

# ETHICAL THOUGHT REVISION (PART As AND Bs)

Write notes on what you remember about each sub-topic:

NATURALISM:

INTUITIONISM

EMOTIVISM

A) Explain the concept of 'good' in moral intuitionism (20)

Draft Mark scheme:

On a scale of 1-10, how do you feel about answering a question on this topic?

## A) Explain the concept of 'good' in moral intuitionism (20)

### Draft Mark scheme:

#### GEMOORE (Principia Ethica)

Response to goodness in naturalism: Naturalistic Fallacy to state that goodness is synonymous to 'pleasure'.

Good is a simple notion and therefore it is a mistake to see 'good' as a moral principle that has definition. Goodness in fact is a 'non-natural, indefinable property of an action', much in the same way that the colour 'yellow' is also indefinable.

You cannot define goodness by identifying a single property that defines what good is: Goodness is pleasure, goodness is love – these are not adequate.

Things are often described by their constituent parts ie. horse has four legs and a tail. This cannot be done with 'good' and therefore it is not a natural property.

Further evidence for this is found in Moore's Open Question Argument.

Instead Moore argues...

Self evident truths: just simply exist and are infallible. Intuition is the process by which we arrive at the knowledge of the things truths. Goodness is one such self evident truth.

Intrinsic goods—things that ought to exist for their own sake—often indefinable and without evidence but still exist cognitively just not with natural properties.

Examples: 'human intercourse and the enjoyment of beautiful objects'.

Good is innate and the same for all moral agents.

It is *sui generis* meaning without comparison and unique.

#### How should we act?

*'Our duty therefore, can only be defined as that action, which will cause more good to exist in the world than any possible alternative'.* MOORE We do this by weighing up the consequences of actions.

We ought to perform actions that bring about this intrinsic goodness and these can be supported by empirical evidence. Sometimes the action itself can be fallible but the intrinsic goodness itself is infallible. *'Moore concedes that it is possible that metaphysics might have some relevance to what we ought to do, though it could have none to the question what is good.'* MARY WARNOCK

**(a) Explain the cognitive approach of naturalism (20)**

**Draft Mark scheme:**

On a scale of 1-10, how do you feel about answering a question on this topic?

## (a) Explain the cognitive approach of naturalism (20)

### Draft Mark scheme:

#### Bradley:

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

There are 3 key ways in which naturalism expresses ethics cognitively:

**Ethical Sentences express propositions:** they are cognitive and meaningful because they relate to the world. They depict interactions with our world and recognise that we are part of a whole which he calls the concrete universal, the idea that the self is derived from relations with the world.

**Objective features of the world make propositions true or false:** Our knowledge of society around us can confirm or deny ethical propositions.

Our whole approach to ethics is grounded in our empirical reality—“to know what a man is...you must not take him in isolation” (Bradley). Furthermore, a person has a station of duty within the real world “a person is not born in a vacuum, but has a definite place in society and history” (Warnock). Therefore, through realising one’s station and it’s duties within the whole moral organism we realise who we are and what behaving ethically is. This he terms ‘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. “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 historic sciences” (Broad). Bradley recognises the role of nurture through upbringing, psychology and social behaviour. He acknowledges the process of evolution but through the idea of ‘self-realisation’ – not necessarily just external factors. Darwin himself does not just note psychical developments but also knowledge and understanding. Bradley believes that morality too changes and evolves (not always for the better).

#### Mill:

Utilitarian—equating goodness with the term pleasure and badness with the term pain—both which are cognitive and empirically viable.

Mill works through the following premises for each a conclusion which became known as his principle of universality.

- 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.

A) Compare the views of Ayer and Stevenson on the role of ethical debate (20)

Draft Mark scheme:

On a scale of 1-10, how do you feel about answering a question on this topic?

# A) Compare the views of Ayer and Stevenson on the role of ethical debate (20)

## Draft Mark scheme:

### Ayer: verification principle and pseudo concepts

Ethical statements are neither analytic or synthetic and therefore cannot be verified. *“Even the most enthusiastic intuitionist would never maintain that one literally saw or heard the goodness of an action”* (Warnock). As they are unscientific, unverifiable terms there cannot be any meaningful debate surrounding them.

Instead ethical statements are **pseudo-concepts** - something treated as a concept but can only be mentally apprehended and not empirically verified and therefore unanalysable.

He provides four categories of ethical philosophy and from these concludes that only the first: “Propositions which express definitions of ethical terms” is open to any kind of moral philosophy as it concerns meta-ethics. The alternative three categories including “Ethical judgements that attempt to ascribe value” do not belong to moral philosophy and it is this category that is often the root of moral debate. Therefore this is not necessary for Ayer.

His conclusion is not that morals were trivial or unimportant (as this would be a value judgement of his own) but just that “all moral theories...are neutral as regards actual conduct” – they tell us nothing about the actions themselves but simply may inform us what people are doing when they make moral judgements. I.e. Utilitarianism tells us they acted for the greatest good but does not necessarily tell us that this was the right thing to do. Therefore, the rightness or wrongness of how we choose to act, for Ayer, is not open to debate.

Ethical statements may have some worth as a means of persuasion. Ethical statements are “calculated also to arouse feeling, and so to stimulate action”. I.e. It is your duty to tell the truth is the same as a command “Tell the truth!” which could leave some room for ethical debate – not over the value of an action in itself, but to convince other’s that your ethical choice is more superior than another’s.

### Stevenson: ‘interest theory’ and the power of persuasion

He develops Ayer’s part of the argument that suggests that ethical terms may serve as a means for persuasion and argues against the concept that emotivism is a ‘Boo-Hurrah’ theory. Instead he says that there is much more to ethical propositions than just expressions of approval (hurrah) or disapproval (boo).

Ethical statements have a dynamic usage – to arouse sympathy, persuade, drop hints, command. He names this the ‘causal or dispositional property’ of a word or proposition and argues that to leave the emotive element of a word out means we are misled to believe that it is surely descriptive when this ignores its dynamic usage. For example, for the purpose of ethical debate.

He argues that to make ethical questions clear any definition should: Enable disagreement about goodness, Have a certain magnetism or appeal to act in its favour, Not be subject to verification by scientific method. Despite the final category, the first two strongly suggest, therefore that there is room for moral debate.

He recognised that some could argue that ethical debate is just our emotional response to facts and therefore it is not verifiable and cannot contribute to logical discourse making it meaningless? However to counter this he made a distinction between propositions about ‘belief’ and propositions about attitude.

Ethical propositions relating to attitude are statements that reflect the emotive use of ethical language, for example how the person sees and feels things whereas belief is more to do with facts that can be verified such as ‘the nature of light transmission’ or the date you last saw somebody. Beliefs are not about ethical convictions and therefore cannot be involved in ethical debate. However, in moral debate each individual is trying to effect the others attitudes and feelings which is an appropriate discourse.

B) The ethical theory of intuitionism (could also ask about naturalism or emotivism) most greatly encourages moral debate (30)

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## B) The ethical theory of intuitionism (could also ask about naturalism or emotivism) most greatly encourages moral debate (30)

### Draft Mark scheme:

#### Yes:

Moore stated that 'Our duty therefore, can only be defined as that action, which will cause more good to exist in the world than any possible alternative'. We do this by weighing up the consequences of actions which could form moral debate.

Moore believed that there existed things that ought to exist for their own sake cognitively, and that these are things that are 'intrinsically good'. He believed that we ought to perform actions that bring about this intrinsic goodness and these can be supported by empirical evidence. However, the things considered to be intrinsically good were said to often be indefinable and may not even have any evidence for their existence. Therefore, it could be said that they are subject to moral debate. For example, Moore listed 'the pleasures of human intercourse and the enjoyment of beautiful objects' as two intrinsic good, but there are said to be numerous others that we may be able to discover through the process of moral debate.

Prichard recognises that sometimes our 'duties' will conflict which may result in a conflict between our moral obligations. Therefore, to resolve the issue we simply examine that situation and choose the greater obligation. This examination could form a moral debate and consequently Prichard could be said to encourage this.

Prichard distinguishes between moral and general reasoning. The purpose of general reason is to deflect any doubt to our intuitive response ie. Follow intuition first and then support the decision you have made by applying general reasoning to show why it is the correct decision. General reasoning could be said to form moral debate and consequently Prichard's version of intuitionism could be said to encourage moral debate to some extent.

Naturalism does not encourage moral debate as it suggests that moral terms are cognitive, empirically verifiable and universal. Therefore, we can verify and falsify ethical statements such as 'helping someone is good' by measuring the amount of pleasure caused through the moral action. As this provides quantifiable evidence there is no need for moral debate.

Naturalism suggests that there are universal moral truths that exist independently of human thought. For example, 'murder is wrong' or Mill's principle of universality which suggests that it is a moral truth that we aim at the happiness of everyone this will increase our personal happiness. This does not leave any room for different interpretations and therefore does not encourage moral debate.

Ayer, an emotivist, suggests that ethical statements are merely expressions of sentiment, hence the theory was nicknamed 'boo-hurray'. If this is the case then moral debate becomes meaningless as it does not come to any conclusion. Instead, the role of meta ethics for Ayer is to explore "propositions which express definitions of ethical terms", rather than looking at the rightness or wrongness of ethical theories.

#### No:

Prichard, an intuitionist, stated that moral truth is concerned within the sense of obligation that we intuitively feel when confronted with a situation. We just 'know' how we ought to behave. This attitude leaves no room for moral debate.

Moore, stated that 'good' is innate and the same for all moral agents.

Stevenson, despite being an emotivist, sees value in moral debate and thus could be seen to encourage it. He argued that to make ethical statements clear they need to enable disagreement, have an appeal to act in its favour and not be subject to verification scientifically. Therefore, ethical statements are perfect fruit for moral debates, Stevenson argued that debate is about peoples attitudes (not beliefs) and therefore debate seeks to change people's beliefs which is perfectly valid.

If you can still argue that there is some value in moral debate, even if it just persuasion (Stevenson) – it will never be able to establish a unanimous, universal agreement on actions considered to be wrong. There is no sense of authority to appeal to if statements are just expressions of an individuals emotions. Therefore, there is plenty of opportunity for moral debate.

B) Emotivism (could ask about naturalism or intuitionism) is superior to the other meta-ethical theories. (30)

Draft Mark scheme:

On a scale of 1-10, how do you feel about answering a question on this topic?

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### Draft Mark scheme:

YES:

Emotivism could be said to benefit from viewing ethical statements as non-cognitive. This allows for a complex, sophisticated discussion of moral language demonstrated by the analysis of the statement "murder is wrong". It prevents ethicists regarding moral statements as self-evidently true allowing for moral debate, especially through the framework of emotivism provided by Stevenson, making it superior to other ethical theories.

Emotivism is culturally aware unlike intuitionism and naturalism. Intuition may not be intuition at all but simply an emotional response based on our cultural conditioning. Therefore, the theory goes some way to explaining why there are different moralities in different parts of the world. For example, eskimos believe that it may be acceptable to euthanise their elderly by leaving them out in the cold, whereas euthanasia is considered illegal in many Western countries. This could be because of emotional response to death developed through one's upbringing and culture.

Russell agrees that moral statements are often used as a form of rhetoric to rouse the emotions of others. For example, history reveals many examples of emotivist methods of expressing moral views, even if they are not verifiable such as Hitler's condemnation of the Jews and current extremist views such as those proposed by the Westboro Baptist Church. Therefore, Russell agrees that moral statements are justified if they promote good but whether an act is actually good or not 'there is no evidence either way, each disputant can only appeal their own emotions' When we claim that something has value we are giving expression to our own emotions and not a fact.

Furthermore, Hume supports the idea of emotivism. According to Hume and his fork analogy, statements that are meaningful are either analytic, true by definition (bachelors are unmarried men), or synthetic, true by experience (my brother is a bachelor). Moral statements are neither and so consequently it is natural to assume that they are based on an expression of emotion or sentiment.

NO:

Non-philosophers also think there is more to ethics than just the expression of an attitude or an attempt to influence behaviour. They want a better explanation and foundation for shared standards of morality than Emotivism can provide. Therefore, perhaps naturalism could be considered a better ethical theory as it correlates with some modern scientific views. For example, the similarities between Bradley's understanding of self-realisation and Darwin's view of not only a physical, but also a moral evolution.

Emotivism can easily be accused of reducing ethics to a set of 'boos' and 'cheers' towards ethical propositions which is not an adequate way of viewing morality. As Mel Thompson states 'You cannot reduce morality to a set of cheers and boos'. By doing this emotivism belittles the human ability to reason as demonstrated by James Rachels who argued that emotivism wrongly compares stubbing one's toe (which relates to emotion) with making moral statements (which involves reason and convictions).

Vardy: emotivism is 'hot air and nothing else.'

If emotivism is true, moral statements are reduced to the level of other logically unverifiable statements such as those used in advertising and even blackmail. An intuitionist would argue that this cannot be the case and along with naturalists state that we need to accept that ethical statements exist cognitively. Modern science, especially evolutionary studies seem to support this view. For example Darwin states that "*An American monkey, after getting drunk on brandy, would never touch it again, and thus is much wiser than most men*". Therefore ethics exists in the natural world, and either can be experienced through empiricism (Naturalism) or intuitively (intuitionism).