

Objective Prescriptions And Other Essays Author R M Hare Published On May 1999

Objective Prescriptions and Other Essays: Exploring R.M. Hare's May 1999 Publications

May 1999 didn't see a single publication by R.M. Hare titled "Objective Prescriptions and Other Essays." However, R.M. Hare, a prominent figure in moral philosophy, published extensively throughout his career, and focusing on his work surrounding **prescriptivism**, **moral philosophy**, **universalizability**, and **ethical naturalism** allows us to explore the themes that might be found in a hypothetical collection with that title. This article will delve into Hare's key philosophical positions, examining how his ideas on prescriptivism, particularly the concept of objective prescriptions, shaped his ethical framework. We'll explore the implications of his work and consider its lasting impact on contemporary moral philosophy.

Hare's Prescriptivism: A Foundation for Objective Prescriptions

R.M. Hare's ethical theory, known as prescriptivism, forms the bedrock for understanding his concept of objective prescriptions. Prescriptivism argues that moral judgments are not merely descriptive statements about the world; instead, they are imperatives—commands or prescriptions—that guide our actions. This sets Hare apart from many other ethical theorists, particularly those advocating for ethical naturalism, which attempts to ground moral values in natural facts.

Hare vehemently rejected ethical naturalism. He argued that statements like "Stealing is wrong" are not verifiable like scientific claims. Instead, they function as prescriptive statements—commands to refrain from stealing. This, however, doesn't mean his prescriptions are subjective. Instead, Hare introduces the crucial concept of **universalizability**.

The Principle of Universalizability

A cornerstone of Hare's prescriptivism is the principle of universalizability. This principle states that for a moral judgment to be valid, it must be possible to universalize it without contradiction. If I say "I should steal this bread," but I wouldn't want everyone to steal bread whenever they're hungry, my judgment fails the test of universalizability. This reveals a fundamental inconsistency in my moral reasoning. The concept of universalizability allows for objective prescriptions—prescriptions that, if universally acted upon, wouldn't create logical contradictions or undermine the very possibility of moral reasoning. This is how Hare bridges the gap between prescriptivism and objectivity.

The Implication of Objective Prescriptions in Hare's Moral Framework

The implication of Hare's concept of objective prescriptions is profound. It implies that morality isn't merely a matter of personal opinion or cultural relativism. There are objective moral truths, according to Hare, but these truths are not discovered through empirical observation; rather, they are derived through the rational application of the principle of universalizability.

For example, consider the prescription "one should not lie." If everyone lied all the time, communication would collapse; the very concept of lying would become meaningless. This demonstrates the objective nature of the prescription against lying, according to Hare's framework. This isn't to say that every moral dilemma has a simple, universally agreed-upon solution. Hare acknowledges the complexities of moral reasoning, especially when competing prescriptions conflict. However, the framework of universalizability provides a method for evaluating the consistency and rationality of our moral choices.

Hare's Influence and Criticisms

Hare's work has significantly influenced contemporary moral philosophy. His emphasis on the prescriptive nature of moral judgments and the importance of universalizability has challenged traditional ethical theories, prompting ongoing debate and refinement.

However, his work has also faced criticisms. Some argue that the principle of universalizability is too demanding and fails to account for the complexities of real-world moral dilemmas. Others criticize his focus on rationality, suggesting

that emotions and intuitions also play vital roles in moral decision-making. Despite these criticisms, Hare's contribution to moral philosophy remains significant.

Beyond Objective Prescriptions: Exploring Other Aspects of Hare's Work

While a hypothetical collection titled "Objective Prescriptions and Other Essays" would likely focus on this key concept, Hare's philosophical contributions extend far beyond it. His work on **language and ethics**, exploring how the structure of language itself reflects moral reasoning, is equally crucial. He rigorously analyzed moral discourse, aiming to clarify the logic underpinning ethical judgments. Understanding these broader aspects of his thought enriches our appreciation of the significance of "objective prescriptions" within his larger philosophical project.

Conclusion

Although there's no specific collection titled "Objective Prescriptions and Other Essays" published by R.M. Hare in May 1999, examining his work on prescriptivism, universalizability, and his rejection of ethical naturalism provides a rich understanding of what such a collection might contain. Hare's contribution to ethical theory is lasting, even if subject to ongoing debate and refinement. His emphasis on the rationality and objectivity of morality, even within a prescriptive framework, continues to shape the discussion of ethical theory today.

FAQ

Q1: What is the main difference between Hare's prescriptivism and other ethical theories?

A1: Hare's prescriptivism distinguishes itself from other ethical theories by emphasizing the prescriptive, or command-like, nature of moral judgments. Unlike descriptive theories that simply describe moral facts, Hare argues that moral statements function as imperatives that guide action. This sets him apart from ethical naturalism, which seeks to ground morality in natural facts, and emotivism, which reduces moral statements to expressions of emotion.

Q2: How does Hare's principle of universalizability work in practice?

A2: Hare's principle of universalizability requires that moral judgments be capable of being consistently applied

universally. If a judgment cannot be consistently applied to everyone without generating a contradiction, it fails the test of universalizability. For example, if I claim "I should lie to get what I want," but wouldn't want everyone to lie all the time, my judgment is inconsistent and, therefore, morally flawed according to Hare.

Q3: Are there any limitations to Hare's theory of objective prescriptions?

A3: Yes, Hare's theory, while influential, has faced criticisms. Some argue that the principle of universalizability is too simplistic and doesn't adequately address the complexities of real-world moral conflicts. Others criticize the emphasis on purely rational decision-making, neglecting the role of emotions and intuitions in ethical judgments. The problem of conflicting universalizable prescriptions is also a significant challenge for his framework.

Q4: How does Hare's work relate to contemporary moral philosophy?

A4: Hare's work continues to influence contemporary moral philosophy through its challenge to traditional ethical theories and its emphasis on the prescriptive nature of moral judgments. His work inspires ongoing discussions about the relationship between rationality, emotion, and morality, as well as the role of language in ethical discourse. His focus on universalizability continues to be debated and refined.

Q5: What are some examples of objective prescriptions according to Hare?

A5: Hare would consider prescriptions like "Do not kill innocent people," "Keep your promises," and "Do not steal" to be objective prescriptions. These are not simply matters of personal opinion, because their universal application doesn't lead to a logical contradiction; a world where everyone killed innocents would be a world without morality itself.

Q6: How does Hare's view on universalizability differ from Kant's categorical imperative?

A6: While both Hare and Kant emphasize the importance of universalizability, there are key differences. Kant's categorical imperative focuses on the formulation of a maxim that can be willed as a universal law. Hare, on the other hand, emphasizes the prescriptive nature of moral judgments and their consistency within a system of preferences. Kant's focus is on the rational consistency of the *maxim* itself, while Hare emphasizes the consistency of the *prescription* in action and its universal applicability without contradiction.

Q7: How does Hare's concept of objective prescriptions relate to his views on meta-ethics?

A7: Hare's concept of objective prescriptions is central to his meta-ethical position. His prescriptivism argues against both emotivism and ethical naturalism. While he believes moral judgments are prescriptive, his principle of universalizability introduces a form of objectivity. The objectivity doesn't reside in a correspondence to empirical facts, but rather in the logical coherence and consistency that must be demonstrated by any universally applicable moral prescription.

Q8: What are some resources for further reading on R.M. Hare's philosophy?

A8: For a deeper dive into R.M. Hare's philosophy, readers can consult his seminal works, including **The Language of Morals** and **Moral Thinking**. Numerous scholarly articles and books analyzing his work are also available. Searching academic databases like JSTOR, Google Scholar, and PhilPapers will yield substantial resources.

Delving into Hare's "Objective Prescriptions and Other Essays": A Retrospective on Moral Philosophy

R.M. Hare's "Objective Prescriptions and Other Essays," published in May 1999, serves as an important contribution to the field of moral philosophy. This compilation of essays, spanning a substantial part of Hare's illustrious career, presents an integrated overview of his unique brand of prescriptivism, a theory that persists to spark controversy and stimulate study today. This article will examine the key ideas contained within the volume, emphasizing its significance and considering its enduring influence on ethical reasoning.

Hare's prescriptivism, fundamentally, posits that moral judgments are not merely explicative, showing facts about the world, but are rather imperative, directing our actions and choices. He distinguished between two levels of moral thinking: instinctive moral judgments, which are often influenced by feeling, and rational moral thinking, which uses reason to evaluate and refine those judgments. This second process is essential for Hare, as it allows us to reach coherence in our moral beliefs and to implement them equitably across different situations.

The essays in "Objective Prescriptions and Other Essays" deepen our grasp of this system. They tackle objections to his theory, explaining intricate concepts and providing revealing illustrations. For example, Hare regularly highlighted the

relevance of universalizability – the idea that moral judgments must be applicable to everyone in analogous situations. This principle, he asserted, is crucial for avoiding arbitrary and prejudiced moral evaluations.

Furthermore, the book explores the relationship between moral philosophy and practical ethics. Hare wasn't simply concerned with constructing an theoretical theory; he was eager to apply his ideas to practical moral problems. This practical orientation is clearly visible throughout the essays, which address a extensive spectrum of ethical issues, from animal rights to conservationist ethics.

The prose of "Objective Prescriptions and Other Essays" is marked by its lucidity and precision. While dealing complex philosophical notions, Hare achieves to communicate them in a comparatively understandable way. He avoids unnecessary terminology, choosing unambiguous language that enables the reader to understand the main arguments without trouble. This accessibility, however, does not reduce the seriousness of his examination.

In conclusion, "Objective Prescriptions and Other Essays" remains a important aid for anyone involved in the investigation of moral philosophy. Its exploration of prescriptivism, coupled with its stress on concrete application, constitutes it a enduring addition to the discipline. Hare's scholarship proves our understanding of moral reasoning and provides a structure for formulating more coherent and just ethical judgments.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs):

- 1. What is prescriptivism in moral philosophy?** Prescriptivism argues that moral statements are not merely descriptive, stating facts, but are prescriptive, guiding action. They tell us what *ought* to be done.
- 2. How does Hare's concept of universalizability work?** Universalizability means that a moral judgment should be applicable to everyone in similar circumstances. If you believe something is morally right for you, you must believe it's right for everyone in a relevantly similar situation.
- 3. What is the significance of the distinction between intuitive and critical moral thinking in Hare's work?** This distinction highlights the importance of critical reflection on our intuitive moral judgments, emphasizing the need for reasoned, consistent moral beliefs.
- 4. How does Hare's work apply to real-world ethical issues?** Hare's framework, while theoretical, aims for practical

application. His emphasis on universalizability and critical thinking can help guide decision-making in diverse moral dilemmas, fostering fairer and more consistent outcomes.

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