

Specification Theme 1: Ethical Thought

E: Meta-ethical approaches – Intuitionism

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, boo-hurrah 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.