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The Cosmos of Duty is not in Chaos: a Defense of the Unity of Practical Reasons

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**THE COSMOS OF DUTY IS NOT IN CHAOS:
A DEFENSE OF THE UNITY OF PRACTICAL REASONS**

by

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A thesis submitted to the
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of the requirement for the degree of

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This thesis entitled:
The Cosmos of Duty is not in Chaos: A Defense of the Unity of Practical Reasons
written by Spencer Jay Case
has been approved for the Department of Philosophy

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The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we
Find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards
Of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

Spencer Case

The Cosmos of Duty is Not in Chaos: A Defense of the Unity of Practical Reasons

Thesis Advisor: Chris Heathwood

Abstract

My project here is to defend the Unity of Practical Reasons, the view that all practical reasons are comparable in terms of reason *simpliciter*. This view contrasts with Structural Reasons Pluralism – Structural Pluralism for short – which holds that practical reasons are comparable only within respective domains. In Chapter 1 I explicate both the Unity of Practical Reasons and Structural Reasons Pluralism and provide a brief history of these views in Western moral philosophy. In Chapter 2, I present what I take to be the strongest arguments in favor of Structural Pluralism, which are found in the work of Henry Sidgwick and David Copp. In Chapter 3, I offer my responses to those arguments. In Chapter 4, I present arguments against the chief semantic claim of Structural Pluralism and contend that can we at least *understand* the claim that there is an all-things-considered domain that is both comprehensive and normatively supreme. In Chapter 5, I argue against the chief metaphysical claim put forward by defenders of Structural Pluralism, and argue that we have decisive reason to believe in the existence of a comprehensive and normatively supreme domain. In Chapter 6, I present a second argument against Structural Pluralism based on a dilemma: is the correct account of Structural Reasons Pluralism restricted to a certain number of legitimate domains or completely unrestricted? One horn of the dilemma leads to absurdities, the other to the acceptance of an overarching domain of the sort Structural Pluralism denies, and hence to contradiction.

Acknowledgments

I would like to begin by thanking those whose constructive criticism and support have contributed to this thesis. First, I must thank my three committee members, Alastair Norcross, Michael Huemer and Chris Heathwood for their patient criticisms of earlier drafts of this project. Heathwood has been an indispensable adviser and his eye for detail has caught many mistakes that may have gone unnoticed without him. Norcross, who has played the role of foil on this committee, has helped me see novel lines of objection. In response, I have tried to place as little weight as possible on moral intuitions whose veracity is easily undermined. Huemer played a key role in helping me decide what arguments to include and what arguments to leave out. The thesis is no doubt tighter as a result of his criticism. Among my fellow graduate students, no one has been more helpful than Christian Lee. Some of his suggestions, given as the beer flowed at The Kitchen Next Door, allowed me to sharpen the convergence argument in Chapter 5 considerably. The quality of the thesis has also been enhanced by discussions with Graeme Forbes, Mitzi Lee, Dominic Bailey, Robert Pasnau and Brian Talbot at the University of Colorado, and Bill McCurdy and Jim Skidmore at Idaho State University. I take full responsibility for any remaining errors or omissions.

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Chapter 1: Reasons Pluralism and the Unity of Practical Reasons

As agents we are subject to different kinds of practical reasons, and sometimes these reasons seem to pull us in different directions. Many philosophers believe that in cases in which different types of reasons issue different verdicts, there can be no "overall" best thing to do. Perhaps there is no sense to be made of the claim that there is. An action may be better or worse relative to the standards of this domain or that domain, but not better or worse *simpliciter*, for there is no comprehensive, normatively authoritative scale on which to rank the verdicts of the various domains. All true statements about practical normativity must be understood to include some adverbial modifier, explicit or contextually implied, indicating the domain of practical reason in which it occurs. "You should give to charity" should probably be read: "Morally, you should give to charity"; "You should make a more gentle brush stroke over there" should be probably be interpreted as: "*Aesthetically*, You should make a brush stroke," and so on. Above the plurality of local verdicts there is no higher appeal; in the event of their conflicting, we must simply pick which to adhere to on something other than a rational basis. This is the view known as Reasons Pluralism or Pluralism about Practical Reasons. A direct implication of Reasons Pluralism is that a more comprehensive meta-domain which issues the final word in cases of conflict among the domains – variously called "the all-things-considered" domain, reason-as-such, Just Plain Ought, and reason *simpliciter* – either does not exist or does not come into play in divergent cases.¹

Reasons Pluralism comes in two basic varieties. The first is what Dale Dorsey calls "Substantive" Reasons Pluralism and David Phillips calls "the permissive interpretation" of Reasons Pluralism.² I take Phillips' language to be somewhat more natural, and so I will adopt it. According to Permissive Pluralism, there are no reason *simpliciter* imperatives when the verdicts of different domains diverge in their judgments, but there are reason *simpliciter* permissions to perform actions in

¹ I prefer reason *simpliciter*, but be aware that many of the philosophers I quote have preferences for one of these other terms.

² Both writers speak of 'dualism' rather than 'pluralism,' but I have already given my reasons for preferring not to use this terminology. In e-mail correspondence, Dorsey has confirmed that nothing substantial about his view is lost by adopting the wider term.

accordance with the verdict of any local domain of practical reason.³ ⁴ Few philosophers take Permissive Pluralism seriously due to its entailing the implausible conclusion that any time different domains issue verdicts at all, those verdicts are always equal in terms of reason *simpliciter*. Owen McLeod writes: "[The] implication that conflicts of moral and prudential obligation will always or necessarily resolve themselves into rational ties is implausible."⁵ Derek Parfit appears to reject Permissive Pluralism for the same reason.⁶ Dorsey believes this feature of the view generates so many counterexamples that Permissive Pluralism is "almost too easy to defeat."⁷ I agree with this consensus and so will have little further to say about this form of Reasons Pluralism.

The second, more radical, version of Reasons Pluralism with which I will be primarily concerned is what Dorsey calls Structural Pluralism. According to this version of Reasons Pluralism, we have neither reason *simpliciter* imperatives nor reason *simpliciter* permissions when the verdicts of specific domains diverge. Structural Pluralism simply rejects practical reason *simpliciter*, so we are

³ Dorsey cashes out Permissive Pluralism as: "For any two actions A and B, if A-ing is morally required and B-ing is prudentially required, neither A-ing or B-ing is rationally unjustified." (Dorsey, 1) I have two caveats with this definition. First, Dorsey's use of a double negative is a bit confusing here and so I prefer to translate "not unjustified" to "permissible." Alastair Norcross has helpfully pointed out that whether this is a merely cosmetic rehashing of Dorsey's view or a substantive revision depends on one's view of permissibility. One might, for instance, think permissibility is a positive deontic state that can't be construed as the mere absence of rational "un-justification" against an option. I do not think much hinges on this distinction, however; Dorsey's arguments against what I'm calling Permissive Pluralism regardless of one's specific account of permissibility. Second, Dorsey specifically lists the domains of prudence and morality, whereas I prefer to leave the particular domains open-ended so as to encompass a greater variety of Pluralist views. So, I prefer to cash out Permissive Pluralism idea as follows: "For any two actions A and B, if A-ing is required in one domain and B-ing is required in another, both A-ing and B-ing are all-things-considered permissible."

⁴ Note that Permissive Pluralism is silent on the question of whether the morally obligatory thing would be required of us when the verdict of morality is not opposed by the verdicts of any other domains.

⁵ McLeod 2001, 287.

⁶ Parfit, 136: "[Henry] Sidgwick assumes our self-interested reasons cannot be weaker than, or be outweighed by, our reasons to avoid acting wrongly. We should reject that assumption."

⁷ He provides as a counter-example cases in which agents are asked to choose whether to enjoy a trivial pleasure at the cost of causing a great amount of pain to many other people. Dorsey asserts that, according to Permissive Pluralism, the agent is not unjustified in pursuing the trivial pleasure in cases in which doing so would be the best thing he could do for himself, a strongly counterintuitive result. (Dorsey 6-7) I think Substantive Pluralism need not fold quite so quickly. We can make the view more resilient against this kind of *reductio ad absurdum* argument by supplementing it with the claim that that the criterion for a prudential verdict must be higher than a slight balance of prudential reason in favor of one option constitutes a prudential *verdict*. A defender of Substantive Pluralism may even introduce the notion of a prudential requirement and claim no prudential requirements are in play until one's life and limb are at stake. Such a move can only delay the reckoning for Substantive Pluralism a short time, however, because regardless how high or low the bar for prudential requirements is placed, it seems unlikely that there will *always* be a tie between morality and prudence.

therefore left with only domain-level imperatives and reasons. What Reasons Pluralists of this stripe mean by reasons is what Sarah Stroud refers to as "D-reasons":

[O]n this alternative use of "reason," a D-reason is a consideration relevant from the point of view of domain D, a consideration which has weight within or internal to the D-system of evaluation.

To say that a certain consideration constitutes a D-reason, however, leaves open whether it has any force for the rational agent, any bearing on the practical question of what to do. That is to say D-reasons in this sense are not necessarily genuine reasons for action. A simple example will illustrate this. It may be perfectly true of me, at a party, that from a social-climbing point of view I have a reason to cultivate the rich drunk bore holding forth in the corner. Let us say that I have an SC-reason to cultivate him. But it certainly doesn't follow that I have any reason, *simpliciter* to do so.⁸

Structural Pluralism consists of two claims: that there is a plurality of domains of practical reason, and that D-reasons are comparable in weight *only* to other reasons within the same domain. Because there is no reason *simpliciter*, no cross-domain comparisons of normative weight are possible. Often proponents of this kind of Reasons Pluralism add the semantic claim that 'reason' can only mean reason within a domain—reason *simpliciter* can't even *be made sense of*. Dorsey so closely associates the semantic claim with Structural Pluralism that he claims the latter is a product of the former. Structural Pluralism, he writes, "[I]s a product of the fact that we cannot make sense of an all-things-considered standpoint, distinct from our prudential or moral standpoints, that settles that which we have strongest practical reason to do."⁹ If the semantic claim be accepted, then all assertions like "A was a just-plain-good action" or "A was a good action, period" are either false or literally meaningless.

The view I shall defend, the Unity of Practical Reasons, is the view that reasons of all types – from different domains, if you will – are comparable in terms of normative weight. Hence, an over-

⁸ Stroud, 172. It is worth mentioning that not all agree with Stroud's claim that D-reasons are not genuine reasons, so this should not be taken for granted. However, if the arguments I present in Chapter 4 are on point, it will be clear why Stroud is correct.

⁹ Dorsey, 16.

arching all-things-considered or reason *simpliciter* "master" domain exists. On this view, our epistemic limitations may prevent us from being able to arrive at a correct comparison between two options in a given case, but there must in principle be some answer to this question. A full and complete answer to a practical inquiry will never be of the form "we X-ly ought (or have most reason) to do one thing, Y-ly another to do something else, and that's all there is to it." There will always be some further fact about how the X-ly and the Y-ly verdicts compare to each other in terms of reason *simpliciter*, even if we cannot know what it is.¹⁰ It is critical to note that the Unity of Practical Reasons does *not* entail that there are some reasons that are neither prudential nor moral, nor any of the standard "domains" of reason that are alleged to exist. It may well be that all of our actual reasons will fall into such categories on some way of carving them up. The crucial point is that all of these reasons will be comparable in terms of normative weight. 'Reason *simpliciter*' is the name I choose to give to the property in virtue of which the D-reasons have normative weight.

These definitions leave it up in the air as to where to place nihilism about practical reasons, the claim that there are no practical reasons whatever. Neither the claim that "all-reasons are D-reasons" nor the claim that "all practical reasons are ultimately comparable" have existential import, so it seems we have the opportunity to make a terminological choice whether to class nihilism as a form of Reasons Pluralism, the Unity of Practical Reasons, or some third option. If we define Structural Pluralism negatively as the denial of the Unity of Practical Reasons, then practical nihilism is compatible with Structural Pluralism; if we define the Unity of Practical Reasons negatively as the negation of Structural Pluralism – with some justification, since even in nihilism, practical reasons would be unified, if being uniformly false can be understood as a kind of unity – then practical nihilism would be consistent with the Unity of Practical Reasons.

¹⁰ The Unity of Practical Reasons is not necessarily in conflict with Permissive Pluralism. Parfit writes that according to Permissive Pluralism, "Whenever one act would be impartially best but another act would be best for ourselves, we have sufficient reasons to act in either way. No reason of either kind can be outweighed by any reason of any other kind." What Parfit says here is consistent with the claim that the verdicts of morality and prudence are *equal* in normative weight, and, I claim, no two things can be *equal* in terms of absolute normative weight unless they are *comparable* in terms of absolute normative weight. If one understands this to mean neither can be outweighed by the other because they are incomparable, then obviously Permissive Pluralism is not compatible with the Unity of Practical Reasons. (Parfit 131)

Because I can find no justification for describing one of these views positively and the other negatively, I think the most reasonable stipulation to make is that both the Unity of Practical Reasons and Structural Reasons Pluralism assume the existence of some kind of reasons. The Unity of Practical Reasons claims that at least some of the reasons that exist are reason *simpliciter* reasons, and Structural Reasons Pluralism denies this. Practical nihilism is a third option distinct from both, just as atheism is distinct from both monotheism and polytheism.

ii.)The History of Reasons Pluralism and the Unity of Practical Reasons in Western Philosophy

If the survey of the history of Western moral philosophy reveals one trend with regard to the acceptance of Reasons Pluralism, it is that philosophers seem to be attracted to Reasons Pluralism to the degree that they think that morality and prudence recommend different actions. The ancient philosophers were aware of the apparent tension between morality or justice and self-interest, but provided ethical theories that attempted to resolve (or dissolve) this tension, so Reasons Pluralism never had much sway for these philosophers.

In Plato we see this in the early chapters of *The Republic*, wherein Socrates attempts to answer the immoralist Thrasymachus. It is noteworthy that neither Socrates nor Thrasymachus seem to have considered the idea that the verdicts of both self-interest and justice could be incomparable. As I read it, both seem to have assumed that morality and self-interest were competing for the same turf, though they disagreed as to which one prevailed.¹¹ Aristotle, the early Stoics and Epicureans all seem not to have disagreed with this, and also seem to have followed Plato in providing moral systems in which self-interest and ethics coincide, or at least mostly coincide.¹² By late antiquity, philosophers were taking seriously the idea that morality and self-interest issued incompatible verdicts, and that it was not necessarily the job of moral theory to explain away with this apparent tension. This culminated with Cicero, who held "[T]he advantageous and the morally right, happiness

¹¹ Jowett 609-621.

¹² Striker.

and virtue, far from coinciding in the rational pursuit of objects of natural impulse, might actually be opposed to one another."¹³

Reasons Pluralism seems to have picked up steam in modern philosophy,¹⁴ particularly with the rationalist philosophers. In *Outlines of the History of Ethics*, Sidgwick characterizes the rise of reasons pluralism as the most significant difference between modern and ancient philosophy:

[I]n Platonism and Stoicism, and in Greek moral philosophy generally, but one regulative and governing faculty is recognized under the name Reason – however the regulation of Reason may be understood; in the modern ethical view, when it has worked itself out clear, there are found to be two – Universal Reason and Egoistic Reason, or Conscience and Self-love.¹⁵

William K. Frankena argues persuasively that Sidgwick's account in *On the History of Ethics* overstates the modern trend toward Dualism of Practical Reason. In fact, thoroughgoing Dualism of this type appears not to have originated until Sidgwick himself (if even then – as he seems not to have held this doctrine with complete conviction or consistency, as we shall soon see). Still, we do find, in modern ethicists, a greater tendency to consider prudence and ethics or morality as independent domains of inquiry. Moreover, quite a few modern philosophers seemed to gesture in the direction of Reasons Pluralism, particularly dualism between prudence and morality, even if they had not moved quite as far in that direction as Sidgwick had thought.¹⁶ Thomas Reid was among those moderns who seem to have partially anticipated the problem with which Sidgwick would later be concerned. Reid writes,

Indeed, if we suppose a man to be an atheist in his belief, and, at the same time, by mistaken judgment, to believe that virtue is contrary to his happiness upon the whole, this case, as Lord SHAFTSBURY observes, is without remedy. It will be impossible for this man to act, so as not to contradict a leading principle in his nature. He must either sacrifice his happiness to

¹³ Striker.

¹⁴ Apologies to the medieval philosophers.

¹⁵ Sidgwick OHE 198 f quoted in Schultz, 175.

¹⁶ Frankena.

virtue, or his virtue to happiness; and is reduced to this miserable dilemma, whether it is best to be a fool or a knave.¹⁷

The problem Reid is most directly concerned with is a conflict in human nature, not a conflict in practical reason itself as Sidgwick and later Pluralists would have it. His implicit suggestion that, failing the harmony of prudential and moral reasons, God could serve to pull the chasm back together by rewarding virtue and punishing evil, thus making practical reason unified, is a "solution" Sidgwick himself would consider, though ultimately reject.¹⁸

Another important rationalist moral philosopher, Joseph A. Butler, came closer to full-fledged Reasons Pluralism than Reid because he stated the conflict not in terms of inclinations of human nature but in terms of practical reason. Both "reasonable self-love" and "conscience," Butler wrote, issue "manifest obligations" that we must obey.¹⁹ In the preface to the second edition of *Methods of Ethics*, Sidgwick credits Butler for his own use of term "The Dualism of Practical Reason" and for much of his thinking about the issue.²⁰

Immanuel Kant, too, seems to have had some broad sympathies with Reasons Pluralism. This is not at all obvious at first blush since Kant takes obligations to self to be derivative from obligations to humanity generally, which is instantiated in each one of us. However, Kant's conviction that *moral* reasons do not have two distinct sources – one in self-interest, and another in respect for humanity generally – is compatible with a Reasons Pluralism between moral and non-moral reasons. Sidgwick writes:

Kant recognizes by implication the reasonableness of individual regard for his private happiness... Though duty is to be done for duty's sake and not as a means to the agent's happiness, still, Kant holds, we could not rationally do it if we did not hope thereby to attain happiness [because we will have made ourselves worthy of it]. And Kant holds that we are bound by reason to conceive ourselves as necessarily belonging to [a moral world in which

¹⁷ Reid, 262.

¹⁸ Sidgwick ME 503-507. I use scare quotes with "solution" because I believe even if the two perspectives always endorsed the same action, there would be a remaining question about which of the over-determining reasons we should act *from*. I hope to develop this idea in greater detail elsewhere.

¹⁹ Butler.

²⁰ Sidgwick ME xviii-xix.

happiness is duly proportioned to merit]... We must therefore postulate [such a world]: and this involves a belief in God and the hereafter... I cannot theoretically know these beliefs to be true, but I must postulate them for practice in order to fulfill rationally what I recognize as "categorically" commanded by the Practical Reason.²¹

Frankena agrees with Sidgwick's gloss on Kant. He adds:

My duty [for Kant] is still categorical, and I am to do it as such, but I may hope and, to be rational in doing it, must believe that [my *own*] happiness will be its reward. In this way, Kant is after all recognizing two principles of rationality, though not quite in the way that Clarke, Butler and Reid had, or Sidgwick does. There is no suggestion in Kant that self-interest is a principle of morality or that it is a supreme principle of rationality.... For him being moral is rational as such and therefore must be rewarded with the happiness it deserves, and we are rational (in a further sense) if and only if, besides being moral, we act with the expectation that it will actually be so rewarded because it *deserves* to be.²²

Like other pre-Sidgwick modern ethical philosophers, J.S. Mill never explicitly endorses Reasons Pluralism, but I believe the idea lurks just beneath the surface in Chapter 3 of his *Utilitarianism*, which deals with the ultimate sanction of the principle of utility. I find it ambiguous as to whether he is discussing a purely empirical issue of how people will in fact be motivated to do what Utilitarianism demands, or the normative one of how it is that they *ought* to, though I am inclined to think he took a "sanction" to have some kind of justifying role as well as a motivating one. Imagining a man who does not "feel the pull" of abiding by Utilitarianism, even after being convinced that it is the true moral theory, Mill writes:

He says to himself, I feel that I am bound not to rob or murder, betray or deceive; but why am I bound to promote the general happiness? If my own happiness lies in something else, why may I not give that the preference?²³

While Mill may have been primarily concerned with the psychological possibility of utilitarianism in this chapter, I take this to be a straightforwardly normative question; normative

²¹ Sidgwick OHE 276. Quoted in Frankena 192.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Mill, 27.

pluralism lurks just under the surface. Mill's answer is that there are two kinds of sanction, internal and external. External sanctions include such things as fear of reprisals from others, including God, or fear of the displeasure of others. Internal sanctions are internal intimations of duty, especially guilt, that cause us to shrink from immoral behavior. Mill admits with open eyes that this makes the "ultimate sanction of all morality" nothing more than "a subjective feeling in our minds." Moreover, he provides no reason for why we *ought* to abide by the internal sanctions of morality rather than equally strong self-interested motives which pull in another direction.

We have seen, then, that moral philosophers have been gradually drifting toward Reasons Pluralism even before the view was explicitly stated. This is especially true of modern moral philosophers. With the career of Henry Sidgwick, the problem of Reasons Pluralism would finally take center-stage.

Chapter 2: Two Defenders of Reasons Pluralism

i.) Sidgwick's enigmatic Pluralism

Sidgwick, a student of Mill, is perhaps the most famous defender of Reasons Pluralism. Sidgwick discusses Pluralism in a number of places, but most famously in his masterwork, *The Methods of Ethics*, which secured his place as one of the greatest ethical philosophers in the history. *Methods* is a long book, over 500 pages, and only a few these discuss Reasons Pluralism. Yet in a lecture included in the preface to the sixth edition of *Methods* chronicling his personal intellectual development, Sidgwick mentions concern about the relationship between morality and prudence as among his chief motives for writing the book: "I therefore set myself to examine methodically the relationship between interest and duty." The few pages devoted directly to Reasons Pluralism are the most controversial in the book and his grand pronouncements of despair when he finds Pluralism inevitable are all the more striking for their stark contrast against a background of drab, methodical writing.

In *Methods*, Sidgwick uses an intuitionist method to meticulously evaluate three competing moral systems: utilitarianism, egoism and intuitionism, which we today call deontology. Over the course of the book, Sidgwick attempts to show that when we think clearly about deontic principles we tend to qualify them in a utilitarian direction. He offers no master argument against deontology, but seems satisfied by the end of the discussion that that view has suffered death by a thousand cuts. This leaves him with two remaining "methods": egoism and utilitarianism. In deciding between these, Sidgwick is conflicted. Both methods, he thinks, are founded on fundamental principles of practical rationality. Ultimately the perceived conflict between them leads Sidgwick to endorse some form of Reasons Pluralism, though it is unclear which version of Reasons Pluralism he accepts.

Sidgwick thought that utilitarianism issues from the principle of "Rational Benevolence," according to which it is rational to treat the benefit of all as equally important,²⁴ and that egoism issues from the "Principle of Egoism," or prudence, according to which an agent's special relationship

²⁴ Sidgwick ME 96.

to herself makes it most rational for her to do what is in her own interest in the long run.²⁵ These two methods correspond to a radically impartial "point of view of the universe" and one's own partial point of view, respectively. Sidgwick is committed to utilitarianism, an expression of the principle of Rational Benevolence, as the true moral theory, and yet finds himself unable to abandon the idea that the Egoistic Principle expresses something equally true about practical reason. What's more, Sidgwick seems to think that both morality and prudence – duty and interest, on his way of talking – purport to be reasonable *simpliciter*. The following two quotes make clear the tension within Sidgwick's work over this issue:

And here again, just as in the former case, by considering the relation of the integrant parts to the whole [of the Universal good, of which each sentient being's good is a part] and to each other, I obtain the self-evident principle that the good of any one individual is of no more importance, from the point of view (if I may say so) of the Universe, than the good of any other; unless, that is, there are special grounds for believing that more good is likely to be realised in the one case than in the other. And it is evident to me that as a rational being I am bound to aim at good generally—so far as it is attainable by my efforts,—not merely a particular part of it.²⁶

In the final chapter of *Methods* Sidgwick writes:

It would be contrary to Common Sense to deny that the distinction between any one individual and any other is real and fundamental, and that consequently "I" am concerned with the quality of my existence as an individual in a sense, fundamentally important, in which I am not concerned with the quality of the existence of other individuals: I do not see how it can be proved that this distinction is not to be taken as fundamental in determining the ultimate end of rational action for an individual.²⁷

The second quote is in direct conflict with the first quote, since it can't be the case that as rational being I am bound as a rational being to promote overall utility and yet not so bound because it is reasonable for me to treat myself differently. As Phillips points out, though, the second quote is still

²⁵ Sidgwick ME 121.

²⁶ Sidgwick ME 382.

²⁷ Sidgwick ME 498.

weaker than some of what Sidgwick says about egoism.²⁸ It establishes only that the agent has some reason to prefer his own interest as an exception to Rational Benevolence; it does not claim that I always have most reason to prefer my own best interest above all else, which is how we normally think of egoism nowadays. To the best of my knowledge, Sidgwick never explicitly endorses that more common, stronger variant of egoism, though he edges closer to it in a number of places in *Methods*. For instance, in the lecture included in the preface to the sixth edition to *Methods*, Sidgwick imagines a Kantian egoist – someone willing to universalize the principle of Egoism – who says:

I quite admit that when the painful necessity comes for another man to choose between his own happiness and the general happiness, *he must as a reasonable being* prefer his own, i.e. it is right for him to do this on my principle...I as a disengaged spectator should like him to sacrifice himself for the greater good, but I do not expect him to do it, any more than I should do it myself if I were in his place.²⁹

The egoism being discussed here is of a more radical variety: not just that rationality must take account of some difference between how one responds to one's own happiness and the happiness of others, but that being a reasonable person *commits one to* privileging one's own good over the good of others. "It did not seem to me that this reasoning could be effectively confuted," Sidgwick admits. Reacting to the tension in Sidgwick between morality and egoism, regardless which way we choose to construe it, C.D. Broad writes, "Thus Sidgwick is left in the unfortunate position that there are two principles, each of which separately seems to him self-evident, but which when taken altogether, seem mutually inconsistent."^{30 31} Sidgwick himself seems to have thought his position very unfortunate,

²⁸ Phillips 114-154.

²⁹ Sidgwick, xvii-xviii. Emphasis mine.

³⁰ Broad, 159.

³¹ Some philosophers have denied that there is any contradiction in Sidgwick's Pluralism. David Brink, for instance, thinks that Sidgwick shares his own view that morality itself does not provide reasons, but that the reasons for obeying morality are derived from an "external" source. (Brink 1988 and Brink 1992) The trouble with such an interpretation of Sidgwick is that it is inconsistent with what Sidgwick says in *Methods* and many other places. His exact words are: "as a *rational* being I am bound to aim at good generally" and "...*practical reason*, being divided against itself, would cease to be a motive on either side..." I read these quotes as saying our moral duty does have some rational force behind it (why else would practical reason be *divided* when moral and prudential verdicts disagree?) These quotes and others do not support Brink's reading of Sidgwick's Pluralism. McLeod makes the same point about the shortcomings of Brink's reading of Sidgwick.

indeed. In first edition of *Methods*, Sidgwick ended on the pessimistic, almost despairing, note. He wrote that due to this inconsistency,

The cosmos of duty is thus really reduced to Chaos; and the prolonged effort of the human intellect to frame a perfect ideal of rational conduct is seen to have been foredoomed to inevitable failure.³²

Our understanding of both the tragic beauty of this famous passage and Sidgwick's philosophical predicament are enhanced by knowledge the etymology of the word cosmos, which derives from the Greek word, *kosmos*, which denotes unity and beauty. Today's Oxford English dictionary still registers the word cosmos as "the universe seen as a unified whole."³³ Being reduced to chaos is not a possible state for a cosmos to be in; it is the destruction of the cosmos altogether. Thus, Sidgwick's view at the time he wrote that passage in the first addition of *Methods* seems to be one of unmitigated practical nihilism.

Later editions of *Methods* tone down the air of tragedy. J.L. Mackie, a twentieth-century philosopher famous for his moral skepticism, characterizes Sidgwick as having been brow-beaten by his peers to watering down his pessimism in subsequent editions.³⁴ I disagree; I think Sidgwick's writings and biography suggest the impetus to remove that passage and downplay the consequences of Reasons Pluralism sprang from long-held personal convictions about moral realism. For instance, in his memoirs, he expresses his deep commitment to moral realism, along with portents of a crisis of faith, in the following way:

Duty is to me as real a thing as the physical world, though it is not apprehended in the same way; but all my apparent knowledge of duty falls into chaos if my belief in the moral government of the world is conceived to be withdrawn.

Well, I cannot resign myself to disbelief in duty; in fact, if I did, I should feel that the last barrier between me and complete philosophical scepticism or disbelief in truth altogether,

³² Quoted in McLeod 2001, 274.

³³ Oxford English Dictionary.

³⁴ Mackie 163-197.

is broken down. Therefore, I sometimes say to myself 'I believe in God'; while sometimes I can say no more than 'I *hope* this belief is true and must act as if it was.'³⁵

The parallel language with his more famous despairing quote is hard to miss. The bit about God might seem out of place, and it deserves further explanation. Sidgwick was not a religious man; indeed, in 1869 he resigned his fellowship at Oxford because he found himself unable to affirm the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England, which was, in Sidgwick's day, a condition of holding that fellowship. His desire to believe in God (above mentioned in the same passage with his belief in duty) seems to have been born of a belief that the problem posed by Reasons Pluralism that he so reluctantly arrived at in *Methods* could have been solved only by a God who rewarded the righteous and punished the wicked. Sidgwick, who was the first president and one of the founders of the Society of Psychological Research, had an interest in inquiries into things now associated with pseudo-science. As Marcus Singer records in his introduction to a book of Sidgwick's essays, Sidgwick may have been motivated in part by hopes of unifying practical reasons:

For even though Sidgwick came to doubt the truth of most of the prescribed tenets of Christianity—such as the doctrines of the divinity and resurrection of Christ—he was still inclined, indeed anxious, to hold on to some version of theism, and he had hopes, albeit skeptical hopes, that these theistic beliefs could receive some measure of confirmation through psychical research. He was looking for proofs, even though he never succeeded in finding any.... His main hope was that such proof would help resolve what he came to call the Dualism of Practical Reason, by showing it ultimately and in the long run in everyone's own individual interest to pursue and promote the general happiness. But this method of proof failed him, as did all others he considered.³⁶

Sidgwick could never shake his concern that something was deeply amiss with the structure of practical reason on account of Reasons Pluralism. Even in the Seventh Edition of *Methods*, which included revisions Sidgwick added at the very end of his life, Sidgwick hastens to reassure the reader that an inability to dissolve Reasons Pluralism would not mean that "[I]t would become reasonable for

³⁵ Quoted in Singer, xvi.

³⁶ Singer, xvii.

us to abandon morality altogether: but it would seem necessary to abandon the idea of rationalising it completely."³⁷ That's cold comfort. He further admits, in the final paragraph of the book that a failure to resolve the problem opens the door to universal skepticism about practical rationality,³⁸ though it does not seem like a door the Sidgwick himself is prepared to go through. Sidgwick eventually fell back on the traditional appeal to harmony between morality and self-interest in order to downplay what he saw as the disturbing consequences of Reasons Pluralism. "But," he admits,

...[I]n the rarer cases of recognized conflict between self-interest and [moral] duty, *practical reason, being divided against itself*, would cease to be a motive on either side; the conflict would have to be decided by the comparative preponderance of one or the other of two groups of non-rational impulses.³⁹

For all this apparent turmoil, it is not clear how Sidgwick understood the nature of the "contradiction" he thought he'd discovered. There are some reasons for thinking Sidgwick was a Permissive Pluralist. Sidgwick's position, as stated in the final paragraphs of *Methods*, is that morality isn't *entirely* rational, significantly leaving open the possibility for morality to be at least *partly* rational. Permissive Pluralism could be seen as consistent with that conclusion. Recall that according to Permissive Pluralism, abiding by the verdict of morality is always at least rationally *permissible*. If one's default position is Moral Rationalism, the view that moral imperatives are imperatives of reason *simpliciter*, then Permissive Pluralism shows that morality is not entirely vindicated, since morality would not issue rational imperatives in cases where the verdicts of morality and self-interest diverge.⁴⁰ Yet, morality would not be wholly irrational, either, since one would never act irrationally when one acts according to its verdicts.

³⁷ Sidgwick ME 508.

³⁸ Sidgwick ME 509.

³⁹ Sidgwick ME 508.

⁴⁰ For a good defense of Moral Rationalism, see Stroud's article, "Moral Overridingness and Moral Theory." Here, Stroud defends a version of Moral Rationalism under the label of the "Overridingness Thesis." As happens so frequently in philosophy, there is no single agreed upon term for this concept. For a critical discussion of Moral Rationalism, see Shaun Nichols' article, "How Psychopaths Threaten Moral Rationalism, or is it Irrational to be Immoral?."

It is therefore understandable that many philosophers, including Derek Parfit, interpret Sidgwick as a Permissive Pluralist.⁴¹ Nevertheless, I think there are also compelling reasons for doubting whether it is best to read Sidgwick as endorsing Structural Pluralism. When Parfit articulates what he takes Sidgwick's Pluralism to be, he never quotes Sidgwick on the matter, or suggests that there might be alternative readings and I have been unable to locate any place in *Methods*, or anywhere else, where Sidgwick clearly endorses this interpretation of his view. Moreover, while Permissive Pluralism does seem to account for some of the concerns that Sidgwick has about morality's not being completely rational, it does not seem to explain the despair that Sidgwick expresses about his conclusion. The idea that both following the verdict of morality and the verdict of prudence are permissible from the perspective of reason *simpliciter* hardly seems to account for Sidgwick's dramatic claims that "practical reason is divided against itself," or his claim that "the cosmos of duty are really reduced to chaos." Parfit takes these facts to be evidence that Sidgwick overstated the problem, but this seems uncharitable, given that there is a view in the neighborhood, Structural Pluralism, whose adoption might be an occasion for such despair, especially for someone as committed to moral realism and Moral Rationalism as Sidgwick. Thus, my own view is that while Sidgwick hadn't settled on a particular formulation of Pluralism, it makes the most sense to understand Sidgwick as a Structural Pluralist.

If the version of Reasons Pluralism that Sidgwick puts forward is hard to nail down, his argument in favor of it is even more so, since Sidgwick seems to arrive at Pluralism through a series of intuitive considerations rather than through some explicitly stated argument. In some sense, the fact that Sidgwick never states his argument for Reasons Pluralism premise-by-premise may be an advantage, since the intuitive sense that there is something right about the pessimistic picture of morality that Sidgwick paints will probably outlast any explicitly stated argument for that conclusion. This poses a challenge for those who favor a unified theory of practical reason. Critics must address *some* argument if they wish to provide an answer to Sidgwick, but they must always be wary of putting forward an argument that Sidgwick himself would not or should not have accepted.

⁴¹ Parfit states the view as: "We always have most reason to do whatever would be impartially best, unless some other act would be best for ourselves. In such cases, we have sufficient reason to act in either way. If we knew the facts, either act would be rational." (Parfit 134)

I think the best way to proceed is to focus on the tension at the foundations of ethics that clearly bothered Sidgwick. Sidgwick's core concern, as I see it, was that we have two fundamental intuitions about practical rationality which conflict. One of them is "the self-evident principle that the good of any one individual is of no more importance, from the point of view (if I may say so) of the Universe, than the good of any other." The other, which Sidgwick tends to state more cautiously, as something he is unable to deracinate from the impartial perspective. This is the fundamental intuition that

'I am concerned with the quality of my existence as an individual in a sense, fundamentally important, in which I am not concerned with the quality of the existence of other individuals. I do not see how it is to be proved that this distinction is not to be taken as fundamental in determining the ultimate end of rational action for an individual.'⁴²

The contradiction between these two fundamental intuitions can be stated either directly or indirectly. The contradiction can be seen directly between the following propositions:

- 1.) It is not rational to privilege oneself in producing utility.
- 2.) It is rational to privilege oneself in producing utility.⁴³

A less direct way of formulating the contradiction is as follows:

- P1 An act is morally right if and only if it maximizes utility.
- P2 An act is prudentially right if and only if it maximizes agent-utility.
- P3 An act is reasonable if and only if it is morally right or prudentially right
- P4 An act is not reasonable if and only if it is morally wrong or prudentially wrong.
- P5 It is possible for an act that maximizes utility to fail to maximize agent-utility and vice versa.⁴⁴

Sidgwick's concern seems to have been that, given our conflicting intuitions, a unified theory of practical reason would inevitably produce a contradiction via either a combination of 1 and 2 or a combination of P1-P5. Thus, we must reject the Unity of Practical Reasons on pain of contradiction.

Stated premise-by-premise, the argument would be:

- 1.) If the Unity of Practical Reasons is true, then either (1&2) or (P1-P5) is true.
- 2.) Neither (1&2) nor (P1-P5) can be true, for they are inconsistencies.
- C: It is not the case that the Unity of Practical Reasons is true.

⁴² Sidgwick ME 498.

⁴³ Phillips.

⁴⁴ McLeod provides a similar formulation in McLeod 2001, 284. McLeod labels these propositions differently, and uses "iff" for "if and only if," but the effect is the same. Also, I have broken up one of the premises—a conjunction—into two distinct premises for the sake of clarity.

I will evaluate this argument in the following chapter. In the meantime, let's have a look at Copp's argument for Structural Pluralism.

ii.) Copp's argument against the Unity of Practical Reasons

David Copp offers a spirited defense of Structural Pluralism deserves discussion. As a philosopher writing in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Copp has been able to stand on the shoulders of Sidgwick, and formulate his version Reasons Pluralism more precisely than Sidgwick formulated his. Copp's endorsement of Reasons Pluralism differs from Sidgwick in a number of ways. First, whereas Sidgwick seemed to be conflicted about which version of Reasons Pluralism to adopt, Copp clearly endorses Structural Pluralism. At the outset of an article arguing in favor of Reasons Pluralism, he writes:

I will be defending the notion that neither morality nor self-interest overrides the other, that there simply are verdicts and reasons of these different kinds, and that there is never an overall verdict as to which action is required simpliciter in situations where moral reasons and reasons of self-interest conflict. Accordingly, I reject the position that, in each situation all the reasons there are determine one overall verdict, the verdict of "Reason" or "Reason-as-such."

(I note – and it will be relevant in subsequent chapters – that this formulation leaves open the possibility that there is an all-things-considered, reason-as-such verdict in cases in which morality and prudence *agree*.) Copp, unlike Sidgwick, is committed to metaphysical and epistemological naturalism and argues for Structural Pluralism within this framework.⁴⁵ Another key difference between Copp and Sidgwick is that Sidgwick insists on just two irreducible domains, moral and prudential, because these two are directly supported by fundamental intuitions about practical rationality. Copp's view, by contrast, proceeds from a general outlook about the structure of practical reason rather than from core intuitions which support prudence and morality, respectively. The upshot is that whereas Sidgwick is concerned about the "Dualism of Practical Reason" in the sense of the

⁴⁵ For the purposes of my project here, I will it is best to skip over the details of Copp's big picture, and focus only on his argument for pluralism, which I believe can stand on its own apart from the rest of his philosophy (and has been treated that way by other philosophers in the literature).

specific conflict between morality and self-interest, Copp explicitly endorses a greater plurality of domains including etiquette, perfectionism and aesthetics though like Sidgwick he focuses the most attention on the traditional duality between morality and self-interest. He does not, however, go so far as to allow for an indefinite number of such domains, and we shall soon see that this may be source of problems for Copp's view. Again, whereas Sidgwick takes a despairing attitude toward his conclusion, Copp seems to think we have nothing to fear from accepting even a very strong version of Pluralism. Finally, unlike Sidgwick, who presents a largely intuition-based case for Pluralism but offers no explicit argument, Copp does offer a very explicit, central argument for his version of Reasons Pluralism.

A brief terminological detour may be necessary at this point. Copp distinguishes among three "grades" of normativity and takes his argument against Reasons Pluralism to be a rejection only the strongest of these. Generic normativity is the normativity within what Copp calls "standpoints," which I take to be identical to the normativity of what Stroud calls D-reasons. For instance, when people say lying is wrong they are evaluating it by the standards set by the domain or standpoint of morality. Motivational normativity is the kind of normativity that agents must be motivated to abide by, inasmuch as they are rational agents. The final grade of normativity is what Copp calls "authoritative normativity." This is normativity, often claimed for morality – wrongly, in Copp's opinion – goes over and beyond merely generic normativity and motivational normativity. We might identify authoritative normativity with the kind of normativity that is all-things-considered or reason *simpliciter* decisive. Copp believes that naturalism is unable support authoritative normativity, but is able to support both generic and motivational normativity.⁴⁶ Another way to think of the question before Gyges, in terms

⁴⁶ That conclusion, I am convinced, is a hollow victory for naturalism, since it is not hard to show how neither generic nor motivational normativity are genuine normativity at all. Copp thinks of morality as having generic normativity, yet he writes that "...a rational person need not take moral reasons into account in deliberation if she were aware of them, just in virtue of being rational. Moral reasons are not authoritative reasons" (Copp 2007, 274-275). But if moral reasons are wholly ignorable and need not even be taken into consideration in deliberation by a rational agent, they lack not only authoritative normativity, but *any normativity whatsoever*. As for motivational normativity, I find Copp's listing this as a "grade of normativity" particularly strange, as it seems to me that it must be the case with *any* kind of normativity that agents will be inclined to abide by its dictates inasmuch as they are rational. What is a rational person besides if not someone who is responsive to reasons? Copp mentions that the motivation of motivational normativity may be felt as "alien and unwelcome," in which case it open to doubt whether motivation of this sort is genuinely normative, rather than an irrational compulsion.

of Copp's own "three grades of normativity" terminology, is whether morality or self-interest has a higher grade of normativity, or whether both simply have "generic normativity," of what I am calling D-reasons.

In a paper called "The Ring of Gyges: Overridingness and the Unity of Reason" Copp argues that the acceptance of a supreme and comprehensive domain of reason *simpliciter*, which alone could support authoritative normativity, must lead inexorably to inconsistency. He takes as his starting point a story that Thrasymachus, Socrates' immoralist interlocutor, tells in Plato's *Republic*.⁴⁷ According to the story, Gyges, a poor shepherd in the employment of the king of Lydia, discovers a magic ring with the power of making him invisible. Gyges decides to use the ring's power to commit wicked deeds with impunity. After committing adultery with the queen, he kills the king with her help and becomes king of Lydia himself. Thrasymachus contends that the decoupling of wickedness from prudential consequences in this case makes it clear that justice is nothing more than a restraint on our self-interest that we would all reasonably cast aside if we could. Copp is no immoralist; he fleshes out the details of Plato's story to suggest his picture about Reasons Pluralism. He stipulates, modestly enough, that Gyges knows in advance that behaving in this way allows him to participate in fulfilling relationships, to perfect talents of states-craft, and to enjoy his life as never before. On any reasonable account of self-interest, Copp concludes, behaving immorally is in Gyges' self-interest.

Thus, Copp sees his version of the Gyges story as a paradigmatic case of a conflict between morality and self-interest. The question that arises for Gyges in deciding how to act is: which of the two perspectives, self-interest or morality, is normatively more important – overriding, in other words – in cases of conflict? Note that the question is not: which is more important morally or self-interestedly, for we already have this information. The question is about reasons in a more encompassing sense, what Copp calls reason-as-such, what McLeod calls Just Plain Ought, and what I have been referring to here as reason *simpliciter*.⁴⁸ This would give tell us what to do, not just according to this or that perspective, but *period*.

⁴⁷ Jowett.

⁴⁸ McLeod 2001.

Copp uses the intuitive conflict of the Gyges case to set the stage for his argument against the possibility about the idea that there is a domain with the requisite supremacy and comprehensiveness needed to issue verdicts with authoritative normativity. Copp argues by reductio: if there *were* a comprehensive, normatively superior standpoint capable of settling all disputes among the domains – call it S – then there would have to be some domain R to make it so. S could not simply declare *itself* the most authoritative, so that R would have to be something distinct from S. But then it seems R, not S is really the most authoritative ultimate domain, contradicting our original assumption. Copp writes:

This standard R would have to be normatively the most important standard. Otherwise, its status would not settle definitively the relative normative standard S and the special standpoints. Otherwise, there would be some standpoint superior to R and *its* assessment of the relative importance of S and the special standpoints would be the definitive one.⁴⁹

Copp sums up the problem as follows:

The incoherence can be displayed in two sentences: The claim that a standard S has the property of supremacy and the claim that it is normatively the most important in terms of some other standard, R, which is the normatively most important standard. But only one standard could be normatively the most important.⁵⁰

Dorsey takes Copp's argument to hinge on the threat of vicious infinite regress.⁵¹ I think the argument could be cashed out in this way, but I think it is clear from these quotes that Copp is aiming to show that the acceptance of a comprehensive, all-things-considered domain generates incoherence, not regress. With that in mind, I take the following to be the most formidable version of Copp's argument:

⁴⁹ Copp 1997, 102.

⁵⁰ Copp 1997, 103.

⁵¹ Dorsey 16-24.

- 1.) If some domain P is the normatively most important domain, then there must be some other set of standards, Q, which makes it the most normatively important.
 - 2.) The reason that makes P the most authoritative domain (i.e. a domain with the features of comprehensiveness and supremacy) must be either a. the reasons it provides itself or b. the reasons provided by some other domain.
 - 3.) Lemma a.: Q cannot be identical to P.
 - 4.) Lemma b.: if some other domain Q provides the reason that P is supreme, then Q is actually supreme. But comprehensiveness and supremacy are both exclusive properties and so cannot belong to both P and Q.
- C1: No domain P can be the normatively most important domain in the sense of being both comprehensive and authoritative.
 C2: There is no all-things-considered domain having the features of comprehensiveness and supremacy.
 C3: Structural Pluralism is true.
 C4: The Unity of Practical Reasons is false.

I take the first premise to be motivated by the intuition that there must be something in virtue of which the most authoritative domain is the most authoritative domain. Premise 2 gives an exhaustive set of options. Premise 3 is motivated by the thought that every domain is most important source of reasons by its own lights, and so no domain can simply declare itself the most authoritative. Premise 4 presents the other horn of the dilemma: if something external to P provides the source of P's authority, then that thing is actually the most normatively authoritative thing. Consider an analogy: if someone asks me who appointed me to guard this post and I say, "The captain appointed me," then it is clear that the captain has more authority than me, since his authority is the source of my authority. But Q's having more authority than P contradicts the starting assumption that P is the most authoritative domain. Hence, the assumption that there is a most authoritative domain, the domain of reason simpliciter, fails by *reductio ad absurdum*.

This concludes my presentation of Sidgwick's and Copp's arguments in favor of Structural Reasons Pluralism. I will now turn my attention to providing responses to these arguments.

Chapter 3: Responses to Sidgwick and Copp

i.) Response to Sidgwick

A problematic feature of Sidgwick's case for Reasons Pluralism, regardless of whether it is characterized as Permissive Pluralism or Structural Pluralism, is that it moves too quickly from epistemic claims to metaphysical conclusions. Sidgwick points out that we have two conflicting basic intuitions that point both toward utilitarianism and egoism, respectively. From these data, he concludes that the cosmos of duty is reduced to chaos, meaning, I take it, that there can be no authoritative cross-domain comparisons of D-reasons. Yet other, less dramatic, conclusions are available to be drawn and, if what Sidgwick himself says in his more clear-headed moments is on point, *must* be drawn. He writes,

We cannot... regard as valid reasonings that lead to conflicting conclusions; and I therefore assume as a fundamental postulate of Ethics, that so far as two methods conflict, one or the other of them must be modified or rejected.⁵²

Inasmuch as this principle is true, it surely applies to the conflicting methods that led Sidgwick to arrive at utilitarianism and egoism, respectively. If Rational Benevolence and the Egoistic Principle deliver conflicting results, one or the other of them must be false, even if we are not in a position to determine which. This may not be the most satisfying conclusion for a philosopher to arrive at, but neither is it theoretically or practically worthless. After all, if the rest of Sidgwick's argumentation in the *Methods* is on point, he will have at least paired down the available theories to just two, egoism and utilitarianism, eliminating all those that have deontic constraints along the way—hardly a trivial result! We at least know to avoid those actions which are detrimental to both one's own well-being and to the total good, and to aim for those that promote both. In divergent cases, we can assign a 50 percent subjective probability to each as the correct action. Perhaps we can even come up with more fine grained subjective probabilities for particular cases. Thus, a conclusion of the sort "P or Q" in ethical theory, would not provide us with justification for abandoning the enterprise

⁵² Sidgwick ME 6.

of ethics, or show the cosmos of duty to be a chaos. Perhaps it would reveal that we are straddled with a great deal of uncertainty, but it seems to me that we are stuck with a great deal of it anyhow.

I now proceed to discuss the specific argument I presented on behalf of Sidgwick's argument against the Unity of Practical Reasons in the previous chapter. That argument is as follows:

- 1.) If the Unity of Practical Reasons is true, then either (I&2) or (P1-P5) is true.
 - 2.) Neither (I&2) nor (P1-P5) can be true, for they are inconsistencies.
- C: It is not the case that the Unity of Practical Reasons is true.

Recall that (I&2) and (P1-P5) are the two most common ways of construing the contradiction that Sidgwick saw between morality and self-interest. The first, direct way of generating the contradiction occurs between two propositions:

- 1.) It is not rational to privilege oneself in producing utility.
- 2.) It is rational to privilege oneself in producing utility.⁵³

The second, less direct way of formulating the contradiction requires four or five propositions to fully express. This formulation differs from the first mainly in that it requires the possibility of divergent cases, or disagreement between morality and prudence on the question of what it is best to do in some situations:

- P1 An act is morally right if and only if it maximizes utility.
 P2 An act is prudentially right if and only if it maximizes agent-utility.
 P3 An act is reasonable if and only if it is morally right or prudentially right
 P4 An act is not reasonable if and only if it is morally wrong or prudentially wrong.
 P5 It is possible for an act that maximizes utility to fail to maximize agent-utility and vice versa.⁵⁴

Sidgwick's argument is valid, and premise 2 is necessarily true, so the argument stands or falls with premise 1. While the text of *Methods* does not make explicit the reasons Sidgwick had for accepting this claim, I suspect Sidgwick accepted it based on two prior assumptions. The first assumption is that any unified account of practical reasons must include both a moral or impartial component and a prudential or partial component. Second, Sidgwick seems to have thought that both

⁵³ Phillips.

⁵⁴ McLeod provides a similar formulation in McLeod 2001, 284. McLeod labels these propositions differently, and uses "iff" for "if and only if," but the effect is the same. Also, I have broken up one of the premises—a conjunction—into two distinct premises for the sake of clarity.

of these components purport to be identical with the verdicts of reason *simpliciter*.⁵⁵ These two claims generate an inconsistent set, though the precise content of the inconsistent set will depend on how one understands Sidgwick's practical "contradiction" playing out.

Both assumptions relied upon to support premise 1 are vulnerable to objection. Against the first, we can point out that there are many candidates for a unified theory of practical reason that do not contain both moral and prudential components. Immoralists such as Thrasymachus of *The Republic*, already mentioned, or The Fool of Hobbes' *Leviathan*⁵⁶ infamously took reason to be unified around self-interest and granted no place to morality whatsoever. On the other end of the spectrum, G.E. Moore accepted utilitarianism not only as the correct moral theory, but as the correct complete account of practical rationality, thus denying self-interest a foothold as an independent domain of practical rationality.⁵⁷ Practical reason might also be unified around some third concept that involves aspects of both morality and self-interest. Arguably, this is what Aristotle and other ancient philosophers were doing with the concept of *Eudaimonia*.⁵⁸ We can imagine more radical unified theories of practical reason that neither endorse one half of the morality/self-interest dichotomy, nor try to dissolve the differences between them. For instance, one might take aesthetic value to be the one and only good worth pursuing, as did the character Lord Henry Wotton in Oscar Wilde's novel, *A Picture of Dorian Gray*.⁵⁹

Against the second assumption – that both prudence and morality purport to give verdicts on behalf of reason *simpliciter* – we may raise the point that there is no need for the proponent of the Unity of Practical Reason to understand morality and prudence as vying for the same turf in such a way as to generate a contradiction. One might think that all morality's verdicts are identical to the verdicts of reason *simpliciter*. Or one might think that neither morality nor self-interest is always identical with reason *simpliciter*, but the verdicts of reason *simpliciter* decide on a case-by-case basis

⁵⁵ We have already seen textual evidence that Sidgwick seems to have accepted some version of Conceptual Moral Rationalism, roughly: the view that morality purports to have the backing of reason *simpliciter* behind all of its verdicts. I do not think it would be uncharitable to attribute to Sidgwick something similar about prudence to Sidgwick, though he is less explicit about it.

⁵⁶ Hobbes.

⁵⁷ Moore 98-99.

⁵⁸ Striker.

⁵⁹ Wilde.

which domain should prevail. In short, both morality and self-interest may have roles in a unified theory of practical reason without generating a contradiction. In short, there are a variety of unified theories of practical reason that do not commit one to accepting contradictions. The Unity of Practical Reasons may remain agnostic about which of these options is correct.

I would like to end this section on Sidgwick with a positive suggestion, borrowed from Owen McLeod's his article, "What is Sidgwick's Dualism of Practical Reason?" McLeod favors an interpretation of the contradiction between Egoism and Rational Benevolence similar to P1-P5, which requires divergent cases. He suggests that Sidgwick replace propositions 3 and 4 of the inconsistent set he puts forward on behalf of Sidgwick with 3* and 4* which would make the set logically consistent. The new set of propositions is as follows:⁶⁰

- P1 An act is morally right if and only if it maximizes utility.
- P2 An act is prudentially right if and only if it maximizes agent-utility.
- P3* An act is *prima facie* reasonable if and only if it is morally right or prudentially right
- P4* An act is *prima facie* not reasonable if and only if it is morally wrong or prudentially wrong.
- P5 It is possible for an act that maximizes utility to fail to maximize agent-utility and vice-versa.

I take it that McLeod has in mind something like Ross's *prima facie* duties, but those allergic to all talk of Rossian *prima facie* duties are invited to construe *prima facie* it in its evidential sense. Regardless which way we understand the term *prima facie*, is possible for a single act to be both *prima facie* reasonable and *prima facie* unreasonable without any kind of contradiction. What is not possible for McLeod, or me, is for a single act to both be and not be what he here calls "all-in reasonable," or what I would call reason *simpliciter* reasonable or all-things-considered reasonable. McLeod writes,

[I]n order for an act to be both all-in reasonable and all-in not reasonable, it would have to be an act such that no alternative has more weight than it, and some alternative does have more weight than it. Since that is impossible, it is impossible for an act to be all-in reasonable and all-in not reasonable.⁶¹

⁶⁰ McLeod 2002, 288. Again, this is not verbatim; I have made some stylistic changes, but the style is the same.

⁶¹ McLeod 2002, 288.

Fortunately, as McLeod and I have argued, we have alternatives to Sidgwick's Practical Pluralism which do not involve any contradiction. This concludes my response to Sidgwick.

ii.) Response to Copp

Recall that I took Copp's master argument for Structural Pluralism and against the Unity of Practical Reasons to be the following:

- 1.) If some domain P is the normatively most important domain, then there must be some other set of standards, Q, which makes it the most normatively important (otherwise it would just be declaring itself normatively the most important.)
 - 2.) The reason that makes P the most authoritative domain (i.e. a domain with the features of comprehensiveness and supremacy) must be either a. the reasons it provides itself or b. the reasons provided by some other domain.
 - 3.) Lemma a.: every domain is most important source of reasons, by its own lights, so this cannot be the source of P's comprehensiveness and supremacy.
 - 4.) Lemma b.: if some other domain Q provides the reason that P is supreme, then Q is actually supreme. But comprehensiveness and supremacy are both exclusive properties and so cannot belong to both P and Q.
- C1: No domain P can be the normatively most important domain in the sense of being both comprehensive and authoritative.
 C2: There is no all-things-considered domain having the features of comprehensiveness and supremacy.
 C3: Structural Pluralism is true.
 C4: The Unity of Practical Reasons is false.

I think the first thing to notice about Copp's argument is that it is a sword that cuts both ways. It "proves too much" so that, if sound, it would undermine Structural Pluralism as surely as it would undermine the Unity of Practical Reasons. As McLeod points out, a similar argument can be raised against D-reasons that the Structural Pluralist accepts:

If [Copp's] argument were sound, a parallel argument would show that there is no such thing as an act's being all-things-considered morally right or wrong. The argument would go something like this: in order for conflicts between particular *prima facie* moral duties to be authoritatively settled, there would have to be a supreme moral standpoint. But if there is a supreme moral standpoint, M, then there is another standpoint, N, that ranks M as such; and so on. Thus, there can be no such thing as a supreme moral standpoint; hence, no standpoint from which to assess the all-things-considered rightness or wrongness of actions; hence, no such fact as what a person all-things-considered morally ought to do.

This conclusion should give us pause. Rossian moral theory may have its defects, but it certainly does not imply that there is no such thing as what a person all-things-considered morally ought to do. Clearly, something has gone wrong.⁶²

Again, I think McLeod's decision to use Rossian *prima facie* duties to make this point is unfortunate, since *prima facie* duties in this sense are controversial. However, it would be a mistake to think the force of McLeod's objection depends on this feature; his worry can, I believe, be generalized to apply even to those who reject *prima facie* duties in this sense. Consider a case in which a given action would increase my happiness but decrease happiness on the whole. It's true for a utilitarian that the happiness the action would give me would be a defeasible reason to do it. My happiness carries moral weight in a sense that is not merely epistemic, yet it is subordinate to the verdict of morality as a whole. It is only this widely shared feature of a moral theory – defeasible sub-verdicts, not Rossian *prima facie* duties *per se* – that are needed for McLeod's "proves too much" criticism.

McLeod is right to infer that something has gone wrong. The thing that has gone wrong is premise 1, which rules out the possibility of brute facts of practical reason. This assumption is suspect because, as Russ Shafer-Landau points out, there are many domains of inquiry that contain at least some brute facts, among them logic, mathematics, physics and chemistry.⁶³ It is hard to see how the Reasons Pluralist can consistently refuse to allow for brute facts in practical reasoning to be appealed to without drawing all of those other domains into question. We certainly do not want to find ourselves in the position of Achilles in Lewis Carroll's essay, "What the Tortoise said to Achilles" who was ensnared in a vicious infinite regress due to his inability or unwillingness to accept the validity of Modus Ponens as a brute fact about logic.⁶⁴ The committed Reasons Pluralist may object that practical reason is sufficiently different from these other domains of inquiry alleged to have brute facts as to cast doubt on the analogy. But we have already seen that the Reasons Pluralist must accept brute facts

⁶² McLeod 2001, 286.

⁶³ Shafer-Landau 45.

⁶⁴ Carroll.

of practical reasons within domains, so the assertion that there cannot be brute facts about reason-as-such, or the all-things-considered domain is suspect.⁶⁵

Copp insists that there can be no brute facts about practical rationality, claiming: "We need a showing that rationality has special normative significance."⁶⁶ He adds:

We imagined [Gyges] as asking "Why should I be moral?" and this seemed an intelligible question for him to ask since doing his duty would mean giving up a life of power and love. But we can also imagine him asking, "Why should I be rational?" and this also seems to be an intelligible question to ask since pursuing his plan would involve him in murder, and it would therefore mean violating his moral duty.⁶⁷

Our discussion is complicated because Copp in some places adopts a specialized meaning of the word "rationality" that means something like pursuit of ends one values in the sense of having a certain kind of pro-attitude toward.⁶⁸ Taken this way, it is indeed an intelligible question why Gyges should be rational, and one to which we are right to hope for a substantive answer. But if we take "rationality" to simply be responsiveness to the reasons that there are, asking, "Why should I be rational?" is tantamount to asking "Why should I act according to the reasons that I have?" The answer is simply: because they are the reasons that you have! Copp is right that to ask, "Why should I be rational?" is still an *intelligible* question, since questions with trivial answers are intelligible, but it is not one to which an interesting answer can be given. I should abide by the verdicts of practical rationality as such simply because it is the verdict of practical rationality as such, and that is the end of it. Asking for further justification for doing what I ought to do according to the verdicts practical reason as such is like asking, "What holds up the world?" To borrow a memorable phrase from Prof. Dominic Bailey, you don't need a turtle to put it on.

McLeod provides another response to Copp's argument that I do not think is successful, though I think a discussion of it may nonetheless be illuminating. This response involves rejecting

⁶⁵ I thank Graeme Forbes for an informative discussion about this. Dr. Forbes suggested the "and" operator is an even more obvious case of a brute fact about logic than *modus ponens*. If one doesn't immediately grasp the logic from p, q to "p and q" no further principle can be appealed to. Logicians disagree about what aspects of logic are the most basic, but that there is a "basement" is beyond dispute.

⁶⁶ Copp 2007, 273.

⁶⁷ Copp 2007, 279.

⁶⁸ Copp 2007 309-355.

premise 4 of Copp's argument, which states, "if some other domain Q provides the reason that P is the most authoritative, then Q is actually most authoritative." McLeod believes that there may be some set of standards that makes the all-things-considered domain normatively most authoritative without *itself* being the most supreme. McLeod distinguishes between the normative supremacy within a domain and the supremacy that involves the establishment power to set up a domain in the first place. His example is the relationship between the Constitution of the United States and the US Supreme Court:

Now the Constitution is not itself the highest court of appeal in the land; it is not "supreme" in the same sense in which the Supreme Court is supreme. Thus, there is a standard of sorts – the Constitution – that coherently assigns supremacy to the Supreme Court, but is not itself supreme in the same sense. It is supreme only in the sense that it establishes the Supreme Court is the highest court in the land.

Now consider *S*, our candidate for a standard with the property of supremacy. If *S* is supreme, then *S* issues verdicts about what just plain ought to be done; there is no higher court of appeal. And it may be that there is some further "standard" – a much better word would be theory – *R*, that entails that *S* is supreme in the requisite sense. But this does not mean that *R* itself is supreme in the requisite sense. *R* establishes that *S* in the normatively most important standard, but *R* itself does not settle deontic conflicts.⁶⁹

To be clear: McLeod acknowledges it *would* be troubling if we justified the judicial authority of the US Supreme Court by an appeal some even more authoritative judicial body, call it the Super-Supreme Court. For this would contradict our starting supposition that the US Supreme Court is judicially supreme. McLeod takes the Constitution to be different than a Super-Supreme Court because it is superior to the US Supreme Court in a way *other than the way in which* the US Supreme Court is supposed to be supreme. Returning now to Copp's argument, If McLeod is correct, we are now in a position to allege that this premise rests on an equivocation, since it may be the case that one thing is authoritative in one way and another in another way. Once this equivocation is exposed, it becomes clear that no contradiction is entailed by claiming both the standard and the thing with the establishment power are supreme, but in different ways.

⁶⁹ McLeod 2001, 287.

This takes care of the contradiction, but the threat of vicious infinite regress looms large, as it seems we are owed some answer as to why the Constitution has establishment authority with regard to the US Supreme Court, and not something else. Perhaps we can appeal to the authority of the Constitutional Convention for establishing the power and scope of the Constitution, but we are immediately faced with the same question with regard to *its* authority. This can lead to only one of two outcomes: either we reach bedrock of brute "establishment" facts at a certain point, or we accept an infinitely regressing series of standards which have different types of establishment power. If we reject the possibility of infinite regress then we must arrive at some bedrock with regard to establishment power.

McLeod seems to accept a bedrock establishment power, which he identifies as "theory." Presumably, McLeod means that it is the feature of reality that the correct theory represents that has the bedrock establishment power rather than the theory itself, which exists in the minds of human beings. With this in mind, I submit that it is unclear whether this feature of reality would really be distinct from the domain of reason *simpliciter* itself. In a forthcoming paper, Chris Heathwood argues that any theory of moral reasons, even reductionist ones, must include at least some brute facts about normativity of the form: "If such-and-such non-moral condition holds, then such and such moral condition holds in virtue of that."⁷⁰ I think that Heathwood is correct, and that his point can be extended to theories of practical reason generally: any theory of practical rationality must include some brute facts about practical rationality with exactly the same structure. If that is right, then perhaps the feature of reality that possesses the establishment power might simply be identified with the all-things-considered or reason *simpliciter* domain, after all. So it is unclear to me whether McLeod's second objection reduces to the point already made about brute facts. It may, however, make the unavoidability of brute facts about practical reason seem all the more clear to us.

This concludes my response to Copp, though I shall have something more to say about his views in Chapter 6.

⁷⁰ Heathwood 6.

Chapter 4: Can we make sense of reason *simpliciter*?

I mentioned in Chapter 1 that Reasons Pluralists make both semantic and metaphysical claims. While most of my project is devoted to refuting their metaphysical claims, it is worth taking some time to address their chief semantic claim, the claim that a normatively authoritative, all-things-considered domain, the domain of reason *simpliciter*, cannot *even be made sense of*. This can be taken to mean either that the concept of a reason *simpliciter* domain is itself incoherent, and so can't be made sense of even in principle, or that they simply find themselves unable to understand it. The claim that the idea of a comprehensive, authoritative domain is incoherent seems to be what Copp was getting at with his argument. Since I have already responded to this argument and I am not aware of any other for the same conclusion, I will focus here on the claim of Reasons Pluralists to be unable to understand the idea of an all-things-considered or reason *simpliciter* domain. My argument will proceed in two steps: first I will establish that the relation of normative superiority is instantiated within domains. Indeed, even the Reasons Pluralist must believe it to be so. Second, I will contend that once this is allowed, that there is no reason for thinking that this kind of relationship can't be instantiated between all domains the Pluralist accepts and a meta-domain that issues all-things-considered reasons or reasons *simpliciter*.

To establish the first point, let us to return to a point that McLeod made in his response to Copp. McLeod noted that within the domain of morality, morality itself is normatively superior to the lower level of *prima facie* duties that may enter in to a given moral decision. I believe this point can be generalized to other domains as well. In the aesthetic domain, the evaluation of a novel's plot and the evaluation of its writing style both carry some aesthetic weight, but less aesthetic weight than the evaluation of the novel as a whole. In the prudential domain, consideration of certain aspects of my own well-being carry some amount of prudential weight, but less prudential weight than the view of prudential reason as a whole. It seems, then, that this same relation of normative superiority is a necessary feature of every normative domain, as being a product of the verdicts of many sub-domains. Thus, the defender of Pluralism, who does believe in reasons *within* domains, must at least understand the concept of normative superiority within domains.

The question now is whether we can make sense of a comprehensive, all-things-considered domain that bears the same relation of normative superiority to the standard domains Pluralists accept (prudence, morality, etiquette, etc.) that these domains bear to their sub-domains. I believe a concrete example can be of help here. Consider finding yourself in a case in which two of these domains – say etiquette and morality – issue conflicting verdicts. To paint a fuller picture, imagine that you find yourself in a society in which the code of etiquette involves of acknowledgement of a racial hierarchy. Morally, you are opposed to racism, but when the occasion to give deference to the racial hierarchy arises, you are compelled to act in *some* way. You find yourself asking the question: "Should I act in accordance with etiquette, or in accordance with morality?" You decide that morality is more important and ignore the injunction of etiquette.

I have a strong intuition in this case that you have acted reasonably; that is, that you did not act under a whim or according to some arbitrary psychological fetish in privileging morality over etiquette but responded to practical reasons that came to bear on that situation. I cannot compel the Reasons Pluralist to share my intuition, but I think many Reasons Pluralists are likely to agree with me about this case. Even those Pluralists who do not share my intuition might be willing to concede that they can *at least make sense of* coming to an overall judgment in a case like this in which we decide it is reasonable to privilege the verdict of one domain over the verdict of another. That concession alone would not be proof that we can make sense of a normatively supreme, all-things-considered domain, but it does, I believe, shift the burden of proof.⁷¹

To Reasons Pluralist who is able to follow me this far I would ask, "If you are willing to allow that we can *at least conceive of* coming to an overall judgment between the domains of etiquette and morality in a divergent case like the one described, then why think that we are not capable of conceiving that reason may arrive at an overall judgment between any two (or more) domains in

⁷¹ Perhaps the defender of Reasons Pluralism endorses a restricted version of Reasons Pluralism according to which etiquette is not a legitimate domain. In this case, my example will not be persuasive. However, I think a similar strategy can work for versions of Pluralism that contain only the standard categories of prudence and morality. We may substitute this example with the case provided by Dale Dorsey in which a man can watch his favorite TV show (prudentially the best option, but only slightly better than the next best prudentially good option) at the expense of shocking one hundred people (morally the worst option, by far). Most of us have the intuition that he has most reason to refrain from watching his favorite TV show and not in the trivial sense that he morally ought to refrain from the delivering the shocks. (Dorsey 6-7)

divergent cases?" To be able to understand this as coherent simply is to be able to understand the idea of a normatively supreme all-things-considered domain as coherent. It therefore seems that we can make sense of a supreme, all-things-considered domain; Reasons Pluralists who do not have this concept can arrive at it by a series of simple, seemingly innocuous steps from claims that they do hold.

My final point is that the Reasons Pluralist's claim not to be able to understand the concept of all-things-considered domain may not be consistent with the claim that an all-things-considered domain doesn't exist. If I do not know what a concept is, then it seems I am in no place to insist that concept is never instantiated. Alastair Norcross has suggested a way I might not be able to understand a concept and yet know it is un-instantiated: I might know that a "gritch" is a 2-ton thing at a certain map coordinate, then arrive there and see there is no two ton object at that location. In such a case, I would be justified in concluding that there is no "gritch" even though I have no concept of what a "gritch" is based on this incomplete description. Also, Norcross's example of the "gritch" would only provide me with justification for believing that there is no gritch at this particular location, not that no gritches in the universe exist. It might be further stipulated that I know that existing *at this particular location* is part of the essence of gritch-ness. Now I would be justified in believing that there is no gritch (for there can only be one) but I find the example too contrived to cast much light on the concept I am interested in exploring here, which involves no such curious indexicals. In most cases, if not all, one cannot infer that something doesn't exist without understanding the concept.

This concludes my critique of the Reasons Pluralists' semantic claims.

Chapter 5: Argument 1: Structural Pluralism and convergent cases

It is common for proponents of Structural Pluralism to focus on cases in which one domain of practical reasons dictates that I do one course of action and another dictates that I refrain or do something incompatible. In other words, there is a tendency to focus on divergent cases. Indeed, we have seen that Copp builds cases of conflict into his definition of the kind of Structural Pluralism he defends. Focus on the tensions between morality and prudence is especially common. Copp's own example is Gyges and the ring of power: he can either use the ring of power for evil doing what is in his self-interest at the expense of morality or remain a poor shepherd doing what is morally good at the expense of his self-interest. Sidgwick also seems to be mainly concerned with divergent cases. His concern that "[A] *harmony* between the maxim of Prudence [i.e. the Principle of Egoism] and the maxim of Rational Benevolence must somehow be demonstrated, if morality is to be completely rational..."⁷² Likewise, in his despairing conclusion, Sidgwick writes: "But *in the rarer cases of a recognized conflict between self-interest and duty*, practical reason, being divided against itself, would cease to be a motive on either side..."⁷³ The first quote seems to imply that it is only the non-harmonic cases – divergent cases in other words – which threaten the rationality of morality. I read the second quote as an explicit statement that the problem that so bothered Sidgwick emerges only in cases of divergence.

My own view is that divergent cases may serve to make whatever philosophical and practical problems that surround Reasons Pluralism more visible, but those features must be present in convergent cases as well. Troubling features of Reasons Pluralism may remain even when the demands of two distinct domains converge one hundred percent of the time. For example, consider a case in which two deities demand conformity to exactly the same set of standards. If both these deities demand my complete and exclusive respect, it is still an open question *from respect of which* deity should I conform to these standards. Likewise, if morality and prudence were to require exactly the

⁷² Sidgwick ME 498. Emphasis mine.

⁷³ Sidgwick ME 508.

same set of actions, it would still be reasonable for me to wonder what my motive should be in performing those actions, and whether I am affording one of these domains the proper respect if I act exclusively from the other. It may be tempting to respond that actions in this case are rationally over-determined, but this would be mistaken, for if Structural Pluralism is true there would be no all-things-considered domain which would take both into account and issue an over-determined verdict. The action would simply be co-determined in two incomparable domains. So the problem remains.

Moreover, if morality, prudence and all the other practical domains issue domain-relative reasons incomparable in normative weight when their judgments diverge, why should we expect things to be different in cases when their judgments converge? Claiming that the domains of morality and prudence are comparable in convergent cases is something like claiming that it is possible to add two mathematical variables together, but a computing error to subtract one from the other—very strange!⁷⁴ I would not be surprised to learn that ingenious mathematicians and logicians are capable of devising rules to represent such counter-intuitive functions, but I cannot believe that such systems would represent the formal structure of our practical reasons. I take it as a given, then, that the trans-domain comparability of practical reasons on an absolute scale in both divergent and convergent cases stand and fall together. The argument I will now present is as follows:

- 1.) If practical reasons of different domains are incomparable and non-additive in divergent cases, they are incomparable and non-additive convergent cases.
- 2.) It is not the case that practical reasons of different domains are incomparable and non-additive in convergent cases.
C1: Therefore practical reasons are not incomparable and non-additive in divergent cases.
- 3.) If practical reasons of different domains are comparable and additive in both divergent and non-divergent cases, then the unity of practical reasons is true.
C2: The unity of practical reasons is true.

I will now attempt to vindicate premise 2 drawing on my own riff on the Gyges story. Recall that on Copp's telling of the story, Gyges was presented with a choice in which the verdicts of morality and self-interest diverged sharply. I propose to modify the Gyges case so that Gyges has three options: a. remain a shepherd and be morally good but live a less satisfying life for himself, b.

⁷⁴ The full strangeness of this result can be appreciated when we imagine modifying a case of an exact tie between two domains to a case in which the two domains diverge but only *slightly*. In order for my interlocutor to maintain that there is an all-things-considered best thing to do in the convergent case but not in the divergent case, he would have to maintain that this slight alternation makes the all-things-considered domain vanish, as if by magic.

use the ring for evil purposes and, in so doing, provide himself with a very satisfying life and, lastly, c. use the ring to do good deeds thereby procuring for himself rewards that are equal to what he would have procured for himself had he used it for wicked purposes. Suppose Gyges can choose to give up the power to become invisible and use the ring instead to stave off a devastating drought, or to peacefully repel an invading army. We can represent this version of the dilemma on a chart, taking the numbers to represent not the number of reasons in favor of for and against the various options, but as measurements of the total weight of the reasons for and against each option:

c.) Use ring morally	b.) Use ring wickedly	a.) Remain a shepherd	Action
+1,000	+1,000	-1,000	Prudential Reason
+1,000	-1,000	+1,000 ⁷⁵	Moral Reason

Now, given this set of options, what ought Gyges do? What does Gyges have the most reason to do? Better yet, to avoid complications with the contentious words 'ought,' and 'reason' what would you recommend that Gyges do if he were your friend coming to you for advice? I would unhesitatingly recommend to Gyges the one thing that is *both* morally good and prudentially good. The intuition can be made clearer if we break the three-way comparison down into two two-way comparisons. Gyges is faced with choosing between a and c. According to my stipulations, there are only two differences: c has strong prudential reasons in favor of it and a has strong prudential reasons against it. Likewise, given a choice between b and c, the only difference is that b. has strong moral reasons against it and c has strong moral reasons in favor of it. Again, I take these features to be relevant as to which option I would recommend, and again I would recommend c. And I am inclined to think that I have a rational basis for both of these recommendations. Since I take c to be rationally preferable to both b and a in pairwise comparisons, I take it to be all-things-considered better. If pressed on why, I would appeal to the following principles. For the choice between a and c, the principles are as follows:

⁷⁵ For the sake of rounding out the numbers to make the point I want to make, I will assume that there is some moral good to Gyges' remaining a shepherd and not bothering with the ring either way. If it seems too implausible that the moral good would be equal between this and doing the heroic act, the reader is invited to substitute some other act that is prudentially good for Gyges but morally innocent.

1.) Given a choice between an option that has more weighty prudential reasons in its favor and an option that has no (or less weighty) prudential reasons in its favor but is otherwise identical to it, it is reasonable to prefer the option with weightier prudential reasons in its favor.

And:

2.) Given a choice between an option that has greater prudential weight against it to one with no (or less weighty) prudential reasons against it but otherwise identical to it, it is the most reasonable to choose the one with no (or less weighty) prudential reasons against it.

For the choice between b. and c., the principles I appealed to are as follows:

3.) Given a choice between an option that has weighty moral reasons in its favor and an option that has no (or only trivial) moral reasons in its favor but is otherwise identical to it, it is reasonable to prefer the option with weighty moral reasons in its favor.

And

4.) Given a choice between an option that has weighty prudential reasons against it to one with no (or only trivial) prudential reasons against it but otherwise identical to it, it is the most reasonable to choose the one with no (or only trivial) prudential reasons against it.

The acceptance of any one of these principles would be incompatible with Sidgwick's "Dualism of Practical Reason" between the prudential and the moral, the most common kind of Structural Pluralism. This is because all four principles involve trans-domain comparison and imply the existence of an authoritative all-things-considered domain. One may accept a less common version of Reasons Pluralism that involves the domains of aesthetic and legal reasons, say, rather than between prudential and moral, in which case the above principles would have no force. However, we can abstract from these four formulas above to arrive at two more general formulas that are both incompatible with all forms of Structural Pluralism:

5.) Given a choice between an option that has more (or weightier) reasons, of any kind, in its favor and an option that has fewer (or less weighty) reasons, of any kind, in its favor but is otherwise identical to it, it is reasonable to prefer the option with more (or weightier) reasons in its favor.

And

- 6.) Given a choice between an option that has more (or weightier) reasons, of any kind, against it to one with fewer (or less weighty) reasons, of any kind, against it but otherwise identical to it, it is most reasonable to choose the one with fewer (or less weighty) reasons against it.⁷⁶

The Structural Pluralist, who insists that all the truths about practical reasons must be settled *within* domains, is committed to the claim that c is not all-things-considered or reason *simpliciter* preferable to either b or a on either pairwise comparison. This is so despite the extra prudential or moral reasons in favor of c. Perhaps she can claim that she has a personal preference for c or take cold comfort in the fact that, by her own lights, there is at least no reason why she should prefer one of the other options to c. Still, she is stuck with the conclusion that choosing c over one of the other options would simply be the result of a non-rational preference, despite the fact that it is both the only option that has neither morality nor prudence counting against it in pairwise comparisons, and the only option that does have weighty moral and prudential reasons counting in its favor! In other words, she is forced to deny both 5 and 6. But, I contend, these appear to be basic principles of practical reasoning, and any position which entails a denial of them has met its end via *reductio ad absurdum*.

My argument is:

- 1.) If c. is more choice-worthy than b on a pairwise comparison and more choice-worthy than a. on a pairwise comparison, then c is more choice-worthy than both a and b.
- 2.) c. is more choice-worthy than b on a pairwise comparison and more choice-worthy than a. on a pairwise comparison.
C1: Therefore, c is more choice-worthy than both b. and c.
- 3.) If c is more choice-worthy than either b or a, then it is possible to compare reasons across domains to arrive at an all-things-considered verdict.
- 4.) If it is possible to compare reasons across domains to arrive at an all-things-considered verdict, then the Unity of Practical Reasons is true.
C2: Therefore, the Unity of Practical Reasons is true.

I take premise 1 to require no further defense. Premise 3, too, seems straightforward enough—if c is more choice-worthy than both a and b it can't be simply superior from within a distinct domain, for this would violate my stipulations about the case. So, c must be superior to both a

⁷⁶ Granted, a philosopher with consequentialist inclinations who sees harm as reducible to the depravation of benefit will not see a difference between 1 and 2 or 3 and 4 or 5 and 6, but that does not matter greatly for my argument here; the consequentialist should be happy with either way of talking.

and b from some more encompassing point of view. Premise 4 requires some clarification, as it may be possible to accept a more encompassing "point of view of rationality" while denying that it has normative supremacy above the other, local domains. I, however, am using "all-things-considered" to mean a domain that *does* have the property of normative supremacy. My justification for this is the claim that verdicts which take more of our total reasons into consideration are normatively superior to those which take *less* of our reasons into consideration. Suppose in deciding between two career options, Smith decides that quality of location counts in favor of relocating to Hawaii and having the best job prospects counts in favor of relocating to Dallas, Texas. Then, with this in mind, Smith decides quality of location is more important than job prospects and so decides to move to Hawaii. This verdict in favor of staying is normatively superior to either of the provisional judgments precisely because it takes two different types of reason into consideration and makes a judgment that encompasses more reasons than either of them taken independently. I take this to be basic and will offer no further defense in favor of it.

That leaves us with premise 2 as a possible vulnerability. While I find the intuition behind premise 2 – that Gyges, in my example, has most reason to choose c in either of the pairwise comparisons – very compelling, I recognize that some philosophers are skeptical of case intuitions. Nevertheless, I believe that even if we discount the case intuition that c is the most choice-worthy action, a good case can be made for premise 2 on independent grounds. Consider two plausible claims about rationality: first, a reason is defined which "that which counts in favor or against."⁷⁷ A practical reason is just a special kind of reason, namely "that which counts in favor or against an *action*." Thus, to have an added practical reason is to have an added reason in favor of performing some action. This is not to say that the action with the greatest number of reasons in favor of it or against it automatically wins or loses, respectively; it may be the case that one has a hundred trivial reasons to perform some action and one reason, strong enough to be decisive, against it (it is morally impermissible, say.) I do not advocate a policy of "one reason, one vote," but I do insist that every reason counts for *something* normatively. Indeed, to be a practical reason at all *just is* to count

⁷⁷ This can be either in favor of an action in the case of prudential reason or in favor of a belief in the case of epistemic reason.

normatively for or against some action; the idea of a practical reason which counts for or against no action is incoherent. From these basic claims about the nature of reasons, and practical reasons in particular, we can determine that *c* is the most choice worthy action for Gyges to take without any appeal to case intuitions whatsoever. The argument is:

- 1.) If two options are identical in all practically salient respects except that one option has either one more reason in its favor or (inclusive or) one fewer against it, then there is some reason to prefer that option.
 - 2.) The only difference in practically salient respects between *c* and either of its rival options is that *c* has either one more reason in its favor or (inclusive or) one fewer reasons against it.
- C: therefore, there is at least some reason to prefer *c* to its rivals.

This argument is valid, but some proponents of Reasons Pluralism may allege that it is not sound. They may complain that premise 1 is true only if the word "reasons" in the antecedent is taken to mean "D-reasons" and "reasonable" in the consequent is taken to mean "reasonable relative to the standard of some set of D-reasons." As it stands – the criticism continues – we are invited to slide from "reason" in the sense of D-reason to "reasonable" in an all-things-considered sense, and this interpretation makes the premise false. So Gyges has either more prudential reason or more moral reason to prefer *c*, depending on the set-up, but not more reason *simpliciter*.

I respond first by saying the argument is valid regardless of how we interpret "reasons" in the antecedent of premise 1, so long as we use the term univocally. Second, I note that a Reasons Pluralist who insists that all "reasons" are simply "D-reasons" which lack normative weight is going to have a difficult time distinguishing his view from practical nihilism. It is, after all, perfectly consistent with practical nihilism to admit the existence of D-reasons which lack normative weight. I take it as axiomatic that reasons are those things "which counts in favor or against"; to deny this is to threaten to make "reasons" into a specialty term. Yet, if I am right that the Structural Pluralist must deny that *c* is more choice-worthy than its rivals in my modified version of the Gyges story, then he is confessing that the added D-reasons don't actually count for (or against) anything. If all reasons occur within domains and all D-reasons behave this way, then it is hard to see how we have a view distinct from practical nihilism. This seems inconsistent with the Reasons Pluralists' insistence that there are

reasons of different kinds. For instance, Copp writes: "I think there are reasons of many different kinds, including moral reasons, aesthetic reasons, and, presumably reasons of self-interest."⁷⁸

I anticipate the following response from the Reasons Pluralist:

When you say that a practical reason must count in favor of or against some action you assume, wrongly, that it must count for or against some action *simpliciter*. This amounts to question-begging. We Structural Pluralists accept that reasons count for and against actions, but we take there to be many ways for reasons to matter. In addition to counting for or against an action *simpliciter*, reasons might count for or against an action morally, prudentially, aesthetically, etc. Thus, there is no reason to suppose that this principle of practical reasoning which says "A practical reason must count in favor of an action" counts against our view.

I find this response unconvincing, especially when we focus on concrete cases of decision-making, which are, lest we forget, what the concern about practical reason is all about. If I am asking a friend for advice as to whether I ought to become a doctor or a lawyer, it will be of no help for him to give a reply that cites the proscriptions of the Constitution of the Satanic Grave Robber Society⁷⁹ or the honor code of medieval Europe. An indefinite number of D-reasons like this in favor of doing something are worthless for actually providing me with normative guidance. They don't count in favor *in a way*, they count for nothing!

Nor will it do for the Reasons Pluralist to insist that Gyges is *morally* unreasonable when he chooses a over c and *prudentially* unreasonable when he chooses b over c while maintaining that there is no reason *simpliciter* sense of reasonable. For once we start the game of delineating types of reasonableness we are not likely to find any stopping place, and the types of reasonableness will proliferate to absurdity. If Gyges puts his left hand on a burning stove is he left-hand-on-stove irrational? If he puts his right hand on a burning stove is he right-hand-burning-stove irrational? In a move analogous to McLeod's initial objection to Copp's argument, I am suggesting that the sword cuts both ways here. If the Reasons Pluralist is in his rights to object to an all-things-considered, reason

⁷⁸ Copp 1999, 91.

⁷⁹ This colorful example of a domain we should ignore comes from Dorsey, 5.

simpliciter reasonableness, then we are in ours when we object to an all-things-considered moral or prudential reasonableness.

This concludes my first argument against Structural Reasons Pluralism.

Chapter 6: Argument 2: the restricted/unrestricted dilemma

A second argument against Structural Pluralism goes as follows:

- 1.) Structural Pluralism must be either restricted or unrestricted.
 - 2.) Unrestricted Structural Pluralism is false.
 - 3.) Restricted Pluralism must appeal to some restricting principle, which must either be normative or descriptive.
 - 4.) If the restricting principle is normative, then there is an all-things-considered ought and Structural Pluralism is false.
 - 5.) There restricting principle can't be purely descriptive.
- C: Structural Pluralism is false.

I begin with specifying what is meant by restricted and unrestricted. By Unrestricted Pluralism, I mean a version of Structural Pluralism according to which *all* domains issue D-reasons.⁸⁰ In other words, for any set of standards whatsoever, there are D-reasons relative to that set of standards. Restricted Pluralism, by contrast, maintains that only some domains of evaluation issue D-reasons. Its list of domains will likely include the standard domains of morality and prudence and may include others, such as aesthetics and etiquette, depending on the version being put forward. It is a logical truth that either all sets of standards issue D-reasons, or that some do not, so the dichotomy put forward in the first premise is genuinely exhaustive.

The absurdity of Unrestricted Pluralism can be shown straightway, for such a view would have to maintain that any set of standards conceivable issues reasons *in precisely the same sense* that morality and prudence do, and no higher standard adjudicates among their verdicts. This includes such irrelevant sets of standards as "blades-of-grass-counting" and acting in accordance with the Constitution of the Satanic Grave Robbers Society. Copp cites a similar example from Richard Joyce who imagines, "[S]omeone declares a normative system in which everyone ought only to purchase things made in Norway in the autumn and purports thereby to have made it the case that there are duties of the Norwegian-autumnal-product kind."⁸¹ Even worse, for any set of standards that *does* seem to have some normative pull, we can stipulate some set of standards that is its opposite. Morality issues us moral D-reasons; anti-morality issues anti-moral D-reasons which tell us to do the least moral action available to us. We can imagine similar anti-domains for aesthetics, prudence, and so

⁸⁰ For the purposes of this chapter, disregard the conclusion of the previous chapter which purported to show that D-reasons are not reasons in any sense.

⁸¹ Copp 2009, 26.

forth. The Unrestricted Pluralist must see all of these domains as being, in a sense rationally on a par, since they all issue D-reasons between which there can be no adjudication. I take it as obvious that not all of these domains are rationally on a par; abiding by some is more reasonable than abiding by others. We are even in our rights to wonder why we should stop short of admitting domains which demand impossible things. After all, if we are willing to go against the grain of intuitions this far, it's unclear why we would stop short of denying "ought implies can." I take the absurdity here to be self-evident; thus, we should reject Unrestricted Pluralism.

If we are to endorse Structural Pluralism, then it seems we must restrict the domains that issue respectable D-reasons to rule out at least the most preposterous domains, whose verdicts we may legitimately ignore. In other words, we must adopt some sort of Restricted Structural Pluralism. The question before us is this: how do we sort the wheat from the chaff? How do we determine which domains are "legitimate" and which are not? Again, I prefer to break this question down into an exhaustive dichotomy of possible answers: either the principle includes normative terms or it does not. Copp appears to take the former route, and attempts to specify a normative principle to determine which domains constitute reasons. He writes:

[H]umans face a family of endemic problems, due to the interaction between their nature and the circumstances in which they live. Second, the capacity of humans to deal successfully with these problems depends on their subscribing to a system of norms or standards. Our subscription to these systems enables us to deal with the relevant problems. This is the basic fact that underlies all normativity. For example, the function of morality is to ameliorate the problem of sociality. The normative systems that have a relevant normative status... are abstract systems of rules that, when subscribed to and complied with by enough people in their scope, enable us to deal with such problems. The *function* of the various normative systems of this sort that play characteristic roles in human life is to enable us to cope with these problems.⁸²

Copp defines a problem as a limitation on our ability to achieve what we value. This lands him in hot water immediately since, "achieving what we value" is a good only relative to the particular

⁸² Copp 2009, 26.

domain that he refers to as self-grounded reason.⁸³ We are certainly within our rights to ask how the standards of some particular domain can provide the principle that demarcates the domains that issue D-reasons from those that do not. Copp is also confused to refer to our ability to deal with human problems as "a basic fact that underlies all normativity." In fact, the very idea of a problem, understood both in the normal sense and as a barrier to achieving what we value, *presupposes* normativity and so can't be called upon to explain it. If one appeals to a normative principle to sort the good domains from the bad or irrelevant domains, then one has appealed to an inter-domain normative principle of exactly the sort that Structural Pluralism denies. That which evaluates domains and ranks their verdicts in terms of rational importance simply *is* the all-things-considered domain, or the domain of reason *simpliciter*.

It might be thought that the Structural Pluralist can avoid this objection by appealing to some purely descriptive, non-normative set of standards to distinguish the good domains from the bad and irrelevant ones. Copp's own view might be read as an attempt to do this if we take "problem" here to be a technical term denoting the inhibition of the expression of a certain kind of psychological state, the "valuing state," provided that we are careful not to describe this state in normative terms. An example might give us some reason for encouragement: the good cars in the lot are to be sorted from the bad ones based on how new their paint coats are, how many RPMs their engines can run at for extended periods of time, etc., none of which are normative properties. Unfortunately for the friend of Structural Pluralism, this response is doomed to fail.

The trouble is that we may ask of any purely descriptive criteria, "Why this set of descriptive criteria, rather than some other?" and it becomes clear that some normative criterion was being drawn upon to select the descriptive criterion to begin with. So although we might, in many practical situations, be able to identify a set of non-normative criteria for sorting F's according to good and bad, these criteria will necessarily be parasitic upon an unstated set of normative standards. In the case of Copp's theory, we have only ask, "Why is it that *these* psychological states delineate the domains that issue D-reasons and not others?" to get some sense of the difficulty. The choice must either be arbitrary, or some normative features must be appealed to. That Copp identifies the relevant

⁸³ Copp 2007, 333.

psychological states as "valuing states" –a term which wears its normativity on its sleeves – I take him to have conceded this latter point.

Perhaps the best response available to the Structural Pluralist is to reject premise 3 of this argument on the ground that it is simply a brute fact which domains issue "legitimate" D-reasons, and this cannot be explained by reference to any more general principle. The trouble is any such response will entail endorsing brute facts about practical reason, which Copp is so keen to deny in his attempted refutation of the Unity of Practical Reasons. Surely, a move such as this would put the defender of Reasons Pluralism in an awkward situation, since we may now ask, "once we allow for there to be brute facts about D-reasons, why can't there be a smaller set of brute facts about reason *simpliciter* as well?" Indeed, the brute facts of reason *simpliciter* would probably be fewer and have a role in explaining why we should pay attention to some domains and not others. Worse yet, we are in our rights to ask why the brute facts about which domains are "legitimate" and which are not would not simply *be* facts about all-things-considered rationality since they must, by definition be over and above the D-reasons which occur within any particular domain.

Thus, it seems to me that the defender of Reasons Pluralism runs into very serious problems regardless of how he answers this dilemma.

Conclusion

A religious analogy may serve to elucidate the trouble that Structural Reasons Pluralism threatens us with. Matthew 6:24 of the King James Version of the Bible states, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." A "Mormonad" poster, part of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints' youth outreach program, depicts the idea expressed in this scripture as a seated woman holding both a violin to her chin and a French horn in her lap.⁸⁴ She looks up uncertainly at the imposing figures of two maestros who, with their backs to the poster-viewers, seem to be leading different songs. She seems to be favoring the one on our left, but not decisively. The religious message is clear enough: just as the role of each maestro is an exclusive one, so the role of God in our lives must be exclusive. It cannot be that God and "the way of the world" both occupy the exclusive role of the most important things in our lives. The language of love and despising is a little antiquated: perhaps, in modern English, but it certainly seems correct that she must follow one at the neglect of the other.

My goal in this essay has been to defend the Unity of Practical Reasons, thus rejecting the idea that we are constantly subject to a plurality of masters. While I try not to be influenced too much by my desire to arrive at what I saw as an attractive conclusion, I find myself delighted that reason has vindicated the more optimistic view of rationality. We have seen that Sidgwick, one of the great defenders of Reasons Pluralism, found our situation to be tragic, almost intolerable. In his famously despairing statement at the end of the first edition of *Methods*, he declared that the cosmos of duty are reduced to chaos. If my arguments here are sound, then more accurate philosophical astronomy has revealed that the heavenly bodies have never deviated from their regular orbits. Rationality need not bring despair.

⁸⁴ Online at: <http://www.lds.org/new-era/1983/03/mormonad?lang=eng>

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