

## PREFACE

Ethics is a science. It is a science because science, properly conceived, is able to inquire into the nature of whatever is experienced, to formulate hypotheses about such nature, and to test such hypotheses.

The commonly accepted Positivistic claim that science is, or ought to be, completely value-free, is false, and both prevents investigating the nature of goodness and rightness by conforming scientists and relieves them from responsibility from such investigation. It also impoverishes humankind from benefitting from such scientific investigation.

That values (good and bad, intrinsic and instrumental, apparent and real, actual and potential) can be examined scientifically has been demonstrated in an earlier volume, *Axiology: The Science of Values* (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 1993). The purpose of the present volume is to demonstrate that ethics, specifically ethics as the science of oughtness, can also be examined scientifically and can reach conclusions that can be tested for reliability.

Ethics as a science includes many questions, theoretical and practical, not considered here. Claims about scientific investigation of them must be considered elsewhere. Ethics as the science of oughtness is a science that persons can test and demonstrate conclusively whenever they are willing. Each person already has the evidence needed for such testing.

The purpose of this volume is limited. Although its ultimate purpose is practical (improving personal and human welfare), its immediate intention is to increase understanding of the nature of oughtness. Awareness that oughtness is the power that an apparently greater good has over an apparently lesser good in compelling our choices is available to every person. The principle can be demonstrated in more complicated ways (by opinion polls, computerized calculations, statistical analyses, controlled or crucial experiments, peer-group assessments by reputable scientists, and classroom or student laboratory exercises), but also simply, immediately and with evidential certainty by each person willing to observe it operating in personal experience.

Oughtness may be simple or complex, actual or conditional, apparent or real, and personal or social. It originates in the needs of persons and emerges whenever desires conflict and decisions are

required. Every decision is an ethical decision when requiring choosing between apparent good or bad alternatives or more or less of either. Being ethical is an omnipresent condition of living, personal and social, because being presented with problems, everyday or scientific. Every decision by a scientist is ethical in this sense, and ignoring the need for understanding ethics, that is, scientific understanding of ethics, is a moral deficiency in any scientist.

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