

Sidgwick's Answer to Mill's "Proof"

Mill's famous "proof" of Utilitarianism has been subject to much criticism. Henry Sidgwick the last and most sophisticated of the classical utilitarians built his own theory of utilitarianism partly as a critical response to Mill's.

The purpose of this paper will be:

- Firstly, to show why, according to Sidgwick, it is not "happiness" but "desirable consciousness" that is the only thing an agent *desires*, or maybe rather *should desire*.
- Secondly, to present Sidgwick's justification of utilitarianism and see how it differs from Mill's. While for Mill utilitarianism was the only right theory, Sidgwick, who like Butler thought there was a dualism of practical reason, found it hard to reject egoism. Still he hoped that utilitarianism is the best moral theory, if not the only rational one. Sidgwick uses common sense morality and its axioms to prove that we should go from aiming at self-interest into aiming at the general interest. Though Mill also thinks that we can use common sense morality to choose right acts, the paper will show that there is an important difference between the two utilitarians in the reason they give for this usage.
- Thirdly, to examine critically whether Sidgwick's proof is a proper and sufficient answer to Mill's problems, whether it can stand the objections raised against Mill and finally if there are philosophical arguments that enable us to reject egoism and stay with utilitarianism alone.

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