

HEDONISTIC THEORY OF VALUE BY HENRY SIDGWICK

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Abstrak:

Ada empat macam teori nilai dalam etika hedonistik. *Pertama*, teori nilai hedonistik; *kedua*, teori nilai kuasi-hedonistik; *ketiga*, teori nilai anti-hedonistik; dan *keempat* teori nilai pluralistik. Henry Sidgwick (1838-1900) termasuk penganut teori hedonistik nilai (macam pertama) karena dia menyatakan bahwa kriteria nilai intrintik ada pada kesenangan atau kenikmatan. Maka dari itu, teori nilai hedonistik Sidgwick sangat bergantung pada definisi tentang kesenangan dan peranan kesenangan. Bagi kaum utilitarian, hanya konsekuensi (tindakan) yang patut diperhitungkan. Namun Sidgwick berargumentasi bahwa motif manusia (pelaku) juga perlu diperhitungkan meski motif manusia tidak bisa dilihat atau diukur.

Keywords:

hedonistic theory, feeling, pleasure, ultimate good, rational desire, happiness.

1. Introduction

Henry Sidgwick defends a (quantitative) hedonistic theory of value. Sidgwick's arguments for the hedonistic theory of value depend on his definition of pleasure. A hedonistic theory of value enables us to systematise our common sense beliefs about what things are good or bad. Sidgwick claims that the things valued by common sense are all productive of pleasure and esteemed by us roughly in proportion, as they tend to produce pleasure¹.

2. The Notion of Pleasure

2.1. Definition

Sidgwick gives a preliminary definition of pleasure in the following passage from *The Methods of Ethics* book II, chap. II, sec. 2: "Pleasure is the kind of feeling which stimulates the will to actions tending to sustain or produce, - to sustain it, if actually present, and to produce it, if it be only

represented in idea -; and similarly pain is a kind of feeling which stimulates to actions tending to remove or avert it."² In this passage Sidgwick seems to endorse a "motivational" theory of pleasure. However, in a footnote at the end of the passage Sidgwick refers the reader to later "qualifications and limitations which this proposition requires, before it can be accepted as strictly true"³.

In the later passage to which Sidgwick refers us⁴, he takes up Herbert Spencer's view that pleasure "is a feeling which we seek to bring into consciousness and retain there"⁵. Sidgwick grants that "pleasures normally excite desire"⁶. But he claims that the intensity of a pleasure is not necessarily proportional to the degree to which it is desired. He says "it still does not seem to me that I judge pleasures to be greater and less exactly in proportion as they stimulate the will to actions tending to sustain them"⁷.

It seems clear to me that exciting pleasures are liable to exercise, even when actually felt, a volitional stimulus out of proportion to their intensity as pleasures. ... I also find that some feelings which stimulate strongly to their own removal are either not painful at all or only slightly painful: - e.g., ordinarily the sensation of being tickled. If this be so, it is obviously inexact to define pleasure, for purposes of measurement, as the kind of feeling that we seek to retain in consciousness⁸.

Sidgwick then considers the view that pleasure or pleasantness is an introspective quality of feeling independent of volition "like the quality of feeling expressed by 'better'"⁹. He rejects this and goes on to define pleasure as a feeling that the subject understands to be "desirable":

When I reflect on my pleasure and pains, and endeavour to compare them in respect of intensity, it seems to me that the comparative judgments which I pass are by no means clear and definite, even taking each separately. This is true even when I compare feelings of the same kind: and the vagueness and uncertainty increases, in proportion as the feelings differ in kind. Let us begin with sensual gratifications, which are thought to be especially definite and palpable. Suppose I am enjoying a good dinner: if I ask myself whether one kind of dish or wine gives me more pleasure than another, sometimes I can decide, sometimes not. So if I reflect upon two modes of bodily exercise that I may have taken: if one has been in marked degree agreeable or tedious, I take note of it naturally: but it is not natural to me to go further than this in judging of their pleasurable or painfulness, and the attempt to do so does not seem to lead to any clear affirmation. And similarly of intellectual exercises and states of consciousness predominantly emotional: even when the causes and quality of the feelings compared are similar, it is only when the differences in pleasantness are great, that hedonistic comparison seems to yield any definite result¹⁰.

2.2. A Desirable Feeling

In defining the meaning of desire, Sidgwick states that something is desirable if it “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”.¹¹

Sidgwick means this as an account of *prima facie* desirability, because he goes on to remark that something desirable in this sense may well not be desirable, on the whole, in virtue of what it might be a part of or lead to. Nevertheless, when desirability is referred to in his account of pleasure, it is clearly this sense that he has in mind. We do not propose to subject this account to scrutiny. For even if one does not agree with this as a definition of desirability, one need only insert it in Sidgwick’s definition of pleasure whenever he uses the word ‘desirable’. And it is only by assuming this definition of desirable that we shall be able to see what he has in mind.

At the beginning of chapter II of the second book, Sidgwick defines pleasure as a feeling one recognises to be “desirable”:

Let, then, pleasure be defined as feeling that is preferable or desirable, considered merely as feeling, and therefore from a point of view from which the judgment of the sentient individual is final: and not considered in respect of its causes, or of the relations of the sentient individual to other persons or things, or of any other facts that come directly within the cognizance and judgment of others beside the sentient individual¹².

Sidgwick holds that judgements about desirability of one’s own feelings are infallible. If I have a feeling that I experience as being desirable, I cannot be mistaken about its being desirable¹³. Since Sidgwick claims that “desirable” means the same as “good”¹⁴, his definition of pleasure amounts to the following: a pleasure is a feeling that is experienced as being good.

Standard versions of the hedonistic theory of value explain what is good in terms of pleasure. They hold that what is pleasant is “prior to” what is good; we can identify pleasant feelings independently of knowing what is good. Sidgwick’s definition of pleasure reverses this relation. He holds that feelings of good are prior to feelings of pleasant. We can’t say that a feeling is pleasant without first knowing that it is good. Given Sidgwick’s definition of pleasure, the statement that all pleasures are good is analytic¹⁵. Sidgwick’s definition of pleasure, however, does not make it analytic that pleasure is the only thing that is (non-instrumentally) good.

2.3. The First Instance Experiences of Feelings

Sidgwick holds that pleasures are in the first instance experiences of feelings, experiences which are recognised to be desirable as experiences¹⁶. This seems to be quite true of many pleasures, particularly pleasant sensations¹⁷. One sort of pleasure is the pleasant sensation of warm sun on a cool day. What pleases one, is that in which one takes pleasure, and that is the feeling itself. As we say, it feels good. It is also true of pleasant thoughts. Caught in the grind, one lets one's thoughts run to the mountain or to the seashore. Again, that in which one takes pleasure is something mental – amusing, perhaps. The pleasure here is one of imagining or thinking something.

What makes these different experiences or feelings pleasures are the relation that they have to desire; namely, that they are recognised (explicitly or implicitly) as desirable. This comprehension need not involve recognition of the presence of a common, particular kind of experience. To find that you feel pleasure from an experience is not to recognise that it produces another experience, but rather to apprehend the initial experience in a certain way.

If it were the feeling or experience itself which was recognised as desirable (by the sentient individual), then, so far as the desirability of the experience goes, it would not much matter how one came to have it. So it is that Sidgwick writes that pleasure is a feeling which is recognised to be desirable, "when considered merely as a feeling, and not in respect of its objective conditions or consequences...."¹⁸. What this suggests is that if I am to get pleasure from the news that the war is over then I must apprehend my experience of thinking that the war is over to be desirable, however that experience might come about.

It is important to emphasize that Sidgwick's point is not merely that in getting pleasure from the knowledge that one has been able to help a friend, one must be aware that it feels good to think that one has helped a friend. His view on what makes the thought that one has helped a friend a pleasure, is that the experience of thinking it is recognised to be desirable whatever the objective conditions of one's thinking it.

When Sidgwick says that it is the feeling that is recognised as desirable apart from its objective conditions, he does not mean the feeling as identified by that towards which it is directed but rather by how one feels. That is, when Sidgwick says that pleasure consists in feeling, which is recognised as desirable, he might be taken to mean that it is one's feeling good that is recognised to be desirable¹⁹. But at this point it would be well to keep in mind a point of Charlie D. Broad:

We must begin by remarking that it is logically impossible that an experience should have no characteristic except hedonic quality. It is as clear that no experience could be *merely* pleasant or painful as that nothing could be black or white without also having some shape and some size. Consequently the hedonist can neither produce nor conceive an instance of an experience, which was just pleasant or painful and nothing more²⁰.

Broad's point is that even if we consult our experiences or feelings only as experiences or feelings, quite apart from their objective conditions, they must have more qualities than mere pleasantness or desirability. There is, therefore, no way of considering the mere experience of "feeling good"²¹. An experience of pleasantness or feeling good is a quality which supervenes on its further qualities. But this throws us back into the same boat because when we consider one's feeling good on account of the war's ending, we are faced with the same objection as before. This experience is not recognised to be desirable apart from its objective conditions.

One of the most important things is the object of one's pleasure that in which one takes pleasure. It is not a feeling at all, but rather some state of affairs, some "objective condition", to use Sidgwick's phrase. And in this case, what is recognised to be desirable is not the feeling that something is the case, but rather that, as one believes, something is in fact the case.

2.4. All Productive Pleasures

A hedonistic theory of value enables us to systematise our common sense beliefs about whether things are good or bad. Sidgwick claims that the things valued by common sense are all productive of pleasure and esteemed by us roughly in proportion, as they tend to produce pleasure²².

A large part, perhaps the majority, of mankind would reply that it is Happiness, or Pleasure without pain. And yet Common Sense certainly seems to judge things and actions to be good independently of – or at least out of proportion to – the pleasure actually derived from them²³.

When we judge one kind of consciousness to be more pleasant than another, we judge it to be preferable considered merely as feeling, without taking into account the conditions under which it is felt; but when we judge it to be better though less pleasant, what we really prefer is no longer the feeling itself, but something in its conditions, concomitants or consequences²⁴.

Sidgwick goes on to support this claim with several illustrations. He argues that knowledge and virtue are valued roughly in proportion to their conduciveness to happiness²⁵. He concludes this argument by claiming that alternative theories do not provide as good a way of systematising our beliefs about the ultimate good.

If, however, this view be rejected, it remains to consider whether we can frame any other consistent account of the contents of the notion of Good. If there be some objective constitution of the relations of conscious beings to each other and to universe generally, ... On what principle shall we harmonize or select among the different opinions that are current respecting it? ... I cannot but conceive it to depend upon the degree in which they respectively possess this 'felicific' quality. And thus we are finally led to the conclusion ... that the Intuitional method rigorously applied yields as its final result the doctrine of pure Universalistic Hedonism²⁶.

2.5. Surplus of Pleasure over Pain

Henry Sidgwick gives it much the same meaning as Jeremy Bentham would have done²⁷. Like Bentham, Sidgwick takes happiness to mean the greatest possible surplus of pleasure over pain. He seems to think all pleasures or pains are quantitatively compared according to Bentham's dimensions. By 'all whose happiness is affected' he means (as Bentham does) all sentient creatures and not just all humans.

3. The Role of Pleasure

3.1. Pleasure is Good

Nevertheless, the requirement that the good-making property is inherent in the good object and that generalization should proceed over the inherent features of the desired objects is of basic importance to Sidgwick's argument that pleasure and only pleasure is good. Sidgwick defines pleasure in the following way:

Let, then, pleasure be defined as feeling which the sentient individual at the time of feeling it implicitly or explicitly apprehends to be desirable; - desirable, that is, when considered merely as a feeling, and not in respect of its objective conditions or consequences, or of any facts that come directly within the cognisance and judgment of others besides the sentient individual²⁸.

Sidgwick defines pleasure in this way for two basic reasons: to avoid commitment to a qualitative characterisation of pleasure and pain and to make it possible to measure pleasure and pain each on its own and together on a single quantitative scale. From this definition Sidgwick's argument for the goodness of pleasure is fairly simple.

Sidgwick argues that the understanding by an individual of the desirability of a current feeling *qua* feeling must be taken to be final. And he appears to mean incorrigible when he says that it is final²⁹. Thus, if a person judges that a current feeling is desirable is incorrigible evidence that the feeling is desirable. Hence, every pleasure is desirable. Therefore, pleasure is a good.

3.2. Pleasure is the Ultimate Good

Sidgwick claims that pleasure is the ultimate good³⁰. Acting rightly then is merely a matter of maximising this good. There are two very different strains of argument that Sidgwick gives for this form of utilitarianism. One set of arguments consists in showing how the considered moral judgements of common sense are best-systematised by Sidgwick's utilitarian principle – "Maximum Happiness"³¹ (we read as one ought to maximise pleasure). In this line Sidgwick argues that the workaday moral principles of common sense depend on the utilitarian principle in cases of conflict and exception, and that the principles themselves can be seen as having a justification in terms of the one utilitarian principle. We do not want to discuss these arguments, for it seems to us, and there are places in *The Methods of Ethics* where it surely seems to Sidgwick, that these arguments by themselves will not do the job of grounding utilitarianism³². Consider the following:

In short, without being disposed to deny that conduct commonly judged to be right is so, we may yet require some deeper explanation why it is so³³. In the variety of coexistent physical facts we find an accidental or arbitrary element in which we have to acquiesce, as we cannot conceive it to be excluded by any extension of our knowledge of physical causation....But within the range of our cognitions of right and wrong, it will generally be agreed that we cannot admit a similar unexplained variation³⁴.

In what do such justifications or grounds consist? From here, Sidgwick gives a second strain of argument justifying the utilitarian principle from much more general considerations. One such argument is given in the section entitled, "Ultimate Good"³⁵.

... a fundamentally important part of the function of morality consists in maintaining such habits and sentiments as are necessary to the continued existence, in full numbers, of a society of human beings under their actual conditions of life. But this is not because the mere existence of human organisms, even if prolonged to eternity, appears to me in any way desirable; it is only assumed to be so because it is supposed to be accompanied by Consciousness on the whole desirable; it is therefore this Desirable Consciousness which we must regard as ultimate good³⁶.

This argument for the claim that pleasure is the ultimate good and hence that everyone ought to maximise it is quite different from the claim that the utilitarian principle best systematises common-sense morality. This argument is entirely *a priori*, and were it sound it would be the sort of ground for utilitarianism that Sidgwick is seeking. Unfortunately, the argument *non sequitur*. This point was realised long ago by James Seth. He wrote: "It does

not follow that, because nothing is good ... out of relation to consciousness, therefore its goodness ... lies in the mere state of consciousness"³⁷. In a way, this is the same point as before. Just because I cannot take pleasure in some fact unless I am aware of it, it does not follow that what I really take pleasure in, and hence apprehend as desirable, is my awareness of it.

3.3. Pleasure is the Ultimate Object of Rational Desire

The structure of the argument will be to proceed from the definition of the good-on-the-whole in terms of the rationally desirable to an identification of some types of rationally desirable objects. Hence, if we say that this pleasure is rationally desirable it will follow that all pleasures are rationally desirable. Furthermore, this move is not made as a result of an observation that, as a matter of fact, all objects of a certain type are the objects of a rational desire. It is rather the other way around; namely, from the fact that we can establish that this thing is desirable; we are committed to regarding all things of the same sort as desirable. And if we find an instance in which one of the things of this sort is not desirable, then it follows that objects of this sort are not desirable. This form of argument is crucial to Sidgwick's subsequent arguments against other potential candidates for goodness.

4. Conclusion

What does the hedonistic theory of value maintain? First of all, a hedonist about the good need not be a hedonist about the right. One may adopt a hedonistic theory of value without adopting any such theory of obligation. A hedonist about the good may be a deontologist about the right; roughly speaking, Sidgwick combines hedonism about the good with deontologist about the right³⁸.

Henry Sidgwick identifies happiness in terms of "surplus of *pleasure* over pain"³⁹. He makes happiness a principle. "The greatest general happiness" is the greatest sum of happiness of individuals, or according to Sidgwick, the greatest possible surplus of pleasure over pain. If we are to calculate such surplus consciously, we need to do the interpersonal comparison of pleasure. In any case, we may again have several different decision procedures for the method of utilitarianism.

There are several characteristics of Sidgwick's happiness. He considers happiness as pleasure. Pleasure ('agreeable feeling') is not only the sole object of desire, but also pleasure can be attained only if it is not consciously pursued⁴⁰. According to Sidgwick my happiness is a rational, ultimate end for all rational beings. There are only two logical possibilities. Either my happiness,

rather than their own, is an ultimate end for all other rational beings as well as for me; or my happiness is part of a whole which is the ultimate end for all rational beings, myself included⁴¹.

The merits of the role of desire might save most of Sidgwick's argument for pleasure. The merits of this approach are: First, it says something about why we are concerned with desire in the first place; and this motive is consistent with the rest of the theory. Secondly, it tells us why Sidgwick automatically moves from the "definition" of good in terms of rational desirability to a discussion of the possible sorts of objects of desire. Thirdly, it makes for a reasonable fit between the formal and material elements of Sidgwick's conception of the good. Fourthly, it also makes sense of Sidgwick's endorsement of the idea that pleasure is the good.

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Endnotes:

- ¹ Cf. H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*⁷, 127.
- ² H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*⁷, 114.
- ³ H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*⁷, 43.
- ⁴ See H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*⁷, 114-117.
- ⁵ H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*⁷, 125.
- ⁶ H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*⁷, 127.
- ⁷ H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*⁷, 126.
- ⁸ H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*⁷, 127.
- ⁹ H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*⁷, 115.
- ¹⁰ H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*⁷, 122-123.
- ¹¹ H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*⁷, 111.
- ¹² H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*⁷, 118; cf. H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*⁷, 114.
- ¹³ Cf. H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*⁷, 376.
- ¹⁴ Cf. H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*⁷, 100.
- ¹⁵ Cf. J.B. Schneewind, *Sidgwick's Ethics ...*, 317.
- ¹⁶ Cf. H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*⁷, 62.
- ¹⁷ H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*⁷, 33.
- ¹⁸ H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*⁷, 131.
- ¹⁹ Cf. H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*⁷, 128.
- ²⁰ Ch. D. Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory*, 235.
- ²¹ Sidgwick use the term "well feeling", cf. H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*⁷, 179.
- ²² Cf. H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*⁷, 401.
- ²³ H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*⁷, 367.
- ²⁴ H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*⁷, 370.

- ²⁵ Cf. H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*², 370.
- ²⁶ H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*², 375.
- ²⁷ Cf. H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*², 411-417.
- ²⁸ H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*², 131.
- ²⁹ Cf. H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*², 398.
- ³⁰ See H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*², 372f. & 391f.
- ³¹ H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*², 413.
- ³² Cf. H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*², 90-91 & 198-200.
- ³³ H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*², 102.
- ³⁴ H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*², 209.
- ³⁵ H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*², 367-378.
- ³⁶ H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*², 397.
- ³⁷ James Seth, "Is Pleasure the Summum Bonum?" in *International Journal of Ethics*, 422.
- ³⁸ Cf. H. Sidgwick, *ME*², 215; William K. Frankena, *Ethics*, 83-84.
- ³⁹ H. Sidgwick, *ME*², 413. Italics are mine; See also Douglas den Uyl and Tibor R. Machan, "Recent Work on the Concept of Happiness", in *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 124.
- ⁴⁰ Cf. H. Sidgwick, *ME*², 45; See also Anthony Quinton, *Utilitarian Ethics*, 88.
- ⁴¹ Cf. H. Sidgwick, *ME*², 388; See also W. D. Hudson, *A Century of Moral Philosophy*, 43.

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