

On the Distinction of Two Types of Ethics

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An important part of morality seems to lie in the idea that what is right for one person must be right for anyone else in the same position. This can be expressed by saying that moral judgements must be universalizable. For instance, if I say you ought not to lie, I commit myself to saying that anyone else in your position, including me, ought not to lie. In this paper, I argue against the necessity of universalizability for all moral judgements. An investigation of the psychological fundamentals from which ethics derives leads me to the distinction of two types of ethics, one claiming universalizability, the other being of a more personal nature. I begin my argument by analyzing value judgements by means of an analysis of value words. Here I show 'preference' and 'prescriptivity' to be the necessary conditions of all value judgements. These terms are taken from Hare (e.g., *Moral thinking*). After arguing that moral judgements are an example of value judgements as well as any other value judgement, I conclude that the moral judgements of a subject express the subject's 'preference' and 'prescriptivity', i.e. his or her 'desire' and 'command'.

Following this line of argumentation I come to the following conclusions about ethics in general:

- 1 Though it is said that ethical statements need to be universalizable, even this claim can be thought of as a result of a subject's desire for ethical statements to be that way.
- 2 This desire is caused by a subject's wish to make people (rather than himself) do what he likes.
- 3 Ethics of the above kind has to be distinguished from another kind of ethics that shows other psychological fundamentals as its values can be entirely personal. Ethics of the first kind I call Ethics1, ethics of the second type Ethics2.
- 4 Ethics2 derives from a subject's desire to personally acquire the absolute good or devote his life to the fulfillment of his highest values. Under Ethics2 I subsume not only the devotion of a religious believer but also that of an Olympic athlete.

This last step, severing ethics from its relation to universalizability, opens a framework that allows for a proper estimation of the ethics of existentialist philosophers like Nietzsche and Kierkegaard.