

T. H. Green and Henry Sidgwick on free agency and the guise of the good

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Abstract

The history of the thesis of the guise of the good between Kant and Anscombe is not well understood. This article examines a notable disagreement over the thesis during this period, between Green and Sidgwick. It shows that Green accepts versions of the thesis concerning action and desire in one sense of “desire,” and that Sidgwick rejects the thesis concerning both action and desire. It then considers why Green accepts the thesis, and how effective Sidgwick’s criticism of Green is. Despite the appearance of a mere clash of intuitions, an interesting rationale for the thesis can be found in Green’s theory of free will and moral responsibility, of which I defend a broadly compatibilist interpretation. Sidgwick’s criticisms either miss this rationale altogether, or do not take adequately into account Green’s complex theory of free will.

1 | INTRODUCTION

“I would hazard a guess,” writes one of the main contemporary defenders of the thesis of *the Guise of the Good*, “that something like [*the Guise of the Good*] ... [was] widely taken for granted around Kant’s time, and ... certainly still very influential [in the 1970s.] But wherever the historical truth lies, the climate has changed significantly” (Tenenbaum, 2007, p. 1). For its part, a recent book-length history of *the Guise of the Good* claims that “the thesis appears to be largely ignored or only incidentally mentioned in the 150 years after Kant,” and that Anscombe, in asserting it in *Intention* (1957), “was effectively bringing back to life an idea that had long remained absent from the philosophical scene (with one important exception [sc. Brentano] ...)” (Orsi, 2023, p. 125). These remarks suggest, at any rate, that what happened to *the Guise of the Good* between Kant and Anscombe is obscure to contemporary

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analytical moral philosophers and historians of moral philosophy. Whether the thesis did fall into obscurity in that period is another matter, and it seems premature, precisely because of inadequate historical knowledge, to affirm that it did. This essay seeks to contribute to elucidating what happened to *the Guise of the Good* by examining its treatment by two of the most important anglophone moral philosophers of the period, T. H. Green and Henry Sidgwick.

What is *the Guise of the Good*? One version, concerning intentional action, is the thesis:

The Guise of the Good (Action): In intentionally doing an action ϕ , one takes ϕ to be good.

Another version of *the Guise of the Good*, concerning desire, is:

The Guise of the Good (Desire): In desiring x , one takes x to be good.

“Good” can be understood either as good overall (i.e., the best available action) or as good in some respect. These yield different versions of *the Guise of the Good*; I will call them, respectively, *the Guise of the Good Overall* and *the Guise of the Good in some Respect*. *The Guise of the Good in some Respect (Action)*, but not *the Guise of the Good Overall (Action)*, is consistent with there being akratic intentional actions where, in doing ϕ , one doesn't take ϕ to be good overall, but does take it to be good in some respect. Each version of *the Guise of the Good in some Respect* is entailed by the corresponding version of *the Guise of the Good Overall*. Some contemporary defenders of *the Guise of the Good* defend only *the Guise of the Good in some Respect*¹; some defend *the Guise of the Good Overall*.²

Section 1 shows that Green accepts a version of *the Guise of the Good Overall (Action)*, and a version of *the Guise of the Good Overall (Desire)* in a special sense of “desire.” Section 2 shows (*contra* Pellegrino [2021]) that Sidgwick rejects *the Guise of the Good Overall*, and probably rejects *the Guise of the Good in some Respect*, concerning both intentional action and desire; among the evidence will be Sidgwick's lectures on Green's ethics. Section 3, the philosophical core of the essay, considers why Green accepts *the Guise of the Good* and how effective Sidgwick's criticism of Green is. Despite the appearance of a mere clash of intuitions, an interesting rationale for *the Guise of the Good* can be found in Green's theory of free will and moral responsibility, of which I defend a broadly compatibilist interpretation: actions, for Green, are determined, albeit non-naturally so, and acting under the guise of the good is needed to secure moral responsibility. For Sidgwick, in contrast, the issue of *the Guise of the Good* is of more marginal importance, and his criticisms of Green either appeal simply to putative counterexamples without broaching Green's rationale for *the Guise of the Good* at all, or do not adequately take into account Green's complex theory of free will.

2 | GREEN ON THE GUISE OF THE GOOD

This section establishes Green's views on *the Guise of the Good*, first concerning action and then concerning desire, using evidence from his *Prolegomena to ethics*. In §§85–153 of the *Prolegomena*, Green—having already set out a theory of the metaphysical conditions of human experience and the relation between the phenomenal world and the knowing and acting human being—seeks to explain how the human will may be free and actions may be morally imputable to their agents and to clarify the relation between intellect, will and desire. Since it is fairly clear just from the direct evidence that Green accepts (certain versions of) the thesis, we can postpone—until Section 3—the question of why Green does so, or what the significance of the thesis is in Green's wider ethical and metaphysical theory.

Green writes:

[1] The particular human self ... in every moral action, virtuous or vicious, presents to itself some possible state or achievement of its own as for the time its greatest good, and acts for the sake of that good. (§99)³

[2] By an instinctive action, we mean one *not* determined by a conception, on the part of the agent, of any good to be gained or evil to be avoided by the action. It is superfluous to add, good to *himself*, for anything conceived as good in such a way that the agent acts for the sake of it, must be conceived as *his own good*[.] ... By a moral action, an action morally imputable or that can be called good or bad, we mean one that is so determined as the instinctive action is not. Clearly it is nothing but our knowledge of what moral or motivated action is, that gives a meaning to the negation conveyed in the description of another sort of action as instinctive. (§92)

[3] When Esau sells his birthright for a mess of pottage, ... it is ... his own conception of himself, as finding for the time his greatest good in the satisfaction of hunger, that determines the act (§96).⁴

[4] The motive in every imputable act for which the agent is conscious on reflection that he is answerable, is a desire for personal good in some form or other (§91)

[5] To every action morally imputable, or of which a man can recognise himself as the author, the motive is always some idea of the man's personal good (§95)⁵

[6] The motive [of a moral action] ... is constituted by ... an act in which the agent presents to himself a certain idea of himself—of himself doing or himself enjoying—as an idea of which the realisation forms for the time his good. (§95)

What Green says in [1] entails: in doing a moral action, one takes it to be for the time one's greatest good. To take it to be for the time one's greatest good is presumably to take it to be the best available action. This entails *the Guise of the Good Overall* concerning moral actions: in doing a moral action, one takes it to be good overall. This version of *the Guise of the Good Overall* differs from the one discussed at this essay's outset in that it claims that, in doing a moral action, one takes it to be one's *own* good. I will call this *the Guise of One's Own Good Overall*.

What does Green mean by “moral action”? In [2], he implicitly identifies “moral” actions and “motivated” actions, and indicates that any action that isn't instinctive is moral.⁶ This suggests that by “moral action” Green refers to the kind of action that *the Guise of the Good (Action)* is about, such that Green can be taken to be endorsing *the Guise of the Good (Action)*. However, Green exegetically characterizes “moral action” as “action morally imputable or that can be called good or bad,” and “morally imputable action” or “action that can be called good or bad” (which he implicitly treats as synonymous) seem to provide the *meaning* of “moral action.”⁷ What underwrites Green's identification of moral actions with motivated actions and with non-instinctive actions is a substantive claim about what a moral action is, misleadingly presented in definitional mode (“we mean ...”), which might be rejected by someone who adopts the definition of “moral action” as morally imputable action: a moral action is any action that is “determined by a conception, on the part of the agent, of any good to be gained or evil to be avoided by the action.”

This substantive claim entails that, in doing a moral action, one has a conception of a good to be gained or evil to be avoided by an action. Throughout Green's discussion, he uses “[one's] good” and “[one's] greatest good” alternately, indicating that he uses “[one's] good” as an abbreviation of “[one's] greatest good.” Thus, what Green says in [2] should be understood to entail *the Guise of One's Own Good Overall (Action)*. [3], where Esau's action is used as an example of a moral action, also confirms that Green accepts *the Guise of One's Own Good Overall (Action)*. So—despite inconsistency of terminology as to whether a motive is an idea of good or a desire for good or constituted by an act of presenting an idea of good—do [4], [5], and [6].

In *Prolegomena*, §121, Green considers what “desire” means with reference to the example of desiring food when we are hungry:

Do we mean by it (1) hunger itself, as a particular sort of painful feeling; or (2) an instinctive impulse to obtain food, excited by this painful feeling but without consciousness of an object to which the impulse is directed; or (3) an impulse excited by the image of a pleasure previously experienced in eating, such as we seem to notice in a well-fed dog or cat when the dinner-bell rings; or (4) desire for an object in the proper sense; i.e. for something which the desiring subject presents to itself as distinct at once from itself, the subject that desires, and from other objects which might be desired but for the time are not?

Green says little about desire in sense (1). He is mainly concerned to distinguish sense (4) from senses (2) and (3). Green, as the above passage suggests (“in the proper sense”), prefers that “desire” be used in sense (4). He variously calls desire in senses (2) or (3) “impulse” (§§85, 105, 110, 143–146), “instinctive impulse” (§§118, 121, 130), “animal impulse” (§91), “mere desire” (§§103, 147), “appetite” (§130) or “solicitation” (§143). Hereafter, I call desire in sense (4) “desire-in-the-proper-sense,” and desire in senses (2) or (3) “impulse.”

Moral action, Green believes, happens thus:

A man, we will suppose, is acted on at once by an impulse to avenge an affront [and various other passions, which suggest different lines of action.] ... So long as he is undecided how to act, all are, in a way, external to him. ... [A moral effect only] ensues when the man's relation to these influences is altered by his identifying himself with one of them, by his taking the object of one of the tendencies as for the time his good. This is to *will*, and is in itself moral action[.] ... But in the act of will the man does not cease to desire. Rather he, the man, for the first time desires, having not done so while divided between the conflicting influences. His willing is not a continuation of any of those desires, if they are to be so called, that were previously acting upon him. It is that which none of these had yet become; a desire in which the man enacts himself, as distinct from one which acts upon him. (§146)

The “desire in which the man enacts himself” and that occurs in moral action is desire-in-the-proper-sense. Green thinks, then, that, in desiring-in-the-proper-sense an object, a man takes it to be “his good,” which should be understood as short for “his greatest good.” This entails *the Guise of One's Own Good Overall (Desire)* concerning desire-in-the-proper-sense. Since Green thinks that one feels impulses—which may be closer than desire-in-the-proper-sense to what is now usually meant by “desire”—before one takes any of them to be one's greatest good, he presumably rejects *the Guise of One's Own Good Overall* concerning impulse. Whether he would reject the weaker thesis of *the Guise of One's Own Good in some Respect* concerning impulse is unclear.

3 | SIDGWICK ON THE GUISE OF THE GOOD

Sidgwick rejects every version of *the Guise of the Good* that we have considered. This section adduces evidence from his lectures on Green's ethics and his article “Unreasonable action,” responds to a recent article (Pellegrino, 2021) putting forward a contrary interpretation, and considers one passage from *Methods of ethics*⁸ that may seem to pose a problem for my interpretation.

3.1 | The lectures on Green

The second and third of Sidgwick's lectures on Green's *Prolegomena* respectively concern “Green's view of freedom, and of desire, intellect, and volition” and “Green's view of moral (including immoral) action.” In lecture II, Sidgwick writes that there are “desire[s] directed to an action which we at the same time judge to be bad or incompatible with

our highest good: for example, desire of the pain of another human being” prompted by revenge, or “escape from a post of duty and danger” prompted by fear;

this obvious truth ... is obscured for [Green] ... partly by the fact that he (1) is inclined to refuse the term ‘desire’ to any ‘solicitation’ as he calls it, except one with which a man identifies himself, while (2) desires with which a man identifies himself he conceives as a desire for personal good. (LEGSM, pp. 23–24)

Evidently, Sidgwick thinks that it is possible that one desires *x* and simultaneously believes that *x* isn't one's highest good. Presumably (since he thinks the possibility contradicts what Green says), Sidgwick thinks that this possibility is one in which, in desiring *x*, one doesn't take *x* to be one's highest good. Sidgwick imagines that

Green would ... say: Either you do not yield to the impulse of revenge or fear—then it is merely a solicitation; or you do—then you identify yourself with the impulse and ... regard the object as your personal good. In fact Green ignores wilful choice of evil. This is involved in his account of motive given in the previous chapter; compare §§ 91, 92, and (most explicitly) § 99 [all quoted above]. (LEGSM, p. 24)

That is, Sidgwick thinks that he and Green would agree that what Green calls solicitations (which Sidgwick thinks can quite properly be called desires) are not under the guise of one's own good overall; and that Green believes that desires-in-the-proper-sense, and what Green calls moral actions (“yielding”—Sidgwick's term, not Green's—to an impulse), are under the guise of one's own good overall, but is mistaken on this point because of the possibility of “wilful choice of evil.” Thus, Sidgwick rejects *the Guise of One's Own Good Overall (Desire)* concerning both impulse and desire-in-the-proper-sense, and *the Guise of One's Own Good Overall (Moral Action)*.

There is further evidence for Sidgwick's position on *the Guise of the Good (Action)* from lectures II and III:

[1] in ‘wilful sin’ I have chosen evil known as such; ... in deliberate self-sacrifice I have preferred the ‘good’ of others to mine—not consciously identified it with mine. (LEGSM, p. 27)

[2] what a man chooses is not always chosen as his good, since (a) in wilful sin he chooses what he judges bad on the whole, and (b) in conscious self-sacrifice he prefers the good of others to his own. (LEGSM, p. 30)

[3] [Green] is so far under the influence of ancient Greek and especially Aristotelian modes of thought as to ignore usually, and expressly exclude sometimes, that wilful choice of wrong known to be wrong which is so essential an element in the modern Christian moral consciousness of ‘sin.’ (LEGSM, p. 25)

In referring to “ancient Greek and especially Aristotelian modes of thought,” Sidgwick has in mind (to quote his *Outlines of the history of ethics*) that:

[4] [Plato's and Aristotle's] psychological system has no place for that deliberate choice of evil recognised as such, which, for the Christian moral consciousness, is the primary and prominent type of bad volition. ... The only states of mind which they recognise as immediate antecedents of bad acts are (1) predominance of irrational impulse overpowering rational judgment or prompting to action without deliberation, and (2) mistaken choice of evil under the appearance of good. (*Outlines*, p. 67)

At LEGSM, pp. 30–31, Sidgwick distinguishes six kinds of actions:

- [5] (1) Unconscious[] ...
 (2) Instinctive[]—that is, ... without even rudimentary “intention.”
 (3) With intention but without clear self-consciousness ...
 (4) With *personal* choice, implicit consciousness that one could have determined otherwise, but without *rational* choice—i.e., not as *good*. ...
 (5) Against rational judgment, moral or prudential. We may have wilful choice of what is known to be evil—‘wilful sin’—also deliberate sacrifice of my own good to another’s.
 (6) In accordance with rational judgment, moral or prudential, which may of course be mistaken.

Comparing the classification in passage [5] with Sidgwick’s discussion in *Methods*, 7th edn, l.v.2 (p. 61) indicates that he considers actions of kinds (3)–(6) all to be intentional actions. The comments on self-sacrifice in passages [1], [2], and [5] suggest that Sidgwick thinks that it is possible that, in acting intentionally, one doesn’t take one’s action as one’s own good (overall or in any respect). Thus, he rejects, not just *the Guise of One’s Own Good Overall (Action)*, but *the Guise of One’s Own Good in some Respect (Action)*. Discussing wilful choice of evil in all five passages, Sidgwick implies that it is possible that, in acting intentionally, one doesn’t act “under the appearance of good.” In implying this, Sidgwick rejects *the Guise of the Good Overall (Action)*.

These passages are not, by themselves, decisive as to whether Sidgwick also rejects the corresponding theses concerning desire, for, as a reviewer (to whom I am grateful) points out, Sidgwick may think that one can act without acting from desire and that any action not under the guise of the good is also not from desire. This would leave it open for Sidgwick to think, like Mill, both that, in desiring anything, one desires it under the guise of one’s own good, and that one can intentionally sacrifice one’s own good by acting out of will and overriding desire.⁹ For this reason, Skorupski (2000, p. 328) thinks that “Sidgwick never makes ... clear ... [whether] he agree[s] or disagree[s] with the Mill/Green thesis, that whatever is desired is desired as part of one’s own good.”

However, Sidgwick’s discussion of psychological hedonism in *Methods*, l.iv tells against this possibility. In the seventh edition version of l.iv, having defined “Psychological Hedonism” as “the view that volition is always determined by pleasures or pains actual or prospective,” Sidgwick writes that, in “subject[ing] psychological Hedonism ... to ... examination,” “[t]he question at issue ... is ... whether there are no desires and aversions which have not pleasures and pains for their objects” (7th edn, pp. 40–43). The implication is that (treating aversion as negative desire) the only way for the will not to be always determined by pleasures and pains is for there to be desires not directed at pleasure or pain. Sidgwick, this suggests, thinks that one cannot act without acting from desire. A discussion of Mill in the first edition version of *Methods*, l.iv, omitted from subsequent editions, also tells against the possibility raised by the reviewer. If Mill were right that “we desire a thing *in proportion* as the idea of it is pleasant” (Sidgwick’s italics), Sidgwick writes, “the scope of ethical discussion would be much more limited than it is ordinarily thought to be,” because

if in the case of any conflict of impulses all the conflicting desires and aversions are strictly proportioned to pleasures and pains in prospect, then the resultant impulse must always be directed towards what appears to be the individual’s greatest happiness. On this view the notions “right” and “wrong” would seem to have no meaning except as applied to the intellectual state accompanying volition: since if future pleasures and pains be truly represented, the desire must be directed towards its proper object. And thus the only possible method of Ethics would seem to be some form of Egoistic Hedonism. ... If my own greatest happiness—or what I think such—is what I cannot help aiming at, it cannot be true that I ought to aim at something else. (*Methods*, l.iv, pp. 30–31; underlining mine)

The crucial point for our purposes is that Sidgwick assumes that volition goes together with the impulse resulting from the balance of desires, which (as the emboldened “desire” indicates) Sidgwick takes to be itself a desire: if an

agent's all-things-considered desire (as we might call it) is necessarily directed at what appears to be his greatest happiness, so must his volition be. Indeed, in the earlier article version of the chapter, "Pleasure and desire" (where Sidgwick seems to be aware of Mill's distinction of will from desire—see the footnote on p. 671), Sidgwick professes that he "cannot reconcile" Mill's allowing that people sometimes choose a good that they know to be less valuable (even when the competing goods are pleasures of the same kind) with Mill's view about the connection between pleasantness in idea and desire. "If we always desire more strongly what is in idea most pleasant, how can we choose what we know to be the less valuable pleasure?" ("Pleasure and desire," p. 665). Sidgwick, this suggests, thinks that one cannot act without acting from one's strongest desire. Thus, that Sidgwick rejects *the Guise of One's Own Good in some Respect (Action)* and *the Guise of the Good Overall (Action)* is indeed evidence that he also rejects the corresponding theses concerning desire.¹⁰

In [2], by "wilful sin," Sidgwick means choosing "what [one] judges bad on the whole." One can judge something bad on the whole, yet take it to be good in some respect. Does Sidgwick accept *the Guise of the Good in some Respect (Action)*? The right answer is probably that Sidgwick does not consider this version of *the Guise of the Good*, which was developed in response to criticisms of *the Guise of the Good* like those made by him; and the evidence of LEGSM provides little basis for speculating about whether Sidgwick would accept *the Guise of the Good in some Respect*. (His comment in [5] on actions of kind (4) may be an exception. Sidgwick seems to say that, in doing such an action, one doesn't take it to be good, not because one acts against a judgment of what is good overall, but because one doesn't make an evaluative judgment about the action at all. This seems to be a counterexample to *the Guise of the Good in some Respect (Action)*, similar to Hursthouse's (1991) "arational actions.")

3.2 | "Unreasonable action"

More evidence for Sidgwick's views about *the Guise of the Good* comes from his article "Unreasonable action," in which he is concerned with how actions that are contrary to the agent's own judgment of what he ought to do are to be explained. Sidgwick mentions Green and Bentham as philosophers whose theories imply that such actions aren't really possible (pp. 180–182), but argues, to the contrary, that such actions *are* possible. Sidgwick writes: "My conclusion on the whole would be that – in the case of reflective persons – a clear consciousness that an act is what ought not to be done, accompanying a voluntary determination to do it, is a comparatively rare phenomenon. It is, indeed, a phenomenon that does occur" (p. 183).¹¹ The "ought not" judgments with which Sidgwick is concerned are presumably judgments that imply that the agent doesn't take the act to be good overall. Sidgwick argues that, in many apparent instances of the phenomenon being investigated, the relevant practical judgment is either (1) not present or (2) only obscurely present (p. 183), and gives examples of (1) on pp. 183–185 and of (2) on pp. 185–186 and in the article's last paragraph (p. 187). Nonetheless, in the penultimate paragraph, he writes:

there remains pure undisguised wilfulness—where a man with his eyes open simply refuses to act in accordance with his practical judgment, although the latter is clearly present in his consciousness, and his attention is fully directed towards it. I think it undeniable that this phenomenon occurs[.] (pp. 186–187)

Again, Sidgwick thinks that it is possible that, in intentionally doing an action, one doesn't take it to be good overall. Thus, he rejects at least *the Guise of the Good Overall (Action)*. What he says in "Unreasonable action" suggests that he would reject *the Guise of the Good in some Respect (Action)* too. That, in "pure undisguised wilfulness," someone acts against his judgment that an action ought not to be done when "his attention is fully directed towards" this judgment suggests that he doesn't have in his consciousness any other judgment, in particular any judgment that the action is good in some respect. This interpretation is confirmed by what Sidgwick says later in the paragraph:

my experience would lead me to conclude that it [sc. pure undisguised wilfulness] more often takes place in the case of negative action—non-performance of known duty: in the case of positive wrong action some process by which the opposing judgment is somehow thrust into the background of consciousness seems to me normally necessary[.] (p. 187)

This implies that, in pure undisguised wilfulness, no opposing judgment is in even “the background of consciousness.” Sidgwick seems to allow the possibility that, in intentionally doing an action, someone judges that it ought not to be done and doesn't take it to be good in any respect, and thus to reject *the Guise of the Good in some Respect (Action)*. Another consideration, which I owe to Roger Crisp, is that Sidgwick thinks that “pure undisguised wilfulness” is rare, but merely akratic actions where, in doing the action, one takes it to be good in some respect, but not good overall, surely are not rare.

In “Unreasonable action,” Sidgwick sometimes speaks of desire, instead of action, in the role of that which opposes the practical judgment: for example, “the judgment which Desire finds in its way” (p. 185), “the ingenuity of self-sophistication is shown [in] the process of persuading oneself that a brave and manly self-identification with a vicious desire is better than a weak self-deceptive submission to it” (p. 187), “the desire which is stimulating the unreasonable volition” (p. 183), “I should say that it was far easier for a desire clearly recognised as conflicting with reason to inhibit action than to cause it” (p. 187). It is reasonable to infer, then, that Sidgwick thinks that in the cases of pure wilfulness that he argues to be possible,¹² agents do act from some desire, and that he also rejects *the Guise of the Good in some Respect (Desire)* (and a fortiori all stronger versions of *the Guise of the Good* concerning desire).

3.3 | Pellegrino's argument

Contrary to what I have argued, Pellegrino (2021) argues that Sidgwick accepts *the Guise of the Good*. In fact, however, the passages that Pellegrino cites as crucial support for this conclusion are irrelevant to whether Sidgwick accepts *the Guise of the Good*.

Pellegrino (2021, p. 107) writes:

Sidgwick says that [a] ‘emotions’, [b] ‘the impulse that prompts us to obey the dictates of Reason’, and [c] ‘the feelings which prompt to voluntary action’ are [d] ‘inseparable from an apparent cognition – implicit or explicit, direct or indirect – of rightness in the conduct to which they prompt’ [*Methods*, 7th edn, I.iv.1]. Elsewhere, he remarks: [e] ‘The peculiar emotion of moral approbation is, in my experience, inseparably bound up with the conviction, implicit or explicit, that the conduct approved is ‘really’ right – i.e. that it cannot, without error, be disapproved by any other mind’ [*Methods*, 7th edn, I.iii.1.]. (The labels in square brackets are mine.)

Pellegrino's claim that [c] are [d] can be dismissed, since [c] in fact occurs in the paragraph *after* [d], when Sidgwick has moved on to a different issue (psychological hedonism), and there is no suggestion that [c] are [d].

It is unclear of which token of “emotions” [a] is supposed to be a quotation, and [b] is separated from [d] by a considerable portion of text. In the paragraph in which [a], [b], and [d] occur, Sidgwick begins by saying that he has “left undetermined the emotional characteristics of the impulse that prompts us to obey the dictates of Reason,” because they seem to vary greatly between different people and in the same person, without varying in what they prompt to. He then discusses various emotions as which [b] might be felt. He concludes: “Other phases of emotion might be mentioned, all having with these the common characteristic that they are inseparable from an apparent cognition ... of rightness in the conduct to which they prompt.” Evidently, Sidgwick does not say that emotions in general are “inseparable from an apparent cognition ... of rightness in the conduct to which they prompt.” Rather, what he says is that the impulse that prompts us to obey the dictates of reason, under whatever emotional guise it is

felt, is “inseparable from an apparent cognition ... of rightness” in the conduct to which it prompts. This claim, as Pellegrino notes, expresses, not *the Guise of the Good*, but only the uninteresting thesis: “(1') when we rationally desire X, we see it as morally right” (Pellegrino, 2021, p. 108). This thesis is uninterestingly true, at any rate, in Sidgwick's terms: by “dictate of reason,” Sidgwick means “the cognition or judgment that ‘X ought to be done’—in the stricter ethical sense of the term ought” (*Methods*, 7th edn, I.iii.3, p. 34). Thus, the thesis that Pellegrino finds in Sidgwick amounts to: when we desire X as morally right, we see it as morally right.

[e], from Sidgwick's argument against meta-ethical subjectivism, says: if one feels the emotion of moral approbation of some conduct, one believes, implicitly or explicitly, that the conduct is right and cannot be disapproved by another without error. This perhaps suggests (1'), as Pellegrino takes it to suggest, but it certainly does not express *the Guise of the Good*.

Pellegrino's introduction of passages [a]–[e] is puzzling, since he himself thinks that they express only (1'), not *the Guise of the Good*. Yet, he seems to think that they establish a presumption in favor of ascribing *the Guise of the Good* to Sidgwick, and the remainder of his argument for the ascription is presented as responses to objections. He says later of another of his claims that, together with passages [a]–[e], it “constitutes cumulative evidence” for the ascription (Pellegrino, 2021, p. 111). But establishing that Sidgwick held (1') does not establish a presumption in favor of ascribing *the Guise of the Good* to Sidgwick, and passages [a]–[e] are no evidence at all for the ascription.

Pellegrino also discusses “Unreasonable action.” How does he avoid concluding that Sidgwick rejects *the Guise of the Good*? Pellegrino (2021, p. 109) writes: “exactly like many supporters of GG [sc. *the Guise of the Good*] Sidgwick explains them away by positing that they are desires for an *apparent* good.” He then quotes Sidgwick's distinction of cases of apparent unreasonable action in which the relevant practical judgment is either (1) not present or (2) only obscurely present from the “comparatively rare” cases in which it is clearly present, and describes the mechanisms whereby Sidgwick claims a judgment opposing the relevant practical judgment manages to influence the agent in cases of kinds (1) and (2). But this is beside the point. Sidgwick explains away many apparent counterexamples to *the Guise of the Good*, but not all.

3.4 | *Methods*, 7th edn, I.ix.3

I know of only one passage that may support attributing *the Guise of the Good* to Sidgwick. It is from the first paragraph of *Methods*, 7th edn, I.ix.3, where Sidgwick considers the definition of one's good as whatever one desires. He raises this objection: “a man often desires what he knows is on the whole bad for him,” for example “the pleasure of drinking champagne which is sure to disagree with him.” Sidgwick answers: in such cases, the agent only desires what he considers good, and what he considers bad is by him known to accompany or follow what he desires, but not desired. Sidgwick continues:

granting this, and fixing attention solely on the result desired, apart from its concomitants and consequences—it would still seem that what is desired at any time is, as such, merely apparent Good, which may not be found good when fruition comes, or at any rate not so good as it appeared. It may turn out a ‘Dead Sea apple,’ mere dust and ashes in the eating: more often, fruition will partly correspond to expectation, but may still fall short of it in a marked degree. And sometimes—even while yielding to the desire—we are aware of the illusoriness of this expectation of ‘good’ which the desire carries with it. I conclude, therefore, that ... we cannot identify the object of desire with ‘good’ simply, or ‘true good,’ but only with ‘apparent good.’ (*Methods*, 7th edn, p. 110)

Here, Sidgwick may seem to say that the object of desire is always “apparent good,” and that desire “carries with it” an “expectation of ‘good’.”

We should note, however, the passage's dialectical situation. It occurs during Sidgwick's attempt to develop a desire-based definition of the good, beginning with crude, unsatisfactory definitions and progressively making them more satisfactory. Sidgwick's concern in the paragraph where the passage is located is to reject the definition of one's good as whatever one desires, not to give an account of desire. It suffices for his purpose to show that what one desires isn't the (true) good, and it is understandable if he is somewhat loose in language with respect to a matter that isn't at issue. Moreover, in the sentence, "sometimes—even while yielding to the desire—we are aware of the illusoriness of this expectation of 'good' which the desire carries with it," "this expectation of 'good' which the desire carries with it" refers to "expectation" in the previous sentence, which refers in turn to the "merely apparent Good" that is "what is desired" in the sentence before. Thus, the sentence doesn't imply that every desire carries with it an expectation of good, but merely says that, among the cases where what is desired is merely apparent good, in some of them we are aware that it is merely apparent, not true, good.

In sum, Sidgwick says that what we desire is *at best* "apparent good," not true good, and we are sometimes even aware that it isn't the true good—without prejudice as to whether what one desires is indeed always apparent good and without claiming that every desire carries with it an expectation of good.

4 | GREEN'S THEORY AND SIDGWICK'S CRITICISM INTERPRETED AND ASSESSED

Why does Green accept, and Sidgwick reject, *the Guise of the Good Overall* and *the Guise of One's Own Good Overall*? Is Sidgwick's criticism of Green effective? On first appearance, Green and Sidgwick base their positions on strikingly similar methods. Green writes:

self-reflection is the basis of the view here given in regard to the distinctive character of the motives which moral actions represent. ... [I]t is to it, avowedly, that we make our appeal when we say that to every action morally imputable, or of which a man can recognise himself as the author, the motive is always some idea of the man's personal good. (§95)

In *LEGSM*, Sidgwick does not make explicit his basis for believing that there are cases of wilful wrongdoing that are counterexamples to *the Guise of the Good*, except in invoking "the modern Christian moral consciousness of 'sin[]'" (*LEGSM*, p. 25); but in "Unreasonable action," he explicitly states that his methodology is "introspective observation" (p. 183), "to observe with as much care as possible ... the mental process that actually takes place in the case of unreasonable action" (p. 182). Green is concerned "to conduct his self-reflection as circumspectly as possible, and to save it as far as may be from errors which personal idiosyncrasy might occasion, by constant reference to the customary expressions of moral consciousness in use among men, and to the institutions in which men have embodied their ideas or ideals of permanent good. In the interpretation, however, of such expressions and institutions self-reflection must be our ultimate guide" (§95, p. 106). Similarly, Sidgwick is wary of "put[ting] forward [his] results ... as typical and fairly representative of the experiences of men in general" ("Unreasonable action," p. 183), and appeals also to "the common moral experience of mankind" (p. 182).

If all we have is clashing reports of the results of introspection, the controversy between Green and Sidgwick would, perhaps, be of little interest except in illustrating a course that the debate over *the Guise of the Good* has commonly, but unfruitfully, taken. As Setiya (2010, p. 83) puts it:

Objections to the guise of the good often take the form of examples, cases of perversity or depression in which it is argued that someone acts in a way that she regards as bad without qualification, or simply finds indifferent. Without elaboration, however, this strategy is bound to fail. The description of the examples is controversial, and advocates of the guise of the good will find ingenious ways in

which to make sense of them. What is more, taken by themselves, the examples leave untouched the *grounds* for accepting the guise of the good. How does our reflection on agency push us toward it? ... The point cuts both ways. If descriptions of spiteful action do not refute the guise of the good, it is not established by Anscombe's ... well-known remarks about wanting a saucer of mud.

Take one of the several ways in which putative counterexamples might be redescribed. Sidgwick claims: it is possible that one chooses what one judges bad overall. Defenders of Green might reply: in such cases, one nonetheless experiences an appearance of the chosen action as good, and in acting on this appearance *takes* the action as good, even while one *judges* it bad, just as one might see a stick in water as bent even while judging it straight.¹³ Indeed, Green's terminology of “presenting ... as good” fits well with this response. We reach a stalemate that further introspection is unlikely to resolve.

4.1 | Green on moral responsibility and *the Guise of the Good*

But the case of Green and Sidgwick isn't quite like this. Despite Green's methodological statement, the broader discussion in which his remarks on *the Guise of the Good* occur suggests, if not an argument for the thesis, at least its role in his theory. One of Green's concerns in the discussion of action, desire, and will in the *Prolegomena* is to establish what actions are morally imputable to an agent. Green's position seems, *prima facie*, to be straightforwardly a Humean compatibilism whereby moral responsibility attaches (as Hume puts it [*Treatise*, 2.3.2.6]) to “durable or constant” causes in an agent's “characters and disposition”:

The view ... that action is the joint result of character and circumstances, if we know what we are about when we speak of character, does not render shame and remorse unaccountable and unjustifiable[.] ... On the contrary, rightly understood, it alone justifies them. If a man's action did not represent his character but an arbitrary freak of some unaccountable power of unmotivated willing, why should he be ashamed of it or reproach himself with it? (§110)

One's actions, Green thinks, are determined by circumstances and character (“All results are *necessary* results” [§109]),¹⁴ and one is morally responsible only for actions that “represent” one's character; in turn, one's character is determined by its history: “the form in which the self ... at any time presents a highest good to itself—and it is on this presentation that conduct depends—is due to the past history of its inner life” (§102).

But Green holds distinctive views about what “represent[s] one's” ... character.” Green claims (i) that moral responsibility depends on moral actions not being natural events:

that a man's action is the joint result of his character and circumstances, is true enough in a certain sense, and, in that sense, is quite compatible with an assertion of human freedom. It is *not* so compatible, if character and circumstances are considered reducible... to combinations and sequences of natural events. (§106)

Moral responsibility “implies the action of an eternal consciousness which makes the processes of animal life organic to a particular reproduction of itself in man” (§115). Moreover, Green claims, (ii) the particular action by one's eternal self implied is that of presenting the act for which it is to be responsible as its greatest good—moral responsibility depends on moral actions being done under the guise of one's own good overall.

Why does Green claiming (ii)? (His motivation for claiming (i) will be considered in the next sub-section.) Green thinks that an action directly caused by an impulse, with which one doesn't identify and which to that extent feels external, doesn't “represent one's character” and so isn't imputable. If Esau's action, he writes,

were determined directly by the hunger, it would have no moral character, any more than have actions done in sleep, or strictly under compulsion[.] ... Since, however, it is not the hunger as a natural force, but his own conception of himself, as finding for the time his greatest good in the satisfaction of hunger, that determines the act, Esau recognises himself as the author of the act. He imputes it to himself, and it is morally imputable to him[.] ... If evil follows from it, ... he is aware that he himself has brought it on himself. (§96)

For Green, it seems, an action's imputability to an agent requires that the agent endorse it, which is to take it as, at that moment, choiceworthy by her and in this sense as her good overall.¹⁵ It is indeed *prima facie* plausible that, for example, the kleptomaniac who regards her impulse as an alien imposition, and doesn't take stealing to be something that she has reason to do, isn't morally responsible for stealing, at least directly (she may be indirectly responsible if she is responsible for, say, failing to take reasonable precautions to restrain herself from stealing). Green's position here doesn't imply that an agent isn't morally responsible for actions that are "out of character" in the ordinary-language sense, that is, deriving from transient rather than enduring traits¹⁶; what matters, on Green's account, is, rather, whether the agent endorses the action.¹⁷

4.2 | Green's metaphysics of agency

Is this interpretation of the role of *the Guise of One's Own Good Overall* in Green's theory of agency and moral responsibility compatible (a) with his claim (i) that moral responsibility depends on moral actions not being natural events, and (b) with the theory of the eternal self that underlies this claim?

(a) Not only is the above interpretation compatible with (i), but it, together with Green's other views, gives reason to accept (i). According to the above interpretation, moral responsibility depends on the agent's taking the action to be his greatest good. Green also thinks that an agent's taking an action to be his greatest good cannot be a natural event.¹⁸ It follows from these positions that (i) moral responsibility for actions depends on their not being natural events.

Why does Green think that an agent's taking an action to be his greatest good cannot be a natural event? Desire-in-the-proper-sense—"desire in that sense in which desire is ever the principle or motive of an imputable human action" (§144)—implies, Green writes, "a consciousness of [the] object, which in turn implies a consciousness of self" (§118). Green believes that, in perception, "the presentation of sensible things ... implies the action of a principle which is not, like sensation, in time, or an event or a series of events, but must equally be present to, and distinguish itself from, the several stages of a sensation to which attention is given." "In like manner," he thinks, "the transition from mere want to consciousness of a wanted object ... implies the presence of the want to a subject which distinguishes itself from it and is constant throughout successive stages of the want" (§85); and it is this "form of consciousness ... which yields, in the most elementary form, the conception of something that *should be* as distinct from that which *is*" (§86). That is, the conscious distinction of the self from wanted objects implied in taking an object to be good requires the postulation of an atemporal subject that distinguishes itself from the animal life, including sensations and wants, that is "organic" to it (cf. Mander, 2012, p. 70).

(b) Tyler (2010, Chapter 6) and Mander (2012) argue that Green presents "two rival pictures of the eternal self" (Mander, 2012, pp. 74–75) and how it makes moral responsibility possible (Tyler thinks that they are inconsistent, Mander [2012, p. 80] that Green can "reduce," but not altogether remove, the tension between them). One is a libertarian account, on which one's actions are undetermined because one's eternal self, being outside time and the causal order, has "freedom in something like the fashion of alternative possibilities" (Mander, 2012, p. 72). The other is a compatibilist account, on which "we may be said to freely perform, and to be morally responsible for, those actions which flow from our character" (Mander, 2012, p. 74). Even if *the Guise of One's Own Good Overall* were

needed to deliver moral responsibility on the compatibilist account, would it not be redundant if Green accepted the libertarian account?

Green's theory of the eternal self does not, however, entail a libertarian account of moral responsibility whereby, at any time, the circumstances and the agent's character, taken together, leave open alternative possibilities as to what the agent presents as his greatest good and thus does (cf. Mander, 2012, p. 72), such that freedom and moral responsibility could be grounded in the availability of alternative possibilities. Green is clear in accepting "that moral action is the joint result of character and circumstances," in the sense "that moral action is the expression of a man's character, as it reacts upon and responds to given circumstances" (§107); and he understands "result" in a such way that "[a]ll results are necessary results" (§109), and "character" as formed by previous moral actions—"the ever-new adoption of desired objects by a self-presenting and, in that sense, eternal subject as its personal good" (§101). Character and circumstances, taken together, do not leave open alternative possibilities as to what the agent does.

In any case, Green's remarks as to moral actions not being natural events, and their requiring a timeless consciousness, on which Mander and Tyler base the libertarian interpretation (for example, Mander, 2012, pp. 81–82, nn. 5–14), should be otherwise interpreted. Green himself provides an elucidation, worth quoting in full, of what he recognizes could easily be taken for an inconsistency:

Two seemingly incompatible, yet equally true, sets of statements may be made in regard to it [sc. motive as an idea of personal good]; which, however, are not really incompatible, because one relates to the motive in its full reality, which is not a sensible event, the other to a sensible event which is implied in it ... but is not it. The sensible event or phenomenon, implied in the motive, is, like every other event, determined by antecedent events according to natural laws. The motive itself, though it too is in its own way definitely determined, is not naturally determined. It is constituted by an act of self-consciousness which is not a natural event, an act in which the agent presents to himself a certain idea of himself—of himself doing or himself enjoying—as an idea of which the realisation forms for the time his good. It is true that the moral quality of this act, its virtue or its vice, depends on the character of the agent. It is this that determines what the kind of personal good, which under any set of circumstances he presents to himself, shall be. This character, in turn, has had its history, just as a man's developed intelligence, as it at any time stands, has had a history. But just as this latter history, though to call it a history of an eternal consciousness would be a contradiction, has yet taken its distinctive nature, as a history of *intelligence*, from a certain action of an eternal self-distinguishing consciousness upon the processes of feeling; so the history of human character has been one in which the same consciousness has throughout been operative upon wants of animal origin, giving rise through its action upon them to the specific quality of that history. (§95; underlining mine)

Green does not deny that what an agent presents as good, in given circumstances, is determined by his character, but only denies that this determination is natural, that is "by antecedent events according to natural laws." This determination cannot be natural because the action which is determined is not a natural event, and moreover the agent's character, which determines, is the result of a history of non-natural actions of the eternal consciousness (which actions, being timeless, are not literally antecedent, but are a history in the sense that they relate to circumstances in time antecedent to the circumstances to which the determined action relates¹⁹). Nonetheless, although the determination of the latter action by the former actions and circumstances isn't causal as determination within the natural world is, since the operation of the eternal consciousness is metaphysically prior to the laws of the natural world (§§52, 54, 75–77, 82),²⁰ Green thinks that there is a non-natural kind of determination applying to the actions of the eternal consciousness whereby the latter action cannot but be the case given the former actions and circumstances. As Green says in his lectures on Kant, "the connection of human actions with each other is as regular and admits of being as definitely known ... as that of natural phænomena" (*Works*, ii, 103). The sense in which the agent whose action is "determined by the idea of himself as the object for the sake of which the act is done" and

who thus “imputes it to himself” is free is “not a sense ... in which freedom ... =power to do or not to do.” Rather, “it is a sense in which freedom is opposed to the determination of one natural event by another, or a phænomenon by a phænomenon (for this consciousness of self as an object is not such an event or phænomenon), and it is a sense in which freedom implies a certain sort of determination by reason” (*Works*, ii, 108–109). Thus, Green's theory of the eternal consciousness does not allow alternative possibilities of the kind that might make *the Guise of One's Own Good Overall* redundant for grounding moral responsibility.

4.3 | Sidgwick's criticism of Green

Sidgwick's criticism of Green's *Guise of the Good* thesis, in his discussion of Green's views of desire and volition (*LEGSM*, pp. 22–28), is based only on putative counterexamples; he hardly considers why Green accepts *the Guise of the Good*, except in saying that Green is too much influenced by Greek thought (*LEGSM*, p. 25). As suggested above, this is a strategy of limited fruitfulness.

In his preceding discussion of Green's account of freedom (*LEGSM*, pp. 16–22), Sidgwick—without comment as to the truth or falsity of *the Guise of the Good*—does recognize that Green grounds an action's imputability in its being done under the guise of one's own good. Could an effective criticism of Green's *Guise of the Good* thesis be constructed from what Sidgwick says in criticizing Green's account of freedom?

Sidgwick regards Green's view “as being, for all practical purposes, pure Determinism” (*LEGSM*, p. 16). In Green's view, Sidgwick says in his lectures on “The metaphysics of T. H. Green,” “‘free’ simply means ‘not natural’, not explicable by natural causality; and that ... means only that in human intelligence and human volition alike ... a self-distinguishing, self-objectifying consciousness is necessary” (Sidgwick, *Lectures* [1905], p. 253). In *LEGSM*, Sidgwick makes the same point, and charges that freedom in this sense cannot justify moral imputation:

if we ask why a particular self is determined to present to itself a given idea rather than any other, as its greatest good, we cannot find the answer in the universal element of the self which is common to all particular selves—saints and sinners alike—we must therefore find it in the particular element. ...

That the motive ‘lies in the man himself, that he makes it’—i.e. that it is what it is in consequence of the activity of a self-conscious intelligence—‘and is aware of doing so’ (§102), does not really make any difference, if that in his character which causes him to make his motive good or bad is due to its past history: and this would seem to be the case on Green's view, as there is nothing in the mere presence of self-consciousness ... to determine its goodness or badness. (*LEGSM*, p. 20)

Whether Sidgwick's criticism is successful in undermining Green's account of freedom—and, thus, whether it is successful in undermining the rationale for Green's accepting *the Guise of the Good* that I have proposed—depends on further exegetical and philosophical issues. Sidgwick takes it (a) that Green differs from more typical, naturalistic determinists only in claiming that certain actions are imputable in virtue of being done under the guise of the good and as such non-naturally, and thinks (b) that actions cannot be imputable just in virtue of being done in this way, if they are nonetheless determined by circumstances and a character that is itself determined by its history. Both (a) and (b) can be challenged. In accepting (b), Sidgwick is rejecting compatibilist theories on which it is sufficient for moral responsibility that the action issues from the agent's character, and unnecessary that this character itself not be ultimately determined by external circumstances. This is consistent with Sidgwick's position in the chapter on free will in *Methods*, where he writes (in the seventh edition version), “if the wrong act, and the bad qualities of character manifested in it, are conceived as the necessary effects of causes antecedent or external to the existence of the agent, the moral responsibility—in the ordinary sense—for the mischief caused by them can no longer rest on him” (7th edn, I.v.4, p. 71); but neither in *Methods* nor in *LEGSM* does Sidgwick argue for this position. In light of sophisticated compatibilist theories developed both before and after Sidgwick, his dismissal here of compatibilism is rather

too quick; if it is to be the basis of an effective criticism of the proposed rationale for Green's accepting *the Guise of the Good*, more will have to be said.

I have suggested that, for Green, being done under the guise of the good—and thus being non-natural in the way that, on Green's metaphysics, an action done under the guise of the good must be—is necessary for explaining moral responsibility. But it is unclear that Green intends it to be sufficient. If there is more to Green's account of freedom than what (a) claims, merely establishing (b) may not undermine the proposed rationale for Green's accepting *the Guise of the Good*. On one interpretation, Green's account of freedom has an ultimate libertarian basis: “the eternal self-conscious subject of the world” timelessly makes an undetermined choice to “reproduce” itself in a particular self with a certain character constituted by certain moral actions, among which relations of non-natural determination hold (cf. §100); and while it is in virtue of being done under the guise of a particular self's own good overall that an action reflects that self's character, it is in virtue of the undetermined choice of the eternal consciousness to reproduce itself in a particular self that this particular self—the eternal consciousness thus reproduced—is responsible for the actions that reflect its character. This is a mere sketch of an interpretation, which cannot be elaborated here. But it suggests that one who accepts Green's metaphysics has resources for grounding moral responsibility in conjunction with *the Guise of the Good* that Sidgwick does not consider.

5 | CONCLUSION

Did *the Guise of the Good* fall into obscurity? That Green accepts the thesis in *Prolegomena to ethics*, a work of great philosophical and public influence in Britain for several decades,²¹ does not, of course, settle the question, but it should prompt further research into how widely, and for what reasons, *the Guise of the Good* was discussed, accepted or rejected by other philosophers of the period. My discussion of the role of *the Guise of the Good* in Green's moral psychology, I also hope, has philosophical as well as historical interest. Although recent discussions of *the Guise of the Good* have not been unaware that the thesis may be connected to questions about moral responsibility, this concern has generally been secondary to questions about the explanation of action. While Green does not argue for *the Guise of the Good*, it can be located in his moral psychology in an interesting way, and the connection between *the Guise of the Good* and moral responsibility is worth further exploration.

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ENDNOTES

¹ For example, Raz (2016, p. 5).

² For example, Tenenbaum (2007).

³ This passage is quoted in Sidgwick, *Lectures on the ethics of Green, Spencer, and Martineau* (hereafter “LEGSM”), pp. 24–25. Section numbers refer to Green's *Prolegomena*, of which I use Brink's edition (Green, 2003).

⁴ This passage is partly quoted in LEGSM, p. 19.

⁵ This passage is quoted in LEGSM, p. 18.

⁶ Elsewhere, Green speaks of “moral or distinctively human actions” (§87). Calderwood (1885, pp. 82–83) criticizes Green's identification of moral actions with motivated or distinctively human actions.

⁷ In his *Lectures on Kant*, Green glosses “moral action” as “an action morally imputable, or for which the agent is accountable, an action to which praise or blame are appropriate” (*Works*, ii, 133).

- ⁸ Hereafter “*Methods*,” cited by book, chapter and section, followed by page.
- ⁹ Cf. Skorupski (2021, pp. 447–448).
- ¹⁰ Skorupski (2000, p. 316), considering *Methods*, 6th edn (here identical to the seventh edition), I.iv, says: Sidgwick “denies that every desire is a desire for one’s pleasure[.] ... However this leaves open the possibility that when people desire things other than their pleasure, they still ... desire them as part of their good.” My suggestion is that Sidgwick’s argument in *Methods*, I.iv, while not itself committing him to also rejecting that possibility, implies a view of the connection of action to desire that, together with his rejection elsewhere of *the Guise of One’s Own Good in some Respect (Action)* and *the Guise of the Good Overall (Action)*, indicates that he also rejects the corresponding theses concerning desire.
- ¹¹ The “ought” here is not narrowly moral: “by ‘practical judgment’ I do not necessarily mean what is ordinarily called ‘moral judgment.’ ... I mean, of course, to include this as one species of the phenomenon to be discussed; but in my view, and, I think, in the view of Common-Sense, there are many cases of consciously unreasonable action where morality in the ordinary sense does not supply the judgment to which the act is opposed” (“Unreasonable action,” p. 175).
- ¹² Sidgwick evidently thinks that, in akratic action, agents do act from some desire, allowing inference from the falsity of a guise-of-the-good thesis about action to that of the corresponding thesis about desire, for he believes that cases of akratic action show that “Mill’s general statement as to the relation of Desire to Pleasure and the Pleasant ... need[s] some qualification” (“Unreasonable action,” p. 181).
- ¹³ Stampe (1987) and Tenenbaum (2007) develop versions of this proposal.
- ¹⁴ Green MS 10A, 37, quoted in Thomas (1987, p. 207), provides more evidence for the compatibilist interpretation: “if it were possible for us to have an insight into a man’s character... as exhibited in his inner no less than outer actions, so thorough that every slightest impulse should be known to us as well as all outward circumstances acting on him, we could predict his future conduct as certainly as the occurrence of an eclipse; and for all that it may be maintained that he is free.”
- ¹⁵ That Green thinks that responsibility for an action requires the agent’s endorsing it as choiceworthy, not for someone else, not necessarily for everyone, but for herself, may explain why Green accepts the guise of *one’s own good* (cf. §92; Tyler, 2010, pp. 119–121). Brink (2003, pp. 27–28) and Irwin (2009, pp. 586–587) suggest other explanations.
- ¹⁶ Tyler (2010, p. 121) takes the rhetorical question at §110—“If a man’s action did not represent his character but an arbitrary freak of some unaccountable power of unmotivated willing, why should he ... reproach himself with it?”—to imply (assuming, Tyler writes, that by “arbitrary freak” Green doesn’t just mean something like sleepwalking) that actions that are “out of character” in the ordinary-language sense aren’t morally imputable, which Tyler thinks conflicts with “Green’s own theory.” Tyler probably has in mind Green’s view that (as Green puts it elsewhere) “moral predicates are ultimately relative” to character, which is formed insofar as an agent’s “effort [towards self-satisfaction] ... tends to fix itself in a certain direction” (*Works*, ii, 141–144 [*Lectures on Kant*]; cf. ii, 337 [*Principles of political obligation*]). This view deserves further consideration. Nonetheless, at §110, where Green takes “character” and “circumstances” to jointly determine action, “character” plausibly means something like the totality of the agent’s motive-adopting dispositions, which can produce action that is “out of character” in the ordinary-language sense; by “arbitrary freak of unmotivated willing” Green cannot intend (as Tyler seems to think) a really possible contrast-case of willing that doesn’t express character, for Green thinks that “unmotivated willing” is impossible (“To a will free in the sense of unmotivated we can attach no meaning whatever” [§97]).
- ¹⁷ A succinct statement of Green’s view is at *Works*, iii, 224 (“Fragment on ‘The word is nigh thee’”). There have been prominent endorsement theories of free action in recent analytical philosophy; that of Watson (1975), on which a free action is one whose motivation accords with the agent’s system of values, bears particular resemblance to Green’s view. Actions that are akratic or unreflective, but free, are often thought to pose problems for endorsement theories; Irwin (2009, pp. 588–590) makes a criticism of Green of this kind, and sketches a modification that might allow Green to avoid it.
- ¹⁸ As Skorupski (2000, p. 323) says, Green implicitly denies that “any naturalistic account can be given of *what it is to ... act on the basis of a reason*.”
- ¹⁹ It is natural for us to speak analogically when speaking of the eternal consciousness. Green notes (§§75–77) the analogical nature of the term “cause” when applied to the action of the eternal consciousness. Mander (2006, pp. 188–190) suggests a rationale for Green’s metaphorical language.
- ²⁰ As Sprigge (2006, pp. 232, 235) puts it, likening the natural world to “a story spun by an eternal consciousness,” “the human mind is not merely something in the story but is part of the story-teller.” “Nature,” in Green’s normal usage, means “the system of related phenomena” as distinct from “the principle, other than itself, which that system implies” (§54); there is an interesting analogy with Spinoza’s *natura naturata* and *natura naturans*.
- ²¹ For Green’s influence, see, for example, Richter (1964).

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