



Normativity

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Definitions

Wikipedia: „In philosophy, **normative** statements affirm how things **should** or ought to be, how to **value** them, which things are **good** or bad, which actions are **right** or wrong. Normative is usually contrasted with positive (i.e. descriptive, explanatory, or constative) when describing types of theories, beliefs, or propositions.

Positive statements **are falsifiable statements** that attempt to describe reality. [...]

Normative statements and norms, as well as their meanings, are an integral part of human life. They are **fundamental** for prioritizing goals and organizing and planning thought, belief, emotion and action and are the basis of much ethical and **political** discourse.“

- “In social sciences the term "normative" is used to describe the effects of those structures of culture which regulate the function of social activity.“


Usual tripartition of normative ethics

- Teleological/consequentialistic ethics
- Deontological ethics
- Virtue ethics

5 characteristics of normative ethics (v.d. Pfordten 1997)

- **Criteria, labels, rationales**, such as divine orders, consequences of acts, happiness, norms of a group, values, rights, discourse, Kantian imperative, ...
- **How to obtain these criteria?**
empirically, by intuition, logically universalizing, coherentist
- **What/Who is the origin, carrier or concerned of the criteria?**
god, acting person, all concerned humans, all living entities, ...
- **Content of reasoning/obligation**
human behaviour with regard to institutions, persons, goods, consequences, acts, ...
- **Logical structure of reasoning**
From 'right' follows 'good', naturalistic fallacy, role of description, evaluation, prescription



Lost?

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- **Description:**
empirically observing facts
 - **Analysis:**
arranging the facts according to a mental model
 - **Evaluation:**
Valuing the observations
 - **Prescription:**
Defining the obliged behaviour („x should ...“)

Problems ? (a) individually

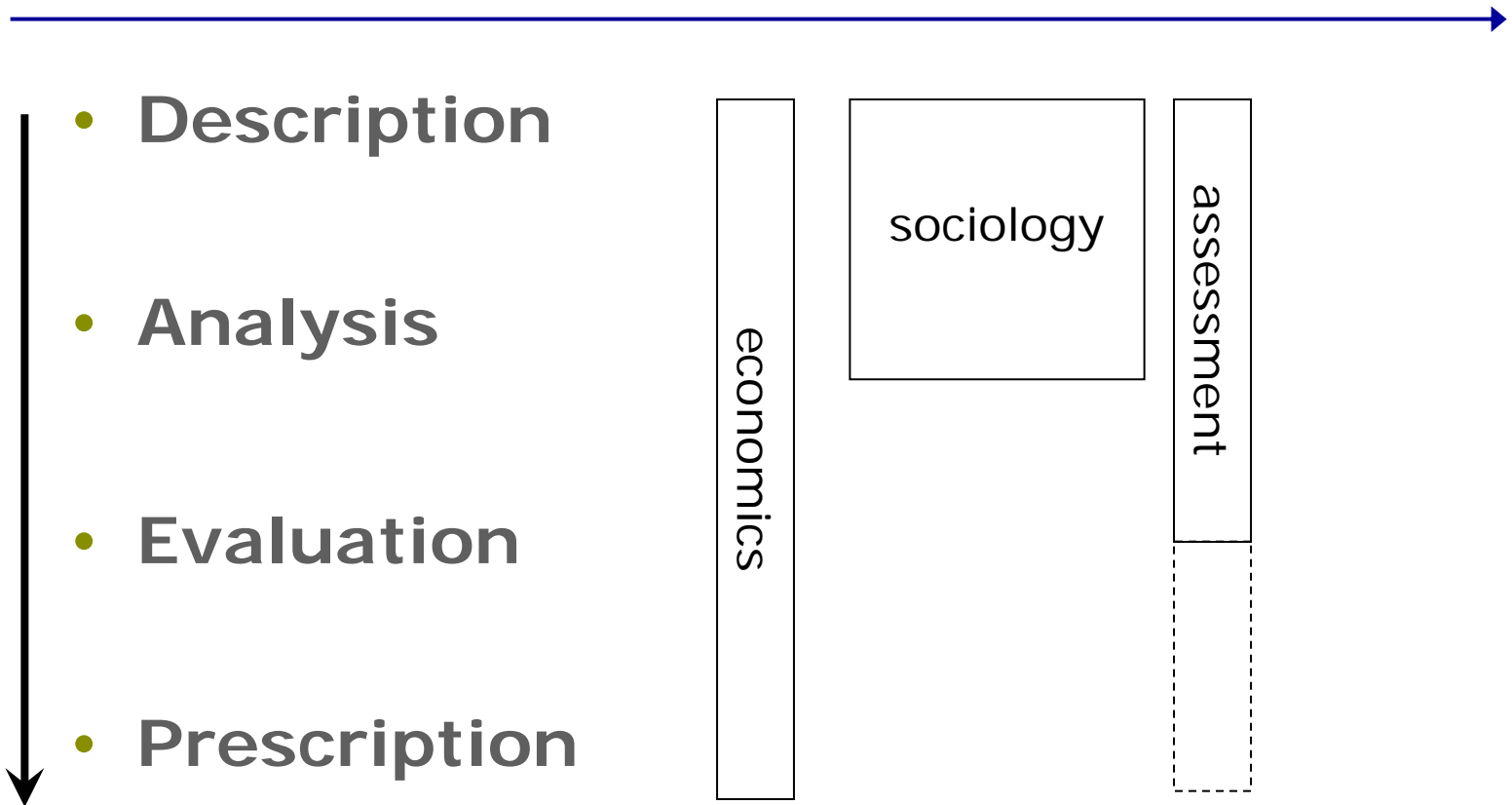
- **Description:**
bias, omission, ignorance, uncertainty, ...
- **Analysis:**
Indicisiveness between models, ambiguity
- **Evaluation:**
unclear or incoherent values
- **Prescription:**
Indicisiveness, dilemma, irrationality

Problems ? (b) socially

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- A decorative graphic on the left side of the slide, consisting of overlapping green and purple circular shapes.
- **Description:**
dependent on view point
 - **Analysis:**
dependent on view point and on knowledge
 - **Evaluation:**
even more unclear or incoherent values
 - **Prescription:**
Indicisiveness, dilemma, irrationality
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- A vertical black arrow pointing downwards, positioned to the left of the list items.

Where should we be?

(prescriptive question)



Where should we be?

(prescriptive question)

• **Descriptions**
a, b, c

• **Analysis**
a, b, c

• **Evaluations**
a, b, c

• **Prescriptions**
a, b, c

- In a pluralistic understanding, things get blurred
- One description/analysis ,should' count more than others?
- One evaluation ,should' count more than others?
- Who decides what counts and how it counts?

Post-normal, mode 2, action research etc.

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- **Post-normal science:** uncertain facts, values in dispute, far-reaching consequences and a high urgency of decisions
 - **Mode-2:** a complex process of ongoing negotiation and communication of a network of competing and cooperating groups and individuals, set up to 'solve' a certain problem
 - **Action research** is a reflective process of progressive problem solving led by individuals working with others in teams or as part of a „community of practice" to improve the way they address issues and solve problems.

Science one actor amongst others.

Hagedorn: Institutions and Agricultural Economics,

Journal of Economic Issues 1993



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1. The problem of values applied in the domain of social sciences: the question to what extent these sciences have to make values a subject of their research (level of objects).
 2. The real value judgement problem: the question to what extent statements in the social sciences must themselves have the nature of value judgements (level of object language).
 3. The problem of the value basis of the social sciences: the question to what extent values form the basis of the social sciences (level of metalanguage).

My stance: as values form the basis of social science research, social science statements necessarily have the nature of value judgements. Social science addressing conflicts makes values a subject of their research

Conclusion

- There is no description without prescription
- Be more aware of the normativity in your scientific knowledge when going
 - from description to prescription,
 - from situations with low stakes to high stakes,
 - from certainty to ignorance
- Openness, self-reflexivity, awareness, and explicitness of normative assumptions, goals, limits, etc. are important for accountability, legitimacy, and honesty of research & policy advice alike.

References

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