

## THE MORAL PSYCHOLOGY OF INTERNAL CONFLICT

This book pushes back against the potential trivialization of moral psychology that would reduce it to emotional preferences and takes an enactivist, self-organizational, and hermeneutic approach to internal conflict between a basic exploratory drive motivating the search for actual truth, and opposing incentives to confabulate in the interest of conformity, authoritarianism, and cognitive dissonance, which often can lead to harmful worldviews. The result is a new possibility that ethical beliefs can have truth value and are not merely a result of ephemeral altruistic or cooperative feelings. It will interest moral and political psychologists, philosophers, social scientists, and all who are concerned with inner emotional conflicts driving ethical thinking beyond mere emotivism, and toward moral realism, albeit a fallibilist one requiring continual rethinking and self-reflection. It combines “basic emotion” theories (e.g., Panksepp) with hermeneutic depth psychology. The result is a realist approach to moral thinking, emphasizing coherence rather than foundationalist theory of knowledge.

RALPH D. ELLIS received his PhD from Duquesne University and a postdoctoral MS from Georgia State University. A lifelong practitioner of Gendlin’s “focusing” method, he has worked as a social worker as well as teacher, and is interested in integrating the social sciences with enactive consciousness theory. His books include *An Ontology of Consciousness*, *Theories of Criminal Justice*, *Coherence and Verification in Ethics*, *Questioning Consciousness*, *Eros in a Narcissistic Culture*, *Just Results: Ethical Foundations for Policy Analysis*, *Love and the Abyss*, and *Curious Emotions*; he has also co-authored a book with Natika Newton on enactivist consciousness theory called *How the Mind Uses the Brain*.

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OF INTERNAL CONFLICT

*Value, Meaning, and the Enactive Mind*

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CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-18995-9 — The Moral Psychology of Internal Conflict  
Ralph D. Ellis  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom  
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA  
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi 110025, India  
79 Anson Road, #06-04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.  
It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of  
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[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781107189959](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107189959)  
DOI: 10.1017/9781316996683

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First published 2018

Printed in the United Kingdom by Clays, St Ives plc

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

ISBN 978-1-107-18995-9 Hardback

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978-1-107-18995-9 — The Moral Psychology of Internal Conflict  
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*To the memory of Gene Gendlin and Jaak Panksepp, who each  
profoundly influenced me in their own ways*

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## *Acknowledgments*

For many years, I have been concerned that moral psychology may be driving us toward an increasing relativization of ethics. The need for moral behavior to be motivated has led to an emphasis on natural empathic emotions as the driving force for morality. What worries me is that, if we are to act morally when and if our empathic emotions happen to motivate us, then the general rule becomes the following: Always do whatever you want to do (benevolent if that is the way you happen to feel, and implicitly, malevolent if that is how you happen to feel). This book is my attempt to confront that problem after many years of studying enactivist and self-organizational approaches to consciousness and emotion.

The development of this project is almost completely thanks to the kindness of many psychologists and philosophers who shared their knowledge and insights with me. Jaak Panksepp generously discussed his research and ideas with me, from which I was able to get some insight not only into his findings, but also his own interpretations of them. Some of the most central arguments of this book developed through a series of conversations with Charlie Harvey, who steered me in better directions with regard to the phenomenological dimension. I was lucky enough to read Eugene Gendlin's *Experiencing and the Creation of Meaning* as a very young man – an exposure that dramatically influenced the entire direction of both my intellectual and personal development. In the area of enactivist cognitive theory, I would never have known without the help of Natika Newton how to navigate the challenging realm of self-organization and dynamical systems, especially as they connect to emotion. I was also helped, over a period of many years, by neuropsychologist Bill Faw, who has a unique ability to break down brain processes in a way that is remarkably intelligible to the novice that I still am in this area. The results of many exchanges with Peter Zachar in the realm of clinical psychology also show up in this book, especially around the issues of authoritarianism and conformity theory and the interplay of biology with environmental influences in developmental psychology. I was

also helped immensely by collaborations with Louise Sundarajan, a gifted clinical psychologist.

Randy Auxier, a former editor of *The Pluralist*, has patiently argued through with me many of the crucial issues discussed here, and also has given me kind encouragement throughout most of my academic career. The organizers and participants of the Society for Philosophy in the Contemporary World have offered amazing forums for serious and constructive discussion; part of the argument of this book was put forward in a simpler form in a 2017 article in the Society's journal. I was also helped immensely by the Society for the Scientific Study of Consciousness. Anthony Freeman, one of the spearheads of that movement, especially encouraged me to become increasingly involved in that area.

Maxim Stamenov played a pivotal role in my life trajectory. As a person who had approached consciousness from both an empirical and phenomenological perspective, I had been virtually irrelevant to the English-speaking cognitive theory discussion, which was dominated by extreme reductionism at the time, until Stamenov read my early work *An Ontology of Consciousness* and invited me to write a volume for his *Advances in Consciousness Research* series, just at the time when the study of consciousness was entering what I believe was a Kuhnian revolutionary situation. Without that invitation, I might never have gotten involved with any of the above-mentioned people who helped me so much in the study of consciousness from empirical, phenomenological, physiological, and clinical perspectives. From the philosophical standpoint, I am grateful for the educating exchanges I have had with Andy Fiala, David Carr, Tom Nenon, David Chan, Nick Georgalis, John Bickle, Norm Fischer, and a much longer list. I am indebted to the editors of the *Cilicia Journal of Philosophy* for allowing me to use some passages from my 2016 article for them. Finally, I have to thank my graduate students at Clark Atlanta University for constantly challenging and pushing me on many of the issues discussed here.