Religion and Ethics Eduqas / WJEC A level Knowledge Organiser:

Theme 1D – Naturalism

Key concepts:

- **Meta-ethics** is a discipline in ethics that attempts to understand the nature of ethical statements, attitudes, properties and judgements.

- **Naturalism** is a meta-ethical theory stating that we can learn the meaning of ethical terms like 'good' or 'bad' by looking at knowledge gained through the senses - **empirical** data.

- Naturalism takes a **realist** view that the world around us exists and can be known.

- Naturalism is a **cognitivist** meta-ethical theory that says ethical statements or **propositions** are meaningful and can be **verified** (proven to be true) or **falsified** (proven to be false) by looking at how they affect the world.

- A **normative** use of Naturalism makes judgements about good or bad behaviour by observing behaviour and its positive or negative effects in the world e.g., Utilitarianism is a normative application of ethical Naturalism.

- Verified moral statements are **objectively** true so moral laws exist independently of human beings and are part of the nature of the world.

- Moral laws are **universal**, meaning they can always be applied to all people.

- F. H. Bradley's essay 'My Station and its Duties' appears in his book *Ethical Studies* as part of his ethical thought process and is not his final position.

- Bradley presented a new kind of Naturalism in this essay that combined meta-ethical ideas found in the contrasting approaches in Utilitarianism and Kant. He ultimately rejected this.

- The individual 'self' is a part of the wider 'whole' of society from which it cannot be separated.

- To understand one's own identity or 'self' is a journey of **self-realisation**.

- Moral behaviour involves understanding one's own position or **station** in society and following the **duties** or responsibilities that belong to that station.

- Moral statements are cognitive as they relate to the **concrete universal** or the world that the individual is part of.

- Naturalism makes a false link between 'is' statements about the world and 'ought' statements about morality. **Hume's Law / Hume's Guillotine** cuts this link. A moral **imperative** or 'ought' is a different type of statement than a descriptive one and so you cannot derive an 'ought' from an 'is'.

- The **Naturalistic Fallacy** says that it is false to try and define moral terms by relating them to other states, like happiness or fulfilling a duty. G.E. Moore compared this to defining the colour yellow. Goodness, like yellow, cannot be defined as a natural property.

- Moore says that when a naturalist tries to define goodness like a natural property, they raise an **open question** that cannot be answered with a simple yes or no e.g., if good is defined as 'doing my duty within my station' we can still ask, 'but is that good?'

Key quotes:

'In my station my particular duties are prescribed to me, and I have them whether I wish to or not.' - F.H. Bradley

'For as this ought, or ought not, expresses some new relation or affirmation, it is necessary that it should be observed and explained...' - Hume

'If I am asked, "What is good?" my answer is that good is good, and that is the end of the matter.' - G.E. Moore

Issues for analysis and evaluation:

Key arguments/debates

Whether ethical language is meaningful or relates in any way to the real world.

Whether ethical language is objective.

Whether naturalism is a useful theory in ethical philosophy.

Key questions

Can ethical language be understood in the same way as non-ethical language?

Can we test or check the meaning of ethical terms using empirical evidence?

Key words:

meta-ethics	Naturalism	empirical	realist
cognitivist	propositions	verified	falsified
normative	objectively	universal	self-realisation
station	duties	concrete universal	Hume's Law / Hume's Guillotine
imperative	naturalistic fallacy	open question	