

INTRODUCTION

Symposium on David Phillips's *Sidgwickian Ethics*

Henry Sidgwick's *The Methods of Ethics* has many admirers. In the foreword to the Hackett edition of the book, John Rawls claims that of the works devoted to defending classical utilitarianism *The Methods of Ethics* is "the most philosophically profound." More recently, in *On What Matters*, Derek Parfit states that *The Methods of Ethics* is the best book on ethics ever written, since it contains "the largest number of true and important claims."

Despite these accolades, there exist only a small number of attempts to systematically engage with the ethical doctrines in *The Methods of Ethics*, including F. H. Hayward's *The Ethical Philosophy of Sidgwick: Nine Essays, Critical and Expository*, chapter six of C. D. Broad's *Five Types of Ethical Theory*, and J. B. Schneewind's *Sidgwick's Ethics and Victorian Moral Philosophy*. Each of these rewards repeated study, but they are no longer current. In the nearly four decades since Schneewind's book was written, there have been many innovations in philosophical ethics. In addition, a good number of excellent article- and chapter-length discussions of specific doctrines in Sidgwick have appeared, as has Bart Schultz's monumental achievement, *Henry Sidgwick: Eye of the Universe. An Intellectual Biography*, that treats of Sidgwick's life and entire corpus.

This has for some time represented an opportunity for a new systematic book-length treatment of Sidgwick's ethics and its relation to contemporary work in meta-ethics and normative ethics. David Phillips's newly published *Sidgwickian Ethics* (2011) has exploited this opportunity. Phillips provides an interpretation and evaluation of the key meta-ethical and normative moral views found in *The Methods of Ethics*. Accordingly, he deals with Sidgwick's commitment to non-naturalism, to epistemic intuitionism, to the falsity of deontology and to the truth of both utilitarianism and rational egoism, and therefore to the dualism of practical reason.

Phillips does a number of things of note. He brings contemporary work in meta-ethics and moral epistemology to bear on Sidgwick's (now popular) views in these areas, in an effort to both understand and defend them. He provides a full account of Sidgwick's argument for utilitarianism, emphasizing the role played therein by the self-evident intuitions that Sidgwick accepts. He raises a number of astute criticisms of it, including that its argument against the deontological morality of common sense is unfair. He spends considerable effort making sense of and in part defending rational egoism, concluding that the argument that Sidgwick provides for egoism is more successful than his argument for utilitarianism. Using these insights, Phillips sheds important light on the nature of Sidgwick's dualism of practical reason.

In every case the arguments and analyses found in Sidgwickian Ethics are worthy of sustained study. This is, of course, not to say that what Phillips argues is beyond cavil. Hence this symposium, which provides an opportunity to determine to what extent Phillips's own contributions to Sidgwick scholarship survive rational scrutiny. It includes, in addition to a précis of Sidgwickian Ethics, critical reactions to its main interpretive and philosophical claims from Roger Crisp, Robert Shaver and Anthony Skelton, and a reply to these reactions by Phillips. Beyond providing an opportunity to extend the conversation on Phillips's understanding of Sidgwick's doctrines and their philosophical import, the symposium is meant to contribute more broadly to the scholarly and philosophical appreciation of Sidgwick's distinct ethical outlook.¹

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¹The papers in this symposium were first read at the 12th Annual Conference of the International Society for Utilitarian Studies, Stern School of Business, New York University, August 8-11, 2012.