

**BUTLER'S SIX SERMONS ON
MORAL SUBJECTS; A SEQUEL
TO THE THREE SERMONS ON
HUMAN NATURE**

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Butler's Six Sermons on Moral Subjects; A Sequel to the Three Sermons on Human Nature by
W. Whewell

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SIX SERMONS ON MORAL SUBJECTS.

A SEQUEL TO THE
THREE SERMONS ON HUMAN NATURE.

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WITH A PREFACE
AND A SYLLABUS OF THE WORK.

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EDITOR'S PREFACE.

DR. BUTLER'S Three Sermons *On Human Nature* were recently published separately, as containing the leading points in his view of the moral nature of man; but in truth, no one can have a complete notion of Butler's moral philosophy, without taking into his consideration also the doctrines delivered in his other sermons, especially those concerning *Compassion, Resentment, and the Relation of Benevolence to Self-love*. These are the subjects of the Six Sermons which I now publish, and which are the fifth, sixth, eighth, ninth, eleventh and twelfth, of the *Fifteen Sermons preached at the Rolls Chapel*.

The leading aims of these Six Sermons are in a great measure the same with those of the Three Sermons which I have already edited; namely, the establishment of a true view of the nature of man, in opposition to the systems of Hobbes and others, which resolve all man's actions into selfish regards; and

the enforcement of certain duties on the ground of man's nature thus established.

Thus in the beginning of the *Sermon on Compassion*, (Art. 1 of this), we have a note on Hobbes's account of Compassion, which much resembles the note on Hobbes's account of Benevolence, Art. [3] of the *Three Sermons*. And the *Sermon on Benevolence*, (Art. 96 of this,) further develops the doctrine of Articles [5]...[9] of the *Three Sermons*, with regard to the distinction between self-love and other affections. And though he does not say much of *Resentment* in the *Three Sermons*, he mentions (Art. [7] of that volume), indignation against successful vice, as one of the affections which tends to the good of society.

One point in Butler's account of *Resentment* as given in the present volume, has been admired as happy and novel: I mean, the distinction between sudden anger and settled resentment, (Art. 46 of this). The distinction is of this kind: The former does not imply that we have wrong inflicted on us, the latter does. The former flashes up before we have time to reflect, and resists all violence and harm; the

latter glows with a permanent heat against injury and injustice. The former is an instinct, implanted for preservation; the latter is a moral sentiment given for the repression of injustice. The former, we may add, belongs to animals; the latter is peculiar to man. It is not often that a moralist can fasten upon a distinction, so new and yet so true, in the well-gleaned field in which his task lies.

Butler labours very much to give prominence to the distinction between our self-love and our other affections, whether or not they be those which tend directly to our pleasure: as for instance, hunger, revenge, and the love of our neighbours. He remarks—that self-love has an *internal* object, our own happiness; the other affections have *external* objects:—that the pleasures derived from external objects *presuppose* the affections; for we should have no pleasure in food if we had no appetite:—that self-love produces *interested* actions, the affections, if unrestrained, produce *passionate* actions;—that *self-love* presupposes the *desires* by the gratification of which our happiness is promoted;—with other remarks of a like kind. Doubtless these are import-

ant differences between the simple original affections or appetites, and that complex and abstract principle which we especially term *self-love*. But I am not sure that Butler has not drawn this line of distinction stronger than it can easily be kept in men's minds. For since self-love, according to him, is the desire of our own happiness, and since our own happiness consists in the gratification of certain desires of external things, it may come to pass that our original desires are absorbed in and replaced by self-love. Whether the case shall be so or not, appears to depend upon the extent to which our habits of abstraction and generalization have gone. Take, for instance, the love of luxurious fare. This can hardly be said to be simply an original desire. The original desires tend to certain meats and drinks; and it is only when speaking of these in a general and abstract manner that we call them *luxuries*. We might speak of them in a manner more general and abstract still, and might call them *ingredients of happiness*; and our desire for them under this aspect might stand in the place of our desire for luxuries, as our desire for luxuries stands in the place of our desire

for turtle and champagne. The abstract and general desire not only includes the particular desire, but it may come to replace it and supersede it in the mind, as I have remarked in the *Elements of Morality*, Art. 35. And thus the desire of luxuries would, in the end, not be so much an original desire, distinguishable from self-love, as it would be one of the modes in which self-love acts. Butler, very justly as seems to me, makes self-love consist in *thinking* much about ourselves, with reference to the gratification of our desires. But on this very account, we cannot rigorously put self-love in opposition to other desires; because we cannot oppose a mode of *thinking* to a mode of *desiring*.

That a special desire may come to be identical with self-love, Butler himself appears to teach, when he says (Art. 124 of this), that *covetousness* is commonly not the mere desire of money, but is identical with the general principle of self-love.

The habits of abstraction and generalization by which the desires of external things are absorbed and replaced by the desire of happiness and the thought of our own