

T1 Ethical Thought

Religious Studies for
A2 and A Level Year 2
Religion and Ethics
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This section covers AO1
content and skills

Specification content

Objective moral laws exist independently of human beings; moral terms can be understood by analysing the natural world; ethical statements are cognitivist and can be verified or falsified; verified moral statements are objective truths and universal.

Key terms

Cognition: the mental action or process of acquiring knowledge and understanding through thought, experience, and the senses

Empirical: knowledge gained through the senses

Epistemology: philosophy of knowledge derived from the Greek episteme (knowledge) and logos (words or discussion) i.e. 'discussion about knowledge'

Peripatetic axiom: philosophical view found in ancient Greek philosophy that 'Nothing is in the intellect that was not first in the senses'

Tabula rasa: literally means 'a clean slate' and refers to the peripatetic axiom

D: Meta-ethical approaches – Naturalism

Naturalism: objective moral laws exist independently of human beings

The best way to approach Naturalism is to begin with re-visiting a concept from Year 1. In philosophy, the terms '**empirical**' and 'empiricism' were used. These terms are usually quite heavily associated with philosophers Locke and Berkeley but especially with the Scottish philosopher David Hume. The empirical philosophical view is particularly pertinent when it comes to consider the philosophical discipline of epistemology; that is, the study of how and what we 'know'. The word **epistemology** is derived from the Greek episteme (knowledge) and logos (words or discussion), i.e. 'discussion about knowledge'.

Key quotes

Naturalism is an approach to philosophical problems that interprets them as tractable through the methods of the empirical sciences or at least, without a distinctively *a priori* project of theorising. (Jacobs)

Ethical naturalism is the idea that ethics can be understood in the terms of natural science. One way of making this more specific is to say that moral properties (such as goodness and rightness) are identical with 'natural' properties, that is, properties that figure into scientific descriptions or explanations of things. (Rachels)

The epistemological position empiricism takes is that all knowledge is derived from the senses; that is, what we see, hear, touch, smell and feel is responded to by our intellect which gives the experiences meaning. David Hume advocated that we are born in a state of **tabula rasa**, which literally means 'a clean slate'. In other words, we are born with an absence of preconceptions, predetermined views, or indeed anything in our minds. Everything that we know and learn has its origins in the world of sense experience. This is not a new idea; indeed, it affirms the **peripatetic axiom** of ancient Greek philosophy and it is also referred to in Aquinas' writings: 'Nothing is in the intellect that was not first in the senses'.

When a proposition (statement) is put forward based upon what we experience, it is first of all verified (checked for validity, i.e. does it make sense and have meaning in relation to what we experience?) and then assessed through empirical means for the extent of its truthfulness or 'truth value'. This means that the world of sense-experience is appealed to as the basis for establishing the meaning and truthfulness of a statement, proposition or theory. Once verification of meaning is established by **cognition**, the truth value of a proposition can be assessed.



David Hume argued that we were born tabula rasa

Key quote

According to the naturalist, there is only the natural order. If something is postulated or claimed to exist but is not described in the vocabulary that describes natural phenomena, and not studied by the inquiries that study natural phenomena, it is not something we should recognize as real. (Jacobs IEP)

Cognitivism and realism

Linked to this philosophical approach are the ideas of **cognitivism** and **realism**.

Cognitivism is very much related to how our mental faculties process information and terms and you will meet this again when studying religious language. Cognitivism holds that a statement or proposition must be related to our experience in order to verify whether or not it makes sense (true), or, whether or not it is meaningless (false). Cognitivism is the linguistic aspect of the empirical approach, that is, it establishes primarily whether or not a **proposition** has valid empirical meaning. This was crucially important to those philosophers that belonged to what was called the Vienna Circle, or, **Logical Positivists**.

Often, an underlying assumption of cognitivism is that the world around us is objective or real, that is it exists independently of us and our minds and so can be used to establish knowledge and truth. This philosophical position is referred to as realism; however, there are many different discussions within philosophy as to how a realist understanding or interpretation of the world is derived, how this relates to cognitivism, and indeed, what the result of that implies for our knowledge of the world. This is not our concern here. For our studies we take realism to mean that the world around us is simply 'there' and it is not just our imagination, a delusion nor psychological projection. In other words, it is a real existence that is mind-independent of us and therefore judgements about moral behaviour are 'real' because they directly relate to objective facts of existence.

For example, take the statement: 'The kind neighbour takes out my bins to the road every Monday morning.' In cognitive terms this makes sense as it concurs with our world of experience and what we know – our minds recognise the notions of kindness, neighbour, taking, etc. Realism acknowledges that this is true when we experience, through our sense of sight, the neighbour physically taking out the bins and realism acknowledges that we did not just imagine it.

The 'kindness' aspect is the final assessment. Therefore, a cognitive, realist approach affirms that a judgement as to the neighbour's moral character can be found through the experience of this being a helpful act and bringing happiness to others involved (from experience we can see that a 'kind' act is that which brings happiness). The language is meaningful, and the moral judgement relates directly to the consequences of the physical act. A cognitive, realist approach, then, sees a moral or ethical proposition as being related directly to the empirical world, truthful and valid.



An act as simple as taking out another's bin for collection can be seen in ethical terms.

quickfire

- 1.1 What is the peripatetic axiom?

quickfire

- 1.2 What does the word epistemology mean?

Key terms

Cognitivism: the meta-ethical view that ethical sentences express meaningful propositions and can therefore be true or false

Logical Positivists: famous group of philosophers interested in logical philosophy also known as the Vienna Circle

Proposition: statement

Realism: view that an object exists in reality independently of our mind (mind-independent)

Key quotes

According to moral realists, statements about what actions are morally required or permissible and statements about what dispositions or character traits are morally virtuous or vicious (and so on) are not mere expressions of subjective preferences but are objectively true or false according as they correspond with the facts of morality – just as historical or geographic statements are true or false according as they fit the historical or geographic facts. (Hale, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*)

Naturalism was supposed to explain away ethics altogether by associating ethical concepts such as goodness or duty with non-ethical concepts such as pleasure or utility or the desire that society should be preserved. (Warnock)

quickfire

- 1.3 What does the term 'proposition' mean?

quickfire

- 1.4 Which group of philosophers were associated with the Vienna Circle?

Key term

Ethical Naturalism: the view that ethical propositions can be understood by analysing the natural world

Empiricism, cognitivism and realism are all inter-related; however, as with realism, that inter-relationship is much debated within epistemology and different philosophers take different positions on the subtleties of what this inter-relationship actually is. This is where it gets really complex but fortunately, again, it is not our concern. Suffice to say that an empirical, cognitivist and realist approach is one that recognises that the world around us can provide answers to our philosophical questions and that we do not need to go beyond the realm of the senses for an explanation.

In short, this position described above is the position of philosophical Naturalism. What, then, of ethical debate about the nature of good, bad, right or wrong? What does this all mean for ethics?

Naturalism and analysis of the natural world

From this foundation of philosophical Naturalism it is proposed that ethical knowledge can be reduced to, and explained through, empirical means. **Ethical Naturalism**, then, argues that we can know whether something is good, bad, right or wrong by deference to the world around, an experience of which imparts this ethical knowledge.

Key quote

According to the naturalist, there are no Platonic forms, Cartesian mental substances, Kantian noumena, or any other agents, powers, or entities that do not (in some broad sense) belong to nature. (Jacobs)

This means that ethical Naturalism proposes:

That moral terms can be understood by analysing the natural world (empirical)

In other words, ethical language can be understood by referring to, and closely analysing, what we experience from the natural world around us. For example, we all understand that to experience the kindness of another is a 'good' experience and that to experience cruelty from another is a 'bad' experience.

That ethical statements are cognitivist and can be verified or falsified (cognitivist)

Taken further, this then means that our experiences have meaning because we can verify, from our experiences, that kind acts are 'good' and cruel acts are 'bad' due to the happiness or suffering that these experiences produce. We can all verify this and it means the same for everyone.

That verified moral statements are objective truths and universal

If the ethical descriptions and statements about our world have meaning for everyone then it also follows that they are objective truths and universal. If the world around us is objective or real, that is it exists independently of us, then it can be used to establish knowledge and truth. We can then discuss ethics meaningfully and establish certain propositions about good and bad ethical behaviour, for example that kindness is good, because our experience of the world verifies this.

That objective features of the world make propositions true or false (moral realism)

If these experiences are mind-independent, uniform and universal then this also means that the statements 'kindness is an ethically good act' and 'cruelty is an ethically bad act' are true because these experiences are grounded in the objective features of the world around us. That is, we can actually see how kindness works. From this, we all can agree that kindness is good because the experiences in the world around us establish that this is true.

The classical example of Ethical Naturalism as an ethical theory is that of **Utilitarianism** as proposed by Mill. A Utilitarian approach is typically Naturalistic in that it applies ethical reasoning from the basis of the experience of happiness and that the most useful ethical action is seen as that which brings the maximum levels of 'happiness or pleasure'. Utilitarians argue that everyone should do the most useful thing. The most useful thing is seen as action or actions that result in maximum levels of happiness or pleasure. Therefore, actions that produce the most happiness are seen as good. However, Mill was very interested in establishing an ethical society, not just individual guidance, and therefore the most important contribution by Mill, then, can be argued to be his introduction of the idea of **universalisability**. This proposed that everyone ought to aim at the happiness of everyone, as increasing the general happiness will increase individual happiness. This argument then supports the idea that people should put the interests of the group before their own interests.

Mill's theory of Utilitarianism mirrors the progressive statements on the previous page:

- Moral terms can be understood by analysing the natural world in relation to the effects of our actions.
- Ethical statements are cognitivist and can be verified or falsified in relation to what we know about actions and their consequences from the empirical world, namely, the amount of happiness or pain they create.
- Verified moral statements are objective truths and universal so we can establish that everyone ought to aim at the happiness of everyone, as increasing the general happiness will increase individual happiness.
- The objective features of the world, namely the impact of acts that create happiness and acts that create suffering, make our ethical propositions about the nature of such action true or false.

The most important point about Ethical Naturalism is that it supports the view that objective moral laws exist independently of human beings and are grounded in the empirical nature of existence. Having established the link between an objective external existence (realism) and that a cognitivist approach can verify or establish the validity of what we experience (empiricism), then it logically follows that what we know about what we experience makes our ethical statements objective. Therefore, we can recognise objective moral laws that exist independently of human beings and that are located firmly in the world around us.

As Naturalism places great emphasis on the empirical then it opens itself up to the realm of the sciences and so we find we have social Naturalism, biological Naturalism, evolutionary ethics, psychological Naturalism and philosophical materialism. There is also the whole question of whether or not the purpose of Naturalism is **descriptive** or **normative**, as we shall see later with evolutionary ethics.

For the purpose of this Specification, Ethical Naturalism should be understood as set out here, that is, as empirical, cognitive and realist, and also in relation to the contribution to philosophy of F. H. Bradley to which we now turn.

AO1 Activity

Think of an everyday scenario and write a paragraph describing it with reference to some of the key terms above.

Study tip

Start to create a glossary of key terms but make sure that you have a separate column for the definitions so that it makes it easy to cover them up and test yourself.

Key terms

Descriptive: term used as a criticism of Naturalism that it can only describe and not be prescriptive

Normative: to do with 'norms' of behaviour used in ethics to describe theories stating what we should do or how we should behave

Universalisability: Mill's utilitarian principle that that everyone ought to aim at the happiness of everyone, as increasing the general happiness will increase individual happiness

Utilitarianism: theory first systematically outlined by Jeremy Bentham stating that we ought to aim to produce the greatest amount of pleasure and the least amount of pain

quickfire

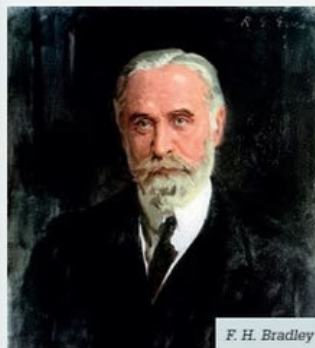
- 1.5 How does Utilitarianism define the word 'good'?



Mill's argument that the interests of the group should come before the interests of the individual is the underlying feature of democracy.

Specification content

F. H. Bradley – ethical sentences express propositions; objective features of the world make propositions true or false; meta-ethical statements can be seen in scientific terms.



F. H. Bradley

Key quote

This philosophical method is called by Hegel 'dialectical', and it is the method of Bradley's *Ethical Studies*. (Norman)

Key terms

Dialectical synthesis: Hegel's view that two opposite views (hypothesis, antithesis) can be united (synthesis) through philosophical analysis

Dualism: philosophical view that accepts two states of existence, the physical and metaphysical

Idealism: group of metaphysical philosophies asserting that reality, or reality as humans can know it, is fundamentally mental, mentally constructed, or otherwise immaterial

Polemical: philosophical argument of or involving strongly critical writing or speech

F. H. Bradley's *Ethical Studies* and Idealist Moral Philosophy

The rest of this section we will look at F. H. Bradley. The following pages may seem comprehensive when Bradley appears to be just one part of the Specification list; however, this is misleading as the Specification for T1A is a whole entity in relation to Naturalism and the intention is that the following pages can be used to select appropriate evidence and examples to illustrate naturalistic propositions and its overall position. Obviously, you will not need to take all this into an examination with you but that does not mean it is not relevant. Any of the following can be used to support your answers. It also makes sense to consider Bradley's full argument as presented in chapter five of his work *Ethical Studies* which is where he expounds key elements of ethical naturalistic theory.

Francis Herbert Bradley was born on January 30, 1846 in Clapham, Surrey, England. His father was an evangelical preacher. Bradley studied at Marlborough College and left it in 1863. In 1865, Bradley got into University College, Oxford and was later elected to a lucrative fellowship at Merton College, Oxford in 1870 which was tenable for life, had no teaching duties, and could be affected only by marriage. Bradley never married and therefore, without teaching duties, had much time to continue writing. Although Bradley was inspired by Hegel's dialectical method, Bradley did not look upon himself as a Hegelian philosopher. However, his views on ethics were aired in his highly polemical work *Ethical Studies* published in 1876. This was a series of related essays to work dialectically through the defective theories towards a better understanding of ethics.

F. H. Bradley was a famous British philosopher belonging to the tradition of British **idealism** or Neo-Hegelians as they are sometimes called. He was heavily influenced by the philosopher Hegel's approach to philosophical investigations.

Technically, Bradley cannot be regarded as a Naturalist philosopher; his major work on ethics, *Ethical Studies*, is a highly **polemical** work so typical of the Hegelian tradition. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel was a German philosopher who tried to overcome the idea of **dualism**, that is the distinctive separation of the metaphysical and the physical by considering one view (thesis) and then the contrary view (antithesis) and then combining them (synthesis) – although it was not quite as straightforward as this may suggest. This method was known as **dialectical synthesis**. Bradley, a British idealist philosopher, following Hegel's methodology, attempted to present a more developed form of Naturalism by combining it with Kant's philosophy of duty.

The Stanford Encyclopedia suggests that sometimes Bradley's work is taken out of context and considered as his 'final' position on philosophy and this has happened with regard to Naturalism. Although Bradley gives a good account of it, Naturalism is not his final position and so this explains some of the confusion when he is presented as a Naturalist philosopher in some books.

Key quotes

There is a broad sense of 'moral naturalism' whereby a moral naturalist is someone who believes an adequate philosophical account of morality can be given in terms entirely consistent with a naturalistic position in philosophical inquiry more generally. According to such broad metaphysical naturalism, all facts are natural facts. Natural facts are understood to be facts about the natural world, facts of the sort in which the natural sciences trade. (Lenman)

... the famous 'My Station and Its Duties', where he outlines a social conception of the self and of morality with such vigour that it is understandable that the mistaken idea that it expresses his own position has gained some currency. (Stanford)

In other words, what Bradley does with Naturalism is try to bring together the two theories of Utilitarianism and Kantian ethics by taking their theories with all their inadequacies and imperfections and attempting to unify them without any deficiencies. What he ended up with was a developed 'naturalistic' philosophy of ethics in one chapter of his book (*My Station and its Duties*). However, this philosophical position in itself Bradley saw as deficient due to the incompleteness of its metaphysical end (**self-realisation**). By the end of his book, Bradley had again shifted position towards a more metaphysical, idealist position. Mary Warnock observes:

'The last two essays in *Ethical Studies* are devoted to further elaboration of this notion of the end (**self-realisation**) ... and to a discussion of the relation between religion and morality. The respects in which the theory is essentially metaphysical are perhaps now clear. More specifically, it is essentially an idealist moral philosophy, deriving from the idealist view of the unity and coherent nature of reality.' The confusion sometimes repeated in books is to associate Bradley with Naturalism without qualification. Whilst Bradley himself was no Naturalist philosopher by any means, his essay *My Station and its Duties*, does present us with a very refined form of Naturalism.

Bradley's Hegelian Ethics and the development of the Naturalist philosophy

It is in the essay entitled *My Station and its Duties* (chapter five of Bradley's book *Ethical Studies*, 1867), where he attempts to unify Kant's theory of duty with the Naturalism of Utilitarianism. As mentioned above, *Ethical Studies* is a progressive work in that it contains seven different proposals about, and positions on, ethical theories, each of which is seen as superior to the previous one and yet at the same time retaining some of the validity of its predecessor. Therefore, the presentation of this in essay five is seen to be an **advancement** of one type of Naturalism (ethical Hedonism and Utilitarianism) and an **improvement** on the **deontology** and **transcendental idealism** of Kant. In true Hegelian fashion, Bradley rejects both Utilitarianism and Kantian ethics but in *My Station and its Duties* combines (through dialectical synthesis) the empirical basis of Naturalism with the idea of universal obligation evident in Kant's idealist ethical theory.

Bradley is attracted by the Naturalist approach of Utilitarianism but is uncomfortable with its subjective nature and the lack of unity that it brings, as Norman confirms, the aim of *My Station and its Duties* is to present 'all these particulars into a coherent whole'. Bradley is also interested in Kant's transcendental notion of duty, but yet is dissatisfied with the detachment from the empirical realm that is, according to Norman, 'divorced from any way of becoming particular and concrete'. Norman continues, 'The initial movement is from the hedonistic utilitarianism of "pleasure for pleasure's sake" to the Kantian morality of "duty for duty's sake", and from that to the social morality of "My Station and its Duties".'



The famous philosopher Emmanuel Kant

Key terms

Deontology: ethical system that outlines a set of duties

Self-realisation: Bradley's view that the self wanders through a philosophical course of discovery that ends with the one being united with the whole

Transcendental Idealism: Kant's philosophy that the human self, or transcendental ego, constructs knowledge out of sense impressions and from universal concepts called categories that it imposes upon them

quickfire

- 1.6 How did the philosopher Hegel try to overcome dualism?

Key quotes

The concept of 'My Station and its Duties' is the core of Bradley's moral theory. (Warnock)

This view, the belief in the necessary dependence of people upon one another and upon their circumstances, is set out in explicit opposition in the first place to individualism, that is to utilitarianism interpreted as a kind of egoistic hedonism, and secondly to the Kantian and abstract formulae of duty for duty's sake. (Warnock)

Key quote

The moral world is a world of active agents, choosing things and doing things, and projecting themselves upon their environment. (Warnock)



Aldous Huxley the British author

Bradley's essay *My Station and its Duties*

In looking at Bradley's vision of ethics in *My Station and its Duties*, it may help us to consider the two opposing views that he wanted to leave behind (Hedonistic Utilitarianism and Kantian ethics). Two passages from English literature may help us explain Bradley's problem and solution from a different perspective. The first is a famous prose passage written by the Metaphysical poet John Donne in the 17th century:

No man is an island,
Entire of itself,
Every man is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main.
If a clod be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less.
As well as if a promontory were.
As well as if a manor of thy friend's
Or of thine own were:
Any man's death diminishes me,
Because I am involved in mankind,
And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls;
It tolls for thee.

(John Donne, *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions, Meditation 17*)

Although not originally meant as a poem, it expresses extremely well an aspect of Bradley's philosophy in the essay *My Station and its Duties* in that it sees a human being as an essentially social creature working inter-dependently with other human beings and affecting them within this world.

This is a far cry from the idea of an isolated self, suggested by Aldous Huxley, that is some kind of separate personal entity that looks on agonisingly from outside the world, and yet can still see and understand, what we all experience:

We live together, we act on, and react to, one another; but always and in all circumstances we are by ourselves. The martyrs go hand in hand into the arena; they are crucified alone. Embraced, the lovers desperately try to fuse their insulated ecstasies into a single self-transcendence; in vain. By its very nature every embodied spirit is doomed to suffer and enjoy in solitude. Sensations, feelings, insights, fancies — all these are private and, except through symbols and at second hand, incommunicable. We can pool information about experiences, but never the experiences themselves. From family to nation, every human group is a society of island universes. (Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception*)

The problem that Bradley had was that he wanted to demonstrate that Hedonistic Utilitarianism did not recognise the 'self' as part of the whole (as in Donne's poem) and that it was too egotistical. At the same time, he also rejected Kant's transcendental idealism of the 'self' as some kind of separate but interactive autonomous will (like Huxley's passage). Bradley's position in *My Station and its Duties* was to demonstrate that the 'isolated' self was actually part of the 'island' of the whole social organism. Bradley wished to unite Huxley's separated self to the empirical world of Donne. He writes:

For he does not even think of his separate self; he grows with his world, his mind fills and orders itself; and when he can separate himself from that world, and know himself apart from it, then by that time his self, the object of his self-consciousness, is penetrated, infected, characterised by the existence of others. Its content implies in every fibre relations of community.

For Bradley, the whole point of ethics was concerning the 'self' but not in abstract alone with no relation to the physical world, like metaphysical philosophers would suggest. Instead, the realisation should be that the 'self' could be fully appreciated when understood within, and not to be seen as separate from, the whole and the best way to understand oneself, one's purpose and one's duty was to find one's niche, or 'station' as Bradley expresses it. As Bradley writes:

'To know what a man is (as we have seen) you must not take him in isolation. He is one of a people, he was born in a family, he lives in a certain society, in a certain state. What he has to do depends on what his place is, what his function is, and that all comes from his station in the organism.'

Bradley goes on to explain that the problem with Kantian ethics was that it was far too 'abstract' and yet simultaneously 'subjective' because it was not 'real in the world' but simply an 'inner notion in moral persons'. Bradley states, 'It did not come to us as what was in fact, it came as what in itself merely was to be, an inner notion in moral persons, which, at least perhaps, had not power to carry itself out and transform the world.' In other words, although supposed to be a universal notion of duty, Kantian ethics and universalisation depended too much upon the unpredictable will of the individual.

Bradley's solution was that through a process of 'self-realisation', whereby one actively identifies one's place in the social organism of the world: 'we, in fact do, put ourselves forth and see ourselves actual in outer existence'. That is, it is the enactment and inter-action with the world around us is where the self discovers its ethical sense of duty. This is the **process** of self-realisation. Such self-realisation eradicates the sense of self-isolation that is merely a delusion. Bradley is clear that the true idea of 'self' is imbued with the society within which it operates.

Therefore, in relation to the wording of the Specification:

Ethical sentences express propositions

Bradley's essay sees ethical sentences as cognitive (verifiable) and also meaningful because they relate to this world and are not part of some abstract, intuitive conscience. Ethical sentences depict interactions with our world and recognise that we are part of a whole. For Bradley, it is because an agent's 'station' and 'duty' are to be found within the empirical realm that the nature of ethical statements expressed are both verifiable (cognitive) and relate to the facts of the world in which we live (Bradley follows Hegel and refers to this as the '**concrete universal**'). However, it is with the duty element that Bradley clearly sees as beyond the Kantian notion of *a priori* knowledge but grounded firmly in the experience of the real world. Our place and role in the historical community provide us with a measurable observable basis for a satisfying life. Our goal is to realise our true self, which we learn (through observation) in the family and community, and adapt the values of our society – and those of other societies that offer sound criticisms of our society.

Objective features of the world make propositions true or false

Bradley's essay acknowledges that our knowledge of society around us can assert, confirm or deny the claims of ethical propositions in relation to realising and finding one's station in life in accord with the process of self-realisation.

Meta-ethical statements can be seen in scientific terms

An ethical judgement of value can be made within the parameters of the empirical world without any appeal beyond this. Ethical decisions are part of the process of self-realisation, of engaging with, and becoming part of the whole through embracing the 'concrete' reality by finding one's niche, place or station of duty within the organism as a whole. This socially interactive process is the crucial aspect for Bradley.

Key quotes

Thus a morally good or a morally bad act is a kind of self-assertion or self-expression ... for when we judge a man's acts from a moral point of view it is as *his* acts, part of his whole system of actions, that we judge them. (Warnock)

To aim, therefore, at identifying oneself, whether with the object of one's thought or with the world in which one is living and acting, is to do no more than to aim to remove illusion, and to exist in reality.

(Warnock)

Key quote

The difficulty is: being limited and so not a whole, how to extend myself so as to be a whole? The answer is be a member in a whole. Here your private self, your finitude, ceases as such to exist; it becomes the function of an organism. (Bradley)

quickfire

- 1.7 What was Bradley's problem and what was the solution he proposed?

Key term

Concrete universal: Bradley's view that the self is not isolated but is derived from dialectical relations with the world

Key quote

There is nothing better than my station and its duties, nor anything higher or more truly beautiful.

(Bradley)

Bradley's starting point with ethics, according to Mary Warnock, is that he acknowledges a certain set of 'facts': 'the fact that we often feel ourselves to be under some obligation' or the fact that 'we have morally failed in some way'. This foundation, for Bradley, was the fact of 'moral consciousness' that united everyone and each goal of self-realisation served the end of what he calls the self as a whole, that is, society. Bradley's notion of self-realisation, according to Mary Warnock, is 'directed over a period of time to a way of life, a system of interconnected actions'. That is, a person's moral acts are judged over a period of time and as part of their actions overall. Morality becomes an act of self-assertion or self-expression.

Bradley's view of morality is general at best. However, any moral act destroys the illusion that we are isolated from the world and embrace reality. Therefore, the ultimate aim or end of morality is not just to remove the illusion of separateness from the world but actually it is to bring any sense of separateness to an end. In other words, through self-realisation, Bradley's Naturalistic ethic went beyond simply identifying what the 'is' purports to be but also that 'I am what I ought to be'. Bradley states: 'How does the contradiction disappear? It disappears by me identifying myself with the good will that I realise in the world, by my refusing to identify myself with the bad will of my private self.'

Key quotes

There is here no need to ask and by some scientific process find out what is moral, for morality exists all round us, and faces us, if need be, with a categorical imperative, while it surrounds us on the other side with an atmosphere of love. (Bradley)

This is the Hegelian morality which stresses the social character of the individual, and finds the content of moral life in the actions which derive from particular social relations and functions. (Norman)

Bradley writes:

What is it then that I am to realise? We have said it in 'my station and its duties'. To know what a man is (as we have seen) you must not take him in isolation. He is one of a people, he was born in a family, he lives in a certain society, in a certain state. What he has to do depends upon what his place is, what his function is, and all that comes from his station in the organism.

For Bradley, a person's individual station of duty accomplishes a universal work; through self-sacrifice the self is restored. In other words, through realising one's station and its duties within the whole moral organism we realise who we are and what behaving ethically is. This is achieved, not through biological predisposition alone, but influenced greatly by the environment around us as we grow and develop. Norman questions the biological influence of 'genetic inheritance' but sees the main strength of Bradley's argument as reflecting 'Hegel's division of ethical life into the family, civil society ... and the state'. As Warnock writes, a person is 'not born in a vacuum, but has a definite place in society and history'. Unfortunately, Bradley tends to focus mainly on the state which tends then to move into seeing morality as 'more or less equated with patriotic duty to one's country', according to Norman.

Norman notes that 'Bradley's ethics of social relations needs to be revised in this way if it is to be plausible and acceptable. It requires this radical extension of the kinds of social relations to be considered. When thus enlarged, however, it becomes a theory of tremendous importance ...'

Norman agrees that Bradley's philosophy does transcend the issues of disinterested altruism in Utilitarian theory and the explanation of altruism in Kant's appeal to

universality: 'What we are doing here is not arguing from egoism to altruism but revealing the inadequacy of the dichotomy between egoism and altruism.'

The advantages of *My Station and Its Duties*

The proposals found in the essay *My Station and its Duties* are a marked improvement on Utilitarianism and Kant's idea of duty for three reasons:

1. *My Station and its Duties* is to do with the 'concrete' and considers actual facts. It also does not waver into the unpredictable or unaccountable because 'in my station my particular duties are prescribed to me, and I have them whether I wish to or not'. The individual is 'always at work for the whole'. However, actual facts dictate that duty will not be the same at every time and in every place. Bradley writes, 'within certain limits I may choose my station according to my own liking, yet I and everyone else must have some station with duties pertaining to it, and those duties do not depend on our opinion or liking'.

Key quote

In short, man is a social being; he is real only because he is social, and can realise himself only because it is as social he realises himself. The mere individual is a delusion of theory; and the attempt to realise it in practice is the starvation and mutilation of human nature, with total sterility or the production of monstrosities. (Bradley)

2. *My Station and its Duties* is 'objective' because it brings together subject (individual) and object (the world around us). It is this 'bringing together' that is the completing of the whole and the justification of absolute objectivity for Bradley. In other words, the whole works and functions as it should do when everyone works within their particular station.

Key quote

Morality is 'relative', but nonetheless real. At every stage there is the solid fact of a world so far moralised. There is an objective morality in the accomplished will of the past and present, a higher self worked out by infinite pain, the sweat and blood of generations, and now given to me by free grace and in love and faith as a sacred trust. (Bradley)

3. *My Station and its Duties* in uniting subject and object gets rid of the contradictions found in self-seeking Utilitarianism through the empirical self and also the abstract but distanced duty of Kant which Bradley refers to as the 'non-sensuous moral ideal'. Bradley's theory is that all sense of conflict between duty and individual sensuality is resolved as all these elements become part of the wider external world. This is the concrete universal. He states:

'It is a concrete universal because it is not only above, but is within and throughout its details and is so far only as they are. It is the life, which can live only in and by them, as they are dead unless within it, it is the whole soul, which lives so far as this body is as unreal an abstraction as the body without it. It is an organism and a moral organism, and it is a conscious self-realisation, because only by the will of its self-conscious members can the moral organism give itself reality. It is the self-realisation of the whole body, because it is one and the same will which lives and acts in the life and action of each. It is the self-realisation of each member because each member cannot find the function which makes him himself, apart from the whole to which he belongs; to be himself he must go beyond himself, to live his life he must live a life which is not merely his own but, which nonetheless, but on the contrary all the more is intensely and emphatically his own individually.'



Bradley believed that through realising one's station and its duties within the whole moral organism we realise who we are and what behaving ethically is.

quickfire

- 1.8 What are the three advantages of *My Station and its Duties* according to Bradley?

Key quote

The universal which is the end, and which we have seen is concrete and does realise itself, does also more. It gets rid of the contradiction between duty and the 'empirical' self; it does not in its realisation leave me forever outside and unrealised.

(Bradley)

Key terms

Categorical imperative: Kant's view of an unconditional moral obligation which is binding in all circumstances and is not dependent on a person's inclination or purpose

Despotism: Bradley's understanding of absolute power or the ultimate controlling all

Key term

Non-sensuous moral ideal: Bradley's term for Kant's general theory of duty

Bradley's ethical guidance

So what normative ethical guidance does Bradley offer? It all appears very vague. Bradley's view is that 'there cannot be a moral philosophy which will tell us what in particular we are to do, and also that it is not the business of philosophy to do so'. Indeed, for Bradley such an idea was 'simply ludicrous'.

Despite this, throughout his essay, Bradley does offer statements such as:

- 'I am what I ought to be ...'
- 'My station and its duties teaches us to identify others and ourselves with the station we fill ...'
- It teaches us that a man who does his work in the world is good ...
- 'First in the community is the individual realized ...'
- 'The realm of morality is nothing but the absolute spiritual unity of the essence of individuals, which exists in the independent reality of them ...'
- 'The work of the individual for his needs is a satisfaction of the needs of others as much as of his own ...'
- 'Them as myself, myself as them.'

Bradley then quotes Hegel in support: 'the wisest men of antiquity have given judgement that wisdom and virtue consist in living agreeably to the Ethos of one's people'. This is about as specific as it gets for Bradley as he also states that 'the view which thinks moral philosophy is to supply us with particular moral prescriptions confuses science with art'.

Bradley's moral Naturalism 'breaks down the antithesis of **despotism** and individualism' but at the same time as denying them separately 'preserves the truth of them both'; to be an individual recognises the whole and in return the whole determines a person's individuality. Bradley's ultimate moral injunction is to be aware of the morality that is all around us, that 'faces us, if need be with a **categorical imperative**, while it surrounds us on the other side with an atmosphere of love'.

There are some commentators that have tried to contextualise what Bradley meant by the term 'my station and its duties' by arguing that the Victorian era of which Bradley was part typically emphasised a tightly organised social structure involving class, social etiquette and social expectations for moral behaviour. In short, the Lords were Lords, and the working class were working class, and one was to know one's place and passively accept it because 'obedience to the norms of society were accepted'.

On the one hand, according to Bradley's own views, there may be some truth to this view of social contextualisation; on the other hand, is not a fair reading of Bradley's 'my station and its duties' as nowhere did Bradley suggest that morality was about passive acceptance and is a far cry from the idea of self-realisation that aims to 'put ourselves forth'. Finding one's station in life and the accompanying set of moral duties is integral to the process of self-realisation and, although determined to some extent by society, it is not constrained by it. Natural talents and abilities are to be expressed as this is all part of a natural process. Indeed, Bradley recognised that morality 'evolved' but his idea of a moral evolution was part of a process of constant change and development and yet at the same time being able to retain its objectivity. Bradley writes:

'All morality is and must be "relative", because the essence of realisation is evolution through stages, and hence existence in some one stage which is not final; here, on the other hand, all morality is "absolute", because in every stage the essence of man is realised, however imperfectly.'

So the question remains, 'how do we know and come to identify what our duty is?' Bradley's solution in *My Station and its Duties* was that this 'knowledge' had a physical basis and a clear scientific explanation.

Naturalism and science: evolutionary ethics

Key quote

If naturalism be true, ethics is not an autonomous science; it is a department or an application of one or more of the natural or historical sciences. (Broad)

In terms of the Naturalistic claim that meta-ethical statements can be seen in scientific terms, Naturalism no longer remains exclusively in the domain of philosophy. Bradley recognised this in *My Station and its Duties* when he acknowledges the role of **nurture** through upbringing, psychology and social behaviour when he writes:

'If we suppose the world of relations; in which he was born and bred never to have been then we suppose the very essence of him not to be. If we take that away, we have taken him away, and hence he now is not an individual in the sense of owing nothing to the sphere of relations in which he finds himself but does not contain those relations within himself as belonging to his very being, he is what he is, in brief so far as he is what others also are.'

Bradley also acknowledges the process of evolution but views the whole 'process' through the notion of 'self-realisation': 'Evolution must evolve itself to itself, progress itself forward to a goal which is itself, development being out of nothing but was in, and bring it out, not from external compulsion, but *because* it is in'. It is true that Naturalism therefore opens itself up to the field of scientific enquiry and it is no surprise then that there has been an explosive interest in the last 40 years in explaining ethics from a scientific perspective whether it be biological or psychological.

Key quote

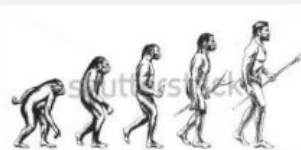
Whence morality? That is a question which has troubled philosophers since their subject was invented. Two and a half millennia of debate have, however, failed to produce a satisfactory answer. So now it is time for someone else to have a go ... Perhaps [biologists] can eventually do what philosophers have never managed, and explain moral behaviour in an intellectually satisfying way. (The Economist)

Charles Darwin once wrote: 'An American monkey, after getting drunk on brandy, would never touch it again, and thus is much wiser than most men.' This is a quite amusing but also an interesting and insightful quotation. If animals can make decisions based upon experiences of what is pleasure and pain, then in light of Naturalism this then surely begs the further question 'what can we learn from other species about the nature of ethics?' The theory of evolution or '**natural selection**' as Charles Darwin termed it, opens up the possibility that as we have evolved as a species physically, then our knowledge and understanding of our own behaviour has also evolved. Morality too, then, changes and 'evolves' – not always for the better one may add – and certainly the picture of 'progress' as Bradley saw it was more akin to a biological understanding of what the process of evolution involves.

Biologically speaking, human beings have evolved as apes and within the ape species from some distant pre-ape / pre-human relative. As part of the ape family our closest relatives are the other great apes (orangutan, gorilla, chimpanzee and

Key quote

This Hegelian account of the moral life, in which the self is fully realised by fulfilling its role in the social organism which grounds its duties, is clearly one which greatly attracted Bradley, and he seems never to have noticed the implicit tension between the metaphysical account of the self as necessarily social and the moral injunction to realise the self in society. (Candlish)



Bradley understood evolution as part of the process of self-realisation.

Key quote

Personal morality and political and social institutions cannot exist apart and (in general) the better the one, the better the other. The community is moral, because it realises personal morality; personal morality is moral, because in so far as it realises the moral whole. (Bradley)

Key terms

Natural selection: Darwin's theory of evolution

Nurture: upbringing

Key terms

Bonobo: an endangered great ape closely related to the chimpanzee and human being

Meme: an element of a culture or system of behaviour passed from one individual to another by imitation or other non-genetic means

quickfire

- 1.9 Why did Jared Diamond's book *The Third Chimpanzee* cause a stir when it was published in 1991?

Key quotes

Evolutionary ethics tries to bridge the gap between philosophy and the natural sciences by arguing that natural selection has instilled human beings with a moral sense, a disposition to be good ... Morality would be interpreted as a useful adaptation that increases the fitness of its holders by providing a selective advantage. (Schroeder IEP)

Evolutionary naturalism has been an important option in recent philosophy, not only in ethics but in epistemology and philosophy of mind. Naturalists have sometimes made exaggerated claims about the importance of evolution for ethics. (Rachels)

How can a trait that was developed under the pressure of natural selection explain moral actions that go far beyond reciprocal altruism or enlightened self-interest? (Schroeder IEP)

bonobo). The bonobo and chimpanzee have more in common with humans than gorillas and are our closest living relatives, so much so that in 1991 Jared Diamond's book *The Third Chimpanzee* caused a stir when it argued that humans, bonobos and chimpanzees should form the same sub-category within the great apes.

With such advancements in our scientific understanding of biology, it is no surprise that one of the most recent areas to contribute to the debate about Ethical Naturalism is the field of evolutionary ethics. A combination of psychological and biological approaches, evolutionary ethics tries to demonstrate that ethics can be explained through empirical means, that is, a purely physical as opposed to metaphysical, explanation. This has famously been explored by evolutionary scientists such as Professor Richard Dawkins in his explanation of the '**meme**' and also by psychology and behavioural science even to the point where experiments on the impact of smells on 'moral behaviour' have been carried out – one only has to browse through the annals of the journal *Psychological Science* to see! One such experiment observed that a team of researchers found that when people were in a room sprayed with a citrus-scented cleanser, they behaved more fairly when playing a classic trust game; another experiment suggested that the smell of cleanser made subjects more likely to volunteer for a charity; and, one study concluded that pleasant scents can trigger generosity!

For the scientific study of ethics, the explanation for ethical behaviour can also be found by looking at our behaviour towards each other and providing scientific analysis. Dawkins has even explained possible reasons for altruism. Some, however, feel that this is no good for the philosophical study of ethics as it may explain **how** ethical behaviour may work but not always **why** ethics works this way. We shall look at this further and evaluate such claims in the AO2 sections.

AO1 Activity

There has been a lot to comprehensively digest with the work of F. H. Bradley and so try to design a flow diagram that indicates the key aspects of each section, e.g. Hegel's dialectical, Bradley's developed Naturalism, *My Station and its Duties*, advantages, moral guidance, science.

Study tip

In answering a question on Ethical Naturalism, it may be helpful to mention the two different examples studied here: Utilitarianism and Bradley's *My Station and its Duties* to demonstrate that you are aware that there are different expressions of Ethical Naturalism.



The bonobo and chimpanzee have more in common with humans than gorillas and are our closest living relative.

Challenges to Naturalism

There have been many challenges to Naturalism as an adequate explanation for the nature of ethics. The challenges are not restricted to those listed in this part of the Specification, as challenges also include alternative theories that have been proposed, such as Intuitionism and Emotivism. Indeed, as this theme progresses you will see how each theory interacts and responds to another with challenges. In terms of Naturalism itself, immediately there are three.

Hume's Law (the is-ought problem)

Possibly the most famous objection to Naturalism is that in maintaining that ethical propositions can be identified from natural phenomena, this then reduces ethical propositions to observational or descriptive meaning or a mere explanation of what is happening. For example, when a person gives money freely to another who is less fortunate, we can see that it has brought more comfort to the life of the less fortunate and had no real material detriment for the giver. However, to draw from this a conclusion that 'it is good for the more fortunate person to give money to a less fortunate person' has nothing at all to do with the actual actions. A new layer of knowledge has been introduced that is not part of the original state of play. This new layer, according to critics of Naturalism, is NOT part of the actions but something quite separate. Logically, one cannot draw out from the argument an element that was not included in the first place. That is, to say what **is** happening does not logically lead to the conclusion of what **ought** to happen. The observation was first put forward by David Hume and is sometimes referred to as **Hume's Law** or Hume's Guillotine and states that it is not logical to derive an 'ought' from an 'is'. Hume writes:

'In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remarked, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when of a sudden I am surprised to find, that instead of the usual copulations, is, and is not, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an ought, or an ought not. This change is imperceptible; but is, however, of the last consequence. For as this ought, or ought not, expresses some new relation or affirmation, it is necessary that it should be observed and explained; and at the same time that a reason should be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it.'

In terms of moral propositions, Hume's view is debated and is related to another one of his principles, often referred to as **Hume's Fork** (see diagram). This sees the principles of *a priori* knowledge (conceptual and prior to experience) and *a posteriori* knowledge (relating to experience) as completely separate types of knowledge, and just as the prongs on a fork cannot converge, neither can the types of knowledge. For Hume, a moral proposition is neither stating a propositional, that is, an *a posteriori* empirical 'fact', nor is it an *a priori* truth and so does not really belong to the world of logic or empiricism; such a statement is a statement of value or judgement that cannot be deduced logically or demonstrated empirically from a series of events. The philosophers Bertrand Russell and Alfred Ayer made Hume's Fork a basis for further development of their own empiricist philosophies, and especially in the case of Ayer, had a marked influence on their moral philosophy.

Specification content

Challenges: Hume's Law (the is-ought problem); Moore's Naturalistic Fallacy (moral language is indefinable); the Open Question Argument (moral facts cannot be reduced to natural properties).

Key terms

Hume's Fork: sees the principles of *a priori* knowledge (conceptual and prior to experience) and *a posteriori* knowledge (relating to experience) as completely separate types of knowledge

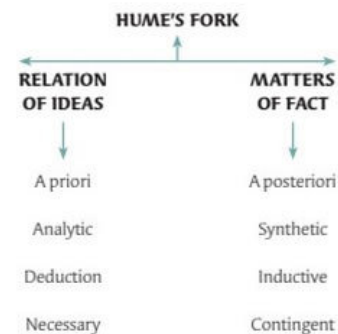
Hume's Law: that an 'ought' cannot be derived from an 'is'

Key quote

Naturalism in ethics, like attempts to square the circle and to 'justify induction', will constantly recur so long as there are people who have not understood the fallacy involved. (R. M. Hare)

Key quote

Naturalism provides a view from the outside, and from that perspective, it provides all sorts of interesting information. But it misses something that can be experienced only from the inside, namely the normative force of the reasoning. (Rachels)



Professor Philip Stratton-Lake of Reading University explains the 'is/ought' challenge to Naturalism with reference to cooking a lobster!

'Empirical investigation can tell us many things about the world, but it does not seem that it can tell whether certain acts are right or wrong, good or bad... For instance, if science told us that a lobster's neurological system is sufficiently advanced for it to feel pain, we'd revise our view about the permissibility of boiling them alive. But all that science would have told us is that lobsters feel pain when boiled alive. Science does not inform us that boiling them alive is wrong. That seems to be something that cannot be known empirically.'

This is a good analogy but it also reveals something else about Hume's argument when Stratton-Lake states, 'we'd revise our view about the permissibility of boiling them alive'. To illustrate this we can return to the example first put forward:

- A person gives money freely to another who is less fortunate.
- We can see that it has brought more comfort to the life of the less fortunate.
- The action also had no real material detriment for the giver.
- A conclusion is drawn that 'if it causes us no material detriment we **ought** to give money to a less fortunate person'.

The matter of fact, following Hume's analysis, is that the conclusion drawn has nothing at all to do with the actual actions themselves and that we have introduced an extra element of judgement or value that is not inherent in the actions themselves. The example has merely demonstrated that one thing has led to another. The conclusion is not valid.

We observe the actions but unless we have, say, a premise that 'comfort and not creating financial difficulties for oneself = good', and that we 'ought to pursue this' then we cannot induce the conclusion we 'ought'. In other words, if we want this conclusion to be derived from the reasoning, then we must reveal the hidden premise that could suggest it.

Even then, this premise is incorrect because it has equated 'good' with 'comfort' and 'financial health' but the question still remains, how has this been established? Can this be demonstrated? We cannot do this without first defining what 'good' is. If not then we must reject the premise and without a premise we see that it has failed again.

This is important for two reasons:

The first is to do with what Hume was actually stating in the extract above. There is disagreement amongst philosophers. Traditionally, it has been understood as meaning **ethical propositions can never be considered as empirically valid**. However, some philosophers question this conclusion and argue that Hume was simply pointing out that **the logic was inconsistent and nothing more**. Secondly, it is exactly this point about the logic that is the starting point for our next challenge from Moore, namely that if we are to discuss ethics meaningfully then we need to establish the most basic of questions: 'what do we mean by "good"?' Moore writes,

... this question, how good is to be defined, is the most fundamental question in all Ethics... Its definition is, therefore, the most essential point in the definition of Ethics ... Unless this first question be fully understood, and its true answer clearly recognised, the rest of Ethics is as good as useless from the point of view of systematic knowledge. (Moore)

Challenges: Moore's Naturalistic Fallacy (moral language is indefinable)

We will be looking at the work of G. E. Moore in the next section on Intuitionism. Indeed, it was Moore's critique and rejection of Naturalism that was a crucial element in the development of his own theory of ethics. Moore's contention was

Key quote

The most important objection to ethical naturalism is that it leaves out the normative aspect of ethics. Since the whole point of ethics is to guide action, there could hardly be a more serious complaint. The objection can be expressed in various ways. One way, which we have already considered, is to say that we cannot derive 'ought' from 'is'. Another is to say that ethical assertions are prescriptive, whereas their naturalistic translations are merely descriptive. Or it may just be said: look at the whole naturalistic account and you will find nothing that tells you what to do. (Rachels)

quickfire

1.10 By which term is Hume's Law also known?

quickfire

1.11 What do the two prongs of Hume's Fork represent?

very simple. He began his ethical enquiries with what he considered the most obvious question to ask: 'what is good?'

By this, Moore is concerned with what he calls the 'intrinsic value' of good as an end in itself. He sees this as a peculiar use of the word good that differentiates it from good or right actions that are a means to an end in bringing about good. Ethics, then, is based entirely on the underpinning notion of what good 'is'.

Moore writes:

Let us, then, consider this position. My point is that **good is a simple notion**, just as yellow is a simple notion; that, just as you cannot, by any manner of means, explain to anyone who does not already know it, what yellow is, so you cannot explain what good is. Definitions of the kind that I was asking for, definitions which describe the real nature of the object or notion denoted by a word, and which do not merely tell us what the word is used to mean, are only possible when the object or notion in question is something complex.

Moore is not saying that things can't be 'good'; indeed, there are many things that can be identified by their 'goodness', for example, pleasure, love, happiness, health and so forth. What Moore was pointing out was that a particular quality that is described as 'good' cannot be used to define 'good'; in other words, we cannot identify a single property or quality that explains what goodness in itself 'is'. We can say a door is yellow so that it is a yellow door, but when we ask what yellow is, we do not reply 'it is door or dooriness'. A yellow door would help us understand the notion of yellow but the door does not define what yellow 'is'. In the same way with 'good', we can identify pleasure as good but to answer that 'goodness' is pleasure, that is – pleasure alone – does not satisfy our quest for a definition as there are many other things that are also good or a means to goodness. There is no shortage of possible definitions: naturalness, virtue, wisdom, love, peace, duty, etc. This means that good in itself cannot be a natural property and to identify it with a particular natural property does not define good. Good in itself is 'unanalysable'. Moore called this the Naturalistic Fallacy and just as Hume argued you cannot derive an ought from is, Moore argued you cannot define goodness through nature and experience. Good is simply good.

Key quotes

If I am asked, 'What is good?' my answer is that good is good, and that is the end of the matter. Or if I am asked 'How is good to be defined?' my answer is that it cannot be defined, and that is all I have to say about it. (Moore)

It does not matter what we call it provided we recognise it when we meet it. (Moore on the Naturalistic Fallacy)

Another way Moore tried to explain it was in relation to 'parts'. He argued that things are often defined in relation to their constituent parts, for example, a horse, namely four legs, etc., or a chariot, four wheels, etc. The problem with good is that it has no constituent parts itself, it is just a simple notion or concept. He writes:

'Good, then, if we mean by it that quality which we assert to belong to a thing, when we say that the thing is good, is incapable of any definition, in the most important sense of that word. The most important sense of definition is that in which a definition states 'what are the parts which invariably compose a certain whole?'; and in this sense good has no definition because it is simple and has no parts. It is one of those innumerable objects of thought which are themselves incapable of definition, because they are the ultimate terms of reference to which whatever is capable of definition must be defined.'



The door cannot define yellow in the same way an action cannot reveal what 'good' means.

Key term

Naturalistic fallacy: Moore's view that it is a logical error to explain that which is good reductively in terms of natural properties such as 'pleasant' or 'desirable'

Key quote

It is an enquiry to which most special attention should be directed; since this question, how good is to be defined, is the most fundamental question in all Ethics. That which is meant by good is, in fact, except its converse bad, the only simple object of thought which is peculiar to Ethics. Its definition is, therefore, the most essential point in the definition of Ethics; and moreover a mistake with regard to it entails a far larger number of erroneous ethical judgements than any other. Unless this first question be fully understood, and its true answer clearly recognised, the rest of Ethics is as good as useless from the point of view of systematic knowledge.

(Moore)

quickfire

1.12 When Moore stated 'good is a simple notion' what did he mean?

Key quote

Moore makes it perfectly clear that what he thinks you cannot legitimately do to 'good' is to analyse it. It is impossible to name its parts because it has no parts. (Warnock)

In particular, Moore was keen to attack the principles of Utilitarianism that clearly equated the definition of good with pleasure. However, ethics is about discovering any property that defines goodness that is potentially part of other properties – a sort of common denominator. For example, pleasure, happiness and love may be analysed to see whether or not we can identify the 'goodness' elements within them. Since we cannot discover this, we cannot say that they are all exactly the same as good as they are all very different; this would be nonsense. However, that is exactly what theories such as Utilitarianism do in identifying goodness as happiness.

Moore writes:

'Yet a mistake of this simple kind has commonly been made about good ... Ethics aims at discovering what are those other properties belonging to all things which are good. But far too many philosophers have thought that when they named those other properties they were actually defining good; that these properties, in fact, were simply not other, but absolutely and entirely the same with goodness. This view I propose to call the **naturalistic fallacy** and of it I shall now endeavour to dispose.'

Therefore, Moore concluded that:

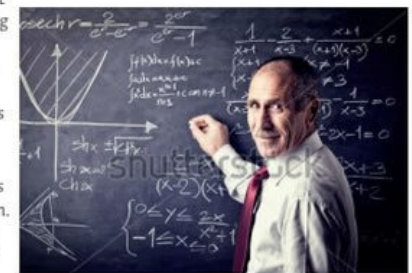
- Good is a simple concept or notion that cannot be broken down;
- Good, in itself, it is not relational, nor dependent upon any other constituent part and neither is it a constituent part itself;
- The term 'good' is therefore indefinable;

and that not to recognise this would render any pursuit of ethics as 'useless' as he confirms: 'Unless this first question be fully understood, and its true answer clearly recognised, the rest of Ethics is as good as useless from the point of view of systematic knowledge.'

G. E. Moore also then relates the implications of this to his second question 'what ought we to do?' Whilst Hume's Law made an observation about logical process and inducing an inappropriate conclusion from what 'is' the case, Moore focuses on the linguistic process of meaning and the nonsensical conclusions that had to be drawn if one identifies good with a natural quality.

He looks at Mill's Utilitarianism and explains the linguistic contradiction in trying to find an 'ought' from something that is unanalysable. He finds simply that in setting to find out what one 'ought' to do from identifying the meaning of good with pleasure, one only arrives at the end of not what we ought to do, but of what we do already do. Moore's reasoning is as follows:

- If we think that we can define good by a natural quality such as 'what is desired' we are mistaken. Then to argue that we 'ought to pursue desire because it is good' is another fallacy.



A closed question always invites a definitive answer.

'That fallacy, I explained, consists in the contention that good means nothing but some simple or complex notion, that can be defined in terms of natural qualities. In Mill's case, good is thus supposed to mean simply what is desired; and what is desired is something which can thus be defined in natural terms.' (Moore)

- We are mistaken because it creates a **tautology**. That is, if 'desire' is good then we ought to seek desire. Unfortunately, this then means that we ought to seek what we do in fact seek.

'Mill tells us that we ought to desire something (an ethical proposition), because we actually do desire it; but if his contention that "I ought to desire" means nothing but "I do desire" were true, then he is only entitled to say, "We do desire so and so, because we do desire it"; and that is not an ethical proposition at all; it is a mere tautology.' (Moore)

- Moore's contention is that since good is indefinable we cannot identify it as a natural quality because when we consider what this implies ethically in terms of duty, obligation and 'ought' (normative proposition) all we are doing is describing what we are already doing and not a normative proposition.

'The whole object of Mill's book is to help us to discover what we ought to do; but in fact, by attempting to define the meaning of this "ought", he has completely debarred himself from ever fulfilling that object: he has confined himself to telling us what we do do.' (Moore)

Challenges: The Open Question Argument (moral facts cannot be reduced to natural properties)

The open question argument, as it is called, is really a demonstration of the futility of defining good within the parameters of empiricism; quite simply, all attempts will fail because they still leave an unanswered question about 'good'. In other words, if we can define the ethical notion of good then we can state precisely what that good is in relation to psychological, biological or sociological truths. This would be a simple 'closed question' with a definitive answer. For example, 'Have you done your homework?' or 'Shall we have tea at 6pm?' or 'is the sum of $2 + 2$ equal to 4?'. The answer to such questions can be a straight, 'yes' or 'no'. The problem is that this does not work with good.

The main issue is that in attempting to define good by natural properties (e.g. pleasure) we are actually posing an open question, that is, a question with no definitive answer. This is because we still can legitimately ask 'is pleasure good?' once we have defined good as pleasure. It would not be a meaningless question to ask. But if we have succeeded in defining good then we should not need to ask this further question because it would be illogical.

- For example, if 'pleasure is the same as good' then we could say 'whatever promotes pleasure is good' but this would be really an unnecessary statement equivalent to 'whatever promotes pleasure promotes pleasure!'
- Also, if we ask whether or not the promotion of pleasure is good, then we will in effect be asking 'are good things good?' which is, of course, nonsense.
- **Since it is never absurd to ask of natural properties 'is this good?',** we know that we can logically ask the question 'is the promotion of pleasure good?' and, in fact, it is **not nonsense** because pleasure is a complex notion and not a simple notion.
- Therefore, if that is the case, then good cannot be identified as, or defined by, natural properties which are by their very nature complex notions.

Key term

Tautology: saying the same thing twice over in different words

quickfire

1.13 What is a closed question?

Moore writes:

'The hypothesis that disagreement about the meaning of good is disagreement with regard to the correct analysis of a given whole, may be most plainly seen to be incorrect by consideration of the fact that, whatever definition may be offered, it may always be asked, with significance, of the complex so defined, whether it is itself good.'

Key quotes

Moore claims that we can test any naturalistic definition of goodness by asking whether something that has those natural properties is good, and then seeing whether this question is open or closed. If the definition is true, then the question must be closed, so if it is open, the definition must be false. (Stanford, Stratton-Lake)

Suppose, for instance, someone proposes that goodness can be defined in terms of causality and pleasure. To be good, they claim, is just to cause pleasure. Moore's view is that if this definition were correct, it would be a closed question whether something that causes pleasure is good. For in effect one would be asking whether something that causes pleasure causes pleasure, and that is clearly a closed question. But, Moore insists, the question 'is something that causes pleasure good?' is an open question. One could, without conceptual confusion, debate whether something that causes pleasure is good. So goodness cannot be defined as that which causes pleasure. (Stanford / Stratton-Lake)

AO1 Activity

Go through the three challenges again and try to summarise them yourself so that you can deliver a quick presentation to someone else that will last no longer than one minute.

Study tip

Try to think of your own challenges to Naturalism or make a list of what you consider to be its strengths and what you consider to be its weaknesses.



It is a tautology to say 'The wealthy person had a lot of money'.

AO1 Developing skills

It is now important to consider the information that has been covered in this section; however, the information in its raw form is too extensive and so has to be processed in order to meet the requirements of the examination. This can be achieved by practising more advanced skills associated with AO1. The exercises that run throughout this book will help you to do this and prepare you for the examination. For assessment objective 1 (AO1), which involves demonstrating 'knowledge' and 'understanding' skills, we are going to focus on different ways in which the skills can be demonstrated effectively, and also refer to how the performance of these skills is measured (see generic band descriptors for A2 [WJEC] AO1 or A Level [Eduqas] AO1).

- **Your task is this:** Below is a **summary of Naturalism**. It is 279 words long. You need to use this for an answer but could not repeat all of this in an essay under examination conditions so you will have to condense the material. Discuss which points you think are the most important and then re-draft into your own summary of about 140 words.

The most important point about ethical Naturalism is that it supports the view that objective moral laws exist independently of human beings and are grounded in the empirical nature of existence. Having established the link between an objective external existence (realism) and that a cognitivist approach can verify or establish the truth or not (objective knowledge) of what we experience (empiricism), then it logically follows that what we know about what we experience makes our ethical statements objective. Therefore, we can recognise objective moral laws that exist independently of human beings and that are located firmly in the world around us.

In other words, ethical language can be understood by referring to, and closely analysing, what we experience from the natural world around us. For example, we all understand that to experience the kindness of another is a 'good' experience and that to experience cruelty from another is a 'bad' experience. Taken further, this then means that our experiences have meaning because we can verify with others that kind acts are 'good' and cruel acts are 'bad' because of the happiness or suffering that these experiences contain. We can all recognise this and this means the same to everyone. If the ethical descriptions and statements have meaning for everyone then it also follows that they are objective truths and universal. We can discuss ethics meaningfully and establish certain propositions about good and bad ethical behaviour. If these experiences are uniform and universal then this also means that the statements 'kindness is an ethically good act' and 'cruelty is an ethically bad act' are true because these experiences are grounded in the objective features of the world around us.

When you have completed the task, refer to the band descriptors for A2 (WJEC) or A Level (Eduqas) and in particular have a look at the demands described in the higher band descriptors towards which you should be aspiring. Ask yourself:

- Does my work demonstrate thorough, accurate and relevant knowledge and understanding of religion and belief?
- Is my work coherent (consistent or make logical sense), clear and well organised? **(WJEC band descriptor only but still important to consider for Eduqas)**
- Will my work, when developed, be an extensive and relevant response which is specific to the focus of the task?
- Does my work have extensive depth and/or suitable breadth and have excellent use of evidence and examples?
- If appropriate to the task, does my response have thorough and accurate reference to sacred texts and sources of wisdom?
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- Will my answer, when developed and extended to match what is expected in

Key skills Theme 1

This Theme has tasks that deal with the basics of AO1 in terms of prioritising and selecting the key relevant information, presenting this and then using evidence and examples to support and expand upon this.

Key skills**Knowledge involves:**

Selection of a range of (thorough) accurate and relevant information that is directly related to the specific demands of the question.

This means:

- Selecting relevant material for the question set
- Being focused in explaining and examining the material selected.

Understanding involves:

Explanation that is extensive, demonstrating depth and/or breadth with excellent use of evidence and examples including (where appropriate) thorough and accurate supporting use of sacred texts, sources of wisdom and specialist language.

This means:

- Effective use of examples and supporting evidence to establish the quality of your understanding
- Ownership of your explanation that expresses personal knowledge and understanding and NOT just reproducing a chunk of text from a book that you have rehearsed and memorised.

This section covers AO2 content and skills**Specification content**

Whether ethical and non-ethical statements are the same.

AO2 Activity

As you read through this section try to do the following:

- Pick out the different lines of argument that are presented in the text and identify any evidence given in support.
- For each line of argument try to evaluate whether or not you think this is strong or weak.
- Think of any questions you may wish to raise in response to the arguments.

This Activity will help you to start thinking critically about what you read and help you to evaluate the effectiveness of different arguments and from this develop your own observations, opinions and points of view that will help with any conclusions that you make in your answers to the AO2 questions that arise.

Issues for analysis and evaluation**Whether ethical and non-ethical statements are the same**

This argument is really evaluating whether or not ethical statements are related to the empirical world just as non-ethical statements are and concerns the debate between Ethical Naturalism and Intuitionism mainly.

Ethical naturalism is empiricist in orientation and argues that ethical propositions are no more than statements of fact that can be justified by appeal to the natural world, therefore ethical statements are not 'beyond' non-ethical statements. Although there are different ways to interpret ethical statements, they all relate to what is actually real and objective. For instance, Mill sees ethical statements as, really, statements about pleasure or pain. For Bradley, it is all about realising the concrete universal and through self-realisation finding one's duty. These different ways at least agree that ethical and non-ethical statements are the same. Evolutionary ethics argues that it is all to do with how we assess and adapt biologically, psychologically and socially just like Charles Darwin's drunken monkey. If we know that fire is hot then we do not touch the flame; how is this any different from deciding how to live ethically when we know that violence causes pain and so avoid it?

We may feel, deeply, that a moral sentiment is 'real', absolute and provable like any claim about the 'objective world'; for example, it is directly related to actions that we can work out a sense of justice in society. Indeed, this viewpoint reflects not only Naturalism but also moral viewpoints based on religion and revelation. For example, the parable of the Good Samaritan in Christianity teaches through clear actions that it is good to help someone in need or who is suffering. There is nothing metaphysical about that.

It is ethical dilemmas and problems that cause debate and disagreement but surely this is all part of learning how to best adapt to life in a collaborative way? One of the most famous statements of Naturalist ethics has been made by Richard Dawkins who argued that 'selfish genes' can explain the behaviour of humanity by using evidence of the evolution of certain behaviour traits in apes. Dawkins identifies different ways in which 'selfish genes' may bring about altruistic behaviour in individuals. Kin selection is no more than genes replicating themselves by creating individuals who are prone to nurture and defend; we see this in parental love and family affections. Dawkins explains collaboration and sharing but most importantly what he calls the Handicap Principle: Here, Dawkins demonstrates that some animals take on the most dangerous jobs of watching for predators and providing for the less fortunate. For Dawkins, this all explains the general capacity for normative judgement and guidance, and the tendency to exercise this capacity in social life. Animals also demonstrate sentiments and are able to detect them in others, can be motivated by others, make simple judgements and exhibit certain particular systems of norms or types of practice. This all shows that morality is actually embedded in the process of evolution and has a purely naturalistic explanation.

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The problem is one of finding room for ethics, or placing ethics within the disenchanted, non-ethical order which we inhabit, and of which we are a part. (Blackburn)

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Key quote

The problem is one of finding room for ethics, or placing ethics within the disenchanted, non-ethical order which we inhabit, and of which we are a part. (Blackburn)

Key quote

There is nothing about simple properties which implies that they are non-natural. There is nothing incoherent about a simple natural or metaphysical property. Consequently, one cannot conclude that goodness is a non-natural property simply by showing that it is a simple property. One has to argue for non-naturalness in some other way. (Hutchinson)

However, there are clear challenges to Naturalism. Moore argued that contrary to ethical Naturalism, ethical statements are *a priori* matters of truth just as with mathematics and can be identified through use of one's intuition. In this sense ethical propositions are very different to non-ethical propositions. Firstly, Hume's 'is-ought problem' can be used to show that Naturalism is wrong – you cannot derive a value from a fact. Therefore, ethical statements are not the same as non-ethical statements. Secondly, the ethical term 'good' is indefinable because it is a simple notion like the word yellow but it is also self-evident; non-ethical statements are not self-evident and so not the same as ethical statements. Thirdly, the term good always raises an open-ended question when we attempt to define its meaning with reference to a natural or non-ethical property. All these arguments present ethical propositions and language as very different from non-ethical statements.

It could be argued that ethical language is value laden in a different way from non-ethical language. For example, the statement 'this is a good door' is not an ethical statement and yet uses the word good. The judgement made may be down to its specific purpose, such as opening easily, looking good, retaining heat in a house or to its durability. However, when we make the statement, 'this is a good person', the goodness element is not entirely about 'purpose' if we did have one but is more about the person's moral qualities. It is something very different and so linguistically, ethical statements are very different from non-ethical statements. We could maintain that ethical and non-ethical statements are the same, as maintained by Ethical Naturalism. Ethical Naturalism would reject Moore's linguistic analysis for a more pragmatic and empirical approach to ethics. Ethics is about action and not about *a priori* concepts. Evidence abounds to support this and also the fact that contemporary science (biology and psychology) are working towards a suitable, empirical explanation.

Alternatively, we could conclude that ethical and non-ethical statements are entirely different matters. This could be by arguing that ethical understanding of good is innate and accessed through our intuition. The support of ethics being about values, debates and judgements adds strength to this position. The evaluative nature of ethics, however, is not confined to ethics alone and does have some relevance in non-ethical statements.

There may be somewhere where the two converge. Bradley attempted to do this but he, himself admitted that he had failed to unite the conceptual with the empirical and had to find an alternative answer to Hume's Fork.

Study tip

It is vital for AO2 that you actually discuss arguments and not just explain what someone may have stated. Try to ask yourself, 'was this a fair point to make?', 'is the evidence sound enough?', 'is there anything to challenge this argument?', 'is this a strong or weak argument?' Such critical analysis will help you develop your evaluation skills.

Key questions

Is empiricism (or logical positivism) all that there is to our knowledge of the world?

Does the fact that there are different naturalist theories weaken this meta-ethical view?

Does the fact that we 'feel' an ethical viewpoint is prove-able or objective mean that it really is?

Is it true that you cannot derive values from facts?

If good is indefinable, as Moore says, why then do so many still persist in offering definitions of this term?

So what possible conclusions could we arrive at?

AO2 Activity

List some conclusions that could be drawn from the AO2 reasoning from the above text; try to aim for at least three different possible conclusions. Consider each of the conclusions and collect brief evidence to support each conclusion from the AO1 and AO2 material for this topic. Select the conclusion that you think is most convincing and explain why it is so. Try to contrast this with the weakest conclusion in the list, justifying your argument with clear reasoning and evidence.

The extent to which ethical statements are not objective.

The extent to which ethical statements are not objective

Ethical Naturalism in some sense promotes the views that ethical propositions are objective because they can be evidenced through empirical means. So, for example, Mill (Utilitarianism) and Bradley (*My Station and Its Duties*) felt that their respective ideals such as happiness and duty were perfectly objective.

However, this may not be the case at all. Even David Hume recognised the fact that ethical statements were value statements and meant something very different from empirical 'facts'. Hume was the first philosopher to suggest that they do not have meaning but are just expressions of emotions or approval and disapproval. If this is accepted as the case then empiricism cannot accept the claims to objectivity of an Ethical Naturalism as proposed by Mill (Utilitarianism) and Bradley (*My Station and Its Duties*). In fact, values suggest personal views and personal views differ. This makes ethical statements more subjective. Mackie suggested this when he argued: 'In short, this argument from relativity has some force simply because the actual variations in the moral codes are more readily explained by the hypothesis that they reflect ways of life than by the hypothesis that they express perceptions, most of them seriously inadequate and badly distorted, of objective values.'

This line of argument asks that if morality were objective, why are there so many arguments about morality throughout the world? Indeed, the very fact that this course considers Divine Command Theory, Virtue Theory, Ethical Egoism, Naturalism, Intuitionism and Emotivism presents a fundamental challenge to the claim that ethical statements are objective due to the great variety and difference in how ethical statements are explained. How does a person distinguish between something actually being right and it merely seeming right to that person? It still may be concluded by that person that their view is right, but someone like Moore or Prichard who appeal to duty and intuition can only respond in a moral argument by saying, 'I know I am right' when there is a disagreement over an ethical issue or a challenge to their ethical theories.

Key quote

Disagreements about moral codes seems to reflect people's adherence to and participation in different ways of life. The causal connection seems to be mainly that way round: it is that people approve of monogamy because they participate in a monogamous way of life. (Mackie)

One strength of Naturalism is that it makes morality objective, and this has the strength of raising morality above personal opinion. Through Naturalism you can arrive at absolutes (such as murder is wrong) and this matches a common-sense view of ethics. We have seen this work in Natural Law Theory, and the Roman Catholic Church amongst others accept this view. Indeed, Naturalism entails scientific testing of degrees of morality, for example, as we have seen through the application of Utilitarianism to the needs of society. This approach also reflects a modern worldview that we need to test statements (scientific, empirical approach) and not just accept blindly a claim to objective knowledge, especially when it has been pointed out that such knowledge is to do with 'feelings'.

Despite this, one could argue that and identify that there are common elements of morality that span across the globe, through culture, language and geography. This is a demonstration, not only that a particular Naturalistic ethical theory is founded in objectivity, but that morality in general is as well.

There are some important issues to consider here. What do we mean by 'objective'? Do we mean that ethical statements are consistent and are applied

consistently? Do we mean they are *a priori* objective as with mathematical formulae? Is objectivity just an abstract concept that has no real appropriation for the real world? Do we mean they are beyond question or challenge? Or, do we mean that they mean the same for all and can be recognised and followed by all? Is objectivity perceived by all? To each question we may get a different answer as to whether or not ethical statements are objective.

There is also the question as to whether ethical statements can really be objective if there are so many theories, or that one theory develops from another; for example, Bradley's claim that through the dialectical methodology we can arrive at an ultimate answer

In general, although not always, the concept of objectivity is associated with the meta-physical and deontological systems, that are *a priori*, conceptual whereas ethical systems that are more empirically based do recognise some form of subjectivity.

Key quote

In short, this argument from relativity has some force simply because the actual variations in the moral codes are more readily explained by the hypothesis that they reflect ways of life than by the hypothesis that they express perceptions, most of them seriously inadequate and badly distorted, of objective values. (Mackie)

There are several possible conclusions. The most obvious is that ethical statements do reflect objective and absolute truths. Alternatively, ethical statements are merely a 'sign of the times', that is, products of human culture. Overall, however, it appears that all we can ascertain is that some ethical statements and positions are objective whereas others are contingent and reflect the need for human interpretation and creativity.

Study tip

It is vital for AO2 that you actually discuss arguments and not just explain what someone may have stated. Try to ask yourself, 'was this a fair point to make?', 'is the evidence sound enough?', 'is there anything to challenge this argument?', 'is this a strong or weak argument?' Such critical analysis will help you develop your evaluation skills.

Key questions

In terms of Moore's claim for objectivity based on intuitionism, what prevents this from simply being Moore's own subjectivity?

Do statements of value really not have any factual meaning?

Does the reality of so many different ethical systems really mean that ethics is relative? Can't there be 'more' or 'less' true ethical approaches?

If something is common sense and/or true across cultures (don't commit murder), does that really mean it is objective and absolute?

Can scientific testing really establish what should constitute moral behaviour?

AO2 Activity

List some conclusions that could be drawn from the AO2 reasoning from the above text; try to aim for at least three different possible conclusions. Consider each of the conclusions and collect brief evidence to support each conclusion from the AO1 and AO2 material for this topic. Select the conclusion that you think is most convincing and explain why it is so. Try to contrast this with the weakest conclusion in the list, justifying your argument with clear reasoning and evidence.

Key skills Theme 1

This Theme has tasks that deal with the basics of AO2 in terms of developing an evaluative style, building arguments and raising critical questions.

Key skills

Analysis involves:

Identifying issues raised by the materials in the AO1, together with those identified in the AO2 section, and presents sustained and clear views, either of scholars or from a personal perspective ready for evaluation.

This means:

- That your answers are able to identify key areas of debate in relation to a particular issue
- That you can identify, and comment upon, the different lines of argument presented by others
- That your response comments on the overall effectiveness of each of these areas or arguments.

Evaluation involves:

Considering the various implications of the issues raised based upon the evidence gleaned from analysis and provides an extensive detailed argument with a clear conclusion.

This means:

- That your answer weighs up the consequences of accepting or rejecting the various and different lines of argument analysed
- That your answer arrives at a conclusion through a clear process of reasoning.

AO2 Developing skills

It is now important to consider the information that has been covered in this section; however, the information in its raw form is too extensive and so has to be processed in order to meet the requirements of the examination. This can be achieved by practising more advanced skills associated with AO2. The exercises that run throughout this book will help you to do this and prepare you for the examination. For assessment objective 2 (AO2), which involves 'critical analysis' and 'evaluation' skills, we are going to focus on different ways in which the skills can be demonstrated effectively, and also refer to how the performance of these skills is measured (see generic band descriptors for A2 [WJEC] AO2 or A Level [Eduqas] AO2).

► **Your task is this:** Below is a **summary of two different points of view concerning ethical Naturalism**. It is 150 words long. You want to use these two views and lines of argument for an evaluation; however, to just list them is not really evaluating them. Present these two views in a more evaluative style by firstly condensing each argument and then, secondly, commenting on how effective each one is (weak or strong are good terms to start with). Allow about 200 words in total.

- Moral naturalism, while attractive, has been dismissed by many in the light of G. E. Moore's Open Question Argument (Moore 1903, 5–21). Moore's thought is as follows. Suppose 'N' to abbreviate a term expressing the concept of some natural property N, maximally conducive to human welfare perhaps [2], and suppose a naturalist proposes to define goodness as N-ness. We swiftly show this to be false by supposing someone were to ask of something acknowledged to be N, whether it was good. This, Moore urges, is an open question. The point is, essentially, that it is not a stupid question in the sort of way, 'I acknowledge that Lenman is an unmarried man but is he, I wonder, a bachelor?' is a stupid question: if you need to ask it, you don't understand it. Given what the words concerned mean, the question of whether a given unmarried man is a bachelor is, in Moore's terminology, closed. So goodness and N-ness, unlike bachelorhood and unmarried-man-hood, are not one and the same.
- For Bradley, it is because an agent's 'station' and 'duty' are to be found within the empirical realm that the nature of ethical statements expressed is both verifiable (cognitive) and relates to the facts of the world in which we live (realism). However, it is with the duty element that Bradley clearly sees as beyond the Kantian notion of *a priori* knowledge but grounded firmly in the experience of the real world. Our place and role in the historical community provide us with a measurable observable basis for a satisfying life. Our goal is to realise our true self, which we learn (through observation) in the family and community, and adapt the values of our society – and those of other societies that offer sound criticisms of our society.

When you have completed the task, refer to the band descriptors for A2 (WJEC) or A Level (Eduqas) and in particular have a look at the demands described in the higher band descriptors towards which you should be aspiring. Ask yourself:

- Is my answer a confident critical analysis and perceptive evaluation of the issue?
- Is my answer a response that successfully identifies and thoroughly addresses the issues raised by the question set?
- Does my work show an excellent standard of coherence, clarity and organisation? (WJEC band descriptor only but still important to consider for Eduqas)
- Will my work, when developed, contain thorough, sustained and clear views that are supported by extensive, detailed reasoning and/or evidence?
- Are the views of scholars/schools of thought used extensively, appropriately and in context?

E: Meta-ethical approaches: Intuitionism

Intuitionism: objective moral laws exist independently of human beings and moral truths can be discovered by using our minds in an intuitive way

The best way to approach Intuitionism is to begin with re-visiting a concept from Year 1. In philosophy, the term **a priori** was used. This term is usually quite heavily associated with the areas of philosophy such as logic and rationalism. Remember that a *a priori* refers to knowledge that we may have prior to experience; that is, an innate, conceptual awareness of principles, for example, those associated with mathematics like shapes and numbers. G. E. Moore had proposed that 'good' was a simple concept and indefinable other than in relation to itself, then just as with mathematics, the principles of ethics are *a priori* and exist independently of human beings. In addition, these are self-evident truths and therefore truths that do not need to be 'established' and known through some kind of rationalism.

It is important to note that Moore did not explain how a recognition of good was to be implemented, processed or caused; it just 'is'. Just as 'good' is undefinable, or at best defined as 'good', in the same way we just recognise 'goodness' through 'intuition' and it does not need any working out. He wrote:

'Again, I would wish it observed that, when I call such propositions Intuitions, I mean merely to assert that they are incapable of proof; I imply nothing whatever as to the manner or origin of our cognition of them. Still less do I imply (as most Intuitionists have done) that any proposition whatever is true, because we recognise it in a particular way or by the exercise of any particular faculty: I hold, on the contrary, that in every way in which it is possible to recognise a true proposition, it is also possible to recognise a false one.'

In other words, once we begin to apply reason or suggest something is worked out through reason, error becomes possible. This was important for Moore and relates to his two key questions about moral philosophy.

In the preface to his book *Principia Ethica* Moore also suggests that there are two key questions for moral philosophy: (1) what kind of things ought to exist for their own sake? and (2) what kind of actions ought we to perform? His answer to the first question was that such things that ought to exist for their own sake were intrinsically good. We can see these things even though they are indefinable, and we cannot present any evidence to support this other than simply recognising this. The answer to the second question was that we ought to perform actions that bring about this intrinsic goodness and this can be supported by empirical evidence.

The term 'Intuitionism' is also referred to as '**ethical non-naturalism**' because it removes itself from the idea that objective moral laws can be induced from the empirical world. However, this does not mean it is a 'metaphysical' approach to ethics as it also clearly asserts that moral principles are 'there' in the same way concepts such as numbers 'exist'. Intuitionism has also been referred to as a '**non-metaphysical moral realism**'.

Key quote

Our first conclusion as to the subject-matter of Ethics is, then, that there is a simple, indefinable, unanalysable object of thought by reference to which it must be defined. By what name we call this unique object is a matter of indifference, so long as we clearly recognise what it is and that it does differ from other objects. (Moore)

This section covers AO1 content and skills

Specification content

Objective moral laws exist independently of human beings; moral truths can be discovered by using our minds in an intuitive way.

Key quote

G. E. Moore's *Principia Ethica* was first published in 1903. It has become the custom to regard it as the source from which the subsequent moral philosophy of the century has flowed. (Warnock)

Key terms

A priori: prior to the senses

Ethical non-naturalism: an alternative term for Intuitionism

Non-metaphysical moral realism: an alternative term for Intuitionism

Key quotes

Principia Ethica actually downplayed the metaphysical side of its non-naturalism, saying that goodness has 'being' but does not 'exist', as numbers too do not exist, and in particular does not exist in any 'supersensible reality', because there is no such reality. (Hurka)

Intuitively the intuitionists seem right. Empirical investigation can tell us many things about the world, but it does not seem that it can tell whether certain acts are right or wrong, good or bad ... That seems to be something that cannot be known empirically. (Stanford, Stratton-Lake)

quickfire

- 1.14 If moral terms are not identified with natural qualities then why are they not metaphysical?

Specification content

Intuitive ability is innate and the same for all moral agents.

Key terms

Innate: part of, integral to

Self-evident: a proposition that needs no verification and remains a truth independently of whether or not we perceive it as so

Sui generis: unique

Moore sees no connection between meta-ethics and metaphysics since meta-ethics is concerned with the very first question about ethics, namely, the nature of goodness. As we have seen from the Naturalistic Fallacy, no exploration, examination nor enquiry into the innate properties of the empirical and physical world could provide insight into what 'goodness' is.

Mary Warnock states: 'Moore concedes that it is possible that metaphysics might have some relevance to the question of what we ought to do, though it could have none to the question of what is good. For what we ought to do is determined by some practical and causal questions about the consequences of our acts.'

George Edward Moore was born on November 4, 1873, to Daniel and Henrietta Moore and grew up in South London. He was schooled at Dulwich College, where he studied the classics in Greek and Latin. Moore studied at Cambridge University at the age of 18 and became interested in the study of philosophy becoming good friends with fellow student Bertrand Russell, and in later life Ludwig Wittgenstein, who was a student under Russell. Moore graduated with a first-class philosophy degree and won a fellowship to continue his studies. Moore returned to Cambridge in 1911 after a seven-year break from studies and taught and lived there for the rest of his life. As well as professor of philosophy, Moore was editor of *Mind* and was well respected by friends and colleagues, renowned for being a man of impeccable moral character. Moore died in Cambridge in 1958.



G. E. Moore

Intuitive ability is innate and the same for all moral agents

The word 'good' is not meaningless even though it cannot be defined; it is simply that to say something is 'good' is saying something that cannot be paraphrased by another word. The term that is often used for this by intuitionists is that good is **sui generis**, meaning that it is without comparison and unique (from the Latin 'of its own kind'). This understanding and ability to recognise 'good' is **innate** and the same for all moral agents. Moreover, the 'goodness' that we perceive is not some relative truth based upon empirical perception; it is objective and the same self-evident truth for all.

Moore writes:

'Everyone does in fact understand the question 'Is this good?' When he thinks of it, his state of mind is different from what it would be, were he asked, 'Is this pleasant, or desired, or approved?' It has a distinct meaning for him, even though he may not recognise in what respect it is distinct. Whenever he thinks of 'intrinsic value,' or 'intrinsic worth,' or says that a thing "ought to exist," he has before his mind the unique object – the unique property of things – that I mean by "good". Everybody is constantly aware of this notion, although he may never become aware at all that it is different from other notions of which he is also aware. But, for correct ethical reasoning, it is extremely important that he should become aware of this fact; and as soon as the nature of the problem is closely understood, there should be little difficulty in advancing so far in analysis.'

Moore was careful to differentiate between intuition and things that are **self-evident**. Intuition is the process by which we arrive at the 'knowledge' and

recognition of the things that are self-evident. Intuition is a conscious mental state that recognises what is self-evident. The self-evident concept of good, however, is not a mental state at all.

In other words, conscious intuition reveals objective truths, self-evident truths and not things that may be common sense, an obvious fact or truth relating to a particular empirical context. What is obvious, or evident, to one person may well not be to another; however, an objective proposition is self-evident, which means it is evident in itself and does not depend upon normal, natural perception. For example, the number 4 is a self-evident truth; it may well be the case that it is not evident to some and yet evident to others. However, it still remains a truth independently of whether or not we perceive it as so. A proposition may be evident to someone but a self-evident proposition is just there in itself anyway in the first instance and known through intuition. Intuition does not provide justification for a self-evident proposition; intuition just accesses that self-evident proposition.

Richard Norman points out that Moore is keen to define the type of 'intuitionist' philosopher that he is because his Intuitionism is different in two respects: (1) intuition it is not about belief in what actions are right, but about things that are good in themselves, and (2) he does not want to imply that there is some special way in which we can know them to be true, as Norman writes, 'He means only, he says, that we can know them to be true, and that we cannot give any further reasons why they are true ... It is simply a belief which one knows to be true, but for which one has no reasons.'

Key quote

The first thing to note is that a self-evident proposition is not the same as an obvious truth ... What is obvious to you may not be obvious to me. But self-evidence is not relative in this way. Although a proposition may be evident to one person but not to another, it could not be self-evident to one person, but not to another. A proposition is just self-evident, not self-evident to someone. (Stanford/ Stratton-Lake)

Intuition allows for objective moral values

The last two chapters of Moore's *Principia Ethica* are concerned with two questions:

- What should we do?
- What things are good?

Firstly, Moore's answer to the first question is very simple: any moral obligation has inherent within it the obligation to do good and produce the greatest amount. Moore states:

'Our "duty," therefore, can only be defined as that action, which will cause more good to exist in the Universe than any possible alternative. And what is "right" or "morally permissible" only differs from this, as what will not cause less good than any possible alternative. When, therefore, Ethics presumes to assert that certain ways of acting are "duties" it presumes to assert that to act in those ways will always produce the greatest possible sum of good.'

This is our duty, to perform actions that cause more good to exist than any possible alternative. We do this by calculating and weighing up of the consequences of actions.

Key quote

The individual should rather guide his choice by direct consideration of the intrinsic value or vileness of the effects which his action may produce.' (Moore)



Something that is self-evident does not require proof.

quickfire

- 1.15 Can something exist that is self-evident even if we are not aware of it?

Specification content

Intuition allows for objective moral values.



Moore argued that disagreements in ethical debate were mainly down to an underpinning methodology that a person accepted as true.

Key quotes

All moral laws, I wish to shew, are merely statements that certain kinds of actions will have good effects. (Moore)

The utmost, then, that Practical Ethics can hope to discover is which, among a few alternatives possible under certain circumstances, will, on the whole, produce the best result. It may tell us which is the best, in this sense, of certain alternatives about which we are likely to deliberate ... it may thus tell us which of the alternatives, among which we can choose, it is best to choose. If it could do this it would be sufficient for practical guidance. (Moore)

This sounds surprisingly familiar if we consider that it is a similar proposition to what utilitarian philosophers may proclaim. Indeed, Warnock observes, 'on the question of conduct Moore is in far closer agreement with the utilitarians than with any other moral philosophers ... They differ only about the question of how to assess the value of the consequences.' Moore's Intuitionism has therefore come to be seen by philosophers as a form of consequential Intuitionism.

Indeed, Moore had already argued as to why there are disagreements in ethical debate and in particular with his own view when he states:

'Though, therefore, we cannot prove that we are right, yet we have a reason to believe that everybody, unless he is mistaken as to what he thinks, will think the same as we do. It is as with a sum in mathematics. If we find a gross and palpable error in the calculations, we are not surprised or troubled that the person who made this mistake has reached a different result from ours. We think he will admit that his result is wrong, if his mistake is pointed out to him. For instance, if a man has to add up $5 + 7 + 9$, we should not wonder that he made the result to be 34, if he started by making $5 + 7 = 25$. And so in Ethics, if we find, as we did, that "desirable" is confused with "desired," or that "end" is confused with "means," we need not be disconcerted that those who have committed these mistakes do not agree with us. The only difference is that in Ethics, owing to the intricacy of its subject matter, it is far more difficult to persuade anyone either that he has made a mistake or that that mistake affects his result.'

In other words, the reason people do not see what Moore is arguing about intuition and ethical debate is because their different answer is down to their mistake in methodology or working out the problem. Somewhere along the line we can identify the mistakes of others. However, Moore argues that if they have made that mistake initially, it is very difficult in ethical debate to point out that the rest of the argument, which may seem sound, is actually built upon an error.

At the end of *Principia Ethica* Moore identifies some intrinsic moral goodness (chapter 6 *The Ideal*). His method for identification of such goods is to propose such things that if they were to exist independently and abstractly they would still be considered good. Moore writes: 'Indeed, once the meaning of the question is clearly understood, the answer to it, in its main outlines, appears to be so obvious, that it runs the risk of seeming to be a platitude. By far the most valuable things, which we know or can imagine, are certain states of consciousness, which may be roughly described as the pleasures of human intercourse and the enjoyment of beautiful objects.'

For Moore, the purity of human friendship and aesthetic beauty were intrinsic goods on the basis that we can perceive them as existing in isolation from everything else and still class them as good. Moore did not deny that there were other goods, but just that sometimes they are mixed due to the complexity of the natural world. He writes: 'It is necessary to consider what things are such that, if they existed by themselves, in absolute isolation, we should yet judge their existence to be good; and, in order to decide upon the relative degrees of value of different things, we must similarly consider what comparative value seems to attach to the isolated existence of each.' In general, Moore's goods are similar to Aristotle's virtues and his recognition of their mixed nature is in line with his initial analysis of simple and complex in relation to establishing 'what is good?'

Moore's evils are divided into three groups:

1. The first class consists of those evils, which seem always to include an enjoyment or admiring contemplation of things which are themselves either evil or ugly ...
2. The second class of great evils are undoubtedly mixed evils; but I treat them next, because, in a certain respect, they appear to be the converse of the class last considered ...
3. The third class of great positive evils appears to be the class of pains.

Key quote

In *Principia Ethica* he defended his claim that beauty on its own is good by appealing to intuitions about a very specific beautiful world ... Moore likewise insisted that before we make judgements of self-evidence we must make sure that the propositions we are considering are clear; failure to do so, he claimed, explained much of the disagreement about ethics. (Stanford / Hurka)

AO1 Activity

Try to list some examples of virtues that can be seen to be good that arise from personal relationships and think of ways in which these good can become mixed or distorted. For example, agapeic love (see Situation Ethics book 1) can be spoiled by poor intention. Honesty is good but can be affected by the situation that calls for discretion.

Study tip

Moore's theory of intuition needs to be carefully explained so that you know exactly what Moore is referring to. It may help by thinking of things that it is not, rather than what it is, to help you.

Intuition needs a mature mind so not infallible

Intuition in itself as a foundation of knowledge is the belief that at some point there must be a framework, basis, anchor or starting point from which all other judgements can be made. Aristotle recognised this in his book *Metaphysics* when he stated: 'Some, indeed, demand to have the law proved, but this is because they lack education; for it shows lack of education not to know of what we should require proof, and of what we should not. For it is quite impossible that everything should have a proof; the process would go on to infinity, so there would be no proof.' What Aristotle is arguing is that knowledge always rests upon something, for example, evidence or something that is relative to it to help explain it (e.g. hot and cold). If we continue looking retrospectively upon knowledge then there must be a 'first cause' (c.f. Cosmological argument year 1 book) otherwise knowledge would be infinite. The basis for knowledge had to begin with something. The key question is whether this begins with our education (nurtured) or whether or not it is simply *a priori* and innate within us. In other words, Moore suggests that this process of intuition by which we have access to self-evident knowledge is *a priori*.

For Intuitionists, then, knowledge of good is innate and *a priori* knowledge. However, although not subject to rational proof in the same way empirical knowledge is, the implications of what is recognised as intuitively good does reveal a sense of **infallibility** to the idea of 'self-evident' truths when it comes to consideration of acting upon this knowledge. Moore, as we have seen, conceded that what could be intuitively recognised as good was not to do with actions and consequences but a recognition of the thing that was good in itself. Therefore, any fallibility of intuition is directly related not to the *a priori*, self-evident awareness and recognition of good, but rather in how we practically put this knowledge into action.



Moore held that although intuition of good was infallible, how we translate this and act upon intuition may well be.

quickfire

1.16 What two things did Moore suggest were self-evidently good?

Key term

Infallibility: without error

Platitude: a moral comment that has been used too often to be meaningful, cliché

Specification content

Intuition needs a mature mind so not infallible.

Key quotes

What then is it for a proposition to be self-evident? Locke says that a self-evident proposition is one that 'carries its own light and evidence with it, and needs no other proof...' Price tells us that a self-evident proposition is immediate, and needs no further proof... Ross writes, a self-evident proposition is 'evident without any need of proof, or of evidence beyond itself' (Stanford/Stratton-Lake)

If nothing is self-evident, nothing can be proved. (C.S. Lewis)

Key quote

A self-evident proposition is one of which a clear intuition is sufficient justification for believing it, and for believing it on the basis of that intuition ... but this is not because understanding provides justification; rather, it is because it is needed to get the proposition clearly in view, and so enables a clear intuition of it. But it is the intuition that justifies, not the understanding. (Stanford/Stratton-Lake)

For Moore, the 'what ought I do?' was his secondary question to which his answer was to pursue those actions that produce more good. The identification of such actions was directly related to his self-evident awareness of intrinsic goodness found in aesthetic beauty and personal friendship relationships. He also recognised that there were mixed goods of less purity in the same way the empirical world is made up of mixed, complex phenomena. However, the goal to pursue acts that produce the greatest amounts of good are not shared by all Intuitionists. We will see that H. A. Prichard argued that it was not the 'good' (i.e. Moore's first question that revealed the sui generis of moral knowledge) but rather the obligation to act, that is, the duty innate in the idea of 'what we ought to do', that was the basis, the sui generis, for all moral thinking. We will explore this more later. Likewise, W.D. Ross, like Prichard, rejected Moore's proposal that to pursue the acts that produced the greatest amount of good was the best application of the self-evident, intuitive ethical knowledge. Indeed, in his book *The Right and the Good*, Ross argued that some actions are not dependent upon their consequences to be considered right or wrong. Ross argued that intuition could be used to establish what he called '**prima facie duties**' such as fidelity, justice and keeping a promise. However, they are *prima facie* because they could be prioritised over another when a conflict of interest arises.

However, according to Ross, there is need for a gradual awakening towards a revelation of this innate intuitive awareness and suggests that self-evident insights are: 'not in the sense that it is evident from the beginning of our lives, or as soon as we attend to the proposition for the first time, but in the sense that when we have reached sufficient mental maturity and have given sufficient attention to the proposition it is evident without any need of proof, or of evidence beyond itself.' In a similar fashion, another philosopher who advocated ethical intuitionism, H. A. Prichard, also felt strongly that the revelation of such ethical intuitions was not evenly distributed amongst people and that some had a more developed, or more mature 'sense' of intuition than others.

Key quotes

How do we acquire moral and axiological knowledge? Ross maintains that 'both in mathematics and in ethics we have certain crystal-clear intuitions from which we build up all that we can know about the nature of numbers and the nature of duty'. (Stanford, Skelton)

But despite what has been said above, critics of intuitionism can claim that the fact that there is disagreement between moral philosophers and even intuitionists themselves undermines the view that certain propositions are self-evident ... Persistent disagreement amongst reflective, thoughtful, and comprehending moral philosophers may cast doubt on the view that any of these propositions are self-evident. (Stanford/Stratton-Lake)

quickfire

1.17 Why does an application of intuitive thought need a mature mind?

Ought is indefinable but can be recognised by intuition

H. A. Prichard was a very distinguished moral philosopher who taught at Oxford during the first half of last century. Like Moore, Prichard argued that moral knowledge was indefinable, but it was not the 'good' that was the basis of intuitive moral insight. Moore's distinction was that 'goodness' (i.e. that which is good in itself) is the basis of our intuitive recognition and that 'rightness' or 'oughtness' was the outworking of this. As we have seen, this created some possible incoherence when considering how Moore suggested this was pursued and the consequentialism that followed did not sit comfortably with other Intuitionists.

For Prichard (and Ross) it was the 'rightness' or sense of obligation or duty that was the intuitive element of our moral thinking. Their approach became more deontological. That is, when there are actual moral conflicts we learn to decide upon the greater obligation, and over time, develop a more advanced, intuitive sense of right and wrong. Despite empirical evidence, it was still the sense of duty and moral intuitionism that was the driver in deciding what to do and NOT a goal of creating the most possible good. Prichard and, later, Ross, were philosophers who had a slightly different approach to Moore in that they were concerned about the sense of 'oughtness' and 'duty' as a key element of intuition and defining the way we think morally rather than it being a consequence of our moral insight as Moore had attested.

Born in London in 1871, Harold Prichard attended Clifton College in Bristol and was admitted to New College, Oxford to study mathematics. After receiving a First Class Honours in mathematics in 1891, he then studied Greats (ancient history and philosophy) taking First Class Honours in 1894. After a brief period working for a firm of solicitors in London, he returned to Oxford where he spent the rest of his life, first as Fellow of Hertford College (1895–98) and then of Trinity College (1898–1924). Prichard published remarkably little: only two lectures and two papers in moral philosophy, the most famous being his widely anthologised paper, 'Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?', published in 1912. However, Prichard is reported to have written much that he never published – writings that were nevertheless circulated among his colleagues over whom he apparently had substantial philosophical influence. Anthologies of his unpublished writing were made after his death.

For Prichard moral knowledge was unique, sui generis and also was clearly separated from reason and empirical influence. Prichard rejected Moore's intuitive consequentialism that argued that 'what we ought to do' is to act so that we produce the greatest amount of good through our actions. Prichard argued that since our moral intuition can be found in our sense of obligation or duty when we recognise what we 'ought' or 'should' do, then any reasoning about 'what should we do?' or 'how should we act?' has already been answered. Moral truth is contained within the sense of obligation that we intuitively feel when confronted with a situation. This truth, however, is not subject to reason and since this is the case, the way to behave morally is equally not the result of rational analysis and debate. We just 'know' what we ought to do.

Duty remains **underivative**, indefinable and an **irreducible** concept just like Moore's 'good' and yellow in three ways:

1. In the normative realm it maintains the non-naturalist view that normative truths of duty are sui generis, neither reducible to nor derivable from empirical investigation. They are self-evident.
2. Neither are the truths of duty extracted from moral judgements, normative truths or values that have a non-moral origin.

Specification content

H. A. Prichard, 'ought to do' has no definition; recognise what we 'ought to do' by intuition.

Key quote

Knowledge is not knowledge of the ground of the obligation, but is itself the ground of the obligation. (Warnock)

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Key terms

Irreducible: cannot be broken down into further parts

Underivative: is not dependent on or derived from something else, a simple concept

Key terms

Claims: Prichard's term for an argument put together from general reasoning

General reasoning: using the empirical evidence around us to present logical argument

Moral reasoning: application of intuition

Preliminaries: gathering of claims

Unreflective consciousness: Prichard's explanation that intuition is not determined by philosophical reflection

quickfire

- 1.18 How did Prichard disagree with Moore about what we 'ought' to do?

Specification content

H. A. Prichard: two ways of thinking (general and moral).



Although it is usual to consider evidence and circumstances of a moral decision, these preliminaries do not provide us with any moral obligation according to Prichard.

quickfire

- 1.19 How is general reasoning different from moral reasoning according to Prichard?

3. The duties are specific (e.g. to keep promises and not to harm others) and do not derive from a more general consequentialist duty to promote good consequences. As Thomas Hurka writes, 'The main reason we ought to keep our promises or not harm others is just that we ought to; those duties, like the normative realm as a whole and moral duty in general, are self-standing.'

Key quotes

The improper question is supposed to be the demand for reasons why something which has the characteristic of being obligatory, has this characteristic. All demands, Prichard says, for proof that something is a duty are mistaken. (Warnock)

In 1909 Prichard published his only book, *Kant's Theory of Knowledge*, which was an account of Kant's Transcendental Idealism ... The book's main conclusion is that 'knowledge is sui generis and therefore a "theory" of knowledge is impossible. Knowledge is knowledge, and any attempt to state it in terms of something else must end in describing something which is not knowledge'. (Dancy)

Although the specific duties may conflict, the fact is that they are not reducible to one basic duty like consequentialism and are indeed independent of consequentialist thinking. As Thomas Hurka explains, 'The various duties can conflict, but when they do there are no rules for deciding between them: we can only make a direct intuitive judgement about which duty is stronger.'

How this process is activated is the subject of the next section on general and moral reasoning.

Two ways of thinking (general and moral)

The last section ended with considering the fact that duties can conflict when an ethical decision needs to be made. In one sense, this is illogical if there is only one right way to act. It may be that we respond that 'the real world is not as simple as that and moral issues are complex' but this response is very much based in what Prichard calls the world of **general reasoning**.

General reasoning is basically using the empirical evidence around us to present logical argument. For any moral decision, the appreciation of certain facts concerning the circumstances involved is referred to as '**preliminaries**'. However, such preliminaries, no matter how strong, do not hold any obligation. In addition, Prichard speaks not of conflicting duties but of the fact that general reasoning may throw up different '**claims**' and the ultimate 'claim' may well be the ultimate moral duty but it does **not necessarily have to be**. Prichard was careful to point out that an appeal to general reasoning must not let it become the driver for recognising one's proper moral duty; only intuition can do this.

Moral reasoning is the recognition and assertion of one's duty by intuitive thought. It is present in our **unreflective consciousness** according to Prichard.

Key quotes

Prichard makes clear, being in a position to grasp the self-evidence of an obligation may require appreciating certain facts about one's circumstances that are 'preliminaries' in the process of thinking about ethical issues ... part of a process that Prichard calls 'general' in contrast to moral thinking. (Timmons)

If we ask ourselves what this something else is, we seem driven to say that ... what is called a conflict of duties is really a conflict of claims on us to act in different ways, arising out of various circumstances of the whole situation in which we are placed. (Timmons)

Key quotes

Prichard is not suggesting that nothing can get us to feel an obligation – for example, seeing something or hearing something or learning about something. What he is denying is that any description of such facts, no matter how complete, entails or otherwise implies any particular obligation. (Kaufman)

The sense that we ought to do certain things arises in our unreflective consciousness, being an activity of moral thinking occasioned by the various situations in which we find ourselves. (Prichard)

Moral reasoning subsumes general reasoning. The danger in this relationship between the two types of reasoning is that general reasoning will not take a subordinate role. Indeed, to focus on the complexity of a moral issue is in itself an appeal to the consequentialist position. However, to be guided by this alone would be tantamount to surrendering moral intuition.

Prichard was fearful of the consequential nature of general thinking and pointed out that it is here where the potential for distortion of duty can be found. For example, although he agreed that a moral duty must always mention its explanatory ground; however, in trying to derive the obligation to keep promises from a duty to promote the good, consequentialism could turn the obligation to keep promises into a quite different obligation that promote other values, i.e. discretion, honesty and trust. We have the same problem here as with the open question argument because we can then ask, 'but is honesty good?' In effect consequentialism turns the duty to keep promises into something it is not, and thereby distorts the moral phenomena. As Thomas Hurka writes, 'in trying to explain the duty to keep promises, consequentialism destroys it'.

Moral thinking must not work like that because it is intuitive and self-evident. Prichard does acknowledge that whilst issues can appear complex, we must not let general reasoning distort moral phenomena and turn it into consequentialism. Prichard refers to another example from Aristotle to demonstrate how identification of an intuitive ultimate good such as *eudaimonia* (well-being) can be distorted in a different way when duties are derived from it. For instance, concerning the duty to relieve pain if it is for someone else, is it that doing so will make our own lives better? Or, is it that doing so will make the other person's life better? If the answer is that it will make our own lives better, by contributing, given the right motives, to our own *eudaimonia*, we can object that this is not the right explanation. This is because the obvious and right explanation is that relieving another's pain will make his or her life better, so the duty is fundamentally other-regarding and not directed towards our own well-being.

Key quotes

Even when consequentialism yields the right verdict about which act is right, he held, it oversimplifies the explanation of the act's rightness ... and in ignoring it consequentialism distorts the moral phenomena. (Hurka)

Even when consequentialism yields the right conclusion about how we ought to act, it gives the wrong reason for it ... According to Prichard, we ought to pay our debt because we incurred it, and not because (or only because) of any good that will result. (Hurka)

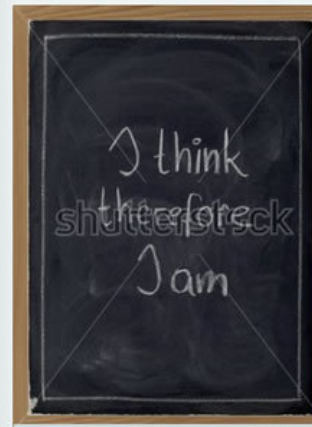
Ross also argued that 'even when consequentialism is right about which acts are right, it is wrong about why they are right. If we think we ought to keep a promise, he insisted, the reason is not that this will have good consequences; it is simply that we promised.' (Hurka)

Key quote

This idea of distorting the moral phenomena was central to Prichard's argument that moral duty in general is underivative. (Hurka)

Key term

Eudaimonia: Aristotle's term for happiness of well-being



Descartes was the famous philosopher you coined the term 'I think, therefore I am' (French: *je pense, donc je suis* / Latin: *cogito ergo sum*) and introduced the principle of doubt to confirm a truth)

Key terms

Descartes' principle of skepticism: that doubt can be resolved through challenge

Ex hypothesi: according to the hypothesis proposed

So we have now established that general reasoning can be dangerous if it is given too much emphasis. However, the question still remains, 'how can we ensure that moral duty succeeds?'

Prichard's Intuitionism is very clever in the way it proposes its methodology for this and it is linked closely to epistemology. Indeed, Prichard uses **Descartes' principle of skepticism** to demonstrate that moral reasoning is that which is 'confirmed by doubt'. In other words, general reasoning is used to support and confirm what we originally recognised through intuition. We sometimes need to check the addition of our maths, even though we know our method is correct; we sometimes confirm our initial observations with a 'second glance'. Prichard writes:

'Just as the recognition that the doing of our duty often vitally interferes with the satisfaction of our inclinations leads us to wonder whether we really ought to do what we usually call our duty, so the recognition that we and others are liable to mistakes in knowledge generally leads us, as it did Descartes, to wonder whether hitherto we may not have been always mistaken. And just as we try to find a proof, based on the general consideration of action and of human life, that we ought to act in the ways usually called moral, so we, like Descartes, propose by a process of reflection on our thinking to find a test of knowledge, i.e. a principle by applying which we can show that a certain condition of mind was really knowledge, a condition which **ex hypothesi** (according to the hypothesis proposed, i.e. intuition) existed independently of the process of reflection.'

In other words, the way general thinking is used is for reflective purposes in relation to the intuition and not for evaluative purposes to build an argument or case as for what is right. In a given situation we should be intuitively aware of what the right course of action should be. We are presented with plenty of alternatives and arguments but they are there not to convince us; they are there to deflect the doubt that what we originally thought of was the correct course of action. It is almost like reverse consequentialism! Hurka observes that, 'The stage of being moved by such skepticism is not pointless; it is an essential part of philosophical reflection. But its end-result should be a return to our original convictions, and so it is with moral duty.' Therefore, the purpose of general reasoning is to shore up our initial intuition and not to distort it.

Key quotes

Modern epistemology, which begins with Descartes, is a response to the fact that we can doubt many of the things that we think we know to be true, and the theorising that follows is an effort to find a procedure by which we can demonstrate that we really do know what we think we know ... Prichard thinks that similarly, modern moral philosophy's primary aim is to find a way by which to demonstrate that what we think is our duty, really is obligatory. (Kaufman)

We might, he thinks, come to doubt the truth of such insights, but the mistake of moral philosophy is to assume that such doubts can be assuaged by argument. The only appropriate response, in the moral as in the mathematical case, is that the doubts themselves are illegitimate. Reflection can serve a useful purpose only insofar as it returns us to a place in which we can recognise the self-evidence of the claims we began by doubting. (Le Bar)

Therefore, general reasoning is not used independently to arrive at some sort of conclusion by presenting and manipulating evidence and argument. Absolutely not. These are the claims Prichard speaks of. Instead, general reasoning is used to shore up the knowledge already gained through intuition as to what our obligation is. It is useful to see what Prichard actually writes:

*The sense that we ought to do certain things arises in our unreflective consciousness, being an activity of moral thinking occasioned by the various situations in which we find ourselves. At this stage our attitude to these obligations is one of unquestioning confidence. But inevitably the appreciation of the degree to which the execution of these obligations is contrary to our interest raises the doubt whether after all these obligations are really obligatory, i.e., whether our sense that we ought not to do certain things is not illusion. We then want to have it proved to us that we ought to do so, i.e., to be convinced of this by a process which, as an argument, is different in kind from our original and unreflective appreciation of it. **This demand is, as I have argued, illegitimate.***

Hence in the first place, if, as is almost universally the case, by **Moral Philosophy is meant the knowledge which would satisfy this demand, there is no such knowledge, and all attempts to attain it are doomed to failure because they rest on a mistake, the mistake of supposing the possibility of proving what can only be apprehended directly by an act of moral thinking.** Nevertheless the demand, though illegitimate, is inevitable until we have carried the process of reflection far enough to realise the self-evidence of our obligations, i.e., the immediacy of our apprehension of them ... In the second place, suppose we come genuinely to doubt whether we ought, for example, to pay our debts owing to a genuine doubt whether our previous conviction that we ought to do so is true, a doubt which can, in fact only arise if we fail to remember the real nature of what we now call our past conviction. The only remedy lies in actual getting into a situation which occasions the obligation, or -- if our imagination be strong enough -- in imagining ourselves in that situation, and then letting our moral capacities of thinking do their work. Or, to put the matter generally, if we do doubt whether there is really an obligation to originate A in a situation B, the remedy lies not in any process of general thinking, but in getting face to face with a particular instance of the situation B, and then directly appreciating the obligation to originate A in that situation.

Extract from H.A. Prichard Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake? (1912)

AO1 Activity

What key words would you use if you were going to write your own essay on the topic of H. A. Prichard? Choose four to six terms and write a few sentences justifying why each of these terms are critical for this discussion.

Study tip

It is popular to think that Prichard uses evidence to support and determine a moral decision in line with intuition. Make sure that you understand that evidence is there to deter doubt with regard intuition and to shore up that intuitive thought.

Specification content

Challenges: no proof of moral intuition exists; intuitive 'truths' can differ widely; no obvious way to resolve conflicting intuitions.

Key quote

Just as we try to find a proof, based on the general consideration of action and of human life, that we ought to act in the ways usually called moral, so we, like Descartes, propose by a process of reflection on our thinking to find a test of knowledge, i.e. a principle by applying which we can show that a certain condition of mind was really knowledge, a condition which ex hypothesi existed independently of the process of reflection.

(Kaufman)

Key term

The argument from queerness:
Mackie's view that Intuitionism is too odd to accept



Knowledge that cannot be verified by empirical means has the same queerness as metaphysical entities according to J. L. Mackie.

quickfire

1.22 Why did Mackie consider Prichard's intuitionism 'queer'?

Key quotes

John Mackie maintained that moral properties, understood broadly along intuitionist lines, are queer because they are inherently motivational, in the sense that when we come to see that some act is good, we are motivated to do it. No other property we know of has such inherent motivational force. (Stanford / Stratton-Lake)

Of course the suggestions that moral judgements are made or moral problems solved by just sitting down and having an ethical intuition is a travesty of actual moral thinking. (Mackie)

No proof of moral intuition exists: the argument from queerness

Possibly the most famous of challenges to the proposal of Intuitionism was that of J. L. Mackie in his book, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, published in 1977 (pages 38–42). Mackie's position is that there are no objective ethical values, that is, values that can be known, verified and part of the empirical world and yet at the same time independent of us.

Mackie argues that what Intuitionism does is present us with implausible oddities and strange suggestions that ultimately make the whole theory queer; hence, he refers to it as **'the argument from queerness'**. Mackie writes:

'Even more important, however, and certainly more generally applicable, is the argument from queerness. This has two parts, one metaphysical and the other epistemological. If there were objective values, then they would be entities or qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe. Correspondingly, if we were aware of them, it would have to be by some special faculty of moral perception or intuition, utterly different from our normal ways of knowing everything else.'

Firstly, it is this very 'queerness' of moral properties that makes it implausible that they exist. Mackie's is a very heavily empirically based objection and no different from Kant's challenge against the cosmological argument for the existence of God that if a God did exist, this 'first cause' would be so very different from anything that we experience or know and so would not be able to recognise or know about it. This is because our knowledge is limited to the phenomenal world of space and time and it is not possible to speculate about what may or may not exist independently of space and time. Secondly, Mackie refers to Hume when considering how knowledge can never provide an 'influencing motive of the will' and that any ethical term that does this has to add the element of queerness to a particular description. In the end, Mackie summarises the proposal that moral judgements are made and issues solved by an ethical intuition 'is a travesty of actual moral thinking'.

Intuitive 'truths' can differ widely and there is no way to resolve conflicting intuitions

The main problem with Intuitionism for many philosophers is that because there is no real, established list of 'duties' or 'obligations' then not only are people unaware of what they should do, what they think they should do will also differ widely. Ross and Prichard did make reference to some suggested 'duties', Prichard in his various essays through illustration and Ross through a more systematic presentation of what he called 'prima facie' duties. However, the fact that duties vary from person to person and situation to situation, the wide difference is potentially unavoidable. Stratton-Lake concurs, 'if intuitions are intellectual seemings, one might ask why certain moral propositions seem true whereas others do not'. For example, if two people met the same moral dilemma and yet had different intuitions about what was the right thing to do then how would this be resolved? Rather than solving moral problems it appears to make them more complex to actually work out.

More pertinently, even the Intuitionist philosophers cannot agree on what duties and obligations are universal. This may be due to the fact that they have slightly different approaches as we have seen – Moore is more consequentialist and yet Prichard and Ross are more deontological – yet the fact still remains that they disagree. As Richard Norman observes, 'Clearly Ross's experience may be different from Moore's, for what is self-evidently true for one of them is self-evidently false for the other.'

Linked to the idea of conflicting duties is the criticism that differences occur because an individual is more or less left to their own devices and no amount of logical discourse could deter a decision because Intuitionism is not based on nor answerable to the process of logical reasoning. As Norman writes again, 'Moreover, since the truths which are supposed to be self-evident are, by definition, ones for which no reasons can be given, there can be no way of resolving the disagreement or of showing which of the views in question is really the apprehension of a self-evident truth.'

In response, the deontological intuitionists would argue that although there may be conflicts and claims to self-evident truths, this does not mean that the truths themselves are conflicting as in any given situation there is one single intuitive truth – it is a case of distinguishing between true intuition and those guided by consequentialism and empirical evidence towards a very different goal.

As Stratton-Lake argues, 'It is worth noting that moral disagreement does not imply that people have different intuitions ... Similarly, it is plausible to suppose that many act consequentialists still have the intuition that it is wrong to harvest organs from a healthy but non-consenting donor to save five other lives. But because they have persuaded themselves of the truth of act consequentialism, they would not believe this act is wrong.'

Key quote

Finally, Ethical Intuitionists allowed that various other factors can lead to disagreement. Clarke, for instance, allowed that stupidity, corruption, or perverseness ... John Balguy also acknowledges that self-evident moral principles ... have been, doubted, 'even by philosophers and men of letters' ... And Price maintained that all forms of knowledge, including intuitive knowledge, may be evident in different degrees. Intuition may be clear and perfect but may sometimes be faint and obscure. Such variance in degrees of clarity allows that a self-evident proposition may be imperfectly and obscurely grasped, and this may lead someone to deny its truth ... Given all these ways in which the truth of a self-evident proposition may be missed, it is no surprise that there is no universal assent. But the absence of universal assent is quite consistent with self-evidence, as long as one does not regard 'self-evidence' to mean, or imply, obviousness. (Stanford/ Stratton-Lake)

Overall there are many philosophers who see moral disagreement as throwing doubt over the claim that moral propositions are self-evident. If specific moral propositions are known and correctly understood, then, everyone who had an understanding would accept them and there would be universal agreement and acknowledgement between these people. Therefore, since there is not such universal agreement, then there can be no self-evident moral propositions.

Key quotes

Philosophers who claim that fundamental value-judgements are self-evident are not necessarily committed to claiming that their truth is always apparent to everyone. (Norman)

It is not surprising, then, that other philosophers have concluded that these fundamental value-judgements are really not the expression of self-evident truths at all; they are merely the expressions of personal preferences, of feelings and emotions, of individual likes and dislikes. (Norman)

Key skills

Knowledge involves:

Selection of a range of (thorough) accurate and relevant information that is directly related to the specific demands of the question.

This means:

- Selecting relevant material for the question set
- Be focused in explaining and examining the material selected.

Understanding involves:

Explanation that is extensive, demonstrating depth and/or breadth with excellent use of evidence and examples including (where appropriate) thorough and accurate supporting use of sacred texts, sources of wisdom and specialist language.

This means:

- Effective use of examples and supporting evidence to establish the quality of your understanding
- Ownership of your explanation that expresses personal knowledge and understanding and NOT just a chunk of text from a book that you have rehearsed and memorised.

AO1 Developing skills

It is now important to consider the information that has been covered in this section; however, the information in its raw form is too extensive and so has to be processed in order to meet the requirements of the examination. This can be done by practising more advanced skills associated with AO1. For assessment objective 1 (AO1), which involves demonstrating 'knowledge' and 'understanding' skills, we are going to focus on different ways in which the skills can be demonstrated effectively, and also refer to how the performance of these skills is measured (see generic band descriptors for A2 [WJEC] AO1 or A Level [Eduqas] AO1).

► **Your next task is this:** Below is a **summary of Mackie's argument from queerness**. You want to explain this in an essay but they are your teacher's notes and so to write them out is simply copying them and not demonstrating any understanding. Re-write your teacher's notes but you need to replace the words used (apart from key religious or philosophical terminology) with different words so that you show that you understand what is being written and that you have your own unique version.

Mackie argues that what Intuitionism does is present us with implausible oddities and strange suggestions that ultimately make the whole theory queer; hence, he refers to it as 'the argument from queerness'. Firstly, it is this very 'queerness' of moral properties that makes it implausible that they exist. Mackie's is a very heavily empirically based objection and no different from Kant's challenge against the cosmological argument for the existence of God that if a God did exist, this 'first cause' would be so very different from anything that we experience or know and so would not be able to recognise or know about it. This is because our knowledge is limited to the phenomenal world of space and time and it is not possible to speculate about what may or may not exist independently of space and time. Secondly, Mackie refers to Hume when considering how knowledge can never provide an 'influencing motive of the will' and that any ethical term that does this has to add the element of queerness to a particular description. In the end, Mackie summarises the proposal that moral judgements are made and issues solved by an ethical intuition 'is a travesty of actual moral thinking'.

When you have completed the task, refer to the band descriptors for A2 (WJEC) or A Level (Eduqas) and in particular have a look at the demands described in the higher band descriptors towards which you should be aspiring. Ask yourself:

- Does my work demonstrate thorough, accurate and relevant knowledge and understanding of religion and belief?
- Is my work coherent (consistent or make logical sense), clear and well organised?
- Will my work, when developed, be an extensive and relevant response which is specific to the focus of the task?
- Does my work have extensive depth and/or suitable breadth and have excellent use of evidence and examples?
- If appropriate to the task, does my response have thorough and accurate reference to sacred texts and sources of wisdom?
- Are there any insightful connections to be made with other elements of my course?
- Will my answer, when developed and extended to match what is expected in an examination answer, have an extensive range of views of scholars/schools of thought?
- When used, is specialist language and vocabulary both thorough and accurate?

Issues for analysis and evaluation

Whether moral terms are intuitive

One line of argument would be that many people would say that they experience things as intuitively 'right' or 'wrong' and some people may refer to it as 'instinct'. In other words, they take it for granted that it is 'the way it is or should be' and that it is an 'objective feature of the world' or 'a fact'. Intuitionism supports this common experience of morality even for those who do not believe in God. For those who believe in God, they may argue that intuitive ethical thinking is very similar to religious experience, revelation or an awareness of objective moral codes that exist independently of the empirical world.

From a philosophical perspective, Prichard argued that moral knowledge was unique, sui generis and also was clearly separated from reason and empirical influence. This line of thinking did not see 'what we ought to do' as produce the greatest amount of good through our actions like Moore advocated. Instead, to guard against the accusation that ethical thinking is empirical, Prichard argued that our moral intuition can be found in our sense of obligation or duty. In other words, moral truth is contained within the sense of obligation that we intuitively feel when confronted with a situation. Prichard made sure that there could be no empirical challenge to intuitionism by stating that this truth, however, is not subject to reason. If this is the case, the way to behave morally is also not a result of empirical analysis or rational debate. His argument concluded that we just 'know' what we ought to do. This is a very difficult argument to counter.

In support of Prichard, many religions, philosophers and societies could argue that the world is an 'ordered' place. This order is shown in the laws of nature, the laws of mathematics, the laws of ethics and the fact that there is a common sense of morality in many cultures. Intuitionism supports this view of the world by presenting moral terms as intuitive (underived and true apart from analysis). Indeed, approaching moral terms as intuitive avoids the naturalistic fallacy – definitions reduce or limit the ideas of 'good' and 'bad'.

Key quote

Prichard maintains that our feelings of obligation are basic and immediate – prima facie, to borrow an expression from fellow 'Intuitionist' W. D. Ross – and for anyone who has ever felt morally obligated, this seems pretty hard to deny. (Kaufman)

However, one could argue that if moral terms were intuitive, then we would expect morality to be uniform the world over or at least we would expect there to be uniformity (a common intuition) between those who consider and reflect seriously on morality. However, anthropology can give examples where this is not the case! Psychologists and sociologists can demonstrate that what appears to be intuitive approaches to morality are really the result of conditioning from family, tribe and/or culture.

The typical response may be that some are not using intuitive thinking and are being guided by general reasoning and this would account for any differences. Indeed, we are back to square one with Prichard's definition of duty as both intuitive and self-evident. Within just our own culture there are widely different views on specific ethical issues amongst those who have reflected deeply but are we to consider that these people are not listening to their intuition? There is no way to verify Intuitionism! There is no empirical evidence for it and there is no agreement on the origin of Intuitionism. Even the Intuitionists disagree amongst themselves on what morality consists of, for example Moore's version is different from that of Prichard and from that of Ross.

This section covers AO2 content and skills

Specification content

Whether moral terms are intuitive.

AO2 Activity

As you read through this section try to do the following:

1. Pick out the different lines of argument that are presented in the text and identify any evidence given in support.
2. For each line of argument try to evaluate whether or not you think this is strong or weak.
3. Think of any questions you may wish to raise in response to the arguments.

This Activity will help you to start thinking critically about what you read and help you to evaluate the effectiveness of different arguments and from this develop your own observations, opinions and points of view that will help with any conclusions that you make in your answers to the AO2 questions that arise.

Key questions

Is our intuition really a trustworthy guide to ultimate truth? What about my intuition that there is a ghost in my closet?

Is there really one true order to the universe, or is that viewpoint merely an interpretation of reality?

Is there really no uniformity amongst the various moralities the world over?

Do people in our own culture really disagree on the most important aspects of morality?

Do you need to have empirical evidence to know if an action should be judged as moral or immoral?

This is the very basis of the challenge to the proposal of Intuitionism that J. L. Mackie proposed in his book, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, published in 1977 (pages 38–42). Mackie argues that what Intuitionism does, in hiding behind the explanation of self-evident truths, is to present us with implausible oddities and strange suggestions that ultimately make the whole theory queer; hence, he refers to it as 'the argument from queerness'. Mackie argues: 'If there were objective values, then they would be entities or qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe ... Correspondingly, if we were aware of them, it would have to be by some special faculty of moral perception or intuition, utterly different from our normal ways of knowing everything else.'

This is similar to Kant's challenge against the cosmological argument for the existence of God that if a God did exist, this 'first cause' would be so very different from anything that we experience or know and so would not be able to recognise or know about it. This is because our knowledge is limited to the phenomenal world of space and time and it is not possible to speculate about what may or may not exist independently of space and time.

Another argument was presented by David Hume. David Hume argued that knowledge can never provide an 'influencing motive of the will' and that any ethical term that does this has to add the element of queerness to a particular description. This also supports Mackie's argument that Intuitionism is 'a travesty of actual moral thinking'.

It appears we can adopt different conclusions as follows: Moral terms are intuitive; or, moral terms come from testing our views over and over again in different situations; or, moral terms are both given by our intuition and develop in response to real-life situations. Ultimately, it would seem, the problem of 'testing' and evaluating whether moral terms are intuitive all reduces to the principle that intuition is self-evident. Therefore, even if we demonstrated that ethical terms were not intuitive we would be wrong according to intuitivists and that we simply have not used our intuitions correctly!

Key quote

Moreover, since the truths which are supposed to be self-evident are, by definition, ones for which no reasons can be given, there can be no way of resolving the disagreement or of showing which of the views in question is really the apprehension of a self-evident truth. (Norman)

Study tip

It is vital for AO2 that you actually discuss arguments and not just explain what someone may have stated. Try to ask yourself, 'was this a fair point to make?', 'is the evidence sound enough?', 'is there anything to challenge this argument?', 'is this a strong or weak argument?' Such critical analysis will help you develop your evaluation skills.

AO2 Developing skills

It is now important to consider the information that has been covered in this section; however, the information in its raw form is too extensive and so has to be processed in order to meet the requirements of the examination. This can be done by practising more advanced skills associated with AO2. For assessment objective 2 (AO2), which involves 'critical analysis' and 'evaluation' skills, we are going to focus on different ways in which the skills can be demonstrated effectively, and also refer to how the performance of these skills is measured (see generic band descriptors for A2 [WJEC] AO2 or A Level [Eduqas] AO2).

► **Your next task is this:** Below is a **brief summary of two different points of view concerning the validity of the theory of Intuitionism**. You want to use these two views and lines of argument for an evaluation; however, they need further reasons and evidence for support to fully develop the argument. Re-present these two views in a fully evaluative style by adding further reasons and evidence that link to their arguments. Aim for a further 100 words.

Many people would say that they experience things as intuitively 'right' or 'wrong' – in other words as 'objective features of the world' or 'facts'. Intuitionism supports this common experience of morality – even for those who do not believe in God.

There is no way to verify Intuitionism! There is no empirical evidence for it and there is no agreement on the origin of Intuitionism (God? Gut feelings? Genetics?). Even the Intuitionists disagree amongst themselves on what morality consists of!

When you have completed the task, refer to the band descriptors for A2 (WJEC) or A Level (Eduqas) and in particular have a look at the demands described in the higher band descriptors towards which you should be aspiring. Ask yourself:

- Is my answer a confident critical analysis and perceptive evaluation of the issue?
- Is my answer a response that successfully identifies and thoroughly addresses the issues raised by the question set?
- Does my work show an excellent standard of coherence, clarity and organisation?
- Will my work, when developed, contain thorough, sustained and clear views that are supported by extensive, detailed reasoning and/or evidence?
- Are the views of scholars/schools of thought used extensively, appropriately and in context?
- Does my answer convey a confident and perceptive analysis of the nature of any possible connections with other elements of my course?
- When used, is specialist language and vocabulary both thorough and accurate?

Key skills

Analysis involves identifying issues raised by the materials in the AO1, together with those identified in the AO2 section, and presents sustained and clear views, either of scholars or from a personal perspective ready for evaluation.

This means:

- That your answers are able to identify key areas of debate in relation to a particular issue
- That you can identify, and comment upon, the different lines of argument presented by others
- That your response comments on the overall effectiveness of each of these areas or arguments.

Evaluation involves considering the various implications of the issues raised based upon the evidence gleaned from analysis and provides an extensive detailed argument with a clear conclusion.

This means:

- That your answer weighs up the consequences of accepting or rejecting the various and different lines of argument analysed
- That your answer arrives at a conclusion through a clear process of reasoning.

This section covers AO1 content and skills

Specification content

Theory that believes objective moral laws do not exist; a non-cognitivist theory; moral terms express personal emotional attitudes and not propositions.

Key quote

The sense of the world must lie outside the world. In the world everything is as it is and happens as it does happen. In it there is no value – and if there were it would be of no value. (Wittgenstein)

quickfire

1.23 According to Russell, where did question of value belong?

Key terms

Emotivism: theory that ethical propositions are simply expressions of approval or disapproval

Verification principle: methodology of the Logical Positivists that only statements that are empirically verifiable (i.e. verifiable through the senses) are cognitively meaningful

F: Meta-ethical approaches: Emotivism

Emotivism as an ethical theory

The theory of **Emotivism** is usually associated with the British philosopher A. J. Ayer and, quite independently of Ayer's work, the American philosopher Charles L. Stevenson. Whilst Ayer was more influenced by the Logical Positivists and the ideas of the **verification principle**, Stevenson was influenced more by the later ideas of Wittgenstein on the meaning of language.

However, prior to the popularisation of the theory of moral language as emotive, this had been already raised by empiricists such as David Hume and then by one of Moore's closest friends at Cambridge, Bertrand Russell. Ayer acknowledges this in his first edition preface: 'The views which are put forward in this treatise derive from the doctrines of Bertrand Russell and Wittgenstein, which are themselves the logical outcome of the empiricism of Berkeley and David Hume.'

A year prior to the publication of Ayer's book, *Language, Truth and Logic* (1936) Bertrand Russell had published a book called *Religion and Science* (1935) and argued that moral judgements of right and wrong were justified if they promote good but in terms of whether or not an act is a good act he states: 'there is no evidence either way; each disputant can only appeal to his own emotions'. He also argued that moral statements were a form of rhetoric to rouse the emotions of others. Russell writes: 'Questions as to "value" lie wholly outside the domain of knowledge. That is to say, when we assert that this or that has "value", we are giving expression to our own emotions, not to a fact which would still be true if our personal feelings were different.' He concluded the contrary to Moore when he argued that for something to have intrinsic value is a matter, not of objectivity as Moore claimed, but of pure subjectivity. For example, the classic case is with the goodness of beauty, which, as we know from the common phrase that 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder', is totally a matter for debate and personal perspective.

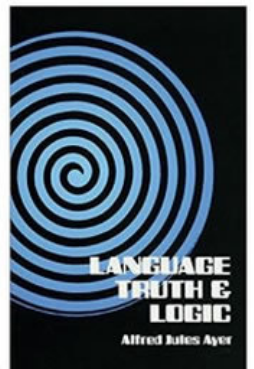
Key quote

Moore would agree that moral judgements are neither analytic nor empirically verifiable. But he believed that they are nevertheless true or false, because they are about non-natural properties. But Ayer responds that our 'intuitions' are simply our feelings of approval or disapproval. Feelings are not cognitions of value, and value does not exist independently of our feelings. (Lacewing)

In other words, whilst Moore indicated that 'self-evident' truths did not need justification, Russell drew a different conclusion that for something to



It was the philosopher Bertrand Russell who first really challenged Moore's views and suggested that ethical language was emotive.



Alfred Ayer's book *Language, Truth and Logic* generated a lot of debate amongst moral philosophers when published in 1936.

be 'self-evident' just means that it cannot be deemed true or false and, in that case, in the words of Richard Norman, 'They make no statements and they convey no knowledge'.

This principle of non-verification was taken up by Alfred Ayer in relation to his work with the Logical Positivists who were all mainly from mathematical, scientific or engineering backgrounds. The Logical Positivists, you will have, or will learn from the Philosophy topic on Religious Language, were interested in types of knowledge and language that could be verified through either analytical or synthetic means by appeal to logic or empiricism. This in itself relates back to Hume's Fork.

Warnock summarises his position well when she writes:

'Ayer's general contention is, briefly, that any statement that has meaning must fall into one of two categories. Either, it must be analytic, that is necessarily true but not concerned with empirical matters of fact; or it must be empirical. If it is empirical, it can never be more than probable; it is, in fact, a hypothesis. Both the meaning and the probability of the hypothesis are established by empirical verification. That is to say, if a statement is to qualify for the second category, it must be capable of verification by sense experience.'

The problem for ethical propositions is that to be verified they must fit into one of the two categories of Hume's Fork (see earlier diagram and explanation). Either, they fit into the category of logic, mathematics and symbols as analytic propositions; or, they fall into the second category of the empirical experience of science and propositions of empirical matter of fact.

Key quote

Even the most enthusiastic intuitionist would never maintain that one literally saw or heard the goodness of an action. (Warnock)

There are no other categories of knowledge and language.

The problem is, as Hume, Russell and Ayer analysed, ethical propositions do not fall into either category. Furthermore, as Hume had observed years earlier, 'when you pronounce any action or character to be vicious, you mean nothing, but that from the constitution of your nature you have a feeling or sentiment of blame from the contemplation of it'. Hume points out that such feelings are 'not qualities in objects, but perceptions in the mind'. Reason cannot find a motive for an action and neither can an ethical proposition be grounded in anything else other than our own 'experience'.

Whilst Hume gave a typical Naturalist account of such feelings by linking them 'objectively' to biological heritage and social conditioning, Russell and Ayer drew a very different conclusion.

Key quote

On Hume's account, our ethical nature is characterised by the capacity for sympathy, or the ability to feel with (empathise with) others. On such an account any variation in moral codes must be a consequence of differing social conditions, while ultimately all such codes must express some fundamentals which humanity shares. (Hayward)

In order to discover precisely what Ayer concluded, it would be beneficial to refer closely to his argument presented in chapter 6 of his seminal work, *Language, Truth and Logic* (LTL). At the outset, however, Ayer never proposed that ethical propositions were of no value or worth or that ethical debate was not worthy of pursuit, as he states clearly in later writings, but simply that they are not factual or

Key quote

Questions as to 'value' lie wholly outside the domain of knowledge. That is to say, when we assert that this or that has 'value', we are giving expression to our own emotions, not to a fact which would still be true if our personal feelings were different. (Russell)



Alfred Ayer was influenced by Hume's empiricism and also the scientific approach of the Logical Positivists.

Specification content

A.J. Ayer – ethical statements are neither verifiable nor analytic; made to express joy or pain (emotion); expressed to be persuasive; emotivism is not subjectivism.

quickfire

1.24 What was Ayer's purpose in his analysis of ethical language?

Key quotes

If someone still wishes to say that ethical statements are statements of fact, only it is a queer sort of fact, he is welcome to do so. So long as he accepts our grounds for saying that they are not statements of fact, it is simply a question of how widely or loosely we want to use the word 'fact'. My own view is that it is preferable so to use it as to exclude ethical judgements, but it must not be inferred from this that I am treating them with disrespect. The only relevant consideration is that of clarity. (Ayer)

We are not now concerned to discover which term, within the sphere of ethical terms, is to be taken as fundamental ... We are inquiring whether statements of ethical value can be translated into statements of empirical fact. (Ayer)

quickfire

1.25 How many classes of philosophical ethical investigation did Ayer outline?

that it is not possible to verify them. In LTL he writes that his task is: 'to show what people are doing when they make moral judgements' and no more.

A.J. Ayer: Ethical statements are neither verifiable nor analytic

Ayer sets off with the recognition that whilst ethical statements are of value, 'significant' (he does not explain how) and 'scientific' in one sense (he does not explain how), in another sense because they are simply emotions they become unscientific, insignificant and unverifiable. Ayer seems to acknowledge that ethical statements do have some meaning and relevance but he does not elaborate because his investigation is all about how language works in the literal sense and what is happening when we use it. He writes:

'We shall set ourselves to show that in so far as statements of value are significant, they are ordinary "scientific" statements; and that in so far as they are not scientific, they are not in the literal sense significant, but are simply expressions of emotion which can be neither true nor false.'

Ayer sees four categories existing within ethical philosophy:

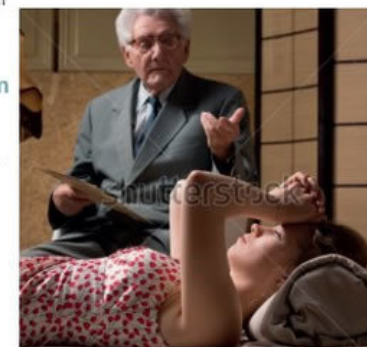
1. Propositions which express definitions of ethical terms.
2. Propositions describing the phenomena of moral experience, and their causes.
3. Exhortations to moral virtue.
4. Ethical judgements that attempt to ascribe value.

Ayer argues that philosophers do not always differentiate between these classes: 'It is unfortunately the case that the distinction between these four classes, plain as it is, is commonly ignored by ethical philosophers; with the result that it is often very difficult to tell from their works what it is that they are seeking to discover or prove.' Indeed, Ayer sees only sees the first class, that of meta-ethics and definitions of ethical terms as the area that could be considered to constitute ethical philosophy.

According to Ayer, the second category belongs to the scientific disciplines of psychology and sociology. The exhortations are really commands and have the intention and purpose of provocation and do not belong to any branch of philosophy or science. The fourth category certainly does not belong to moral philosophy according to Ayer as it is simply a matter of personal approval or disapproval. However, is it possible that such value judgements could be somehow 'translated to ethical fact'? Ayer posits.

Emotivism is not subjectivism

The position held by subjectivism is that values arise out of the different attitudes that a person of society/culture has towards things. In other words, our emotions about the things that we see ascribe some sort of value to them. For example, we may feel that corporal punishment is bad, but is it really our feelings about the action the very thing that makes the action a 'bad' thing? For Ayer, emotions and attitudes towards issues that elicited an ethical proposition in no way affect the moral value of the object of such a proposition.



Ayer felt that ethical language and its use and meaning belonged to the subject area of psychology rather than philosophy.

Ayer writes:

'If we say this, we are not, of course, denying that it is possible to invent a language in which all ethical symbols are definable in non-ethical terms, or even that it is desirable to invent such a language and adopt it in place of our own; what we are denying is that the suggested reduction of ethical to non-ethical statements is consistent with the conventions of our actual language. That is, we reject utilitarianism and subjectivism, not as proposals to replace our existing ethical notions by new ones, but as analyses of our existing ethical notions. Our contention is simply that, in our language, sentences which contain normative ethical symbols are not equivalent to sentences which express psychological propositions, or indeed empirical propositions of any kind.'

Rejection of Intuitionism

As we have already seen, Ayer overtly rejects Intuitionism. His reasons are not the same as those of Russell, who, if we remember, rejected intuition because it was purely subjective and not a basis for knowledge. For Ayer it was a simple matter of verification. This occurs especially where there is a debate about establishing which value is true when there are different intuitions. Since there is no way to solve this then its value cannot be determined and thus demonstrates that an appeal to intuition is pointless. Ayer writes:

'In admitting that normative ethical concepts are irreducible to empirical concepts, we seem to be leaving the way clear for the "absolutist" view of ethics – that is, the view that statements of value are not controlled by observation, as ordinary empirical propositions are, but only by a mysterious "intellectual intuition". A feature of this theory, which is seldom recognised by its advocates, is that it makes statements of value unverifiable. For it is notorious that what seems intuitively certain to one person may seem doubtful, or even false, to another. So that unless it is possible to provide some criterion by which one may decide between conflicting intuitions, a mere appeal to intuition is worthless as a test of a proposition's validity.'

In addition, Ayer points out that any ethical element in a proposition adds nothing to its factual content. He uses stealing as an example and demonstrates that to say 'You acted wrongly in stealing that money' is no different from saying 'You stole that money'. There is no further statement being made about 'stealing money' that can be evaluated as true or false. It is simply a moral disapproval.

Key quotes

For in saying that a certain type of action is right or wrong, I am not making any factual statement, not even a statement about my own state of mind. I am merely expressing certain moral sentiments. And the man who is ostensibly contradicting me is merely expressing his moral sentiments. So that there is plainly no sense in asking which of us is in the right. For neither of us is asserting a genuine proposition. (Ayer)

In every case in which one would commonly be said to be making an ethical judgement, the function of the relevant ethical word is purely 'emotive'. It is used to express feeling about certain objects, but not to make any assertion about them. (Ayer)

Key quotes

I do in fact suspect that the experiences which some philosophers want to describe as intuitions, or as quasi-sensory apprehensions, of good are not significantly different from those that I want to describe as feelings of approval. (Ayer)

We begin by admitting that the fundamental ethical concepts are unanalysable, inasmuch as there is no criterion by which one can test the validity of the judgements in which they occur. (Ayer)



For Ayer ethical language was nothing more than personal approval or disapproval.

Key quote

The sentence 'You ought to tell the truth' also involves the command 'Tell the truth', but here the tone of the command is less emphatic. In the sentence 'It is good to tell the truth' the command has become little more than a suggestion ... In fact we may define the meaning of the various ethical words in terms both of the different feelings they are ordinarily taken to express, and also the different responses which they are calculated to provoke. (Ayer)

Key term

Pseudo concepts: something treated as a concept but can only be mentally apprehended and not empirically verified

quickfire

1.26 What did Ayer compare the verification of an ethical proposition to?

Ethical statements can be persuasive

Despite all this, Ayer did give one concession to ethical propositions. In a sense it was a great shame that he did not elaborate further on this aspect; however, it appears that since ethics is only one aspect of his whole theory about LTL, then he dealt with it within the framework of the purposes of his book and the simple notion of verification. As Mary Warnock observed, 'Ayer, perhaps unwisely, presents his case for emotivism as though it rested primarily on a desire to find an ethical theory which would not conflict with the verification doctrine'.

The area he conceded that ethical propositions may have some worth was as means of persuasion. He writes: 'It is worth mentioning that ethical terms do not serve only to express feeling. They are calculated also to arouse feeling, and so to stimulate action. Indeed some of them are used in such a way as to give the sentences in which they occur the effect of commands. Thus the sentence "It is your duty to tell the truth" may be regarded both as the expression of a certain sort of ethical feeling about truthfulness and as the expression of the command "Tell the truth".'

In conclusion, there is no way that we can find a criterion for determining the validity of ethical judgements according to Ayer. Ethical statements have no objective validity whatsoever. If, as established above, the ethical element says nothing more about the statement than it is illogical to then ask whether that additional element is true or false. According to Ayer, ethical statements are 'pure expressions of feeling and as such do not come under the category of truth and falsehood'. We cannot verify them just as we cannot verify a cry of pain!

Therefore, ethical propositions are simply what Ayer called 'pseudo-concepts' and unanalysable. Ayer saw this as falling within the discipline of psychology. They are also to do with the moral habits of a given person or group of people, and a study of what causes them to have precisely those habits and feelings. This was an area of study for sociology and anthropology. Even the discipline of casuistry (applying an ethical rule to solve a given moral situation) is not a scientific discipline but rather one of analytical investigation as to how a moral system is structured.

Once again, if ethical arguments were formal logic or scientific procedure then the concept of goodness and rightness would be demonstratively different from the actions or situation. Since these concepts have been shown to add nothing to the action or situation then they are not independently verifiable. As Ayer puts it, 'There is no procedure of examining the value of the facts, as distinct from examining the facts themselves.'

Key quotes

Ethical argument is not formal demonstration. And not in a scientific sense either. For then the goodness or badness of the situation, the rightness or wrongness of the action, would have to be something apart from the situation, something independently verifiable, for which the facts adduced as the reasons for the moral judgement were evidence. (Ayer)

There is no procedure of examining the value of the facts, as distinct from examining the facts themselves. We may say that we have evidence for our



Anthropology studies the evolution of human behaviour and Ayer felt that this was best suited to assess moral behaviours.

moral judgements, but we cannot distinguish between pointing to the evidence itself and pointing to that for which it is supposed to be evidence. Which means that in the scientific sense it is not evidence at all. (Ayer)

In conclusion, Ayer revisits what he stated in the first place. He was not set out to demonstrate that 'morals are trivial or unimportant, or that people ought not to bother with them' and nor did he conclude this. Ayer would consider this a value judgement of his own and so by his own method, unverifiable, as there would be no logical justification for this conclusion. His conclusion is that 'all moral theories, intuitionist, naturalistic, objectivist, emotive, and the rest, in so far as they are philosophical theories, are neutral as regards actual conduct'. In other words, they tell us nothing about the actions themselves but simply may inform us what people are doing when they make moral judgements. Ayer then distinguishes between ethics proper, that is the first three of his four categories listed above (namely, experience, virtue and value) to which no true moral philosopher should be 'presumptuous' enough to engage, and meta-ethics. He sees meta-ethics as the true realm of philosophy, and indeed, the subject with which he has himself been engaging with in attempting to define and analyse ethical propositions.

It would be beneficial here to present his conclusion:

I hope that I have gone some way towards making clear what the theory which I am advocating is. Let me now say what it is not. In the first place, **I am not saying that morals are trivial or unimportant, or that people ought not to bother with them.** For this would itself be a judgement of value, which I have not made and do not wish to make. And even if I did wish to make it, it would have no logical connection with my theory. For the theory is entirely on the level of analysis; it is an attempt to show what people are doing when they make moral judgements; it is not a set of suggestions as to what moral judgements they are to make. And this is true of all moral philosophy, as I understand it. All moral theories, intuitionist, naturalistic, objectivist, emotive, and the rest, in so far as they are philosophical theories, are neutral as regards actual conduct. To speak technically, they belong to the field of meta-ethics, not ethics proper. That is why it is silly, as well as presumptuous, for any one type of philosopher to pose as the champion of virtue. And it is also one reason why many people find moral philosophy an unsatisfying subject. For they mistakenly look to the moral philosopher for guidance.

Key quote

Again, when I say that moral judgements are emotive rather than descriptive, that they are persuasive expressions of attitudes and not statements of fact ... I am not saying that nothing is good or bad, right or wrong, or that it does not matter what we do. (Ayer, *On the Analysis of Moral Judgements*)

AO1 Activity

Why not research the Logical Positivists on the Internet to find out more about what they thought regarding ethics.

Study tip

It is good to see a link between philosophers/philosophical ideas, for example, how Hume, Russell and Ayer follow a particular empiricist tradition.

Specification content

Ethical terms are just expressions of personal approval (hurrah) or disapproval (boo); explains why people disagree about morality.

Key terms

'Hurrah-boo' theory: another term for the theory of Emotivism

Interest theory: Stevenson's theory of Emotivism

Dynamic power: the sense in which language is best analysed to determine meaning according to Stevenson

quickfire

1.27 Which philosopher developed a more systematic approach to Emotivism?

Ethical terms are just expressions of personal approval (hurrah) or disapproval (boo)

Now that we have covered Ayer's argument in LTL there are two areas of the Specification left to cover in relation to Emotivism as a theory. Since Emotivism extends beyond Ayer, it would be beneficial to look at these two areas briefly in relation to the work of Charles L. Stevenson as well as Ayer. Stevenson was an American philosopher noted for his work on Emotivism and is seen as the philosopher who developed it into a full-bodied, systematic theory. In 1937 he published in the *Mind* Journal an article entitled, *The Emotive Meaning of Ethical terms*. He followed this up with two later papers and then produced his book, *Ethics and Language*, published in 1944 by Yale University Press, which is seen to be a classic systematic presentation of the theory.

For some reason, at a point in time that the current author cannot accurately locate, there emerged in response to Ayer's proposals a nickname for his theory of Emotivism. This was because Ayer insisted that ethical propositions were simply emotive and feelings of either approval or disapproval. Emotivism therefore became known also as the **'Hurrah-boo!' theory** as it was felt that Ayer proposed that ethical terms are just expressions of personal approval (hurrah) or disapproval (boo). To be fair to Ayer, his role was simply to indicate what was happening with language when we use ethical propositions in line with his overall theory of verification. When something could not be verified, Ayer offered a simple reason and explanation but to explore further the thing that could not be verified was not his intention. As we have seen, he saw this as the role of sciences.

Nonetheless, the one glimpse of an alternative to ethical terms only being expressions of personal approval (hurrah) or disapproval (boo), was when he suggested that there was an alternative purpose of persuasion.

It is with this glimpse that we see an alternative approach that was taken by Charles Stevenson. Surprisingly, Stevenson developed his work at the same time as Ayer quite independently and in a different direction.

For Stevenson, his interest was not really in verifying ethical language but he did accept that if we seek scientific verification, then this was not the most helpful way to view the theory of Emotivism. He started with the word 'good' and argued that to make ethical questions clear any definition should: (1) enable disagreement about goodness; (2) have a certain magnetism or appeal to act in its favour; (3) not be subject to verification by scientific method.

He saw this as understanding the true nature of Emotivism but preferred the term **'interest theory'**. Stevenson was interested in how ethical propositions were used in two ways: (1) how they acquired power; and, (2) how **dynamic power** in using an ethical proposition influenced its meaning.

Stevenson realised that we actually use ethical propositions, or in fact any words, for a variety of purposes, e.g. arouse sympathy, persuade, drop hints, approve, disapprove, command, etc. He referred to this as the 'causal or dispositional property' of a word or proposition.

He writes, 'The emotive meaning of a word is the tendency of a word, arising



The American philosopher Charles L. Stevenson thought that the answer to 'verifying' ethical language could be found by studying its use.

through the history of its usage, to produce (result from) affective responses in people'. In other words, there are certain ethical words that are very well suited to an emotive meaning because they have a dynamic use. To leave an emotive element of such words out would mean we are misled to believe that it is purely descriptive when in actual fact this ignores its dynamic usage and so its actual meaning is distorted. The reason that the term 'good' is indefinable is because in any definition of it the emotive element will be distorted. Stevenson argued that good has a pleasing emotive meaning and that 'this is a rough description of meaning and not a definition'; however, it is adequate enough.

Stevenson suggested that the emotive aspects of ethical propositions were used in a variety of different ways although he tended to see persuasive definitions as a common use. His research is vast, and the book *Ethics and Language* is 336 pages long but these initial observations serve to show that there is much more to ethical propositions than just being expressions of personal approval (hurrah) or disapproval (boo).

Key quote

While Stevenson granted that moral language didn't have factual or cognitive content, he argued that it had emotive meaning. Moral propositions aren't true or false, but they aren't meaningless either – moral language allows us to express emotions. (Messerly)

Emotivism explains why people disagree about morality

Key quote

Thus he could easily account for our differences regarding ethics – we have different emotions. And when we disagree, Stevenson said we have a disagreement in attitude. But reasons or arguments will not change other people's attitudes. (Messerly)

The obvious conclusion to be drawn from Emotivism is that if ethical propositions are really just expressions of approval or disapproval then it follows that people inevitably will disagree about morality because we are all simply expressing our own opinions.

Moreover, it may then be suggested that there can never be any agreement in ethical debate and also that maybe ethical debate becomes pointless. Ethical debate would just become our emotional response to facts that we all agree on; since emotions are not verifiable and cannot contribute to meaningful logical discourse, ethics becomes meaningless.

However, for Stevenson ethical debate was meaningful and to demonstrate this he made a distinction between propositions, distinguishing between **propositions about 'belief'** and **propositions about 'attitude'**. Attitudes are statements that reflect the emotive use of ethical language in debate; they reveal how the person feels and sees things. Beliefs are more to do with facts that can be verified such as the 'nature of light transmission' to use Stevenson's example, or, something like the date that you last met somebody. Beliefs are not about ethical convictions.

- War is the last resort, and abortion is the legal termination of a foetus, are examples of beliefs.
- War/abortion is always wrong and war/abortion is sometimes wrong are attitudes.

quickfire

- 1.28 For a clear ethical definition, what three things needed to be present according to Stevenson?



Stevenson saw persuasion as a key purpose of ethical discourse.

Key terms

Propositions about belief: statements of fact or verifiable by empirical means

Propositions about attitude: views or value judgements about statements of belief

Key quote

It is disagreement in attitude, which imposes a characteristic type or organisation on the beliefs that may serve indirectly to resolve it, that chiefly distinguishes ethical issues from those of pure science. (Stevenson)

Specification content

Challenges: no basic moral principles can be established; ethical debate becomes a pointless activity; there is no universal agreement that some actions are wrong.

quickfire

- 1.29 According to Stevenson are beliefs showing ethical conviction?

Key quote

In normative ethics any description of what is the case is attended by considerations of what is to be felt and done about it; the beliefs that are in question are preparatory to guiding or redirecting attitudes. (Stevenson)

According to Stevenson, what happens in ethical debate is that people are trying to change others' attitudes not their beliefs. It would be valid to say that these attitudes are just describing the feelings of the individuals involved; however, if we account for emotive meaning we can see that each is trying to affect the others' feelings and influence them. The disagreement is a disagreement not **about** attitudes – the debate concerns not a focus on how one attitude is better than another – but rather it is a disagreement **in** attitudes towards the issue in hand. Therefore, Emotivism can explain why people disagree about morality without making ethical debate meaningless. In fact, Emotivism makes ethical debate meaningful.



Remembering that the chemical composition of water is H₂O and that the atoms are joined by covalent bonding is a proposition about belief according to Stevenson.

Key quotes

It is thus possible for there to be meaningful agreement in ethics, and the emotivist theory cannot be criticised on the grounds that it excludes this possibility. (Norman)

One advantage of this theory is that it easily explains how and why it is that moral judgements motivate us. If moral language were just descriptive, stating how things are, why would that get us to act in certain ways? We need to care. And what we care about is captured in our attitudes to the world. (Lacewing)

Challenges to Emotivism

Mary Warnock points out that Emotivism is too broad a theory for ethical language. It is not precise enough because it does not differentiate between ethical and non-ethical emotive use of language. For example, if emotivism attempts to influence someone's attitude then how exactly is an advertisement for donations to Water Aid different from advertising a McDonald's burger as 100% pure beef with nothing added in order to suggest it is healthy food?

Other general challenges include the fact that ethical language and debate is not always 'emotive', sometimes we use it to distance ourselves from others' views or indeed display indifference and not moral judgement and some see morality and ethical debate as a rational and logical process of reasoning.

We now look at three more specific challenges.

No basic moral principles can be established

A general criticism of Emotivism is that the theory only values meta-ethics. Ayer used meta-ethics to reduce ethical statements to mere sentiments that express no factual information whatsoever. If this is the case then no basic moral principles can be established. Likewise, Stevenson confined his approach to meta-ethics in that he looked specifically at the meaning and use of language. Even when he applied this to ethical statements there was no real insight offered into meta-ethical definitions or normative principles.

As Hayward writes, 'One conclusion that can be drawn from emotivism is that value judgements are not rational and so no rational agreement is possible on ethical matters and no knowledge can be had of them.'

Differences in opinion only heighten this problem and complicate matters. Emotivism suggests no way in which differences of opinion can be resolved; it can only observe that they happen. However, history demonstrates that clear decisions have been made for the better and to say that it was simply down to emotions ridicules these important ethical decisions.

Finally, the fact that it reduces morality to emotions which have no rational basis nor justification, means that the whole idea of basic moral principles is unfounded and suggests that they do not exist anyway. The other extreme is that there is no limit on moral principles that can be identified through emotions but that they are so conflicting that no sense of coherence can be found amongst them all.

Ethical debate becomes a pointless activity

Related to the above challenge, if there are no basic moral principles then ethical debate becomes a pointless activity because we need to ask, 'what are we debating?' If we cannot differentiate 'good' from 'bad' and 'right' from 'wrong' and only have feelings to revert to then why bother at all?

Certainly, if ethical debate is not pointless it would certainly not be rational and could provide no definitive answers. By reducing ethical debate to trying to influence each other's attitudes then it becomes no more than an exercise in propaganda. Surely this cannot be the case if an argument is presented with sufficient evidence?

The problem is that if one does follow the inclination of Emotivism then it does not address why many feel that whether or not the basis of 'good' and 'bad' is established it is also possible to present ethical debate. Ethical debate is not just about emotions but also to do with a process of reasoning using evidence to support an argument. It can be acknowledged that the outcome of the argument may be explained as personal opinion but the argument itself is still important. Indeed, how is that any different to Prichard's Intuitionism? Therefore to suggest that ethical debate is pointless appears 'to be throwing the baby out with the bathwater'.

There is no universal agreement that some actions are wrong

Although it could be argued that there is some value still in moral debate, even if it just about persuasion, it will never be able to establish a unanimous, universal agreement on those actions that are considered as wrong. There is no sense of authority to appeal to.

In addition, what would happen in ethical debate? History has proven that minority interests and 'emotions' (to use Ayer's perspective) have actually been the correct way forward. Look at slavery, homosexuality and women's rights not as moral issues but as relating to basic human rights and the law. The outcome has shown that basic principles of what is wrong can be established through ethical argument. Emotivism does not seem to reflect what has actually happened through ethical debate.

There are many more examples that could be used even if we do not have a set of guidelines established and put everything 'ethical' down to personal emotions.

If we accept Emotivism, Mackie has pointed out that we are not clearly differentiating between the things we disapprove of. He comments that there is a vast difference between his 'dislike of curries' and that of genocide!

Therefore, it seems that saying that there is no universal agreement that some actions are wrong would be contradicting what actually happens in reality and is not adequate enough to explain our different types of disapproval.

Key quotes

Stevenson analyses emotive meaning by connecting meaning to use. The purpose of moral judgements is not to state facts, but to influence how we behave through expressions of approval and disapproval. Words with emotive meaning do just that. If moral language is just descriptive, how can moral truths motivate us? Emotivism, by contrast, connects caring, approving, disapproving, with the very meaning of ethical words. (Lacewing)

The main difficulty with logical positivism is that according to the principle of verification, the principle of verification itself is meaningless ... But if the principle of verification is meaningless, then what it claims cannot be true. So it does not give us any reason to believe that the claims of ethics are meaningless. (Lacewing)

The emotivist defines 'morally good' as an 'expression of approval'. The emotivist is unable to distinguish between my dislike of curries from my dislike of genocide. But the difference between the two is profound. I dislike curry because I don't like its taste. I abhor genocide because it's immoral. (MacIntyre)



Not liking the taste of a certain food is a very different expression of disapproval from disagreeing about whether one approves of cruelty to animals.

Key skills

Knowledge involves:

Selection of a range of (thorough) accurate and relevant information that is directly related to the specific demands of the question.

This means:

- Selecting relevant material for the question set
- Be focused in explaining and examining the material selected.

Understanding involves:

Explanation that is extensive, demonstrating depth and/or breadth with excellent use of evidence and examples including (where appropriate) thorough and accurate supporting use of sacred texts, sources of wisdom and specialist language.

This means:

- Effective use of examples and supporting evidence to establish the quality of your understanding
- Ownership of your explanation that expresses personal knowledge and understanding and NOT just a chunk of text from a book that you have rehearsed and memorised.

AO1 Developing skills

It is now important to consider the information that has been covered in this section; however, the information in its raw form is too extensive and so has to be processed in order to meet the requirements of the examination. This can be done by practising more advanced skills associated with AO1. For assessment objective 1 (AO1), which involves demonstrating 'knowledge' and 'understanding' skills, we are going to focus on different ways in which the skills can be demonstrated effectively, and also refer to how the performance of these skills is measured (see generic band descriptors for A2 [WJEC] AO1 or A Level [Eduqas] AO1).

► **Your next task is this:** Below is a **brief summary of one challenge to Emotivism**. You want to explain this in an essay but as it stands at present it is too brief. In order that you demonstrate more depth of understanding, develop this summary by providing examples that will help you explain it further. Aim for 200 words in total.

Moral debate, even if it just about persuasion, will never be able to establish a unanimous, universal agreement on those actions that are considered as wrong. There is no sense of authority to appeal to. In addition, what would happen in ethical debate? History has proven that minority interests and 'emotions' (to use Ayer's perspective) have actually been the correct way forward. The outcome has shown that basic principles of what is wrong can be established through ethical argument. Emotivism does not seem to reflect what has actually happened through ethical debate.

When you have completed the task, refer to the band descriptors for A2 (WJEC) or A Level (Eduqas) and in particular have a look at the demands described in the higher band descriptors towards which you should be aspiring. Ask yourself:

- Does my work demonstrate thorough, accurate and relevant knowledge and understanding of religion and belief?
- Is my work coherent (consistent or make logical sense), clear and well organised?
- Will my work, when developed, be an extensive and relevant response which is specific to the focus of the task?
- Does my work have extensive depth and/or suitable breadth and have excellent use of evidence and examples?
- If appropriate to the task, does my response have thorough and accurate reference to sacred texts and sources of wisdom?
- Are there any insightful connections to be made with other elements of my course?
- Will my answer, when developed and extended to match what is expected in an examination answer, have an extensive range of views of scholars/schools of thought?
- When used, is specialist language and vocabulary both thorough and accurate?

Issues for analysis and evaluation

The extent to which moral terms are just expressions of our emotions

The first argument could be that moral terms do not attempt to define what terms like 'right' or 'wrong' mean, they are just an individual's emotional response to situations. Alfred Ayer suggested this.

Indeed, viewing moral terms as expressions of emotion would explain the diversity of moral opinion that we see across cultures and within our own culture. Any intuitionist response that seeks to explain these differences by positing that there are different intuitive abilities at work, cannot be substantiated with any evidence at all other than 'we know this is the case'.

Again, another argument could be that we can measure emotions and even explore the biological foundations of emotions. There has been no similar claim when it comes to Intuitionism. Instead of empirical evidence for Intuitionism there are conflicting and unsubstantiated claims that intuitions come from God, the 'gut' or genetics.

One could argue that the Emotivism view is very logical and scientific. Emotivism recognises the importance of the scientific approach to language and that words have particular meanings. These meanings must be empirically verified and, as they cannot be verified, Emotivism rejects, therefore, the abstract use of words in previous philosophical discussion.

Also, Emotivism does not necessarily mean that moral terms have no value. For example, Stevenson pointed out that what happens in ethical debate is that people are trying to change others' attitudes and if we account for emotive meaning we can see that each is trying to affect the others' feelings and influence them. Therefore, Emotivism can explain why people disagree about morality without making ethical debate meaningless. In fact, Emotivism makes ethical debate meaningful and is, according to Stevenson, more than just an expression of emotion.

Key quote

And therefore we should, I think, conclude that the validity of ethical judgements is not determined by the felicitous tendencies of actions, any more than by the nature of people's feelings; but that it must be regarded as 'absolute' or 'intrinsic', and not empirically calculable. (Ayer)

However, if moral terms were only expressions of emotions then there would be no point in real moral debate. The emotional responses people give are based on some inner belief or conscience and surely something more deeply rooted than mere emotions. Any Ethical Naturalist would obviously disagree and argue that moral terms express propositions, which can be seen as true or false by considering objective features of the world.

You could also argue that asserting moral statements as mere expressions of emotions is a way of defining moral terms. This leads us back to Moore's naturalistic fallacy and the rationality of not defining moral terms.

It is also held by some that emotional debates are needed to engage with what ethics is all about. What Emotivism does is just look at meta-ethics but not ethics proper. Indeed, one could argue that Ayer was wrong because his exclusion of groups 2–4 was simply due to the fact that all he was interested in was meta-ethics.

This section covers AO2 content and skills

Specification content

The extent to which moral terms are just expressions of our emotions.

AO2 Activity

As you read through this section try to do the following:

1. Pick out the different lines of argument that are presented in the text and identify any evidence given in support.
2. For each line of argument try to evaluate whether or not you think this is strong or weak.
3. Think of any questions you may wish to raise in response to the arguments.

This Activity will help you to start thinking critically about what you read and help you to evaluate the effectiveness of different arguments and from this develop your own observations, opinions and points of view that will help with any conclusions that you make in your answers to the AO2 questions that arise.

Key questions

Is it true that our strong feelings of approval or disapproval are the only force behind our ethical statements?

Is it really true that different intuitive abilities are the reason for moral disagreements?

Are there really 'objective features of the world' or is every observation really an interpretation?

Do common ethical approaches across cultures really point to an objective morality?

Isn't truth or falsity in the eye of the beholder?

If Emotivism were true, there would be no point to moral discussions. This runs counter to the instincts of many who feel that these discussions are valid. Also, if Emotivism is true, it must reduce a moral statement to the same level as all other statements that do not come from a source that is logically verifiable; moral statements are therefore at the same level as statements used in advertising, bribes and blackmail. An Intuitionist would say that this cannot possibly be the case!

Another argument would be that if moral statements are nothing more than a creation of family/culture/society, why are people able to 'stand outside' of their culture/family/society and challenge them morally? Therefore, there must be a basis for morality other than human emotion.

In addition, how do we differentiate 'right' between two people's moral opinions? Nothing can be resolved, and therefore some would see this as unworkable.

Stevenson argues that ethical language has a dynamic nature and magnetism but it could be suggested that rational ethical statements are not judged on the basis of emotional response but assessed by the nature of their argument. Mary Warnock has clearly pointed out that a claim that 'murder is wrong' is not simply about seeking approval! Such a serious ethical proposition is to be challenged, questioned, debated and deliberated with caution. If ethical statements were really just down to emotions then our moral obligations would not be consistent at all and there would be chaos.

It could be argued, however, this is one of the strengths of Stevenson's views in that it does allow Emotivism to move beyond a simple exchange of voices; it allows for persuasion, challenge and the clear expression of reasons. Why is it considered a bad thing for moral debate to be based upon gaining others' approval or avoiding their disapproval; this appears to have been most of the practice in applied ethics throughout history.

Key quote

While Stevenson granted that moral language didn't have factual or cognitive content, he argued that it had emotive meaning. Moral propositions aren't true or false, but they aren't meaningless either – moral language allows us to express emotions. Thus he could easily account for our differences regarding ethics – we have different emotions. And when we disagree, Stevenson said we have a disagreement in attitude. But reasons or arguments will not change other people's attitudes. (Messerly)

One conclusion could be that moral terms are expressions of emotions but there is more to moral language than just approval, as Stevenson has demonstrated. Alternatively, moral terms are not at all the expressions of emotion, they are objective and absolute features in the world and this would be the conclusion of Ethical Naturalism. It could also be concluded, however, that moral terms may have both an emotional pole and an objective pole and that it is difficult or impossible to untangle one from the other.

AO2 Activity

List some conclusions that could be drawn from the AO2 reasoning from the above text; try to aim for at least three different possible conclusions. Consider each of the conclusions and collect brief evidence to support each conclusion from the AO1 and AO2 material for this topic. Select the conclusion that you think is most convincing and explain why it is so. Try to contrast this with the weakest conclusion in the list, justifying your argument with clear reasoning and evidence.

Whether one of Naturalism, Intuitionism or Emotivism is superior to the other theories.

Whether one of Naturalism, Intuitionism or Emotivism is superior to the other theories

One line of argument would be that Emotivism, like Naturalism, does not ask us to simply believe that morality exists/is a given (as does Intuitionism). It appeals to our scientific minds. However, rather than saying (with naturalists) that morality can be measured or observed in the natural world, Emotivism has a robust presentation of morality as a social and psychological creation.

One could suggest that it is egalitarian! All moral expressions can be explained by this theory, from 'thou shalt not kill' (as a 'boo!' to killing) to 'be nice and help everyone' ('hurrah' for nice people!). Even the seemingly emotionless moral idea that 'principles should rule over feelings' can itself be seen as a creation of an emotional society!

In addition, Emotivism saves you from pointless conversations! It advises you that you can discuss matters of fact (i.e. what happens to a foetus in the abortion process); but warns you from thinking you can have a discussion of moral values (rightness/wrongness of abortion) since these are merely expressions of emotion.

Key quote

'Moral judgements express feelings or attitudes' it is said. 'What kind of feelings or attitudes?' we ask. 'Feelings or attitudes of approval' is the reply. 'What kind of approval?' we ask, perhaps remarking that approval is of many kinds. It is in answer to this question that every version of emotivism either remains silent, or by identifying the relevant kind of approval as moral approval – that is, the type of approval expressed by a specifically moral judgement – becomes vacuously circular. (MacIntyre)

On the one hand, it could be argued that Intuitionism has the virtue of corresponding with the sense that many of us have that certain actions are just 'right and good' or 'wrong and bad'. Indeed, Emotivism reduces a moral statement to the same level as all other statements that do not come from a source that is logically verifiable; moral statements are therefore at the same level as statement used in advertising, bribes and blackmail. It becomes no more than propaganda. An Intuitionist would say that this cannot possibly be the case. For Prichard, moral reasoning was far superior to general reasoning when it came to ethical decisions and that Intuitionism was a clear differentiator between ethical and non-ethical propositions. In this case, moral statements are not reduced but actually stand firm. Naturalism, on the other hand, sees itself as the solution because it argues that we can have an objective set of moral values that can be established through empirical means. Indeed, they would argue that Utilitarianism is their champion in that we can clearly see how this works in society, for example, with our political system and aspects of law.

Naturalism may be seen as superior as it encourages moral discussion and debate. After all, if Emotivism were true, there would be no point to moral discussions. This runs counter to the instincts of many who feel that these discussions are valid.

Intuitionism has the virtue of corresponding with the sense that many of us have that certain actions are just 'right and good' or 'wrong and bad' – Emotivism reduces a moral statement to the same level as all other statements that do not come from a source that is logically verifiable; moral statements are therefore at the same level as statements used in advertising, bribes and blackmail. An Intuitionist would say that this can't possibly be the case!

Intuitionism and Rationalism can be seen as superior to Emotivism because if, as Emotivism demands, moral statements are nothing more than a creation of family/culture/society, why are people able to 'stand outside' of their culture/

Key questions

Is it really true that moral discussions really have no point?

If societies create morality how does one account for people in those societies challenging moral norms?

Are moral statements really at the same level as statements used in advertising and other forms of persuasion?

Are there not certain activities that are simply 'bad' or 'wrong' or, alternatively, 'good' or 'right'?

Can't we prove that there are moral absolutes by looking at common moral themes shared by societies across the world?

family/society and challenge them morally? Therefore, there must be a basis for morality other than human emotion.

Key quote

The central ethical terms – 'right', 'wrong', 'good' and 'bad' – only have emotive meanings, of expressing approval or disapproval. But many moral terms ('steal', 'honesty', 'respect') have both descriptive and emotive meanings. To be told that someone is 'honest' is to learn something about them. For instance, they can't be honest while lying frequently! And whether someone lies frequently is a matter of fact. But the term 'honest' isn't just a description; it also has an emotive meaning of approval. (Lacewing)

All three theories have their strengths and their weaknesses. It could be suggested that they look at different aspects of ethics. For instance, Emotivism tends to focus on how the propositions are used (Stevenson) whereas Naturalism tends to calculate decisions based upon evidence and experience. Intuitionism is unique in that it considers the obligatory nature and how ethical awareness compels us to behave. Would there be any use trying to adopt Bradley's Hegelian dialectical methodology and synthesise through combining all aspects and seeing them as different ways of achieving the same goal?

Depending on which line of argument is accepted one could conclude that there is no real answer and that any of Naturalism (or Emotivism, or Intuitionism) is superior to the other theories. Indeed, since there is no way, ultimately, to prove what is the source of our morality, judging that one of these meta-ethical positions is superior is not possible. In addition, it could be concluded that there is no proof that there is an objective or absolute source of morality, then Naturalism or Emotivism has to be superior to the other theories.

AO2 Activity

As you read through this section try to do the following:

1. Pick out the different lines of argument that are presented in the text and identify any evidence given in support.
2. For each line of argument try to evaluate whether or not you think this is strong or weak.
3. Think of any questions you may wish to raise in response to the arguments.

This Activity will help you to start thinking critically about what you read and help you to evaluate the effectiveness of different arguments and from this develop your own observations, opinions and points of view that will help with any conclusions that you make in your answers to the AO2 questions that arise.

AO2 Activity

List some conclusions that could be drawn from the AO2 reasoning from the above text; try to aim for at least three different possible conclusions. Consider each of the conclusions and collect brief evidence to support each conclusion from the AO1 and AO2 material for this topic. Select the conclusion that you think is most convincing and explain why it is so. Try to contrast this with the weakest conclusion in the list, justifying your argument with clear reasoning and evidence.

The extent to which the different meta-ethical theories encourage moral debate

The extent to which the different meta-ethical theories encourage moral debate

One line of argument could be that Emotivism definitely discourages moral debate, as disagreement is not about 'rightness' or 'wrongness' but about different emotional stances. The only debate you can have is about facts (defined via Logical Positivism), not the moral positions that are apparently based upon these facts. In other words, whilst it may appear that a debate is actually taking place it is no more than an exchange of emotions and is not a meaningful debate. Emotivism tends to reduce ethical debate to a very basic level according to this line of thinking.

In addition, it could be argued that Intuitionism discourages moral discussion as it says morality is known intuitively. There can never be an explanation of why we should act morally as we always know that we ought to. The key to Prichard's Intuitionism is that it is moral thinking that determines the outcome and not general reasoning. Therefore, we are technically encouraged not to engage too much in debate.

Nevertheless, in response to this, Prichard does consider it necessary to consider all 'claims' and 'preliminaries' before confirming (through Descartes' skeptical doubt) that our intuition was the correct recognition of duty. Since, intuitive thinking does develop and need a mature approach of thought it could be argued that, in fact, Intuitionism according to Prichard does encourage moral debate.

For those who follow absolutist and objective approaches to ethics (i.e. Intuitionism, Divine Command theory, etc.), there is no point of having dialogue with the natural and social sciences. This is because added insights cannot change one's moral stance. However, again, quite to the contrary, there is the whole debate about the application of Natural Moral Law, for example, the principle of Double Effect and indeed the position taken by Revisionists such as those who are linked with Proportionalism. This whole area has been a minefield as the great depth and breadth of Roman Catholic moral theology will attest to over the past 50 years.

Key quote

There is no particular Socratic or Dimechian or Kantian way to live your life. They don't offer ethical codes and standards by which to live your life. (Stephen Fry)

The various approaches that align with Naturalist ethics can certainly encourage debate since they encourage observation and measurement – you can debate the validity of the observations and the measurements (i.e. is activity X causing more pleasure than pain?). Utilitarianism is the classic example for encouraging engagement with social and political issues, both of which have an underlying ethical basis. The greatest happiness principle and the principle of universalisability are pertinent examples in relation to law and democracy. Even Bentham's Hedonic Calculus is relevant to how Utilitarianism developed through ethical debate and created Act and Rule versions.

Also, it is the whole purpose of moral debate according to Stevenson's version of Emotivism. Indeed, Emotivism explains why people do engage in debate about morality for persuasion and affirmation of attitudes. Indeed, Emotivism itself, as a theory, has encouraged much debate about morality as it is so extremely reductive! It provokes discussion about the essence of ethics as few other approaches can.

Also, if we follow Ayer's Emotivism then it does not address why many feel that whether or not the basis of 'good' and 'bad' is established, ethical debate is not just about emotions but also to do with a process of reasoning using evidence to support an argument. It can be acknowledged that the outcome of the argument may be explained as personal opinion but the argument itself is still important. Indeed, how is that any different to Prichard's intuitionism? Therefore, to suggest

Key questions

Is it really true that the only meaningful discussion one can have is about facts rather than values?

Does Intuitionism with its insistence on morality as a 'given' really discourage any ethical discussion?

If the social sciences can inform our ethical choices, doesn't this mean that ethics is not objective and absolute?

Is it not possible to speak of measurements of pain and pleasure in terms of the results of moral decisions?

Does Emotivism really end all discussion since it reduces morality to emotional expression?

that ethical debate is pointless appears 'to be throwing the baby out with the bathwater'.

Key quote

In matters of conscience, the law of the majority has no place. (Gandhi)

Study tip

It is vital for AO2 that you actually discuss arguments and not just explain what someone may have stated. Try to ask yourself, 'was this a fair point to make?', 'is the evidence sound enough?', 'is there anything to challenge this argument?', 'is this a strong or weak argument?' Such critical analysis will help you develop your evaluation skills.

One conclusion could be that meta-ethical approaches do encourage moral debate even though some of these encourage more debate than others. Another alternative conclusion could be that one of the meta-ethical approaches actually encourages debate: Emotivism rules it out, Intuitionism prevents any discussion on the source of morals, and in Naturalism there are only calculations and no real debate about morality. Finally, there could also be a conclusion that suggests there will always be debates regardless of these theories. Since these are 'meta' ethical approaches rather than normative ethical theories, their intention is not to focus on debating particular issues but outlining a general approach to ethics. We will still have to discuss particular moral decisions.

AO2 Activity

As you read through this section try to do the following:

1. Pick out the different lines of argument that are presented in the text and identify any evidence given in support.
2. For each line of argument try to evaluate whether or not you think this is strong or weak.
3. Think of any questions you may wish to raise in response to the arguments.

This Activity will help you to start thinking critically about what you read and help you to evaluate the effectiveness of different arguments and from this develop your own observations, opinions and points of view that will help with any conclusions that you make in your answers to the AO2 questions that arise.

AO2 Activity

List some conclusions that could be drawn from the AO2 reasoning from the above text; try to aim for at least three different possible conclusions. Consider each of the conclusions and collect brief evidence to support each conclusion from the AO1 and AO2 material for this topic. Select the conclusion that you think is most convincing and explain why it is so. Try to contrast this with the weakest conclusion in the list, justifying your argument with clear reasoning and evidence.

AO2 Developing skills

It is now important to consider the information that has been covered in this section; however, the information in its raw form is too extensive and so has to be processed in order to meet the requirements of the examination. This can be done by practising more advanced skills associated with AO2. For assessment objective 2 (AO2), which involves 'critical analysis' and 'evaluation' skills, we are going to focus on different ways in which the skills can be demonstrated effectively, and also refer to how the performance of these skills is measured (see generic band descriptors for A2 [WJEC] AO2 or A Level [Eduqas] AO2).

► **Your next task is this:** Below is an argument concerning **whether Naturalism, Intuitionism or Emotivism is superior to the other theories**. You need to respond to this argument by thinking of three key questions you could ask the writer that would challenge their view and force them to defend their argument.

On the one hand, it could be argued that Intuitionism has the virtue of corresponding with the sense that many of us have that certain actions are just 'right and good' or 'wrong and bad'. Indeed, Emotivism reduces a moral statement to the same level as all other statements that do not come from a source that is logically verifiable; moral statements are therefore at the same level as statements used in advertising, bribes and blackmail. It becomes no more than propaganda. An Intuitionist would say that this cannot possibly be the case. For Prichard, moral reasoning was far superior to general reasoning when it came to ethical decisions and that Intuitionism was a clear differentiator between ethical and non-ethical propositions. In this case, moral statements are not reduced but actually stand firm. Naturalism, on the other hand, sees itself as the solution because it argues that we can have an objective set of moral values that can be established through empirical means. Indeed, they would argue that Utilitarianism is their champion in that we can clearly see how this works in society, for example, with our political system and aspects of law.

When you have completed the task, refer to the band descriptors for A2 (WJEC) or A Level (Eduqas) and in particular have a look at the demands described in the higher band descriptors towards which you should be aspiring. Ask yourself:

- Is my answer a confident critical analysis and perceptive evaluation of the issue?
- Is my answer a response that successfully identifies and thoroughly addresses the issues raised by the question set?
- Does my work show an excellent standard of coherence, clarity and organisation?
- Will my work, when developed, contain thorough, sustained and clear views that are supported by extensive, detailed reasoning and/or evidence?
- Are the views of scholars/schools of thought used extensively, appropriately and in context?
- Does my answer convey a confident and perceptive analysis of the nature of any possible connections with other elements of my course?
- When used, is specialist language and vocabulary both thorough and accurate?

Key skills

Analysis involves identifying issues raised by the materials in the AO1, together with those identified in the AO2 section, and presents sustained and clear views, either of scholars or from a personal perspective ready for evaluation.

This means:

- That your answers are able to identify key areas of debate in relation to a particular issue
- That you can identify, and comment upon, the different lines of argument presented by others
- That your response comments on the overall effectiveness of each of these areas or arguments.

Evaluation involves considering the various implications of the issues raised based upon the evidence gleaned from analysis and provides an extensive detailed argument with a clear conclusion.

This means:

- That your answer weighs up the consequences of accepting or rejecting the various and different lines of argument analysed
- That your answer arrives at a conclusion through a clear process of reasoning.