

Rashdall's Ideal Utilitarianism

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Ideal utilitarianism is the view that the only fundamental requirement of morality is to promote a plurality of intrinsic goods for all those capable of possessing them. This moral framework flourished in the middle part of the period between Henry Sidgwick and A. C. Ewing. It was defended by G. E. Moore and Hastings Rashdall, among others. Discussions of ideal utilitarianism usually focus on Moore and sometimes on Moore and Rashdall. These discussions ignore or obscure the fact that Moore and Rashdall do not employ the same gamut of arguments for the position. In fact, Rashdall's The Theory of Good and Evil provides a sustained and unique defence of the view. My central aim in what follows is to provide a reconstruction and critical evaluation of Rashdall's main argumentative strategies. In §I, I explicate the basic features of his ethical outlook. In §II, I outline the main arguments to which he appeals in his defence of the two 'sides' of ideal utilitarianism. In §III, I raise some worries about his appeal to abstract self-evident propositions in his argument for his account of rightness. In §IV, I address his arguments against pluralist deontology. I contend that the kind of criticisms that Rashdall launches against various forms of the position are equally effective against his value pluralism. In §V, I consider Rashdall's arguments against hedonistic utilitarianism. I maintain that these are not decisive.