**Ethics and Morality**

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Morals are something people develop as individuals. They depend on things like how we were brought up and what we were generally taught. As such, they define our personal principles and they rarely change.

Ethics are a systematic reflection on our morals. They vary depending on which environment we are in, and they allow us a greater ability to deal with moral dilemmas. Thus, ethics essentially allows us to find the right kind of morality.

It is the combination of ethics and morals that defines what a person believes is right or wrong.

## Ethics

Ethics can be divided into two categories, descriptive ethics and normative ethics.

Descriptive ethics describes people’s moral beliefs, claims, behaviours, etc. It studies the morality found in certain subcultures or during certain periods of history. It does not judge those morals.

Normative ethics attempts to discover which actions are, in fact, right or wrong, which are, in fact, good or bad and what exactly it takes, in fact, to be a good or bad person. It judges morality. Normative judgements are value judgements, not descriptive ones.

## Values, Norms and Virtues

Values are goals which are worth striving for. Moral values are related to a good life or a just society. It is not about personal preferences or interests.

Values can be intrinsic or instrumental. Intrinsic values are values that are worthwhile in and of themselves. Instrumental values are values that exist to serve some purpose.

Norms are rules that prescribe what concrete actions are required, permitted or forbidden. Moral norms are indications for responsible action.

The difference between values and norms is that values are things we want to achieve, while norms are a means to achieving those values. Values tend to be more abstract, while norms are much more specific. Values are hard to achieve without norms, while norms are meaningless without values. We can have norms that serve no values, and they will be pointless norms.

For example, we want to guarantee traffic safety. This is a value. It is not specific. We can achieve this value by implementing traffic regulations. These are norms. They are specific and exist to ensure we can achieve our intended value.

Virtues are human characteristics and qualities. They have the following features:

* They are desirable characteristics and express values
* They are expressed via action
* They are lasting and permanent
* They are always present but only used when necessary
* They can be influenced by other individuals