

PATHWAYS TO PHILOSOPHY E

Moral Philosophy 'Reasons, values and conduct'

Essay Question 4

Using several examples, compare and contrast the way moral and non-moral judgments exhibit the 'characteristic marks of truth'. What is the significance of that result for the claim that 'moral judgments are objective, not subjective'?

Introduction

The characteristic marks of truth help us recognize truth when it comes along. If these marks are evident in non-moral judgments that we accept then moral judgments with the same marks might also be considered true. The approach I adopt in this essay is to start with a simple case of a non-moral judgment which is readily acceptable as being true and then develop the case into a more difficult to accept non-moral judgment and moral judgments. In each case the extent of conformity to marks of truth is considered. The aim is to identify how truthful and objective the moral judgments appear.

Characteristic Marks of Truth

The following are some of the characteristic marks of truth identified by various philosophers.

- A Truth is unique. There is only one truth. Different investigators in pursuit of truth concerning a given subject matter assume, that insofar as they remain on the track of truth they are converging towards a single result.
- A Truth remains constant with time.
- Failure to identify the truth is a fault of the method not the truth itself.
- The truth corresponds to the actual state of affairs (Correspondence theory).
- Truth requires a proper fit of elements within a whole system (Coherence theory).
- Truth is whatever some specified group agree upon. Such a group might include all human beings, or subset consisting of more than one person. (Consensus theory).
- Truth is verified and confirmed by the results of putting one's concepts into practice (Pragmatic theory). When we act on the basis of a true theory or explanation, our actions are successful.
- A True belief or judgment is internally consistent.
- A True belief or judgment is consistent with everything else we consider true.

Non-moral Judgments

A simple case of a non-moral judgment is the judgment that I am now at this time (10 AM Wednesday) typing on my Macbook Air. This judgment appears to have most if not all of the 9 marks of truth listed above. This is not to say there is no chance that the judgment might not be true. There is a small chance that I might be dreaming or intoxicated and my judgment incorrect.

If I now consider the judgment that I was typing on my Macbook Air last Wednesday at this time. I think this is probably true but I am not as sure. Marks 1 and 2 are valid. Mark 3 is also valid as the fault, if there is one, is in the tools (my memory) not the truth itself. If this judgment conforms with the actual state of affairs (Mark 4) then we can be confident of its' truth. Typing on my laptop fits in with the normal state of affairs (Mark 5) for my behavior and the rest of mankind, many of whom were also using their notebooks at the same time. My wife

saw me typing at the time so the confirmation of others (Mark 6) is forthcoming. At this stage it is difficult to confirm the judgment using pragmatic tests (Mark 7). All in all there are some but not all of the marks of truth present in this judgment.

Moral Judgments

A moral judgment related to the non-moral cases is that typing on my laptop was a good thing to do. Typing is part of my pathways philosophy study, which is entertaining and enables me to develop as a human being. The action relates to the concept of good being fit for a purpose. A good father acts in a fatherly way. A good human being uses his facilities (mental in this case) to develop himself. Marks 1 to 5 appear valid but mark 6 is a problem. Some would regard my typing a philosophy essay as a waste of time. Universal agreement would seem to be impossible. Mark 7 is difficult but not impossible to demonstrate. My behavior as a human could become more reasonable and considerate (good) over time as a result of my greater understanding of the world. Marks 8 and 9 internally consistent and coherent appear valid.

On the other hand I might make the moral judgment that on Wednesday mornings I should act as a volunteer carer to severely mentally disabled people and give them some time in the park rather than studying Philosophy. Considering again my list of characteristic marks of truth one can see that mark 6 consensus is more likely to be more achieved in this case. Most if not all of the other marks will still be achieved in this case. It seems then fairly clear that helping the disabled is more truly a morally correct judgment.

Using the truth marks suggests that the truthfulness of this moral judgment compared with that of the related non-moral judgments is more of degree than total difference. Some marks are valid and some are not with both types of judgments. This fits in with the concept that there is no such thing as absolute truth only degrees of truthfulness.

It is worth noting here that mark 6 related to consensus is more difficult to achieve for a moral judgment because it depends on the values of the decider. A decider can simply see if I am using my laptop but in moral judgments how much he values, for example, philosophy study or helping the disabled is a factor. The ethics of dialogue approach involves each party attempting to resolve difference through compromise and greater understanding of the other's point of view. In many cases total resolution is impossible because of the difference in values.

The non-moral judgment examples point to a unique truth. Either I am working on my Pathways course typing on my notebook or I am not. One of the two is true. Moral judgments however are not so clearly a single truth. Rather than helping the disabled there might be something even better for me to do. This third possibility might be more truly a better judgment.

Objective Moral Judgments

The non-moral judgment examples given are objective in the sense that they apply to one person and time that is unique. Similar considerations apply to the moral judgment examples. If it is true that it is good for me to type on my notebook as part of my pathways course then this is an objective judgment about a unique situation in the universe.

Although I am part of the world I am also an individual living it. There are two views here my personal one and a more universal one. My judgments moral and non-moral can be considered true for me if they are right for me. Is it better to become a nurse or a teacher? If for me a nurse is better then that is true. Sartre pointed out that the lack of eternal, immutable truths allows us to create what is true for ourselves.

Conclusions

- In terms of marks of truth there is no fundamental difference between moral and no-moral judgments only degrees of conformity.
- There is no absolute truth only degrees of conformity to the various definitions of truth (conformance, consensus etc).
- The truth of moral judgments can be affected by the values of the other.
- Moral judgments can be objective if not true in all interpretations of the word.
- A judgment can be true for me alone.