

## Theme 1E – Intuitionism

### Key concepts:

- **Meta-ethics** is a discipline in ethics that attempts to understand the nature of ethical statements, attitudes, properties and judgements.
- **Intuitionism** or **Ethical non-Naturalism** is a meta-ethical theory that claims that moral facts can be known (**cognitivism**) and exist independently of human beings (**realism**).
- These moral facts can be known prior to physical or **empirical** evidence or experience – **a priori** – they exist **objectively** and apply **universally**.
- Recognising intuitions requires no training or analysis, knowledge of them is **innate** meaning, it is part of or integral to a person's mind.
- There are different ways to translate intuitionism into **normative** ethics:
  - **Consequentialism** – Intuition is used to know the 'good'. We then must calculate the action that produces the maximum amount.
  - **Deontological Ethics** – Intuition can be used to establish duties or obligations that apply universally.
- To recognise moral intuition requires maturity, so it can be wrong if the intuition is immature or underdeveloped, but it should always be trusted.

- J.L Mackie says that we cannot prove the existence of moral intuition. This is the **argument from queerness**. Moral properties are so unlike any other properties that exist and are understood in a way so unlike any other understanding, it is unlikely that they exist.
- Intuitive 'truths' or duties can differ from person to person, so some like Moore are consequentialist and are intuit about 'good', others like Pritchard are deontologists and are intuit about 'duty'.
- Intuitionists do not accept any reasoning that would alter their intuition, so there is no way of solving the conflict between different intuitions.

- H.A. Pritchard claimed that we know our moral duty through intuition.
- Duty is **underivative** because it does not come from any investigations in the empirical world.
- Duty is **indefinable** and **irreducible**, so cannot be described by comparing to other moral judgements or non-moral values.
- Moral knowledge is unique and of its own kind – **sui generis** – so it cannot be understood from empirical evidence.
- Moral agents have a sense of obligation or duty when they recognise through intuition what they ought to do.
- There are two ways of reasoning:
  - **General reasoning** uses empirical evidence to present logical arguments but cannot provide a moral obligation. It leads to consequentialism if it is given priority. It should be used to reflect on intuition but not challenge it.
  - **Moral reasoning** is the recognition of a moral duty through intuition and is superior to general reasoning. It is present in our **unreflective consciousness** or the part of the mind that does not apply reasoning to come to conclusions.

### Key quotes:

**'Knowledge is knowledge and an attempt to state it in terms of something else must end in describing something which is not knowledge.'** – Daney

**'The sense that we ought to do certain things arises in our unreflective consciousness.'** – H.A. Pritchard

**'The suggestion that moral judgements are made ... by just sitting down and having an ethical intuition is a travesty of actual moral thinking.'** – J.L. Mackie

### Issues for analysis and evaluation:

#### **Key arguments/debates**

Whether ethical terms can just be known through intuition.

Whether ethical language is objective.

Whether intuitionism is a useful theory in ethical philosophy.

#### **Key questions**

Do we just know what is morally good or what we ought to do without needing to reason?

Is there any way to choose between conflicting duties?

### Key words:

Meta-ethics

Realism

universally

deontological

sui generis

argument from queerness

Intuitionism

a priori

innate

underivative

general reasoning

Ethical non-Naturalism

empirical

normative

indefinable

moral reasoning

Cognitivism

objectively

Consequentialism

irreducible

unreflective consciousness