

Essay Guideline: Sidgwick's Defense of Mill

From p. 242 of the textbook:

Do Sidgwick's comments on how consequentialism licenses one to give preferential treatment to one's near and dear also support other sorts of preferential treatment? In particular, would it permit a police officer or judge to give preferential treatment to friends and relatives? Why or why not?

Begin by reading pp. 241-242 of the textbook. Make sure you understand the objection to Mill's position, and how Sidgwick tries to defend Mill's theory against this objection.

Notice that Sidgwick's arguments are a justification for giving preference to ourselves and to those who are near and dear to us. Would this same line of argument justify this sort of preferential treatment in other contexts? In particular, would arguments like these justify a judge or police officer (whom we generally expect to treat everyone equally) in treating his/her friends and family members preferentially?

For each one of Sidgwick's 4 reasons, discuss whether it would also be a good reason for a judge or police officer to give preferential treatment to friends and family. Here is an outline for your paper:

- I. Introduction: Briefly outline the argument (against Mill's utilitarianism) to which Sidgwick is responding. Then explain that you will consider whether Sidgwick's reasoning could also be used to justify a judge or police officer giving preferential treatment to friends and family.
- II. Sidgwick's 1st reason: To help others one must know about them. Discuss whether this is a good reason for judges and police officers to give preferential treatment to friends and family.
- III. Sidgwick's 2nd reason: To help others one must have contact with them. Discuss whether this is a good reason for judges and police officers to give preferential treatment to friends and family.
- IV. Sidgwick's 3rd reason: It is human nature that we will work harder (and thus get better results) when we are helping those we care about. Discuss whether this is a good reason for judges and police officers to give preferential treatment to friends and family.
- V. Sidgwick's 4th reason: We must not neglect the relationships that generate so much happiness for us. Discuss whether this is a good reason for judges and police officers to give preferential treatment to friends and family.
- VI. Conclusion: Sum up your discussion briefly, stating whether Sidgwick's reasoning could be used to justify judges or police officers in treating friends or family preferentially.