	Component 3: Religion and Ethics Theme 1: Ethical Thought Booklet 2 – D,E and F and evaluation	

Knowledge and understanding of religion and belief

D	**Meta-ethical approaches - Naturalism:** 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. **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. **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).
E	**Meta-ethical approaches - Intuitionism:** Objective moral laws exist independently of human beings; moral truths can be discovered by using our minds in an intuitive way; intuitive ability is innate and the same for all moral agents; intuition needs a mature mind so not infallible; allows for objective moral values. **H.A. Prichard**, 'ought to do' has no definition; recognise what we 'ought to do' by intuition; two ways of thinking (general and moral). **Challenges**: no proof of moral intuition exists; intuitive 'truths' can differ widely; no obvious way to resolve conflicting intuitions.
F	**Meta-ethical approaches – Emotivism:** Theory that believes objective moral laws do not exist; a non-cognitivist theory; moral terms express personal emotional attitudes and not propositions; ethical terms are just expressions of personal approval (hurrah) or disapproval (boo); explains why people disagree about morality. **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. **Challenges**: no basic moral principles can be established; ethical debate becomes a pointless activity; there is no universal agreement that some actions are wrong.

AO2
 Issues for analysis and evaluation will be drawn from any aspect of the content above, such as:
• Whether ethical and non-ethical statements are the same.
• The extent to which ethical statements are not objective.
• Whether moral terms are intuitive.
• The extent to which moral terms are just expressions of our emotions.
• Whether one of Naturalism, Intuitionism or Emotivism is superior to the other theories.
• The extent to which the different meta-ethical theories encourage moral debate.

Meta-ethics is the study of **ethical language**. The word 'meta' means above and beyond, which is why we use the word metaphysics to describe things that are beyond the natural world such as God, angels and the soul. In meta-ethics, scholars are interested in working out what we mean when we say that something is 'right' or 'wrong', 'good' or 'bad.'

Meta-ethical approaches - Naturalism

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**.

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.

Introduction

Meanings of Good on ncpreligiousstudies
What do we mean by "a good guitar'? Or a good knife?

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What makes a 'good person'?

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Are the meanings of good here the same or different? Is there a prescriptive meaning of good 'a good person should do x'?

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Naturalists believe goodness can be measured and translated into facts (about pleasure, happiness, human flourishing).

Ethical Naturalism

Ethical Naturalism argues that actions have **objective moral properties** which we can experience or observe empirically, through our senses. These properties may be reduced to entirely **non-ethical** or **natural** properties, such as desires or pleasures.

Ethical Naturalism claims ethical statements are **cognitivist**. Cognitivism claims that ethical language expresses ethical beliefs about how the world is, that have been verified (checked for validity) and are either true or false. It claims ethical language aims to describe the world, and so can be true or false (factual).

Ethical Naturalism claims moral terms can be understood by analysing the natural world, we can understand that to experience kindness is a 'good' experience and to experience cruelty is 'bad'.

Imagine that I say 'lying is wrong'. This is equivalent to a naturalist saying something like 'lying causes suffering and distress' or 'lying isn't in your interests'. We can substitute the word 'wrong' in this way with some natural feature of lying which we claim is observable, cognitively provable to be true from experience. In this way ethical statements can be verified, for example, by observing whether lying really does cause human distress. Naturalists also argue that the meanings of these ethical sentences can be expressed as **natural properties** without the use of ethical terms (e.g. "good", "right", etc.).

It suggests that inquiry into the **natural world** can increase our **moral knowledge** in just the same way it increases our **scientific knowledge**, and that any "ethical value" is confirmable through the methods of science. C. D. Broad observed that "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, 1946, p. 103). Moral facts are therefore **facts of nature**. This idea is based on **realism**, this means the world around us is actually 'there' and not just in our imagination, a delusion or psychological projection.
Ethical naturalists include Natural Law and Utilitarian theorists.

According to ethical naturalism verified moral statements are objective truths and are universal, this means apply to all people at all times.

Ethical naturalists include supports of Natural Law and Utilitarianism

Add notes here when you are revising in year 13

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1. What is meta-ethics.

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2. Explain the key terms – objective, cognitivism, empirical and realism.

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3. Write a brief summary of ethical naturalism.

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F.H. Bradley and the nature of ethical statements

(1846 – 1924) *Book – Ethical Studies, Chapter 5 My Station and its Duties.* His writings are referred to as **polemical** as they contain philosophical arguments with strongly critical writing. He was influenced by Hegel and is classed as an idealist; this means he claimed that reality is fundamentally mental/mentally constructed and immaterial.

Bradley tried to create an ethical theory that was an improvement on both Kantian theories of duty and obligation and Utilitarian theories of hedonism and pleasure. He considered Kant's theory too separate from the world of sense experience and Utilitarianism to be too subjective and not universalisable.

Bradley claimed there were objective features of the world that make propositions true or false.

F.H. Bradley also believed that **ethical statements expressed propositions** (statements) which were provable as true or false. Bradley uses this to confirm his view that moral judgment necessarily involves a reference to what is real. *"For consider - a judgment must be true or false, and its truth or falsehood cannot lie in itself. They involve a reference to a something beyond. And this, about which or of which we judge, if it is not fact, what else can it be?"* (1883:41)

So Bradley is a naturalist because morality rests on certain facts about ourselves, our goals, and our place in society. He believed that to be moral is to live in accordance with the moral tradition of one's country. *"We have found the end, we have found self-realisation, duty and happiness in one – yes, we have found ourselves, when we have found our station and its duties, our function as an organ of the social organism."* (1927:34)

Bradley claimed meta-ethical statements can be seen in scientific terms.

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. This places us in the empirical world and offers the best possibility of satisfaction.
To be a 'good' person, we must know our station and its duties, Bradley argued, and hence his argument is a form of **cognitivism**. We can know objectively and test empirically the proposition that 'honesty is good' as this means, 'honesty helps realise my potential and my place in society'.
The good society is about hard work and obedience. Once my position in life is decided, I have a duty to perform the function of that station. Doing wrong is not a case of breaking certain rules (as in normative ethics); rather it is going against your role in society. 'To be moral is to live in accordance with the moral tradition of one's country.' Bradley

'If a man is to know what is right, he should have imbibed the spirit of his community, and its general and special beliefs as to right and wrong.' Bradley

In terms of the Naturalistic claim that meta-ethical statements can be seen in scientific terms, Naturalism no longer remains exclusively in the domain (area) of philosophy. Bradley acknowledges the role of nurture through upbringing, psychology and social behaviour. Bradley also acknowledges the process of evolution. There has been an increasing interest in recent years in explaining ethics from a scientific perspective whether it be biological or psychological.

4. **Summarise Bradley's ideas about ethical statements.**

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5. **Read the information below and summarise the advantages of Bradley's ideas.**

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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.'

Goodness as 'satisfying interests'

James Rachels (1941-2003) prefers to cash (define) the word 'wrong' in terms of 'interests' rather than in terms of pleasure or pain. This is closer to the form of ethical naturalism known as **preference utilitarianism**.

"The most plausible form of ethical naturalism begins by identifying goodness with satisfying our interests, while "interests" are explained in turn as the objects of preferences. Protecting our eyesight, for example, is in our interests because we have desires that would be frustrated if we could not see; and that is why unimpaired eyesight is a good thing. Again, protecting children is a good thing because we care about children and we do not want to see them hurt. As Hobbes put it, "Whatever is the object of any man's appetite or desire, that is it which he for his part calls good" (Hobbes, 1651, p. 28). Reasoning about what to do, therefore, is at bottom reasoning about how to satisfy our interests."
James Rachels (2002)

6. **Explain Rachels' development of ethical naturalism.**

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Conclusion

Our sense perceptions – the things we see, hear, touch, smell and taste – and principles of logic are the tools that a moral person uses to make judgments about ethics. These moral truths are facts like numbers or biological data. I can conclude that something is wrong from observation and analysis. When I hear a lie being told, what I see isn't only the facts of how a statement is untrue, who said it and what actually happens – I also perceive the fact that it's morally wrong. The wrongness of lying is as much a fact of the universe as the fact that the exposure of the lie as untrue can stop its effects. This means that moral facts aren't views or opinions, personal likes or dislikes. Nor are they based on some sort of spiritual or intuitive sense. When I observe that something is wrong, it's an objective moral fact of the universe. **Eduqas notes**

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).

David Hume – the is/ought gap

'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.' (Hume, 1739, p. 468)

'Since morals, therefore, have an influence on the actions and affections, it follows, that they cannot be derived from reason; and that because reason alone, as we have already proved, can never have any such influence. Morals excite passions, and produce or prevent actions. Reason of itself is utterly impotent in this particular. The rules of morality, therefore, are not conclusions of our reason.'
(Hume, 1739, p. 457)

Hume is pointing out that factual statements and moral statements are of a different kind. There are two points we can make here:

1. Hume's argument is an argument about the missing premise. He is saying people move too quickly from a descriptive statement 'this is causing me pain' to a normative statement 'this is wrong' without establishing what is wrong about pain. The two statements are essentially different.

2. Hume's argument is about moral motivation. Hume points out that we need to explain what is obligatory in an 'ought statement' as these statements are action-guiding. Ought statements have power 'to cause or prevent actions'. But says Hume, it is our feelings and desires which provide the motivation. So for Hume the missing premise is to say 'I don't want to be hurt' – this is what makes pain morally 'wrong'.

6. Explain in your own words Hume's argument for an is/ought gap.

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7. How does Hume think moral statements and beliefs are derived?

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Making an 'ought' into an 'is'

All attempts to move from an 'ought' to an 'is' face the same problem: they attempt to describe a situation which logically dictates what an individual is then obliged to do. However, there is no reason for us not to ask why we should do this. If I ask why I ought to eat oranges, the reply might be that they are a good source of vitamin C, but that is not in itself sufficient. I can ask why I should care that they are a good source of vitamin C and be told that it is because they are good for my health. But even this is not enough, because I might not be concerned about looking after my health and certainly not consider that there is any moral obligation upon me to do so. Furthermore, if I have an allergy to oranges, it certainly wouldn't be 'good' for me to eat them, whatever their health-giving benefits.

In ethical terms, to say that something is good, and therefore prescribe it as a moral action we should be obliged to perform, is unconvincing to many. Why should we seek the happiness of the greatest number, do our duty or pursue the virtues? These may be good in some circumstances or even most but that alone is not sufficient to make them a matter of moral obligation.

Moore distinguished between natural facts which are known through the senses and moral facts which are known through intuition. Values are not facts, but evaluations of facts. Facts exist independently of human beings and how they feel, but values are dependent on humans to exist to make evaluations. Nevertheless facts can be used to support value judgements; hence values are not entirely independent of facts. For example, we may say that abortion is wrong because it causes the foetus to suffer. However, we still need to prove that abortion does cause suffering.

Almost any example of moving from fact to moral value raises the same problems. Consider this example:

D1: 'It is good to give money to charity' (or: 'Giving money to charity is good')

P1: 'You ought to give money to charity.'

It seems here as if there is no logical problem involved in moving from D1 (descriptive 'is') to P1 (prescriptive 'ought'). However, on closer examination several problems do emerge:

- Why is giving money to charity good?
- If it is to help the deserving poor, how do we know they are deserving?
- Is giving to charity once enough, or is it only good if it is a repeated action?
- Is it the giving alone which is good or does there have to be a guarantee that the money is going to be used wisely?
- How do we define wise use of charitable donations?
- Is it still good to give to charity if I have no money to give?
- If so, does this mean I can never be good? Is there an alternative action I can perform to ensure that I can still be described as good?
- Is giving to charity the only intrinsically good action?

The range of questions which emerge here, concerning only one possible example of attempting to define good or identity a good action, show that there can be no simple transition to an 'is' from an 'ought' in moral terms.

Open Question Argument

Moore's position is often called the **Open Question Argument**. A statement such as 'Anything which brings happiness is good' leads to the question 'Is it good that X leads to happiness?' This is an open question because the answer is 'maybe yes, maybe no' hence it does not increase our moral knowledge about X or about happiness. Put another way, we could say 'Good is that which maximises the happiness of the greatest number', but if we then ask the question, 'Is it good to maximise the greatest happiness of the greatest number?' the same problem arises- sometimes it is and sometimes it isn't.

- 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.

However, they are still significant statements which cannot easily be answered or dismissed because despite the problems, we are not satisfied with saying that there can be no meaningful moral assertions about what is good and about what people ought to do. John Searle argued that it is possible to derive an 'ought' from an 'is' in the case of promising. If I say that 'I promise to...' then I take on the obligation of fulfilling that promise, so the fact of speaking the words lead me to carry out my obligation to do so. But more than that, if we hold certain things to have moral value we feel that it is reasonable to encourage others to do so to.

A response to the challenges - James Rachels – How to derive an ought from an is

This, however, has a surprising implication for the idea that we cannot derive "ought" from "is." Rather than explaining why such derivations are impossible, it helps to explain how they are possible. In 1964 Max Black offered this example:
• Fischer wants to checkmate Botwinnik.
• The one and only way to check mate Botwinnik is for Fischer to move the Queen.
• Therefore, Fischer ought to move the Queen.
Black argued that this is in fact a valid chain of reasoning: if the premises are true, the conclusion must be true also. But the premises concern only matters of fact. They include no "ought" judgments. The conclusion, however, is about what ought to be done.
Thus it seems that we can derive "ought" from "is." Hume was wrong, then, to say that we can never derive "ought" from "is." But he was wrong for a reason that his own analysis exposes. If our premises include information about a person's relevant desires, we may validly draw conclusions about what he or she should do. This result is not out of keeping with the spirit of Hume's view. Indeed, it is probably better to express Hume's view as the idea that we cannot derive ought-judgments from facts about how the world is independently of our desires and other attitudes regarding it. That is the point of Hume's Guillotine. (James Rachels, Naturalism, pages 8,9)

8. What is James Rachels' argument here?

9. Does he satisfactorily bridge the is/ought gap?

The Naturalistic Fallacy – G.E. Moore

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. Consider yellow, for example. We may try to define it, by describing its physical equivalent; we may state what kind of light-vibrations must stimulate the normal eye, in order that we may perceive it. But a moment's reflection is sufficient to show that those light-vibrations are not themselves what we mean by yellow. They are not what we perceive. Indeed, we should never have been able to discover their existence, unless we had first been struck by the patent difference of quality between the different colours. The most we can be entitled to say of those vibrations is that they are what corresponds in space to the yellow which we actually perceive. Yet a mistake of this simple kind has commonly been made about good. It may be true that all things which are good are also something else, just as it is true that all things which are yellow produce a certain kind of vibration in the light. And it is a fact, that 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. (Principia Ethica, 1903, Chapter 1, section 10)

10 . Explain what Moore means by goodness being a 'non-natural, indefinable property of an action'.
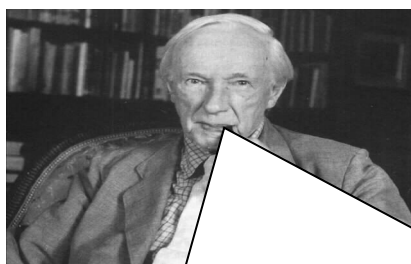
11. The naturalistic fallacy is.....

12. Strengths of Naturalism – complete the evaluation

✓ Based on what is natural – everyone can experience it. This is a strength because

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✓ Nature is universal so supports argument that morals can be universally known – factual. This is a strength because

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✓ Presents a solid guideline that ethics follow in every situation. Therefore,

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- **John Searle** argues that in some cases you <u>can</u> derive an ought from an is:
    - (P) You promised to pay me back my £5
    - (C) Therefore you ought to pay me back
- Searle argues that the institution of promise keeping is a natural fact about us (society), and there are 'normative implications' for this.
    - But perhaps there is a hidden evaluative premise – 'you ought to keep promises' (or the premise just is evaluative anyway).

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Chunking activity

Chunk the key ideas of ethical naturalism

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Chunk the key challenges (AO1 and AO2)

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Chunk the strengths (AO2)

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1 E Meta-ethical approaches - Intuitionism

Specification content - Objective moral laws exist independently of human beings; moral truths can be discovered by using our minds in an intuitive way; intuitive ability is innate and the same for all moral agents; intuition needs a mature mind so not infallible; allows for objective moral values. H.A. Prichard, 'ought to do' has no definition; recognise what we 'ought to do' by intuition; two ways of thinking (general and moral).

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

Intuitionism

Intuitionists argue that when I say "stealing is wrong" I mean "I have a moral intuition that stealing is wrong". An intuition is a form of perception in reaction to an **a posteriori** observation, something I either know innately or because of moral training about the things that I observe - that some of those things are "good' and some "bad". Moral properties are, as Descartes observed, "clearly and distinctly true".

1. What is intuition?

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G. E. Moore

So, just as I can learn through direct observation that my brother is in the next room, so I can also learn that punching my brother is wrong through sensing my reaction to seeing him punched.

To do this I will need either:

1. Innate moral feelings (intuitions), as GE Moore (1873-1958) argues for, or

2. A type of perception of events that can pick out exactly what properties make them wrong.

G.E. Moore is a **non-naturalist** because he believes that science will not be able to establish the features of an action that make it good. We cannot establish them just by observation of facts. So Moore argues that the moral features are "irreducible" as we cannot reduce them to a scientifc form. We can only know that things are wrong **a priori** (before experience).

Moore concludes that goodness is an **indefinable property** of an action like yellow is an indefinable property of a lemon. Good just is good, as yellow just is yellow.

Consider yellow, for example. We may try to define it, by describing the physical characteristics in terms of light-waves. But those light-waves are not themselves what we mean by yellow. They are not what we actually **perceive**. We would never have been able to discover their existence, unless we had first been struck by the difference of quality between the different colours. The most we can say is that light-waves represent in some way the yellow which we actually perceive. Moore uses the idea of colour as an **analogy**. Just as the colour yellow cannot be reduced to its scientifcally observable light-waves, so

the idea of goodness cannot be reduced to a factually observable feature of the world, such as happiness, as utilitarian naturalists believe.

"If I am asked "what is good?" my answer is that good is good, and that's an end of the matter....there is no intrinsic diffculty in the contention that "good" denotes a simple and indefnable quality. There are many other instances of such qualities....by far the most valuable things, which we can know or imagine, are certain states of consciousness which may be roughly described as the pleasures of human intercourse and the enjoyment of beautiful objects." (1903:6-10)

2. Summarise Moore's argument in three sentences.

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G.E. Moore extract on indefinable properties

"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. That there must be an indefinite number of such terms is obvious, on reflection; since we cannot define anything except by an analysis, which, when carried as far as it will go, refers us to something, which is simply different from anything else, and which by that ultimate difference explains the peculiarity of the whole which we are defining: for every whole contains some parts which are common to other wholes also. There is, therefore, no intrinsic difficulty in the contention that good denotes a simple and indefinable quality. There are many other instances of such qualities.

Consider yellow, for example. We may try to define it, by describing its physical equivalent; we may state what kind of light-vibrations must stimulate the normal eye, in order that we may perceive it. But a moment's reflection is sufficient to show that those light-vibrations are not themselves what we mean by yellow.

They are not what we perceive. Indeed, we should never have been able to discover their existence, unless we had first been struck by the patent difference of quality between the different colours. The most we can be entitled to say of those vibrations is that they are what corresponds in space to the yellow which we actually perceive.

Yet a mistake of this simple kind has commonly been made about good. It may be true that all things which are good are also something else, just as it is true that all things which are yellow produce a certain kind of vibration in the light. And it is a fact, that 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." (principia Ethica, Chapter 1, section 10)

3. Can you add any more points about Moore?

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H. A. Prichard

H. A. Prichard (1871-1947) argues that, like Moore's 'good', moral obligation is something known directly by intuition (Moral Obligation, 1949). Not just goodness, but the idea of obligation itself is indefinable.

"*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*". (HA Prichard, 1912)

He believed that everyone has a different moral intuition – some more developed than others. Where there is conflict between our moral obligations, we simply examine the situation and choose the greater obligation.

So we recognise immediately from certain non-moral facts of the situation whether an action is right or wrong: the sense of obligation is 'absolutely underivative and immediate'. This insight we possess is the equivalent, argues Prichard, to mathematical insight and it is obtained by a special unique faculty of human reason.

"*Suppose we come genuinely to doubt whether we ought, for example, to pay our debts. The only remedy lies in actually 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 capacities of moral thinking do their work*".

Using this special moral faculty of the human mind we can combine it with our imagination to create scenarios which then allows us to **intuit** how to act. But there is, according to Prichard, no other way of deriving fundamental moral principles. It is a process of intuition combining with imagination, rather than some other method of logic, or an appeal to natural facts which are themselves deemed to be moral facts. The key to moral thinking "lies not in any process of general thinking", but in intuition.

References HA Prichard 1912, "Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?" Mind, 21: 21–37.

Two ways of thinking (general and moral)

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. Furthermore, Pritchard speaks not of conflicting duties but of the fact that general reasoning may throw up different 'claims' and it may not lead to use knowing the ultimate moral duty. Pritchard said general reasoning should not be used to recognise our moral duty, only intuition can do this.

Moral reasoning is the recognition and assertion of one's duty by intuitive thought.

4. Summarise Pritchard's version of the intuitionism.

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H. A. Pritchard extract from 'Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?'

"With these considerations in mind, consider the parallel which, as it seems to me, is presented though with certain differences by Moral Philosophy. 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."

Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake? *Oxford University Press*. Mind 21 (81): 21–37

Pritchard V's Plato extract

"It is worth recalling in some detail what Prichard's reservations are. In his best known paper, Prichard sees obligation toward specific actions as called for by specific conditions or circumstances, and our apprehension of this "calling" as "absolutely underivative or immediate."

He likens this apprehension to mathematical insight (e.g., that a three-sided closed figure must have three angles as well), in that "insight into the nature of the subject directly leads us to recognize its possession of the predicate"; such insights are, he says, "self-evident." 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 recognize the self-evidence of the claims we began by doubting.

In a later paper, Prichard is more explicit about how Plato in particular has gone down the garden path with a form of reflection that is worse than useless. Once again, the charge is that Plato fails to appreciate that we think, "and think without having any doubt, that certain actions are right and that certain others are wrong."

Instead, Plato accepts as legitimate the bogus challenge of the Sophists (represented in Republic by Thrasymachus) of showing that what is required of us by justice is really to our own advantage.

Here, however, we get a difference in emphasis from the earlier paper. Whereas there Prichard's focus seemed to be on the mistake of thinking reflection could do something to supplement direct moral intuition – here we get a charge that Plato has supplied what has come to be known as the wrong kind of reason for morality. Prichard's main point now is that "conduciveness to our advantage is simply not what renders an action our duty, though we may be unable to say for sure quite what does render an action so." Mark Le Bar Canadian Journal of Philosophy, Volume 37 (2007) Supplement [vol. 33] pp. 1-32

A critique of Intuitionism extract

"Another familiar objection to the appeal to moral intuitions is that they are often tainted by their origin. Earlier I quoted Singer as observing that many common intuitions have their ultimate source in primitive religious beliefs, ancient taboos about sex, and social practices that were useful in a world that is no longer ours. There are many other tainted sources, such as superstitions concerning purity and defilement, and, perhaps most important, individual and collective self-interest. The vast majority of whites in the antebellum South thought it obvious that the enslavement of blacks was morally justified. Although they sought biblical and biological warrant for the practice, what really motivated their belief was crude self-interest. As long as they all had a strong interest in maintaining the practice and could reinforce each other's beliefs by participating in the practice and raising their children to accept it as part of the natural background to their lives, they were able to insulate their intuitive sense of the rectitude of the institution of slavery from challenges that would otherwise have disturbed it.
People do the same today with their belief that it is permissible to kill animals in order to eat them. Because eating meat gives them pleasure, people assume that it is in their interest (though in the forms and quantities in which they consume it, it is not). Most people therefore eat meat and this itself shields them from critical reflection. For they assume that because virtually everyone does it, including the very nicest people they know, it simply cannot be seriously wrong to do it. Yet without the blinkering effects of self-interest, the many powerful moral objections
to this practice would be obvious."
Jeff McMahon, The Blackwell Guide to Ethical Theory, Second Edition. Edited by Hugh LaFollette and Ingmar Persson 2013, page 116

5. Summarise the criticism of intuitionism discussed by McMahon

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Strengths of intuitionism

- ✓ Intuitionism allows for objective moral values to be identified and therefore proposes a form of moral realism. It is not a question of dismissing the possibility of any moral facts.
- ✓ Intuitionism does not propose a subjective or emotive approach to ethics but it does avoid the problems of identifying ethics with a natural property.
- ✓ Whilst we may recognise the wrongness of some actions, it is difficult to specify exactly why they are wrong. Rather we interpret it through a moral sense, not a list of moral definitions.
- ✓ We can identify a moral sense in the same way as we might identify an aesthetic sense in art or literature.
- ✓ Intuitionism allows for moral duties and obligations, and so satisfies a moral absolutist.
- ✓ The intuitionist points to the existence of a considerable common consensus on moral issues, such as the value of human life, as evidence of a common intuition of morality.
- ✓ Intuition may be associated with the idea of conscience as a moral guide.

Problems with intuitionism

- ➢ People do intuit and reason to different conclusions and there is no obvious way to resolve their differences.
- ➢ How can we be sure that our intuitions are correct? Is it a gut feeling? Is it God's direction? How reliable is experience as a guide?
- ➢ Intuition may be considered to be a meaningless concept, since it is non-verifiable.
- ➢ Hume argued that we have a motivation for acting in certain ways, although intuitionists may respond to this with the suggestion that if we feel motivated towards a particular action it is because we have an innate desire to do it that goes beyond reason.

Chunking activity

Chunk the key ideas of intuitionalism

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Chunk the key challenges (AO1 and AO2)

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Chunk the strengths (AO2)

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Emotivism

Meta-ethical approaches – Emotivism:

Theory that believes objective moral laws do not exist; a non-cognitivist theory; moral terms express personal emotional attitudes and not propositions; ethical terms are just expressions of personal approval (hurrah) or disapproval (boo); explains why people disagree about morality.

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.

Background: Hume's fork

David Hume (1711-1776) bases his theory of moral language on a famous distinction, which we can call **Hume's fork**, which the emotivists build upon. Language about the real world, argues Hume, is either analytic or synthetic: it is a fork with two prongs, so called, because it gives us two alternative types of language, so that statements about the objective world can only be of one of two sorts.

Hume argued all statements that are either true or false are either analytic or synthetic. An analytic statement is true by definition: "all bachelors are unmarried". The truth or falsehood of this statement is contained in the very idea of "bachelorhood". A synthetic statement, in contrast, can only be verified by sense experience. 'My brother is a bachelor' is synthetic because I can check whether he is or is not married (it's a statement of fact).

Moral statements are neither **analytic** nor **synthetic,** argued Hume, so they're an expression of emotion or sentiment. The fork therefore has two "prongs". The trouble is, moral statements don't ft either the analytic or synthetic "prong", and so are pronounced objectively "meaningless". We mustn't overstate this though: moral statements are still subjectively meaningful – meaningful to me.
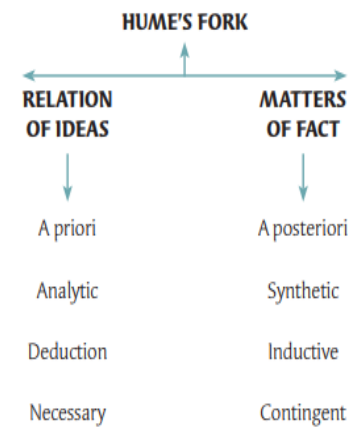
AJ Ayer

A.J. Ayer (1910-1989) builds on David Hume's insights discussed above in two senses:

1. Ayer adopts the same **analytic/synthetic** distinction about language about the real world (rather than about metaphysics). Only statements that are either analytic (true by definition) or synthetic (true by observation) are meaningful.

2. Ayer agrees with Hume that moral statements add nothing factual and can have no factual basis. They have no **empirical** basis

AJ Ayer agreed with Moore (see Intuitionism) that you can't get values or moral judgements from descriptions. 'Argument is possible on moral questions only if some system of values is presupposed'. Therefore to say that something is wrong is to say that I disapprove of it or that it goes against my values. In other words, "Abortion is wrong" is the same as saying "I don't like abortion". Ayer argued that moral statements are merely subjective, sentimental statements based on personal values (personal values because there is no absolute, objective value in the world – we decide what we value).

Statements of fact are either logically necessary (true by definition) or observable – moral statements are neither analytically or synthetically verifiable, so there are no moral facts.

Emotivism is not subjectivism

The idea of subjectivism is that values come from different attitudes that a person of society/culture has towards things. In other words, our emotions about the things that we see ascribe (give) some sort of value to them. For examples, we may feel that bullying 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 trigger an ethical proposition (statement) in no way affect the moral value of the object of such a propostion,

CL Stevenson said the purpose of a moral statement was to persuade someone of the rightness or wrongness of an action. 'Good' is a persuasive definition. He said that when we talk about moral issues, we express approval or disapproval. Unlike Ayer, he said moral statements were not merely expressions of emotion, but were based on deeply held beliefs. This gives a better explanation of why people disagree strongly about morality – their ideas are based on fundamental social, political or religious beliefs. However, Stevenson is an emotivist because he believes moral statements are the result of subjective opinions, views or beliefs.

 "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. So far, we are in agreement with the absolutists. But, unlike the absolutists, we are able to give an explanation of this fact about ethical concepts. We say that the reason why they are unanalysable is that they are pseudoconcepts. The presence of an ethical symbol in a proposition adds nothing to its factual content. Thus if I say to someone, "You acted wrongly in stealing that money," I am not stating anything more than if I had simply said, "You stole that money." In adding that this action is wrong I am not making any further statement about it. I am simply evincing my moral disapproval of it. It is as if I had said, "You stole the money" in a peculiar tone of horror, or written it with the addition of exclamation marks. The tone, or the exclamation marks, adds nothing to the literal meaning of the sentence. It merely serves to show that the expression of it is attended by certain feelings of the speaker.. It is clear that there is nothing said here which can be true or false. Another man may disagree with me about the wrongness of stealing.. in saying that a certain type of action is right or wrong, I am not making a factual statement, not even a statement about my own mind. I am merely expressing certain moral sentiments. And the man who is ostensibly contradicting me is merely expressing his moral sentiments. So there is plainly no sense in asking which of us is right. For neither of us is asserting as genuine moral proposition." (A. J. Ayer Language, Truth and Logic). Highlighting

1. If someone thinks the opposite to me, then all they are doing is showing their personal approval/disapproval.
2. There is no way of testing what the word 'good' means.
3. The presence of the word 'good' in a sentence adds nothing to the meaning of the sentence.
4. You cannot analyse an ethical idea like 'good' to find out what it means.

Activity –

1. **Highlight all words you do not know and find their meaning in a dictionary**
2. **Match the numbered explanations at the bottom to the ideas found in the quote.**
3. **Summarise Ayer's ideas in TWO sentences**

Extract from A.J. Ayer Language, Truth and Logic

"We reject the subjectivist view that to call an action right, or a thing good, is to say that it is generally approved of, because it is not self-contradictory to assert that some actions which are generally approved of are not right, or that some things which are generally approved of are not good. And we reject the alternative subjectivist view that a man who asserts that a certain action is right, or that a certain thing is good, is saying that he himself approves of it, on the ground that a man who confessed that he sometimes approved of what was bad or wrong would not be contradicting himself. And a similar argument is fatal to utilitarianism. We cannot agree that to call an action right is to say that of all the actions possible in the circumstances it would cause, or be likely to cause, the greatest happiness, or the greatest balance of pleasure over pain, or the greatest balance of satisfied over unsatisfied desire, because we find that it is not self-contradictory to -say that it is sometimes wrong to perform the action which would actually or probably cause the greatest happiness, or the greatest balance of pleasure over pain, or of satisfied over unsatisfied desire, And since it is not self-contradictory to say that some pleasant things are not good, or that some bad things are desired, it cannot be the case that the sentence 'X is good' is equivalent to 'x is pleasant', or to 'x is desired'. And to every other variant of utilitarianism with which I am acquainted the same objection can be made. And therefore we should, I think, conclude that the validity of ethical judgements is not determined by the felicific 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."
(*Language, Truth and Logic, 1946:107*)

A Critique, Alasdair MacIntyre

"Moral judgments 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 judgment – becomes vacuously circular.

What is "moral approval?" It depends partly on the belief that a particular act is morally good (and that belief may come from a number of different sources depending on whether you are a naturalist utilitarian, a non-naturalist Kantian or a follower of a religion that looks to divine commands). But 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".
(Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue, page 12)

Strengths of Emotivism

1. It highlights the reason why moral disputes are impossible to resolve decisively.
2. It acknowledges and in some way values the existence of moral diversity.
3. It is true to say that moral opinions are often formed on the basis of gaining other's approval or avoiding their disapproval (in childhood for example).
4. History reveals many examples of emotivist methods of expressing moral views, even if they are not verifiable, for example Hitler's condemnation of the Jewish people and current extremist views such as those proposed by the Westboro Baptist Church.

Chunking activity

Chunk the key ideas of emotivism

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Chunk the key challenges (AO1 and AO2)

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Chunk the strengths (AO2)

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Explain the meta-ethical approach of Naturalism.
Candidates could include some or all of the following, but other relevant points should be credited.
[AO1 20]
• Naturalism is meta-ethical theory. It explores the status, foundations, and scope of moral values and words. Naturalism concentrates on what morality itself is.
• Naturalism states that objective moral laws exist independently of human beings. Morality is not the result of human rational thought but is an independent reality.
• As morality is independent of reality, moral terms can be understood by analysing the natural world in the same way that scientific terms can be understood from analysis.
• Both ethical and non-ethical statements can both be regarded as cognitivist.
• Cognitivism is the meta-ethical view that ethical sentences express propositions and can therefore can be verified or falsified.
• Verified moral statements can then be accepted as objective truths in the same way that scientific statements are accepted as objective truths.
• As moral statements are objective truths they must also be universal i.e. apply to all in the same way.
• Candidates can refer to the work of F.H. Bradley on Naturalism. Bradley developed naturalism by arguing that ethical sentences express propositions. These propositions can be seen as true or false by considering objective features of the world. Therefore, meta-ethical statements can be seen in the same way as scientific terms.
This is not a checklist, please remember to credit any valid alternatives.
3. (b) 'The Naturalistic Fallacy illustrates that ethical language can never be objective'. Evaluate this view.
• The Naturalistic Fallacy is commonly associated with G. E. Moore. He argued ethical terms like 'good' and 'bad' cannot be used in objective statements. This is because you cannot define ethical words like 'good' and 'bad'. Any attempt to find a definition will reduce / limit the idea of these terms. Therefore, ethical terms like 'good' and 'bad' cannot be used in objective statements because ethical terms are themselves are undefinable.
• Ethical statements cannot be objective because the terms used to express them are not themselves objective. Naturalism cannot illustrate ethical language as being objective because the words used in ethical statements cannot express ethical facts.
• The view that ethical language can never be objective is also supported by the meta-ethical theory of Emotivism. Emotivism states objective moral laws do not exist. Moral terms express personal emotional attitudes and not propositions that can be verified or falsified. Instead, ethical terms are just expressions of personal approval or disapproval.
• However, Naturalism states that objective moral laws do exist that are independent of human beings. Moral terms can be understood by analysing the natural world. Ethical words like 'good', 'bad', 'right' or 'wrong' are defined in the same way we define scientific terms, through observation of the natural world. Ethical statements are verified or falsified using scientific criteria.
• Ethical statements are cognitivist, and as a result, morality can be defined in factual terms. This would mean that ethical statements have an absolute nature that can be applied to all moral agents equally. The idea is supported by F.H. Bradley, he stated that ethical sentences express moral propositions. It is the objective features of the world around us that can be used to decide if these propositions are true or false.
• Intuitionism would also argue that objective ethical statements exist. However, objective moral laws can be discovered by using our minds in an intuitive way. Intuitive ability is a universal innate ability and therefore allows for objective moral values.

D: Meta-ethical approaches – Naturalism

Issue 1: Whether ethical and non-ethical statements are the same

AO2 Lines of Argument

• Ethical naturalism is empiricist in orientation and not autonomous, therefore ethical statements are not 'beyond' non-ethical statements.

• There are a variety of non-ethical ways to interpret ethical statements (Bradley, Hume, Mill, etc.) For instance, Mill sees ethical statements as, really, statements about pleasure or pain. These different ways at least agree that ethical and nonethical statements are the same.

• We may feel, deeply, that a moral sentiment is 'real', absolute and provable like any claim about the 'objective world'; this viewpoint reflects not only Naturalism but also moral viewpoints based on religion/revelation.

• Contrary to ethical Naturalism, ethical statements are 'a priori' matters of truth; one could appeal to Divine Command Theory, revelation or even deistic morality.

• 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.

• Moore showed that 'good' is indefinable, contrary to the claims of Naturalist ethical theories (the naturalistic fallacy & the open question argument).

Key questions that may arise could be:

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

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

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

4. Is it true that you cannot derive values from facts?

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

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. Ethical and non-ethical statements are the same, as maintained by ethical naturalism.

2. Ethical and non-ethical statements are entirely different matters; ethics is a 'given' through our intuition.

3. Ethical statement and non-ethical statements are not the same, but they are related: science can confirm the validity of ethical absolutes.

Issue 2: The extent to which ethical statements are not objective

AO2 Lines of argument

• Hume can be used to show that value statements are different from facts – they do not have meaning.
• If morality were objective why are there so many arguments about morality? Differences between moral systems could be cited.

• There's no way for a person to distinguish between something actually being right and it merely seeming right to that person.

• Naturalism 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.

• Naturalism entails scientific testing of degrees of morality (i.e. Utilitarianism). This reflects a modern world view and our need to test statements

• There are common elements of morality that cross gender, culture, language and geography – this is proof not only that a particular Naturalistic ethical theory is founded in objectivity, but that morality - in general - is as well.

Key questions that may arise could be:

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

2. Do statements of value really not have any factual meaning?

3. 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?

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

5. Can scientific testing really establish what should constitute moral behaviour?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. Ethical statements reflect objective and absolute truths.

2. Ethical statements are merely a sign of the times, products of human culture.

3. Some ethical statements/positions are objective, others are contingent and reflect the need for human interpretation and creativity.

E: Meta-ethical approaches – Intuitionism

Issue 1: Whether moral terms are intuitive

AO2 Lines of argument

• 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.

• Many religions and philosophers and societies support the idea 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).

• Approaching moral terms as intuitive avoids the naturalistic fallacy – definitions reduce or limit the ideas of 'good' and 'bad' (reference Moore here).

• If moral terms were intuitive, then we would expect morality to be uniform the world over – at least we would expect there to uniformity (a common intuition) between those who consider and reflect seriously on morality. 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.

• Within just our own culture there are widely different views on specific ethical issues amongst those who have reflected deeply – 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 (God? Gut feelings? Genetics?). Even the Intuitionists disagree amongst themselves on what morality consists of!

Key questions that may arise could be:

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

2. Is there really one true order to the universe, or is that viewpoint merely an interpretation of reality?
3. Is there really no uniformity amongst the various moralities the world over?

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

5. Do you need to have empirical evidence to know if an action should be judged as moral or immoral?
Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. Moral terms are intuitive.

2. Moral terms come from testing our views over and over again in different situations.

3. Moral terms are both given by our intuition and develop in response to real life situations.

Issue 2: The extent to which moral terms are just expressions of our emotions

AO2 Lines of argument

• Moral terms do not attempt to define what terms like 'right' or 'wrong' mean they are just moral agents' emotional response to situations (Ayer, emotivism, boohurrah theory).

• Viewing moral terms as expressions of emotion would explain the diversity of moral opinion that we see across cultures and within our own culture. An intuitionist response which seeks to explain these differences by positing that there are different intuitive abilities at work feels like a 'cop out'.

• 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.

• 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 – something more than feelings.

• Bradley would say moral terms express propositions, which can be seen as true or false by considering objective features of the world.

• 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.

Key questions that may arise could be:

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

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

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

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

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

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. Moral terms are expressions of emotions

2. Moral terms are not at all the expressions of emotion, they are objective and absolute features in the world.

3. Moral terms may have both an emotional pole and an objective pole – it is difficult or impossible to untangle one from the other.

F: Meta-ethical approaches – Emotivism

Issue 1: Whether one of Naturalism, Intuitionism or Emotivism is superior to the other theories

AO2 Lines of argument

• 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.

• It's 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!

• Emotivism saves you from pointless conversations! It advises you that you can discuss matters of fact (i.e. what happens when for 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.

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

Key questions that may arise could be:

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

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

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

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

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

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. Naturalism (or Emotivism, or Intuitionism) is superior to the other theories.

2. 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.

3. Since 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.

Issue 2: The extent to which the different meta-ethical theories encourage moral debate

AO2 Lines of argument

• Emotivism definitely discourages moral debate, as the only debate you can have is about facts (defined via logical positivism), not the moral positions that are based on emotions rather than facts.

• Intuitionism, especially as expressed by H. A. Pritchard, discourages moral discussion as it says morality is known intuitively. There can never be an explanation of why we should act morally – we always know that we ought to do.

• 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.

• 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?')

• Emotivism 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.

• Even Intuitionists have had to debate issues - i.e. how one handles numerous moral intuitions at the same time.

Key questions that may arise could be:

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

2. Does Intuitionism with its insistence on morality as a 'given' really discourage any ethical discussion?
3. If the social sciences can inform our ethical choices, doesn't this mean that ethics is not objective and absolute?

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

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

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. Meta-ethical approaches do encourage moral debate – though some of these encourage more debate than others.

2. None 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.

3. 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.