

My Roles and their Duties: Sidgwick as Philosopher, Professor, and Public Moralist

STEFAN COLLINI

EVEN BY THE STANDARDS of moral philosophers, Henry Sidgwick showed a striking readiness to use the term 'duty'. And even among Victorians, he displayed an exceptionally strong consciousness of the duties required of him personally. It was, of course, consistent with his utilitarianism to insist that the forms taken by one's obligations were to a considerable extent a function of one's circumstances, including, very importantly, the circumstance of whether one occupied a position which carried with it specific expectations or which entailed some kind of exemplary status, where being seen to meet those expectations and to live up to that status could play an important part in calculating the long-term consequences of one's actions for the general happiness. After all, *the* great crisis of Sidgwick's life had turned on the question of a role and its duties, and in the persistence and scrupulousness with which he attempted to think through the grounds of those obligations lay the genesis of *The Methods of Ethics*.

I am not a philosopher and I shall leave to philosophers the many large and interesting questions concerning Sidgwick's conception of duty and its relation to the nature and methods of moral reasoning. My interest here is, rather, in duties in the plural, not in Duty with a capital 'D', and even then only with what certain of those duties suggest about

the sense of public role or identity underlying them (and I am conscious of the risk of slight anachronism in importing the full range of contemporary connotations into the use of the vocabulary of 'role' and 'identity'). Roles and identities are, of course, social rather than purely individual matters, involving structured perceptions and expectations on the part of other social actors (to extend the dead metaphor in 'roles'), and they are, therefore, historically variable and culturally specific. In this essay, I want to examine certain aspects of Sidgwick's public roles and identities and his sense of the forms of activity they allowed or entailed. Part of my purpose here is to try to create a little two-way traffic between such literature as there is on Sidgwick and his milieu on the one hand, and, on the other, recent attempts to offer fairly large-scale characterisations of the development of the educated class in Britain at the end of the nineteenth century and of the distinctiveness of the part played by leading intellectual and academic figures when seen in comparative perspective.

This literature has tended to work with a small range of models provided by studies of distinctive national traditions: I am thinking here of, for example, the work of Christophe Charle on the emergence of 'les intellectuels' in France, of Fritz Ringer on the caste of German 'mandarins', and also of my own work on 'public moralists' in Victorian Britain.¹ Such models have been related to various characteristics of public debate and social structure in different countries, but they have all highlighted the question of the different uses made of the growing cultural authority of the higher learning at the end of the nineteenth century. Viewed from within this literature, Sidgwick proves to be a rather teasing case study: he was a champion of the newer ideal of the university as the home of disinterested research, yet one who

¹ Christophe Charle, *Naissance des 'Intellectuels': 1880-1990* (Paris: Minuit, 1990); Fritz Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community 1890-1933* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969); Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain, 1850-1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). There have now been several attempts to address these models in an explicitly comparative perspective: see, for instance, Christophe Charle, *Les Intellectuels en Europe au XIXe siècle: Essai d'histoire comparée* (Paris: Seuil, 1996); Marie-Christine Granjon, Nicole Racine, and Michel Trebitsch (eds), *Histoire comparée des intellectuels* (Paris: IHTP, 1997).

worked to involve the university in a wide range of practical and vocational activities; he was an exemplar of the new breed of academic specialists, yet one who retained in some settings the imperial ambitions of the generalist; and he was a figure intimately connected with the political world of his day yet who none the less largely abstained from participation in public debate.

In exploring these complexities, I shall here be concentrating on the latter part of Sidgwick's career, essentially the 1880s and, more particularly, the 1890s. I do so for two main reasons. One is that in Sidgwick's case philosophical and scholarly attention has naturally been concentrated on *The Methods of Ethics* and, largely as a consequence of that, on the earlier stages of his career in the 1860s and 1870s, especially the relation between his religious crisis and the development of his moral philosophy. That period, I would agree, was when Sidgwick's thinking and writing were in some ways at their most interesting, but to understand his role as a public figure, even to some extent as a representative figure, we have to turn to the period when his reputation and institutional influence were at their highest.

The other reason for concentrating on this period is that the issues I am addressing about the cultural authority of the higher learning and the public roles of the academic can only properly be formulated for the period *after* the reform of the ancient universities in the 1860s, the founding of the new civic universities in the 1870s, and the beginnings of specialised professional associations and journals in the 1870s and 1880s. Partly as a consequence of this, the literature (such as it is) on the appearance or non-appearance of intellectuals in Britain has focused on the closing decades of the century, when, it is argued, there developed for the first time a sense of belonging to a separate intellectual stratum in society.² By looking in more detail at this relatively neglected phase of Sidgwick's work and career, I hope also to contribute to our understanding of the validity and limits of some of the familiar generalisations about the historical role of intellectuals in British culture. I shall begin, therefore, with a brief exploration of

² See, in particular, T. W. Heyck, *The Transformation of Intellectual Life in Victorian England* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), esp. 'Conclusion'.

Sidgwick's conception of his roles as philosopher and professor, and I shall then offer a slightly more extended characterisation of the ways in which he did or did not bring these roles to bear in participating in a broader public sphere. Since this touches on features of Sidgwick's work about which I have written elsewhere, there are aspects of his contribution which I shall ignore or refer to only in passing, especially his two major publications from this period, *The Principles of Political Economy* (1883) and *The Elements of Politics* (1891).³

1. *Professing philosophy*

A. J. Ayer once divided philosophers into 'pontiffs' and 'journeymen', contrasting the soaring metaphysical ambition of the former group with the (ostensibly) modest analytical aims of the latter.⁴ It may be no less fruitful to think of a contrast of this type as also representing a dividedness of aim within individual philosophers. Certainly, one of the most interesting features of Sidgwick's self-conception here is the way he oscillated between, on the one hand, appearing to take all of human knowledge as his legitimate domain, and, on the other, speaking of philosophy as a strictly specialised activity only to be cultivated by the unhappy few. Some of his set-piece declarations about philosophy, insisting on its almost limitless scope, can sound decidedly 'pontifical'. 'I regard philosophy ... as the study which "takes all knowledge for its province"', as he put it on one occasion; 'as philosophers we aim at knowledge of the whole'. Or again: 'I regard the harmonising of different sciences and studies as the special task of philosophy.' And of course this embraced the whole field of practical reason as well: only,

³ See my 'The ordinary experience of civilized life: Sidgwick's politics and the method of reflective analysis', in Bart Schultz (ed.), *Essays on Henry Sidgwick* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 333–67. That essay is a slightly revised and extended version of Chapter 9 of Stefan Collini, Donald Winch, and John Burrow, *That Noble Science of Politics: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Intellectual History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 277–307.

⁴ A. J. Ayer, 'The claims of philosophy' (1947), in *The Meaning of Life and Other Essays*, ed. Ted Honderich (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1990), 1–3.

as he put it in 1899, by combining the study of the ideal and the actual can we 'hope to attain that wider view which belongs to philosophy as distinguished from science; from which we endeavour to contemplate the whole of human thought—whether concerned with ideas or with empirical facts—as one harmonious system'.⁵

I shall return to the question of quite what relation to other disciplines this entailed within the increasingly specialised university, but here I want first to touch on Sidgwick's conception of the method appropriate to this potential meta-discipline. Philosophy, as he put it in lectures given in the 1890s and published posthumously, 'uses primarily what I may call the Dialectical Method, i.e. the method of reflection on the thought which we all share, by the aid of the symbolism which we all share, language'. He argued that philosophical analysis should seek to define terms '*as far as possible* in conformity with common usage', and even though this was not an entirely straightforward matter since common usage is often confused, 'still, I think that here and in other cases we may find distinctions, vaguely and imperfectly recognised in ordinary discourse, which when made clear and explicit will furnish the required definitions'.⁶ It is the effect of transposing this method from the domain of philosophy to the necessarily more approximate world of public debate that is of interest here. Sidgwick more than once declared his belief that this method was particularly valuable in subjects that were 'so full of controversy', for on his view controversy 'usually implies mutual misunderstanding among thinkers', and the philosophical clarification of terms could avoid much of this. But the danger, when dealing with practical rather than purely philosophical matters, was that 'controversy' could then too readily be assumed to arise purely out of conceptual muddle rather than out of genuine and irreconcilable differences in experience of the world.

The interesting tension in Sidgwick's position here lay in his attempts to balance a belief in the larger utility of the method of philosophical analysis with his conviction that the serious pursuit of

⁵ HS, *Philosophy, Its Scope and Relations* (London: Macmillan, 1902), 10; HS, 'The relation of ethics to sociology' (1899), in *Miscellaneous Essays and Addresses* (London: Macmillan, 1904), 266, 249.

⁶ *Philosophy*, 49, 3–4.

philosophy as a discipline was of its nature likely to be confined to a small circle of adepts. We may here refer to a remark he made at an earlier stage of his career when writing to his mother about his newly published *The Methods of Ethics*: 'I don't expect the "general public" to read much of my book. In fact the point of it rather is that it treats in a technical and precise manner questions which are ordinarily discussed loosely and popularly.'⁷ Here he not only accepts that to treat a question 'in a technical and precise manner' is *ipso facto* to withdraw it from the sphere of 'the general public's' attention, but he appears to take some pride in this consequence. And indeed, even within the university he seemed to wish to restrict rather than to expand the numbers of those who should be encouraged to pursue serious philosophical studies.

The most extended of Sidgwick's own reflections on his position as a teacher of philosophy came in his journal entry in December 1884 following the outspoken criticism of his 'failure' in this capacity by his former pupil and present colleague, Alfred Marshall. Marshall had accurately, if unkindly, focused on Sidgwick's efforts to

give a wretched handful of undergraduates the particular teaching that they required for the Moral Sciences Tripos. He contrasted my lecture-room, in which a handful of men are taking down what they regard as useful for examination, with that of [T.H.] Green, in which a hundred men—half of them B.A.'s—ignoring examinations, were wont to hang on the lips of the man who was sincerely anxious to teach them the truth about the universe and human life.

With characteristic mildness, Sidgwick's reflection begins: 'I was much interested by this letter', and he went on to analyse his own view of 'the causes of my academic failure—I mean my failure to attract men on a large scale'. By means of a quotation from Bagehot on Clough, he indirectly sketched his own character and views, especially their unillusioned realism. But this meant, he acknowledged, that he had no uplifting message to give about a world that he regarded with considerable irony. He reflected that this unillusioned view did not make him personally unhappy,

⁷ HS to his mother, 28 Dec. 1874; Sidgwick Papers, Trinity College, Cambridge, Add Mss c. 99., f. 180 (this letter is also quoted in Collini, 'Ordinary experience', 335–6).

but, feeling that the deepest truth I have to tell is by no means 'good tidings', I naturally shrink from exercising on others the personal influence which would make men [resemble] me as much as men more optimistic and prophetic naturally aim at exercising such influence. Hence as a teacher I naturally desire to limit my teaching to those whose bent or deliberate choice is to try to search after ultimate truth; if such come to me, I try to tell them all I know; if others come with vaguer aims, I wish if possible to train their faculties without guiding their judgements. I would not if I could, and I could not if I would, say anything which would make philosophy—my philosophy—popular.⁸

To which it is, of course, hard not to reply, 'You should be so lucky!' As a philosopher, Sidgwick's chief problem was hardly an excessive popularity. Students of *The Methods of Ethics* will, incidentally, notice that this passage hints at the question of keeping esoteric truths from the masses which also surfaces in his account of the utilitarian method of moral reasoning, here suggesting that most students may best be left undisturbed in their animating illusions. But although the passage concentrates on not having an ethical system to teach, it does also represent Sidgwick's wider view of the aim of teaching philosophy, especially to those who come to it with 'vaguer aims', namely, the goal of 'train[ing] their faculties without guiding their judgements'.

There would not nowadays be anything strikingly scandalous in suggesting that, not just in his actual teaching but also in his deployment of his philosophical method more generally, Sidgwick sought to 'guide [his readers'] judgements' rather more than he lets on. I have discussed elsewhere the way in which, in Sidgwick's hands at least, the 'method of reflective analysis' told in a conservative direction.⁹ I want here to consider from another angle the more specific question of what there was, as it were, 'left' for the moral philosopher to do in society once he had concluded that he could arrive at no wholly coherent and satisfying account of first principles. As he had put it in a letter as early as 1873: 'I think the contribution to the *formal* clearness and coherence of our ethical thought which I have to offer is just worth giving: for a

⁸ HS, journal entry 22 Dec. 1884; in A. and E. M. Sidgwick, *Henry Sidgwick, A Memoir* (London: Macmillan, 1906), 394–6 (hereafter cited as *Mem*).

⁹ See fn. 3 above.

few speculatively-minded persons—very few. And as for all practical questions of interest, I feel as if I had now to begin at the beginning and learn the ABC.’¹⁰ In the later phase of his career, ‘practical questions’ were indeed what Sidgwick concentrated his energies on, though he still did so, of course, as one who brought his philosopher’s tool-kit with him.

It must be said that Sidgwick was not always so equable about his role as a professor of philosophy as his response to Marshall may, at least on the surface, suggest. He constantly worried whether he had anything positive to teach, and as Bart Schultz observes: ‘The problem went beyond that of meeting (or giving a reasoned justification for failing to meet) the institutional expectations of his role.’¹¹ Indeed, the ‘institutional expectations of his role’ were no merely external matter for Sidgwick. In the late 1880s, in particular, he experienced an inner crisis about whether he could really continue to profess moral philosophy if he did not have some kind of positive system to teach, and he even considered, or at least spoke as though he were really considering, resigning his chair (at other times he had flattered himself that although his intellectual position was an uncomfortable one: ‘[I] take it as a soldier takes a post of difficulty’¹²).

This crisis was partly provoked by his concluding, as he was to do more than once thereafter, that psychical research was not going to yield incontrovertible evidence of the existence of the individual after death, the necessary postulate of a coherent ethical theory. ‘Soon, therefore, it will probably be my duty as a reasonable being—and especially as a professional philosopher—to consider on what basis the human individual ought to construct his life under these circumstances.’¹³ Even if it could be said that, in practice, moral behaviour would take care of itself, ‘my special business is not to maintain morality *somehow*, but to establish it logically as a reasoned system’, and this he had concluded in *The Methods of Ethics* could not now be done. ‘Am I’, he therefore asked himself, ‘to use my position—and draw my salary—for

¹⁰ HS to H. G. Dakyns, Feb. 1873; *Mem*, 277.

¹¹ Schultz, *Essays on Sidgwick*, 44.

¹² HS to his sister, 10 June 1881; *Mem*, 354.

¹³ HS, journal entry 28 Jan. 1887; *Mem*, 466–7.

teaching that Morality *is* a chaos from the point of view of Practical reason?'¹⁴

It is perhaps not surprising that the conscientious Sidgwick should have been more troubled than most by the demands of 'my station and its salary', but in considering him in the terms provided by the recent literature on the professionalisation of academic careers in the late nineteenth century, it is interesting to probe into his anxiety a little more closely. After all, there was no question of his either failing to teach his subject in a systematic and objective manner nor of his failing to contribute to the scholarly literature of his discipline, the two activities that had come to be recognised as the defining obligations of the academic career. Sidgwick's worry was that he did not have a *positive* moral system to recommend. The complexities of this anxiety came out in a later reflection on his dilemma about 'the tenability of my position here as a teacher of ethics'. He elaborated a contrast between the position of a professor of theology and a professor of 'any branch of science'. The latter is simply obliged to discover and communicate such truths as he finds the evidence will support 'whether favourable or not to the received doctrines'; but 'a Professor of Theology, under the conditions prevailing in England at least, is expected to be in some way constructive; if not exactly orthodox, at any rate he is expected to have and to be able to communicate a rational basis for some established creed and system'. Sidgwick's working intuition at this point was that 'Ethics seems to me intermediate between Theology and Science regarded as subjects of academic study and profession.'¹⁵

From the point of view of 'professionalisation', there is an interestingly 'impure' conception of the role of a professor at work here. The professor of theology is in some way constrained by the views of those outside the university (by churches and their members, roughly speaking), or even, in a more sophisticated version, constrained by the fact that his subject is in some sense *constituted* by beliefs shared with such others, whereas the professor of science enjoys the autonomy

¹⁴ HS, journal entry 16 Mar. 1887; *Mem*, 472.

¹⁵ HS, journal entry 8 Apr. 1888; *Mem*, 484-5.

accorded to a professional group with its own internal criteria of propriety. But it is not so clear whose beliefs the professor of moral philosophy is expected to share or confirm; one is left wondering whether the implication is—to return to the categories of *The Methods of Ethics*—that the professor is actually *obliged* to find a reasoned basis for ‘common-sense morality’. It is noticeable that in the quoted passage the professor of science is exonerated from having to endorse ‘the *received* doctrines’ and that the professor of theology has to find a basis for ‘some *established* creed and system’ (my italics). According to the restrictive conception of the role of the professor of moral philosophy implicit in these remarks, it would seem that a Nietzsche no less than a Sidgwick ought to feel obliged to look for another job.

Sidgwick, of course, did not look for another job, but he did in some ways re-define his role. At times he felt he was in the position of the ‘philosopher who has philosophised himself into a conviction of the unprofitableness of philosophy. He must do something else.’¹⁶ Sidgwick did not altogether ‘do something else’, but it is noticeable, I think, that in the final phase of his life he increasingly concentrated on a variety of more practical issues, partly at the expense of the enquiry—the, for him, depressingly inconclusive enquiry—into the first principles of ethics. Thus, in this period Sidgwick appeared to live with a kind of two-tier professional identity. In private or in the company of a few devoted seekers after truth, he could give himself unreservedly to enquiry into fundamental questions; but in public, or among that large class of persons who had ‘vaguer aims’, he served more as the medical officer, inoculating them against the contagious diseases they were likely to encounter while serving in the jungle of practical life. Philosophy’s role could appear in practice to be limited to that of removing (other people’s) confusions, and here one is tempted to adapt Churchill’s famous remark about Attlee to say that in Sidgwick’s hands philosophy was a modest enterprise with much to be modest about. But we have long been familiar with those apparently modest descriptions of philosophy’s role as that of an ‘under-labourer’ and so on which

¹⁶ HS, journal entry 14 Apr. 1887; *Mem.*, 475.

actually express imperial intellectual ambitions, and, as we shall see, even in this final period Sidgwick could on occasion assign philosophy a not insignificant public role.

2. *The university in society*

We can come at this question of roles by another route by considering Sidgwick's efforts to enhance the standing of the university in society. As we know, he expended an enormous amount of time and energy, from the 1860s right through to the end of his life, in attempting to reform his own university, partly by ensuring that its status and endowments were deployed to further the ends of learning and research, partly by expanding and modernising its curriculum, partly by helping to establish the conditions for an autonomous academic profession, working always to free it equally from religious control and from indefensible idleness. (Within Cambridge, as his wife's biographer recalls, Sidgwick the zealous reformer was thought 'charming, but not quite "safe"'.¹⁷ Few things can convey a more vivid sense of the conservatism and conventionality of late nineteenth-century Cambridge than to imagine it as filled with people capable of thinking Sidgwick 'not quite "safe"'.) In the early 1870s he gave his support to, and wrote a large number of reviews for, Appleton's new journal, *The Academy*, which aimed to promote 'the endowment of research' and to bring to the discussion of a wide range of scholarly topics a scientific rigour not found in the periodicals of general culture.¹⁸ Within philosophy he worked to further professional cooperation and publication, not least by supporting the founding of *Mind* in 1876, and indeed financing it out of

¹⁷ Ethel Sidgwick, *Mrs Henry Sidgwick, a Memoir (1845–1936)* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1938), 62.

¹⁸ See Diderick Roll-Hansen, *'The Academy' 1869–1879: Victorian Intellectuals in Revolt* (Copenhagen, 1957). One should not, however, conclude that this was wholly a matter of 'withdrawing' from public debate: consider Mark Pattison's remark in 1882 that the journal was a means towards 'a great public end: that, namely, of bringing the knowledge latent in the community to the top, and giving it more control of the conduct of the affairs of the community'; quoted in Heyck, *Transformation*, 216.

his own pocket from 1892. These measures were also aimed at making a sharper separation between serious philosophical enquiry and general literary culture.¹⁹ His election to the Knightbridge Chair at Cambridge in 1883 was in some ways more a confirmation of an already acknowledged local pre-eminence than a translation to a new sphere, but he was, as one contemporary described him, an exceptionally conscientious professor, with a more strenuous conception of the duties of the post than some his contemporaries were altogether comfortable with.²⁰ The position and its status mattered to him, and, as I have remarked elsewhere, 'the title "Professor" became as constitutive a part of his public identity as the name of his diocese is of a bishop's'.²¹ And of course, in a volume published under present auspices, we do not need to be reminded that he was in effect the prime mover in the discussions that led, shortly after his death, to the founding of the British Academy.²²

These enterprises may all be seen as part of what is loosely termed the 'professionalisation' of academic life in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. This description, however, risks misrepresenting Sidgwick's concern during this period, a concern which may be better illustrated by a couple of passing references in his private reflections. One small indication of his sense of the figure the academic should be expected to cut in public affairs comes in a passage in his journal which was omitted from the version published in the *Memoir* (presumably because the person referred to was still alive). It dates from August 1885, as part of an assessment of James Stuart, a fellow professor in Cambridge since 1875 and Fawcett's successor as Liberal MP for

¹⁹ Similarly, in writing in 1879 to his former pupil (and present brother-in-law) Arthur Balfour about the latter's forthcoming *A Defence of Philosophic Doubt*, he counselled against having quotations on the title-page from Leslie Stephen as 'he is only a philosophical litterateur—has no recognized position as a philosopher'. HS to A. J. Balfour, 15 May 1879; Balfour Papers, B.L. Add Mss 49832., f. 24.

²⁰ According to Henry Jackson, recalling Sidgwick's attempts in the 1880s to get the General Board at Cambridge to define the duties of professors: 'Himself a professor, and a very conscientious one, he took a large and generous view of the work which a professor should be expected to do. The professors, however, resented the proposed regulations' (*Mem.* 375).

²¹ Collini, 'Ordinary experience', 336–7.

²² See Collini, *Public Moralists*, ch. 1.

Hackney in 1884. Having praised Stuart's good qualities, Sidgwick went on:

It is rather a pity, though, that he has an academic position, since his treatment of political questions is defective in just the respects where an academic person ought to be strongest: he does not exactly know on what parts of his subject there are accepted theories and systematic methods of reasoning, which an educated person ought at any rate to show adequate knowledge of, even if he intends to banish them to Jupiter or Saturn.²³

Sidgwick's regret here seems to be that Stuart's public display of ignorance is indirectly damaging to the authority in the public sphere of persons holding 'academic positions' in general, though it is interesting to see how far this connects in his mind with the conviction that in politics there really were 'accepted' theories and 'systematic' methods of reasoning (roughly corresponding, we might surmise, to his *Principles of Political Economy* and *Elements of Politics* respectively). Some knowledge of theories and methods of these kinds, in other words, might be especially expected from persons holding academic positions (even if they then went on to disagree with or dismiss them), though it seems only fair to Stuart to point out that the Chair he held was in 'Mechanical Sciences'.²⁴

An indication of another aspect of Sidgwick's concern with the public standing of universities is provided by his reflection on the occasion in 1888 when Cambridge gave honorary degrees to a clutch of current politicians. The date is important, since this was in the immediate aftermath of the Home Rule split, and political opinion in the university was still deeply divided. Personally, Sidgwick took some pleasure in the occasion, not only because three of the figures so honoured were his wife's uncle, brother, and brother-in-law (Salisbury, Balfour, and

²³ HS, journal entry 24 Aug. 1885; Sidgwick Papers, Trinity, Add Mss, c. 97., f. 25.

²⁴ It should also be said that Sidgwick could entertain parallel anxieties about politicians where 'accepted theories' were concerned, for example his remark when Randolph Churchill was appointed to the Treasury in 1886 that because he was 'wholly ignorant of political economy ... there is a danger of his bringing out some utter nonsense in arguing on Money or Trade, which will discredit the government' (HS to Lady Frances Balfour, 30 July 1886; *Mem*, 453).

the physicist Lord Rayleigh), but also because the leading honorands were persuaded to grace a social occasion at the fledgling Newnham College. Still, the scrupulous Sidgwick recognised that giving degrees at this delicate juncture to, among others, Salisbury, Balfour, and Goschen 'was, by irate Gladstonians, regarded as a demonstration on the Unionist side', and the occasion prompted him to confide to his journal his more austere conception of the public function of a centre of learning: 'I think ... that a university ought to give no honorary degrees except for merit that it is professionally competent to recognize, i.e. for eminence in science and learning.'²⁵

This sensitivity to the public perception of the intellectual authority of universities frequently surfaces in Sidgwick's writings and correspondence. For example, when in 1886 Montagu Butler, the socially well-connected Headmaster of Harrow, was appointed Master of Trinity, Sidgwick, despite his personal regard for Butler, recorded his feeling of 'depression and dissatisfaction at the snub given to academic work', that is, to his belief that such positions within a university should reflect achievement in systematic intellectual enquiry rather than public standing of other kinds.²⁶ At the same time, Sidgwick can appear ambivalent about how far this intellectual authority should be deployed in the wider public sphere. Here it is important to remember the changed position of the universities by the end of the century: in the 1860s, the defence of free enquiry had involved campaigning against ecclesiastical, if not directly political, control, whereas by 1900 it could seem that a more pressing way of protecting the status of disinterested scholarship was to abstain from direct participation in public debate altogether.

Sidgwick manifested a comparable ambivalence about the related question of specialisation. His conception of the virtues of systematic scientific enquiry entailed welcoming the advances in specialisation so marked in his own lifetime, but at the same time he, naturally, also expressed reservations about them. In 1897, for example, he observed that 'the development of all sciences and studies' had 'driven English

²⁵ HS, journal entry 11 June 1888; *Mem*, 489–90.

²⁶ HS, journal entry 1 Nov. 1886; *Mem*, 460.

university education' far away from Newman's ideal of a common, unifying element to the whole syllabus. 'This has been more or less the case everywhere; but—to my regret I confess—it has been most prominently the case' in Cambridge. In the same address he also pondered the question whether 'the specialist' could be 'a man of culture', answering in the negative 'so far as he is a mere specialist'. On this score, therefore, it was necessary to find ways 'to maintain, in spite of the increasing specialisation inevitably forced on us by the growth of knowledge, our intellectual interests and sympathies in due breadth and versatility'.²⁷ Of course, a public discourse in which 'character' so often outranked 'intellect' tended to assign particular value to ideals of 'breadth and versatility'. Certainly, Sidgwick's even-handedness contrasts with the more whole-hearted defence of the specialist being developed at exactly the same time by Émile Durkheim. In the more politicised debates surrounding the reform of the university in Third Republic France, Durkheim polemicised vigorously against the cultural role of the 'men of letters', dismissed as mere dilettantes, arguing that the specialised scholar had developed disciplined faculties of reason by virtue of his scientific training which made his judgement ethically superior to the flabby generalities of the dilettante. Among the many relevant differences between Sidgwick and Durkheim in this regard, one may note the former's greater tenderness for the Comtean ideal of the coordinating power of philosophy compared to Durkheim's emphatic endorsement of the autonomy of each developed science.²⁸ Part of the additional complexity of Sidgwick's position arose from the fact that, while he wished to promote the authority of specialists, he partly understood himself as a

²⁷ HS, 'The pursuit of culture as an ideal', *Miscellaneous Essays*, 359, 354. Cf. his comments in the debate on abolishing Greek as a compulsory entrance requirement at Cambridge, denying that he wished that science students could have more time to devote 'to their special studies': 'I entirely agree with those who deprecate any such specialisation' (*Mem.*, 511).

²⁸ Émile Durkheim, 'L'individualisme et les intellectuels', *Revue Blanche*, 10 (2 July 1898), 7–13; see the discussion in Fritz Ringer, *Fields of Knowledge: French Academic Culture in Comparative Perspective 1890–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press/Paris: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1992), 223–5, and 304–6 for Durkheim's generalisation of the case for specialisation in his *De la division du travail social*.

specialist in the coordination of other specialisms. The university was to be recognised as the chief source of licensed expertise without losing the prestige of also being the home of 'culture'.

3. *Cultural authority and public debate*

The questions I want to focus on in the remainder of this essay concern the ways in which, drawing on these conceptions of what it was to be both a philosopher and a professor, Sidgwick contributed to public debate in the 1880s and, especially, the 1890s. Since his role here involved exercising a kind of cultural authority, it may help to begin by considering his own understanding of the form such authority needed to take at the end of the nineteenth century. In a paper he read to the Synthetic Society in 1899, Sidgwick noted 'that men are more and more disposed only to accept authority of a particular kind', namely 'the authority of a scientific "consensus of experts"'. He contrasted this with what he called 'theological authority':

That is, it is not the unconstrained agreement of individual thinkers, pursuing truth with unfettered independence of judgement and unfettered mutual criticism, encouraged to probe and test the validity of received doctrines as uncompromisingly and severely as their reason may prompt, and to declare any conclusion they may form with the utmost openness and unreserve.²⁹

One of the striking things about this passage is that it proceeds entirely by means of an extended negative: in characterising what theological authority is *not*, his chosen terms are themselves all negatives—'unconstrained', 'unfettered', 'uncompromisingly', 'unreserve' and so on. It is interesting to see that in writing to Wilfrid Ward in advance of the meeting at which these claims were to be discussed, Sidgwick explained that 'my paper is likely to turn on the profound difference

²⁹ HS, 'Authority, scientific and theological', paper read to the Synthetic Society 24 Feb. 1899; printed as Appendix 2 in *Mem*, quotation at 609–10. Sidgwick had in fact been adumbrating a broadly similar view of authority since at least his *Ethics of Conformity and Subscription* of 1870; see Schultz, *Essays*, 41–2.

between modern scientific authority and theological authority, the former being the unconstrained consensus of unfettered enquirers after truth, and the latter being—but the adjective here requires careful thinking over'.³⁰ As so often with Sidgwick's careful thinking, we never do quite arrive at a single adjective; hence the sequence of negatives.

The belief that there was an increasing number of issues on which the unconstrained judgement of experts converged was clearly important to Sidgwick's fragile sense of optimism, but in the present context it raises two questions. First, in so far as an issue was one on which experts could speak *as* experts, did this suggest that it was a matter where it would be at least wilful and perhaps irrational to disagree? And secondly, were philosophers to be regarded as 'experts' in this sense, and if so, what were they experts *about*? As I shall suggest, one effect of this emphasis on expertise may have been precisely to *remove* certain topics from public debate, an outcome which Sidgwick may actually have been keen to encourage.

I shall explore these questions by considering some of the arenas in which Sidgwick chose to try to exercise his authority in this period, and this will lead us into some of the more neglected aspects of his late writings. The first of these arenas was constituted by the various Ethical Societies which he contributed to or presided over. It is worth remarking that the largest single category of essays from this final period of Sidgwick's career began as addresses to various Ethical Societies (six of which are published in *Practical Ethics*, plus a further one in *Miscellaneous Essays*). These societies were mostly founded in the late 1880s, partly taking their inspiration from the Ethical Culture movement in the United States, and they represented an unstable coalition of earnest seekers after some source of moral light other than that traditionally offered by Christianity.³¹ Looking at them historically, we would now have to say that these societies, especially the London Ethical Society at which Sidgwick spoke most often, also tended to have an implicit political agenda, which focused attention on individual moral improvement rather than on

³⁰ HS to Wilfrid Ward, 16 Jan. 1899; *Mem*, 572.

³¹ See Ian MacKillop, *The British Ethical Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Gustav Spiller, *The Ethical Movement in Great Britain: A Documentary History* (London: Farleigh Press, n.d. [1934]).

collectivist measures of social reform (the idealist philosopher Bernard Bosanquet, who with his wife was one of the pillars of the staunchly individualist Charity Organisation Society, was the leading light of the London Society). The short-lived London School of Ethics and Social Philosophy (to which Sidgwick delivered two of his late ethical addresses) had been set up as, in effect, the teaching arm of the Ethical Society, but also perhaps as something of a counter to the Fabian-inspired London School of Economics established two years earlier.³²

In addressing these societies, therefore, Sidgwick was only reaching a limited and self-selecting public, partly populated by fellow academic philosophers, albeit largely idealists, and partly by that stratum of educated men and women who flocked to the Settlements and similar benevolent institutions in London in the 1880s and 1890s, earnestly desiring to do good to their fellow man, especially to that man who was paid barely a living wage but who still drank too much. For the most part, in addressing such groups, Sidgwick did not attempt to pursue ethical first principles, but to assume the existence of a good will which was perhaps in need of the offices of a philosopher if it was to be clarified and made coherent.

In these addresses, he explicitly raised the question of whether the task of 'moral construction' should not be carried out entirely 'by experts, ... in short, by philosophers'. He admitted that he had initially sympathised with this idea, but that he had come round to believing that 'the work undertaken cannot be thoroughly well done by philosophers alone', partly because they lacked a sufficient range of information, and partly because their moral judgement needed to be 'aided, checked, and controlled by the moral judgement of persons with less philosophy but more special experience'.³³ There is potentially an interesting question here of who is helping whom in the enterprise of 'moral construction'.

³² It folded within three years, but its successor was eventually absorbed into the LSE's Department of Social Work. See Ralf Dahrendorf, *A History of the London School of Economics and Political Science 1895–1995* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 95; J. H. Muirhead, *Reflections of a Journeyman in Philosophy* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1940), 89.

³³ HS, *Practical Ethics: A Collection of Addresses and Essays* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1898), 31–4.

We may explore the implicit sense of role involved by looking in some detail at one of these addresses, entitled 'The morality of strife', delivered to the London Ethical Society in 1890. After the usual Sidgwickian preliminaries (which, as usual, take up more than half the essay)—the drawing of careful distinctions, the setting aside of topics which may appear to form part of the subject-matter but which on closer inspection do not really do so, the mention of issues which would require more careful scrutiny on another occasion, and so on—we come, finally, to the question of attempting to avert or restrict strife, including thereunder both war between states and conflict between groups or classes within a state. Sidgwick was, of course, not optimistic about the chances of averting warfare altogether, though he thought that on the issue of partially humanising its conduct, the nineteenth century had some reason to feel pleased with itself. As far as averting or reducing conflict was concerned, he believed that only strictly limited success was to be hoped for from what he called 'the external method', namely that of arbitration by an independent tribunal or other third party. The task for morality above all, therefore, was to try 'to reduce its causes by cultivating a spirit of justice'. Here humanity's report-card did not make such happy reading: 'There is hardly any plain duty of great importance in which civilised men fail so palpably as in this.' Still, Sidgwick maintained that people could be brought to perform this judicial function considerably better 'if national consciences could be roused to feel the nobility, and grapple practically and persistently with the difficulties of the task'. Certainly 'the thoughtful and moral part of every community' might do this better (did a slight *frisson* of self-recognition ripple through his audience at this point?).

He went on to urge that in the period before a conflict actually breaks out, 'it is surely the imperative duty of all moral persons, according to their gifts and leisure, to make an earnest and systematic attempt to form an impartial view of the points at issue'. He spelled out how this involved attempting to see things from the other side's point of view and so on, and he regretfully acknowledged that it is 'hard to bring a man to this when once the complex collision of principles and interests has begun, and it is still harder to bring a nation to it; but it is a plain duty imposed on us by reason' (the Sidgwickian universe

seemed to contain an uncommonly high number of 'plain duties'). The same considerations, he insisted, apply to conflict within a state such as that between opposed class interests. Again, the method of external arbitration is likely to have only limited success:

The only sure way of preventing strife within modern states from growing continually more bitter and dangerous lies in persuading the citizens, of all classes and sections, that it is not enough to desire justice sincerely; it is needful that they fit themselves, by laborious and sustained efforts to understand the truths mingled with opposing errors, for the high and deeply responsible function, which democracy throws on them, of determining and realizing social justice so far as it depends on government.³⁴

In best Sidgwickian fashion, I want to leave aside the many interesting questions which might be raised about this essay, and instead concentrate on what might be termed a grammatical or syntactical version of Lenin's famously pithy question: 'Who whom?' In the passages I have cited, there are several verbs whose subjects are not specified, and my interest lies in trying to tease out who these subjects might be assumed to be. Who, for example, is to 'rouse national consciences'? Who are the 'thoughtful and moral persons', especially those with considerable 'gifts and leisure', who should 'attempt to form an impartial view'? Who is it who has the hard task of 'bringing people' to this perspective, even trying to 'bring the nation' to it? Who is the 'we' upon whom reason has imposed this 'plain duty'? And who, finally, is to 'persuade' the citizens of a modern democracy of the strenuous efforts they, as citizens, are obliged to make to establish what justice requires? These phrases all seem to assume the existence of, to adapt a phrase, a tightly knit group of ethically motivated men; they seem to advocate, in another idiom, a kind of moral vanguardism, as though the most strenuous requirements of morality were only freely to be spoken of among consenting adults in the privacy of Conway Hall. This was certainly the preferred scale of the 'public' at which Sidgwick aimed.

³⁴ HS, 'The morality of strife', first published in *The International Journal of Ethics* in 1890, and reprinted in *Practical Ethics*, 105–8, 111–12. An ambiguity in the 'Preface' may have led the detail of its prior publication to be omitted: v–vi, cf. 83.

One of the many duties Sidgwick did undertake with exceptional scrupulousness, as we know from the successive editions of his major books, especially *The Methods of Ethics*, was that of revising and updating his published views. Comparison of the version of this essay as it appears in *Practical Ethics* in 1898 with that first published eight years earlier in *The International Journal of Ethics* shows how seriously he took this task, even in the case of his most occasional writings. The numerous changes are mostly not of great significance for my argument here, but they do suggest how sensitive to circumstances he intended his ethical strenuousness to be. Thus, by 1898 'the burning question of strife between industrial classes' required several pages where it had been passed over in a phrase in 1890. Similarly, in 1898 he added a section to counter the case put by 'some thoughtful persons seriously concerned for moral excellence who would regret the extinction of war', which may just have been a response to the increasingly bellicose, 'manly' temper of imperialist Britain in the 1890s, but which may more specifically have been provoked by the celebrated recent statements of this case by figures like Oliver Wendell Holmes Jnr and William James.³⁵ In addition, the sense of obligation appears to be strengthened in several places. Thus, where in 1890 he had merely offered a bland observation about the duty of states to resist 'unscrupulous aggression', in 1898 he added the more strenuous requirement that 'the duty is no less clear for any individual in the aggressing country to use any moral and intellectual influence he may possess—facing unpopularity—to prevent the immoral act'. In similar vein, perhaps, when discussing the duties of 'the thoughtful and moral part of every community' in the event of war, he in 1898 simply omitted a phrase which in 1890 had allowed that 'when the struggle has commenced, it is doubtless right for most if not all men to side with their country unreservedly'. And what had in 1890 been simply a 'duty of all moral persons ... to form an impartial view' had in 1898 hardened into an 'imperative duty'. And that narrowing of aim that Sidgwick would have called realism is also in evidence: for instance, where in 1890 citizens

³⁵ See particularly Holmes's 1895 Harvard address on 'A soldier's faith', in Max Lerner (ed.), *The Mind and Faith of Justice Holmes* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon, 1943).

had the 'high and deeply responsible function' thrown on them by democracy of 'deciding and declaring social justice', this had shrunk by 1898 to that of 'determining and realizing social justice so far as it depends on government'—the task has been framed in slightly more practical terms and seems to call for rather less mere 'declaring'. Re-publication in book form, especially in Sonnenschein's 'Ethical Library', implied reaching a slightly broader, or at least less definitely specifiable, audience, but the strenuous requirements being laid upon the moral élite are certainly not being relaxed.³⁶

A somewhat different aspect of the role which Sidgwick wanted the philosopher to play in a certain kind of public debate is illustrated by another address from this collection, entitled 'The pursuit of culture', first delivered in 1897. His starting-point here was that 'culture' had by this date become a widely accepted ideal, appealed to even as the goal of social reform where that would enable the working class to cultivate their mental capacities and so on. He presented his own task here as being, characteristically, 'to free this fundamental notion, so far as possible, from obscurity and ambiguity'. And, he seems slyly to suggest, if obscurity and ambiguity are what is at issue, then who better to turn to than Matthew Arnold? He then spends some time teasing out the different senses of 'culture' to be found in Arnold's various writings, before distilling the relevant sense in the following terms:

It is the love of knowledge, the ardour of scientific curiosity, driving us continually to absorb new facts and ideas, to make them our own and fit them into the living and growing system of our thought; and the trained faculty of doing this, the alert and supple intelligence exercised and continually developed in doing this,—it is in these that culture essentially lies.

While it is true that some of this hits the authentic Arnoldian note—especially the 'love' of knowledge and the 'alert and supple intelligence'—one cannot help remarking the presence of some rather

³⁶ Compare the essay as printed in *The International Journal of Ethics*, 2, 5, 6, 14, with the version in *Practical Ethics*, 87, 89–90, 93, 106. Note his sardonic reference to the problem of dealing with issues 'in a manner that would satisfy or edify the "plain man" for whom my little volume was supposed to be written'; HS to Mandell Creighton, 30 Aug. 1898; *Mem*, 569.

unArnoldian elements, such as the emphasis on 'scientific' curiosity, or on the importance of 'new facts', and above all the idea that one's thought must form a 'system', albeit one that is 'living and growing'. Not surprisingly, having built these elements into his definition of culture, Sidgwick concludes that Arnold cannot show us how this capacity is to be acquired, for Arnold's 'method of seeking truth is a survival from a pre-scientific age. He is a man of letters pure and simple; and often seems quite serenely unconscious of the intellectual limitations of his type.' (Here Sidgwick risks sounding disconcertingly like Arnold's *faux-naïf* self-mocking of his own 'want of principles systematic and interdependent' and so on; one almost expects Arminius to be appealed to as the authority on the latest advances of science in Prussia.) It is interesting to see that, scarcely a decade after Arnold's death, Sidgwick can so confidently dismiss his approach as irretrievably out of date. 'Intellectual culture, at the end of the nineteenth century, must include as its most essential element a scientific habit of mind; and a scientific habit of mind can only be acquired by the methodical study of some part of what the human race has come scientifically to know.'³⁷ 'Culture' was supposed to be the man of letters' trump card, but 'intellectual culture' is here promoted as the outcome of 'methodical study', clearly a strenuous activity not likely to be successfully pursued in Grub Street.

Having established that art, science, and morality are by no means identical to each other, he attributes to Arnold the claim that 'it is the special function of literature to comprehend and mediate between these divergent aims and views'. But the task, Sidgwick rules, is beyond literature's powers.

For to satisfy completely the demand to which he appeals, to bring into true and clear intellectual relation the notions and methods of studies so diverse as positive science and the theory of the fine arts is more than

³⁷ HS, 'The pursuit of culture', *Practical Ethics*, 220–22, 223. This essay clearly overlaps in many places with that published first in pamphlet form as *The Pursuit of Culture as an Ideal*, and subsequently in edited form in *Miscellaneous Essays*. The first was given as an address to the London School of Ethics and Social Philosophy, the second to the students of the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, both in the autumn of 1897.

literature as literature can perform; the result can only be attained by philosophy, whose peculiar task indeed it is to bring into clear, orderly harmonious relations the fundamental notions and methods of all special sciences and studies.

Literature, 'though it cannot give philosophic form and order', 'may give a provisional substitute for philosophy to the many who do not philosophize'. It can help to produce a harmony of feeling in our contemplation of the world, 'if not the reasoned harmony of ideas which only philosophy could impart', something that would seem to be beyond the grasp of 'the many who do not philosophize'. And as for the fundamental question as to whether science and morality conflict, 'This is a difficulty with which only a systematic moral philosophy can deal.'³⁸

One cannot help noticing that in each of the last three passages I have quoted, the phrase 'only philosophy' recurs. The public task of putting the pursuit of culture on a sound footing, he suggests, can only be properly undertaken by philosophers, although there is the suggestion of a variant on his 'two-tier' view I mentioned earlier, as though philosophy is for the few and literature for the many. Sidgwick was thus attempting to see off the cultural hegemony of the man of letters, just as in his better-known essays he attempted to see off the challenge of the sociologists and evolutionary naturalists more generally.³⁹ For all their modesty of tone, these essays suggest a job-description for the position of cultural arbiter which severely narrows the field of potential applicants.

4. *Royal Commissions*

I want now to turn to the other major semi-public forum in which Sidgwick acted with some frequency in the 1890s, namely the highly distinctive one of the Royal Commission. Sidgwick sat on or was

³⁸ *Practical Ethics*, 227, 228, 230.

³⁹ Cf. Turner's conclusion: 'Sidgwick did not claim a dominant position for the philosopher in contemporary culture, but he did demand recognition of the intellectual inadequacy of men of science as sole arbiters of English thought'; Frank M. Turner, *Between Science and Religion: A Reaction to Scientific Naturalism in Late-Victorian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 65.

invited to give evidence to no fewer than four such commissions in the course of the decade, revealing along the way his strong sense of the possibility of deploying intellectual authority and expertise to help determine policy. The first was the Royal Commission on New Statutes for the Proposed Gresham University in London: Sidgwick was one of thirteen members of the Commission, under the chairmanship of Earl Cowper, which took evidence from May 1892 to May 1893, and published its report early in 1894 (its recommendations were largely incorporated in the act establishing the University of London in 1900).⁴⁰ Sidgwick threw himself into the work of the Commission at a time when he was overburdened with other labours, leading to one of his periods of overwork—his sense of duty in such matters was acute. This was perhaps all the more true given his awareness as the Commission proceeded that, as he wrote to his wife, ‘so much labour is thrown away, e.g. all the labour I am spending on the New University, as far as I can see’.⁴¹ This presumably referred to the fact that Sidgwick was, vainly as it turned out, opposing the principle of uniting in one institution the dual functions of being an ordinary teaching university based in London and giving degrees through external examinations to students across the country. He signed the final report but appended a dissenting note in which he argued this case, where he forcibly expressed his conviction that the reputation of a university was jeopardised if it was reduced to no more than an examining mechanism for students whom it had had no hand in forming.⁴²

The Royal Commission on Secondary Education set up by Lord Rosebery’s government in 1894 had as its chairman one of Sidgwick’s oldest friends and fellow ‘academic liberals’ from the 1860s, James Bryce, and Eleanor Sidgwick was one of its three female members.⁴³

⁴⁰ See H. Hale Bellot, *The University of London: A History* (London: Athlone, 1969), ch. 5.

⁴¹ HS to his wife, Dec. 1892; *Mem*, 525.

⁴² *Report of the Royal Commission on the New Statutes for the Proposed Gresham University in London* (1894), Cmd 7425; ‘Note’ by Sidgwick, lix–lx. For the work of the Commission, see also Negley Harte, *The University of London 1836–1986* (London: Athlone, 1986), 150–56.

⁴³ Ethel Sidgwick, *Mrs Henry Sidgwick*, 133–4.

Sidgwick was one of those from whom written answers were solicited to a series of questions bearing particularly on the relations between the universities and schools. In his reply, he acknowledged that at first the work of the local examinations syndicate (of which he was a member at Cambridge) may have been 'a little amateurish', but that in the last generation 'the range of university studies has continually extended', and so it could now act with the requisite professional authority even in new fields such as modern languages. He urged the universities to teach technological subjects and to make provision for vocational education, including the training of teachers, but his strongest plea was for the removal of compulsory Latin and Greek as an entry requirement at Cambridge—'no reform in our academic system is at present so urgently needed'—not least on account of the impact such a change would have in encouraging the 'modern side' in schools. His broader concern to make the scholarly authority of the university as widely effective as possible is evident throughout his answers.⁴⁴

The other two commissions were both on economic, indeed fiscal, matters, and are an indication of Sidgwick's considerable reputation as a political economist, at least in official circles. In its final report, published in 1896, the Royal Commission on the Financial Relations Between Great Britain and Ireland included a long memorandum by Sir Robert Giffen, head of the statistical section of the Board of Trade, discussing the basis on which taxable property should be assessed in Ireland and in Britain. Sidgwick had been sent Giffen's memorandum by the Commission and asked to comment. His 'Note' is interesting, partly for its general argument against according Ireland any separate fiscal status, but partly because he at one point mildly challenged Giffen's appeal to 'economic authority', which Sidgwick then glossed as referring to 'English economists', of whom he clearly saw himself as one. Sidgwick's comments recognised Giffen's eminence as a statistician, but implied that he was weaker on the *principles* of

⁴⁴ *Report of the Royal Commission on Secondary Education* (1895), Cmd 7862, Vol. V: 'Memoranda and Answers to Questions'; Sidgwick's reply is at 243–7, quotation at 244, 246. See also H. A. L. Fisher, *James Bryce*, 2 vols (London: Macmillan, 1927), I, 295–9.

taxation, upon which there was an established body of theoretical work.⁴⁵

When in 1897 the Conservative government was setting up a Royal Commission on Local Taxation, it would seem (from a letter to Arthur Balfour in the Balfour Papers) that Sidgwick was asked if he would be willing to serve on it.⁴⁶ In the event, Sidgwick did not become a member of the Commission itself, but he was none the less given the opportunity to submit his views directly to the Commissioners when a list of questions was sent out to sixteen 'financial and economic experts', mostly academics. Sidgwick sent an extremely long and detailed answer on the equity of the present system of local taxation, demonstrating his command both of the facts of existing arrangements and of the principles on which they could be justified.⁴⁷ The general tenor of his submission would not have been unwelcome to the Tory government of the day, most notably his statement: 'I conclude, therefore, that the principle on which partial relief from rates was granted to the owners of agricultural land in 1896 is sound from the point of view of equity.'⁴⁸ This, in the context of the politics of the 1890s, was a striking endorsement of what the authoritative history of the subject has described as 'the most controversial legislative measure of 1896', since

⁴⁵ *Final Report of the Royal Commission on the Financial Relations Between Great Britain and Ireland* (1896), Cmd 8262; 'Note on the Memorandum by Sir Robert Giffen' by Henry Sidgwick, 180–83, quotation at 183. Interestingly, when Sidgwick had given a paper on taxation at the Political Economy Club in London in 1886, Giffen was the one person he mentioned by name in his journal record of the occasion; *Mem*, 447.

⁴⁶ 'When you asked me, on Tuesday, if I should like to be on the new Commission, I answered the question simply; I should not like it. But if you asked me to undertake the work as a public duty, I should not think it right to refuse. To have a right to refuse I should require a much stronger conviction than I actually have of the value to mankind of my philosophic studies.' HS to A. J. Balfour, 16 Apr. 1897; Balfour Papers, BL Add Mss 49832, f. 91.

⁴⁷ Cf. the later comment of his Cambridge colleague Henry Jackson: 'I think he would have liked nothing better than to be Chancellor of the Exchequer', not perhaps a comment it is easy to imagine being made about many leading intellectual figures; *Mem*, 376.

⁴⁸ *Report of the Royal Commission on Local Taxation* (1899), Cmd 9528, 'Volume of Memoranda on Imperial and Local Taxes'; Answers by Henry Sidgwick, 99–112, quotation at 112.

it represented 'an unprecedented subsidy for the landed interest'.⁴⁹ Not perhaps for the first time in the 1890s, Sidgwick's scrupulously measured analysis issued in acceptance of some of the most blatantly ideological features of the *status quo*.

Royal Commissions were in some ways an ideal medium for Sidgwick: reasoned argument and a respect for the evidence seemed to stand a better chance of determining the outcomes than in the rough and tumble of public discussion in a democracy. Above all, they accorded a significant role to expertise. They functioned for Sidgwick as the best expression of that perennial ideal of the well-connected 'insider', the hope of shaping policy without having to engage in politics. If one wanted a formula to cover his activities in this sphere it might perhaps be the time-honoured one of 'helping the authorities with their enquiries'.

5. *National politics*

In so far as Sidgwick did have a public identity in national politics in this period, it was, at least after the Home Rule crisis of 1886, as a Liberal Unionist. He voted Liberal for the last time at the election of November 1885; by August 1886 he is describing himself as one of 'the altogether insignificant handful of Academic Unionist Liberals', and in December 1886 he went up to London to attend an initial meeting of the Liberal Unionist secession.⁵⁰ For some years thereafter, he figured in Liberal Unionist activities both nationally and locally.⁵¹ In 1887 he

⁴⁹ Avner Offer, *Property and Politics 1870–1914: Landownership, Law, Ideology, and Urban Development in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 207–8. The 1896 Act effectively reduced the rateable value of agricultural land to compensate for the loss of revenue caused by the decline in agricultural rents.

⁵⁰ *Mem*, 430; 453; 462.

⁵¹ The inaugural dinner of the Liberal Unionist Club took place on 30 March 1887, with the Marquess of Hartington presiding, at which their organ, *The Liberal Unionist*, was launched. Sidgwick's close friend A. V. Dicey was among those who spoke, and afterwards Dicey recorded his private opinion that the Unionists 'represent the best moral feeling' in the country (Richard A. Cosgrove, *The Rule of Law: Albert Venn Dicey, Victorian Jurist* [London: Macmillan, 1980], 141). Sidgwick was for a while active

'headed the Liberal Unionist deputation to Lord Hartington from the universities', and signed the 'memorial' to Hartington published in *The Times* on 27 June 1887.⁵² The question of Home Rule continued to stir Sidgwick's political feelings, especially what he saw as the 'disgrace' of the unprincipled abandonment of Irish landowners envisaged in Gladstone's later proposals.⁵³ It is intriguing that as late as 1898 maintaining the distinct identity of Liberal Unionism should still matter so much to him: in that year he mentions being a member of the Liberal Unionist council and being at a meeting with 'the Duke' (that is, of Devonshire, as Hartington had become on his father's death), though he could be ironic about the pitfalls of the Liberal Unionists 'pos[ing] as a specially intelligent part of the community'.⁵⁴ By then they represented no more than a principled rump, but all along Liberal Unionism had been a classic political example of the problem of being all chiefs and not enough Indians, though for Sidgwick, with his increasing hostility to the noisiness of popular politics, this may actually have been part of its appeal.

Sidgwick's chief compassion-in-arms among Liberal Unionists at Cambridge was J. R. Seeley, a friend with whom he shared close intellectual as well as political sympathies.⁵⁵ One important facet of Sidgwick's identity which the connection with Seeley brings out is the common Comtean link between a belief in the growth of scientific

among Cambridge Liberal Unionists: in February 1888, for example, he was one of the leading local figures hosting a big Liberal Unionist meeting in Cambridge at which Dicey spoke (Robert S. Rait [ed.], *Memorials of Albert Venn Dicey* [London: Macmillan, 1925], 127).

⁵² *The Times*, 27 June 1887, 6; for the academic Liberal Unionists, see Christopher Harvie, *The Lights of Liberalism: University Liberals and the Challenge of Democracy 1860–86* (London: Allen Lane, 1976), 226, 228–9.

⁵³ *Mem*, 523, on his reasons for voting Conservative in the 1892 election.

⁵⁴ HS to Lady Rayleigh, 10 Feb. 1898; *Mem*, 555. On the absorption, for all practical purposes, of the Liberal Unionists in the Tory Party in the course of the 1890s, see Peter Marsh, *Lord Salisbury and the Discipline of Popular Government: Lord Salisbury's Domestic Statecraft 1881–1902* (Hassocks: Harvester, 1978).

⁵⁵ For Seeley's prominence among Liberal Unionists, see Deborah Wormell, *Sir John Seeley and the Uses of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 169–73.

authority and a disdain for popular politics, indeed any politics. Seeley, a more unbridled Comtist (a more unbridled everything), genuinely believed that 'political differences would disappear in the light of science';⁵⁶ meanwhile, he had little but scorn for the 'anarchy' of party politics and the 'talking shop' that was Parliament. His academic commitment to developing a 'science of politics', a project which Sidgwick supported and, in his more cautious fashion, also tried to promote, was partly animated by a larger conviction about the movement from the 'metaphysical' to the 'positive' stage in human history.⁵⁷ By the 1890s, Sidgwick's own Comtism was decidedly vestigial, but for both men, I suspect, Liberal Unionism, in being opposed to the 'demagoguery' and 'sentimentalism' of current politics, appealed as the best interim expression of a more scientific approach to political questions.

As suggested earlier, Sidgwick's position on domestic policy tended to be markedly conservative in the 1880s and 1890s. He served, for four years as acting chairman of the Cambridge branch of the Charity Organisation Society, and he tended to follow the COS line in opposing all 'relaxations' of the Poor Law system; he was even critical of Arthur Balfour's speech introducing the Medical Relief Bill of 1885 (which removed the disqualification from voting for those who received medical relief only) as likely to undermine 'the movement towards providence which all true philanthropists who know the poor are doing their utmost to support'.⁵⁸ But the politics of the 1890s were increasingly dominated by foreign and colonial issues, and here Sidgwick displayed an interesting mixture of liberal principle and conservative caution. He sympathised with the agitation against the 'Armenian atrocities' of 1896, but, revealingly, he now looked at such issues as though through Downing Street windows:

I have not heard from A.J.B. anything of what is being done (I suppose it to be a Cabinet secret if there is anything) ... It seems to *me* that at the present stage it would be a mistake for England to try isolated action: but I am inclined to approve the agitation going on, as more likely to

⁵⁶ Wormell, *Seeley*, 172.

⁵⁷ See Collini, Winch, and Burrow, *That Noble Science*, esp. 225–34. Sidgwick edited Seeley's posthumous *Introduction to Political Science* (London: Macmillan, 1896).

⁵⁸ *Mem*, 506; HS, journal entry 19 July 1885; *Mem*, 417–18.

strengthen the hands of the Government than to weaken them—at least so long as it is kept on the present lines.⁵⁹

This is surely ‘Government House Utilitarianism’ with a vengeance.⁶⁰

His response to the Boer War was perhaps more revealing still. In private, Sidgwick expressed strong disapproval of the British government’s policy that led to the war. For example, he wrote to Bryce in November 1899: ‘As for the war, I do not mind telling you privately that no political event in my lifetime has ever been so odious to me. It seems to me the worst business England has been in since the war with the American colonies, and I cannot help foreboding that it will end similarly, in an independent Dutch republic.’⁶¹ And in February 1900, he wrote to another friend: ‘I thought the war unjustifiable on any principle of International right, and on the whole indefensible on grounds of policy, though I admit the situation a difficult one.’⁶² Some of his correspondents shared his views, though it is clear that his larger circle of acquaintances mostly did not. At the end of 1899 he apologised to one correspondent for not having written for a long time, ‘but I have been for some months in the exceptional position—among my friends—of disliking and disapproving of this war and foreboding that it will end in disgrace and disaster to England’. He avoided some of the most delicate difficulties of his position by concluding that if any one figure was culpable it was Milner even more than Chamberlain.⁶³

Sidgwick’s personal ties with the government were very close by this point. He frequently stayed with his brother-in-law, Arthur Balfour, where he met other leading Tory figures including Salisbury (and he clearly enjoyed being, as he had put it earlier, ‘at the centre of information’).⁶⁴ One cannot help remarking that on the evening before Sidgwick was to be operated on for the cancer which killed him soon

⁵⁹ HS to H. G. Dakyns, 15 Sept. 1896; *Mem*, 549.

⁶⁰ I take the phrase ‘Government House Utilitarianism’ from Bernard Williams’s criticism of Sidgwick in *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (London: Fontana, 1985), 108–9.

⁶¹ HS to James Bryce, 6 Nov. 1899; Bodleian Library Oxford, Bryce Papers, 15, f. 99.

⁶² HS to H. G. Dakyns, 3 Feb. 1900; *Mem*, 580.

⁶³ HS to Lord Tennyson, 25 Dec. 1899; *Mem*, 576–8.

⁶⁴ HS, journal entry 18 June 1885; *Mem*, 412.

thereafter, he and his wife dined alone with Balfour and his sister 'in the large dining-room at 10 Downing Street'.⁶⁵ But more than personal loyalty underlay his habitual perspective. In *The Methods of Ethics* he had, perhaps a little incautiously (if that adverb can ever be applied to him), used the phrase 'from the point of view ... of the universe', with which Bernard Williams had memorable sport in his criticism of utilitarianism.⁶⁶ But it is fair to say that in the last decade of his life, at least, Sidgwick thought that the proper perspective from which to approach political issues was 'from the point of view of the government'. As I have suggested elsewhere, it is surely revealing that he could implicitly equate the analysis of 'the chief general considerations that enter into the rational discussion of political questions in modern states' with the attempt 'to treat systematically the chief questions for which the statesman has to find answers'.⁶⁷

The consequences of this disposition were most tellingly illustrated when his friend and fellow philosopher, James Sully, wrote to him soliciting his support for making some kind of public statement against the war. At first Sidgwick responded by saying, at least as recorded by Sully, that he would like 'to help in preserving the independence of this brave people', but (striking a more characteristic note) that 'he thought it, however, most undesirable to publish anything of the sort at that crisis'.⁶⁸ In March 1900 he then wrote to Sully to explain why he had decided against signing the petition for stopping the war which Sully was helping to organise. 'Perhaps it is partly my personal connection with the Government', he explained somewhat defensively, 'which makes me think, in considering a question of this kind, "What should I do if I were the Government?"' Putting that question to himself at the present juncture, he concluded that it would not be right simply to halt the war without obtaining certain securities and safeguards for the

⁶⁵ *Mem*, 589–90.

⁶⁶ Bernard Williams, 'The point of view of the universe: Sidgwick and the ambitions of ethics', *Cambridge Review*, 7 (1982); partly repeated in *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, 107–9.

⁶⁷ Collini, 'Ordinary experience', 358–9, quoting *Elements of Politics*, 6, and *Philosophy*, 26.

⁶⁸ James Sully, *My Life and Friends* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1918), 286.

future (about, for example, the rights of non-Boers in South Africa). 'I should think this my duty, taking up the matter at this stage, in spite of my strong condemnation of the diplomacy that brought the war about.' But he recognised that he could not find any measure which would thus bring the war to an honourable end as circumstances stood at present. 'This is why I decided not to sign.'⁶⁹

In considering the question of roles, it is pertinent to observe that not all Sidgwick's academic colleagues felt obliged to be similarly judicious: several were more outspoken on either side. In Cambridge, Westlake, the Whewell Professor of International Law, delivered a public lecture essentially justifying the war, while other senior members such as Oscar Browning and A. C. Pigou spoke against it at the Union and elsewhere.⁷⁰ That it was possible to be both a prominent philosopher and a leading academic figure *and* still to be outspoken in opposition to the war is indicated by the example of Edward Caird. The keeper of the flame of British Idealism had been Master of Balliol for six years when the Boer War began, but that did not stop him expressing the strongest support for its critics. The journalist W. T. Stead was one of the leading anti-war agitators, and Caird wrote to him in September 1899, 'cordially sympathising' with his efforts and emphatically declaring that 'such a war would [be] both a crime and a blunder'.⁷¹ Once the war had actually begun he 'showed where his sympathies lay by taking the chair for Miss Hobhouse on one occasion when she visited Oxford in connection with her efforts on behalf of the Boer women and children in the concentration camps', a very unpopular cause at the time.⁷² Nor was it impossible to be a Liberal Unionist and a critic of the war, though it was naturally rarer than among those who had remained

⁶⁹ HS to James Sully, 29 March 1900; *Mem*, 581–2.

⁷⁰ Westlake's *The Transvaal War* was given as a lecture in Cambridge on 9 Nov. 1899, and reviewed in the *Cambridge Review* (23.11.99), 102–3; for Browning and Pigou see Stuart Wallace, *War and the Image of Germany: British Academics 1914–1918* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1988), 13–14.

⁷¹ As reported in *The Manchester Guardian*, 28 Sept. 1899; reproduced in Stephen Koss (ed.), *The Pro-Boers: The Anatomy of an Antiwar Movement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 23.

⁷² Henry Jones and J. H. Muirhead, *The Life and Philosophy of Edward Caird* (Glasgow: Maclehose, 1921), 153.

within the Liberal fold; Leonard Courtney, for example, was a prominent Liberal Unionist of widely admired high principles who became one of the most consistent (and most vilified) spokesmen for the 'Pro-Boer' position.⁷³

One way to try to get a clearer sense of Sidgwick's 'roles' in comparative perspective may be to ask whether one could imagine him signing an English equivalent of 'le manifeste des intellectuels' in protest against the government's handling of an English Dreyfus Affair. That question may seem to assume too many improbable counterfactual conditions, but one can well imagine Sidgwick being wary of the medium of expression as well as of the outspoken content; certainly he was the last person we can imagine being seduced by the glamour of dissidence. By this stage his preferred course of action would more probably have been to murmur in Arthur Balfour's ear that the government's position might be considered in some quarters to be somewhat injudicious.

6. Roles and duties

The first edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the relevant volume of which was compiled some years after Sidgwick's death, treats 'role' as a French word, always circumflexed, usually italicised, and suggests that even when used figuratively it still alludes to its theatrical origins: to 'play' a role is to play a part or character, to be 'in the rôle of x'. There are few more improbable incarnations in which we could imagine Sidgwick than got up in costume and greasepaint, strutting before the footlights, the handsome *jeune premier* declaiming his lines to a packed house (and of all the incongruities here, not the least may be the juxtaposition of Sidgwick and the idea of 'a packed house'). Still, I think that the tension between social performance and inner identity which the language of 'roles' always suggests may be helpful when considering Sidgwick's later career. It seems to me possible that he at

⁷³ See Koss, *The Pro-Boers*, 29–31, 266–7; also L. T. Hobhouse and J. L. Hammond, *Lord Hobhouse: A Memoir* (London: Arnold, 1905).

times felt that his roles imposed duties whose performance he found merely dutiful. This had fairly obviously been true of his crisis over subscription to the Thirty-nine Articles in 1869; as he put it in the pamphlet which he issued on that occasion: 'There is no danger to religion which an earnest person more deplores and dreads than that there should insinuate itself into his religious exercises a sense of their shadowiness and unreality; a feeling that the view of the universe which they are framed to suit is not precisely that which his innermost self actually takes.'⁷⁴ But he perhaps came to feel something similar about his professorial 'exercises' on more than one occasion. 'A professor must write books', but it is an interesting question how far Sidgwick felt it a positive obligation as a professor to write such dull books.⁷⁵ Metaphors about letting oneself off the leash may suggest something which in Sidgwick's case seems inappropriately canine, but I wonder whether in his journal and his more intimate letters we do not catch glimpses of a certain straining against the constrictions of public judiciousness, and if so, whether this might not have contributed to what I am diagnosing as a certain ambivalence about participating in public debate.

This may perhaps make a small contribution to the resolution of the major question which no honest reader of Sidgwick can avoid, namely, how was it that this exceptionally clever and, by all accounts, delightful man managed, in some of his later writings, to be so heart-sinkingly boring? Anyone who has read at all extensively in Sidgwick's writings from both the 1860s and the 1890s is bound, I think, to feel mildly depressed at what happened to his prose. The best pieces from the earlier period show him excelling in the arts of the polemical essayist—consider his witheringly cogent critique of the reality of a classical education, or the deft, stylish criticism of Matthew Arnold on culture, or the imaginative sympathy and delicacy of phrasing in the essay on

⁷⁴ HS, *The Ethics of Conformity and Subscription* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1870), 27.

⁷⁵ 'Still man must work—and a Professor must write books'; HS to J. A. Symonds, 1 Dec. 1887; *Mem*, 481. Or again: 'Decidedly nature intended me to read books and not to write them; I wish the former function was regarded as a sufficient fulfilment of Professorial duty'; HS, journal entry 15 Dec. 1886: *Mem*, 463.

Clough. And although the prose of *The Methods of Ethics* is naturally more analytical and impersonal, still the argumentative subtlety and the sheer, sustained architectonic command displayed across that long book make it far from boring. But by the 1890s, these qualities can sometimes seem to have been replaced by little more than a ponderous judiciousness. There are still certain themes which can stir faint echoes of his better literary self: he can still write with some attack and conviction about the higher education of women, and in combating a current intellectual fad like sociology he is driven to some crisp arguments and telling phrases. But far more often, especially when writing (as he most frequently did in this period) on some large general issue in ethics or politics, his prose constructs a kind of airless chamber in which all interesting questions wilt and die.

This seems to me most obviously true of his heavy treatises of the period, *The Principles of Political Economy* and *The Elements of Politics*,⁷⁶ and it was clearly something of which Sidgwick was aware (consider his reflection after reading the reviews of the former work that the defect he would *not* be able to remove in revising it would be 'the one damning defect of long-winded and difficult dulness'⁷⁷—a comment which would have the virtue of being endearing did it not possess so much of the prior virtue of being true). But it is revealingly true of *Practical Ethics* also—revealing because he is not in this latter case constrained by the requirements of system and comprehensiveness imposed by a treatise, and also because several of the topics discussed touched quite closely on his own personal dilemmas. But time after time, as we move through the first half or even two thirds of one of these essays in which he elaborately clarifies terms and sets boundaries, what had at first seemed like a rich and absorbing topic gets shrivelled into a thin, dry question to which, once precisely formulated, the answer is more or less obvious.

Some of this may, sadly, be put down to age as Sidgwick's naturally cautious temperament drove his mind along ever more

⁷⁶ See the discussion of the latter in Collini, 'Ordinary experience', and esp. Sidgwick's confession (in the letter to Bryce quoted at 345–6) of the 'barrenness' of some of his analysis.

⁷⁷ HS, journal entry 8 Jan. 1885; *Mem*, 397–8.

deeply etched grooves; some of it may be put down to his sheltered life, his relatively restricted, and largely complacent, social circle, leading him to treat what was purely contingent in social arrangements as given. But somewhere along the way, I blame philosophy—or, to be a bit less provocative, the way Sidgwick applied his conception of philosophy as ‘reflective analysis’ to non-philosophical subjects. Philosophy proceeds, remember, by ‘the method of reflection on the thought we all share, by the aid of the symbolism we all share, language’. And earlier, in *The Methods of Ethics*, he had said of ‘common-sense morality’, to the analysis of which he devotes such a large part of that book, that it is to be taken ‘quite empirically, as we find it in the common thought expressed in the common language of mankind’.⁷⁸ But the danger of this method when applied to practical issues may be precisely to assume that there is more consensus in the ‘common thought’ of mankind than is really the case, and it may be partly for this reason that he tends to regard ‘controversy’ as the result of misunderstanding or lack of clarity, rather than genuine disagreement. After all, what becomes of the philosopher’s role in public discussion of those matters on which ‘we’ do not ‘all’ share the same ‘thought’? Sidgwick, I have been arguing, oscillates between largely withdrawing from public debate and only entering it in tutelary mode in order to reduce it and perhaps even to bring it to an end. Temperament and circumstances obviously played a part in this, but so, too, I am now suggesting, did his conception of the contribution philosophical analysis could make. If professors of philosophy were properly fulfilling their role and its duties, as Sidgwick appears to conceive them, then it would be hardly surprising if the effect were to reduce, even perhaps to come close to eliminating, public debate, as more or less all ‘controversy’ was shown to be ‘unnecessary’. This seems to me to help explain why it is that Sidgwick often appears to come upon contemporary lay discussion like a schoolmaster coming upon a collection of small boys playing a rowdy, disorganised game of football: he explains that he is uniquely trained to act as referee, and he then methodically proceeds to demonstrate that most of their attacking

⁷⁸ HS, *The Methods of Ethics* (1874), 7th edn (London: Macmillan, 1907), 229.

moves are misguided, to reduce the size of the goals to near invisibility, and to entirely deflate the ball.

Others may be better qualified than I am to pursue the analysis of similarities between this conception of the role of philosophy and that found in the so-called 'Oxford philosophy' or 'linguistic analysis' of the late 1940s and 1950s.⁷⁹ The impact on academic philosophy itself was very different in the two cases, partly no doubt because Sidgwick did not gather about him a school on the scale that Ryle and Austin did; in terms of shaping the discourse of professional philosophy in Britain as a whole, size was almost everything. But there may have been some functional resemblance in the broader cultural role involved: both idioms tended to have the effect of lowering the temperature of all discussion to the point where one is left with little more than a small pile of freeze-dried particulars. Sidgwick was certainly not guilty of either the coercive dismissiveness or the schoolboy jokeness displayed by 'Oxford philosophy' at its worst, but the absence of these characteristics, though no doubt admirable in itself, hardly made his prose livelier.

Sidgwick's later career, I have been suggesting, does not quite correspond to any of the major models offered by recent historiography: this is most evident, perhaps, in the case of the French 'intellectual', though his distance from the model of the German 'mandarin' will also by now be clear. But in this phase of his life he also stands at some remove from the classic 'public moralist' of the high-Victorian period. Here we need to recall the various publics that Sidgwick addressed and the media through which he reached them. It is noticeable, I think, how often in this period he is to be found speaking to some relatively small learned body or intellectual society of some kind—the Political Economy Club, Section F of the British Association, various Ethical Societies, the Synthetic Society, the Eranus, university philosophical clubs and so on. These might be seen as in some ways the cultural equivalents of Royal Commissions,

⁷⁹ Cf. Jonathan Rée, 'English philosophy in the fifties', *Radical Philosophy*, 65 (Autumn 1993), 3–21. It is interesting to consider how far Rée's strictures on the 'method of linguistic analysis' (p. 17) might apply to Sidgwick's 'method of reflective analysis'.

select bodies guaranteeing a level of informed discussion. It is certainly striking that during this period Sidgwick published virtually nothing in newspapers, a few letters about purely academic business aside, and practically nothing for the political weeklies; furthermore, he wrote hardly anything for the monthly magazines and only a handful of pieces for the great quarterlies. His periodical publication was now confined to *Mind* and *The International Journal of Ethics* above all, plus some contributions to the house journals of particular organisations such as *The Classical Review* or the journal of the Charity Organisation Society. And, turning to a medium which some of the high-Victorian public moralists had made notable use of, he delivered no genuinely public speeches, and of course he declined all suggestions that he might stand for Parliament. In other words, Sidgwick entered into genuinely 'public' debate in the 1880s and 1890s only to a very limited extent. In so far as he did so, his prime aim was the elimination of 'unnecessary controversy' and the combating of 'dangerous' notions, where 'dangerous' meant, as he put it in 1894, 'liable to fill the mind of the confiding reader with a vain illusion of knowledge'.⁸⁰ In some respects, the force of much of Sidgwick's later writing may be seen as tending to *reduce* the cultural authority of the individual public moralist, especially of the kind that was exercised through exhortation, tone, literary personality, and so on, and as tending to replace it with the authority of collective, impersonal knowledge.

But nor is he an uncomplicated example of Heyck's thesis about the formation in the latter part of the century of a self-consciously separate intellectual class marked by withdrawal from the public domain, specialisation of intellectual focus, and professionalisation of career.⁸¹ He may in some ways appear to have been a standard-bearer for what is called, in an ugly translation of the prevailing French term, 'the autonomisation of the university field'. But even here one has to recognise his place among wider political and literary élites: after all,

⁸⁰ For 'unnecessary controversy', see Collini, 'Ordinary experience', 341; HS, 'Political prophecy and sociology' (1894) *Miscellaneous Essays*, 219.

⁸¹ See Heyck, *Transformation of Intellectual Life*, 224–6.

his main ally in the early stages of the scheme that eventually became the British Academy was James Bryce, hardly the model of the 'pure' academic. In European terms, Sidgwick perhaps corresponded more to the older figure of the 'notable', a personage who was of consequence in the community partly through social connection, partly through institutional role, and partly by virtue of personal gifts or capacities. In English terms, he may have been an early example of a type which became more familiar by the mid-twentieth century: the socially well-connected don, one who made a career by attaining eminence in a branch of scholarship, but one whose social experience gave him both the confidence and means of access to contribute directly and indirectly to the policy-making process, largely by-passing general public debate.

What I am pointing to, therefore, are certain structural parallels or symmetries among Sidgwick's conceptions of his various roles. As a philosopher, he entertained both an intellectually imperial and a more practically restricted sense of the reach of his subject; as a professor, he combined a fairly austere notion of the propriety of concentrating on the scientific advance of one's discipline with a capacious sense of the need to make the authority of the university tell in society; and as a participant in the public arena, he displayed a marked ambivalence, on some occasions feeling the obligation to take up the polemical cudgels against various forms of half-truth, but more frequently wishing rather to limit than to stimulate public debate, preferring to act within carefully selected groups or even behind closed doors.

These roles, and the tensions generated by the relationship between them, were not, of course, unique to Sidgwick, even though the detail and the shading reflect his particular career and temperament. He should, rather, be seen as belonging to the first generation in Britain in which the possibility presented itself of being a fully professional academic who also played a public role. Since then, many academics, needless to say, have confined themselves to cultivating their specialist gardens, just as, conversely, many public commentators have not aspired to make a mark in a scholarly discipline. It is the peculiar burden of the academic intellectual to have to live with the

tension which comes from moving *between* these roles, never wholly at rest at either pole, never wholly at ease with the movement between them. On this score, perhaps none of us can do other than respect the efforts of this 'sinful man who partly tried to do his duty'.⁸²

⁸² Sidgwick left instructions that if no church service were to be used, he would like the following words to be said over his grave: 'Let us commend to the love of God with silent prayer the soul of a sinful man who partly tried to do his duty. It is by his wish that I say over his grave these words and no more.' *Mem*, 599.