

**Sidgwick's Utilitarianism in the Context of the Rise
of British Idealism: A Reappraisal¹**

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Abstract:

Henry Sidgwick's great work, *The Methods of Ethics* (1874), was an attempt to give Utilitarianism an intuitional basis. The six papers he gave at the Metaphysical Society (1869-1880) on nearly the same subject throw a new light on his ideas and how he revised his work several times in the light of religious, scientific and political changes which were taking place at the time. His criticism of what was to become Idealism and the criticism he was subjected to from an Idealist such as Bradley were also of influence on his work. By trying to bring together Utilitarianism and Intuitionism – two opposed ethical methods – he was seeking to defend a revamped form of "Utilitarianism", that is a form of Utilitarianism which would incorporate a self-effacing morality. That he failed to do so is not the point, but he did try and the six papers he gave at the Metaphysical Society help understanding his own version of Utilitarianism.

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