

Public Abstract

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The question of this dissertation is this: does it make sense to hold a moral belief yet not care at all about living up to it? For example: suppose your friend tells you that she now thinks eating meat is morally wrong. Yet when you take her to lunch, she orders a hamburger without any hesitation or anxiety. You ask her if perhaps she has changed her mind on the morality of eating meat, but she replies, "No, I still believe that eating meat is wrong; I just don't care if I do things that are wrong." This scenario has seemed quite odd to philosophers of morality, yet the source of this oddness continues to be hotly debated. In this dissertation, I present the results of numerous psychological studies that suggest that part of this oddness may reside in how we describe someone like your friend in the above example. Describing her as knowing that eating meat is wrong (despite her apathy) seems less strange to people than describing her as believing that eating meat is wrong (again, despite her apathy). Moreover, I present four follow-up studies that suggest that this asymmetry in people's responses to these two kinds of descriptions doesn't seem to reside in some mistake made by the participants of the studies. If these responses are not in error, then this seems to have some major implications for our understanding of moral judgment. Specifically, even if it can make sense to not care at all about living up to how you know you should live, it may not make sense to be completely apathetic towards your own moral beliefs. Of course, this too seems strange: how can someone know how they should live but not really believe they should live that way? (Compare: can you know that  $2+2=4$  while, at the same time, not believe that  $2+2=4$ ?) Yet this research is just beginning; perhaps future research will help make more sense of these results.