CHAPTER 39

CONSTRUCTING PRACTICAL ETHICS

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39.1 Introduction

In this chapter my aim is to shed light on contemporary practices by exposing some of their origins. I proceed by presenting a broad history of practical ethics that is somewhat speculative and impressionistic. My most general conclusion is that the diversity of activities collected under the rubric of 'practical ethics' is fed by a wide range of intellectual and cultural sources. Seeing contemporary practices in the light of their historical background will, I hope, contribute to greater methodological self-consciousness and sophistication, and help to clarify the relationships of practical ethics to the discipline of philosophy.

In constructing such a sweeping narrative I will be accused of overstating some themes and understating others. Moreover, one of the costs of pursuing such a capacious project is that almost certainly some mistakes have crept in. Nevertheless, I think the interpretation that I develop is important and worthy of further discussion, and it is in that spirit that I put it forward.

39.2 Our Subject

Nowadays, we normally divide ethical theory into two major fields, metaethics and normative ethics. Metaethics concerns the meaning and status of moral language. Normative ethics is divided between moral theory, and applied or practical ethics. Moral theory is concerned with what sorts of things are good, which acts are right, and what the relations are between the right and the good. Practical

ethics is concerned with the evaluation of particular things as good and bad, and of various acts, practices, or institutions as right or wrong.[1]

Our subject, practical ethics, is taught in colleges and universities around the world, pursued in dedicated research centres, and discussed in specialized journals. It is usually regarded as encompassing such fields as bioethics, environmental ethics, business ethics, engineering ethics, or professional ethics generally. Abortion, euthanasia, poverty, war, and the moral status of non-human animals are among the topics that have received the most attention.[2]

The history and practice of practical ethics is closely connected to philosophy, but the relation of this field to the discipline is somewhat fraught. This may help to explain why practical ethics is often pursued in interdisciplinary institutes, sometimes by philosophers, but often by academics who are more oriented towards religion than philosophy, or have been trained in a profession such as law, medicine, or business. There are other reasons why this is so, some of which will be illuminated by examining the history of the field.

In this chapter my focus is on practical ethics as it is practised in the secular, Anglophone world of philosophy. This does not cover everything in the domain of practical ethics but it covers a lot, including much of what has been most influential.[3]

39.3 A Standard View

One influential view is that practical ethics is as old as philosophy, but that it was obscured for much of the twentieth century by 'the dominance of positivism and empiricism in the philosophy of science, and the vogue for linguistic analysis in epistemology'.[4] For example, Charles Pigden writes that

> Until about 1920 and since about 1970, practical ethics was regarded as a legitimate branch of philosophy. There are now, and there have been in the past, famous philosophers, such as Jeremy Bentham and Peter Singer, who have devoted themselves to practical ethics. (2003: 477–8)

On this view a continuous thread connects contemporary practical ethics with the concerns of the Greeks, Enlightenment thinkers such as Kant, and progressives such as Bentham and Mill. The connection was ruptured sometime in the early twentieth century, and re-established about 1970 under the influence of the Civil Rights Movement, the anti-Vietnam war movement, and the rise of feminism.

There is something to this story.[5] It is easy to find revealing quotations from the offending period that would have been out of place both earlier and later. Consider two

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[1] Jamieson 2008: chs 2–3.   [2] See Singer 2011 for a good introduction to the field.

[3] My focus is specifically on Great Britain and the United States and I (regrettably) slight the rest of the Anglophone world.

[4] Almond 1998.

[5] Indeed, I myself have contributed to this narrative in Jamieson 1999: 1–7, and Jamieson 2002: ch. 2. However, it should also make us wonder that some philosophers of this period, such as Broad and

well-known examples. In 1956 Peter Laslett declared that political philosophy was dead (1956: vii).[6] Earlier, in 1930, Broad had written that

> We can no more learn to act rightly by appealing to the ethical theory of right action than we can play golf well by appealing to the mathematical theory of the flight of the golf ball. The interest of ethics is thus almost wholly theoretical. (1930: 285)

Broad and Laslett were expressing views that were commonly held at the time, and this makes the 'continuous thread ruptured by positivism and empiricism' account seem plausible. Still, as I suggest in this chapter, the actual intellectual landscape of the offending period was more variegated and complex than this simple story suggests.

It is true that philosophers have always discussed problems of practical urgency (that they do, may be part of why today we count them as philosophers). Consider, for example, Plato's *Crito,* a text that is often used to introduce students to philosophy. The jail-house discussion of the obligation to obey the law, with the imminent execution (or suicide) of Socrates looming in the background, is about as practical and compelling as it gets.

However, it is also true (as I hinted in the previous paragraph) that our application of the terms 'philosopher' and 'philosophy' is somewhat anachronistic. Socrates did not give lectures, mark exams, have tenure, or even work in a university. Nor did he distinguish his activities from doing cosmology or meteorology. For that matter, his concepts probably would not map very neatly onto any of these notions. While the attributions of terms such as 'philosopher' and 'philosophy' become less anachronistic through time (a fact more about time than about our attributions), there are still important and striking differences between the way in which those philosophers from the past who we often treat as our contemporaries thought about what they were doing, and how we think about ourselves and our activities.

Consider, for example, Henry Sidgwick, whose image has been transformed from 'old Sidg', the stuffy Victorian, as Moore and his contemporaries thought of him, to the philosopher's philosopher on whose shoulders Derek Parfit stands.[7] The moral issues that dominated Sidgwick revolved around the requirement that fellows of Cambridge, Oxford, and Durham colleges subscribe to the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England. In effect, one had to affirm the virgin birth of Jesus, his descent into hell, and various metaphysical doctrines about free will and the nature of the trinity in order to work in these universities. Sidgwick lost his faith, and was thereby confronted with the

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Carritt (1925), who were not unduly influenced by positivism and empiricism, were also sceptical of practical ethics.

[6] An implied theme of this chapter that warrants further discussion is that practical ethics and political philosophy are more closely related than has often been acknowledged.

[7] Rawls wrote that 'Sidgwick's *Methods* is the first truly academic work in moral theory, modern in both method and spirit' (1980: 554–5). This would not have been said a generation before. See Schneewind 1977 and Schulz 2004 for their important efforts to place Sidgwick in his historical context. See Phillips 2011 for an interpretation and evaluation of the central argument of *Methods*.

searing question of whether to resign his fellowship.[8] This was the issue that led him back into philosophy (from classics), and deeply influenced his most important work:

> while struggling with the difficulty thence arising…I went through a good deal of the thought that was ultimately systematized in the *Methods of Ethics*.[9]

Schultz tries to put us in Sidgwick's shoes when he writes that

> Conscientious objection to subscription to the Thirty-nine articles of the Church of England was for Sidgwick and his time what conscientious objection to the draft was to the students in the 1960s. (2004: 15)

While the analogy helps convey the importance of the issue to Sidgwick, teaching at Cambridge is not much like being a grunt in Vietnam and resigning a college fellowship is rather different from going to jail. However, what is most difficult for us to imagine is not the importance of this issue to Sidgwick, but what it would mean to do practical ethics in a world in which universities, religious faith, and deference to authority are so tightly bound.[10]

Concerns about anachronism aside, there is something else to say about the simple thought that philosophers have always discussed problems of practical urgency: Yes they have, but they did not always regard themselves as doing philosophy when they did so.

Consider Bertrand Russell, certainly one of the greatest philosophers of the twentieth century and the author of dozens of books on topics that seem central to practical ethics, including *The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism, Why I Am Not a Christian, Human Society in Ethics and Politics, Marriage and Morals*, and *War Crimes in Vietnam*. Not only did Russell generally disavow such books as works of philosophy, he was quite sceptical about whether ethics in any form counted as philosophy. In a book published in 1927, intended to provide the American public with a general introduction to philosophy, he wrote:

> Ethics is traditionally a department of philosophy…I hardly think myself that it ought to be. (1927: 115)

Of course it can be said that Russell was one of those infected by, and even gleefully transmitting, 'positivism and empiricism in the philosophy of science, and the vogue for

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[8] Throughout his life Sidgwick was troubled by the fact that while he believed that it was generally good for people to believe in orthodox religion, he himself could not bring himself to do so, thus motivating his concerns about esoteric morality.

[9] As quoted in Schultz 2004: 115. In the Preface to the first edition of *The Methods of Ethics* Sidgwick (1907: vii) says that the book is not 'directly practical', thus leaving open the question of whether he thinks the book is 'indirectly' practical or not practical at all.

[10] There are other important differences between Sidgwick's outlook and that of most of us today that are often papered over by his fans. One concerns different attitudes towards the 'dualism of practical reason'. For most of us it is a philosophical problem, or a fact that we must live with; for Sidgwick, it was a deeply emotional challenge to the meaning of life and the intelligibility of the universe. He was a fallen Victorian in a way that is inaccessible to most of us. Another area in which there are stark differences concerns his attitudes towards race and colonial domination. See Schultz 2004: ch. 7 for discussion.

linguistic analysis in epistemology'. Still, it would be something of an irony if it turned out that one of the philosophers who wrote most about practical ethics should also have been one who was trying to excise it from the discipline.[11] We need a larger context in order to understand Russell's attitude.

39.4 THE BRITISH ORIGINS OF PRACTICAL ETHICS

There are two important strands in the development of practical ethics in Great Britain. One is associated with the Scottish Enlightenment; the other with the philosophical radicals.

The first use of the term, 'practical ethics' of which I am aware occurs in a tract, 'On the Plantation-Trade', by Charles Davenant, a seventeenth-century English writer on political economy. Davenant characterizes this tract as

> A short view of Practical Ethicks; which, perhaps may be thought needless at present, and rather useful to posterity. [12]

He discusses the virtues and vices of colonial managers, and how various policies affect their development and inculcation.

> The preventing remedy against such distempers is to be had from the precepts of morality, which writers upon all sort of subjects should endeavour to inculcate; for the vices or virtues of a country influence very much in all its business; so that he who would propose methods by which the affairs of a kingdom may be any ways bettered, should, at the same time, consider the predominant passions, the morals, temper, and inclinations of the people.

Davenant is remembered in the history of economics for publishing the first price-quantity table, on the basis of data provided by Gregory King. We know that both Adam Smith and Jeremy Bentham read his work.[13]

David Fordyce, who was Professor of Philosophy at Aberdeen from 1742 until his death in 1751, popularized the term, 'practical ethics'. His *Elements of Moral Philosophy* was first published in 1748 as Part 9 of Robert Dodsley's *The Preceptor: Containing a General Course of Education*, a widely used educational text, and also appeared in the first edition of the *Encyclopedia Brittanica*. In 1754 it was published as a free-standing book that was used as a text throughout Great Britain and colonial America (including Harvard), and also made its way into French and German

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[11] For an excellent account of Russell on ethics see Pigden 2003.

[12] This and the following passage are from Davenant 1697/1771/1967: 75ff. Beauchamp 2007 brought the work of Davenant to my attention.

[13] See Endres 1987, and Giunti, undated, note 46, respectively.

translations. In Book 3, Section 1, 'Of Practical Ethics, or the Culture of the Mind', Fordyce describes his purposes in the following way:

> This Section then will contain a brief Enumeration of the Arts of acquiring Virtuous Habits, and of eradicating Vitious Ones.(1748/2003: 119)

On his view, we are governed by the 'Original Constitution and Laws of our Nature', but we can guide our judgements and taste by practising the virtues. The proper attitude towards our 'Supreme Parent' can also help us in this task.

> It will greatly conduce to refine the Moral Taste and strengthen the virtuous Temper, to accustom the Mind to the frequent Exercise of Moral Sentiments and Determinations, by reading History, Poetry, particularly of the Picturesque and Dramatic kind, the Study of the fine Arts; by conversing with the most eminent for Goodsense and Virtue; but above all by frequent and repeated Acts of Humanity, Compassion, Friendship, Politeness and Hospitality…It is a great Inducement to the Exercise of Benevolence to view Human Nature in a favourable Light, to observe the Characters and Circumstances of Mankind on the fairest Sides, to put the best Constructions on their Actions they will bear…Above all, the Nature and Consequences of Virtue and Vice, their Consequences being the Law of our Nature and Will of Heaven; the Light in which they appear to our Supreme Parent and Lawgiver, and the Reception they will meet with from him, must be often attended to.(Fordyce 1748/2003: 119, 129–31)

In 1764 Thomas Reid, who was friends with Fordyce in Aberdeen, assumed the Chair of Moral Philosophy in Glasgow and began lecturing on 'practical ethics'.[14] Reid did not publish on these topics during his lifetime, but his extensive notes and papers have since been published.[15] Reid's lectures were strongly influenced by Pufendorf's Protestant natural law theory, which had been introduced to Scotland by Gershom Carmichael, one of Reid's predecessors in the Glasgow chair. Carmichael influenced Francis Hutcheson, another one of Reid's predecessors, and Hutcheson in turn directly influenced Reid.

For Reid, philosophy was divided between the study of matter (natural philosophy) and the study of mind (pneumatology). Pneumatology was divided between the study of the divine mind and the study of the human mind. The study of the human mind was divided between the study of the intellectual powers, the study of the active powers, and politics. The study of the active powers included the theory of morals, and practical ethics which he also sometimes called morals or ethics. Practical ethics was divided into duties to God, duties to ourselves, and duties to others. Duties to others, which were the most extensive part of the lectures, were divided into duties to individuals ('natural jurisprudence') and duties to societies ('law of nations'). Reid believed in a strong state, but one that was circumscribed by natural law. Citizens had the right to resist if the state

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[14] While they were both living in Aberdeen in 1735, Forsyth wrote to a friend, 'I have none here with whom I can enter into the Depths of Philosophy' (as quoted in Fordyce 1748/2003: xi, note 7), but by 1737 Reid had written him a letter of introduction for his visit to London. For evidence of Fordyce's influence on Reid, see Haakonssen's commentary in Reid 2007.

[15] Reid 2007.

exceeded its authority. In part because he believed that the state had the right to levy taxes on its citizens he was hostile to the American Revolution, though he supported the French revolution until the height of the terror in 1794.

Debates in the theory of morals, according to Reid, are difficult and abstruse, but are important for defending ethics against scepticism. Different theories of morals 'differ not about what is to be accounted Virtuous conduct but why it is so to be accounted'.[16] Practical ethics, on the other hand,

> Is for the most part easy and level to all capacities. There is hardly any moral Duty which when properly explained and delineated, does not recommend itself to the heart of every candid and unbiased Man. (Reid 2007: 110)

Still, the terrain of practical ethics is vast and there is much to learn about the subject. Moreover, the moral faculty is educable, and one purpose of practical ethics is to inculcate virtue.

The idea of professional ethics was implicit in the way that Reid related duties to stations in life, and it became increasingly explicit as the tradition unfolded. Reid specifically discussed the duties of husbands and wives, parents, masters and servants, kings, magistrates, soldiers, and physicians.[17]

Three of the founders of modern medical ethics—John Gregory, Thomas Percival, and Benjamin Rush—were associated with Edinburgh University during the 1760s. Gregory was Reid's cousin, and Rush became the father of medical ethics in the United States.[18]

The Scottish idea of practical ethics was extremely influential in the United States, especially from the early eighteenth century through the end of the Civil War, when the clergy largely controlled higher education. During this period various books were published that were in the spirit of Fordyce and the Scottish philosophers.[19] These books typically had a strong, mostly liberal, Protestant cast (e.g. Haven, like the Scottish philosophers, was opposed to slavery). American colleges at this time were generally undistinguished, and most of this work bleeds rather naturally into the background of American striving and self-improvement. Another legacy of the Scottish tradition was a focus on professional ethics. As early as the 1820s ethics was taught at the United States Military Academy at West Point.[20]

The second strand in the development of British practical ethics comes from the 'philosophical radicals' (and those influenced by them). As we have seen, Pigden specifically mentions Bentham as a famous philosopher who devoted himself to practical ethics.

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[16] Reid 2007: 112.   [17] E.g. Reid 2007: 238ff. For general discussion see Gallie 1998: 116–18.

[18] Haakonssen 1997.

[19] E.g. Haven 1859. This tradition continued throughout the nineteenth century, even after it ceased to be dominant. See, for example, Hyde 1892. It is startling to see articles from the late nineteenth century appearing in today's prestigious journals that read like slightly secularized Presbyterian sermons (for example, Knight 1894 (Knight was Professor of Moral Philosophy at St Andrews)).

[20] <http://www.antiquephotographics.com/format%20types/stereos/peoplest.htm>. Before the Civil War there was a Department of Ethics and English, chaired by Reverend J. W. French, whose *Practical Ethics* was published in several editions from the late 1850s.

Mill (1985a) states that the *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation Bentham* is occupied with 'constructing the outlines of practical ethics and legislation', and in *Utilitarianism* he says that Bentham's failures to understand character 'greatly limit the value of his speculations on questions of *practicalethics*'(1985b). Yet, as far as I have been able to determine, the expression 'practical ethics' occurs only once in Bentham's corpus.[21] In an essay on *'nomenclature and classification', Bentham divides ethics into the 'genico-scopic' ('general matters-regarding'), and 'idioscopic' ('particular matters-regarding'). He says that 'practical' when applied to ethics is a synonym of 'idioscopic'.*[22]

In 1826 Sir Richard Phillips published *Golden Rules of Social Philosophy, Or, A New System of Practical Ethics*, effusively dedicated to Simon Bolivar ('foremost among the great and good'[23]). The book is organized around 'golden rules' for various professions including princes, legislators, magistrates, bankers, and priests. Phillips emphasizes the book's practical nature: his sole goal is to be 'useful',[24] and he expresses contempt for philosophers who he views as authority worshipers.[25] One chapter of the book is devoted to vegetarianism.

In the thirty-three volumes of Mill's collected works there are only eight uses of the expression, 'practical ethics', including the two references to Bentham that I have already cited and several notes. However, in *A System of Logic,* Mill does more to explain his conception of practical ethics. He writes:

> It is customary, however, to include under the term moral knowledge, and even (though improperly) under that of moral science, an inquiry the results of which do not express themselves in the indicative, but in the imperative mood, or in periphrases equivalent to it; what is called the knowledge of duties; practical ethics, or morality. (1974: 943)

In a review for the *Edinburgh Magazine* he says that the question of when it is permissible for citizens to exercise their right to revolution is 'perhaps, altogether the knottiest question in practical ethics'.[26]

What we have thus far may seem higgledy piggledy. For the Scots, practical ethics has to do with natural law, virtue, and moral education. For philosophical radicals (and those influenced by them), practical ethics is about particular ethical concerns typically expressed as imperatives.[27] While these are different streams of thought and have different historical reach and influence, I think it is important to see what they may have in common and how they came together in late nineteenth-century British philosophy.

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[21] Caution is in order since much of what Bentham wrote has not yet been properly edited and made accessible. This heroic task is currently underway at the Bentham Project, University College, London (for more information, visit <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/Bentham-Project>).

[22] Bentham 1983: 203. His discussion here is even more abstruse than it sounds.

[23] Phillips 1826: vi.

[24] Phillips 1826: xv.

[25] Phillips 1826: xiii.

[26] Mill 1977: 77.

[27] As we have seen Mill was an imperativist about moral language, and Bentham was an imperativist about law and perhaps all normative language. Phillips did not present a metaethic, but he had the habit of addressing his reader in the imperative mood.

The most ubiquitous use of the term 'practical' and its cognates in philosophy is to modify 'reason'. Since at least Aristotle it has been part of the lore of the discipline that theoretical reason concerns beliefs while practical reason concerns action. A looming presence for both the Scottish philosophers and the philosophical radicals was Hume, though each had major disagreements with him.[28] While it is controversial to what extent and in what way Hume can be said to have believed in practical reason, he was adamant that the role of morality is to 'influence our passions and actions',[29] and that 'the end of all moral speculations is to teach us our duty'.[30] I believe that this sense of 'practical' in which it concerns action is key for both the Scottish philosophers and the philosophical radicals. Both believe that ethics is about 'oughts' and the job of practical ethics is to help us to see what we ought to do.

By the end of the nineteenth century a rough consensus had emerged. T.H. Green stated the consensus is the following way. There are three main areas of investigation in ethics: '(1) what is free action?; (2) how do we judge what is to be done?; (3) what is to be done?'[31] Practical ethics is in the domain of the third question.

Sidgwick's last book, published in 1898, was entitled *Practical Ethics*. There he discusses such topics as the morality of war ('strife'), luxury, and truth-telling, and returns again to the subject of religious conformity and tests. While he doesn't provide a systematic account of what practical ethics consists in, he does tell us that it 'inhabits the "region of middle axioms"'[32] and concerns 'the practical guidance of men engaged in the business of the world'.[33]

In a book published posthumously, Sidgwick provided a map of the subject matter of philosophy which helps us to locate practical ethics, though in this book he did not use that expression. He began with the familiar distinction between 'theoretical' and 'practical philosophy'. Theoretical philosophy systematizes 'more completely…the partially systematized aggregates of knowledge which we call the sciences'.[34] Practical philosophy deals 'with the principles and methods of rationally determining "what ought to be"'.[35] It includes 'the study of the fundamental principles of Ethics and Politics, and therefore…[is] equivalent to what is commonly spoken of as Moral and Political Philosophy'.[36] He goes on to say that 'Moral or Ethical Philosophy…is primarily concerned with the general principles and methods of moral reasoning, and only with details of conduct so far as the discussion of them affords instructive examples of general principles and method'.[37] It is the business of Ethics on the other hand 'to supply an answer to questions as to details of duty or right conduct'.[38] The attempt to work out a complete system 'would inevitably lead us out of Philosophy into Casuistry: and that whether Casuistry is a good thing or a bad thing, it certainly is not Philosophy'.[39]

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[28] And, of course, because of his influence on Hume and the Scottish philosophers another looming presence was Bishop Butler.

[29] Hume 2000: Book 3, Part 3, Section 6, Paragraph 6.

[30] Hume 1998: Section 1. It is also worth remembering that Hume wrote on such topics as suicide, and the nature of non-human animals.

[31] As quoted in Thomas 1987: 87.   [32] Sidgwick 1898: 8.   [33] Sidgwick 1898: 18.

[34] Sidgwick 1902: 21.   [35] Sidgwick 1902: 22.   [36] Sidgwick 1902: 37.

[37] Sidgwick 1902: 25.   [38] Sidgwick 1902: 26.   [39] Sidgwick 1902: 25–6.

So, to summarize, practical philosophy includes 'Moral or Ethical Philosophy' as well as 'Ethics', with the former focused on 'principles or methods' and the latter on questions of duty or right conduct. Casuistry, which is not philosophy, attempts to work out a complete system of duty or right conduct. What is left hanging is exactly what, in Sidgwick's view, practical ethics consists in. One possibility is that the term is redundant: practical ethics is just ethics, and Sidgwick calls his book 'practical ethics' in order to remind us that ethics is a branch of practical philosophy. A second possibility is that practical ethics describes a particular region of ethics, perhaps that region governed by 'middle axioms'.[40]

Writing at about the same time G. E. Moore was quite comfortable using the expression 'practical ethics', and was characteristically clear about what he meant by the expression. In *Principia Ethica* he distinguished two questions of ethics that are 'commonly confused…"What ought to be?" and…"What ought we to do?"'.[41] It is the second of these questions, 'What ought we to do?', that is the domain of practical ethics. In a review of Brentano published the same year Moore was just as clear:

> the one supreme rule of Practical Ethics is that we *ought* always *to do* that which will cause the whole state of the Universe to have as much *intrinsic* value as possible.[42]

For Moore practical ethics seemed to be about the entire range of what we ought to do, with no special connection to this question as it might arise in particular contexts or regarding specific problems.[43]

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the expression 'practical ethics' was in fairly common use. It signalled the subject that investigates what we ought to do, with special interest, for most writers, in particular rather than general issues of concern.

39.5 THE CHALLENGE OF CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

Almost immediately, the expression, 'practical ethics', fell out of use. Only nine years after *Principia Ethica* and the Brentano review, Moore published another book on ethics, yet the expression does not occur in this later book nor again in any of his published writings. Something had changed. The idea that the fundamental task of philosophy is

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[40] A third possibility, suggested by Anthony Skelton in correspondence, is that the account given in Sidgwick 1902 is not true to his thought since it was a posthumous work reconstructed from his notes and manuscripts. Generally on Sidgwick's practical ethics see Skelton 2006.

[41] Moore 1993: 163.   [42] Moore 1903: 122.

[43] Unlike Sidgwick, Moore (1993: 56–7) thought that casuistry is 'part of the ideal of ethical science: Ethics cannot be complete without it…For Casuistry is the goal of ethical investigation'. This appears to be a response to Bradley's dismissive remark, 'Our moralists do not like casuistry; but if the current notion that moral philosophy has to tell you what to do is well-founded, then casuistry, so far as I can see, at once follows, or should follow' (1951: 132).

analysis, an idea that Moore pioneered along with Russell, was gaining traction, and Moore's understanding of its implications was beginning to change. Indeed, I believe that it was this understanding of philosophy as analysis that explains Russell's disparaging view of ethics.[44]

The idea of philosophical analysis was already at the centre of *Principia Ethica*. Moore began the book by telling us that he is 'inclined to think that' if 'a resolute attempt' at 'analysis and distinction' were made, 'many of the most glaring difficulties and disagreements in philosophy would disappear'.[45] He then approaches the question of what is good and this leads him to the question of how 'good' is defined. He shrugs off the idea that this is a purely linguistic question, instead saying that '[w]hat I want to discover is the nature of that object or idea'.[46] He draws an analogy between the question of what is good and the question of what is a horse. The way to answer these questions is through dissection:

> We may mean that a certain object, which we all of us know, is composed in a certain manner: that it has four legs, a head, a heart, a liver, etc. etc. all of them arranged in definite relations to one another.[47]

This, he says, is the 'sense that I deny good to be definable…it is not composed of any parts which we can substitute for it in our minds when we are thinking of it'.[48]

Philosophical analysis did not appear out of nowhere. There are many sources and precursors in the British philosophical tradition including Locke's concern with the relation between language and ideas in Book 3 of the *Essay*, the attempts of Berkeley and Hume to analyse our ideas, as well as in the Scottish philosophers' attempts to understand our common-sense commitments. On this topic, as with so many others, competing strands come together in Sidgwick.

Sidgwick's persistent concern with common-sense morality leads him often to something like conceptual analysis. In the Preface to the Sixth Edition of the *Methods of Ethics* he writes:

> In this state of mind I had to read Aristotle again; and a light seemed to dawn upon me as to the meaning and drift of his procedure…What he gave us there was the Common Sense Morality of Greece, reduced to consistency by careful comparison: given not as something external to him but as what 'we'—he and others—think, ascertained by reflection…Might I not imitate this: do the same for *our* morality here and now, in the same manner of impartial reflection on earnest opinion. (1907: xx)

From a certain perspective, *The Methods of Ethics* can be seen as an inconclusive (and, for its author deeply dissatisfying) exercise in proto- or quasi-conceptual analysis. While Sidgwick makes progress in bringing together common-sense morality, his own intuitions, and the different methods of ethics, there is continual fussing over details that

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[44] What I say in this section chimes with Darwall's excellent 2006. The distinction between philosophical and conceptual analysis is one of several distinctions that should be tracked, but I don't think that much turns on my failure to observe it in what follows.

[45] Moore 1993: 33.   [46] Moore 1993: 58.   [47] Moore 1993: 60.   [48] Moore 1993: 60.

don't quite fall into place, and the project eventually founders on the dualism of practical reason. In the background is a deep question of which Sidgwick is aware but does not directly acknowledge: how can this methodology produce 'oughts' that we should regard as binding? For it is one thing to explicate 'our' morality, and it is another thing to say what we really ought to do. In this area, as in so many others, Sidgwick wants to gather all good things around him, and in *Principia Ethica*, Moore follows him.

Analysis took on different meanings and varying ambitions as the century unfolded. Ambitions peaked in the first two decades of the twentieth century with the work of Russell and Wittgenstein, both of whom regarded philosophical analysis as reality revealing.[49] In the 1920s and 1930s philosophical analysis played a less ambitious, but no less central, role in the work of the logical empiricists. Only science could provide an account of ultimate reality, but philosophical analysis was the instrument for distinguishing scientific sentences from the analytic sentences of logic and mathematics, and both of these from the nonsense of metaphysics and theology. Beginning in the 1930s under the influence of Moore and the later work of Wittgenstein, a modest form of analysis devoted to mapping the contours of our concepts spread from Cambridge, taking on local colour in Oxford and elsewhere. The arc of ambition ends with P.F. Strawson's 1959 book, *Individuals*, which eschews the pretensions of 'revisionary' metaphysics in favour of 'descriptive' metaphysics.

As the view that the proper job of philosophy is analysis gained influence, it became increasingly difficult to see what place practical ethics could have in such an enterprise. On this view, philosophy is descriptive not prescriptive. Philosophy may be able to tell us something about how we conceptualize our ultimate ends, but it is difficult to see how this can be transformed into an account of what we actually ought to do. Once this implication of philosophical analysis is grasped, Sidgwick's attempt to hold theoretical and practical ethics together in a single discipline comes crashing down. As the century wears on, those inspired by Moore, Russell, the logical empiricists, and others increasingly dominate the British philosophical landscape, and practical ethics is driven further to the margins. The dark night of repression, that is the tale well told by the standard history, begins to set in.[50]

39.6 APPLIED ETHICS IN THE UNITED STATES

Philosophy in the United States unfolded in a different way. In the United States the Scottish philosophical impulse was largely subsumed by religiosity, there was no equivalent to the philosophical radicals, and there was no philosopher of Sidgwick's power

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[49] What I have in mind is Russell's Logical Atomism and Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*.

[50] From this perspective Rashdall 1907 can be seen as the last major work in the nineteenth-century British tradition of practical ethics, especially volume 2, book 3, chapter 5, where he speaks of 'applied moral philosophy' (1907: 458). A fascinating late contribution is Samuels 1935, published in the same series as Moore 1912, but with a quite different intended audience. It is interesting to ask whether the rise of conceptual analysis and the subsequent exile of practical ethics is related to the increasing

systematizing ethics. Philosophical analysis did not arrive as a powerful subversive force in part because there was so little to subvert. These tendencies did eventually wash up on American shores, but they were late and their force was blunted. They also had to compete with indigenous American Pragmatism and other peculiarities of American thought and culture.

One of these peculiarities was the summer schools devoted to the arts and humanities that became very popular throughout the United States in the late nineteenth century.[51] Important for our story is the 'summer school on applied ethics', held in Plymouth, Massachusetts every summer between 1891 and 1895.[52]

The school had three departments: economics, religion, and ethics. Participants were encouraged to attend lectures in all three areas, and lectures were organized so that they did not compete with each other. The eighteen lectures on ethics were devoted to such topics as 'the development of character', 'suicide', 'ethics of the family', 'professional and political ethics', 'ideals of friendship', 'man's relation to nature and the lower animals', punishment and prison reform, ethics and education, and 'the Indian question'. A contemporary account said that

> the success of this initial season certainly justifies the expectation that the school will become a permanent institution…A host of practical questions of ethical import confront our American society with a distinctiveness that compels recognition; and their study in annual summer conferences at Plymouth, in a scientific and impartial spirit, can but serve a useful service.[53]

The school of applied ethics was founded by Felix Adler, who was born in Germany in 1851. His family immigrated to New York when he was six so that his father could become the rabbi of Temple Emanu-El, which remains one of the largest and most influential reform synagogues in the United States. After graduating from Columbia, Adler went to Heidelberg for rabbinical training and to study philosophy. Heidelberg was one of the centres of the Kantian revival, and like many German Jewish intellectuals of the time, Adler was deeply influenced by neo-Kantianism. On his return to New York it soon became clear that he would not succeed his father as rabbi of Temple Emanu-El. In 1902, after some teaching at Cornell, he was awarded a new chair in political and social ethics at Columbia that was funded by a coalition of 'good government' groups. He held this

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professionalization of British philosophy, especially in light of the fact that the Scottish forefathers of the field were clergymen as well as philosophers and the philosophical radicals had contempt for existing universities.

[51] The general term for this is the 'Chautauqua movement'.

[52] For a brief account see Wright 1910: 991. There are also accounts that can be retrieved from the archives of the *New York Times*.

[53] Shaw 1892: 164–5. The only British philosopher who lectured at the summer school, as far as I know, was Bernard Bosanquet. Initially this may seem surprising, but Bosenquet was on the German side of British philosophy, addressed political and social questions, and wrote for the broad educated public. He was a replacement for William Wallace, White's Professor of Moral Philosophy at Oxford, who died in a bicycle accident after having accepted the invitation. Wallace was a Scottish philosopher who is best known for his Hegel translations.

chair until his death in 1933, though during that time much of his attention was focused on the Ethical Culture Society which he had founded in 1877.

The Ethical Culture Society and its associated schools have been extremely influential, especially in New York. It has appealed in particular to non-religious Jews who identify with Jewish ethics and culture. Many of them were not comfortable participating in synagogues, but were blocked from other schools and institutions by anti-Semitism. The Ethical Culture Society provided a home for them.

In 1928 Adler was elected President of the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association. He promoted 'applied ethics' throughout his career, writing that:

> We need … a clearer understanding of applied ethics, a better insight into the specific duties of life, a finer and a surer moral tact. (Adler 1908: 131)

In 1910 former president, Theodore Roosevelt, gave an important lecture at Harvard under the title, 'applied ethics' . Roosevelt began by saying that educational institutions must train character as well as intellect, and that 'I regard the study of ethics pursued merely as an intellectual recreation as being about as worthless as any form of mental amusement can be'.[54] He emphasized the importance of efficiency in carrying out morally worthy actions, and praised people he considered to be morally exemplary. They included those who dug the Panama Canal, those who work for environmental conservation, and those who work for world peace (he is clear, however, that world peace requires a well-armed United States).

Interest in applied ethics flourished in the native soil of Pragmatism. Although Adler never gave up his neo-Kantianism, he had much in common with his Columbia colleague, John Dewey, who sent two of his children to the Ethical Culture Society school and occasionally lectured there as well. Adler and the pragmatists viewed philosophy as part of a progressive political and social project, and shared an orientation towards German philosophy. They were more concerned with contingency than necessity, and saw philosophy as continuous with science. Adler wrote:

> Applied ethics is … dependent … on empirical science, that is, on an extended and ever increasing knowledge of physiology, psychology, and the environmental conditions that influence human beings. (1918: 257–8)

Previously James had written:

> On the whole, then, we must conclude that no philosophy of ethics is possible in the old—fashioned absolute sense of the term. Everywhere the ethical philosopher must wait on facts. (1891: 349)

While Sidgwick was no stranger to empirical investigation, unlike the pragmatists he thought there was a bright line between philosophy and empirical investigation.[55]

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[54] Roosevelt 1911: 5.

[55] Sidgwick wrote on economics and politics as well as philosophy but his main area of empirical investigation was parapsychology. Davis 1998 argues that different attitudes towards the relevance of facts is part of what distinguishes Sidgwick's practical ethics from contemporary practice; Skelton 2006 disagrees.

Only three years before James's paper was published, he had remarked in a lecture to the Cambridge Ethical Society that

> I should be disposed to regard this study of facts as lying in the main beyond the province of our Society.[56]

The rise of Pragmatism was associated with important changes in American higher education. After the Civil War, colleges and universities were becoming liberated from their clerical overseers, new institutions were being established, and German philosophy and culture began to dominate.[57] Johns Hopkins University was founded as a modern, national research university on the German model. Located in a border state, it opened on George Washington's birthday (February 22) in America's centennial year (1876), in part in an attempt to help mend regional divisions in the aftermath of the Civil War.[58] In 1884 John Dewey received his PhD from Johns Hopkins University, studying with Charles Sanders Peirce among others.

It is difficult to overestimate how different the pragmatists were in background, training, disposition, and interests from most of their British contemporaries. Gesturing towards Hegel and Darwin as the major intellectual influences on Pragmatism is revealing, but so are some simple facts about background and experience. British philosophers of this period mostly studied classics and taught philosophy in the universities in which they were educated.[59] The pragmatists were men of science, and often had quirky career paths. Charles Sanders Peirce's only academic qualification was an undergraduate degree in chemistry. For thirty-two years he worked (apparently quite ineffectually) for the United States Coastal Survey. William James trained as a physician and then set up the first psychology laboratory in the United States. He was already a distinguished psychologist when he joined the Harvard philosophy department at age 55. His biographer, Ralph Barton Perry, quotes James as saying:

> I drifted into psychology and philosophy from a sort of fatality. I never had any philosophic instruction, the first lecture on psychology I ever heard being the first I ever gave. (1935/1996: 228)

Of these three important early twentieth-century pragmatists, only Dewey had philosophical training, and his interests were almost as strong in psychology as philosophy. Indeed, his now lost doctoral dissertation was on Kant's psychology.

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[56] Sidgwick 1898: 16. The 1890s are a rich period for investigating the relations between applied ethics, practical ethics, and Pragmatism. The British ethical societies in which Sidgwick participated were inspired at least in part by Adler's Ethical Culture Society (MacKillop 1986). The *International Journal of Ethics* (which later became *Ethics*) was founded in 1890, and in its first issue published articles by Sidgwick, Adler, and Bosanquet, and in its next issue an article by Dewey.

[57] It is interesting to think about shifts in philosophical influence in relation to immigrant flows. In the eighteenth century, Scots were the largest single group immigrating to the United States. By the second half of the nineteenth century, they were replaced by Germans.

[58] Despite these noble sentiments, like many American universities Johns Hopkins had an appalling history of racism and did not admit black undergraduates until after World War II.

[59] Russell is a major exception, but not much can be further from American experience than the life of a bohemian aristocrat in Edwardian England. The clash between how ethics was practised in Britain and the United States during the 1920s is brought out clearly by Carritt 1925.

In the 1930s the wave of philosophical analysis struck the United States with the arrival of some of the best of the younger generation of logical empiricists. Cambridge analysis had already had some impact, but mainly through Russell's work in logic and the foundations of mathematics. Fleeing Nazi persecution, the logical empiricists brought with them their idea of philosophy and philosophical analysis.

The logical empiricists were extremely influential, but it is easy to overestimate how widely their views were shared. Since both Pragmatism and Logical Empiricism are forms of naturalism that have German roots, it is easy to conflate them. Moreover, while American philosophers were quite receptive to the advanced logic and formal methods that the logical empiricists introduced, that did not mean that they agreed with their philosophical views. Some of the logical empiricists (e.g. Carl Hempel, Hans Reichenbach, Rudolf Carnap, Philipp Frank, and Herbert Feigl) were highly visible because of their appointments in major research universities, yet they were often quite isolated.

One key difference between the pragmatists and the logical empiricists concerned the analytic/synthetic distinction. During this period and up through the 1960s, there was widespread agreement that conceptual analysis required a robust analytic/synthetic distinction.[60] If such a distinction cannot be maintained, then it is difficult to see what distinctive subject matter conceptual analysis would have to work on. This was common ground among those who were sceptical about the distinction (e.g. many American philosophers with pragmatist leanings) and those who defended it (e.g, logical empiricists, and British-style conceptual analysts). What was at stake in this fight was the extent to which philosophy was continuous with empirical science, and the extent to which it was an autonomous subject that could be pursued by armchair methods.

Quine's 1951 rejection of the analytic/synthetic distinction is well known, but less well known is that he expressed doubts about the distinction as early as 1933, when as a twenty-five year old recent PhD he visited Carnap in Prague. Throughout the 1940s Quine, Goodman, Tarski, and White discussed the distinction, and all expressed scepticism. This is especially striking since they were generally attracted to Logical Empiricism. I believe that their almost instinctive scepticism about the analytic/synthetic distinction was rooted in their pragmatist heritage.[61] Morton White exposed some of these roots in a paper published in a festschrift for John Dewey, one year before Quine's paper was published. The paper begins:

> John Dewey has spent a good part of his life hunting and shooting at dualisms: body-mind, theory-practice, percept-concept, value-science, learning-doing, sensation-thought, external-internal. They are always fair game and Dewey's prose rattles with fire whenever they come into view. (1950: 316)

White went on to reject the analytic/synthetic distinction, suggesting that Dewey should have rejected it as well, rather than equivocating as he sometimes did.

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[60] Many philosophers still believe this, but there has been a large, influential body of post-Quinean work attempting to rehabilitate both the analytic/synthetic distinction and conceptual analysis, sometimes by reinterpreting them, sometimes by disentangling them (see Juhl and Loomis 2010, and Russell 2008).

[61] Excepting, presumably, Tarski, but it is worth noting that he was an admirer of Peirce.

It should not be surprising that a philosophy as empiricist, naturalist, and science-oriented as Pragmatism would reject the analytic/synthetic distinction. But Pragmatism is also historicist, which is part of what distinguishes it from other forms of Empiricism such as Logical Empiricism. Historicists, whatever their ontology, have also typically rejected the analytic/synthetic distinction (e.g. the Anglo-Hegelians).[62]

In the 1950s British conceptual analysis began to have significant impact on American philosophy. Moore and Russell spent most of World War II in the United States, Wittgenstein visited shortly after the war, and academic exchanges became increasingly frequent in the years that followed. The British influence became a rivulet in the stream of American philosophy. It was more influential than the French ideas that were beginning to cross the Atlantic at about the same time, but less important than Logical Empiricism or home-grown American styles of philosophizing.

The resistance of Pragmatism was one of the reasons why no form of conceptual analysis ever dominated American philosophy, but there was an even deeper reason. As Hilary Putnam writes,

> American philosophy, not only in the 1940s but well into the 1950s, was decidedly unideological. If there were "movements" at individual departments, they were represented by one or two people. (1997: 157)

The explanation for this probably has most to do with the decentralized nature of academic life and the cultural diversity of the United States during this period, compared to Great Britain, but part of the explanation also probably has to do with the spirit of tolerance and openness that Pragmatism engendered. This led to some strange consequences. Quine was so isolated at Harvard that in the late 1940s he came close to joining Goodman at the University of Pennsylvania so that he would have a sympathetic colleague.[63]

Meanwhile, the applied ethics movement seems to have been largely absorbed into the broad pragmatist mainstream.[64] Dewey's and Tufts's, *Ethics*, which appeared in two editions, one in 1908 and another in 1932, was the most widely used ethics textbook in American colleges and universities well into the 1940s. There was a historical part of the book, a theoretical part, and a part that was called, 'the world of action'. The topics in this section included political order, social problems, labour rights, business ethics, and family values. Douglas Sloan analysed the ethics textbooks that were used after Dewey and Tufts fell out of use, and these were his conclusions:

> the actual teaching was probably much broader and more eclectic than a history of main currents of ethical theory might suggest . . . The prominence given throughout the forties and fifties to normative ethics and practical problems is striking . . . Along with the attention devoted to theoretical ethics the texts dealt with such topics as "the nature of capitalism and business ethics," "the ethics of physical and mental

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[62] For discussion and references see Gewirth 1953. Russell 1897: 55–9 also rejected the distinction when he was in his idealist phase.

[63] Isaac 2011.

[64] Even Kaplan's successor as President of the Ethical Culture Society was a Deweyan.

health," "professional ethics," "ethics and the media of communication," morality and race relations," "marriage and the home," "religion and ethics," "education and ethics," and others. (1979: 31)

Flower and Murphy *summarized the historical tenor of American philosophy in the following way:*

> Americans have constantly assumed that philosophy had a practical role in shaping not only the personal structure of the spirit but the character of human institutions. There are no stout defenders of the purity of philosophy, its neutrality, its studied irrelevance to practice…Not till the mid-twentieth century—beyond our period does philosophy in America toy with ideas of purity and impractability. (1977: xviii)

Why then do so many people think that a dark night of repression fell over applied ethics sometime in the early twentieth century and only lifted around 1970? They may mistake the fate of practical ethics in Great Britain with the story of applied ethics in the United States. Moreover, the expanding academic job market of the 1950s and 1960s may have disproportionately benefited epistemology, logic, and philosophy of language at the expense of other fields. What may have declined is not the amount of activity in applied ethics, but its frequency. In addition, while the pragmatist impulse was very much alive, the two leading inheritors of this tradition (Goodman and Quine) ignored moral and political questions in their professional work, and this may have lowered the visibility of the work that continued to be done in the pragmatist tradition.[65] Generally during this period American universities were becoming more bureaucratized, and most disciplines, including philosophy, were becoming more professionalized. As a result, many philosophers were moving towards what they regarded as the centre of the discipline and writing on more specialized and technical subjects, in contrast to American philosophers of the first half of the century who tended to write about anything that appealed, drawing on whatever sources they fancied.[66]

In addition to these factors, World War II provoked broad cultural changes that made post-war America a different country in many ways than its pre-war counterpart. What this meant for philosophy is that the way people wrote books and articles, how they constructed sentences, the vocabularies they deployed, their strategies for setting out problems, the journals they published in, the ways they behaved at philosophical meetings, and even how they dressed and coifed themselves, all changed dramatically. From the vantage point of the 1960s, the pragmatists looked and sounded old, musty, and boring. They fell out of fashion, and it was easy to pretend that they did not exist.

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[65] White's interests were much broader and even more continuous with the early pragmatists that Goodman's and Quine's, but for whatever reason his influence was not as great. Perhaps his 1970 move to the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, which put him out of contact with graduate students, had something to do with it. Rorty revived the tradition of normatively engaged Pragmatism but well after the prevailing narrative had solidified. Moreover, much of Rorty's work was more in the spirit of meta-pragmatism than of pragmatism, an approach that would have repelled Dewey.

[66] I suspect this change occurred in other disciplines as well.

A final reason is that in this area as in others, the darkest hour was just before dawn. Conceptual analysis was at the height of its influence at the very moment that practical ethics began to explode. Like most young people, the generation that developed practical ethics in the 1970s and 1980s assumed that the world they grew up in was the world that had always been.

When practical ethics came into view again around 1970, both Pragmatism and the American tradition of applied ethics were still in play, even though there was little awareness of this. Rawls's method of reflective equilibrium was right out of the pragmatist playbook,[67] and he became increasingly pragmatist in methodology as the years wore on. The philosophers who formed the Society for Ethical and Legal Philosophy and the Society for Philosophy and Public Affairs and went on to found the journal, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, were to a great extent motivated by similar politics and concerns that had led to the applied ethics movement of the early part of the century. They were political progressives living in a time of perceived moral crisis, and they were committed to the idea that philosophy must have something to say about the important issues of the day.

These continuities were largely invisible in 1970. The generation that was making the revolution had been trained in conceptual analysis, and in overcoming its limitations, they employed many of the same methods, thus obscuring their relations to earlier moments in American philosophy. Moreover, some of the specific problems that were in the forefront in the 1960s were different from those that had burned so bright for Adler and Dewey earlier in the century, at least in the way in which they were framed. Finally, Americans (even philosophers) tend not to look in the rear-view mirror; and when they look at all, it is usually towards Germany or Great Britain.

39.7 THE CONTEMPORARY SCENE

The elements that would lead to the rebirth of practical ethics in Great Britain began to assemble in the immediate post-war period. Interest in 'ought questions' began to revive with the work of W.D. Falk (1947) and others, and by the late 1950s a widely used textbook (Nowell-Smith 1954) returned ought questions to roughly the place that they had occupied at the end of the previous century. Philosophers such as J.L. Austin and Philippa Foot showed in detail how prescriptive and descriptive features are deeply entwined in language. The most influential British moral philosopher of the 1950s and 1960s, R.M. Hare, was a supporter of practical ethics, though his interest in the field was not much expressed in print until the field had already returned to prominence.[68] G.E.M. Anscombe had kept the tradition of casuistry alive in British philosophy.

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[67] Rawls credits it to Goodman and, according to Catherine Elgin (in correspondence) Goodman said that his greatest contribution to political philosophy was giving this method to Rawls.

[68] Hare 1981 maintained that conceptual analysis could deliver binding 'oughts'. Other philosophers, such as Hall 1952, claimed that facts about what we ought to do are as fundamental as any other facts.

There are currently at least five distinguishable styles of work in practical ethics and it is difficult to associate them with particular nations. I will conclude by briefly surveying these approaches.[69]

The Vertical Approach identifies a practical issue, and then determines what the advocates of particular moral theories (e.g. consequentialist, deontologist, contractarian) would say about it. This approach 'applies' moral theories to practical problems in the way that a scientist might apply a general theory to a particular problem. A difficulty with this approach is that these moral theories are really families of moral theories, and they do not uniquely identify the right action to take in response to a practical problem, at least not without many assumptions and stipulations that can be rejected.

The Horizontal Approach, influenced by Rawls, involves taking some particular moral principles commonly regarded to have wide application, and applying them to a series of practical problems. The theories, the facts that bear on them, and the intuitive moral judgements that we make about them are then put into reflective equilibrium. This approach tends to take principles, facts, and (some would say) intuitive judgements at face-value rather than interrogating each of them individually, trusting reflective equilibrium to isolate the gold from the fool's gold. This method, it is often claimed, is biased towards conservative (i.e. non-revisionist) outcomes.

Analysis and Intuition is an iterative process that begins with a candidate moral principle, analyses its content, proposes (usually hypothetical) counter-examples, reshapes or accepts the principle on the basis of intuitive responses, and then begins again. When it comes to formulating candidate principles and counter-examples, this approach can lead to cloud cuckoo land and can lead us away from the highly contextualized ought questions to which practical ethics is supposed to respond. As the descendent of conceptual analysis, it is often difficult to see how this approach can generate real 'oughts' rather than hypothetical judgements about extremely hypothetical cases. While this approach practises reflective equilibrium, it is narrow reflective equilibrium, usually without much regard for empirical considerations.

Reasoning From Middle-Level Principles is an elaboration of Sidgwick's idea that people often disagree about which general principles are acceptable and what we ought to do in particular cases, yet agree about middle-level principles. Reasoning that begins from these widely shared middle-level principles can sometimes lead to widely shared conclusions about particular cases, without entering the debate about the most general principles.

The Case Approach, which is in the spirit of American applied ethics, presupposes that sound conclusions about practical matters are sensitive to getting the facts right, where this involves being clear not just about the physical and biological facts that might appear immediately relevant, but also the social facts about who holds what views and why. On this approach, which has much in common with legal reasoning, the justification of an action or policy may be extremely specific and context-relative.

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[69] I say more about these approaches in two unpublished papers: 'The Methods (of Practical) Ethics', and 'The View From Somewhere: The Use of Thought Experiments in Moral Philosophy'.

Practical ethics is today a glorious mess. Not only do these different approaches imply different views about philosophy and suggest different hopes about what it can deliver, but some individual philosophers practise more than one of these styles, sometimes in the same paper. This helps to explain some of the tension between practical ethics and the discipline of philosophy. If people working in this field can't agree about what they are doing, then it is difficult to locate this field on a map of the discipline. This, of course, assumes that the discipline of philosophy is not itself a glorious mess. Whether or not this is so, however, will have to await further investigation.[70]

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