

“‘Right’ and ‘wrong’ are just expressions of preference; they do not refer to any absolute set of values.” Discuss. (17 marks)

The question of the existence of absolute ‘rights’ and ‘wrongs’ is a much-debated topic in society. Many argue there is no such thing and that all moral judgements are made by order of preference rather than following a set of moral rules or guidelines. It is natural for us as humans who were built to think for ourselves, to want to portray our viewpoint to others on topics of great discussion. Therefore we can expect personal opinions or preferences to take an important role in decision-making.

However, many argue this way of thinking has no moral value at all. It is merely stating what you feel rather than what is morally ‘right’. Expressions of preference are ideas that people are inclined to believe to be correct. They are based on our emotions and feelings, and what we would like to see happen as a consequence to our preference. This key idea is mainly reflected in Emotivism, which is in opposition to absolutism. This is where something is seen as intrinsically right regardless of different situations.

We need to however ask ourselves whether Emotivism is a useful theory? Should we solely think with our mind, logic and reason rather than the feelings and emotions of our heart? We could view Universability a more useful as well as logical theory in every day life. To find out exactly how useful ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ are in Intuitionism and Emotivism according to our emotions, we need to examine their strengths and weaknesses so we can make a logical conclusion for their practicality.

Intuitionism is a widely accepted theory; one we use everyday. It shows the benefit of our in built intuition, which we all can recognise as being there because we can all feel its presence. This is in the form of our conscience. Our conscience tells us what we believe to be right or wrong and the reasons behind it.

It is beneficial because ‘good’ and ‘bad’ are self evident and therefore easy to distinguish. We can instantly see if something is right or wrong by logical thinking. It is also beneficial because it can be adapted to every situation, taking into consideration all the factors, which make something right or wrong, and everybody’s point of view.

However there are some problems with this, for example if everything ‘goodness’ is self evident, then why do we often find ourselves in situations where we cannot decide? Life is a very complicated thing and many decisions are not easy, we have to ponder on them for quite some time before we make up our minds. Does this therefore rule out the theory of everything having a self-evident level of ‘goodness’?

W D Ross argued that “I know what my duty is, but sometimes it conflicts with another and therefore a choice must be made.” He is saying that everything still has a self-evident ‘goodness’ but we are simply put in the position where we have to choose the greater of two evils. We have to decide which option brings more ‘good’ to the

world and opt for that. This means ethical dilemmas are merely a result of 'conflicting duties'. Even so, there are still many situations where we do not know what is right and many cultures where there is no one ethical way of life, we do not have clear instincts on some moral dilemmas.

It also may be perceived as insufficient to simply say we cannot define the moral term 'good' because it leaves us with so many unanswered questions. It seems to be taking the easy way out and does not supply us with a satisfactory solution. It is totally avoiding answering some of the most difficult questions in Meta ethics such as "what does it mean to be 'bad'."

Emotivism too is a useful theory; it suggests that all moral views are just as important as each other because you cannot say one is totally correct or wrong. This is because it is based on personal opinion and feelings, which can never be debated seeing as they are personal to you. Emotions and feelings play a big part in our life and therefore our expressions of preference are valuable. Emotivism therefore gives us an insight into people's feelings and why they perceive things to be right or wrong which in turn can help us to make moral decisions of our own.

People's opinions often take into account definite sets of values, which they agree with. This means there is some moral value behind Emotivism because people's emotions take into account several theories and we make our own minds up after analysing these theories and deciding which one we agree with most. Listening to different emotive opinions will give us a broader out look on moral issues because there are many different points of view to be heard.

There too are some problems with this theory. Some logical positivists such as A J Ayer class Emotivism as "meaningless" because it simply "expresses moral judgement and does not say anything". He believed it to have no real value or use because the statements cannot be proved or disproved so debating them would get you nowhere. It does not prove anything because opinions are neither right nor wrong. This leads some people to seeing this side of ethics as a waste of time and discussion because you will get nowhere by talking about it.

As mentioned in part A, our entire lives are not based on our emotions or feelings. Logical and rational thinking plays a very important part too. Therefore we must include this in the way we think to receive a balanced and fair point of view on everything. Reducing it to mere emotions is not considered an acceptable way of looking at things.

To make a fair and all rounded balanced and acceptable decision, we must include both emotion and reason together, which is why Prescriptivism plays such an important role in Meta ethics. Prescriptivism helps to overcome the problem of Reductivism in Emotivism. This is because rational thinking is brought into consideration, prescribing a course of action to be taken rather than solely relying upon our feelings.

In conclusion, I think that whether we believe 'right' or 'wrong' to be mere personal preference or to have some deeper meaning, which follows absolute values all, depends on personal opinion. Many would say there is no such thing as an absolute set of values because everything depends on different circumstances as to whether it

is right or wrong. Others would say there are some sets of values or morals that are always right, such as striving for peace or happiness. It all depends on which side you base the majority of your decision making; your emotions and feelings or your logic and reasoning.