

THE PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW.

THE METHOD OF A METAPHYSIC OF ETHICS.

THERE is one view of ethics which makes its distinction from metaphysics easy and complete, and it is a view which certain considerations urge us to adopt. It may seem to some that progress lies with this view, and that, while the philosophical moralist moves only in a circle of ancient controversy, the facts of morality are being brought to light and organized into a body of knowledge by the psychologist and anthropologist. Their inquiry into the growth of mind and the record of its actual expressions in customs and institutions, brings them into contact with the characteristic ideas and facts of morality; and to these their analytic and historical methods have been applied with fertile result. The result is a descriptive and historical ethics, which has a right to claim as complete independence of metaphysics as any other descriptive or historical science.

Were this all, no question about the relation of ethics to metaphysics need arise. But it is not all. Even the anthropologists are not always content to let the matter rest here. Sometimes they go on to apply their results to decide upon different degrees of goodness in the ends of conduct, or to distinguish between good and evil. In so doing, new and strange meanings are assigned to scientific generalizations, and a great deal of crude metaphysics is concealed. But yet, if one may say so without offence, the heart of these writers is in the right place, though their ideas may be confused. They see that a merely descriptive and historical ethics neglects the central question of ethical interest. It may be very good history, but it is not really ethics.

The ethical question does not arise out of an historical or