

Role play - Different positions within ethics

Prescriptivist

You believe that there are no objective moral truths. However, morality is more than just an expression of emotion. When someone says “You should not kill”, this is not just a feeling, it is an instruction or command. If morals were just feelings, you might feel it is wrong for Iraqis to kill Americans, but not wrong for Americans to kill Iraqis. Morals are prescriptions, an expectation that we should behave a certain way. If you say “It is wrong to kill innocent people”, you need to be consistent. *Poker is no better or worse than Bridge or even Snap - there's no right way to play cards. However, you couldn't play a game where the rules kept changing or where they were different for different people.* As a prescriptivist, you don't think one set of rules is right and another wrong, but you do think it's wrong if someone's rules contradict each other.

Naturalist

You believe that there are objective moral truths. It is possible to know what is right and wrong. Moral facts are as real as scientific facts. Observation and analysis can tell us what is and isn't ethical. *Ethics is just like biology. You can find out whether it is wrong to eat stinging nettles, and you can also find out whether it is wrong to steal.*

Intuitionist

You believe that there are objective moral truths. However, you cannot argue from the way that things are to the way that they ought to be. No amount of observation and analysis can reveal what is morally right and wrong. Humans just know right and wrong instinctively. *Just as you recognise hot and cold, or know when something is blue, you can tell what is good or bad.* It can't be broken down any further - you can't define good, you just know when things are right or wrong.

Emotivist

You believe that there is no such thing as objective moral truths. *Some people love marmite, others hate it. If you say “Marmite is disgusting” you aren't stating a fact like “The sun is hot”. You are merely expressing your own, subjective opinion.* Morality is like this. When I say “It is wrong to steal”, I am merely saying “Urrgghh - stealing”. There is no right and wrong answer in morals or *marmite* - just feelings.

Deontologist

You believe that ethics is about following a set of rules or principles. The outcome of actions does not sway you - the end doesn't justify the means. Certain actions are wrong, and should not be done. A morally good person does her duty by following ethical laws.

Teleologist

You believe that ethics is about trying to make the world a better place. While rules may be a useful guide, breaking rules may often be the right thing to do, leading to good consequences. There is no point in keeping to a law that brings bad results for everyone. A morally good person tries to help as many people as they can to have good outcomes.