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.

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THE MORAL PSYCHOLOGY
OF INTERNAL CONFLICT

Value, Meaning, and the Enactive Mind

RALPH D. ELLIS
Clark Atlanta University
To the memory of Gene Gendlin and Jaak Panksepp, who each profoundly influenced me in their own ways
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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 Zacharin 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
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