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Sidgwick's Social Philosophy

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## Abstract

Henry Sidgwick is well known as “the last philosopher in the direct line of utilitarian tradition” following Bentham and J. S. Mill. A large number of studies have been made on *The Methods of Ethics*, however, *The Principles of Political Economy*, *The Elements of Politics* and the relationship between these works have not been studied sufficiently. The purpose of this paper is to consider Sidgwick's utilitarianism through his three main works; and to draw a perspective of Sidgwick's system of philosophy consisting of ethics, economics, and politics which has not been clarified yet.

For the present purposes, it would be singularly important to compare Sidgwick's utilitarianism and his system of philosophy with Mill's. We may say that Sidgwick was under the strong intellectual influence of Mill, however, Sidgwick's primary aim was not just to defend but also to correct Mill's legacy. In this paper, we will explore Sidgwick's moral theory in *The Methods of Ethics* and the peculiar conclusion: ‘dualism of practical reason’. Although the dualism has often been considered as Sidgwick's negative conclusion, we will clarify that the conclusion provides him with the fundamental point of view to build up his economics and politics differing from Mill's. In other words, the diversity of moral concerns between Sidgwick and Mill leads to their different social theories respectively.

*Keywords: Sidgwick, Mill, Utilitarianism.*

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# 1. The Days of Sidgwick

Henry Sidgwick is a representative philosopher of late nineteenth century England. From his entrance to Trinity in 1855 at age 17, to his death as Knightbridge Professor of Philosophy in 1900 at 62, Sidgwick was an intellectually eminent actor on the stage of Cambridge. Sidgwick is also acclaimed for his devotion to the reform of Cambridge such as the revision of the Moral Science curriculum eliminating metaphysical texts from its reading list and the establishment of Newnham College, the first women's college at Cambridge. It is also well known that when Alfred Marshall tried to separate the Economics Tripos from the Moral Science Tripos, Sidgwick strongly opposed the proposal.

The most popular and highly evaluated achievement of Sidgwick is unmistakably *The Methods of Ethics*, first published in 1874. The book systematically analyses what is the ultimate moral principle on the basis of a clear definition of primary ethical concepts such as virtue or duty. Even now it is appreciated, especially for its sophisticated discussion of utilitarianism. For instance, even John Rawls, who expanded his theory of justice against utilitarianism, stated: “*The Methods of Ethics* is the clearest and most accessible formulation of what we call the classical utilitarian doctrine”<sup>1</sup>. However the book has generated many controversies because Sidgwick recognized egoism as a moral principle equivalent to utilitarianism; such a view is generally considered indecisive and brings to the conclusion that Sidgwick couldn't unify the moral principles.

If we try to see why Sidgwick reached the conclusion that he himself calls a “failure”, we have to turn our eyes to the late nineteenth century background, especially to the intellectual stance of secular tendencies. It was a source of no little anxiety for the intellectuals that the loss of religious conviction as a moral code for people might trigger a collapse of social harmony. For instance, if we place any religious dogma as the cornerstone of our morals, we can at least regard a discord between private interest and social duty as a derogation, and can get rid of the ethical problem. But for Sidgwick, whose belief is the pursuit of truth with a critical mind, incited by the Apostles<sup>2</sup>, and the implementation of social reform, incited by J. S. Mill, his own religious faith in the Church of England had begun to fluctuate; and a doubt had grown up in his mind about the current university, per se the place of truth,

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<sup>1</sup> See ‘Foreword to *The Methods of Ethics*, 1982’ by Rawls for the seventh edition.

<sup>2</sup> The Cambridge Apostles was a secret circle; L. Strachey, J. M. Keynes and other of the younger generation, who later formed the Bloomsbury group, were also members of the Apostles.

demanding religious obedience regardless of individual beliefs. Hence, he determined to explore the believability of historical descriptions in the Bible and in consequence assured himself that it has no scientific evidence; and therefore, in order to protect his beliefs, Sidgwick sensationally decided to deny the religious oath needed for renewing his Fellowship — Cambridge didn't give up the young eminent scholar and offered him a lectureship in Moral Philosophy; eventually the oath was abolished in 1874. But Sidgwick still recognized that religion has some social significance in so far as it promotes philanthropy among people. Further he had begun to worry how social harmony would be realized without religion, and to doubt Mill's doctrine that the harmony of private interest and social duty is to be realized in the individual's mind. Therefore Sidgwick set his mind on reconsidering the history of ethics and then reevaluated the importance of Aristotle, Kant, Butler and put together his contemporary ethical perception into *The Methods of Ethics*.

In parallel with the erosion of religion in intellectual life, scientism, as represented by Comte's positivism or Spencer's social evolution theory, was coming to life in the late nineteenth century. Social Darwinism was reaching the climax; Spencer's attempt to build up synthetic sociology as positive science was trying to take the place of traditional moral sciences. Also in the field of economics, the movement towards pure science, such as the Marginal Revolution by the likes of Jevons, Menger, and Walrus, was swiftly gaining ground. Sidgwick himself strongly felt that current social problems could not be resolved by moral sciences "in their present state of uncertainty and controversy" (Sidgwick 1890, 349). However he also felt that rushing into scientism could not provide the solution.

A trigger of debate on social problems was the setback of England's economy. In plunging into the so-called Great Depression in the 1870s', the controversy of socialism against individualism, or liberalism, grew heated. Many problems came to the forefront, such as the labor union movement, and the intensification of class-conflict. The political situation also fluctuated acutely; for instance, the democracy moment was heightened through Reform Acts in 1867 and 1884. While Sidgwick showed a certain level of sympathy with socialism and democracy, but, in order to avoid the confusion arising from an excessive deviation towards them, he defends individualism and aristocracy in *The Principles of Political Economy* in 1883 and in *The Elements of Politics* in 1891. That is to say, to find out practical guidance in order to resolve social confusion, Sidgwick takes his way to studying economics and politics.

We can discern Sidgwick's cautious and neutral character from these episodes. Actually such a character is one reason for the generally held view that Sidgwick merely had a conservative and negative academic contribution. For example, leaving

aside *The Methods of Ethics*, “Sidgwick was indeed primarily a commentator upon Mill in his *The Principles of Political Economy*”; or again Sidgwick was just an elitist, a “government house utilitarian” and “unable to build up a system”, without taking any notice of *The Principles of Political Economy* and *The Elements of politics*<sup>3</sup>. However these remarks have overlooked Sidgwick’s primary concern. That is to say, in order to draw practical guidance for ethical or social difficulties, he tried to build up Practical Philosophy — whose main axes consist of ethics, economics, and politics — by reconstructing traditional Moral Sciences on a method suitable to the era of scientism. To take a survey of Sidgwick’s attempt, firstly, we have to pay attention to the way he laid down his original opinion on ethics by strongly criticizing Mill in *The Methods of Ethics*.

## 2. Ethics — *The Methods of Ethics* —

The theme of *The Methods of Ethics*, inherited from Mill’s *Utilitarianism*(1861), is to confirm the ultimate moral principle as to what ought to be done by individual. Both Mill and Sidgwick criticized a behaviour that merely obeyed arbitrary customs, religious canons, particular virtues, and so on (dogmatic intuitionism). They also declared that the desirable behaviour cannot be anything but a behaviour which places happiness or pleasure as the ultimate end. For instance, if we have to take account of plural virtues such as justice or benevolence at once, or have to obey any customs or canons regardless of the long-term consequences or influences on others, dogmatic intuitionism cannot be the rational guidance for desirable behaviour. Truly rational behavior is the act maximizing happiness or pleasure for the agent, also known as hedonistic consequentialism.

But, as to how individual happiness or pleasure is to be maximized, there is a fundamental opposition between Mill and Sidgwick. Mill’s basic stance is to stress the importance of difference of quality in pleasures. We can see in this famous passage,

It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied (Mill 1861, Chap. II).

That is to say, Socrates who is dissatisfied but capable of enjoying high-quality pleasures, is in a happier state than a fool satisfied but incapable of such pleasures.

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<sup>3</sup> Stigler 1990; Williams 1982; Skidelsky 1983.

This is the point, as generally acknowledged, in which Mill modified Bentham's utilitarianism. However Sidgwick points out the logical contradiction of Mill's reasoning.

[I]t is hard to see in what sense a man who of two alternative pleasures chooses the less pleasant on the ground of its superiority in quality can be affirmed to take 'greatest' happiness or pleasure as his standard of preference (*Outlines*, 247).

Sidgwick declares Mill's view to be a "curious blending of Stoic and Epicurean elements" and explicitly objects to Mill; then he introduces his stance that difference of quality in pleasures can be reduced into difference of quantity<sup>4</sup>.

The problem, whether one recognizes difference of quality in pleasures or not, leads them to distinct conclusions respectively as to the ultimate moral principle. In Mill's view which emphasizes the difference in quality, in order to maximize individual happiness, it is particularly important to refine their moral qualifications discerning the higher quality of the one as compared to the other. For he has anticipated the development of humanity as follows:

Not only does all strengthening of social ties, and all healthy growth of society, give to each individual a stronger personal interest in practically consulting the welfare of others; it also leads him to identify his feelings more and more with their good, or at least with an even greater degree of practical consideration for it (Mill 1861, Chap III).

Mill admits that some private interests are often pursued regardless of the harm for interests of others. However, as individuals' moral qualification refines in accord with social development, the impulsion for such a harmful act, Mill believes, will be removed; and private happiness will become unified with the general happiness perfectly<sup>5</sup>. Hence the ultimate desirable act of the individuals is nothing else than the act maximizing the general happiness.

To put it the other way round, the development of humanity becomes a key to achieve social harmony. It is a persistent belief of Mill, also seen in his *On Liberty* or *Considerations on Representative Government*. Therefore the fundamental role of

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<sup>4</sup> Moore points out: "Professor Sidgwick has done wisely to reject [the Mill's doctrine of difference of quality in pleasures]" (Moore 1903, chap III, § 47).

<sup>5</sup> Sidgwick perceives that "Mill, in his short treatise on Utilitarianism (1861) endeavours to induce the individual to take general happiness as his ultimate end" (*Outlines*, p. 245), and expresses that he cannot agree with Mill.

government, Mill stresses, becomes as follows:

[F]irst, that laws and social arrangements should place the happiness, or the interest, of every individual, as nearly as possible in harmony with the interest of the whole; and secondly, that education and opinion, which have so vast a power over human character, should so use that power as to establish in the mind of every individual an indissoluble association between his own happiness and the good of the whole (Mill 1861, chap II).

To Mill, by the appropriate governmental administration of laws and education, “universal harmony of interest” — in other words, the integration between self-interest and benevolence — will be fully realized in each individual mind.

Then how about Sidgwick’s stance stressing the quantity of pleasures? In summary, there are two different methods as to the ultimate desirable behaviour of the individual: the maximization of one’s own happiness (the method of egoism) and the maximization of social happiness (the method of utilitarianism). Sidgwick concludes that the integration between egoism and altruism is impossible in the individual mind.

It would be contrary to Common Sense to deny that the distinction between any one individual and any other is real and fundamental, and that consequently “I” am concerned with the quality of my existence as an individual in a sense, fundamentally important, in which I am not concerned with the quality of the existence of other individuals: and this being so, I do not see how it can be proved that this distinction is not to be taken as fundamental in determining the ultimate end of rational action for an individual (*Methods*, 497-498).

Such a conclusion is often assumed to be a negative assertion such that Sidgwick couldn’t unify moral principles<sup>6</sup>. He could not deny that when an act derived from the method of egoism conflicts with an act from the method of utilitarianism, ‘dualism of practical reason’, from which one cannot decide which act one ought to choose, arises<sup>7</sup>. It is true that we sympathize with others and take thought for their happiness. But

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<sup>6</sup> By the word “failure” in the first edition of *The Methods of Ethics*, there is a tendency to regard the dualism as an indecisive conclusion. But it is probable that Sidgwick himself emphasized the dualism intentionally calling it a “failure”. As to the reason why the word was deleted since the second edition, we can imagine that he tried to cope with some misapprehensions caused from the word by the likes of Barratt 1877; in fact, there is no alteration of his stance on dualism from the second edition onwards.

<sup>7</sup> Moore criticizes Sidgwick’s egoism as follows: Sidgwick admits self-interest is a part of universal good, however, “Yet Prof. Sidgwick holds that Egoism is rational; and it will be useful briefly to consider the reasons which he gives for this absurd conclusion” (Moore 1903, chap. III, § 60).

can we really pronounce that an act sacrificing ourselves for the happiness of others or society contributes to our own happiness? Sidgwick thought we cannot avoid this confliction in our mind<sup>8</sup>. In any case, 'dualism of practical reason' is a crucial difference between Sidgwick and Mill. For instance, Sidgwick says,

[I]t cannot be said that Mill's utilitarianism includes an adequate proof that persons of all natures and temperaments will obtain even the best chance of private happiness in this life by determining always to aim at general happiness (Outlines, 274).

Thus Sidgwick directly casts a doubt on Mill<sup>9</sup>.

Therefore, as to the fundamental role of government, Sidgwick places greater emphasis, not on the development of humanity like Mill, but on the direct provision of services, based on general happiness, for the actual difficulties generating from the diversity of interests, which we cannot resolve in our mind. One reason why he supported elitist "government house utilitarianism" originates from this stance. The assertion cited below has often been picked up as the proof.

[I]t is obviously advantageous, generally speaking, that acts which it is expedient to repress by social disapprobation should become known, as otherwise the disapprobation cannot operate; so that it seems inexpedient to support by any moral encouragement the natural disposition of men in general to conceal their wrong doings; besides that the concealment would in most cases have importantly injurious effects on the agent's habits of veracity. Thus the Utilitarian conclusion, carefully stated, would seem to be this; that the opinion that secrecy may render an action right which would not otherwise be so should itself be kept comparatively secret; and similarly it seems expedient that the doctrine that esoteric morality is expedient should itself be kept esoteric. Or if this concealment be difficult to maintain, it may be desirable that Common Sense should repudiate the doctrines which it is expedient to confine to an enlightened few. And thus a Utilitarian may reasonably desire, on Utilitarian principles, that some of his conclusions should be rejected by mankind generally; or even that the vulgar should keep aloof from his system as a whole, in so far as the inevitable

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<sup>8</sup> On the other, some observers point out a positive side of the dualism; Schultz 2004 regards it as "the deepest problems of human life" to which Sidgwick perceived; and Frankena 1992, reflecting *Outlines of History of Ethics*, says "he proposes his own definition as covering both ancient [egoism] and modern [utilitarianism] views of ethics".

<sup>9</sup> On this point, Schneewind 1977 also points out: "[Sidgwick is] explicitly rejecting Mill's argument".

indefiniteness and complexity of its calculations render it likely to lead to bad results in their hands (*Methods*, 490).

Sidgwick's elitist stance, in a sense, opens a door for the government control over the masses and is generally supposed to lead to his defense of aristocracy. But we should not pass over the strong limitation he made: if the maintenance of esoteric morality is difficult, Sidgwick thought, a political constitution confining it to a few elites is rather nonsense. Further, in *The Principles of Political Economy* or *The Elements of Politics*, he sends strong warnings against extensive governmental intervention.

In any case, Sidgwick penetrated the impossibility of integration between self-interest and benevolence in the individual mind. However it does not necessarily mean that he despaired of solving this problem. Rather it is convincing that he saw the resolution in the practical role of government, directly reconciling the two positions from the point of view of general happiness; and proceeded on to study economics and politics.

### 3. Economics — *The Principles of Political Economy* —

After of *The Methods of Ethics*, Sidgwick's vigorous effort was poured into *The Principles of Political Economy*, first published in 1883. We already saw some negative evaluations of the work, however, it is sometimes noticed that the comprehensive analysis of market failures contributed to the development of welfare economics<sup>10</sup>. Here we want to make it clear what Sidgwick's fundamental concern is in economics, and how it relates to the problem of ethics we have just mentioned. Up to now, this topic has not been given enough attention but it is essential to understand Sidgwick's social philosophy. The key is the unique structure of *The Principles of Political Economy*, divided into science and art. The structure, through its distinction between economic man and ordinary man — which are assumed in science and in art, respectively — is supposed to be connected directly to the 'dualism of practical reason', the conclusion of Sidgwick's ethics.

Why is the division needed? The reason is that Sidgwick was worried about the state of confusion in economics, whose fundamental source he traced back to the historical development of economics, in which science (what is) and art (what ought to be) were gradually confused with each other. Since ancient Greece, economics was developed as

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<sup>10</sup> O'Donnell 1979; Backhouse 2006.

an art, which indicates the desirable role of government for the increase of national wealth. Then, in the eighteenth century, Smith greatly developed economics by introducing the viewpoint of positive science which analyses the mechanism of economic society objectively. Many economists after Smith, however, mistook “free competition”, which Smith used as a sheer assumption of the science, for a universal assumption dominating the art. They began to regard laissez-faire as the sole basis of economics, an assumption which Smith himself had never intended.

In the end, as the economy slowed down in late 19th century England, it became clear that economics solely advocating laissez-faire could not resolve the actual difficulties. Economics fell into a state of confusion from which a keen opposition arose between the deductive economists advocating laissez-faire and pushing scientism in economics, and the historical school advocating protected trade and emphasizing the inductive method<sup>11</sup>. Thus, from the recognition of the present state of economics, in order to eliminate the confusion, Sidgwick thought it necessary to rebuild orthodox economics with a clear distinction between the spheres of science and art.

The distinction between science and art was not an unprecedented concept. We can find its dawn in Aristotle, and the distinction was also of great concern to Bentham and Mill in the nineteenth century. Bentham regarded Smith’s economics mainly as the science analyzing the machinery of economic society; and concentrated himself on the art of economics with a division between Agenda and Non-Agenda. In Mill’s case, the distinction between science and art is rather a problem of epistemology; there is no apparent distinction between science and art in Mill’s *Principles of Political Economy*. Sidgwick might have taken a suggestion from Bentham. No one else had, however, formerly treated economics on the basis of a systematic distinction between science and art. In order to penetrate the distinction between science and art, Sidgwick thought out a unique strategy, which supposes different human characters in each sphere respectively<sup>12</sup>.

Economic man, which science supposes is the human character, assumes that individuals are self-interested. On the other hand, ordinary man, which art supposes, is defined as a human being who is influenced by custom and is driven not only by

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<sup>11</sup> As to late nineteenth controversial state of economics, especially its methods, it was not a problem merely for Sidgwick, but also for many economists in the era, for example Alfred Marshall or Carl Menger in Germany.

<sup>12</sup> The distinction between science and art was often discussed at the time; and we can also see the similar distinction in Cossa 1875 or Walker 1884. After Sidgwick, J. N. Keynes’s *The Scope and Method of Political Economy* (1891) is important on this point. On the one hand, the work appreciates the distinction between science and art by Sidgwick; but on the other hand, it is quite different from Sidgwick on a fundamental point: for Keynes says that the scope of economics is to be confined to science, and separated from the problem of ethics.

self-interest but also by common moral sentiments like justice or benevolence<sup>13</sup>. Sidgwick thought that when we deal with the normative problems of art we have to assume not economic man but ordinary man, on the basis of the distinction between economic man, which economics conventionally assumed as the restricted human character (so-called homo economicus), and ordinary man as it actually exists.

This distinction of human personalities can be explained consistently by his conclusion in *Ethics*, ‘dualism of practical reason’. For a start, we can say that economic man is each economic agent who maximizes his own happiness on the basis of ‘the method of egoism’. Because self-interest, the core notion of the economic man, is an essential motive of desirable behavior for individuals simultaneously, and certifies the reasonability of ‘the method of egoism’ directly. We should notice that economic man is not an unrealistic human assumption; rather, it is an assumption which pays special attention to the fundamental motive of individual economic behavior, in order to make clear the mechanism of actual economic society.

At the same time, in *The Methods of Ethics*, Sidgwick also mentions on ordinary human being definitely as follows:

In the greater part of the treatise of which the final chapter has now been reached, we have been employed in examining three methods of determining right conduct, which are for the most part found more or less vaguely combined in the practical reasonings of ordinary men, but which it has been my aim to develop as separately as possible (*Methods*, 496).

In *The Methods of Ethics*, while Sidgwick sought for the ultimate moral principle desired by ordinary human and rejected the method of intuitionism, he concluded that ordinary human beings adopt both ‘the method of egoism’ and ‘the method of utilitarianism’ which sometimes are in conflict with each other.

To focus on these human characters, let us have a look at the actual discussion in *The Principles of Political Economy*. The issue of economic science is to analyze objectively an economic society consisting of selfish economic men while omitting the value judgment of ‘ought’. So, as to production, Sidgwick’s science tries to verify that the maximization of social production is supposed to be realized by the selfish behaviour of the economic man; and as to distribution and exchange, the selfish behaviour of economic man is supposed to be promoted by free competition. At the same time, he discussed, not only an abstract world of free competition, but also some

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<sup>13</sup> In Book II, Chapter XII, ‘Custom’, the last part of science, the difference of human character has been discussed.

concrete examples such as monopoly or combination. And these inquiries in the science turn out to provide a basic view-point in the art which explores what ought to be done by government.

The theme of the art of political economy is to show what ought to be done by government, in order to maximize the social utility derived from production, distribution and exchange of wealth, as the desirable consequence for the whole society consisting of ordinary men. Here, we have to take notice that the science of political economy is especially the objective analysis of individual economic behavior, as compared with the art of political economy which aims at establishing the desirable role of government. The reason is thought to be as follows. If we look at the consequences of the economic behavior of individuals who pursue their own interest from the point-view of the society as a whole, the outcome is not always what they really desire for the whole society. Further, ordinary man has both 'the method of egoism' and 'the method of utilitarianism', however, he is not always conforming to either of them exactly; and even if he is conforming, they often conflict with each other. Accordingly, Sidgwick seems to think that, on the basis of direct reflection on the truly desirable consequences for the whole society consisting of ordinary men who have two methods as their ultimate moral principle, government should perform the art.

Now, as to production, it becomes the basic plan of the art that government should avoid intervention as much as possible. Sidgwick thought that the selfish production of the economic man, which he examined in the science, tends to maximize social production, therefore the outcome is a desirable production for the ordinary man who obeys both 'the method of egoism' and 'the method of utilitarianism'. But, Sidgwick says, if there are any cases in which the production of the economic man falls into monopoly or some useful goods are not provided in the market, it is possible to increase social production by governmental prohibition of monopoly or governmental supply of public goods<sup>14</sup>.

As regard distribution and exchange, Sidgwick expands the art by distinguishing it between just or fair distribution and economic distribution. Just or fair distribution is a distribution under free competition which is assumed in the science; Sidgwick thinks that the art of government has to guarantee the just remuneration and property rights in society or to establish fair market competition in order to promote each individual's selfish economic behavior and therefore the whole social production. On the other hand, economic distribution is a distribution which raises the social utility driven from the

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<sup>14</sup> As to 'transfer'?? such as roads, railroads, conveyance, postal service, water, bank which produce universal indirect utility, Sidgwick says that governmental management or public utility charge is desirable for them on the ground of their need for large-scale organization or difficulties of profit collection.

existing produce, that is, a redistribution policy based on diminishing marginal utility. It cannot, however, overlook the negative side of redistribution policy, he says. Namely, while keeping up the result of just or fair distribution by stimulating the selfish economic behavior of the economic man under market competition, realizing economic distribution which brings out the maximization of social utility by redistribution policy; this is the art of government in distribution, Sidgwick thought.

But can we, or Sidgwick himself, say that the art of government above outlined is really indispensable? If ordinary man has both 'the method of egoism' and 'the method of utilitarianism' originally, will it be possible that desirable economic society comes to be realized by voluntary beneficence behavior of each individuals following the method of utilitarianism without governmental interferences? Sidgwick gives an answer to this question as follows:

[T]hus almsgiving of all kinds, and other donations to individuals or public objects, may be considered as constituting a secondary redistribution of wealth, valuable as supplementing the defects and mitigating the rigours of the primary competitive distribution... And doubtless moral sentiments and ideal aims do actually exercise this kind of influence in certain cases... I do not, however, think that the effects of these elevated sentiments in modifying the action of economic forces are of fundamental importance in modern societies as they actually exist: and to investigate systematically the probability of their becoming more important hereafter would carry us beyond the scope of the present treatise into a study of the general history of society. It appears to me, therefore, that what I have to say on the actual relations of Morality and Political Economy will be most conveniently said in connexion with the discussion...on the principles which ought to regulate the economic intervention of Government. (*Principles*, 392) .

Sidgwick does not deny completely the possibility that individual moral sentiments will be elevated in the future. In such a case, the desirable economic society will be realized without governmental interferences. But, he thinks, it is not the task of his practical economics to investigate whether this possibility is realistic or not — just as the integration between self-interest and benevolence was excluded from the practical problem of individual ethics. The object of *The Principles of Political Economy* is 'modern societies as they actually exist'; in which, while self-interest has important functions, other moral motives in individuals have a low influence or may even hamper the social happiness at times by wrong calculations of it. Therefore, in order to realize the ideal society in modern society, it is necessary to not depend on individual morality,

but on the desirable art of government based on ‘the method of egoism’ and ‘the method of utilitarianism’, with which the ordinary man is originally endowed. Certainly they are often used confusedly; however, the ordinary man has both ‘the method of egoism’ and the ‘method of utilitarianism’ as his ultimate moral principles. We can conclude that, on the basis of the recognition of this fact, Sidgwick moved on to discuss the art of government. Furthermore, in *The Elements of Politics*, Sidgwick deals, not only with the art of economics, confined to economic problems, but expand his treatment to the general art of government.

#### 4. Politics — *The Elements of Politics* —

Among the three main works by Sidgwick, *The Elements of Politics*, which is a comprehensive discussion on politics, is paid the least attention. For instance, many historical studies of politics make mention of *The Methods of Ethics* instead of this work. Although we can discern some favorable reviews, for example by F. Y. Edgeworth, when it was first published in 1891, there are a few studies examining into the intrinsic value, partly due to the difficulty for the readers to exact the essence from this voluminous and wide-ranging work; therefore it has been cynically regarded as “committee reports”<sup>15</sup>. However, we want to focus on the problem left behind: what is Sidgwick’s fundamental concern in politics and how does it relates to the problems of ethics and economics? On this point, as the distinction between science and art was the key for understanding his economics, the characteristic structure is the key to his politics: the distinct discussions on governmental interference (what the function of government ought to be) and governmental constitution (what the structure of government ought to be); and the two main axis placed in each discussions respectively, individualism–socialism and democracy–aristocracy.

##### **Governmental Interference**

Sidgwick clearly states that the ultimate end of governmental interference is the realization of utilitarian idea, the maximization of social happiness.

The happiness then of the governed community will be assumed as the ultimate

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<sup>15</sup> Edgeworth 1891; Collini 1983. Partly because Sidgwick himself told “my deep conviction is that it can yield as yet little fruit of practical utility--so doubt whether it is worth while to work it out in a book”(Memoir, 481), some reviewers regard the work as negative (Moggridge 1992). However, this is the pour out of feelings, darling hard struggling for it, four year before the completion of the work; so it is very suspicious that Sidgwick still maintained the same feeling after the publication.

end of legislation, ...since we find it admitted equally by persons differing profoundly in their political aims and tendencies (*Elements*, 39-40).

We generally embrace the standard of utilitarianism and this fact is, Sidgwick thinks, the grounds for utilitarianism. Therefore, on the basis of utilitarianism, he argues about the desirable roles of government by classifying them under the three 'subordinate principles': individualism, paternalism, and socialism.

First, Sidgwick argues about individualistic interference because the pursuit of private happiness by the individuals is the driving force for the increase of social happiness. The governmental role desired from this view-point is the 'individualistic minimum' of governmental interference; which is the assistance for the pursuit of private happiness by the individuals: (1) to adapt the material world and to establish human relationships suitable for the pursuit of private happiness, (2) to secure the individuals from the pain or loss, caused directly or indirectly by the action of other person, (3) to throw on parents the duties of care, sustenance, and education of children<sup>16</sup>.

However, self-destructive behavior — an act that would turn out to be undesirable for the actor — is often done by individuals; since individualism sometimes caused some difficulties, there is a room for increasing social happiness. Hence, Sidgwick next discusses on paternalistic interference of government:

[S]o uncompromising an adhesion to the principle "that men are the best guardians of their own welfare" is not rationally justified by the evidence on which the principle rests. / Hence, if strong empirical grounds are brought forward for admitting a particular practical exception to this principle — if, e.g., it is proved that men are largely liable to ruin themselves by gambling or opium-smoking, or knowingly to incur easily avoided dangers in industrial processes — it would, I think, be unreasonable to allow these practices to go on without interference, merely on account of the established general presumption in favour of *laissez faire*. (*Elements*, 136-137)

But paternalistic interference interrupts the free activities of the individuals by diminishing their stimulus to self-help and extending the limits of governmental authority. Sidgwick, therefore, thinks that it is desirable to replace it to the indirect

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<sup>16</sup> The indirect individualistic interference, which previously prevents crimes and harms (to admit the right of self-protection, to arrest suspected criminal, to supervise or caution previously for the mischievous acts), is contrary to the individualistic minimum, however, Sidgwick says, it is justified on the account of utilitarianism.

individualistic interference as far as possible. For instance, in the case of alcohol addiction, he gives priority to regulating the producer and the retail stores over the consumer.

Even if the defects in individualism are compensated by paternal interference, the maximization of social happiness may not be realized, and the direct governmental interference against for individualism may be necessary in some cases; therefore, Sidgwick goes into a discussion on socialistic interference. At first, Sidgwick mentions on the relation between individualism and socialism as follows:

Now no one who, under the guidance of Adam Smith and his successors, has reflected seriously on the economic side of social life can doubt that the motive of self-interest does work powerfully and continually in the manner above indicated; and the difficulty of finding any substitute for it, either as an impulsive or as a regulating force, constitutes the chief reason for rejecting all large schemes for reconstructing social order on some other than its present individualistic basis (*Elements*, 146).

While wary against the socialistic scheme, Sidgwick embraced socialistic interference as a “subordinate element in a system of mainly individualistic”. Accordingly, he accepts socialistic interference in a wide sense — a remedy for the shortcomings of the system of natural liberty —, although it narrow the sphere of private enterprise: the regulation of the use of natural resources, the endowment of scientific research, the provision of roads and bridges, the suppression of monopolies, the security to creditors, the business of communication by letters and telegrams, the provision for the water-supply and for the lighting of towns, and so forth.

On the other hand, collectivism, arguing that industrial peace and a general diffusion of public spirit would be realised by substituting common for private ownership, and governmental for private management, came under the spotlight. However, for the reason that the public management cannot be expected to compete with private competitive management as securing an intensity of energy and inventiveness of new knowledge, Sidgwick confirms as follows:

[T]he realisation of the Collectivist idea at the present time or in the proximate future would arrest industrial progress; and that the comparative equality in incomes which it would bring about would be an equality in poverty (*Elements*, 159).

Thus he resists collectivism or “socialism in its extreme form”. In the matter of redistribution of wealth, while Sidgwick admits that “the attainment of greater equality in the distribution of the means and opportunities of enjoyment is in itself a desirable thing, if only it can be attained without any material sacrifice of the advantages of freedom”, he strongly warns against a harmful influence that a greater equality in the distribution of wealth would diminish the accumulation of capital necessary for the development of industry. Eventually, Sidgwick admits the provision for equalizing opportunities of labor and the relief for extreme indigence due to misfortunes. Furthermore, even if laissez-faire does not lead satisfactory results, the propriety of socialistic interference, Sidgwick thinks, might be questioned due to the disadvantages such as: (1) the danger of overburdening the governmental machinery, (2) the danger of increasing the coercive power used by governing persons, (3) the danger of hampering the efficiency of government by the desire to gratify certain influential sections of the community.

As a context of Sidgwick’s discussion on governmental interference, we have to recall the social problem in the late nineteenth century: the opposition between individualism and socialism. For instance, he says as follows:

In the controversy between individualism and socialism, which has been increasingly active during the last thirty years, the duty of preventing, so far as possible, undeserved poverty, has naturally become prominent. (Sidgwick 1899b, 137)

Sidgwick placed the maximization of social happiness as the ultimate principle of society or governmental interference; and tried to unite individualism and socialism as the subordinate principles contributing to it. In other words, Sidgwick tried to show that the practical problems of actual life, for example like poverty, would be solved by harmonizing individualism and socialism on the basis of utilitarianism and using both of them complementary.

Let us examine, then, how the problem of governmental interference relates to economics for Sidgwick? In short, economics is placed as a department of politics.

[T]he Art of Political Economy, which deals with a special department of governmental interference, designed to improve either the social production of wealth or its distribution, may be partially, but only partially, separated from the general art of legislation or government. (*Principles*, 33)

However, the art of political economy deals especially with the utilities obtainable by wealth and hence can use the theoretical knowledge of economic science as to the production, distribution, and exchange of wealth, to which Adam Smith and his successors have developed. Therefore economics would be systematically expanded as the sole reliable department of the general art of government; and Sidgwick thinks that it is advantageous to do so. Furthermore, in the general art of government where economic considerations are decisive, economic science — an objective analysis of each individual's economic behaviors based on self-interest — shapes the basic policy. At the same time, economics is a department of general art of government, therefore the practical policy finally has to be decided from the point-view of social happiness. For instance, in the case of regulation for monopoly, we have to take account, not only how social wealth would fluctuate, but also how the political liberty would be restricted by it<sup>17</sup>.

### Governmental Constitution

In part two of *The Elements of Politics*, Sidgwick argues about the desirable political system from the point of view of the efficient performance of utilitarian policy discussed in part one, and the proper limits of governmental authority. Sidgwick is generally supposed to have espoused conservative and elitist political thought, because he defended aristocracy while warning against democracy. However, in order to read Sidgwick's intention, it is important to understand *The Elements of Politics* alongside with *Development of European Polity*, which explores the formation and transition of polity from ancient to modern times. For the understanding of *The Elements of Politics*, the following are worth notice from the latter: (1) as Aristotle emphasized, the combination between democracy and aristocracy is necessary for a stable and efficient polity; (2) as Montesquieu did, for a stable and continuous development of polity, the gradual approach should be derived from the perception about the present state of affairs based on historical study; (3) the factors of development of polity — defense, economic factor, maintenance of order, common good, stability, efficiency, financial need, and so on — are all contribute to utilitarianism, the maximization of social happiness<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> We will discuss the relation between politics and ethics in the last section.

<sup>18</sup> *Development of European Polity* is a lecture note by Sidgwick; he tried to publish it with some revisions, however, he fell to the disease; eventually it was published by Mrs. Sidgwick with some arrangement in 1903, after three years of his death. According to Mrs. Sidgwick, Mr. Sidgwick was thinking that a three-fold treatment of politics is desirable for completeness: (1) an analytical and deductive exposition attempted in *The Elements of Politics*; (2) an evolutionary study of the development of polity attempted in *Development of European Polity*; and (3) a comparative study of polities. Because (3) was the future issue for him, and the subject matter overlaps with *Development of European Polity*, for the full view of

Let us return to part two of *The Elements of Politics*. For a start, Sidgwick explores a separation of powers and its mechanism. He regards the contemporary polity in England as almost desirable, because it realizes an efficient performance of each specialized governmental functions and a protection of civil rights by the mutual check of political powers through the separation. Then his practical aim for a political constitution is devoted to an election system actualizing a representative system; Sidgwick basically admits universal suffrage because it has a democratic character contributing to a stability of government. However he says:

[A] widely-extended suffrage involves a danger of a different kind: viz. that the ultimate interests of the whole community may be sacrificed to the real or apparent class-interests of the numerical majority of the electors, either through ignorance or through selfishness and limitation of sympathy. (*Elements*, 389)

For the reason that aristocracy is superior in its intellectual qualifications, Sidgwick emphasizes that a large share of power should be distributed to rich minority.

Next, Sidgwick explores a desirable polity more practically and directly from the viewpoint of the harmony between aristocracy and democracy: especially as regards (1) how people ought to control the government; and (2) is democracy regarded as desirable in itself? First, as to the control of government, while Sidgwick thinks that, in the representative system, a desirable constitution of legislature would be realized on the basis of two axis, aristocracy and democracy; he is anxious that the effectiveness may be lost by a collision between legislator's political opinion and common people's aspiration.

[T]he periodical election of legislators should aim at being as far as possible a selection of persons believed to possess superior political capacity. /I therefore think that it cannot conduce to good government to let their judgment be overruled at any moment by the opinions of a comparatively ignorant and inexperienced majority. I consider, on the contrary, that a representative who does not follow his own best judgment in the exercise of his governmental functions — even when it brings him into conflict with the temporary opinions and sentiments of a majority of his constituents — should be held guilty of a plain dereliction of duty. (*Elements*, 556)

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Sidgwick's politics, she says both book should be read.

In order to diminish the risk that the legislator's judgment may be overruled by the prejudiced opinions of masses, Sidgwick insists that the two-chamber system is impossible; and the representatives are not to be directly required pledges from voters.

Secondly, Sidgwick considers democracy in itself desirable or not. On the one hand, democracy is superior in moral qualifications; the masses are to an extent free from sinister interests opposed to interests of the community as a whole. On the other hand, aristocracy is superior in intellectual qualifications; the decent decision by duly qualified persons is impossible for the efficiency of government.

Accordingly, it is generally admitted by theoretical advocates of democracy in modern times that the part of governmental work which is entrusted to particular individuals or elected assemblies should be entrusted to persons specially qualified. And so far as this is admitted, the principle of aristocracy, as above defined, — that the work of government is a form of skilled labour which should be in the hands of those who possess the requisite skill — is implicitly accepted. Hence, I do not consider representative government — even when the suffrage is universal — as merely a mode of organising democracy, but rather as a combination or fusion of democracy and aristocracy. (*Elements*, 616-617)

Sidgwick justifies the representative system as a constitution of legislature, which fuses democracy and aristocracy, by firmly resisting direct democracy. The representative system becomes more democratic by extending the influence of masses to legislation through the referendum, short parliaments, payment of members, and so on; on the other hand, it is more aristocratic by disfranchising illiterate voters, giving more than one vote to educated persons, and so on. What then is the desirable combination? Sidgwick was deeply anxious for the political constitution of England that the interests of rich minority would be sacrificed for the interests of poor majority, and the social interest would be impaired; he strongly defends aristocracy as his practical conclusion, insisting that legislators are to be more independent and to be drawn in the main from rich minority by make them no salary. And the ultimate standard, to which Sidgwick adjudicates the desirable combination between democracy and aristocracy, was nothing else than utilitarianism: “the ultimate interests of the whole community”.

In order to read Sidgwick's intention properly, we have to notice that he worried about the current drift to democracy. For instance, he states as follows: there is a danger that “the interests of the rich minority are sacrificed to those of the poor majority in a manner disadvantageous to the community as a whole”; “Nor do I see any

reason to think that either the need of special qualifications for the efficient performance of governmental work, or the advantages of unity of administration, are likely to diminish, or to be less appreciated”(*Elements*, 393; 622). Sidgwick experienced the development of labor union movement and the extension of suffrage through the late 1880s’. He did not make mention of these momentums directly in *The Elements of Politics* and *Development of European Polity*. But as to the extension of franchise, he says that England has rather been dragged by the continental movement than led it in *Development of European Polity*; or insists persistently the necessity of aristocratic element of a modern community in *The Element of Politics*. We may, therefore, reasonably conclude that Sidgwick defended aristocracy because he felt that the present state of democracy was going overboard. In addition, when Sidgwick tried to construct politics comprehensively, he distinguished between governmental interference from governmental constitution. It is perhaps for this reason that he tried to prevent generating unnecessary controversy from the confusion between the problem of socialism concerning governmental interference and the problem of democracy concerning governmental constitution.

Furthermore, Sidgwick certainly pays attention to “constitutional liberty” or “educational effect” in his discussion of desirable polity; however, these elements are regarded by him as a secondary benefit of democracy, so it is hard to say that he pursued liberty in itself. This stance is quite different from Mill who, while warning against democracy and defending aristocracy, strongly emphasized the educational effect on the masses through the representative system, and ultimately seeks for the expression of individual liberty in *On liberty* or *Considerations on Representative Government*. The reason for the difference among their opinions is not merely the change of times, but rather that Sidgwick tried to keep consistency not by dogmatic liberalism but by utilitarianism given flexibility. In short, the fundamental principle of Sidgwick, who thinks that the desirable polity varies along with the historical conditions, was utilitarianism.

## 5. Practical Philosophy and the present significance

Although Sidgwick considered ethics, economics, and politics as independent academic areas respectively, there was a common thread in all of there based on utilitarianism. Finally, let us attempt to extend the observation into the perspective of Sidgwick’s social philosophy. He mentions on the comprehensive system of philosophy in *Philosophy: its scope and relations*:

In speaking of Arts I mean — using the term in its widest sense — all departments of human activity, carried on systematically with reasoned adaptation of means to ends, for the attainment of some particular end, other than the knowledge applied in the Art. I thus include not merely handicrafts and what are distinguished as 'Fine Arts,' but also such professions as Medicine and Strategy. When we contemplate human life as a whole and consider the place that any one Art ought to hold in it, we see at once that some Arts are obviously subordinate to others, and these again to others still higher and more comprehensive: but when we try to make the systematisation of Arts and Ends complete, doubts and difficulties are apt to present themselves for the solution of which we require such a study as I have called Practical Philosophy.

The subordinate position of such Arts as aim at the production of 'utilities fixed in material objects' — as economists say — or such immaterial utilities as conveyance, communication, victory in war, etc., — is usually manifest. Any such Art aims at a result which is clearly only desirable as a means to some further end, the desirability of which it does not belong to this Art to investigate. It is the business of the commander-in-chief to beat the enemy: it is not his business to determine whether war ought to be begun; that is admittedly the business of the Statesman. But when we ask on what principles the statesman is to determine it — e.g. whether his ultimate end is to be the preservation or wellbeing of his own state, or the wellbeing or happiness of humanity at large — we raise questions on which the practical maxims of statesmen are apt to disagree with the prescriptions of ordinary morality: so that we seem to require Practical Philosophy to settle the conflict. (Philosophy, 28-29)

The ultimate end for human life is nothing else than utilitarianism: the maximization of happiness. To Sidgwick, ethics and politics, which directly deal with the ultimate problems of individual and government respectively, systemize all subordinate arts. Therefore he tried to construct Practical Philosophy, “a supreme architectonic study”, based on the two studies. Accordingly, even economics is nothing but a subordinate department. This is the reason why he seldom used ‘utilitarianism’ in *The Principles of Political Economy* in contrast to *The Elements of Politics*<sup>19</sup>.

Also as to the ultimate problem, Sidgwick thought, the practical guidance must be indicated upon the actual human and society. Whereas Mill drew a moral hero, who

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<sup>19</sup> In *The Principles of Political Economy*, there is no use “utilitarianism” except for three places; two places as to distributive justice and the other in footnote.

sacrifices himself for the social happiness, as the humanity to be reached in the society, Sidgwick had an insight into the impossibility of integration between self-interest and benevolence in the individual mind, even if ultimately. And from this perception that the actual society cannot but have the problem resulting from this impossibility, he tried to construct a system of philosophy by discussing the practical role of government to resolve the problem directly from the viewpoint of utilitarianism in his economics and politics. If we understand Sidgwick's social philosophy in this way, 'dualism of practical reason', the conclusion of *The Methods of Ethics*, is not the negative conclusion, but rather the starting point to construct his own social philosophy.

To conclude, in order to construct Practical Philosophy systemizing all departments of human society on the basis of utilitarianism interpreted flexibly, Sidgwick wrote *The Methods of Ethics*, *The Principles of Political Economy*, and *The Elements of Politics* respectively, as the most important academic areas; and an interrelation was settled down between the three works.

Then why did Sidgwick have to construct a system of philosophy? Here we have to turn back to the background in the late nineteenth century. Sidgwick was strongly aware that traditional scholarships, whose basis is in ethics and morals shaped by empirical considerations, might be replaced by Spencer's social sciences — Synthetic Sociology based on evolutionary theory or psychology —, or by abstract economic theory from which rational economic man is regarded as the human character in the actual society. The demands of the time couldn't be content with the traditional moral sciences, and Sidgwick himself felt so. But for the reason why Sidgwick tried to construct Practical Philosophy by quite different forms to the system of social sciences of Spencer or Comte, there was Sidgwick's confirmed conviction that the social problems should not to be treated separately from the ethics and morals, to which we can derive them empirically. In the face of hard controversies like the confrontation between individualism and socialism or the democracy movement, Sidgwick thought that it is impossible to overcome the difficulty by depending on positivism or evolutionary theory, and that the practical solution could be derived by reconstructing traditional moral sciences as Practical Philosophy.

Can we say that the problem Sidgwick raised has already been resolved for our own day? Has the moral problem of 'dualism of practical reason' already been cleared? In a certain sense, it seems to be that social science of our day had made a run toward the way Sidgwick feared, and pushed the theoretical study ahead leaving aside the ethical considerations; hence we may be not able to remedy the various difficulties practically from a broad perspective. Of course we can not affirm that Sidgwick's system of philosophy is the perfect prescription, however, he still tells us that it must bear in

mind the fundamental problem which cannot be separated when we cope with social problems.

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