

GENERAL SCIENCE

## Science and Ethics Have Close Parallels

► WHILE SCIENCE is widely admired because of its successes, ethics is a matter of concern mainly because of its failures, says Prof. Henry Margenau, Yale University's first Eugene Higgins Professor of Physics and Natural Philosophy.

In his newly published book, *Ethics and Science* (Van Nostrand, \$7.50), Dr. Margenau views ethics as a successful human enterprise, however, and draws parallels between ethics and science, without reducing ethics to science.

Dr. Margenau, who has served as a consultant to the Atomic Energy Commission, Brookhaven National Laboratory and the Rand Corporation, begins the search for ethical norms by trying to determine whether they are, or can be made valid for all mankind.

Logically and empirically he finds no evidence to reject this possibility. If there did exist a "true contradiction" among these ethical systems, Dr. Margenau believes moral philosophy would be at an impasse.

This same impasse could also be reached in science if contradictions existed. However, after examining the laws of science, Prof. Margenau, a past president of the Philosophy of Science Association, finds that these laws converge: "The belief is general that if the end ever arrives, there will be one all inclusive scientific explanatory theory."

Returning to the area of ethics, Dr. Margenau applies this knowledge and finds that both science and ethics have deep roots in human nature, and that human nature in turn unites both nations and cultures.

Since scientific method reflects "the principles of reason" expressed in "laws of thought" and channeled still further into "laws of action," it seems unreasonable to Prof. Margenau that while science approaches reality, ethics would drift without a goal.

"These laws (scientific) are the product, not the starting point, of man's ethical endeavor," he says. "If science progressively reveals one part of human nature, ethics progressively reveals another."

After studying different ethical systems, Dr. Margenau finds that contrary to general belief, ethical norms do exist: "The agreement as to personal and ethical conduct is global and amazing."

The reason for disagreement, he says, stems from a lack in understanding the constructive nature of ethics, and an over-emphasis on values which divert attention to the wrong areas.

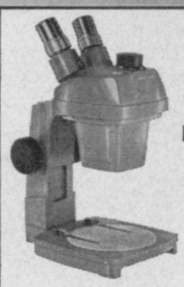
Prof. Margenau, a fellow of the American Physical Society and of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, counsels his reader not to worry about values, but to make whatever basis of belief, whether it be The Sermon on the Mount or the Analects of Confucius, work in his own life.

• *Science News Letter*, 86:287 October 31, 1964


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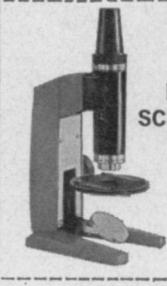
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