

Explain the difference between Meta ethics and Normative ethics

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Ethics is concerned with ideas about moral judgements and the basis for rules of conduct, which apply to all humans, and therefore is a form of ethical absolutism.

What is right i.e. about justice, how people should live. In addition it explores the choices people make and about the values and reasoning that lay behind them and about the meaning and use of moral terms.

The study of Ethics is split into two branches. There is normative ethics. Normative ethics is based on natural law theory which states that what is good can be determined from an analysis of human nature. This considers what kinds of things are good and bad and how we are to decide what kinds of action are right and wrong. This is the main tradition of ethical thinking, as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle used it.

Many moral arguments are concerned with the rights or wrongs of specific matters. "It is always wrong to steal."

The sentence above is a normative statement as using another normative statement such as

"No I think it is right to steal on some occasions," can challenge it. However you can't challenge a normative statement by using a descriptive one

"But everyone around here steals if they get a chance."

It is not saying that it is wrong to steal it is implying that everyone may do something, but it doesn't make it right. It is about values.

It deals with Norms, which may include rules and moral prescriptions like the Golden rule. But they can also include non-moral things, such as rules about the order of operations when working out mathematical problems.

Normative ethics can be split into categories.

Teleological theory. This means that moral judgements are based entirely on the effects produced by an action. This view considers appeals to common sense.

An action is considered right or wrong in relation of its consequences. When considering a course of an action phrases like "Will this hurt me?" or "Will this hurt others?"

Whether we do something or not are determined by what we think the consequences will be, whether we think they will be good or bad. Without doubt people have different opinions about whether a particular result is good or bad, and this accounts for the great variety of teleological theories. For many people, an action is only right if it benefits the person performing the action.

The second is the deontological theory. This is the rightness of an action does not depend solely on its consequences since there may be certain features of the action itself which determine whether it is right or wrong.

For instance: a fair and legal election, a new president is elected in a central African state. Within a few months he reveals himself to be a ruthless and mentally unbalanced tyrant, merciless in liquidating all who oppose him. If you had the power to assassinate him would you?

From a *deontological* view: Killing is wrong and two wrongs don't make a right. However from a *Teleological* view: The consequence is higher than the rule and to kill one person to save many people. In addition the state is under false pretences so he has to be stopped.

Another part of ethics is *Meta ethics*. This deals with a philosophical analysis of the meaning and character of ethical language. It is possible to stand back from moral statements and ask, "What does it mean to say something is right or wrong?" or "In what sense can a moral statement be said to be either true or false?"

Meta ethics can be split into three subcategories:

Ethical Naturalism. This means all ethical statements can be translated into non-ethical ones, as it is similar. Ethical statements are factual. For example Napoleon died in 1821 is of exactly the same order as the statement that Napoleon was evil. Both statements can be established as true by a consideration of the evidence. Another example could be that Adolf Hitler was an evil man, Adolf Hitler committed in 1945.

The above statements can be both backed up with facts. The ethical naturalists would argue that that you can falsify or verify 'evil' by examining his life.

In this theory ethical statements need a universally agreed scale of what is good or what is bad. In addition it means that all ethical statements are facts. In this theory it is hard to get a personal view as no one can challenge the statement. Conversely G.E Moore refused these theories. He argued that ethical naturalism defined moral words such as "good" and "right" in non-moral terms. The technique depends on the difference between a closed and an open question. A closed question means that the definition given is correct.

Ethical Non cognitivism (Emotivism): This theory means that ethical statements can't be reduced to facts. It depends on moral intuition. It decides the truth or fallacy of a statement. Once you strip the supposed facts away from moral statements, they are revealed for what they really are, expressions of a person's own preference and emotions. To say something is wrong is really just another way of saying I don't approve of it. An example of this could be:

Walking one day near the river, you hear frantic cries for help. Two men are struggling in the water and clearly drowning. With dismay you see that one is your father, whom you love dearly, and the other a famous scientist, whom the newspapers report is close to a cure for cancer. Whom should you save?

The greater good means you should save the scientist as he will save many people. However an emotivist would say emotions would take over and at the precise time you would automatically would save your father.

The function of an ethical statement is "to guide choices, our own or other peoples, now and in the future." This means that the content of the words good or bad are established by referring to our common principle.

Ethical Non naturalism (Intuitionism): This expresses the feeling and the emotion of the speaker.

This is the sense, which allows us to establish whether an ethical proposition is true or false. Personally you know yourself its true.

It is non-universal. In this theory G.E Moore argued that goodness could not be defined, because it was unlike any other quality. If you try to say something is "good" you will never find a definition, which does not reduce and limit the idea of goodness, and therefore make it inappropriate. We know that something is good by instinct. You can define an action as being 'right' if it leads to a 'good' result. We can also argue about moral problems deciding which of various options will lead to good but you cannot define that basic idea itself.

In conclusion normative ethics deals with norms, which have an "oughtness." These have a standard or rule to which conformity is in some way expected. Meta ethics on the other hand is when we talk about ethics. Instead of laying down rules about what is good or valuable - the job of normative ethicists is to ask, " what is good" and "what is value."