

What is the  
nature of  
morality?



CR

SB

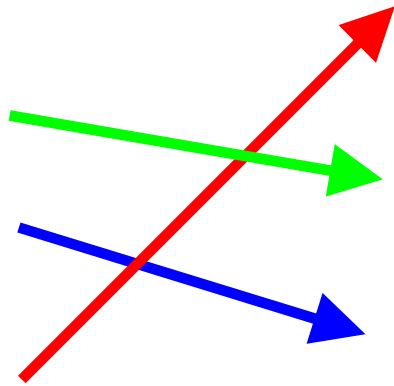
IO

SN

Intuitionism

Emotivism

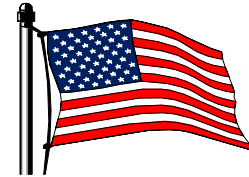
Prescriptivism





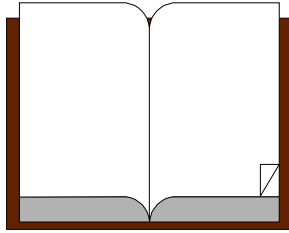
## Ima Intuitionist

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



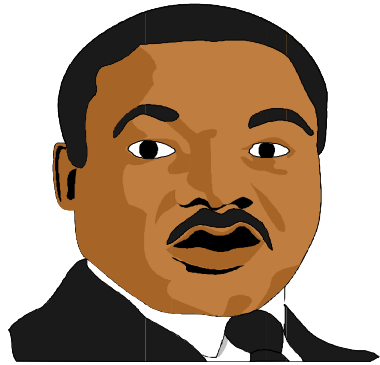
[http://ahp.gatech.edu/declaration\\_ind\\_1776.html](http://ahp.gatech.edu/declaration_ind_1776.html)

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



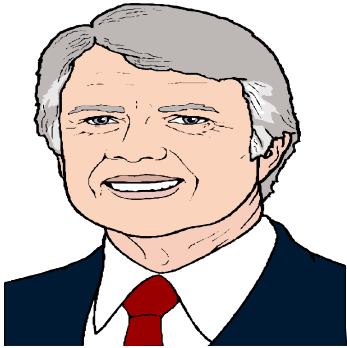
“Good” is  
indefinable.

- 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.

This, while not strictly provable, is a  
presumption of mature common sense  
– and so should be accepted unless we  
have proof to the contrary.



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? (Hint: think of mathematics.)
- 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.

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

# Apply intuitionism to



racism



moral  
education

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

*Math principles*

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precise

largely agreed upon  
by experts of  
different cultures

*Moral principles*

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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  
inculcates 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.