

# What is the nature of morality?



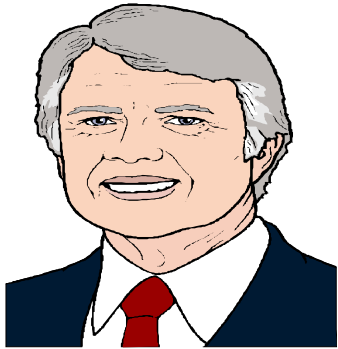
Part One (popular metaethics): CR, SB, IO, SN.

Part Two (philosophical metaethics)

*Intuitionism* (IN): ethics is objective, like SN, but not based on religion.

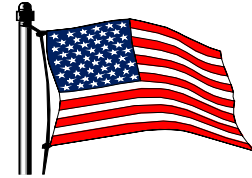
*Emotivism* (EM): somewhat like SB.

*Prescriptivism* (PR): somewhat like IO.



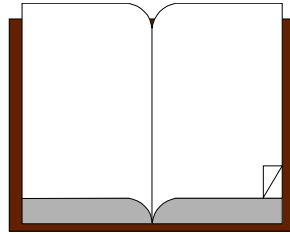
Ima  
Intuitionist  
(IN)

“We hold these truths  
to be self-evident ...”



[http://ahp.gatech.edu/declaration\\_ind\\_1776.html](http://ahp.gatech.edu/declaration_ind_1776.html)

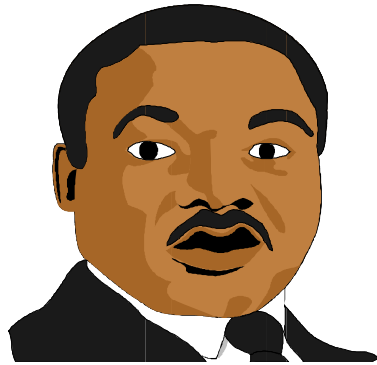
- “Good” is indefinable,
- there are objective moral truths, and
- the basic moral truths are self-evident to a mature mind.



dictionary

“Good” is  
indefinable.

- Why must there be indefinable terms?
- Criticize: “*Grandfather*” means “*kind old man.*”
- Give Moore’s criticism: “*Good*” means “*socially approved.*”
- Hume’s law: We can’t deduce an “ought” from an “is.”



There are  
objective  
moral truths.

Moral realism, while not strictly provable,  
is a presumption of mature common sense  
– and so should be accepted unless we  
have strong arguments against it.



The basic moral truths  
are self-evident to a  
mature mind.

- A self-evident truth (first principle) is a known truth that requires no proof or justification.
- Why must there be self-evident truths *in math*?
- Why must there be self-evident *moral* truths?

## *Math*

---

$$2+2 = 4$$

$$x+y = y+x$$

$$-(x \cdot y) = (-x \cdot -y)$$

## *Morality*

---

All men are created equal.

Pleasure is intrinsically good.

Hatred is wrong.

- Should we accept as self-evident any principle that seems initially plausible to us?
- Are self-evident truths present from birth?
- Do all adults know them?
- Is it self-evident what we ought to do in a concrete situation?
- What moral principles are self-evident?

# Apply intuitionism to



racism



global  
warming



moral  
education

# Why accept self-evident truths in math but not in morality?

*Math*

---

precise

largely agreed  
on by experts of  
different cultures

*Morality*

---

vague

widely disputed by  
experts and very subject  
to social conditioning





“One basic principle must be the absolute rule for the SS man: we must be honest, decent, loyal, and comradely to members of our own blood and to nobody else. What happens to a Russian, to a Czech does not interest me in the slightest...”



“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

Allegedly “self-evident truths”  
can differ widely.



Intuitionist moral education teaches parental (and perhaps Nazi or terrorist) norms, which later will seem to be “self-evident truths.”

We need some way to rationally criticize inherited moral intuitions.

# Ethical naturalism has three forms

- **Semantic naturalism** is the view that what we mean by evaluative terms (like “good”) can be defined using non-evaluative empirical terms (like “socially approved” or “desired”). This is what intuitionism criticizes.
- **Reforming naturalism** is a proposal that we give a new and clearer meaning to evaluative terms (like “good”) using empirical terms (like “what we’d desire after maximal exposure to knowable facts”).
- **Property naturalism** is the view that evaluative properties (like goodness) are identical to empirical properties (like the property of being socially approved or the property of being desired).