



Mains Practice Question

Q. Differentiate between the following terms:

1. Meta ethics and normative ethics.

2. Deontology and consequentialism

(250 words)

21 Feb, 2019 GS Paper 4 Theoretical Questions

1. Normative ethics is distinct from Meta ethics because it examines standards for the rightness and the wrongness of actions, while Meta ethics studies the meaning of moral language and the metaphysics of moral facts.

Meta Ethics: -

- Meta ethics is a branch of analytic philosophy that explores the status, foundations, and scope of moral values, properties, and words.
- Meta Ethics or “analytical ethics” deals with the origin of the ethical concepts themselves.
- It is the most abstract area of moral philosophy. Thereby instead of asking what actions are good or bad, it asks more basic question of what is ‘Good’ or ‘Bad’.
- Meta ethics deals with the nature of goodness and badness.
- Meta ethics is concerned with the nature of ethical properties, statements, attitudes and judgment.
- They are purely descriptive and do not assign any particular action or values.

Normative Ethics

- Normative Ethics deals with “norms” or set of considerations how one should act. Thus, it’s a study of “ethical action” and sets out the rightness or wrongness of the actions.
- It is also called prescriptive ethics because it rests on the principles which determine whether an action is right or wrong.
- The Golden rule of normative ethics is “doing to other as we want them to do to us”.
- For example- Since we don’t want our neighbours to throw stones through our glass window, then it will not be wise to first throw stone through a neighbour’s window.
- Based on this reasoning, anything such as harassing, victimising, abusing or assaulting someone is wrong.
- Normative ethics also provides justification for punishing a person who disturbs social and moral.

2. Deontology and Consequentialism

- Deontological ethics or deontology is an approach to ethics that determines goodness or rightness from examining acts, or the rules and duties that the person doing the act strove to fulfil.
- It is distinct from consequentialism in which rightness is based on the consequences of an act, and not the act by itself.
- In deontology, an act may be considered right even if the act produces bad consequences, if it follows the rule.

- Under this form of ethics you can't justify an action by showing that it produced good consequences, which is why it's sometimes called 'non-Consequentialist'.
- Someone who follows Duty-based ethics should do the right thing, even if that produces more harm (or less good) than doing the wrong thing:
- People have a duty to do the right thing, even if it produces a bad result.
- So, for example, the philosopher Kant thought that it would be wrong to tell a lie in order to save a friend from a murderer.

However Consequentialism is significantly different from Deontology.

- Consequentialism or teleological ethics is based on the premise that the morality of an action is contingent with the outcome of that action.
- This implies that morally right action produces good outcome and morally wrong produces bad outcome
- Consequentialism is based on two principles. Firstly whether an act is right or wrong depends only on the results of that act and secondly more good consequences an act produces, the better or more right that act is.
- It gives us this guidance when faced with a moral dilemma by promoting actions that maximises good consequences.
- It also gives general guidance on how to live so people should live to maximise good consequence.
- Different types of consequential ethics include Utilitarianism, Hedonism, egoism etc.

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