Richard Mervyn Hare (1919-2002)
Universal prescriptivism

- Universal prescriptivism is a form of metaethics
- It says that ethical sentences do not describe; they are only prescriptions that say how to act
- One can distinguish between two forms of ethical theories: descriptivism (moral theory describes some moral reality) and non-descriptivism (moral theory does not describe but only expresses emotions or attitudes (emotivism)
- Universal prescriptivism is also (partly) a form of constructive criticism of Kant`s ethics and its idea that a morally positive activity must be general.

"The most-discussed kind of prescriptivism, known as *universal prescriptivism,* finds this differentia in what has been called the *universalizability* of 'ought'- sentences and other normative or evaluative sentences. Most descriptivists too acknowledge this feature of moral judgements. One cannot with logical consistency, where *a* and *b* are two individuals, say that *a* ought, in a certain situation specified in universal terms without reference to individuals, to act in a certain way, also specified in universal terms, but that *b* ought not to act in a similarly specified way in a similarly specified situation. This is because in any 'ought'- statement there is implicit a principle which says that the statement applies to all precisely similar situations. This means that if I say 'That is what ought to be done; but there could be a situation exactly like this one in its non-moral properties, but in which the corresponding person, who was exactly like the person who ought to do it in this situation, ought not to do it', I contradict myself (Hare, 1963, p. 1 off.). This would become even clearer if I specified my reasons for saying why it ought to be done; 'It ought to be done because it was a promise, and there were no conflicting duties'.

Three warnings are necessary here to avoid confusions which have been too common. First, the 'situation' is to be taken as including the characteristics of the people in it, including their desires and motivations. If, therefore, the speaker says that *a* ought to do something to c, but that *b* ought not to do the same thing to *d,* because the desires of *c* and *d* are quite different, he is not offending against universalizability, because the different desires make the situations different. *Bernard Shaw said 'Do not do unto others as you would they should do unto you. Their tastes may not be the same'* (Shaw. 1903, p. 227): but this is not an objection to universalizability. If I ought to tickle one child's toes because it loves it, it does not follow that I ought to tickle another child's toes, however similar, if the second child hates it.

Secondly, universality must not be confused with generality (Hare, 1972, p. iff.) The principle involved in an 'ought'-statement may be a highly specific, complex and detailed one, perhaps too complex for formulation in words. It does not have to be very general and simple. Complaints against universalizability, that it makes us the slaves of very simple general rules, therefore miss their target. To use an example which gave trouble to Kant: my moral principles do not have to be as general as *'Never* tell lies'; they can be more specific, like 'Never tell lies except when it is necessary in order to save an innocent life, and except when .... and except when ...' (Kant, 1797). In a morally developed person the exceptions may get too complex to be formulated in words. But see below for the value, in our human situation, of general (i.e. not too specific) principles.

Thirdly, there can be universal relations as well as qualities (many-place as well as one-place predicates). Such is the relation *mother of.* The statement that everyone ought to look after his (or her) mother in her old age is therefore a universal statement, and the

statement that *a* ought to look after his mother (but has no such duty to look after other people's mothers), is universalizable. The same can be said about the statement that I ought to keep my promises but not other people's. It is therefore no objection to the thesis of universalizability that there can be duties that one owes just to one person, provided that that person can be specified in universal quantitative or relational terms. It is no objection, even, that one can have the relation in question only to one person. 'Mother of' is an example."
Richard Mervin Hare, Universal Prescriptivism, in: Peters Singer (ed.) A Companion to Ethics.

It must be also considered:

-   That all our situation are individual; different for all peoples
-   That is why everyone must act in a specific way
-   But this way of action must by universalizable.
-   In this way we may protect our action from relativism

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Material value-ethics (selected sources)

Blaise Pascal (1623-1662):
there are such objects which are available for feeling only: eg. various values, moral goods god and His existence, infinity.
Pascal, Thoughts (283) "The heart has its own order; the intellect has its own, which is by principle and demonstration. The heart has another. We do not prove that we ought to be loved by enumerating in order the causes of love; that would be ridiculous."

Pascal: Thought makes the greatness of Man

Pascal: "The heart has its reasons, which reason does not know. We feel it in a thousand things. It is the heart which experiences God, and not the reason. This, then, is faith: God felt by the heart, not by the reason."

Pascal: "Nothing is so conformable to reason as to disavow reason."

Franz Brentano (1838-1917)

-   Emotions (positive and negative) are a source of moral knowledge
-   Emotions are intentional
-   Emotions can play a cognitive role in morality

"Every mental phenomenon is characterized by what the Scholastics of the Middle Ages called the intentional (or mental) inexistence of an object, and what we might call, though not wholly unambiguously, reference to a content, direction towards an object (which is not to be

understood here as meaning a thing), or immanent objectivity. Every mental phenomenon includes something as object within itself, although they do not all do so in the same way. In presentation something is presented, in judgement something is affirmed or denied, in love loved, in hate hated, in desire desired and so on. This intentional in-existence is characteristic exclusively of mental phenomena. No physical phenomenon exhibits anything like it. We could, therefore, define mental phenomena by saying that they are those phenomena which contain an object intentionally within themselves." Franz Brentano, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*

"23 And now we have found what we have been looking for. We have arrived at the source of our concepts of the good and the bad, along with that of our concepts of the true and the false. We call a thing *true* when the affirmation relating to it is correct. We call a thing *good* when the love relating to it is correct. In the broadest sense of the term, the good is that which is worthy of love, that which can be loved with a love that is correct".
„24 Among the things that please us, we may distinguish between those that are pleasing in themselves and those that are pleasing in virtue of something else. In the latter case, the thing is pleasing in virtue of what it brings about or preserves or makes probable. Hence we must distinguish between primary and secondary goods—between what is good in itself and what is good in virtue of something else. The useful is a clear example of the latter type of good. Taking the term "good" in its narrow sense, we may equate the good with the good in itself. It is only the good in itself that can stand side by side with the true. For whatever is true is true in itself, even though it may be known in virtue of something else. Henceforth, when I speak of the good I shall be referring to the good in itself (unless I explicitly say otherwise). So much, then, for the concept of the good."

(both quotes form: Franz Brentano, The Origin of our Knowledge
of Right and Wrong)