

**A STUDY IN THE
PSYCHOLOGY
OF ETHICS**

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A study in the psychology of ethics by David Irons

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OF ETHICS

BY

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P R E F A C E.

FROM the close relation which necessarily exists between ethics and psychology, it is evident that a systematic discussion of the psychology of conduct must render invaluable aid in the solution of purely ethical questions. It is true that psychology alone cannot give a final decision on ethical problems, but it is also true that the particular form which these problems assume is in many cases determined by the assumptions which are made in regard to the psychological principles of action. These assumptions, unfortunately, are too often accepted without an adequate investigation of the facts, and needless confusion is thus introduced into ethics. It may be urged, perhaps, that ethics is not responsible for this state of affairs, since it must build upon the basis which psychology supplies. This principle, that the verdict of psychology must

be accepted in psychological matters, may be sound in theory, but it cannot be put in practice at the present time, since modern psychology has devoted very little attention to the active side of human nature. In these circumstances it seems imperative that students of ethics should undertake an independent examination of that department of psychology which concerns them most intimately.

The present inquiry into the psychological basis of ethics has developed from a study of a class of mental facts which has been much neglected—namely, those phenomena which are usually classed together under the ambiguous term 'emotion.' The theory of emotion which is advanced in the following pages was briefly stated in the January number of 'Mind,' 1894, at the close of an article on "Professor James's Theory of Emotion." In that article the final contention was that emotion must be regarded as an ultimate mental fact which can best be described as 'feeling-attitude.' This view was elaborated in a series of papers which appeared two years later in 'The Philosophical Review.' Ultimately, this theory was found to lead on inevitably to a general standpoint in regard to the principles of human conduct. When this wider question emerged, the inquiry as a whole assumed the character of a study in the psychology of ethics.