



Ima Prescriptivist

- “You ought to do this” is a universalizable prescription (not a truth claim); it means “Do this and let everyone do the same in similar cases.”
- Pick out your moral principles by first trying to be informed and imaginative, and then seeing what you can consistently will.

Moral judgments are a kind of prescription (imperative).

Indicative:

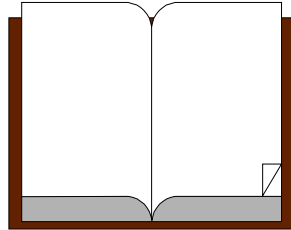
“The door
is open”



Imperative:

“Close the
door”

*Freedom
and
Reason*



An ethical
theory should
do two things

- allow us the freedom to make our own moral judgments.
- show us how to make moral judgments in a rational way.

“good”

Moral
truths?

To form your moral
beliefs, follow:

CR	“socially approved”	relative	your society
SB	“what I like”	relative	your feelings
SN	“what God desires”	yes	God’s will
IN	is indefinable but objective	yes	your moral intuitions
EM	is emotional, like “Hurrah!”	no	your feelings
PR	expresses how you want people to live	no	what you can consistently will, after you get facts & exercise imagination

Apply
prescriptivism to
this principle:



“We ought to beat up all
short people – just
because they’re short.”

Two logical rules for “ought” –
to be logically consistent, we must:

- (U) make similar evaluations about similar cases.
- (P) keep our moral beliefs in harmony with how we live and want others to live.

This combination is logically inconsistent:

- I believe that I *ought* to do something to another.
- I don't desire that this be done to me in the same situation.

To be reasonable in our moral beliefs is to be informed, imaginative, and consistent.



“We ought to put Jews into concentration camps.”

To avoid the GR attack, a Nazi could:

1. Use “ought” so that it doesn’t express a universal prescription.
2. Avoid making moral judgments.
3. Not care if he’s inconsistent and irrational.
4. Desire to be treated thusly himself.

Does prescriptivism claim that this combination is inconsistent?

- I hit you.
- I don't desire that I be hit in the same situation.

Are these *true* according to prescriptivism?

- We ought to be consistent.
- We ought to make moral judgments about our actions.
- We ought to follow the golden rule.

Prescriptivism goes against the common sense belief that moral judgments can be true – and can be known to be true.



“We ought to put Jews into concentration camps.”

It would be better not to have so many escape routes. Nazis can escape the argument if they:

- don't choose to play the game of morality,
- don't care about being inconsistent,
- desire to be treated the same way in the imagined reversed situation, or
- say “all right” instead of “ought.”

Summary

	“Good”	Are there moral truths?	To form your moral beliefs, follow
Intuitionism	is indefinable but objective	yes	your moral intuitions
Emotivism	is emotional – like “Hurrah!”	no	your feelings
Prescriptivism	expresses how we want people to live	no	what you can consistently will, after you get the facts and use your imagination