Ethical Language and Meta-Ethics

Absolutist / Relativist

Absolutist ethics maintains that.

Absolutist ethics are deontological, meaning.

An example of an absolutist rule could be.

Examples of Absolutist theories are:

Strengths of an absolutist approach are:

Weaknesses of an absolutist approach are:
Relativist ethics maintains that...

Relativist ethics tend to be teleological, meaning...

An example of an relativist approach to an ethical problem could be...

Examples of relativist theories are:

Strengths of a relativist approach are:

Weaknesses of a relativist approach are:
Meta-Ethics

Meta-ethics considers the nature of ethical statements, the usefulness of them and the meaning of ethical language. Meta-ethics does not ask if an action is morally good – rather it asks what ‘good’ means.

Normative ethics considers what things, issues, actions are right and wrong. Normative ethics attempts to tell people which things are right and wrong, what to do and what not to do.

Example: “Abortion is wrong”

In relation to the statement about abortion, meta-ethics asks

In relation to the statement about abortion, normative ethics asks

Can empirical evidence prove ethical statements?

A cognitive approach to ethical statements says that “abortion is wrong” is either true or false – by looking at evidence - and so is clearly a meaningful statement, decided on a factual basis.

Non-cognitivists would argue that “abortion is wrong” is neither true nor false, and it cannot be decided by reference to evidence - there is no ‘fact’.

What is an analytic statement?

What is a synthetic statement?

The Logical Positivists believed that

Key members of the Vienna Circle were M. . . . S. . . . . & R. . . . C. . . . .
How would Logical Positivists view ethical statements?
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How would Wittgenstein (1889-1951) view ethical language?
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Naturalism
This is a cognitivist approach which says that ethical statements can be proved true or false by reference to .................................................................
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A naturalist may say that “abortion is wrong” is true because ..........................................................
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A naturalist may say that “abortion is wrong” is false because .........................................................
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An example of a naturalist ethical theory is ....................................................................................

Non-Naturalism
A non-naturalist is still a cognitivist (believes ethical statements can be true or false), but believes that ...................................................................................................................

G.E. Moore (1873-1958) claimed naturalism is wrong because it commits the naturalistic fallacy. The naturalistic fallacy is an illegitimate move from is to ought.

He based his objection on the work of David Hume (1711-1776). Hume argued that you cannot logically move from what is the case (e.g. torture hurts people) to what
ought to be done (e.g. you ought not to torture).

Explain, quoting Hume, what Hume’s position is in your own words.

G.E Moore claimed that we can know what moral terms like 'good' and 'bad' are, but only by .................................................................

Intuitionism
A cognitive theory, based on Moore’s work, that states that moral statements are true or false, based on .................................................................

G.E. Moore said ‘good is . . . .’. It cannot be defined any further, but we still intuitively know what it is.

Complete the quote, “If I am asked ‘What is good?’ .................................................................

................................................................. and that is all I have to say about that” G.E. Moore

H.A. Prichard (1871-1947) said ............ ............. was also indefinable.

W.D. Ross (1877-1971) argued that the terms 'good' and 'obligatory' cannot be defined - they are intrinsically indefinable. However, this is not a problem since it is clear to us what we should do - our moral duties and principles are apparent to us prima facie (at first sight). This, said Ross, is intuitionism at work.

What are the strengths of the Intuitionist approach?

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What are the criticisms of the Intuitionist approach?

Emotivism

A.J. Ayer (1910-1989) [an empiricist and logical positivist], believed that ethical statements are neither analytically or synthetically verifiable and so fail the Verification Principle – both strong and weak verification.

Strong verification is .....................................................
Weak verification is .....................................................

Ayer, however, found a solution to the problem of the meaninglessness of moral statements. Ayer claimed that while ethical statements cannot be verified, they do serve a function (albeit a very limited one). However, they remain meaningless in the sense that they cannot be verified.

Ayer claimed that when I say “abortion is wrong”, what I mean is “Boo to abortion”
In saying abortion is wrong what I am doing is .....................................................

If I say “giving to charity is right”, what I mean is “Hurrah to giving to charity”
In saying giving to charity is right what I am doing is .....................................................

Ayer said we are not saying “I disapprove of abortion” or “I approve of giving to charity”. These are cognitive statements that can be verified in principle.

The effect of this, Ayer says, is that when someone disagrees with him about an ethical issue, “there is plainly no sense in asking which of us is in the right. For
neither of us is asserting a genuine proposition”. In this sense, Ayer argues, moral statements serve no purpose. His approach is sometimes referred to as a “Boo-Hurrah” Theory.

C.L. Stevenson (1908–1979) argued that in fact moral statements do serve a purpose in that ................................................................. .................................................................

So for Stevenson, (unlike Ayer) when someone says “abortion is wrong” they mean . . . ................................................................. .................................................................

What are the strengths of the Emotivist approach?
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What are the criticisms of the Emotivist approach?
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Prescriptivism
R.M. Hare (1919-2002) argues that ethical statements function as .

Prescriptivism takes the view that what is right for one is right for others too (it is a universal approach).

For Hare, "abortion is wrong" functions as .

What are the strengths of the Prescriptionist approach?

What are the criticisms of the Prescriptionist approach?