

# Book Reviews

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**Roger Crisp**, *The Cosmos of Duty: Henry Sidgwick's Methods of Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2015), pp. xxv + 252.

Roger Crisp's *The Cosmos of Duty: Henry Sidgwick's Methods of Ethics* is a major new contribution to the burgeoning field of Sidgwick studies and an important work of moral philosophy in its own right. Crisp has a deep knowledge of the *Methods* (7th edition, 1907) and of contemporary ethical theory. And he is perhaps uniquely well qualified to explore Sidgwick's Aristotelian side, devoting two of his seven chapters to Sidgwick's treatments of virtue in general and of particular virtues. His book will serve as an admirable guide for the uninitiated, while everyone who works on Sidgwick will have much to learn from it.

Henry Sidgwick died in 1900. During the next century only two books devoted exclusively to his work appeared: Frank Hayward's *The Ethical Philosophy of Sidgwick* in 1901 and Jerome Schneewind's seminal *Sidgwick's Ethics and Victorian Moral Philosophy* in 1977. But in the last fifteen years he has been the exclusive subject of four new books in addition to Crisp's: Bart Schultz's intellectual biography, *Henry Sidgwick: Eye of the Universe* (2004); my own *Sidgwickian Ethics* (2011); Mariko Nakano-Okuno's *Sidgwick and Contemporary Utilitarianism* (2011); and Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer's *The Point of View of the Universe: Sidgwick and Contemporary Ethics* (2014).

While these works differ in many important points of detail, it is worth asking also how they differ in their general aim. Crisp says that his book 'will be, as far as I know, the first comprehensive study of the *Methods*' (p. x). This seems importantly right: other primarily philosophical works focus on placing and understanding Sidgwick within a particular context or tradition (Victorian moral philosophy for Schneewind; the utilitarian tradition for Nakano-Okuno; contemporary ethics for De Lazari-Radek and Singer), or focus, as I do, only on one aspect of the *Methods* (its central argument). This goal of comprehensiveness means that Crisp discusses not only aspects of the *Methods* that have garnered a good deal of recent attention in books and articles (metaethics, intuitionism and moral epistemology; the argument for utilitarianism and the critique of deontology; the dualism of the practical reason), but also less explored parts of the text (particularly the aforementioned treatments of the virtues and virtue ethics and the treatment of free will). No doubt the goal of comprehensiveness might be pursued in other ways by philosophers with distinctive interests and orientations different from Crisp's:

as he rightly says, there is a great deal of matter in the *Methods*' painstakingly revised and closely argued 509 pages and it isn't possible in less than 250 pages of commentary and critique to explore all of it microscopically. Someone, for instance, might think that there is more of interest in the discussions of measuring happiness in Book II than Crisp has the opportunity to reveal, or might be particularly concerned to explore Sidgwick's affinities with Kant rather than those with Aristotle. Comprehensiveness may come in degrees, and there may be different ways of studying the *Methods* that are incommensurable with respect to comprehensiveness. But Crisp's is clearly at the least the most comprehensive study of the *Methods* to date.

His approach is one Sidgwick himself surely would have approved: charitable and admiring but in no way hagiographic. He is entirely prepared both to criticize the structure and organization of the *Methods* and to reject some of Sidgwick's important substantive conclusions. Crisp lays out his most important overall verdicts on the *Methods* in the Preface and the introductory chapter; I find myself in general agreement with all of them. Crisp broadly endorses Sidgwick's metaethical non-naturalism and epistemic intuitionism; he suggests that Sidgwick's tripartite division of the main options in ethical theory (egoism, deontology, utilitarianism) is plausible, though Sidgwick's own defence of the tripartite division is inadequate; and he suggests that Sidgwick's verdicts about both the key conflicts, between utilitarianism and pluralistic deontology and between utilitarianism and egoism respectively, are rendered problematic once we allow 'a greater role . . . in ethics for the idea that agents must exercise judgment in individual cases' (p. ix). On the one hand, while Sidgwick thinks he can reject pluralistic deontology, his most serious objections 'can be avoided through reference to practical judgement' (p. ix). On the other, if we allow the right role for practical judgement we can avoid the dualism by treating the 'principles of prudence and benevolence as pro tanto principles guiding judgement about particular cases' (p. xxv).

I agree with Crisp about all of these major issues. I begin to disagree to some extent only at the next level down, when we come to some of Crisp's more specific interpretative claims. One significant such disagreement concerns the interpretation of *Methods*, chapter III.XIII, 'Philosophical Intuitionism' (arguably the most important chapter in the *Methods*). Sidgwick there articulates what he takes to be 'self-evident moral principles of real significance' (p. 379). On the most obvious count there seem to be four such principles: a principle of justice, a principle of prudence, and two further principles from which the 'maxim of benevolence' can be deduced. One key interpretative question is whether the principle of prudence articulated in III.XIII is an egoistic principle that a utilitarian must reject. Crisp thinks the answer to this last question is 'yes'; I am less persuaded.

Crisp thinks the self-evident principle of prudence in III.XIII is

P1: One ought to aim at one's good on the whole.

He acknowledges (p. 117) that Sidgwick never explicitly articulates this axiom in III.XIII. And he notes one obvious alternative interpretative possibility: that the axiom of prudence articulated in III.XIII merely forbids pure

time-preference, and so is just as compatible with utilitarianism as it is with egoism; and that, in so far as Sidgwick supplies an (apparently) self-evident egoistic principle that conflicts with utilitarianism, he doesn't do so until IV.II or the Concluding Chapter. Given the striking brevity of Sidgwick's discussion of his favoured axioms in III.XIII, not too much weight can be laid on the fact that Sidgwick doesn't there explicitly articulate the axiom of prudence Crisp thinks he endorses. The bigger problem is the way that III.XIII reads as if it contains a *successful* argument for utilitarianism, or, more precisely, for the impartial consequentialism that becomes utilitarianism with the addition of hedonism. The most striking passage is on page 388:

Utilitarianism is thus presented as the final form into which Intuitionism tends to pass, when the demand for really self-evident first principles is rigorously pressed. In order, however, to make this transition logically complete, we require to interpret 'Universal Good' as 'Universal Happiness'.

Little here makes the reader think that among the self-evident principles just articulated is an egoistic principle that conflicts with utilitarianism, which is such that if it is really self-evident utilitarianism isn't even true (much less self-evident). Crisp addresses this issue in a lengthy footnote, suggesting (p. 119, n. 43) that 'there is no puzzle if there is no conflict between my own good and the utilitarian end. And, as yet, Sidgwick has identified no such conflict.'

One possibility, that is, is that the principle of prudence articulated in III.XIII *does* conflict with utilitarianism; but that Sidgwick's idiosyncratic architectonic means he is not there ready to notice that it does. But at least my usual experience of reading III.XIII makes me want to say that the principle of prudence articulated in III.XIII doesn't conflict with utilitarianism period, not merely that Sidgwick chooses not to notice the conflict yet. One way to develop the alternative interpretation I favour is to take the principle of prudence in III.XIII merely to rule out pure time-preference (as above); another is to take inspiration from the retrospective description of the argument of III.XIII given in IV.II:

When, however, the Egoist puts forward ... the proposition that his happiness of pleasure is Good, not only *for him* but from the point of view of the Universe ... it then becomes relevant to point out to him that *his* happiness cannot be a more important part of Good, taken universally, than the equal happiness of any other person. And thus, starting with his own principle, he may be brought to accept Universal happiness ... as ... an end ... to which the action of a reasonable agent as such ought to be directed.

This, it will be remembered, is the reasoning that I used in chap. xiii of the preceding book in exhibiting the principle of Rational Benevolence as one of the few Intuitions which stand the test of rigorous criticism. (*Methods*, pp. 420–1; all italics in original)

To employ again a distinction that (as Crisp properly emphasizes) Sidgwick crucially fails to take advantage of at various key points, this passage from IV.II makes the principle of prudence articulated in III.XIII sound like only a *pro tanto* principle. And if that is what is supposed to be self-evident in III.XIII,

then (like a principle ruling out pure time-preference) it does not conflict with utilitarianism and generate the dualism of practical reason. What will generate the dualism is a stronger all-things-considered egoistic principle. And, it seems to me, the evidence from III.XIII, from IV.II, and from the relevant remarks in Sidgwick's important late paper, 'Some Fundamental Ethical Controversies', is that a stronger, all-things-considered rather than *pro tanto* egoistic principle is not to be found in III.XIII. It doesn't make its real appearance in the body of the *Methods* (as distinct from the short intellectual autobiography included in the Preface to the 6th edition) until IV.II and the Concluding Chapter.

Others will no doubt find they disagree with Crisp at other places. And those less in sympathy with his overall verdicts – perhaps because they don't think that there is anything important and right in Sidgwick's reluctant and qualified endorsement of egoism, or because they think Sidgwick's argument for utilitarianism is more successful than Crisp allows – will disagree with him more than I. But all will surely welcome a study that both illuminates familiar aspects of Sidgwick and opens less familiar aspects of the *Methods* to further scholarly and philosophical exploration.

DAVID PHILLIPS

*University of Houston*

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**Iwao Hirose**, *Moral Aggregation* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. vii–234.

Iwao Hirose's book *Moral Aggregation* is a clear and insightful discussion of the nature and role of aggregation in moral reasoning. The book has two parts. In the first, Hirose discusses the nature of aggregation. His chapter on the clarification of what aggregation is, is admirably clear and accessible. He then draws a distinction between substantive and formal moral aggregation (more on this below), and makes a very valuable contribution to the debate by carefully discussing various interpretations of the Separateness of Persons criticism against moral aggregation. He also includes a chapter on intra-personal aggregation, an interesting issue that has not received enough attention. The second part of the book concerns the debate about moral aggregation that followed in the wake of John Taurek's famous Rescue case (see below). Hirose's discussion of the various responses is an important contribution to the debate.

Hirose's main claim in the book is a defence of what he calls *formal* aggregation, in contrast to *substantive* aggregation. Overall, this claim plays a quite small role in the book. But since it is the main claim, it is definitely worth some discussion. The standard form of aggregation is substantive aggregation. Its purpose is to help us decide what to do; it requires that we already have decided what the morally relevant factors are, and that the task left is that of combining their values into an overall value for each option. For example,