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EPISTEMOLOGY AND ETHICAL METHOD.¹

IT is the purpose of this paper to consider in a very summary manner one aspect of the connection between epistemology and ethical method.

In recent years much stress has been laid upon the necessity of a complete separation between ethics and metaphysics. From many different quarters has come the insistence that the phenomena of ethical science are not to be prejudged by any metaphysical bias, but must be subjected to the same mode of treatment that is applicable to the data of all the natural sciences. The psychological facts of the moral consciousness and the historical growth of moral practices are to be simply and scientifically traced and described, and no tincture of metaphysical notions regarding the nature of the self and man's place in the cosmos is to adulterate our pure and empirical narrative of the facts. Consequently, it is urged, ethics is to be viewed and treated as an empirical science, bearing the same relations to metaphysics as physics or any other natural science sustains. Moreover, since epistemological theory is such a vital part of any metaphysics, the demand for the separation of ethics easily lends itself to the view that a natural scientific account of the moral consciousness and life involves no epistemological presuppositions other than the capability of the human mind to tell the plain tale of its own experience. Ethics is thus to be saved from being vitiated by epistemological as well as by metaphysical presumptions.

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