The Dualism of the Practical Reason: Some Interpretations and Responses

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ABSTRACT

Sidgwick's dualism of the practical reason is the idea that since egoism and utilitarianism aim both to have rational supremacy in our practical decisions, whenever they conflict there is no stronger reason to follow the dictates of either view. The dualism leaves us with a practical problem: in conflict cases, we cannot be guided by practical reason to decide what all things considered we ought to do. There is an epistemic problem as well: the conflict of egoism and utilitarianism shows that they cannot be both self-evident principles. Only the existence of a just God could, for Sidgwick, prevent the conflict and thus solve the dualism. The paper first explores in detail and rejects some reconstructions of the dualism: a purely logical account, and accounts whereby egoism and utilitarianism are principles of *pro tanto* reasons or of sufficient reasons. Then it proposes a better account, in which egoism and utilitarianism are logically compatible and yet conflicting principles of all things considered reason. The account is shown to fit with Sidgwick's view of the dualism and of its practical and epistemic pitfalls. Finally, some views are discussed as to the wider positive significance of the dualism, regarded as a challenge to the rational authority of morality, or as indicating the structural opposition of agent-relative and agent-neutral reasons, or again as the imperfect yet amendable attempt at a comprehensive pluralist theory of practical reasons.

1. *Defining the Dualism of the Practical Reason*

Henry Sidgwick famously concludes his *Methods of Ethics* (ME) with the following reasoning. The two methods, i.e., the two "rational procedure[s] by which we determine what individual human beings 'ought'…to do" (ME: 1), which have survived rational scrutiny, namely egoism and utilitarianism, can conflict in particular occasions. Mere experience shows that there is no necessary coincidence between what we ought to do on egoistic grounds and what we ought to do on utilitarian ones. The methods can conflict in this sense. Only an all powerful and just being (God), could produce a necessary coincidence, whereby, in particular, if we do what we ought on utilitarian grounds, then we do what is required by egoism: the utilitarian act will be the act that best serves our self-interest, because, being also the morally

right act, we will be rewarded for having done it by God in the afterlife (and we will be accordingly punished if we did not do it). But we cannot demonstrate, nor postulate, the existence of God, and of an afterlife. Therefore, egoism and utilitarianism can conflict, and do in fact conflict. But then there is "an ultimate and fundamental contradiction in our apparent intuitions of what is Reasonable in conduct" (ME 508). The possibility of practical conflict between egoism and utilitarianism shows that the two methods are, in some sense, contradictory. And a "contradiction" between the best methods of ethics we have looks like something we have reason to worry about.[1]

This is by and large what Sidgwick says. Admittedly, he does say something else. We have further reasons to worry about the contradiction. One is epistemological: "it would seem to follow that the apparently intuitive operation of the Practical Reason, manifested in these contradictory judgements, is after all illusory" (ibidem). This is an unclear remark. For it can be taken to mean that, when we come to contradictory judgements about what we ought to do, these very judgements grandly present themselves as the expression of Practical Reason, but, since the idea of Practical Reason expressing itself contradictorily makes no sense, we are mistaken to take either or both judgements as what Practical Reason has to say. However, this is not what Sidgwick means. Practical Reason can and does express itself contradictorily, but it should not, and that's precisely the problem. So what is illusory? If two propositions can be found to be contradictory, in themselves or in their consequences, they cannot be both intuitive, i.e. self-evident: "the propositions accepted as self-evident must be mutually consistent" (ME: 341). Hence, it is illusory to think of egoism and utilitarianism as the intuitive, self-evident expression of Practical Reason. And things are not good if Practical Reason, that "chief department of our thought", cannot issue self-evident substantive normative statements.

There is another epistemological worry. "If we gave up the hope of attaining a practical solution of this fundamental contradiction...it would [not] become reasonable for us to abandon morality altogether: but it would seem necessary to abandon the idea of rationalising it completely" (ME: 508).[2] To "rationalise morality completely" here means, more or less, to be able to find a straightforward answer to every question of what we have

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[1] The expression "dualism of the practical reason" occurs in ME: xii (Preface to the Second Edition), xxi (Preface to the Sixth Edition), and 404, note 1. He regards it as "the profoundest problem of Ethics" (ME: 386, note 4).

[2] See also ME: 498.

reason to do when all things have been considered. In cases of conflict between egoism and utilitarianism, we have no straightforward answer, for — to anticipate — it will both be true and false that we ought to do a certain act. A less than complete rationalisation is, for Sidgwick, a sign of failure in our normative thought.

Finally, there is a practical worry. It is not the obvious one that in cases of conflict we just do not know what to do. Rather, it is this. Since in cases of conflict we have no more reason to do what egoism requires than to do what utilitarianism requires, whatever we do we will not have reasons and Reason on our side: "practical reason, being divided against itself, would cease to be a motive on either side; the conflict would have to be decided by the comparative preponderance of one or other of two groups of non-rational impulses" (ibidem). Practical reason ceases to be a motive in the sense that there are no further reasons to guide our decision. This does not mean that we will end up doing something for which there is no reason: self-interest or overall happiness would still provide some reason (if there were a third option which did not maximize either self-interest or general happiness, we would have no reason to choose that). But practical reason can only guide and motivate us so far. In either case we would not be able to refer to what we do as to what we ought to do period. The conflict will then *have to* be "decided" by non-rational impulses both in the sense that it would definitely be *unreasonable* to choose neither option, and that our choice of either *cannot but* represent the preponderance of one impulse over another (say, a narrow concern for our happiness, or a sense of sympathy), where there is, in the particular case, no reason for such preponderance — no matter how much we can repeat to ourselves, for instance, that acting on an utilitarian impulse is a better option because it is the morally right one.[3] Therefore this is the practical problem: Accepting the best that practical reason has to offer, i.e. egoism and utilitarianism, commits us to knowingly deliberating and acting, at least sometimes, not against practical reason, or irrationally, but *without enough* practical reason — which is puzzling, if coherent, and in practice not very comforting, especially if cases of conflict are more frequent than Sidgwick appears to believe.

Sidgwick thus is explicit — or relatively easy to interpret — o n the pitfalls of the "contradiction", but not so much on the nature of the contradiction itself. We know that it involves some contradiction between ethical judgements stemming from egoism and utilitarianism, that is in some way

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[3] Strictly speaking then, it is the preponderance that is non-rational, not the impulses themselves.

generated by practical conflict, that God and only God could "solve" the conflict and prevent the contradiction. How can all of this be coherently brought together and, moreover, in such a way that we come to see Sidgwick's dualism as something to worry about, both in itself and for the reasons just discussed?

Two influential accounts of the dualism are not satisfactory, albeit for different reasons. The first is a purely theoretical account. It takes Sidgwick's talk of contradiction in its most direct sense. C. D. Broad thus expressed it:

Sidgwick's difficulty was that *both* the principle that I ought to be *equally* concerned about equally good states of mind, no matter where they may occur, *and* the principle that I ought to be *more* concerned about a good state in my own mind than about an equally good state in any other mind, seemed to him self-evident when he inspected each separately. And yet they are plainly inconsistent with each other, so that, in one case at least an ethical principle which is in fact false must be appearing to be necessarily true (Broad 1930: 245).

This account formulates egoism and utilitarianism as mutually inconsistent theories about what we ought to be more concerned about. Utilitarianism affirms, and egoism denies, that I ought to be equally concerned about equally good states of mind no matter where they occur. It is not clear that this reading is consistent with Sidgwick's definition of methods as rational procedures for determining what we ought to do. Broad's restatement, first, does not specify a reason for being or not being equally concerned about equally good states of mind. But we would have thought that a procedure is rational insofar as it tells us what reasons determine what we ought to do. Second, egoism and utilitarianism would not be theories about what we ought to do, but about the required intensity of concern.

Moreover, if it is assumed that the object of concern are "equally good states of mind" in both cases, and one leaves "good" unspecified, then, since for Sidgwick what is good on the whole is, roughly, what anyone has reason or ought to desire, then Sidgwick's egoist, on Broad's interpretation, already ought to be concerned in some degree about others' state of mind — only, not in the same degree as hers. This may be a choice of interpretive sympathy on Broad's part: since egoism as "Pure Egoism, i.e. 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" (ibidem),[4] so the dualism would be a false problem, something we need not worry about. However, not even on Broad's construal the dualism is something we need to worry too much about: Broad's egoist already accepts that she ought to be concerned about others' happiness, and not for purely instrumental reasons. Broad's egoist, that is, is one who has embraced the "point of view of the universe". And once the egoist embraces that point of view, for Sidgwick, on the one hand, it is arbitrary to distinguish her own happiness as more important than any others' equal happiness (ME: 421); on the other hand, it is too late for her to reassert the importance of the agent's point of view, as one grounding stronger reasons for the agent. The agent's point of view — Sidgwick implies — will irreversibly cease to have its special significance. So Broad softens things up by begging the question against egoism.

But even if we amend Broad's account in these respects we will not get a fair picture of the dualism. For, by construing it as a matter of logically inconsistent principles, it makes no sense of Sidgwick's idea that, without practical conflict, and thanks to God, there would be no contradiction. Broad in fact embraces the point:

No God, however powerful and however benevolent, can alter the fact that these two principles are logically incompatible and that therefore something which seemed self-evident to Sidgwick must in fact have been false (Broad 1930: 253).

The incompatibility should have been apparent to Sidgwick from the outset. Therefore this is not a Sidgwickian interpretation of the dualism. Indeed, any purely logical account will not be Sidgwickian. One way of mending Broad's wording could be this (understanding "right" as shorthand "what there is most reason to do"):[5]

Egoism (E): There is one and only one way for an act to be right: maximizing agent-utility. Therefore acts that maximize agent-utility but not utility are right, and acts that maximize utility but not agent-utility are not right.

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[4] If "good" here again means "good for anyone", then pure egoism would also be self-contradictory. This was G. E. Moore's (in)famous reaction to the dualism (see Moore, 1993: 150ff). I take it that this is not Broad's view (see Broad 1942), so the occurrence of "good" is an unintended slip.

[5] See Skorupski 2001: 69.

Utilitarianism (U): There is one and only one way for an act to be right: maximizing utility. Therefore acts that maximize utility but not agent-utility are right, and acts that maximize agent-utility but not utility are not right.

E and U are logically incompatible. The fact that a God could make E-right and U-right acts coincide only provides some practical reassurance. And yet for Sidgwick God could remove the contradiction itself. Thus we must make sense of a contradiction that arises not purely in virtue of the content of the principles, but also, decisively, in virtue of how the world is like: with or without God. Logical accounts of the dualism assume, uncharitably to Sidgwick, that this cannot be done.

Furthermore, it is not obvious that the logical account restores the sense of a practical problem as we construed it above.[6] Accepting the best of practical reason here would mean accepting mutually inconsistent principles: a problem for epistemic rather than practical conduct, and therefore a task for theoretical reason rather than for practical reason. Indeed, not only does the particular practical problem seen above shift off stage, but it actually disappears. Accepting E and U means accepting mutually inconsistent principles. To the extent that practical reason is constrained by theoretical reason, practical reason could hardly recommend us to act knowingly on directly logically inconsistent principles. But the practical problem stems precisely from the fact that practical reason does recommend us to act on those principles. A condition for this being the case is that accepting those principles is epistemically permissible or even feasible. Since on the logical account accepting E and U is not epistemically permissible or perhaps even feasible — they are mutually contradictory — then on the logical account practical reason does not even issue a prima facie requirement to act on either E or U. The foremost and only requirement would be to revise or reject either or both of E and U, rather than act on them. No practical question will arise before we have done our epistemic duty. require.

This is not to deny that at the heart of the dualism lies a central issue for epistemic conduct. Insofar as the two methods involve contradictory judgements, they are mutually inconsistent, and therefore the rational thing to do is revising and abandoning either or both principles with the hope of finding one (or more) that satisfy the conditions of self-evidence. But the epistemic issue should not replace the practical one: when faced with a con-

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[6] On the other hand, logical accounts are well suited to explain the worries about self-evidence and complete rationalisation.

flict case, we do need to act on either egoism or utilitarianism, although there is no way of telling whether we will do the right thing. Certainly it would be wrong and unreasonable to sit back and philosophize about better principles — no matter whether this is something that we eventually shall have to do.

If the methods do not conflict purely because of their content, then we must take care to formulate such content accordingly. Here is a different, though no better, account of the dualism.[7]

E: If A maximizes agent-utility, this is a *pro tanto* reason to do A.
U: If A maximizes utility, this is a *pro tanto* reason to do A.

On the *pro tanto* account E and U are not directly incompatible. Each merely says that we have a reason *as far as* certain considerations go. In the case of an act that maximizes agent-utility, but not utility overall, it is true that we have reason to do it, and we ought to do it as far as E goes, and it is false that we have reason to do it, and we ought to do it as far as U goes. E and U pull in different directions, and we do have something worth calling a practical conflict. But so far we only have a pluralism of reasons. The dramatic, "dualist" aspect of the dualism does not appear unless we add some other proposition, such as that E and U provide incommensurable reasons.[8] If egoistic and utilitarian reasons cannot ever be weighed against each other, then, whenever they conflict, we will be unable to know what to do, and will be deceived to the extent that we think we may find a rational conclusion by weighing them. The practical problem outlined above would apply: if reason cannot postulate a minimal commensurability, we will be unassisted by reason in our final decisions.

Sidgwick may have implicitly assumed incommensurability through the metaphor of the points of view, as Derek Parfit suggests.[9] To be able to weigh egoistic and utilitarian reasons presuppose that either such reasons do not stem from different points of view, or that the two points of view are not mutually exclusive, or that there is a third all comprehensive point of view. Sidgwick does not consider either the first or the third option. Further, he denies the second one: changing point of view requires a normative *Gestalt* switch,[10] such that as egoists, we can only appreciate our and others'

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[7] Skorupski 2001: 69-70.
[8] See Parfit (ms.): 113.
[9] Ibidem: 114.
[10] Skorupski 2001: 71.

egoistic reasons, and as utilitarians, we can be described as appreciating what is good for anyone, forgetting that we are not just one among others. The two points of view exclude each other, not in the sense that they directly oppose one another (this would make for logical incompatibility), but rather we are unable to inhabit both at once or somehow retain, in the switch, what we have learned to appreciate.

The *pro tanto* account, even with incommensurability, is not convincing. First, just where does the contradiction lie? If the "as far as" clause is part of the content of our judgements, these judgements are perfectly compatible all the way through. If God existed, he could prevent practical conflicts from happening, and save us from the consequences of incommensurability, but there would be no contradiction for him to remove. Hence, so this account does not explain why E and U present us with a special epistemic problem, if the source of the epistemic problem is their mutual incompatibility.

But, secondly, Sidgwick would not accept the *pro tanto* account for epistemic reasons, albeit of a different sort. As he says, any modification of apparently self-evident principles, such as to make them logically compatible, would "suggest a doubt whether the correctly qualified proposition will present itself with the same self-evidence as the simpler but inadequate one; and whether we have not mistaken for an ultimate and independent axiom one that is really derivative and subordinate" (ME: 341). This may look paradoxical: the move to *pro tanto* saves the principles from mutual inconsistence, and therefore should return them as epistemically good candidates. There is a sense, however, in which the *pro tanto* versions will not provide ultimate and independent ethical principles, but really derivative and, more importantly, *subordinate* ones. As such, they are disqualified from being self-evident, and therefore are not good enough candidates for setting up any dualism worth worrying about. (That is why we needed to add the further thought of incommensurability.) The idea is that self-evident principles must be "ultimate and independent" in their very application, i.e. they must be self-sufficient in their job of determining what is right to do, all things considered. But *pro tanto* principles are not in this sense "ultimate and independent": in order to determine all-in rightness, they depend on there not being opposing *pro tanto* principles, or reasons against doing what they favour doing. On the other hand, egoism and impartialism, taken as all things considered principles, are at least *meant* to be in this sense ultimate and independent, however they may then fail to succeed because of how the world is like. Therefore a principle lacks independence, and so self-evidence, not only if I must look "above" to see its connection to a higher principle,

but also if it implicitly directs me to look "around" in search of other possibly opposing principles.[11]

It may be that Sidgwick is misguided here, by conflating self-evidence with self-sufficiency — but we are looking for an account that makes sense of the dualism as he sees it.[12] So, guided by these last remarks, let us move on to a different one in terms of a conflict of sufficient reasons:

E: If A maximizes agent-utility, this is always a sufficient reason to do A.
U: If A maximizes utility, this is always a sufficient reason to do A.

Roughly, a sufficient normative reason to do A is a consideration which fully explains why we ought to do A all things considered. So, like all things considered reasons, and unlike *pro tanto* reasons, sufficient reasons are in the business of adjudicating each practical case. But, like *pro tanto* ones, an ultimate sufficient reason does not rule out the presence of other, possibly competing, ultimate sufficient reasons. Sufficient reasons do their explanatory job independently but not despite of each other. The move to sufficient reasons allows to make sense of the claim of egoism and utilitarianism to provide verdicts rather than just *pro tanto* reasons, without making them inconsistent with each other, i.e. without each claiming to provide the *unique* ultimate reasons. So E and U are not logically incompatible as they stand, and thus can be both self-evident. But the conflict will ensue whenever A maximizes agent-utility, but B maximizes utility, and I cannot do both. In all such cases I have sufficient reasons to do either. The problem is that weighing these reasons against each other would be worthless, however possible in principle. Since I *always* have sufficient reason to do either A or B, I am always allowed to treat either reason as the strongest one, as the one capable of deciding the case. And of course, if a further reason capable of adjudicating the case were needed, E and U would provide *in*sufficient reasons.[13] So, the only hope, again, is a powerful being that did not let conflicts arise. If God existed (with all the necessary attributes), there would necessarily be both egoistic and utilitarian sufficient reasons for the same actions. Sufficient reasons would not point in opposed directions.

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[11] This way of reconstructing Sidgwick I partly take from Schneewind 1977: 279-80; 372-4.

[12] E.g. it doesn't seem to be a problem for David Ross's prima facie duties to be both self-evident and *pro tanto* — in this sense, not "self-sufficient".

[13] This is close to, but not exactly, Parfit's reconstruction of the dualism.

This account, however, again makes no sense of there being a real contradiction and not just an irresolvable practical conflict. Sufficient reasons determine directly what we ought to do, but each does not say: This is what and *only what* you ought to do. They do not function as excluding other possible sufficient reasons. Each claims conclusiveness for itself and not against other reasons.[14]

Moreover, if the practical conflict cannot be expressed in an inconsistent proposition, it is somehow watered down. For practical reason would seem to issue a final, *consistent*, pronouncement: Do either the egoist best act or the utilitarian best act, since there are sufficient reasons for doing either. As long as we choose either disjunct, we are doing what practical reason requires. And if we ask "Yes, but what should I do then?", it is coherent, if somewhat obnoxious, to go on answering: "Do either the egoist best act or the utilitarian best act". At this point, we will feel justified in thinking practical reason on our side all the way through, rather than only up to the point of deciding what to do. If there is sufficient reason for either disjunct, we should have no reason to worry whether we have done the right thing by choosing either. At least, this appears clear in less dramatic examples: if I have a sufficient reason for eating a chocolate icecream (the taste of chocolate) and a sufficient reason for eating a vanilla one (the taste of vanilla), and no other sufficient reasons for doing something else, and I can't eat both, then I will do the right thing whether I eat the chocolate or the vanilla icecream. I may regret having to choose (I'd rather have both) but, by definition, I do not need anything more than sufficient reasons to assure myself that I have done what is right. Sufficient reasons thus somewhat have the ability to turn the sense of conflict into a sense of comfortable choice.

2. *A Better Account*

Can a better account of the dualism be found? We have seen the conditions that need to be met: the dualism must not consist in a simple logical incompatibility, but must arise in virtue of both the content of egoism and utilitarianism, and the possibility that in a world without God the two methods conflict. Moreover, we need to state the content of the principles in such a way as to emphasize the contrast between opposing ethical perspectives.

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[14] Nor does the claim that E and U *always* provide sufficient reasons make any trouble in this respect.

The first step is to formulate each principle as determining all things considered rightness or reasonableness, rather than just *pro tanto* or sufficient reasons, but without logically directly or indirectly denying each other:

(1) E: A is all things considered right if, and because, A maximizes agent-utility.
(2) U: A is all things considered right if, and because, A maximizes utility.

Plus, we need the possibility that an act may maximize, say, utility but not agent-utility and vice versa. The possibility would not arise if we could show that maximization of utility and agent-utility are necessarily inseparable, as for instance would be the case if God existed. Excluding such circumstance, Sidgwick thinks that

(3) It is possible for an act to maximize utility and not maximize agent-utility, and vice versa.

Therefore,

(4) It is possible for an act to be all things considered right and not right.

With (4) we come to see how egoism and utilitarianism lead to a genuine logical contradiction *and* how such contradiction is a consequence of facts about the principles and facts about the world. This reconstruction shows why the dualism is something to worry about both epistemically and practically. Epistemically, since E and U, plus a plausible assumption, lead to a contradiction, we should retract our judgement about the self-evidence of either or both. Indeed, leading to a contradiction is reason enough to doubt not only the self-evidence, but the very validity of either or both methods:

We cannot [...] regard as valid reasonings that lead to conflicting conclusions; and I therefore assume as a fundamental postulate of Ethics, that so far as two methods conflict, one or other of them must be modified or rejected. (ME: 6)

The worry about "complete rationalisation" is obviously explained too. If in some possible cases we are told that the same act can be right and not right all things considered, we have a contradictory answer: which is tantamount to claiming that in those cases practical reason gives us no answer. Notice the difference with the sufficient reasons account: according to that

account, in conflict cases practical reason gives us an answer, which, if unsatisfactory, is surely a meaningful and practicable one: Do either the best egoist act or the best utilitarian act. Nor is the answer unsatisfactory simply because it has a disjunctive content, but rather because we feel that this specific disjunctive content cannot always be the right answer. So the new account makes sense of the epistemic trouble that Sidgwick saw implied by the dualism.

Finally, we can give substance to the practical worry that accepting the best of practical reason leads to knowingly abandoning it (or rather to being knowingly abandoned by it) in problematic cases — when we need it most. Accepting the best of practical reason means accepting a contradiction as our guide in conflict cases. Since we cannot be knowingly guided by a contradiction, in such cases we cannot be guided by practical reason. If we choose to do either act, on the one hand we know that we are listening to *one* voice of practical reason, and we are to that extent not being wholly unreasonable; on the other hand, we know there is *another* voice of practical reason with an equal claim to be listened to, so that we cannot see ourselves as acting from such a thing as *the* verdict of practical reason.

Also, this reconstruction makes sense of the radicality Sidgwick attributes to both the egoist and the utilitarian points of view. First, it presents both principles as all things considered, i.e. having a claim to decide once and for all the normative status of every action. Second, only a further principle to the effect that, say, when the principles conflict, we should follow utilitarianism, could avoid conclusion (4). Such a principle of lexical order would imply some sort of commensurability between egoistic and utilitarian reasons. But, as we have seen, moving from the egoist to the utilitarian point of view and back again implies a normative sort of Gestalt switch, such that features like other people's well-being acquire and then lose ultimate normative relevance altogether, in a way that makes us unable to reach a stable middle ground where we can appreciate both egoist and utilitarian reasons as genuine, and therefore be in a position to compare them. That is why (4) is the conclusion of the argument. Thus we seem to have given each of Sidgwick's ingredients its due importance in our understanding of the dualism.

3. *The Responses to the Dualism*

The dualism, in the form just stated, is a philosophical embarrassment. However, the only way of getting round it that Sidgwick takes seriously is

the denial of premise (3). As Bart Schultz eloquently shows, Sidgwick's perennial interest in spiritism and telepathy reflected the need to find evidence for the possible existence of an afterlife where our self-sacrificing utilitarian efforts might be rewarded by a just and benevolent God.[15] Of course he knows well that there are other options, for instance, qualifying and therefore rejecting (1) or (2) or both as they stand. As just quoted, he assumes as a fundamental postulate of Ethics, that so far as two methods conflict, one or other of them must be modified or rejected. But he never considers any such modification, partly because the "correctly qualified proposition will [not] present itself with the same self-evidence as the simpler but inadequate one" (ME 341). Suppose both egoism and utilitarianism were qualified as *pro tanto* principles, so as to avoid the contradiction (though not necessarily the conflict). It is not obvious that they would lose anything in their apparent or real self-evidence. Nor, as we have seen above, does the suggestion that mere *pro tanto* principles would, as such, be "derivative and subordinate" (ibidem) cut any real philosophical ice, though it may be one of Sidgwick's chief reasons. More probably, the dualistic view of practical reason has here its epistemological bearing. The self-evidence of a given principle can only be appreciated by occupying the point of view relevant to the principle. Now, no weaker principles than (1) and (2) will appear self-evident when we occupy the point of view of the individual and of the universe, respectively. Since there are no other points of view to occupy insofar as practical conduct is concerned, we cannot but endorse (1) and (2) as the best that practical reason has to offer.

The last option for Sidgwick is to make sense of commensurability in order to avoid (4). But he sets things for himself in a way that precludes this. For instance, Sidgwick would have welcomed an argument showing the egoist that she is rationally required to take up the ethical "point of view of the universe". But, in Sidwgick's framework, such an argument would not work towards the commensurability of egoistic and utilitarian reasons. It is not as if we can start out as egoists and then be rationally brought to a wider perspective *while continuing to appreciate egoistical reasons as such*, so as to balance their weight against that of utilitarian reasons. When we rationally take up the point of view of the universe, egoistical considerations as such simply lose any normative weight. Any impartialist persuasion would lead us to replace our self-interested perspective with a utilitarian one, rather

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[15] See Schultz 2004 on this, and in general on the development and significance of the dualism throughout Sidgwick's life.

than to expand the former into the latter. In other words, the effect of any such argument would be the complete rejection (1) in favour of (2).

What is then the proper response to Sidgwick's dualism? The answer to the question hinges on the way the dualism is understood, not only in its formal structure, as seen above, but in its philosophical significance. In this section I will not propose a response to the dualism, but rather aim at describing and evaluating some main reactions. We can fairly distinguish two major interpretive lines: (i) the dualism as presenting a general problem for normativity, and for morality in particular; (ii) the dualism as a failed attempt at constructing a comprehensive ethical view. As we will see, the two lines are not mutually exclusive.

The first title means to cover very different reactions to the dualism. What they have in common is the suggestion that Sidgwick has unveiled a deep structural or meta-ethical problem. I consider three such reactions. David Brink argued that what is at issue is the rationality and authority of morality.[16] Recall that for Sidgwick utilitarianism is the best moral theory, in that it provides the only self-evident method for determining what is morally right and wrong. Other moral views, such as pluralist intuitionism, are shown to be defective in the self-evidence of their principles. Moreover, utilitarianism is the view that best systematizes common sense moral judgements. The dualism between utilitarianism and egoism thus is for Sidgwick coextensive with the contrast between morality itself and egoism. In conflict cases, morality and self-interest contradictorily pull in different directions.

Brink adds a further element: egoism is the best theory of rationality, just like utilitarianism is the best moral theory. If so, "the dualism of practical reason reflects the conflict between the demands of morality and those of individual rationality" (Brink 1988: 291). According to this reading, what is rationally right could be morally wrong, and what is morally right could be rationally wrong. And so we get that the same act can be all things considered right and not right. However, as Brink points out, only an externalist about morality could envisage such a dualism. Externalism is the view that "the rationality of moral considerations depends upon factors external to the concept of morality (i.e. external to the fact that the considerations in question are moral considerations). Externalism implies that it makes sense to ask whether there is reason to be moral or to do as morality requires" (ibidem: 292). On the other hand, "internalism claims that it is true in vir-

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[16] See Brink 1988 and 1992.

tue of the concept of morality that moral considerations necessarily provide agents with reasons for action" (ibidem).

Now there is plenty of evidence that Sidgwick is an internalist. It is sufficient to remember that, as methods of ethics, both morality and egoism are "rational procedures": both present themselves as providing normative reasons for action. Moreover, the dualism is *of the* practical reason, that is, between two principles both belonging to practical reason, whereas on Brink's reading the dualism would be between practical reason (egoism) and something else (morality as understood by utilitarianism). So for Sidgwick moral considerations seem to be intrinsically reasonable.

While acknowledging this, Brink points out some reasons why Sidgwick might (and should) have been an externalist — and therefore why the dualism should be seen as one between morality and rationality. First, if the conflict were just one within morality, then egoism should be a plausible moral view to be set as a rival to utilitarianism. But Sidgwick hesitates to give egoism this credit, mainly because "ethical egoism seems a very implausible theory to explain and systematise our considered moral beliefs and, in particular, our beliefs about the nature and extent of our obligations to others" (ibidem: 302).

However, Brink here misses the target. An internalist reading need not conceive of the dualism as one between competing views about moral obligation.[17] Internalism takes the reasonableness of morality and egoism as given, without thereby implying that egoism is a moral view. Egoism is, rather, a view about what we ought to do from the personal point of view. So the inability of egoism to explain and systematise beliefs about moral obligations is neither here nor there. It is sufficient that egoism explains and systematises beliefs about what we ought to do from the personal or prudential point of view, i.e. when each of us considers her own existence alone, for it to count as a plausible "ethical" position to be set as a rival to utilitarianism.

Second, only an externalist reading can, for Brink, make sense of how egoism and utilitarianism conflict while being logically compatible and therefore self-evident (ibidem: 305). Egoism and utilitarianism are mutually consistent as, respectively, theories of rationality and morality. They conflict, because it is not always rational (in one's self-interest) to be moral (to act as utilitarianism requires).

Brink still assumes that on internalism egoism and utilitarianism would directly contradict each other as being both theories about morality. We

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[17] Brink seems to see this but makes nothing of it (1988: 299, n.11).

know that internalists need not grant that these are conflicting theories of morality. They are better presented as conflicting theories of reasons. Brink could rejoinder that, were egoism and utilitarianism competing theories of reasons, they would be logically incompatible all the same, and therefore could not be both self-evident. In reply, however, we can point to the account offered above to show that egoism and utilitarianism can be theories of the same thing (what there is all things considered reason to do), and not be directly incompatible. And we have seen how Sidgwick's talk of a "contradiction" might be taken literally on such an account. Of course, the epistemic pitfall is that egoism and utilitarianism cannot both be self-evident. But then Brink's externalist account, if it is supposed to be preferred *because* it overcomes the self-evidence problem, begins to look like a way to solve the dualism rather than helping us understand it. The dualism is worrying, *inter alia*, precisely because it implies that egoism and utilitarianism cannot both be self-evident.

Finally, it seems that on Brink's view we lose the sense in which there is a practical conflict to be dealt with. For externalism, we may conceivably fail to have reason to do what morality requires. In this scenario, moral considerations would fail to be normative for us, just as much as the rules of etiquette might fail to be normative were there no reasons for us to follow them. But then how can moral considerations, whose normative force is contingent, conflict with an ever reason-providing egoism? It seems a platitude that only fully normative considerations can meaningfully conflict with each other. So, on the one hand, if moral considerations are not normative, there is no intelligible conflict with egoism. On the other hand, if moral considerations "acquire" normativity, then by externalism it must be in virtue of their coincidence with the results of some theory of reasons, and since egoism is the only other theory around, the dualism as Sidgwick understands it just disappears. In sum, however important Brink's problem may be, it simply is not Sidgwick's.

Parfit regards the dualism as raising a related, but different issue for morality. Here is how he formulates Sidgwick's

Dualism of Duty and Self-Interest: If duty and self-interest never conflict, we would always have most reason both to do our duty and to do what would be best for ourselves. But if we had to choose between two acts, of which one was our duty but the other would be better for ourselves, reason would give us no guidance. In such cases, we would not have stronger reasons to act in either of these ways. If we knew the relevant facts, either act would be rational. (ms.: 122)

This view is importantly different from Brink's. The intrinsic reasonableness and authority of morality is not called into question. Sidgwick is a "moral rationalist": we always have sufficient reason to do our duty or avoid acting wrongly. But, given the dualism, we cannot rule out that we might have sufficient or decisive reason to act wrongly. This would be the case every time our self-interest would be secured by a wrong action. And, to expand the thought beyond Sidgwick's views, we might have sufficient reasons to act wrongly provided by non-moral considerations of special relationships, or by what would be the impartially best outcome, in a context where this — *contra* Sidgwick — does not necessarily determine what we have strongest moral reason to do.

Sidgwick's dualism thus poses the conceptually open question: Is what we have most reason to do always morally right or permissible to do? If the answer is no, because sometimes what we have sufficient reason to do may be morally wrong, then morality is undermined in its ambition to be the supreme guide of practical reason. The point, by now familiar, is that morality, just like utilitarianism, cannot always have the last word on what we have most reason to do, because, if the dualism makes sense, at least often there is no such single last word to be had. (The term "often" is meant to reduce somewhat the extent of the dualism, as in Parfit's view of the dualism discussed below. For Sidgwick, there is never a single last word to be had in cases of conflict.)

Of course, the gravity of the problem will vary depending on what we regard as wrong. For instance, if it is held that it may on occasion be morally permissible to give priority to one's self-interest or that of one's near and dear when an impartially better outcome could be brought about, then the problem is often softened. But if it is always morally wrong to produce even an impartially slightly worse outcome by preferring a better outcome for oneself or for certain others, then it will often be the case that we have sufficient reasons to do what is wrong. Of course, since morality determines both positive and negative sufficient reasons, it will also be the case that we have sufficient reason not to do what is wrong. However, morality will only enjoy a limited authority over practical reason. We can take this to be a genuine legacy from Sidgwick's dualism.

It is worth mentioning another "structural" reading of the dualism. It is tempting to see the conflict as generated by the different kinds of reasons that become salient from the personal and universal perspectives. Personal reasons are given by facts that make reference to the agent who has them: my happiness gives me reasons to promote it, your happiness gives you rea-

sons to promote it, and so on. Impartial reasons are given by facts that make no essential reference to the agent who has them: my happiness, yours, hers… give anyone a reason to promote it as someone's happiness. The dualism would thus reflect a fundamental contrast between agent-relative and agent-neutral reasons As such, it can be expanded into a conflict between any views which countenance the same kind of thing as to be promoted (say, happiness, or perfection, or what have you) but differ as to who is to promote what, and so as to whether their reasons are agent-relative, or agent-neutral.[18] Unless we have an argument for discarding one type of reasons, there will be conflict.

This account is too thin to make sense of a deep dualism. If the turning point is the relativity or neutrality of a reason with respect to the agent, as defined above, then the dualism could be apparently solved by making all reasons agent-relative. Any agent-neutral reason-giving consideration could be stated in a way that gives every agent an agent-relative reason. For instance, one could state agent-neutral impartial reasons as self-referential altruist reasons. John's happiness, as someone's happiness, gives anyone an agent-neutral reason to promote it. But John's happiness, as *someone else's* happiness, gives anyone but John an agent-relative reason to promote it. For each agent but John, the reason-giving fact will be that "the happiness of someone else than me can be promoted". In self-referential altruism, the reason-giving fact will make ineliminable reference to the agent, albeit in a simply negative form: "x's happiness is not mine".[19] Of course, the impersonal reason each of us has to promote their own happiness merely as someone's happiness cannot be translated as a self-referential altruist reason. But naturally each agent continues to have agent-relative egoist reasons to care about his own happiness only. Now, if there are only agent-relative reasons around, it looks like the conflict will be formally solved. But such a solution would ring hollow. Having eliminated agent-neutrality and the "point of view of the universe" does not mean that we now appreciate all our reasons as stemming from our personal point of view. Surely we need to occupy the personal point of view in order to appreciate self-referential reasons, but merely occupying that point of view does not rationally commit us to appreciating all the reasons that *could* be so appreciated. The transition from egoism to pure self-referential altruism may still require a Gestalt switch even remaining within the personal point of view.

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[18] See Hills 2003 for a detailed argument.
[19] See Broad 1942.

Moreover, the sense of conflict does not go. Some of the fiercest moral dilemmas arise between agent-relative reasons, such as when we would need to sacrifice our own life in order to save the life of someone to whom we are strongly attached. *A fortiori*, the sense of conflict cannot go if the sacrifice would save someone to whom we are merely related by "otherness". Confining the dualism within the personal point of view does not by any means alleviate it. Finally, these cases show that incommensurability can persist even if all reasons are agent-relative.[20] In sum, Sidgwick's dualism is best not taken to show a purely general and structural contrast between agent-relativity and agent-neutrality.

The second type of reading regards the dualism as an admirable but failed attempt at a constructive and comprehensive ethical view. According to these interpretations, Sidgwick is right insofar as he picks out two distinct and competing sources of normative reasons, but then fails to put them together in a consistent outlook, or exaggerates their incommensurability, or leaves out other sources of normativity. These theorists take their job as essentially consisting in smoothing Sidgwick over in order to come to a more reasonable and practicable view, while retaining the underlying tensions that must accompany any dualist or pluralist theory worth this name. Samuel Scheffler's "hybrid" theory (1994) makes room for agent-centred prerogatives, as grounded in the independence of the agent's perspective, to be set as limiting the moral demands of consequentialism. Likewise, Roger Crisp suggests a "dual source view" (1996) whereby *pro tanto* reasons stem both from moral requirements as given by utilitarianism and by the personal point of view. John Skorupski offers a more complex picture, whereby the dualism becomes a pluralism, as there are more ultimate sources of reasons for action than Sidgwick recognized. But among these, impartial reasons are set out as indefeasible and finally determinative of what we have overall reason to do — because they only are the expression of "pure" practical reason (2001: 78ff).[21] None of these views however really tries to deal with Sidgwick's worries.

The difficulty with Sidgwick's dualism is not only that it implies inconsistent normative statements. Taken as a normative view, it also has deeply counterintuitive consequences, as Parfit shows. In all conflict cases, we could rationally do either the best egoist act or the best utilitarian act,

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[20] Parfit (ms.: 118-9) seems to believe the agent-relative/agent-neutral contrast is responsible for incommensurability or imprecise comparability.

[21] Broad's self-referential altruism (1942) can also be seen as a constructive response to Sidgwick's dualism .

whatever the strength of the relative reasons. E.g., we could rationally save ourselves from one minute of discomfort rather than saving a million people from death or agony. But "these are unacceptable conclusions. If we acted in such a way, the main reactions of others would rightly be horror and indignation. But, as well as being very wrong, our act would not be rational" (Parfit ms.: 115). This results from Sidgwick taking egoistic and utilitarian reasons to be wholly incommensurable, such that a strong impartial case in favour of an action (saving a million people from death or agony) cannot outweigh a weak egoist case in favour of a different action (saving ourselves one minute of discomfort), and vice versa. To be able to balance these reasons would mean to occupy the personal and the universal points of view at one time, and this, we know, is impossible for Sidgwick.

Parfit thinks the point of view metaphor is better discarded. As he says:

When we are trying to decide what we have most reason to do, we ought to ask this question from our actual point of view. We should not ignore some of our actual reasons merely because we would not have these reasons if we had some other, merely imagined point of view. We can also claim that, to be able to compare partial and impartial reasons, we don't need some third, neutral point of view. We can compare these two kinds of reason from our actual, personal point of view. And some reasons of either kind can be stronger than, or outweigh, some reasons of the other kind (ms.: 117).

This move also does away with the embarrassing Sidgwickian contradiction. The duality of standpoints led Sidgwick to think of each set of reasons as supreme, i.e. as determining overall rightness. But once we bring reasons together into a single point of view, each also loses such absolute aspirations, and we avoid the conclusion that the same act can be overall right and not right. At worst there will be sufficient reasons for actions that cannot be performed at the same time. But that involves no contradiction. However, Parfit concedes to Sidgwick that all we can afford is only imprecise comparability: while different reasons are comparable, and thus each capable in principle to be stronger than another, there might be no precise truths as to their relative strength (ibidem: 113). Moreover, it may often be that the comparison, while possible, does not actually yield any unique answer as to which reason is strongest. Therefore Parfit proposes a revised version of the dualism:[22]

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[22] Cp. Phillips' "indeterminacy view" of Sidgwick's dualism (1998), whereby we *never* have a determinate answer.

Wide Value-based Objective Views: When one possible act would make things go in the way that would be impartially best, but some other act would make things go best either for ourselves or for those to whom we have close ties, we *often* have sufficient reasons to act in either of these ways (ibidem: 117-8).

How often we end up with a disjunctive requirement will depend on further assumptions. As we hinted in the previous section, disjunctive requirements are not necessarily a failure of practical reason. This said, Parfit wants to leave room for situations in which the choice of either disjunct involves a deep sense of conflict, as when we have sufficient reasons to either save our own life or the life of many strangers. So Parfit's dualism is an example of what needs to be done in order to get round Sidgwick's problems while acknowledging their relative inescapability.

It is worth concluding by noting that Sidgwick himself would not have liked such a solution. Abandoning the metaphor of the opposed standpoints provides us with principles of practical reason which are both weaker than they at first sight looked, because they no longer present themselves as supreme.

Moreover, Sidgwick might doubt that impartial reasons can really be appreciated once we leave the point of view of the universe. As we have seen, some of their significance can be formally retained by viewing strangers as part of one's personal point of view, in that they are connected to oneself by some thin relation of "being other than me".

First, this particular proposal sounds paradoxical: the personal point of view, by definition, should be such that whoever and whatever is not me or mine lies beyond its normative scope. Second, even if we can make sense of others, simply as strangers or sentient beings, as lying within the personal point of view, they would be positioned at the farthest border of such a point of view. And while their relevant features, e.g. their well-being, would not for that reason count for less than those of "closer" inhabitants, it seems that, when a conflict arises between two equal distributions of well-being, the fact that in one case the benefit would be distributed among "closer" people might temptingly look like a decisive reason for us to prefer that distribution, other things being equal. In other words, if rejecting the metaphor means refusing to consider things from an imagined "the point of view of the universe", then impartial reasons risk a loss in authority which is not paralleled by a corresponding loss for personal and egoistical reasons. And

Sidgwick would have rather seen egoist reasons lose some of their authority than utilitarian ones.

Of course it might be that the actual point of view through which Parfit suggests we conduct our deliberation is not personal in any partialistic sense. But it would need to be shown why it is not so. One thought might be that, given a certain conception of personal identity, the relation one's present self has to one's future self could be as weak as, or even weaker than, the relation one's present self has to other present and future people.[23] So there would be no a priori reason to view facts about me and what is connected to me as in principle grounding stronger practical reasons than facts about other, unconnected people. The authority of impartial reasons would be no more questioned than the authority of personal and egoistical reasons. This discussion however leads us into metaphysics, and while Sidgwick would not have disliked a metaphysical solution to the dualism, it would take a different paper to explore such a possibility.

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[23] The reference is obviously to Parfit's own view.

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