greater knowledge comes later to a life in which greater knowledge comes earlier, Sidgwick could not argue that my preference makes it the case that there is more total knowledge in the knowledge-later life. The amount of knowledge does not depend on my preferences.

30 Mayerfeld (1999: 68–73). On 77–78, he gives the order example.

31 For a related argument, see Parfit (1984: 496–499).

32 I put aside Moore's other suggestion, that "x is good for me" means "my possessing x is good" (Moore 1903: 98–99).

33 Thanks to Roger Crisp and Joyce Jenkins for written comments, to Joyce and to Tom Hurka for many conversations, and to an audience at Manitoba.

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