

Introduction

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Henry Sidgwick died on 28 August, 1900, at the age of sixty-two, and for much of the following century his philosophical reputation was in decline. The classical utilitarian theory that he worked so assiduously to advance no longer represented the spirit of the age; the Victorian sensibilities that he embodied seemed, to many, quaint in the era of world war, anti-imperialism, communism v. capitalism, the arms race, mass consumerism, overpopulation, feminism, gay liberation, eco-politics, and the information revolution. When the *Monist* symposium appeared in 1974, commemorating the 100th anniversary of the publication of *The Methods of Ethics*, most philosophers would have denied that they could conjure up a vivid picture of Sidgwick's following the example of his later student Bertrand Russell, and living through and engaging in such periods as the sixties. Many of his twentieth-century admirers, such as C. D. Broad, were admittedly at odds with their times.

Consequently, it is somewhat surprising that this commemorative symposium should find Sidgwick's reputation in such vigorous condition. Something quite like 'classical' utilitarianism has survived the onslaughts of communists and Kantians, neo-classical economists and Aristotelians, and is in fact newly inspiring all sorts of radical reformism, from animal liberation to anti-globalization. Like his mentor Mill, Sidgwick is now read standardly in Anglo-American colleges and universities, alongside Rawls and Parfit, Peter Singer and Bernard Williams, Annette Baier and Iris Marion Young. *The Methods of Ethics* has recently been translated into both French and Italian, and continues to enjoy a wide readership in Germany and Japan. Today one would be hard put to insist that Sidgwick is a sadly neglected past great. Indeed, if current trends continue, Moore is in greater danger of that fate than Sidgwick.

But new times impose new questions. Sidgwick studies are presently animated not only by the analytical currency of the *Methods*, but also by troubling questions about just how Sidgwick and his work fit into the complex vicissitudes of the late Victorian era on such matters as imperialism and race, gender and sexuality. The essays that follow provide ample testimony that it would be rash indeed to

close the book on Sidgwick, either analytically or historically. Collectively, they point to any number of new roads for inquiry, new turns of thought hardly anticipated in previous decades. If they end up looking more like a tribute to Sidgwicked scepticism than like the discovery of elusive Sidgwickian truth, that is at least a fate with which he was intimately familiar.

Perhaps the twentieth century has taught us that philosophers may die, but not philosophies. Whether Sidgwick himself would have been pleased with such a thought is another tough question. His work with the Society for Psychical Research might suggest that he would have urged greater agnosticism on both counts. Alas, as of this date, the various tactics that he devised for communicating from the 'other world' appear to have failed. But personal survival is one thing, and what matters in survival quite another.¹

¹ We would like to thank all of the contributors for their participation and enthusiasm. Special thanks to Rob Shaver for being so helpful throughout, and to Marcus Singer and Jerry Schneewind for their encouragement and impartial counsel.