

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.



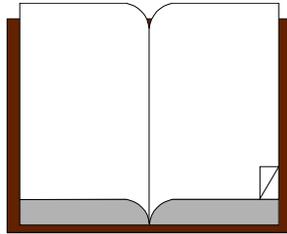
Ima
Intuitionist
(IN)

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



http://ahp.gatech.edu/declaration_ind_1776.html

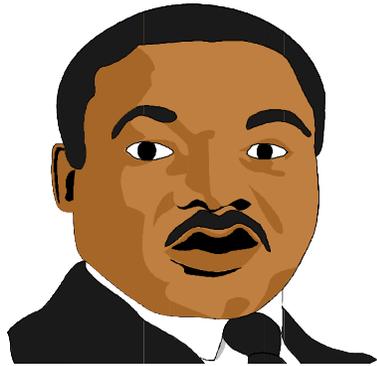
- “Good” is indefinable,
- there are objective moral truths, and
- the basic moral truths are self-evident to a mature mind.



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).