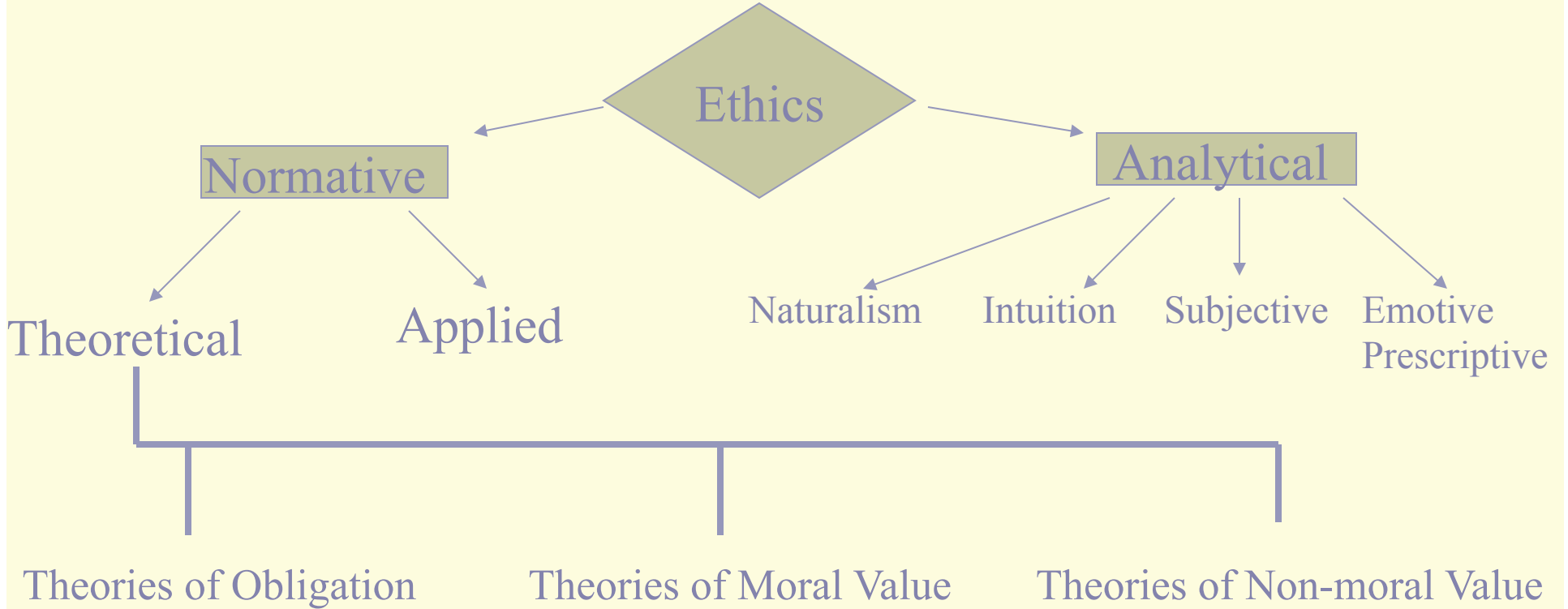
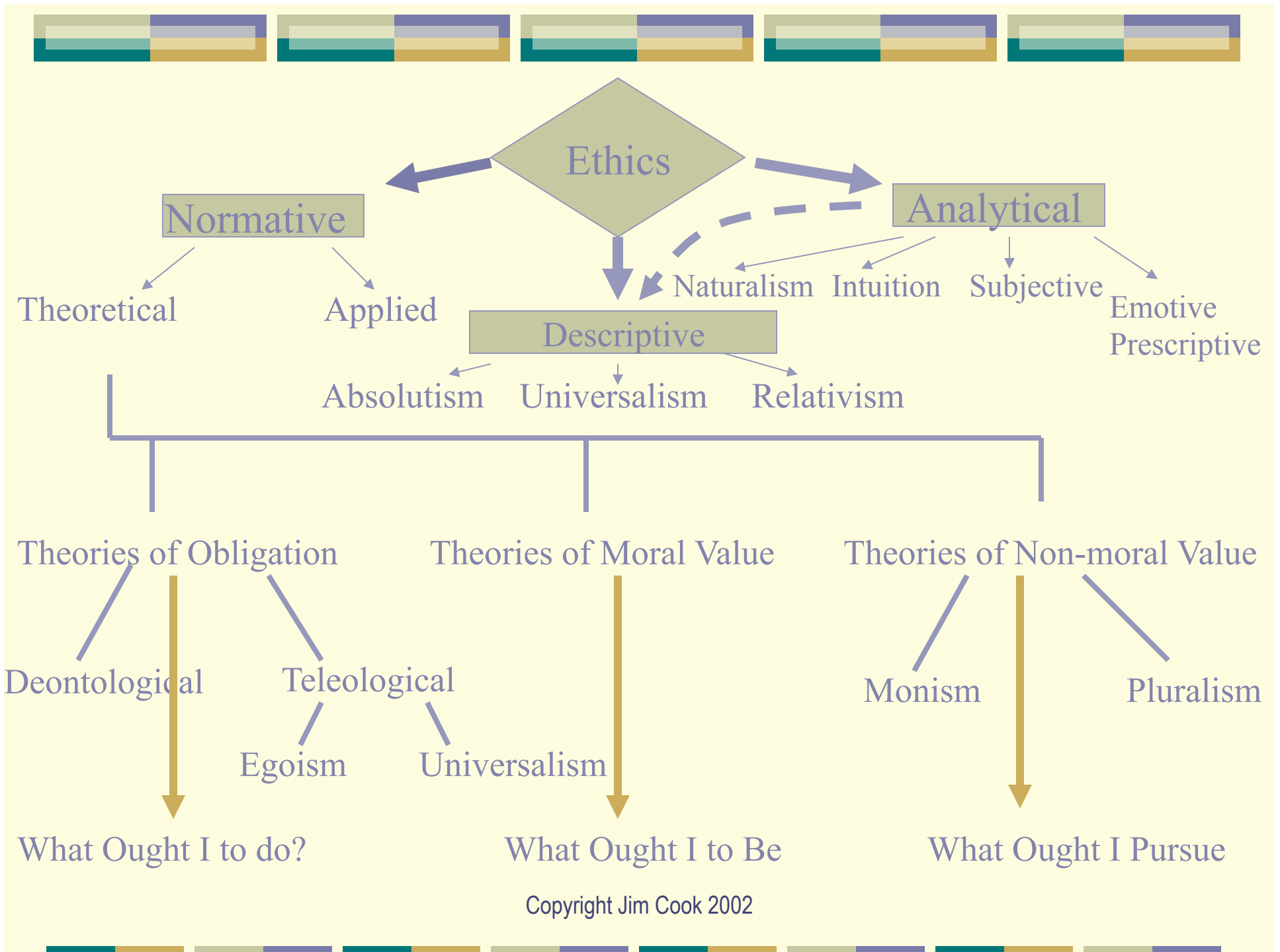



# Philosophical Ethics

## Distinctions and Categories







# 1. What is Ethics

## A First Approximation

- Broadly construed, ethics as a rational discipline is the study of moral problems, morality, and moral judgments. This study may be approached in the following ways
  - **Normative**—addresses questions of what is right, good, obligatory, and how we ought to conduct ourselves

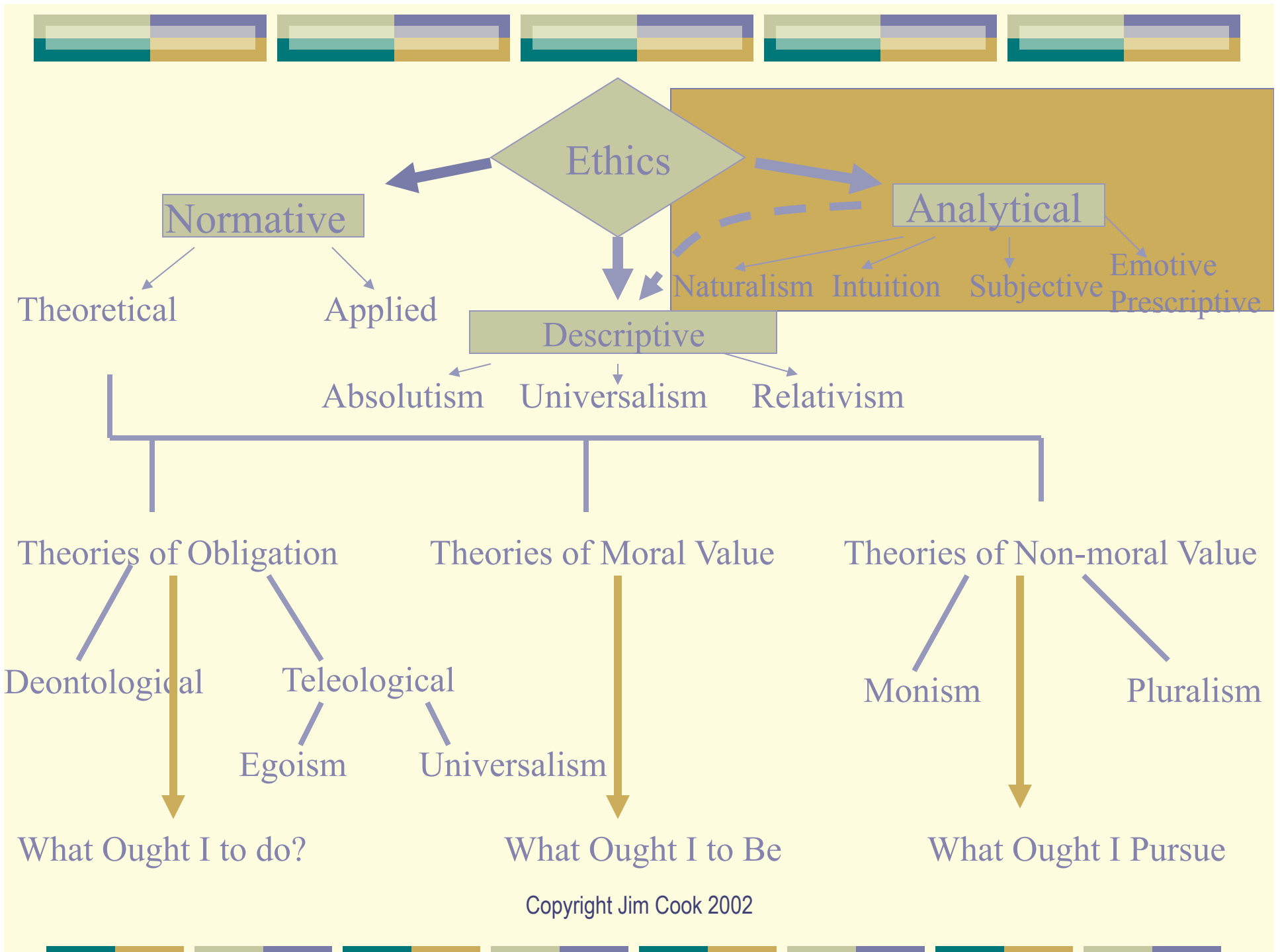


# 1. What is Ethics

## A First Approximation

- **Analytic**—analytic metaethics concerns itself with the meanings or uses of the words utilized in answering normative questions and the nature or metaphysical character of moral concepts
- **Descriptive**—the focus is on the answers given by particular cultures and groups of people on questions of morality. The goal here is to describe or explain the phenomenon of morality





## 2. The Task of Metaethics

- Metaethics is the discipline that studies the **meaning** of moral terms and concepts as well as various moral utterances. It is the task of **clarifying** our moral language. Metaethics does not consist of empirical inquiries, nor does it try to answer either particular or general questions about what is good, right, or obligatory. **It asks and tries to answer logical, epistemological, and semantical questions.**





## 2. The Task of Metaethics

- Some metaethical questions:
  - What is the meaning or use of “right”, “good”, “should”, “ought”, etc.?
  - How can ethical and value judgments be established or justified? Can they be justified at all?
  - What is the cognitive status of ethical judgments?
  - What is the nature of morality?



## 2. The Task of Metaethics

- *Some* Metaethical options—what is the meaning of ethical terms or concepts like “right”, “wrong”, “good”, “bad”?
  - **Naturalism**—this position that asserts that ethical statements are “factual” and assert the presence of absence of certain **properties** that exist either in persons, acts, or a given state of affairs. Hence, ethical judgments can be translated into nonethical propositions. **The “ought” can be defined in terms of the “is”; “value” is reducible to “fact”.** It makes sense, then, to say of ethical judgments that they are either true or false.



## 2. The Task of Metaethics

- **Intuitionism**—the position that understand ethical statements as asserting the presence or absence of **certain non-natural objective qualities** in persons, acts, or states of affairs. Like naturalists, intuitionist claim that ethical terms (concepts) stand for **properties**. But unlike naturalists, these properties are nonempirical, indefinable, simple and unanalyzable—like “yellow” or “pleasantness”. **Ethical judgments are true or false and basic moral convictions are self-evident and can be known only by intuition.**





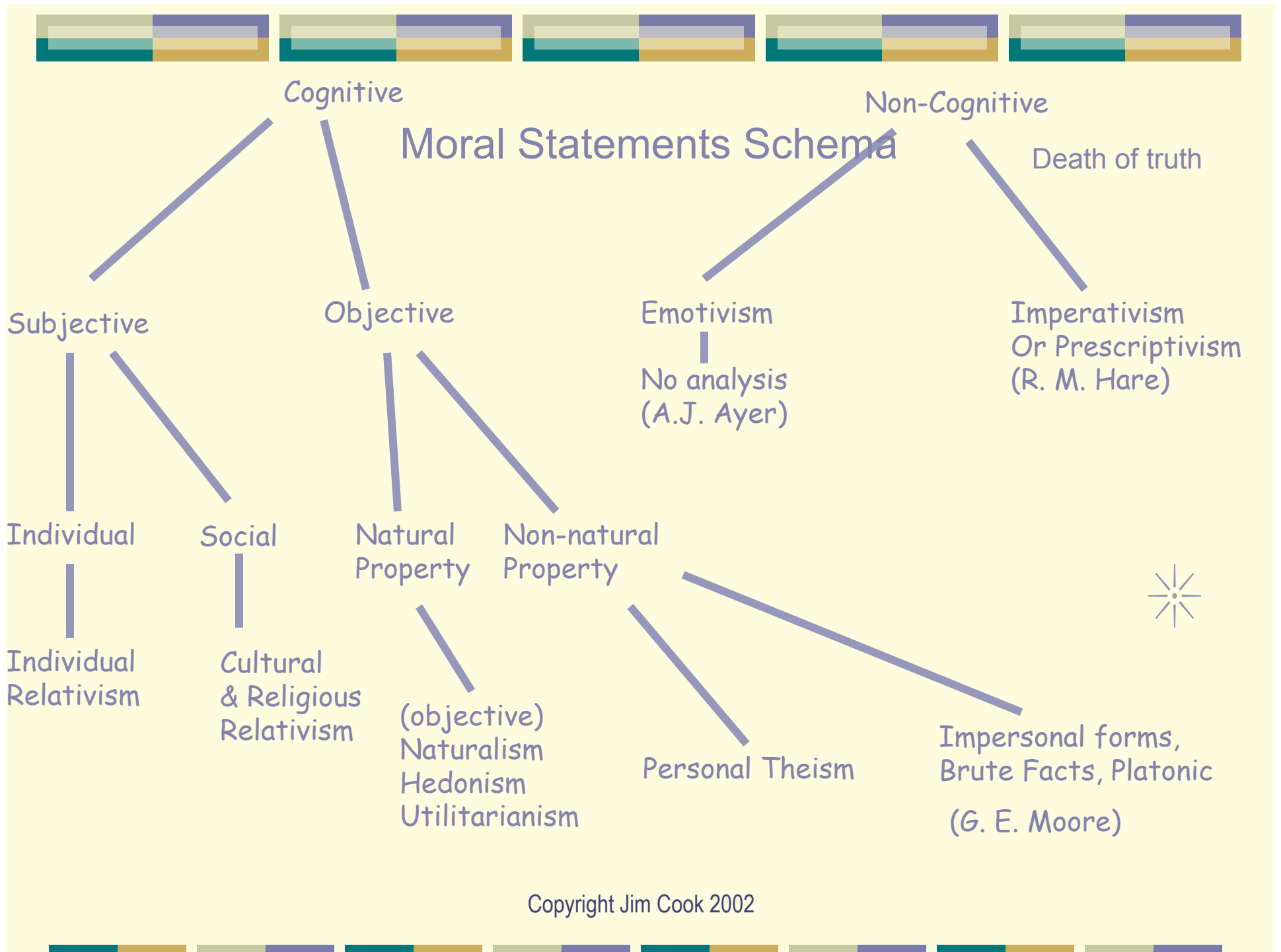
## 2. The Task of Metaethics

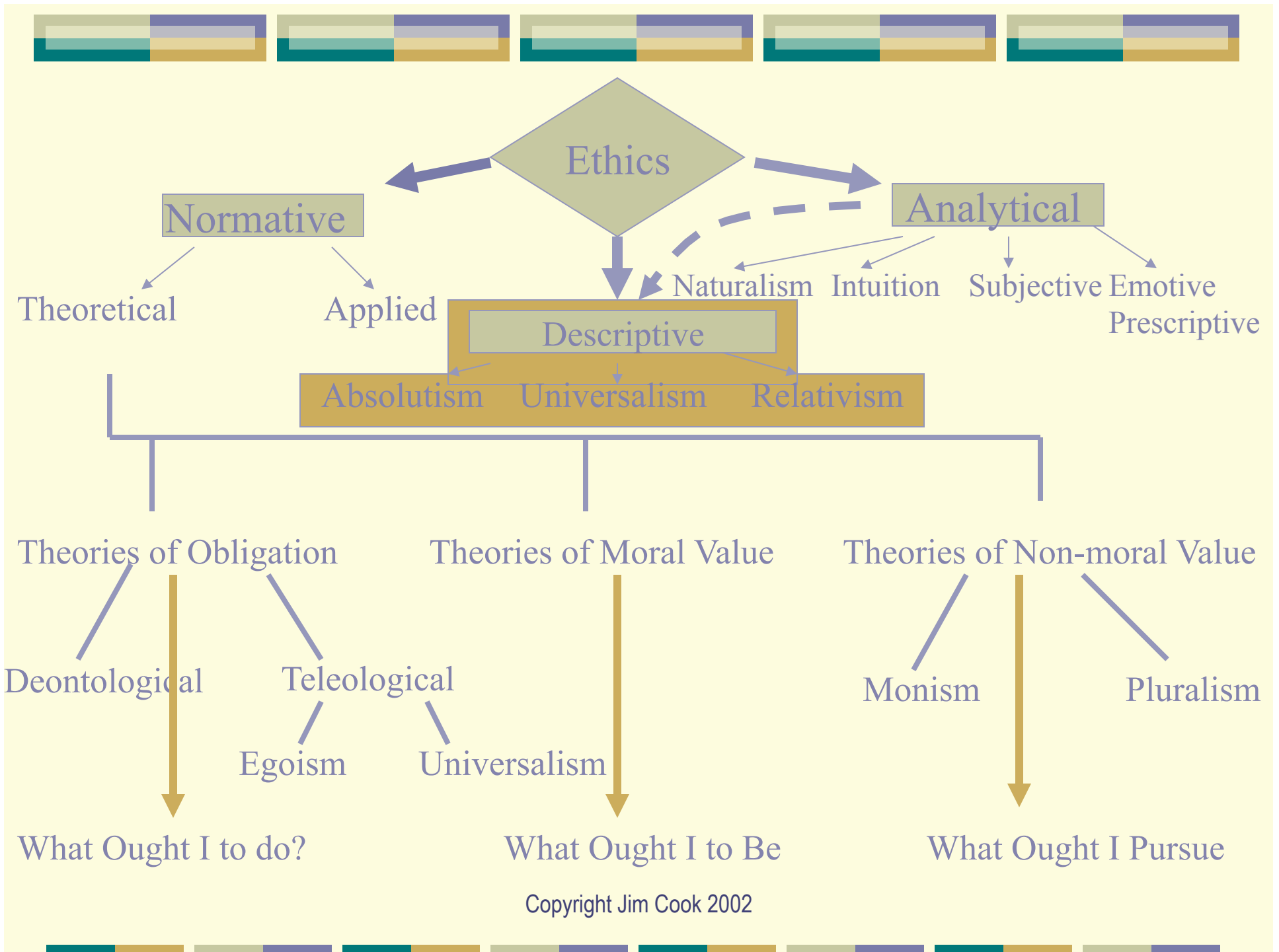
- **Emotivism**—the position that understands ethical judgments as being the expression of emotions and attitudes of the speaker. As such, **ethical assertions assert nothing and cannot be rationally or objectively justified**. Value judgments are simply emotive reactions—positive or negative—and usually seek to evoke similar reactions in the hearer



## 2. The Task of Metaethics

- **Prescriptivism**—the position that asserts that ethical judgments are evaluations, recommendations, prescriptions and seek to guide, recommend and instruct. When someone says that something is good or right, s/he is ready to offer reasons which are not purely persuasive but neither purely private. Ethical judgments, therefore, are not true or false, but they can be justified or unjustified







# 3. The Enterprise of Descriptive Ethics

- **Descriptive ethics** is the study of **moral behavior and attitudes** among individuals, societies and cultures. It seeks to describe **what** people believe and do, **why** they believe what they believe and do what they do, and the **causal influences** affecting beliefs and actions.





# 3. The Enterprise of Descriptive Ethics

- Categories of Description & Explanation
  - **Descriptions** of Moral Belief: “**Most people** believe that abortion is a morally legitimate option”
  - **Descriptions** of Moral Language: “**Most people** mean ‘pleasurable’ when they use the word ‘good’
  - **Explanations** of Moral Belief: “**Most people** believe that abortion is normally legitimate because (1) the economy cannot allow for more unwanted children; (2) women’s bodily rights take precedence over any rights the fetus may have”





# 3. The Enterprise of Descriptive Ethics

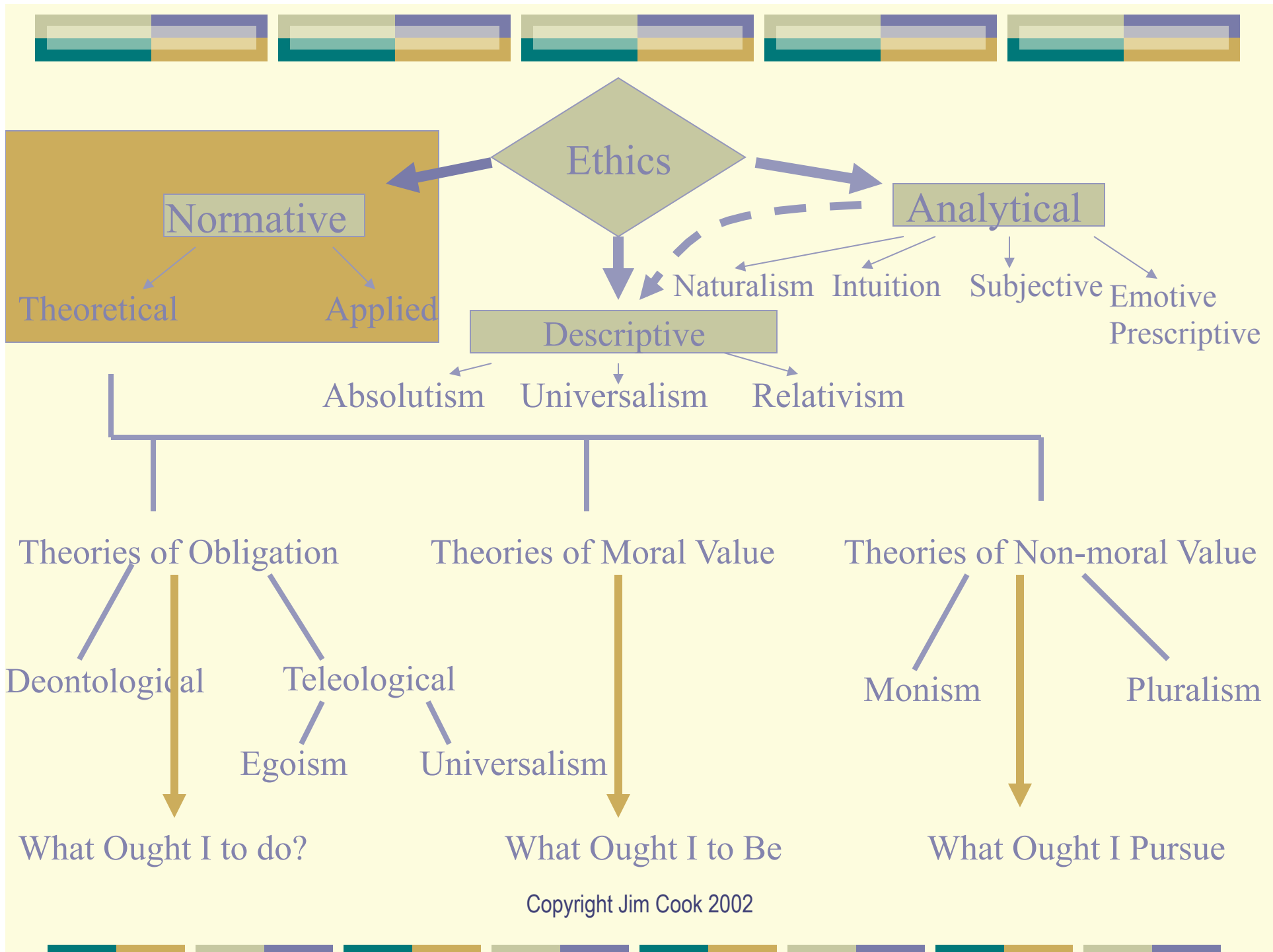
- **Explanations** of Moral Language: “The word ‘pleasurable’ is virtually identical to ‘good’ because they are **used in the same contexts** and interchangeably”
- **Explanations** of Moral Experience: “Moral discourse arose because **people** felt the need for some overall nonviolent method of social control and cohesion”



# 3. The Enterprise of Descriptive Ethics

## ● Descriptive Theories of Moral Codes

- **Relativism**—the position that claims that there exists no single objective absolute moral standard that is universally applicable and discernable to all people at all times and in all places
- **Universalism**—there does in fact exist a set of universal moral norms and values displayed in every culture and in every period of time
- **Absolutism**—the position that there does exist a single objective and absolute moral standard that is universally applicable to and discernable by all people at all times and in all places

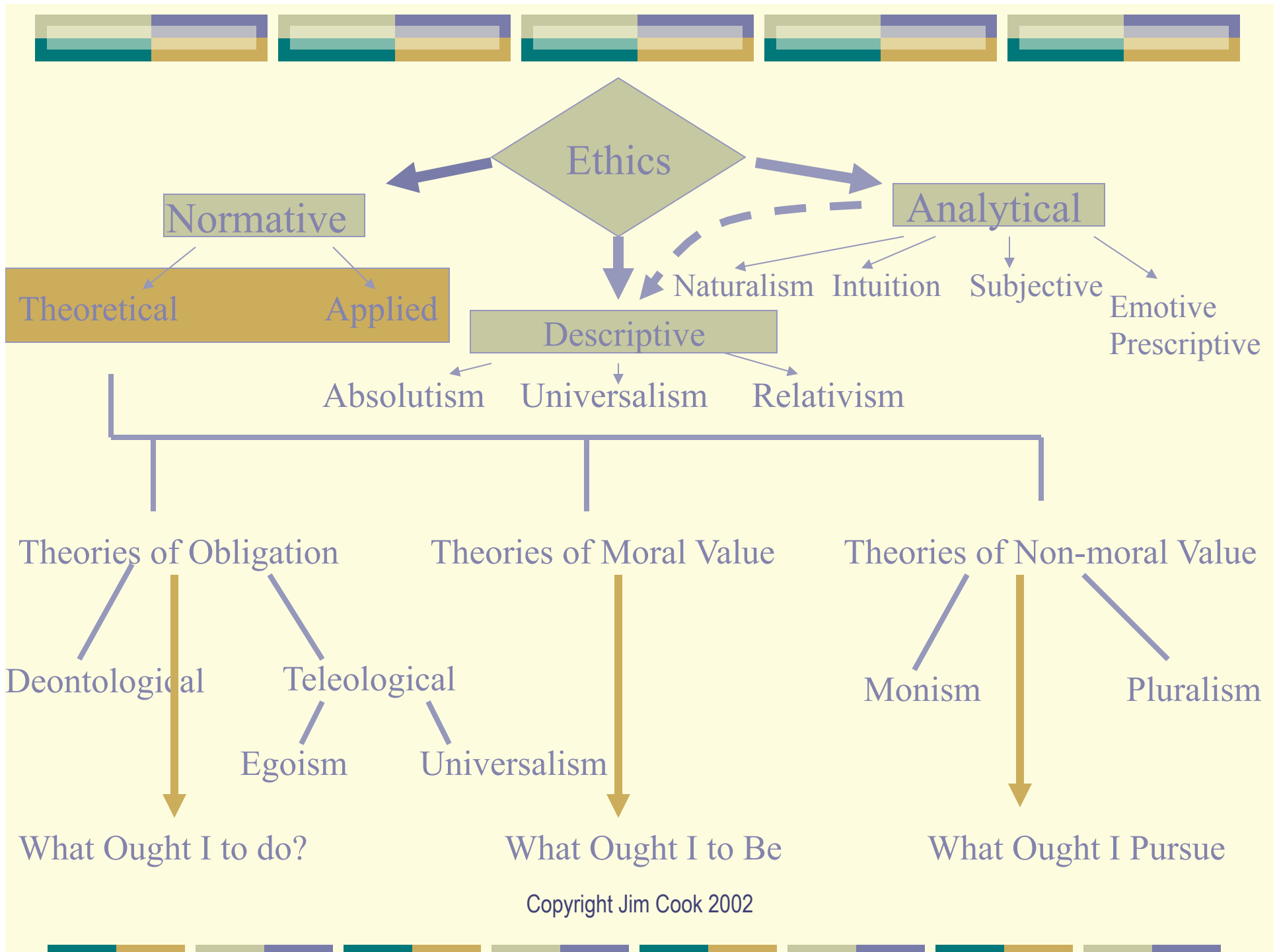




# 4. The Discipline of Normative Ethics

- The discipline of **Normative Ethics**: Normative ethics involves the critical inquiry into the norms and principles that **ought** to govern our actions, the values and goods that are **worth** pursuing in life, and the ideals and qualities that we **should** emulate and adopt as persons of character







## 4. The Discipline of Normative Ethics

- **Theoretical Normative Ethics**—involves the **critical search** for principles, norms, values, and ideals that **ought** to govern human conduct, including a study of major theories about which things are good, which acts are right, and which qualities, attitudes, and dispositions are praiseworthy





## 4. The Discipline of Normative Ethics

- **Applied Normative Ethics**—the attempt to explain and justify positions on specific moral problems and issues: euthanasia, reverse discrimination, nuclear war, genetic engineering, etc. Here one seeks to appeal to general principles and values in which to determine specific cases. Applied ethics concentrates on concrete choices, particular circumstances, and specific problems. It particularly concerned with morally ambiguous situations



# 5. Kinds of Normative Judgments (not pictured)

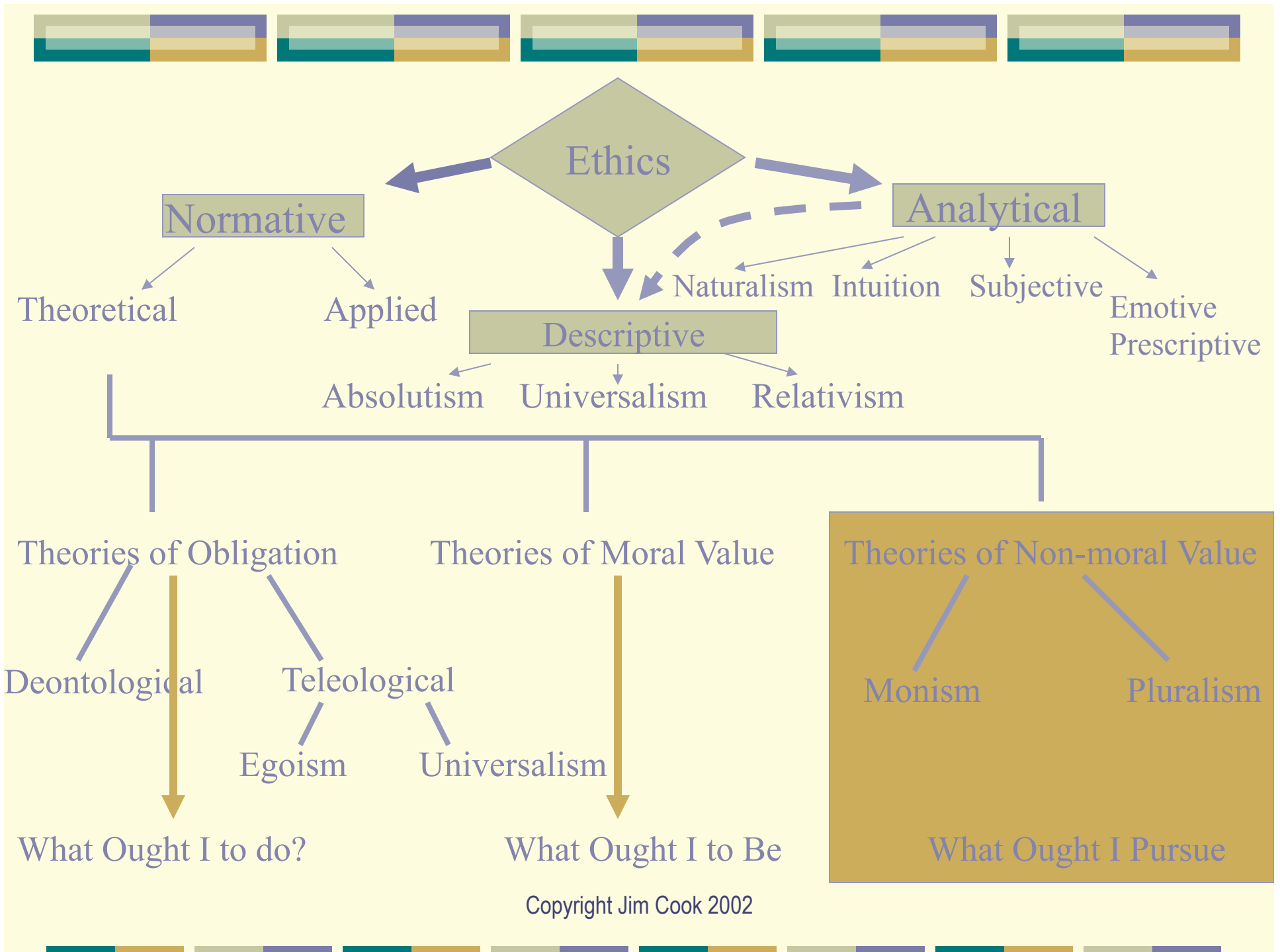
- Moral Normative Judgments (a central hermeneutical problem)
  - Judgments of moral obligation (evaluating actions from a moral point of view)
  - Judgments of Moral value (evaluating persons from a moral point of view)






# 5. Kinds of Normative Judgments (not pictured)


- Non-moral Normative Judgments
  - Judgments of non-moral obligation (evaluating actions from a prudential point of view)
  - Judgments of non-moral value (evaluating objects/states of affairs from an axiological point of view)






## 6. Kinds of Normative Theories

- Theories of **non-moral value**—address the following kinds of questions: What is worth pursuing in life? What is desirable, **good**, or worthwhile? What values should we pursue for ourselves and others? Is there anything that is intrinsically valuable? What is the relationship between “the good life” and “a good life”?




## 6. Kinds of Normative Theories

- Kinds of **non-moral value**: “Good” and its senses
  - **Utility values**—things that are good because of their usefulness for some purpose
  - **Extrinsic values**—things that are good because they are a means to something else that is good, or something else that is better



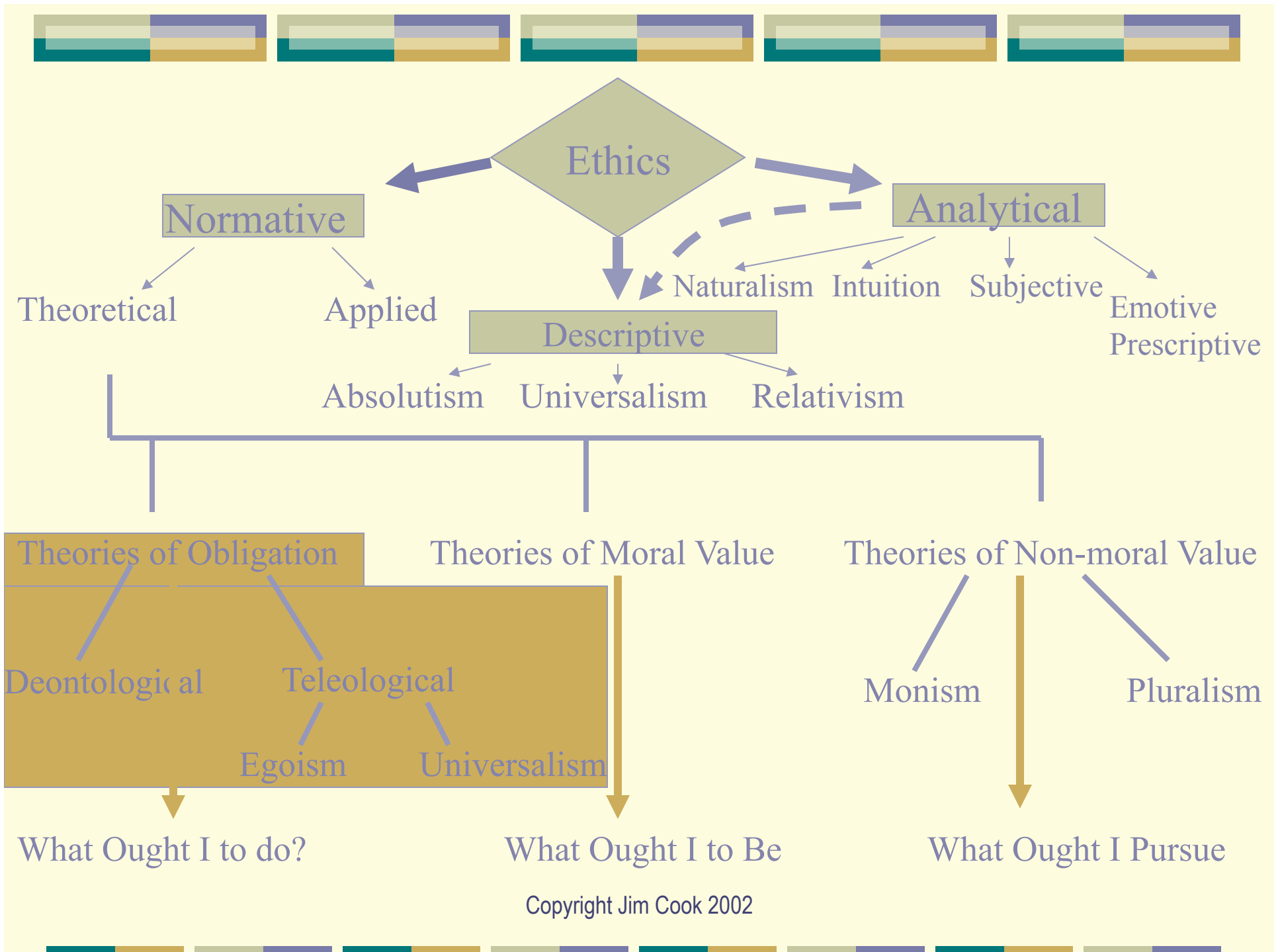
## 6. Kinds of Normative Theories


- **Inherent values**—things that are good because the experience of contemplating or participating in them is good, satisfying, or rewarding in itself
- **Intrinsic values**—things that are good in themselves or good because of their own intrinsic properties



## 6. Kinds of Normative Theories

- Kinds of **non-moral theories**—what is the highest good? What is intrinsically valuable? What is worthy of being desired in and of itself? Is there anything of intrinsic or absolute worth?
  - **Monistic theories**—“there is only **one thing** that is intrinsically good”
  - **Pluralistic theories**—“the highest good is the realization so far as it is possible of **every** intrinsic good, in such balance and proportion as our natural endowments and circumstances may permit





## 6. Kinds of Normative Theories


- **Theories of Moral Obligation**—(1) sets forth principles that are to be guides in moral judgments on moral issues; and (2) explains why it is that a certain action, practice, rule or principle is right/wrong



## 6. Kinds of Normative Theories


- **Teleological theories** (consequentialism)—affirms that the final basis or ultimate criterion/standard of what is morally right, wrong, obligatory, etc., **is the non-moral value that is brought into being**. The final appeal must be based on the comparative amount of good produced, or the comparative balance of good over evil produced. As such, **a theory of non-moral value must first be explicated**. Once this has been done, the question of whose good is it that we ought to try to promote must be answered.






## 6. Kinds of Normative Theories

- **Ethical Egoism**—the position that argues that one ought always to try to do what will promote **one's own** greatest good. Thus an act/practice/rule is right if and only if it promotes one's own best interest



## 6. Kinds of Normative Theories

- **Ethical Universalism** (a version of utilitarianism)—the position that asserts that one ought always try to do what will promote the **greatest general good** or greatest balance of good over evil for everyone. An act/practice/rule is right if and only if it is, or probably is, conducive to the greatest balance of good over evil in the universe as a whole
  - **Act** utilitarianism—“What is right and obligatory in a given situation depends on that **action** which will or is likely to produce the greatest balance of good over evil in the universe. Moral rules are at best general guides




## 6. Kinds of Normative Theories

- **General** Utilitarianism—”what is right and obligatory in a given situation depends on that **action** which will or is likely to produce the greatest balance of good over evil **if everyone else were to do so and so in such a case**”
- **Rule** Utilitarianism—”what is right and obligatory in a given situation is **determined by those rules** which apply and will bring about the greatest possible good for the greatest number of people”

## 6. Kinds of Normative Theories


- **Deontological Theories**—the position that affirms that the moral rightness or wrongness of an action/practice/rule is **NOT dependent** on the consequences that result or the value produced **but on certain features of the action/practice/rule itself**. In other words, it is possible for an action, practice, or rule of action to be morally right or obligatory even if it does not promote the greatest possible balance of good over evil





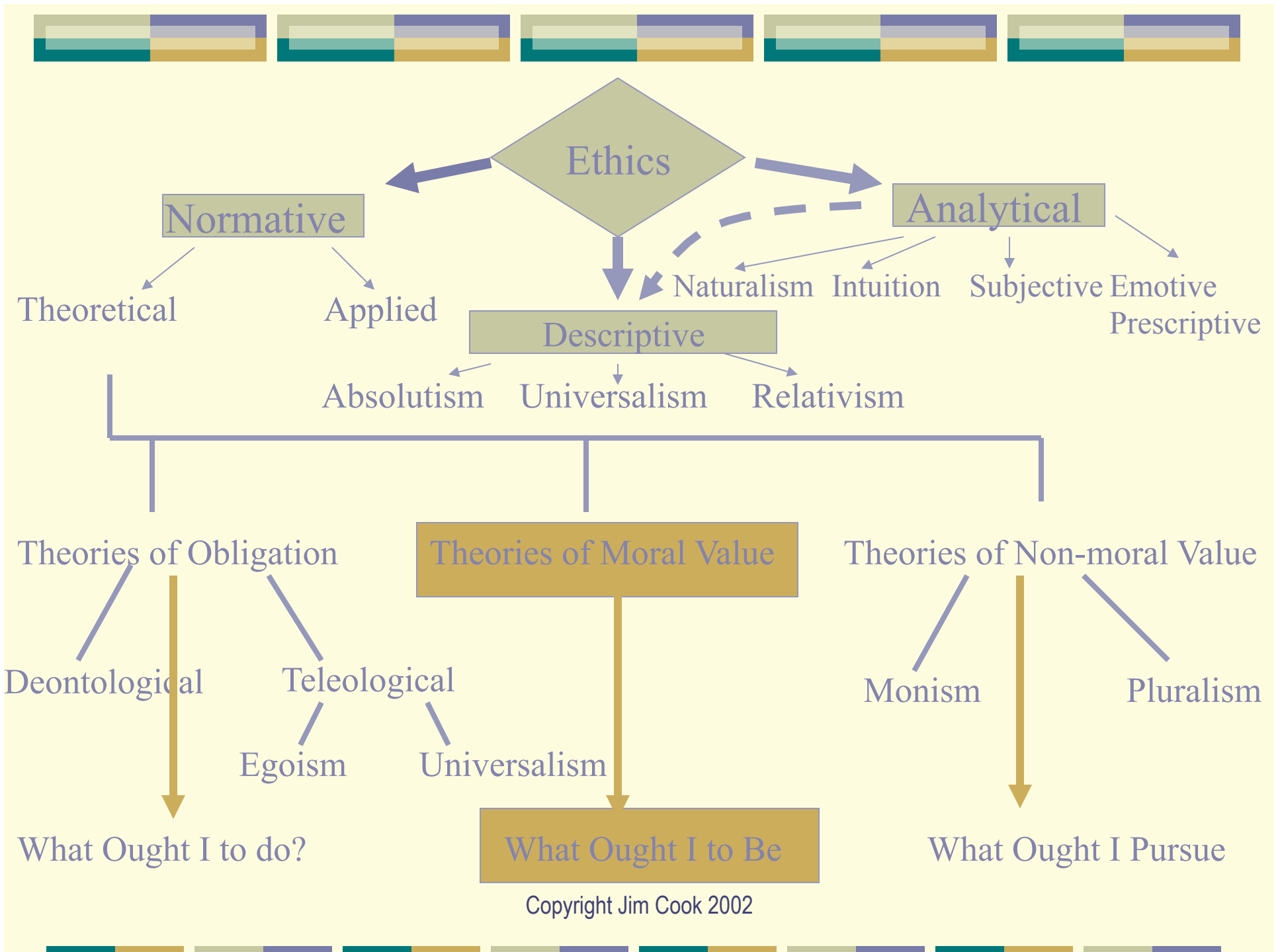
## 6. Kinds of Normative Theories

- **Act** Deontologicalism—the rightness or wrongness of an action in a given situation is **purely particular and dependent upon the situation**. This is because each situation and person is unique. **There are no general moral rules or principles**. One can determine their duty in a particular situation without appealing to rules or principles or to the consequences of the act (intuitionist and some existentialists)




## 6. Kinds of Normative Theories

- **Rule** Deontologicalism—the rightness or wrongness of an action in a given situation is finally to be **determined by one or more rules that possess an intrinsic obligatoriness**. There are certain principles or rules that ought to be followed simply because they are intrinsically right and morally obligatory.









## 6. Kinds of Normative Theories

- **Theories of Moral Value**—is a **theory of virtue**. It explains what attempts to justify the basis, standard and ideal by which one can judge another person—his or her traits of character, motives, intentions, dispositions, attitudes, etc., as morally good/bad, responsible/irresponsible, blameworthy/praiseworthy, virtuous, etc.




## 6. Kinds of Normative Theories

- **Virtue versus Principles**—principles of duty like: “We ought to promote the happiness of all” or “We ought to treat every person fairly”, they help us to determine what we ought to do. They help us to determine which acts/practices are right/wrong. A virtue, however, is a disposition, habit, quality, skill, or trait that a person ought to possess. It seeks to determine what kind of person someone should be.




## 6. Kinds of Normative Theories

- On being and doing—”to be or to do? Which comes first?”
  - **Virtue theories**—judgments of moral obligation are to be derived from judgments of moral value. **What one ought to do is determined by the kind of person one ought to be.** Hence, virtues have a dual function: (1) They must inform us of our duty; and (2) They must move us to do what we ought to do



## 6. Kinds of Normative Theories

- **Theories of obligation**—judgments of moral value are derived from judgments of moral obligation. That is, **what kind of person we ought to be is determined by those principles that govern what we ought to do.** Though the virtues are necessary to motivate us to do our duty, they cannot provide guidance or instruction in and of themselves.



## 6. Kinds of Normative Theories

- **Complementarist approaches**—for every principle there is a morally good trait consisting of a disposition or tendency to act according to it; and for every morally good trait there will be a principle defining the kind of action in which it is to express itself: “Principles without traits are impotent and traits without principles are blind”

