



Ima
Prescriptivist
(PR)

- “You ought to do this” is a universalizable prescription (not a truth claim); it means “Do this and let everyone do the same (including to me) in similar cases.”
- Pick out your moral principles by 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”



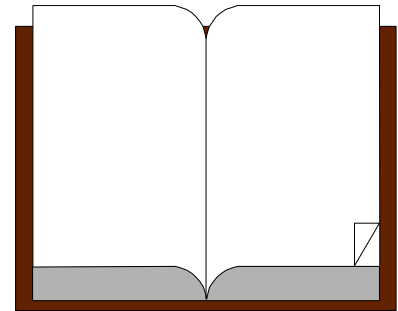
Imperative

“Close the door”



R.M. Hare

An ethical
theory should
do two things



Freedom and Reason

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

Apply
prescriptivism
to this *shortism*
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.

I believe that I ought to steal Detra's bicycle.

- ∴ To be consistent, I have to believe that my bicycle ought to be stolen if I were in her place. (from U)
- ∴ To be consistent, I have to desire that my bicycle be stolen if I were in her place. (from P)

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



Prescriptivism can
attack racist ideas, like:

“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
commonsense belief that moral judgments
can be *true* and *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 consistently
will, after being infor-
med and imagination

Sartre and De Beauvoir

Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone De Beauvoir were twentieth-century French existentialists. Their ethics somewhat resembled prescriptivism; but it was based, not on an analysis of “ought,” but on a rejection of God.

Without God, they argued, we have to create our own values. But if we do this consistently, then we must take others into account; if we will our own freedom, then we must also will the freedom of others.