ETHICAL VALUES IN THE AGE OF SCIENCE

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WERNER HEISENBERG
PREFACE

My original intention in this book was to concentrate entirely on the theory of ethics. But I soon realized that my attempt was based on an assumption which can hardly be made at the present time—that the need for ethics is generally felt and that its importance is acknowledged by everyone interested in moral problems. In fact, however, the significance of ethics (as a separate discipline in the traditional sense) is very often either questioned or denied; more and more people come to believe that, in this field as in others, the philosophical method has been—or should be—replaced by a scientific one. Morality in particular is frequently seen as determined by non-moral factors which can be scientifically ascertained, and this would either make ethics superfluous or confine it to purely practical considerations.

I therefore changed my original plans. The first part of this book tries to prove that there is both room and need for ethics. This is done with the help of an investigation into the relevant claims of history, psycho-analysis, sociology, and some aspects of natural science. Only after thus testing the foundations of ethics in terms of the situation in which we find ourselves, do I proceed in the second part to a discussion of different ethical teachings. I pay particular attention to the relationship of values and value-judgments with morality and ethics, because this approach (as it seems to me) has been unduly neglected. The last chapter also tries to clarify the connection and difference between ethics and religious faith.

I have much pleasure in acknowledging my great indebtedness to Douglas Hewitt and Allan Keeling; I am more grateful than I can say for the time and care they devoted to helping me to clarify difficult problems and to find the right form of presentation for my
Preface

thoughts. I am equally grateful to Hilde Keeling for her patience and the trouble she took in the preparation of the typescript.

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P.R.

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