



"Idiopsychological Ethics"

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II.—“IDIOPSYCHOLOGICAL ETHICS.”

By Professor HENRY SIDGWICK.

IN MIND No. 39 I reviewed Dr Martineau's *Types of Ethical Theory*. A reply from Dr. Martineau, somewhat longer than my review, appeared in the next number. On reading this reply, it seemed to me desirable to deal in different ways with the historical and the theoretical portions of it. Dr. Martineau's answers to my criticisms on his historical work convinced me that there was nothing to be gained by a prolonged and enlarged controversy on this part of the subject: a brief and immediate rejoinder, which I gave in the following number, was all that seemed desirable. The case was otherwise with the further explanations which Dr. Martineau had been led to give of his own views: since, on the one hand, these threw new lights on certain parts of Dr. Martineau's doctrine, which rendered necessary a partial modification of my objections to it; while, on the other hand, they suggested to me that possibly a fuller statement of these objections might render them more intelligible to Dr. Martineau, and to any others who may share his ethical views.

The appearance of a second edition of Dr. Martineau's book seems to afford a favourable opportunity for this fuller statement; and, for the convenience of the reader, I shall take up the question *de novo*, and shall not refer—except in one note—to my original article; while, at the same time, I shall try to avoid any mere repetition of arguments there urged.

I will begin by criticising an unwarranted assumption—as it appears to me—which underlies Dr. Martineau's whole procedure. He characterises his ethical system as “idiopsychological”: that is, he professes to give the “story” that the “moral consciousness tells of itself,” or “what the moral sentiment has to say of its own experience”. And he appears generally to entertain no doubt that there is one and the same “story” to be told in all cases; that if the same question be definitely put to the moral consciousness of any number of different individuals, they will return definitely the same answer as his own. He holds, at any rate,¹ that all

¹ ii. 16, 17. The references are throughout to the second edition (vol. ii).

men in their particular moral judgments judge primarily and essentially of the moral preferability of particular impulses or incentives to action, and that so far as the impulses presented are similar men's judgments of their moral value will also be similar. "However limited the range of our moral consciousness, it would lead us all to the same verdicts, had we all the same segment of the series [of impulses] under our cognisance" (p. 61) . . . "the instant that any contending principles press their invitations on [a man], *there too is the consciousness of their respective rights . . . his duty consists in acting from the right affection, about which he is never left in doubt*" (p. 72)—unless, that is, he wilfully neglects to use the faculty of moral insight with which he is endowed, for "the inner eye is ever open, unless it droops in wilful sleep".

Now I do not find that Dr. Martineau has adduced any sufficient reasons for making this fundamental assumption. He can hardly rest it on the agreement of the accounts given of the moral consciousness by the persons who have most systematically reflected on it; since this class includes, as I shall presently show, moralists who disagree fundamentally with Dr. Martineau. And I see no sign that his assumption is based on a careful induction from the accounts actually given by plain men of their moral experience. Indeed in other passages Dr. Martineau seems to admit that the moral judgments of mature men do not actually manifest an undeviating harmony with his own scale of preferability. "To find the true instinct of conscience," he says, "we may more often go with hope to the child than to the grandparents. . . . of most men the earlier years are nobler and purer . . . unfaithfulness inevitably impairs and corrupts the native insight." That there is an element of truth in this I would not deny: it does not, however, appear that Dr. Martineau has made any such careful and extensive observation of the moral judgments of children as would justify him in affirming broadly that they are more in harmony with his own scale than those of mature men; and, in any case, the assumption that the divergences of the latter are due to "unfaithfulness" is one that seems to me to require a kind of justification that he has not attempted.

I have been led—both from observation of my contemporaries and from examination of the morality of other ages and countries—to take an essentially different view of the variation and conflict in men's moral judgments and sentiments which their discourse appears to reveal. I agree, indeed, with Dr. Martineau that

such variations are to a considerable extent due to differences in the objects contemplated; but I hold that they cannot entirely or even mainly be referred to this cause: that when we have made full allowance for this, an important element of difference still remains which it appears to me unwarrantable to attribute to "unfaithfulness," or "wilful drooping of the inward eye" in one or other of the differing individuals. Among reflective persons, who belong to the same age of history and are members of the same civilised society, the amount of difference that is disclosed by a comparison of moral opinions bears usually a small proportion to the amount of agreement; but it is probably rare that some material difference is not discernible, whenever two such persons compare frankly and fully the results of the spontaneous, unreflective play of their moral sentiments. And if we survey the views of the whole aggregate of persons who devote serious thought to moral questions at any given time, we cannot but see that systematic ethical reflection,—while it tends to group individuals together into so-called schools, and so to intensify the consciousness of a common morality among members of the same group,—has so far tended to develop profounder differences between one group and another.

As an illustration of the irreducible differences of which I am speaking, I may note a point of some importance on which I find myself in disagreement with Dr. Martineau. In stating what he calls the "fundamental ethical fact of which we have to find the interpretation" (p. 18), he affirms that "wherever disapprobation falls, we are impelled to award disgrace and such external ill as may mark our antipathy, with the consciousness that we are not only entitled but constrained to this infliction". Now I find that the sense of being "constrained to award external ill" to a fellow-man of whose conduct I disapprove, not in order to prevent worse mischief to him or to others, but merely to "mark my antipathy," is entirely absent from my moral consciousness; and, what is more, I feel an instinctive moral aversion to the impulse thus characterised which goes decidedly beyond my reflective and deliberate disapprobation of it. But I do not therefore affirm that Dr. Martineau has wrongly analysed his own moral consciousness; still less do I suggest that it has been corrupted through unfaithfulness. I should rather say that his sentiment appears to me to belong to that earlier stage in the development of morality in which legal punishment is regarded as essentially retributive, instead of preventive. Nor do I affirm that the common sense even of civilised mankind

has as yet passed out of this stage ; but I think that it is beginning to pass out of it, and that a continually increasing number of reflective persons are conscious of no *moral* impulse to "award external ill" to their fellow-creatures, except as a means to some ulterior good.

I have made these preliminary remarks, because, while the main object of this paper is to show the erroneousness of Dr. Martineau's account of the moral judgments which we, here and now, habitually pass, it is important to make clear at the outset that the question discussed does not seem to me to admit of being answered so decisively as Dr. Martineau assumes. I think that the assumption of a common moral consciousness which we all share, and which each of us can find in himself by introspection, is to a great extent true ; that to a great extent we—educated members of the same society—tend, in our ordinary thought and discourse, to pass similar judgments of approbation and disapprobation, feel similar sentiments of liking or aversion for the conduct so judged, and similar promptings to encourage or repress it. But, after carefully reflecting on my own moral sentiments and comparing them with those of others—to whom I have no reason to attribute a less careful reflection—I do not find in the result anything like the extent of agreement which Dr. Martineau assumes. This is the explanation of the "hesitation" that Dr. Martineau finds in my attempt to formulate the morality of common sense : on any point on which opposing opinions appear to me tolerably balanced, so that neither can fairly be described as eccentric, I represent common sense as hesitating : to decide any such point either way would be an improper substitution of my own judgment for that common judgment of educated and thoughtful persons which I am trying to ascertain and formulate. Nor do I consider the verdict of common sense, so far as it is clearly pronounced, as final on the question of ethical truth or falsehood ; since a study of the history of human opinion leads me to regard the current civilised morality of the present age as merely a stage in a long process of development, in which the human mind has—I hope—been gradually moving towards a truer apprehension of what ought to be. As reflection shows us in the morality of earlier stages an element of what we now agree to regard as confusion and error, it seems reasonable to suppose that similar defects are lurking in our own current and accepted morality ; and, in fact, observation and analysis of this morality, so far as I have been able to ascertain what it is, has led me to see such defects in it. How to eliminate, if

possible, these elements of error, confusion and uncertainty is, in my view, the fundamental question of ethics, which can only be answered by the construction of an ethical system. With this task I am not at present concerned—further than to explain that I do not expect to find this true moral system where Dr. Martineau looks for it; that is, by introspection directed to the moral sentiments and apparently immediate moral judgments caused in my mind by the contemplation of particular acts, apart from systematic consideration of these acts and their consequences in relation to what I adopt as the ultimate end of action. That I should have such sentiments, and, where prompt action is needed, should act on such judgments, is at once natural and, in my opinion, conducive to the ultimate end; but I continually find that these immediate pronouncements have to be corrected and restrained by a careful consideration of consequences.

To sum up: there are, in my view, three fundamentally distinct questions, which ought to be investigated by essentially different methods: (1) what the received morality was in other ages and countries, which is to be answered by impartial historical study; (2) what the received morality is here and now, which is to be ascertained by an unprejudiced comparison of one's own moral judgments with those of others; (3) what morality ought to be—a problem which can only be solved by the construction of an ethical system. It is the answer which Dr. Martineau has given to the second of these questions—and this alone—which I propose now to consider.

According to Dr. Martineau, the “broad fact” of the moral consciousness is that “we have an irresistible tendency to pass judgments of right and wrong” (p. 17): when I pass such judgments “as an agent” on my own conduct “I speak of *my duty*”—a word which “expresses the sense we have of a debt which we are bound,” or “obliged,” to pay. This sense of obligation implies, of course, a conflict between the moral judgment and some impulse prompting us to conduct disapproved by our moral judgment. But in Dr. Martineau's view it necessarily implies more than this; it necessarily implies the recognition of “another person,” who has authority over us: the dictates of conscience, he holds, are unmeaning unless we give them a Theistic interpretation.

Now I quite admit that a Christian Theist must necessarily conceive of the dictates of conscience as Divine commands; but I think it rash and unwarrantable in him to affirm that

they cannot be regarded as authoritative unless they are so conceived. To me, indeed, it is inconceivable that the authoritativeness or bindingness of moral rules should depend essentially on the fact that they emanate from "another Person". Dr. Martineau himself admits—or I should rather say emphatically declares—that it is not a Person regarded apart from moral attributes that can be conceived as the source of the authority of which we are speaking; it is, he says, "an inward rule of Right which gives law to the action of God's power . . . which first elevates into authority what else would only operate as a necessity or a bribe" (p. 113). If, then, moral rules, when conceived as Divine commands, are thought to have authority not because they emanate from an Omnipotent Person, but because they emanate from a person who wills in accordance with a rule of Right, I cannot conceive how they should lose this authority even if the "other person" is eliminated altogether, provided that the "rule of right" is left.

I may perhaps make this clearer by referring to an analogy which Dr. Martineau elsewhere draws between mathematical and moral truth. "There is," he says, "as much ground, or as little, for trusting to the report of our moral faculty as for believing our intellect respecting the relations of number and dimensions. Whatever be the 'authority' of Reason respecting the true, the same is the 'authority' of Conscience respecting the right and the good"¹ (p. 114).

Now I presume that Dr. Martineau does not maintain that the "authority of Reason respecting the relations of number and dimension in regard to time" cannot "really

¹ In dealing with this point in my former article I quoted passages in which, as it appeared to me, Dr. Martineau committed himself to a "definitely and confidently anthropomorphic conception of the Divine mind". In his reply, Dr. Martineau affirmed that in the passages quoted he intended to "*explain* an anthropomorphic habit" of which he had "exposed the error," not to *adopt* it as his own. I accept, of course, Dr. Martineau's account of his intentions; but, having carefully re-read the passages from which I quoted—especially p. 86 (1st ed.) with its context, which remains unaltered (as p. 92) in the present edition—I feel bound to say that they are not calculated to convey to the mind of an ordinary reader what he now declares to be his meaning. Dr. Martineau writes throughout from an avowedly Christian point of view: hence, when he describes "Christianity" and "Christian feeling" as taking "naturally" a certain view of the Divine Nature, without which "the negative element requisite for every ethical conception, the antagonism to something resisted and rejected, would be wanting; and the evangelical and the heathen Theism would be without further essential distinction"—I do not think any ordinary reader will suppose that Dr. Martineau is intending to "expose the error" of the view in question.

exist” for an atheistic mathematician—one who has, in Laplace’s phrase, had no “*besoin de l’hypothèse de Dieu*” in his system of the physical universe. But if he does not maintain this, I think he is bound in consistency to admit that the “authority of Conscience respecting the right” may similarly exist for the atheistic moralist.

I have accepted, for the sake of argument, Dr. Martineau’s distinction between ‘Reason’ and ‘Conscience’. But, to prevent misunderstanding, I ought to explain that, in my view, the “authority of Conscience” is the authority of Reason in its application to practice: “authority” or “obligation,” in my view, expresses the relation that we recognise on reflection between a judgment as to what ought to be willed by us and a non-rational impulse prompting in a direction opposed to this judgment.

Let us now consider more closely the general nature of the judgment to which this authority—however understood—is recognised as belonging. I find that in discussing this question Dr. Martineau, on the one hand, labours needlessly a point not likely to be disputed; and, on the other hand, confuses or slurs over the distinction which I regard as fundamentally important. We shall all, I conceive, agree that moral approbation, strictly taken,¹ relates to what Dr. Martineau loosely calls the “inner spring or inner principle” of an action—*i.e.*, that it relates to the mental or psychical element of the complex fact which we call action; as distinct from the muscular movement that follows the psychical volition, or any external consequences of this movement considered as external and not as foreseen by the agent. Further, I agree with Dr. Martineau in defining the object of the common moral judgment as volition or choice of some kind. Our difference begins when we ask what the object is which is willed or chosen. In Dr. Martineau’s view the choice is always between particular impulses to action—whether “propensions,” “passions,” “affections” or “sentiments”; in my view it is, in the largest and most important class of cases, among different sets of foreseen external effects, all of which are conceived to be within the power of the agent. That Dr. Martineau has not clearly seen the point at issue may, I think, be inferred from the language (cp. pp. 129-30) in which he criticises my own procedure. He

¹ I say ‘strictly taken,’ because in a wider sense of the terms we approve or disapprove of a human being and his actions without distinguishing between their voluntary and involuntary elements; just as in Dr. Martineau’s words—we “approve a house” or “condemn a ship,” from a consideration of its fitness or unfitness for some accepted end.

says that I, among others, "by no means call in question the general principle that moral worth or defect is to be estimated by the inward *affection or intention* whence actions flow"; and implies that I have thereby "admitted the necessity" of "enumerating" and "classifying" motives or impulses to action, though I afterwards "run away from the work as unmanageable and superfluous". But it is plain that if I am right in regarding the choice of right outward effect as being, in the most important cases, the primary object of ordinary moral judgment, my primary business is to enumerate and classify, not the propensions or passions that prompt to choice, but the outward effects that ought to be chosen and intended. It is always the choice or intention, and not its actual result, that is approved or disapproved; but the differences of choice or intention, on which the moral judgment turns, can only be conceived as differences in the objects chosen; and can therefore, on my view, only be sought in that "field of external effects of action" which Dr. Martineau would relegate to a separate and subsequent investigation.

Nor is the case practically altered by that condition of our approval of right choice to which I have (in my *Methods of Ethics*, bk. iii., ch. i., p. 3) called attention under the term "subjective rightness"; *viz.*, that the outward effects which we judge to be the right objects of choice must not be thought by the agent to be wrong. The condition is, in my view, an essential one; if, in any case—owing to what we regard as a mistake of conscience—the agent makes what we hold to be the right choice of foreseen outward effects, himself conceiving it to be wrong, we certainly withhold our moral approbation. If we are asked whether in this unhappy situation a man ought to do what he mistakenly believes to be his duty, or what really is his duty if he could only think so, the question is found rather perplexing by common sense; and—so far as it can ever be a practical question—it would, I think, be answered differently in different cases, according to the magnitude and importance of the error of conscience. But the difficulties of this question need not now be considered; for, obviously, they arise equally whether the mistake of conscience relates to choice of motives or to choice of outward effects; and, however essential it may be that a moral agent should do what he believes to be right, this condition of the object of moral approbation does not require or admit of any systematic development. Thus the details with which ethics is concerned still remain to be sought elsewhere; and, on my view, they are found by common sense primarily in

the region of external effects, and not among the different propensions, passions, affections or sentiments impelling the agent.

It may be said, perhaps, that the issue as I have stated it cannot be fundamental, because the effects as foreseen must operate as motives—as causing desires or aversions—otherwise action would not result.¹ But my point is that the effects which, in our judgment, make an action bad may not have been desired at all, but only accepted as inevitable accompaniments of what was desired, and that the effects which make it good may have only been desired as a means to some further end; and that it is not to the desired effects of volition, *quâ* desired, but to the effects foreseen as certain or highly probable—and so chosen instead of other possible consequences—that our judgments of approbation and disapprobation are commonly directed under the heads of justice, temperance, good faith, veracity and other leading branches of duty. I contend that the approbation implied by the designation of agents or acts as truthful, just, temperate—and the disapprobation implied by the opposite terms—are commonly given independently of any consideration of motive, as distinct from intention or choice to produce certain external effects (using 'external' to include effects on the agent's physical system). I do not say, as Dr. Martineau has understood me to say, that we regard the motives of such acts as ethically unimportant: I recognise that common sense distinguishes motives as higher and lower, and even positively as good and bad; and if we definitely conceive of (say) truth-speaking as prompted by a motive recognised as bad, we do not approve of the agent's state of mind,

¹ Dr. Martineau would not exactly urge this; because he considers it fundamentally important to lay stress on the absence of any conscious foresight of effects in the case of what he distinguishes as "primary springs of action," which urge us, "in the way of unreflecting instinct," to seek blindly ends not preconceived. I agree that such blind impulses have a considerable place among the normal causes of our voluntary action, though I think he has exaggerated their place; according to my experience, they cannot be at all powerful or prolonged without arousing some representation of the effects to which they prompt. But, in any case, I cannot understand how they can be morally judged *as blind*; I conceive that the effects of the action to which such unreflecting impulses prompt, however absent or faintly represented when the impulse operates, are necessarily represented when it becomes the object of a moral judgment. This will appear, I think, if we reflect on any example included in Dr. Martineau's exposition of the "scale of springs of action"—*e.g.*, in comparing the appetite for food with the desire of the pleasure of eating, he says, "it is surely meaner to eat for the pleasure's sake than to appease the simple hunger": well, it seems to me clear that, so far as I pass this judgment, it is not on hunger, *quâ* blind impulse, but on hunger conceived as an impulse directed towards the removal of an organic want.

though I should say that we still approve of the act. We think that the veracious agent has willed what he ought to have willed, though he ought to have willed something else, too, *viz.*, the suppression of the bad motive—so far, at least, as it was within his power to suppress it while doing the act. I introduce this last qualification, because I think that it is not always within the power of the will—and therefore not always strictly a duty—to get rid of an objectionable motive.

Take the case of the motive which Dr. Martineau places last,—Vindictiveness, or the desire of malevolent pleasure. Bentham and Sir James Stephen¹ regard it as an important part of the benefits of criminal law that it provides the “pleasure of revenge,” or, as Sir J. Stephen says, a “legitimate satisfaction for the passion of revenge”. These phrases, I think, give some offence to our common moral consciousness; and, in my *Methods of Ethics*, I have suggested that “perhaps we may distinguish between the impulse to inflict pain and the desire of the antipathetic pleasure which the agent will reap from this infliction, and approve the former in certain circumstances, but condemn the latter absolutely”. I suggest this, however, with some hesitation, on account of the great difficulty of separating the two impulses. A man under the influence of a strong passion of resentment can hardly exclude from his mind altogether an anticipation of the pleasure that he will feel when the passion is gratified; and, if so, he can hardly exclude altogether the desire of this gratification. It is, I think, clear to common sense that a man ought not to *cherish* this desire, to gloat over the anticipated gratification; but it is, perhaps, too severe to say that the desire of malevolent pleasure should be excluded altogether. If, as Sir James Stephen says, the “deliberate satisfaction which criminal law affords to the desire of vengeance” excited by gross crimes is an indispensable means of preventing such crimes—human nature being what it is; if it is important for the well-being of society that men should derive “heartly satisfaction” from the hanging of a cold-blooded murderer, or the infliction of penal servitude on an unscrupulous swindler; then it is, perhaps, going too far to condemn absolutely the desire of this satisfaction. In any case, it seems to me contrary to common sense to say that the prosecution of such a murderer or swindler becomes a bad act if the prosecutor is conscious of desiring the malevolent pleasure that he will receive from the criminal’s punishment: we commonly judge such an act to be right,

¹ Cp. *General View of the Criminal Law of England*, ch. iv.

even though partly done from a motive which we think ought to be excluded as far as possible. It is sometimes said that, though a man cannot help *having* the inferior motive, he can and ought to avoid *yielding* to it, or ‘identifying himself’ with it; but here there seems to me some psychological confusion or error. I cannot understand how a man can avoid ‘yielding to’ a desire, if he cannot exclude it from his mind while doing precisely the act to which it prompts.¹ Even if the motive of an externally right act were entirely bad—*e.g.*, if a man were strictly veracious with a view to gain and ultimately misuse the confidence of his hearers—common sense, I conceive, would still decide that his veracious volition was right *quod* veracious; only that it coexisted with a wrong intention as to future conduct, and did not indicate any moral worth—*i.e.*, any general tendency to right actions—in the agent.

It is still more clear to common sense that bad acts may be done from the best conceivable motives; indeed we are all familiar with historical examples of men prompted by religion, patriotism or philanthropy to acts that have excited most general and intense moral disapprobation. When we contemplate Torquemada torturing a heretic for the eternal good of souls, Ravailiac assassinating a monarch in the cause of God and his church, a Nihilist murdering a number of innocent persons in order to benefit his country by the destruction of an emperor, a pastor poisoning his congregation in the sacramental wine in the hope of securing their eternal happiness—we recognise that such acts are (so far as we know) not only subjectively right, but done from the very highest motives; still common sense does not therefore hesitate to pronounce them profoundly bad.

It may be said, however, that my argument admits that the distinction of ‘good’ and ‘bad,’ or ‘higher’ and ‘lower,’ motives is recognised by common sense as important; it must, therefore, be the duty of the moralist to make this distinction as precise as possible, in its application to different classes of motives; and in doing this he will be led to frame such a scale as Dr. Martineau’s. But a careful reflection upon our common judgments or motives will lead us, I think, to interpret and systematise them in a manner fundamentally different from Dr. Martineau’s. According to him, the springs of human action may be arranged in an

¹ Very often the course of action prompted by a bad motive would differ palpably in details from that prompted by a pure regard for duty; and such differences would afford occasions for “not yielding” to the bad motive. But I know no reason for assuming that palpable differences of this kind would be found in all cases.

ethical scale, so constituted that if any of its "propensions," "passions," "affections" and "sentiments" thus classified ever comes into conflict with one higher in the scale, right volition consists in choosing the "higher" in preference to the "lower". The view of common sense appears to me rather that, in all or most cases, a natural impulse has its proper sphere, within which it should be normally operative, and that the question whether a higher motive should yield to a lower is one that cannot be answered decisively in the general way in which Dr. Martineau answers it : the answer must depend on the particular conditions and circumstances of the conflict. For a higher motive may intrude unseasonably into the proper sphere of the lower, just as the lower is liable to encroach on the higher ; only since there is very much less danger of the former intrusion, it naturally falls into the background in ethical discussions and exhortations that have a practical aim. The matter is complicated by this further consideration : we recognise that as the character of a moral agent becomes better, the motives that we rank as "higher" tend to be developed, so that their normal sphere of operation continually enlarges at the expense of the lower. Hence there are two distinct aims in moral regulation and culture, so far as they relate to motives : (1) to keep the "lower" motive within the limits within which its operation is considered to be legitimate and good on the whole, so long as we cannot substitute for it the equally effective operation of a higher motive ; and at the same time (2) to effect this substitution of "higher" for "lower" gradually, so far as can be done without danger, up to a limit which we cannot definitely fix, but which we

¹ For the reader's convenience, I give the table of the springs of action in which Dr. Martineau has collected the results of his survey :—

LOWEST.

1. Secondary Passions—Censoriousness, Vindictiveness, Suspiciousness.
2. Secondary Organic Propensions—Love of Ease and Sensual Pleasure.
3. Primary Organic Propensions—Appetites.
4. Primary Animal Propension—Spontaneous Activity (unselective).
5. Love of Gain (reflective derivation from Appetite).
6. Secondary Affections (sentimental indulgence of sympathetic feelings).
7. Primary Passions—Antipathy, Fear, Resentment.
8. Causal Energy—Love of Power, or Ambition ; Love of Liberty.
9. Secondary Sentiments—Love of Culture.
10. Primary Sentiments of Wonder and Admiration.
11. Primary Affections, Parental and Social—with (approximately) Generosity and Gratitude.
12. Primary Affection of Compassion.
13. Primary Sentiment of Reverence.

HIGHEST.

certainly conceive, for the most part, as falling short of complete exclusion of the lower motive.

I may illustrate by reference to the passion of resentment of which I before spoke. The view of reflective common sense is, I think, that the malevolent impulse so designated, as long as it is strictly limited to resentment against wrong and operates in aid of justice, has a legitimate sphere of action in the social life of human beings as actually constituted: that, indeed, its suppression would be gravely mischievous, unless we could at the same time so intensify the ordinary man's regard for justice or for social well-being that the total strength of motives prompting to the punishment of crime should not be diminished. But, however much it were “to be wished,” as Butler says, that men would repress wrong from these higher motives rather than from passionate resentment, we cannot hope to effect this change in human beings generally except by a slow and gradual process of elevation of character: therefore—to come to the point on which Dr. Martineau appears to me to be at issue with common sense—supposing a conflict between “Compassion,” which is highest but one in Dr. Martineau's scale, and “Resentment,” which he places about the middle, it is by no means to be laid down as a general rule that compassion ought to prevail. We ought rather—with Butler—to regard resentment as a salutary “balance to the weakness of pity,” which would be liable to prevent the execution of justice if resentment were excluded.

Or we might similarly take the impulse which comes lowest (among those not condemned altogether) in Dr. Martineau's scale—the “Love of Ease and Sensual Pleasure”. No doubt this impulse, or group of impulses, is continually leading men to shirk or scamp their strict duty, or to fall in some less definite way below their own ideal of conduct; hence the attitude habitually maintained towards it by preachers and practical moralists is that of repression. Still, common sense surely recognises that there are cases in which even this impulse ought to prevail over impulses ranked much above it in Dr. Martineau's scale; we often find men prompted—say by “love of gain” or “love of culture”—to shorten unduly their hours of recreation; and in the case of a conflict of motives under such circumstances we should judge it best that victory should remain on the side of the “love of ease and pleasure,” and that the unreasonable intrusion of the higher motive should be repelled.

Perhaps it may be said that in neither of these instances would the conflict of motives remain such as I have described: that though the struggle might begin, so to say,

as a duel between resentment and compassion, or between love of ease and love of gain, it would not be fought out in the lists so marked out; since still higher motives would come in in each case, regard for justice and social well-being on the side of resentment, regard for health and ultimate efficiency for work on the side of love of ease; and that it would be the intervention of these higher motives that would decide the struggle so far as it was decided rightly and as we should approve. This certainly is what would happen in my own case, if the supposed conflict were at all serious and its decision deliberate; and it is for this reason that such a scale as Dr. Martineau has drawn up, of motives arranged according to their moral rank, can never, in my view, have more than a very subordinate ethical importance. It may serve to indicate in a rough and general way the kinds of desires which it is ordinarily best to encourage and indulge, in comparison with other kinds which are liable to compete and collide with them; and we might perhaps settle, by means of it, some of the comparatively trifling conflicts of motive which the varying and complex play of needs, habits, interests, and their accompanying emotions continually brings forth in our daily life. But if a serious question of conduct is raised, I cannot conceive myself deciding it morally by any comparison of motives below the highest: the case must, as I have elsewhere said,¹ be "carried up" for decision "into the court" of the motive which I regard as supreme—i.e., the desire to promote universal good, understood as happiness of sentient beings generally. Thus the comparison ultimately decisive on the particular question raised would inevitably be not a comparison between the motives primarily conflicting, but between the effects of the different lines of conduct to which they respectively prompt, considered in relation to whatever we regard as the ultimate end of reasonable action. And this, I conceive, is the course which moral reflection will naturally take in the case not only of utilitarians, but of all who follow Butler in regarding our passions and propensions as forming naturally a "system or constitution," in which the ends of lower impulses are subordinate as means to the ends of certain governing motives, or are comprehended as parts in these larger ends. So far as any view of this kind is taken, any tabulation of the moral rank of motives other than the governing ones can, at best, have only a quite subordinate interest: it cannot possibly furnish a method of dealing with the fundamental problems of ethical construction.

¹ *Methods of Ethics*, bk. iii., ch. xii., p. 3.