7 The concept of prescribing

A. *"Ought" sentences*

We carry on normative discourse when we use language for the purposes of evaluating and prescribing and when we give reasons for or against our evaluations and prescriptions. In Part I of this book I have been concerned with evaluative discourse; in Part II I shall be concerned mainly with prescriptive discourse. The basic concepts of evaluative discourse are *good* and *right* (corresponding to evaluations according to standards and evaluations according to rules, respectively). The basic concept of prescriptive discourse is *ought*, although the word "ought" also has evaluative uses. The precise differences between evaluating and prescribing will be the subject of the next chapter. In this chapter I shall try to make clear what an act of prescribing is. Throughout the two chapters I shall center my attention on the evaluative and prescriptive uses of the word "ought." These are to be contrasted with another use of the word, which I shall call its predictive or inferential use. (In ordinary talk the word "should" is perhaps more frequently used than the more severe and formal "ought." Both words have the same variety of uses I shall distinguish in this chapter.)

1. THE INFERENTIAL USE OF "OUGHT"

The predictive or inferential use of "ought" occurs in a context in which we have asserted (or assumed) a set of facts and are expressing a prediction or inference based on these facts. Thus in demonstrating an experiment a physicist might say, "When I throw the switch a spark ought to jump from one electrode to the other." The physicist is not prescribing that the spark jump but predicting that it will. The same use of "ought" occurs when we make an inference. Thus a detective might say, "Judging from his footprint, the man ought to weigh about 150 pounds." This is not like a doctor's saying that someone ought to weigh about 150 pounds. The detective's statement is not evaluative, the doctor's is. The man who guesses people's weight at a carnival is *making an inference* when he says to us, "You ought to weigh about 150 pounds." When a doctor says this, he is *prescribing* to us.

One major difference between predicting and inferring, on the one hand, and prescribing, on the other, is that we predict and infer that conditions ought to occur which are beyond human control, whereas we never prescribe that someone do something which it is beyond his power to do. On looking at a sunset, a person may predict, "It ought to be clear tomorrow." A scientist might infer that there ought to be life on a certain planet. In neither case is an "ought" sentence being used to exert an influence on someone's behavior to bring about that which is predicted or inferred. Nor are we expressing any kind of evaluation of the predicted event or the inferred condition. Indeed, sometimes what is predicted or inferred may be negatively evaluated, so that what ought to happen (in the predictive-inferential sense of "ought") ought not to happen (in the evaluative sense of "ought"). Similarly, what ought not to happen (in the predictive-inferential sense) may be positively evaluated as something that ought to happen. In these instances there is no contradiction in saying that what ought to be the case is bad and that what ought not to be the case is good. Examples of the first are: "My political opponent ought to win in this district." "The hurricane ought to hit this city about midnight tonight." "This student ought to do rather poorly in mathematics." Examples of

the second are: "With all these delays the ski lift ought not to be completed before the season is over." "We ought not to have many bright days this winter." "At this rate he ought not to live until morning." It should be noted that when we make statements of the second sort we are not asserting that it is good that something ought not to happen. In fact, if we were going to evaluate the state of affairs the sentences are concerned with, we would say that what ought not to happen is a good thing. That is, the event whose nonoccurrence is predicted or inferred is something which, if it were to occur, would be positively evaluated.

Not only is there the possibility of this sort of divergence between the predictive-inferential and the prescriptive-evaluative meanings of "ought," there is also the possibility of the convergence of the two meanings in one sentence. Thus a doctor might say cheerfully, "The penicillin ought to fix him up in no time." The basic meaning here is a prediction that the patient will get well. But there is also the clear evaluative connotation that what is predicted (i.e., what ought to happen) is a good thing. In the following statement, not only is evidence given on the basis of which a prediction is made, but a pro-attitude toward the predicted event is also being expressed: "The thief ought to be caught this time because the police have increased their watch on the area." A more complex case of ambiguity occurs when we say, "In light of its past performance, our team ought to have won the game." This expresses an inference based on the statistical probability that there was a better chance that the team would win the game than lose it. But there might be expressed simultaneously a negative evaluation concerning the team's losing the game. That is, the speaker might be blaming the team for not having come up to expectations based on its past performance. His tone of voice would indicate whether or not he was making such a value judgment.

In all these uses of "ought," however ambiguous they may be, it is always possible to separate in our minds the predictive-inferential element from whatever prescriptive or evaluative connotations are involved. Any of these statements is *true* if the thing that we say ought to happen is a probable event. In other words, the prediction or inference, based on the facts contextually implied by (or ex-

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In all these uses of "ought," however ambiguous they may be, it is always possible to separate in our minds the predictive-inferential element from whatever prescriptive or evaluative connotations are involved. Any of these statements is *true* if the thing that we say ought to happen is a probable event. In other words, the prediction or inference, based on the facts contextually implied by (or ex-

plicitly stated in) the sentence, is justified. Whether the prediction or inference is justified is entirely independent of the justifiability of any value judgments the speaker might be making about the predicted or inferred event. In addition to these predictive-inferential "ought" sentences, however, there are sentences, in which the word "ought" is used unambiguously in a purely evaluative or prescriptive way. No prediction or inference need be involved. From this point on, I shall be concerned exclusively with these uses of "ought."

2. CLASSIFICATION OF "OUGHT" SENTENCES

All "ought" sentences, whether evaluative or prescriptive, may be classified as follows:

I. Particular sentences
  A. *Ante eventum* sentences
    1. First person ("I, we ought to do *X*.")
    2. Second person ("You ought to do *X*.")
    3. Third person ("He, she, they, or those named or described in some specific way, ought to do *X*.")
  B. *Post eventum* sentences
    1. First person ("I, we ought to have done *X*.")
    2. Second person ("You ought to have done *X*.")
    3. Third person ("He, she, they, or those named or described in some specific way, ought to have done *X*.")
II. Universal sentences
  A. Active ("One ought to do *X* in circumstances *C*.")
  B. Passive ("*X* ought to be done in circumstances *C*.")

In order to make clear the criteria of classification I am using here, I distinguish the following four aspects or elements of any given "ought" sentence:

1. The speaker (the one who utters—speaks or writes—the sentence)
2. The addressee (the one who is addressed by the speaker when he utters the sentence)
3. The agent (the person designated in the sentence as the one who ought to do the act)
4. The act (in each case, the act referred to by *X*)

I classify an "ought" sentence as particular or universal according to whether the agent is specified or not specified in the sentence. In a universal sentence the nature of the act and the circumstances in which it ought to be done are specified, but the person or persons

who ought to do the act are not. The agent is *anyone* in those circumstances who can do the act. In a particular sentence, on the other hand, the agent is referred to by a proper name, by a personal pronoun, or by a definite description. In each case something more about the agent is specified (or contextually implied) than merely that he is an agent.

Whether an "ought" sentence is *ante eventum* or *post eventum* depends on the temporal relation between the act of uttering the sentence and the act designated in the sentence. (The terms *ante eventum* and *post eventum* are from R. M. Hare's *The Language of Morals*, p. 157.) If the act of uttering the sentence occurs before the act designated in the sentence, the sentence is *ante eventum*. When the sentence is uttered after the designated act, it is *post eventum*. We shall see that this distinction is important for understanding the difference between prescribing and evaluating. For the uttering of a *post eventum* "ought" sentence is never an act of prescribing but is instead the expression of a value judgment. *Ante eventum* sentences, however, may be either prescriptive or evaluative, depending on the circumstances in which they are uttered and on whether they are in the first, second, or third person.

The classification of particular "ought" sentences according to their person may be explained in the following way. A first person singular "ought" sentence (whether *ante eventum* or *post eventum*) is one in which the speaker and the agent are the same person. The addressee, however, may or may not be the same person as the speaker (or agent). He is the same person if the speaker is talking to himself; if he is talking to others, then they are the addressee. In the case of first person plural sentences, the agent is a group which includes the speaker as one of its members. The addressee may be identical with the agent, a part of the agent, different from the agent, or overlap with the agent. Thus one may address the sentence "We ought to do *X*" only to the group which is designated by "we," or only to a part of that group (which may be the speaker alone, if he is talking to himself), or only to persons who are not members of the group (where "we" takes on the meaning, "the group of which you know me to be a member"), or to an aggregate of persons, some of whom are members of the group and some of whom are not. Second person "ought" sentences (whether singular

or plural, *ante eventum* or *post eventum*) are those in which the addressee and the agent are always the same person or persons. The speaker of such a sentence is not the addressee (or agent), except in the somewhat peculiar case in which a person is talking in the second person to himself. In this case, as in the case of the speaker's uttering a first person sentence to himself, the addressee, the agent, and the speaker are all one and the same person. A third person "ought" sentence (whether singular or plural, *ante eventum* or *post eventum*) is only used in situations in which the agent is different from the addressee. Moreover, the speaker is always different from the agent and is usually different from the addressee. (He is identical with the addressee only when he is talking to himself.)

We have seen that for universal "ought" sentences the agent is anyone in the specified circumstances (i.e., circumstances C) who can do the specified act (i.e., act X). If either the speaker or the addressee of such a sentence happens to be in circumstances C and happens to be able to do X, he is included in the agent (i.e., the sentence applies to him as well as to others). If either the speaker or the addressee is not in circumstances C, or if he is in circumstances C but is unable to do X, then he is not included in the agent. As in the case of particular "ought" sentences, when the speaker of a universal sentence is talking to himself, he is identical with the addressee. If in this case he is also in circumstances C and able to do X, he is included in the agent as well as being the speaker and the addressee. That is, the sentence (like a first person or second person sentence spoken to oneself) is uttered *by* him, is uttered *to* him, and *applies* to him.

I shall now attempt to show that, with two exceptions to be noted later, all these various kinds of "ought" sentences have one of two functions in ordinary discourse—either to express value judgments (the evaluative function) or to prescribe an act to someone (the prescriptive function). Whether any given "ought" sentence is evaluative or prescriptive depends first on what kind of sentence it is according to the foregoing classification, and second on the conditions under which it is uttered. We shall find that only certain kinds of "ought" sentences can be prescriptive, and that they are prescriptive only when uttered under certain conditions.

3. POST EVENTUM "OUGHT" SENTENCES

Let us first consider *post eventum* "ought" sentences. These sentences make sense only under two conditions—when the agent has been confronted with the choice of doing either the act specified or some alternative act, and the situation of choice has ceased to exist by the time the sentence is uttered. (The sentence is uttered *post eventum.*) Even in the case of a second person sentence, where the agent is the same person as the addressee, the addressee is no longer in the position of an agent with respect to the particular act in question. To say "You ought to have done X" is to refer to a past situation in which the addressee had a choice of doing or not doing X. The statement contextually implies (first) that the addressee chose not to do X, (second) that the addressee was wrong in so choosing, and (third) that the situation of choice is now past. The second implication is a negative value judgment which is ambiguous with regard to its evaluatum. What is negatively evaluated may be the act which the agent did or it may be the agent himself as well as his act. As we shall see below, to say that an agent ought to do (or ought to have done) an act is to judge the act as the best alternative open to the agent. It is a value ranking whose class of comparison is made up of all the alternatives in the given situation of choice. Similarly, to say that an agent ought not to do (or ought not to have done) an act is to judge or rank the act as less-than-the-best in the situation of choice. Thus when we say to a person that he ought to have done X (and so imply that he did not do X), we indirectly express a negative value judgment of the act which he *did* do, and we directly express a positive evaluation of act X, which he did not do. However, in negatively evaluating the act chosen by the agent we are not necessarily negatively evaluating the agent for having chosen it. This depends on whether we (the speaker) believe the agent was blameworthy or culpable. If he was, then "You ought to have done X" not only condemns the act done by the agent but also condemns the agent for having done it. The act is condemned as not being the best thing for the agent to have done in his situation of choice. The agent is condemned (blamed) for not having done the best thing (namely act X).

The conditions under which an agent is held to be blameworthy or

culpable are complex and need not be considered in detail here. (Almost any book in ethics includes a discussion of the point.) Suffice it to say that we tend not to blame a person for doing what he ought not to have done, when he honestly believed he was doing what he ought to do and when he could not have been expected to have known that there was a better alternative.

It is to be noted that ordinarily both positive and negative *post eventum* sentences express negative value judgments. Whether we say "You ought to have done *X*" or "You ought not to have done *X*," we are condemning the act which the agent did and we are condemning the agent if he was blameworthy. In the first sentence we blame the agent for not having done *X*, in the second for having done it. The first, in other words, contextually implies a "wrong of omission," the second a "wrong of commission." In the first case, act *X* was the best of the alternatives in the situation of choice. In the second case act *X* was not the best of the alternatives (though it was not necessarily the worst of the alternatives). To say "You ought to have done *X*" is to blame the addressee because act *X*, which he did not do, was the best thing for him to do. To say "You ought not to have done *X*" is to blame the addressee because he did *X*, which was not the best thing for him to do. Can a *post eventum* "ought" sentence ever express a positive evaluation of the act or the agent? Such sentences are almost never used for this purpose. In order to do this one would have to make the awkward statement, "You ought to have acted just as you did." It is much more natural to use an evaluative sentence with the predicate "right" to make the point—"It was right of you to have acted as you did," or more simply, "You did the right thing."

Before passing on to first person and third person *post eventum* sentences, it should be pointed out that there is one use of second person *post eventum* "ought" sentences which may be neither evaluative nor prescriptive. This is the utterance of such sentences simply for purposes of emphasis. When we exclaim "You ought to have seen the expression on his face" or "You ought to have seen it rain," we are not expressing any value judgments. It is as if we said "How surprised he was!" or "How hard it rained!" Such "emphasis-oughts," however, may be uttered in contexts where they serve to express evaluations. Thus if we have been praising an

actress we might say, "You ought to have seen her performance in——" Here we not only continue our praise of the actress, but also express the value judgment that it would have been desirable, a good thing, or fitting if the person to whom we are speaking had seen the play referred to. No reference is made to a past situation of choice and there is no implication that the addressee's seeing the play was the best alternative open to him.

When a first person *post eventum* "ought" sentence is uttered, the speaker is expressing a negative value judgment of his own past act and (if he is blameworthy) of himself for having done it. When I say "I ought to have done *X*," I am condemning myself for not having chosen to do *X* in a past situation of choice. This negative evaluation of myself is based on a negative evaluation of my past act. The act is evaluated as a member of the class of comparison made up of the alternatives open to my choice. By saying "I ought to have done *X*" I am acknowledging the fact that I chose not to do the best act open to me, which was act *X*, and *for that reason* I am blaming myself. I also blame myself when I utter the negative sentence "I ought not to have done *X*." But this time I blame myself for what I did, not for what I did not do. It is an acknowledgement of a "wrong of commission" rather than of a "wrong of omission." The sentence contextually implies, not that an act *not* done *was* the best thing for me to do, but that the act *done* was *not* the best thing for me to do. The same analysis applies to first person plural sentences ("We ought—or ought not—to have done *X*"), except that the agent being blamed is not the speaker alone but the whole group of which the speaker is a member.

Third person *post eventum* sentences also express negative evaluations of the agent or his act. However, they do not prescribe an act to the agent. This can only be done when the agent is the addressee, since prescribing is *telling* the agent what *he* ought to do. It is the mark of third person "ought" sentences that the agent is never the addressee. We may *indirectly* guide our own or others' choices by uttering a sentence of the type, "He, she, they ought (ought not) to have done *X*." We would then be giving examples of acts which ought (or ought not) to have been done. Prescribing an act to someone, however, is not merely giving him examples of what he ought to do in various sorts of circumstances. It is to tell him what he ought

to do when he has (or will have) the choice of doing or not doing what he is told. It is to provide a direct and unequivocal answer to the question "What should I do?" Such an answer cannot be provided by a sentence of the form "He, she, they ought to have done *X*," since it only states how *others* should have acted in the *past*, not how the person himself should act in the present or future.

Throughout this discussion of *post eventum* "ought" sentences I have spoken as if the negative value judgment in which we blame or condemn the agent (when he is culpable) is a harsh or severe one. I now wish to emphasize that the negative judgment need not be strong at all. It may run from severe condemnation to mild regret. Nor is it necessary that it be a *moral* condemnation. An art critic might sharply blame a gallery owner by saying "You ought never to have exhibited these paintings." Since he would appeal to aesthetic standards to support his statement, the "ought" sentence is an aesthetic one, not a moral one. A mild reproof from the aesthetic point of view would be illustrated if the gallery owner's friend said to him, "You ought to have made the lighting in this room a bit brighter."

The strength of the condemnation is also diminished when the agent is not believed to be culpable, and only his act is negatively judged. Thus we might say to a child, "You ought not to have taken things that do not belong to you." We are not blaming him (for he did not know better), but trying to teach him that it is wrong to steal. An example of a nonmoral expression of mild regret would occur when we said to a guest who has arrived late, "You ought to have turned left at the traffic light." Here we are not blaming the person, since it was his first visit to our home and he did not know the best way to come. Our statement is about equivalent to saying "It is too bad you did not turn left at—" or "It would have been better if you had turned left at——"

So far I have been considering *post eventum* "ought" sentences in which the grammatical subject refers to an agent who had the choice of doing or not doing the act mentioned in the sentence. But there are *post eventum* sentences in which this is not the case. Such sentences express negative value judgments of persons not explicitly referred to. Consider, for example, a doctor's saying "He ought not to have died." Here the doctor is not blaming the person who died,

but those who did not take proper care of him. An example of a second person sentence used in this way would be, "You ought not to have been treated so unfairly." The speaker is blaming an agent not mentioned in the sentence. An example of a first person sentence would be, "I ought to have been allowed to eat in the restaurant where white people eat." In all cases of this sort, the agent who is being negatively evaluated for having done the act mentioned in the sentence is someone other than the person referred to by the subject of the sentence.

4. ANTE EVENTUM "OUGHT" SENTENCES

All *post eventum* "ought" sentences (except some "emphasis-oughts") have an evaluative function. They are never used to prescribe an act to someone. Let us now turn to *ante eventum* sentences. Are they not all prescriptive rather than evaluative? If we begin with third person sentences, we see at once that they cannot be prescriptive for the same reason that third person *post eventum* sentences cannot be prescriptive; they are never addressed to the agent and so can never provide a direct answer to the question "What should I do?" I suggest, then, that third person *ante eventum* sentences are evaluative. They differ from *post eventum* sentences on two counts. First, they express value judgments only of the act, never of the agent. And second, positive sentences express positive judgments and negative sentences express negative judgments (instead of both expressing negative judgments, as is the case with *post eventum* sentences).

When we say of a person, "He ought to do *X*," we mean that *X* is the best thing for the person to do in a situation of choice which now confronts him or which will confront him in the future. It is to make a value judgment of *X*, based on a process of evaluation in which *X* is compared with all the other acts open to the agent in his present or future situation of choice. This evaluation, which may be made according to rules or according to standards, results in a ranking of *X* as the best member of the class of comparison. Act *X* is superior to all other acts in the order of preferability resulting from the evaluation, and as such it is judged to be the act which the agent ought to do. Unlike the sentence "He ought to have done *X*," which expresses a condemnation of the agent (or his act) on the

ground that he did not do *X* in the past, the sentence "He ought to do *X*" neither praises the agent for doing *X* nor condemns him for not doing it. How could it, since at the time of uttering the sentence the agent has neither done nor omitted doing *X*? He is still confronted with the choice of doing or not doing it, either in the present or in the future. In saying that someone ought to do a certain act *X*, we are not evaluating *him* at all. Nor are we evaluating his past act. We are instead evaluating only the act *X* itself (as the best thing for him to do).

But the act, in being evaluated, is not being prescribed. Although the sentence tells what the agent ought to do, it does not tell it *to him*. The agent is not the addressee. The sentence is being addressed to someone else, who is being told what the agent ought to do. From the standpoint of the addressee, *he* is not being told what to do; he is only being told what someone else ought to do. We can also look at the sentence from the standpoint of the speaker. In saying, "He ought to do *X*," the speaker is stating what he thinks a certain person ought to do. He is not *telling* that person what he ought to do. But prescribing is, at least, telling a person what he ought to do. Therefore the uttering of a third person *ante eventum* "ought" sentence is not an act of prescribing.

Just as the positive sentence "He ought to do *X*" expresses the positive value judgment that X is the best thing for the agent to do in the presupposed situation of choice, so the negative sentence "He ought not to do *X*" expresses the value judgment that *X* is not the best alternative in the situation of choice. Act *X* may be *a* right act (as judged according to a rule) or a good act (as judged according to a standard), but it is not, in comparison with the other acts, the very best (or *the* right) thing to do. Hence it is judged negatively, as being less than the best. Similarly, when we utter the positive sentence "He ought to do *X*," act *X* may be a wrong act or a bad act, but when compared with the alternatives it is the *least* bad. It is the best of the alternatives and consequently is the act that ought to be done.

Let us next consider first person *ante eventum* sentences. Here I shall discuss singular and plural sentences separately, since there are some pertinent differences between them. First person singular *ante eventum* sentences ("I ought to do *X*") are evaluative, not prescriptive. They are, in fact, ordinarily used in the context of the speaker's deliberation, and deliberation (as I showed in Chapter 1) is a form of evaluation. Professor P. H. Nowell-Smith has pointed out that, unlike "You ought" and "He ought," "I ought" contextually implies that the speaker has decided, or is trying to decide, what he ought to do. (*Ethics*. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1954, pp. 261-262.) The sentence "I ought to do *X*" either sums up a deliberative process and informs the addressee that the speaker has come to a final decision, or it is uttered before deliberation has terminated. In the former case, the speaker has carried out an evaluation of all the alternatives open to him (or has accepted someone else's evaluation of them) and has made up his mind concerning which alternative is best. In saying "I ought to do *X*" he is expressing a value judgment which results from that deliberative (evaluative) process. In the latter case, in which the speaker has not completed his deliberation (or has not accepted another's deliberation), he may say "I ought to do *X*" as a tentative decision, not a final decision. In moral deliberations (i.e., when the deliberative process appeals to moral rules and standards for evaluating the alternatives), the speaker is then in the situation analyzed by Nowell-Smith as follows.

> . . . 'I ought' is also used, not to express a decision, but in the course of making up one's mind before a decision has been reached. A man may hesitate between two moral principles and say to himself at one time 'I ought to do X' and at another 'But on the other hand I ought to do Y' or he may contrast 'I ought' with 'I should like to.' In the first of these cases he is hesitating between two moral principles, in the second between acting on a moral principle and acting on some other motive. But in neither case has he arrived at a verdict. (*Ibid.*, p. 261.)

In both of these instances the "ought" sentence is evaluative, not prescriptive. We deliberate about what we ought to do when we are (or will be) in a situation of choice, and are trying to decide on the best course of action open to us. When we come to a decision, however momentary or tentative, we arrive at a judgment about what is the best thing for us to do. To arrive at such a judgment is the very purpose for which we deliberate.

When a first person singular *ante eventum* sentence is spoken to

oneself (in which case the speaker, the addressee, and the agent are all one and the same person) it is tempting to say that the speaker is prescribing an act to himself. On the face of it, the speaker seems to be telling himself what he ought to do, and to tell someone what he ought to do is to prescribe. Indeed, the parallel with ordinary prescribing is so strong that there is a point in saying that in this situation "I ought" really functions as an internalized "You ought" (which, as we shall see, is the phrase we normally use to prescribe an act to someone). Professor Nowell-Smith makes this suggestion in his analysis of cases in which a person involved in moral deliberation hesitates between two moral principles ("I ought to do *X* but on the other hand I ought to do *Y*"), or between acting on a principle and acting on some other motive ("I ought to do *X* but I should like to do *Y*").

> In the first case it is quite natural to represent the two 'oughts' as being spoken by internal moral authorities advising or telling him what to do; and in the second to represent the conflict as one between the Voice of Conscience and Desire. But these are the voices of advocates, not of judges; and what they say is, not 'I ought,' but 'you ought.' (*Ibid.*, pp. 261-262.)

Being an advocate and being a judge are the roles we take, respectively, when we prescribe and when we evaluate. And it is not incorrect to think of ourselves as advocating (prescribing) that we do one thing rather than another, when we tentatively reach decisions during a deliberative process. But a caution must be interposed. Although reaching decisions during deliberation is like prescribing in some respects, in other respects it is not.

First, we are using the word "prescribe" out of its normal context. (The same is true of Professor Nowell-Smith's use of "You ought" in the above passage.) Granted that prescribing consists in telling someone what he ought to do, it typically consists in doing this in a social context in which one person is offering guidance, making recommendations, or giving advice to another. Second, we must realize that in uttering the "ought" sentence to himself, the speaker is not merely prescribing to himself. He is also pronouncing a value judgment that is the outcome of his (or another's) evaluation of

various acts open to him. It is only on the basis of the judgment "*X* is the best thing for me to do" that he then concludes, "I ought to do *X*." Third, if the latter sentence is taken to be an act of prescribing to oneself, the four necessary conditions for prescribing, which I shall consider shortly, must be fulfilled. (When we utter such a sentence seriously to ourselves these four conditions in fact will usually be fulfilled.)

First person plural *ante eventum* sentences have more varied uses than any of the "ought" sentences so far considered. They may be deliberative (and hence evaluative); they may be evaluative but not deliberative; or they may be prescriptive. When the sentence "We ought to do *X*" is deliberative (i.e., when it is uttered in a context of deliberation), it functions in the same way as "I ought to do *X*." The only difference is that in the plural sentence the speaker is a member of a group (referred to by "we") and the sentence is uttered as part of, or as the outcome of, the group's deliberation. As in the case of "I ought to do *X*," the sentence may be uttered privately, addressed by the speaker to himself. When its utterance is public, it is addressed either to the group as a whole or to individual members of the group.

But "We ought to do *X*" may not be uttered in a context of deliberation at all. Furthermore, the addressee may be neither the group as a whole nor any member of the group. The sentence may be addressed to an outside party, and in that case the speaker is simply uttering a value judgment of act *X* as the best thing for the group to do. He is telling someone who is not in the group what the group ought to do. He is not telling the group what *it* ought to do. The sentence in this case is evaluative, but not deliberative and not prescriptive.

Suppose, in a third kind of context, the group is the addressee but, as in the second kind of context, it is not involved in deliberation. Then the speaker as a member of the group is telling the group what *it* ought to do. It is in this case that the speaker is *prescribing* the doing of act *X* to the group (assuming that the four necessary conditions for prescribing, to be stated below, are fulfilled).

In second person *ante eventum* "ought" sentences, the addressee is always the agent. To utter the sentence "You ought to do *X*" is

always to tell someone directly what *he* as an agent ought to do. When such a sentence is uttered under the following conditions, its utterance is an act of prescribing:

1. The sentence is uttered in earnest and is affirmed by the speaker.

2. The addressee is an agent in a present situation of choice (or will be an agent in a future situation of choice) in which doing *X* is one of the alternatives.

3. The agent (or addressee) has (or will have) the freedom to choose to do or not to do *X*.

4. It is considered by the speaker legitimate and proper for the addressee to demand reasons of the speaker as to why he, the addressee, ought to do *X*.

Whenever the addressee and the agent of an *ante eventum* "ought" sentence are identical, the act of uttering the sentence under the four conditions above is an act of prescribing. Thus all second person *ante eventum* sentences are prescriptive when uttered under them. First person plural sentences are prescriptive under these conditions if they are addressed to the group designated by "we" in the sentence. And, with the qualifications that were set forth above, all first person sentences, singular or plural, are prescriptive when addressed by the speaker to himself. We shall see later that there are other kinds of sentences than "ought" sentences which may be used prescriptively, but in every instance the four conditions listed must hold. I shall examine each condition in turn.

1. We would not say that uttering an "ought" sentence was an act of prescribing unless the speaker uttered the sentence in earnest and also affirmed what it said. By saying that a sentence is uttered "in earnest" I mean to exclude not only its being uttered in jest, but also its being uttered simply to frighten, amuse, annoy, bewilder, shock, or have some other emotional effect upon the addressee. Unless a sentence were normally used "in earnest," it would not have the capacity to bring about such effects. These emotional functions of a sentence are consequently secondary or derivative. What, then, is the primary or nonderivative use of a sentence? It is the use of the sentence "in earnest," that is to say, when the speaker's main intention in uttering it is to have the addressee give his sincere assent to what is being said. He is not merely letting the addressee

know what he thinks about something. His intention is to have the addressee accept what he says and act accordingly. When the statement is a prescription (i.e., when uttering the sentence is an act of prescribing), the addressee's acceptance of it will involve at least setting himself to do the prescribed act and having a pro-attitude toward doing it. Giving one's sincere assent to a prescription involves being *disposed* to perform the act and to approve of its being performed, even if one fails actually to perform it.

To utter a sentence in earnest, in this sense, precludes its being uttered in certain special contexts. For example, a sentence is not uttered in earnest when it occurs in the context of poetry or fiction, or when we are interested only in setting forth a proposition for consideration or as a supposition. We do not utter a sentence in earnest when we are "mentioning" it but not "using" it, or when our sole purpose is to let the addressee know what we think about something, without expecting him to agree with us.

Now it is possible to utter a sentence in earnest and yet not affirm what it says. For example, we may not ourselves believe what we are saying, although we want and expect the addressee to believe it. This would be the case whenever we are lying to the addressee, or whenever we are trying to conceal from him our true thoughts and feelings. An "ought" sentence is prescriptive, then, only if it is both uttered in earnest and affirmed by the speaker. (Throughout this book I am assuming that sentences are being uttered in earnest and are being affirmed by the speaker.)

2. The second condition, that the addressee be an agent in a situation of choice, is clear from what has been said earlier. To prescribe is to tell someone what he ought to do, and what he ought to do is the act which is the best alternative open to him. His situation of choice need not occur at the time when the act is prescribed, since it makes perfectly good sense to tell a person that he ought to do a certain act in the future. There must be, however, a specific expectation that a future situation of choice will occur. Thus if we say "You ought to return the book you have borrowed," the addressee must either be in a situation where he can choose to return the book or not, or else there must be a specific future situation in which it is foreseen that he will have such a choice. Otherwise there would be no reason for our addressing the sentence to him. If, for

example, he replies, "The book is lost. I have looked everywhere and can't find it," we shift our prescription, and say, "Then you ought to replace it." We do not continue to prescribe his returning the particular copy of the book which has been lost, on the mere chance that it might be found in the unforeseeable future.

Sometimes second person *ante eventum* "ought" sentences are addressed to persons who are not in a present situation of choice with regard to the proposed act and there is no specific expectation that they ever will be in such a situation in the future. In these cases the sentences are not used for prescribing but for expressing a value judgment. Thus after a trip out West we might say to our friends who have never been there, "You ought to see the Grand Canyon!" This is simply another way of saying "The Grand Canyon is a wonderful sight!" The "ought" sentence would be an act of prescribing only if our friends were planning a trip out West and going to see the Grand Canyon was a possibility open to them.

3. The third condition for an "ought" sentence to be an act of prescribing is that the agent be *free* to choose to do or not to do the act mentioned in the sentence. This condition, in conjunction with the second condition, may be summarized in the familiar statement: "Ought" implies "can." The third condition itself may be analyzed into two requirements: (a) The agent will not do *X* unless he chooses to do *X*; (b) The agent will only choose to do *X* as a result either of his own deliberation or of his freely given decision to follow another's deliberation. Both of these requirements presuppose that there are genuine alternatives open to the agent. This means first, that the agent has the physical ability and the psychological (intellectual and emotional) capacity to do any of the acts in question; second, that the agent is not under external constraint (coercion, duress) to do one thing rather than another; and third, that the agent is not under the influence of any internal compulsion to do one thing rather than another. It makes no sense to say that someone ought to do something when he either cannot possibly do it or cannot help but do it. This is also true of *post eventum* "ought" sentences. To say that a person ought to have done *X* contextually implies that he did not do *X* but that he could have done *X* if he had so chosen and that he could have so chosen. Similarly, to say that a person ought not to have done *Y* contextually implies that he did *Y* but that he would have done otherwise if he had so chosen and that he could have so chosen.

To prescribe an act to someone is not to force or compel him to do it. Indeed, prescribing can occur only if the person is free to choose not to do the act prescribed. This condition derives from the fact that prescribing is one way of giving advice, making a recommendation, or offering guidance. In Chapter 2, I contrasted these activities with commanding, ordering, and issuing directives. There I argued that it is of the essence of giving advice, making a recommendation, or offering guidance that the person who receives the advice, recommendation, or guidance be free to choose not to follow it. This is just what a person is not free to do when he is in a position to be commanded. He must obey a command (under penalty of punishment). A person does not *obey* a prescription. He *decides* to follow it or carry it out; he *adopts* it as a guide to his conduct.

4. Because an act of prescribing is always an act of guiding someone (or making a recommendation, or giving a piece of advice), the fourth condition must hold whenever prescribing takes place. It must always be legitimate and proper for the person to whom one prescribes (i.e., the addressee) to demand reasons for his doing the prescribed act. In my discussion of advising and commanding in Chapter 2, I pointed out that not only must the person who is being advised be free to choose not to follow the advice, he must also be acknowledged to have the right to ask why he should follow it. Prescribing, like all advising, is a rational act. It presupposes its own justifiability. The person who prescribes may not be able to give a justification for his prescription and the addressee may not *in fact* demand that he do so. But he who prescribes must acknowledge the *right* of the addressee to make such a demand. The person who is commanded to do something, on the other hand, is not in the position to ask why he should obey. He is engaged in a social practice whose defining rules are such that the person who commands him has authority over him. To demand a justification for obeying the commands is to place oneself *outside* that social practice and ask that it be justified *as a whole*. But a person may be engaged in the social practice of receiving advice and *within* the practice demand that the advice which he receives be justified. This is part of what it means to engage in such a practice.

A cogent and detailed argument has been given by Professor W. D. Falk to show that all advising or guiding is in this sense rational. In his article "Goading and Guiding" (*Mind*, LXII, 246, 1953, pp. 145-171) he points out that imperatives may not always express commands. We may use imperatives in giving advice (guiding), but when we do, we presuppose their justifiability.

'Do this' may be used in the sense of 'my advice to you is, do this'; it may express a *recommendation*. . . . It is . . . logically assured here that none but rational methods will be used in support. Advice can be 'good' or 'bad'; it has an implicit canon of achievement, defined in terms of what it is understood to set out to do. And this is purely to 'guide,' to make people act as they would have valid and sufficient reasons for acting and not otherwise. (*Ibid.*, pp. 168-169.)

Thus the whole point of giving advice, guiding, or making a recommendation, is to tell a person what it would be rational for *him* to do. To engage in this social practice (as the giver of advice) presupposes that one has good reasons to give the addressee for doing the act which one recommends. Professor Falk argues that one can consistently say "My advice is, do this" only if one has

. . . formed an opinion concerning the facts of the situation all round, as well as concerning their relevance as reasons for the hearer. In fact, 'Do this,' as advice, may also be treated as the stating of an opinion to this effect. One can say 'my opinion is, do this' as if one were saying, 'my opinion is that you have the best of reasons for doing this, the facts all round being so and so'; and one disarms advice by challenging either the facts or their alleged force as reasons. (*Ibid.*, p. 169.)

The person who is being advised can always challenge the advice by challenging the reasons presupposed by the adviser in giving the advice. Whatever reasons are good reasons for the adviser must also be good reasons for the advisee. This follows from the feature of prescriptive speech which Falk calls its "other-regarding orientation."

Whenever guiding is used as a method, persuasion has an other-regarding orientation: looking at actions from other people's point of view, trying to make others do what they would want, or would have an incentive to do, if they were not ignorant or obtuse. And where one is guiding to goad one is still trying to make them act as one wants *oneself* only by means of trying to make them act as they would want *themselves*. Surely then not all prescriptive speech aims purely and typically at bending the hearer's attitudes to those of the speaker. . . . It can serve both to make others favour what we favour; and to aid them in learning to favour what *they* do not favour but would, or might, for independent and acknowledged reasons of their own. (*Ibid.*, p. 161.)

Concerning the use of "ought," Professor Falk points out that to say that a person ought to do something is not to give him a reason for doing it. Prescribing is not giving reasons, even though it presupposes (contextually implied) that reasons can be given for doing what is prescribed. To utter a prescriptive "ought" sentence is to claim that an act ought to be done in light of (or as a consequence of) the supporting reasons. We might say that prescribing is a rational act but not an act of reasoning. The "ought" sentence which expresses a prescription does not itself state any of the reasons for doing the prescribed act.

The fact is 'you ought to' is not used to *replace* or *supplement* any of the features of the situation ordinarily put forward in persuasion by rational methods. On the contrary, it only works in *conjunction* with them. 'You ought to go now' is incompletely persuasive by itself. It needs support from 'your bus is leaving,' or 'you are expected for dinner,' or any other natural feature of the situation which may count as a reason for going. . . . (*Ibid.*, p. 166.)

What, then, is the function of an "ought" sentence if it is not to give a reason for doing what is prescribed? Its purpose is simply to *prescribe* the doing of the act. It is to exert an influence on an agent's behavior or choice. But a rational influence, not any influence. To prescribe the doing of an act is to tell someone that he ought to do it in light of such-and-such reasons for doing it.

Professor Falk never tells us *why* prescribing an act does not consist in giving a reason for it. I should like to offer the following as a possible explanation. In any prescription we must distinguish the act of prescribing from the act prescribed. Why is the act of prescribing itself not a way of justifying the act prescribed? The answer lies in the fact that the relation between the act of prescribing and the act prescribed is the relation between the act of uttering a sentence and what the sentence is about. The act prescribed is

part of the content of a prescription; it belongs to what is being said, not to the saying of it. The act of prescribing, on the other hand, is a linguistic act; to prescribe is to utter a certain sort of sentence under certain conditions. *What* is prescribed, however, may or may not be a linguistic act. ("You ought to tell him you are sorry" and "You ought to repay the debt" are cases in which the act prescribed is, respectively, a linguistic act and a nonlinguistic act.) Now the uttering of a sentence is seldom the giving of a reason for believing what is said. It is only in unusual circumstances that our uttering a sentence provides evidence for the truth of what we assert by means of the sentence. Examples would be: "I am alive." "I can speak English." "I am not asleep." It is clear that a sentence of the form "You ought to do *X*" is not of this sort. To utter this kind of sentence gives no evidence for its truth and hence no justification for doing act *X*. So an act of prescribing is not giving a reason for doing the act prescribed. The act of prescribing tells a person what he is to do; it does not tell him why he is to do it.

It may now be seen why making a statement of empirical fact is not an act of prescribing, even when it is done to exert a rational influence on the addressee's behavior. It gives the addressee a *reason* for doing something, and an act of prescribing never does this. To say to someone "You ought to go now" is not to give him a reason for going now. But this is precisely what we do when we say "Your bus is leaving" or "You are expected for dinner." When we add to such statements of fact the remark "You ought to go now," we are not giving an *additional reason* for the person to go. We are drawing a (practical) conclusion. We are telling the person what he should do in light of the reasons already given. This is the act of prescribing. To give the reasons themselves is to justify the act prescribed, not to prescribe it.

Perhaps the point at which making a statement of empirical fact comes closest to being an act of prescribing is the point at which we assert that an act is or is not in accordance with a rule. If we are watching a game and suddenly say to one of the players "That is against the rules," we are making an assertion which is empirically true or false. Such an assertion may well have the same effect as the prescription "You ought not to do that." Similarly, to assert that a certain act is morally obligatory (i.e., that it is required by a moral

rule) is to make a statement of fact in a context where a moral value system is accepted. This assertion may be made under the same conditions and for the same purpose as the prescription "You ought to do that." But neither of these factual statements is a prescription, since each supplies a reason for (or against) doing something. To say that an act is in accordance with or violates a rule is not exactly the same as saying *that* a person ought or ought not to do it. It is to say *why* a person ought or ought not to do it. It is to express a value judgment of the act, namely, that the act is right or wrong. A person might then conclude that *therefore* it ought or ought not to be done. Prescribing, however, is not evaluating. (In the next chapter I shall give an account of the differences between prescribing and evaluating.)

B. Prescriptions and rules

So far I have discussed only *particular* "ought" sentences. I have now to consider the one remaining type of "ought" sentences—universal sentences. These sentences may take either an active form ("One ought to do *X* in circumstances *C*") or a passive form ("*X* ought to be done in circumstances *C*"). The two forms are equivalent in meaning. To say "One ought to keep one's promises" is to say "Promises ought to be kept." Whatever assertions I make about universal sentences, therefore, will apply equally to both forms.

In universal sentences no particular agent is specified although an act is specified (act *X*) and the circumstances in which the act ought to be done are specified (circumstances *C*). We may then consider as the *agent* anyone in circumstances *C* who can do *X*. When such a sentence is uttered, however, the *addressee* may or may not be the agent. If the addressee is not in circumstances *C*, or if he cannot do *X*, the sentence does not apply to him. That is, it does not function as a guide to his conduct. Consequently it is not prescriptive. Uttering a universal "ought" sentence is an act of prescribing only if either of the following conditions holds. 1. The addressee is in circumstances *C* and has the choice of doing or not doing *X* at the time when the sentence is uttered. 2. There is a specific expectation that the addressee will be in circumstances *C* and will have the choice of doing or not doing *X* in the foreseeable

future. Since condition 1 here is the same as the second of the four conditions for prescribing listed previously, we may conclude that a total of *five* conditions must hold if the uttering of a universal "ought" sentence is to be an act of prescribing: the four conditions listed previously plus the condition that either the addressee is now in circumstances C or will be in circumstances C in the foreseeable future.

Suppose a universal "ought" sentence is addressed to someone when he is not in circumstances C and when there is no expectation that he ever will be in circumstances C. Or suppose the sentence is addressed to someone when he has no choice about doing the act and when there is no expectation that he will have such a choice. The speaker would not then be telling a person what *he* ought to do. He would instead be telling a person what *anyone* ought to do in certain circumstances. The speaker, in short, would not be prescribing but *stating a general rule of conduct.* It is necessary at this point to distinguish the following things—prescribing, laying down a rule, adopting a rule, and justifying a prescription by appeal to a rule.

A rule tells us how people in general ought to act in certain circumstances. The function of a rule is to regulate or govern people's conduct by stating what they are or are not to do. Thus a rule, as we saw in Part I, may be used as a norm by which to evaluate people's conduct. Every rule requires, permits, or forbids an act *of a certain kind* to be done in circumstances *of a certain kind.* When we express a *rule* by means of a universal "ought" sentence, the sentence should be in the form "One ought to do acts of kind K in circumstances of kind C," rather than in the form "One ought to do this particular act X in these particular circumstances C." A rule applies to anyone who has the choice of doing or not doing what it enjoins. Now to state a rule may or may not be an act of prescribing. Whether or not it is depends on whether the addressee is (or will be) in the specified kind of circumstance and whether the addressee has (or will have) the choice of doing the specified kind of act. When uttering a rule is an act of prescribing, the speaker is *laying down the rule as a guide to the addressee's choice.* When uttering a rule is not an act of prescribing, the speaker may be doing either or both of two things. He may be

laying down the rule for others to follow (*though not for the addressee to follow*), or he may be *adopting the rule for himself.* In the latter case, uttering the rule expresses his decision to try to follow it whenever *he* is in the circumstances specified by the rule, and whenever *he* has the choice of following the rule or violating it. To lay down a rule is to place the conduct of people in general (including oneself) under its regulation. To adopt a rule is to decide to place one's own conduct, not that of others, under its regulation.

Sometimes rules of conduct are called "universal prescriptions." One of the dictionary definitions of "prescribe" is "to lay down a rule." I concede that common usage of the terms "prescribe" and "prescription" allow for their being applied to rules. I should not dispute with someone who wishes to call a rule a prescription and the act of laying down a rule an act of prescribing. Nevertheless I should want to make clear the difference between making a statement about how people in general ought to act and telling a person how *he* ought to act. We may use a rule for the latter purpose only if the person we address is or will be in a situation to which the rule applies. Whether we want to speak of "prescribing" when these conditions do not hold is purely a verbal matter. For my purposes it is convenient to restrict the term "prescribe" to telling a person what *he* ought to do. It is only in this sense that all acts of prescribing are cases of giving advice, making recommendations, or offering guidance.

If we think of a rule as a "universal prescription" and the utterance of a particular "ought" sentence (under the four necessary conditions I have discussed) as a "particular prescription," we may view the justification of an act of prescribing as follows. We show that the act in question is a particular instance of a universal prescription. The reasoning process may be presented thus:

A: "You ought to do X."
B: "Why?"
A: "Because anyone in circumstances C ought to do acts of kind K, you are in circumstances C, and act X is an act of kind K."

Here A justifies his particular prescription by citing a rule and by claiming that the act which he has prescribed is required by the rule. He is assuming in his reply that B, in addition to being in

circumstances C, has the choice of doing or not doing X. (If B did not have such a choice, A would not have prescribed that he do X in the first place.) When B demands a justification for A's prescription, A must show three things: that B is in circumstances C (a matter of empirical verification), that act X is of kind K (a matter of definition and of empirical verification), and that the rule "One ought to do acts of kind K in circumstances C" is a justified rule (a matter of validation, vindication, and rational choice). To justify an act of prescribing in this way is to use a form of argument similar to Aristotle's "practical syllogism," in which a universal principle (rule) is the major premise, a specification of an act that falls under the principle is the minor premise, and a prescription of the act is the conclusion.

If we want to call this a case of justifying a "particular prescription" by showing that it is an instance of a "universal prescription," no harm is done so long as we do not forget the differences between stating rules and prescribing acts, and so long as we do not think that this is the only way in which "particular prescriptions" can be justified. We may justify prescriptions by appeal to standards as well as to rules. Suppose a football coach says to his quarterback "You ought to call more pass plays." His prescription is justified not by reference to the *rules* of the game, but to the *standard* of instrumental value toward the end of winning the game at hand. (I shall examine the justification of prescriptions at greater length in the next chapter.)

The difference between stating a rule and stating that an act is or is not in accordance with a rule can be understood in terms of the justification of each kind of statement. We justify the first by the complex process of validation, vindication, and rational choice. We justify the second by simple empirical procedures, once the act has been shown to fall under the rule. (To show that the act falls under the rule involves the various procedures of validation outlined in Chapter 3.) Both types of statement may be expressed in sentences having the predicates "right" and "wrong." Thus the same rule may be stated in the sentence "One ought (ought not) to do acts of kind K in circumstances C" and in the sentence "It is right (wrong) to do acts of kind K in circumstances C." When we use "right" and "wrong" to state that an act is or is not in accordance with a rule

which we have adopted, we use sentences of the form "It is right (wrong) to do act X" or "Act X is right (wrong)." In these cases the sentence expresses a value judgment (based on an evaluation according to rules).

C. Prescriptions and "ought" sentences

Both of the following generalizations are false: All utterances of "ought" sentences are acts of prescribing. All acts of prescribing are utterances of "ought" sentences. I shall now attempt to enumerate the various exceptions which render these statements false.

There are many kinds of "ought" sentences that are not used as prescriptions. In the first place there are all *post eventum* sentences, all first person singular *ante eventum* sentences, all third person *ante eventum* sentences, and those first person plural *ante eventum* sentences which are not addressed to the group referred to in the sentence. As we saw in Section A of this chapter, these "ought" sentences are evaluative, not prescriptive. In the second place, there are those universal "ought" sentences which express rules that do not apply to the addressee. As we saw in Section B, these sentences are not used to *tell* a person what *he* ought to do and therefore are not prescriptive. In the third place there are certain "ought" sentences I have not yet discussed which are neither prescriptive nor evaluative. In the fourth place there are what may be called "ought-to-be" sentences as distinct from "ought-to-do" sentences. I shall now examine these last two groups of "ought" sentences and show why they are not prescriptive.

"Ought" sentences are neither prescriptive nor evaluative when the sole justification of the act proposed is pure utility. In Chapter 1, the distinction was drawn between pure utility and instrumental value. Something has instrumental value when it is a means to a valuable (good, desirable) end. If an end has no value or if we disregard its value, we might still judge that something is an effective means to it. Such a judgment is a judgment of pure utility; it has no evaluative connotations. Similar considerations hold for pure utility "ought" sentences, in which we say that a person ought to do a certain act *if* he wants to achieve a certain result. We make no evaluation of the result to be achieved. We might say that a

murderer ought to have used a silencer on his gun (under the assumption that he did not want to be caught), without thereby claiming that it would have been a good thing if he had used a silencer. Pure utility "ought" sentences may be particular or universal, and particular sentences may be of any person or tense. In no case are they prescriptive, even when they are in the form of second person *ante eventum* sentences. One of the four necessary conditions of prescribing is absent, namely that the addressee have the right to demand reasons for his doing the act mentioned in the sentence and that the speaker be disposed to give such reasons. In the case of pure utility sentences there is no presupposition that the speaker considers the act to be justified. When he says "You ought to do *X*" he always assumes, if he does not explicitly state, "If you want *Y*," and he makes no judgment about the value of *Y*. Accordingly he is not recommending that the addressee do *X* and his utterance of the sentence is not an act of prescribing.

Throughout this chapter I have been concerned only with "ought-to-do" sentences. An exhaustive analysis of the meanings (uses) of the word "ought" requires that the three types of "ought-to-be" sentences also be discussed. I shall argue that all sentences of these types may be uttered in earnest and affirmed by a speaker without the speaker's thereby prescribing an act to an agent.

The first type of "ought-to-be" sentence may be either *ante eventum* or *post eventum* and may be in the first, second, or third person. It is a sentence in which we say that someone ought to have (or have had) a certain feeling or disposition, rather than that he ought to do (or have done) a certain act. Consider the following examples. "I ought to feel grateful, but I'm afraid that I don't" (first person *ante eventum*). "You ought to be glad you escaped without injury" (second person *ante eventum*). "He ought to feel sorrow about his father's death" (third person *ante eventum*). "They ought to have had more understanding and less indignation about the child's prank" (third person *post eventum*). In all cases of this sort, we use an "ought" sentence to express a *value judgment* concerning someone's feelings or dispositions. We are not prescribing that someone do an act. Even in the case of second person *ante eventum* sentences, the speaker is not prescribing to the addressee. The addressee is not confronted with the choice of having or not having the feeling or disposition in question, since a feeling or a disposition is not the sort of thing we can choose to have or not to have. A person who says that we ought to have a certain feeling or disposition is not *recommending* that we have it, nor is he *guiding* our choice. He is instead judging that it would be appropriate, fitting, or desirable that we have it. Thus a particular "ought-to-be" sentence expresses a value judgment. Of course if a person accepts such a value judgment, he will *try* to develop his character and personality in such a way that in future situations similar to those referred to by the sentence, he will have the appropriate, fitting, or desirable feeling or disposition. The value judgment will exert an influence on his behavior. But it would not be correct to call this doing what someone had prescribed. The first type of "ought-to-be" sentences, then, are not prescriptive.

The second type of "ought-to-be" sentences assert that some state of affairs which does not now exist ought to exist, or that some existing state of affairs ought not to exist. Consider these examples. "There ought to be a world government." "Racial discrimination ought not to exist." "Automobiles ought to have air-pollution filters over their exhausts." "This room ought not to have red walls." "There ought to be a law against that kind of advertising." "A doctor ought to be here at a time like this." "We ought to have more honest local politicians." How are these sentences to be construed? In the first place, the phrases "There ought to be a," "A . . . ought to exist," and "We ought to have a" (where the "we" stands for some group or for some society, or for all mankind) are approximately equivalent in meaning. Similarly, "Object *O* ought to have" is about equivalent to "There ought to be a . . . for object *O*." Thus all these sentences can be reduced to a sentence of the form, "There ought (ought not) to be a . . . ." The second point to notice is that all of these "ought-to-be" sentences can be restated as "ought-to-be-done" sentences. For each of the examples above, an equivalent can be given as follows. "A world government ought to be established." "Racial discrimination ought to be eliminated." "Air-pollution filters ought to be placed on all automobile exhausts." "The walls of this room ought to be painted a different color." "A law against that kind of advertising ought to be passed." "A doctor ought to be called at a time like this." "More honest local politicians ought to be voted

in." Each of these "ought-to-be-done" sentences is of the form "*X* ought to be done in circumstances *C*." But this is just the passive form of a universal "ought-to-do" sentence, which has already been analyzed. Its active form is, "One ought to do *X* in circumstances *C*." Therefore the second type of "ought-to-be" sentence introduces no new problems. Like all universal "ought" sentences, they may be used either prescriptively or to express a rule. In the latter case we have another instance of an "ought" sentence not being used for the purpose of prescribing.

The third type of "ought-to-be" sentence that is not prescriptive is one in which we assert that some object, event, or situation is as it ought to be. For example, we might say "Their new house is just what a house for an elderly couple ought to be." Or we might say that the circus this year is "everything a circus ought to be." What we are saying is that the house or the circus is *ideal*. "Ought-to-be" sentences of this type are always evaluative. They are used for stating that something completely fulfills the standards which we deem appropriate for judging the thing. If we say that something is not as it ought to be, we are stating that it fails to fulfill the standards appropriate for judging it. An example would be, "This student's paper is not what it ought to be." Sometimes "ought-to-be" sentences of this type are used to assert that something is (or is not) good-of-its-kind. Concerning a timid lion we might say, "He doesn't behave as a lion ought to behave." In none of these cases are we prescribing when we utter an "ought" sentence.

Not all utterances of "ought" sentences, then, are acts of prescribing. But are all acts of prescribing utterances of "ought" sentences? In investigating the nature of prescribing, I have so far been concerned only with "ought" sentences. May not other kinds of sentences be used for this purpose? I think the answer to this is clearly in the affirmative. There are a number of other linguistic forms ordinarily used for giving a direct and unequivocal answer to the question "What should (ought, shall) I do?"

In the first place there are imperatives. To claim that imperatives may function as prescriptions is to deny that all imperatives express commands. Prescribing is done in the context of giving advice, making recommendations, or offering guidance, and I have shown that these activities are fundamentally different from commanding,

ordering, or issuing directives. That sentences in the imperative mood can be used for prescribing is clear from the fact that it is perfectly proper to answer the question "What should I do?" with such sentences as: "Do *X*." "Be sure to do *X*." "Do not fail to do *X*." Whether imperatives express prescriptions or commands depends on the conditions under which they are uttered. They express prescriptions only when they are uttered under the four conditions I have stated as necessary for an "ought" sentence to be prescriptive. To utter an imperative sentence under these conditions is to tell a person what he is to do when he has (or will have) the *choice* of doing or not doing what he is told. Such an utterance is then an act of prescribing.

In addition to their prescriptive use and their use as commands, imperatives may also be used to state rules. Thus the rule "One ought to do acts of kind *K* in circumstances *C*" may be expressed in the imperative: "In circumstances *C*, do acts of kind *K*." It is for this reason that rules are sometimes defined as "universal imperatives." This definition may be quite misleading, since we may think that rules can only be stated in sentences in the imperative mood and that stating rules is the same thing as commanding. We have already seen that rules can be stated in "ought" sentences and in sentences using the predicates "right" and "wrong." And stating a rule may or may not be an act of commanding someone to do something. It is a command only when the person who states the rule is in a position of *authority* and is *laying down* the rule for others to follow (as distinct from adopting it for himself).

A second way to prescribe without using an "ought" sentence is by means of what may be called "necessity" words. Thus we may answer the question "What should I do?" by saying: "You must do *X*." "You are to do *X*." "You are obliged to do *X*." When such sentences are uttered in the context of giving advice, making recommendations, or offering guidance, they function like second person *ante eventum* "ought" sentences. Uttering such a sentence in that sort of context is an act of prescribing whenever the four necessary conditions of prescribing are fulfilled. (In such a context, the four conditions normally *will* be fulfilled.) It is also possible to state a rule by using "necessity" words. The rule "One ought to do acts of kind *K* in circumstances *C*" may be stated in the form "One must do

acts of kind *K* in circumstances *C*." This would not be a prescription unless the rule was stated under the four necessary conditions of prescribing and under the additional conditions that the addressee be in circumstances *C* either in the present or in the foreseeable future.

Thirdly, there are a variety of expressions that are milder in their feeling-tone than "ought" sentences, imperatives, and "necessity" sentences, and yet which may be used prescriptively. "I suggest that you do *X*." "My advice is, do *X*." "I recommend that you do *X*." "If I were you, I should do *X*." All these utterances are prescriptive whenever they are made under the four necessary conditions of prescribing, and they are always made in the context of advising, recommending, or guiding.

I conclude, then, that not all acts of prescribing are utterances of "ought" sentences. It should be noted that the nature of prescribing as I have tried to elucidate it in this chapter is common to all kinds of prescriptions. I wish to emphasize that *moral* prescriptions have no special status among prescriptions in general. The concept of prescribing does, of course, apply to moral prescriptions, such as "You ought to keep your promises." But it also applies in equal measure to all of the following nonmoral prescriptions. "You ought to change the frame on that picture" (aesthetic). "You ought to build the new factory in this city" (economic). "You ought to repeat the experiment under more careful controls" (intellectual). "You ought to kneel during prayer" (religious). "You ought to reinforce the steel on that bridge" (technological). "You ought to put the fork on the left side of the plate" (etiquette or custom). "You ought to throw a pass on the next play" (playing a game). The nature of prescribing does not change as the point of view from which a prescription is made changes. What makes the uttering of a sentence an act of prescribing is not the point of view taken by the speaker, but the kind of sentence it is and the conditions under which it is uttered. In this chapter I have tried to show what kinds of sentences are prescriptive and what conditions must be fulfilled if the uttering of such a sentence is to be an act of prescribing.

8 Prescribing and evaluating

A. Prescriptions and value judgments compared

The purpose of this chapter is twofold: to examine the similarities and differences between prescriptions and value judgments, and to understand how they are logically related to each other. My principal thesis will be that prescriptions are justified in the same way that value judgments are justified. I intend to show that the justification of a prescription is nothing but the justification of a set of value judgments.

What precisely is the difference between prescribing an act to someone and judging the value of something? There are three major points of difference: 1. An act of prescribing is a linguistic act, whereas a value judgment is a mental disposition. 2. All prescribing is done for the purpose of guiding conduct, but most evaluating is not done for this purpose. 3. Prescribing an act is not giving a reason for doing it, while on the contrary evaluating an act is giving a reason for (or against) doing it. I shall consider each point in turn.

1. To prescribe an act to someone is always to *tell* him that he ought to do the act, but we may judge something to have a certain value without telling anyone about it. When, as the result of a