CHAPTER ONE

Morality and Moral Philosophy

Suppose that all your life you have been trying to be a good person, doing your duty as you see it and seeking to do what is for the good of your fellowmen. Suppose, also, that many of your fellowmen dislike you and what you are doing and even regard you as a danger to society, although they cannot really show this to be true. Suppose, further, that you are indicted, tried, and condemned to death by a jury of your peers, all in a manner which you correctly consider to be quite unjust. Suppose, finally, that while you are in prison awaiting execution, your friends arrange an opportunity for you to escape and go into exile with your family. They argue that they can afford the necessary bribes and will not be endangered by your escaping; that if you escape, you will enjoy a longer life; that your wife and children will be better off; that your friends will still be able to see you; and that people generally will think that you should escape. Should you take the opportunity?

AN EXAMPLE OF ETHICAL THINKING (SOCRATES)

This is the situation Socrates, the patron saint of moral philosophy, is in at the opening of Plato's dialogue, the *Crito*. The dialogue gives us his answer to our question and a full account of his reasoning in arriving at it. It will, therefore, make a good beginning for our study.

Socrates first lays down some points about the approach to be taken. To begin with, we must not let our decision be determined by our emotions, but must examine the question and follow the best reasoning. We must try to get our facts straight and to keep our minds clear. Questions like this can and should be settled by reason. Secondly, we cannot answer such questions by appealing to what people generally think. They may be wrong. We must try to find an answer we ourselves can regard as correct. We must think for ourselves. Finally, we ought never to do what is morally wrong. The only question we need to answer is whether what is proposed is right or wrong, not what will happen to us, what people will think of us, or how we feel about what has happened.

Having said this, Socrates goes on to give, in effect, a threefold argument to show that he ought not to break the laws by escaping. First, we ought never to harm anyone. Socrates' escaping would harm the state, since it would violate and show disregard for the state's laws. Second, if one remains living in a state when one could leave it, one tacitly agrees to obey its laws; hence, if Socrates were to escape he would be breaking an agreement, which is something one should not do. Third: one's society or state is virtually one's parent and teacher, and one ought to obey one's parents and teachers.

In each of these arguments Socrates appeals to a general moral rule or principle which, upon reflection, he and his friend Crito accept as valid: (1) that we ought never to harm anyone, (2) that we ought to keep our promises, and (3) that we ought to obey or respect our parents and teachers. In each case he also uses another premise which involves a statement of fact and applies the rule or principle to the case in hand: (1a) if I escape I will do harm to society, (2a) if I escape I will be breaking a promise, and (3a) if I escape I will be disobeying my parent and teacher. Then he draws a conclusion about what he should do in his particular situation. This is a typical pattern of reasoning in moral matters and is nicely illustrated here.

In this pattern of moral reasoning one determines what one should do in a particular situation by reference to certain general principles or rules, which one takes as premises from which to deduce a particular conclusion by a kind of practical syllogism, as Aristotle called it. One takes general principles and applies them to individual situations. How natural this procedure is will be apparent to any reader of the *Crito*. In all fairness, however, we must observe at this point that some moral thinkers have a different view of the logic of moral deliberation. As we shall see in Chapter 2 the

act-deontologists and other proponents of "situation ethics" take particular judgments to be basic in morality, rather than general ones, which they regard as inductive generalizations from particular cases, if they recognize the existence of general rules at all.

It happens that in the *Crito* Socrates thinks his three principles all lead to the same conclusion. But sometimes when two or more rules apply to the same case, this is not true. In fact, most moral problems arise in situations where there is a "conflict of duties," that is, where one moral principle pulls one way and another pulls the other way. Socrates is represented in Plato's *Apology* as saying that if the state spares his life on condition that he no longer teach as he has been doing, he will not obey, because (4) he has been assigned the duty of teaching by the god, Apollo, and (5) his teaching is necessary for the true good of the state. He would then be involved in a conflict of duties. His duty to obey the state applies, but so do two other duties, (4) and (5), and these he judges to take precedence over his duty to obey the commands of the state. Here, then, he resolves the problem, not just by appealing to rules, for this is not enough, but by determining which rules take precedence over which others. This is another typical pattern of reasoning in ethics.

To return to the *Crito*, Socrates completes his reasoning by answering his friends' arguments in favor of escaping by contending that he will not really be doing himself, his friends, or even his family any good by becoming an outlaw or going into exile, and that death is not an evil to an old man who has done his best, whether there is a hereafter or not. In other words, he maintains that there are no good moral grounds on the other side and no good prudential ones—which would count only if moral considerations were not decisive—either.

All this is interesting, not just because it represents one of the classic discussions of the question of civil disobedience, but because it illustrates two kinds of moral problems and how one reflective and serious moral agent went about solving them. It also shows us much of Socrates' working ethics: principles (1) to (5) plus the second-order principle that (4) and (5) take precedence over the duty to obey the state. This duty to obey the state, by the way, is for him a derivative rule which rests on (1), (2), and (3), which are more basic. One can find out one's own working ethics by seeing how one would answer these two problems oneself, or others like them. This is a good exercise. Suppose that in doing this you disagree with Socrates' answer to the *Crito* problem. You might then challenge his principles, which Crito did not do. You might ask Socrates to justify his regarding (1), (2), and (3) as valid, and Socrates would have to try to answer you, since he believes in reason and argument in ethics, and wants knowledge, not just true opinion.

At this point Socrates might argue that (2), for example, is valid because

it follows from a still more basic principle, say, (4) or (5). That is, he might maintain that we should keep promises because it is commanded by the gods or because it is necessary for the general welfare. But, of course, you might question his more basic principle, if you have any good reason for doing so (if you question without reason, you are not really entering into the dialogue). At some point you or he will almost inevitably raise the question of how ethical judgments and principles, especially the most basic ones, are to be justified anyway, and this is likely to lead to the further question of what is meant by saying that something is right, good, virtuous, just, and the like, a question which Socrates in fact often raises in other dialogues. (In the *Euthyphro* for example, he argues, in effect, that "right" does not mean "commanded by the gods.")

THE NATURE OF ETHICS OR MORAL PHILOSOPHY

When this happens the discussion has developed into a full-fledged philosophical one. Ethics is a branch of philosophy; it is *moral philosophy* or philosophical thinking about morality, moral problems, and moral judgments. What this involves is illustrated by the sort of thinking Socrates was doing in the *Crito* and *Apology*, supplemented as we have supposed it to be. Such philosophical thinking will now be described more fully.

Moral philosophy arises when, like Socrates, we pass beyond the stage in which we are directed by traditional rules and even beyond the stage in which these rules are so internalized that we can be said to be inner-directed, to the stage in which we think for ourselves in critical and general terms (as the Greeks were beginning to do in Socrates' day) and achieve a kind of autonomy as moral agents. We may, however, distinguish three kinds of thinking that relate to morality in one way or another.

1. There is descriptive empirical inquiry, historical or scientific, such as is done by anthropologists, historians, psychologists and sociologists. Here, the goal is to describe or explain the phenomena of morality or to work out a theory of human nature which bears on ethical questions.

2. There is normative thinking of the sort that Socrates was doing in the *Crito* or that anyone does who asks what is right, good, or obligatory. This may take the form of asserting a normative judgment like

"I ought not to try to escape from prison,"
"Knowledge is good," or
"It is always wrong to harm someone,"

and giving or being ready to give reasons for this judgment. Or it may take the form of debating with oneself or with someone else about what is good or right in a particular case or as a general principle, and then forming some such normative judgment as a conclusion.

3. There is also "analytical," "critical," or "meta-ethical" thinking. This

is the sort of thinking we imagined that Socrates would have come to if he had been challenged to the limit in the justification of his normative judgments. He did, in fact, arrive at this sort of thinking in other dialogues. It does not consist of empirical or historical inquiries and theories, nor does it involve making or defending any normative or value judgments. It does not try to answer either particular or general questions about what is good, right, or obligatory. It asks and tries to answer logical, epistemological, or semantical questions like the following: What is the meaning or use of the expressions "(morally) right" or "good"? How can ethical and value judgments be established or justified? Can they be justified at all? What is the nature of morality? What is the distinction between the moral and the nonmoral? What is the meaning of "free" or "responsible"?

Many recent moral philosophers limit ethics or moral philosophy to thinking of the third kind, excluding from it all questions of psychology and empirical science and also all normative questions about what is good or right. In this book, however, we shall take the more traditional view of our subject. We shall take ethics to include meta-ethics as just described, but as also including normative ethics or thinking of the second kind, though only when this deals with general questions about what is good or right and not when it tries to solve particular problems as Socrates was mainly doing in the *Crito*. In fact, we shall take ethics to be primarily concerned with providing the general outlines of a normative theory to help us in answering problems about what is right or ought to be done, and as being interested in meta-ethical questions mainly because it seems necessary to answer such questions before one can be entirely satisfied with one's normative theory (although ethics is also interested in meta-ethical questions for their own sakes). However, since certain psychological and anthropological theories are considered to have a bearing on the answers to normative and meta-ethical questions, as we shall see in discussing egoism, hedonism, and relativism, we shall also include some descriptive or empirical thinking of the first kind.

THE NATURE OF MORALITY

We have described ethics as philosophy that is concerned with morality and its problems and judgments, or with *moral* problems and judgments. It must be noticed, however, that the word "ethics" is not always used for this branch of philosophy; sometimes it is used as just another word for "morality," and sometimes to refer to the moral code or normative theory of an individual or group, as when I spoke earlier of "Socrates' working ethics." More important for our present purposes are some other facts about our usage of words. The terms "moral" and "ethical" are often used as equivalent to "right" or "good" and as opposed to "immoral" and "unethical." But we also speak of moral problems, moral judgments, moral codes, moral

arguments, moral experiences, the moral consciousness, or the moral point of view. "Ethical" is used in this way too. Here "ethical" and "moral" do not mean "morally right" or "morally good." They mean "pertaining to morality" and are opposed to the "nonmoral" or "nonethical," not to the "immoral" or "unethical." Similarly, the term "morality" is sometimes used as opposed to "immorality," as when we say that the essence of morality is love or speak of the morality of an action. But we also use the word "morality" to refer to something that is coordinate with but different from art, science, law, convention, or religion, though it may be related to them. This is the way we use the term when we ask, "What is morality? How does it differ from law? How is it related to religion?" In this sense "morality" means what Bishop Butler called "the moral institution of life." This is how I have been using "morality" and propose to go on using it. Correspondingly, I shall use "moral" and "ethical" in this sense also.

Now, morality in the sense indicated is, in one aspect at least, a social enterprise, not just a discovery or invention of the individual for his own guidance. Like one's language, state, or church, it exists before the individual, who is inducted into it and becomes more or less of a participant in it, and it goes on existing after him. Moreover, it is not social merely in the sense of being a system governing the relations of one individual to others; such a system might still be entirely the individual's own construction, as some parts of one's code of action with respect to others almost inevitably are, for example, "My rule is to smile first." Morality, of course, is social in this sense to a considerable extent; however, it is also largely social in its origins, sanctions, and functions. As first encountered by the individual, at any rate, it is an instrument of society as a whole for the guidance of individuals and smaller groups. It makes demands on individuals that are, initially at least, external to them. Even if the individuals become spokesmen of these demands, as they usually do to some extent through what is called "internalization," the demands are still not merely theirs nor directed only at themselves. If they come to disagree with the demands, then, as Socrates thought and as we shall see later, they must still do so from the moral point of view that has somehow been inculcated into them. One may think of society, as many people do, as having a supernatural dimension and as including a divine lawgiver, but even then one is ascribing this social character to morality.

Because of such facts, morality is sometimes *defined* as an instrument of society as a whole, as if an individual, family, or social class cannot have a morality or moral action-guide of its own that is different from that of its society. However, in view of what we shall be saying in a moment, it seems desirable to allow that smaller groups and even individuals may have or work out such distinct guides for their conduct, and to call at least some of these "value-systems" moralities or moral codes, namely, those that re-

semble what we shall refer to as the moral point of view. Even so, it seems plausible to insist that an individual who has such a personal morality must be thinking that others besides himself, indeed his entire society, should adopt it or at least its more basic principles or ideals.

In any case, whether it is thought of as an instrument of society or as a personal code, morality must be contrasted with prudence. It may be that prudence and morality dictate some of the same conduct, for example, honesty. It may also be that prudence is a moral virtue; however, it is not characteristic of the moral point of view to determine what is right or virtuous wholly in terms of what the individual desires or of what is to his interest. In Freudian terms, morality and prudence are both attempts to regulate the id; but while prudence is simply a function of the reality principle in the ego, morality is the function of a superego which does not think merely in terms of getting what is desired by the individual id or even in terms of salvaging the greatest balance of satisfaction over frustration for it.

Considered as a social system of regulation, morality is like law on the one hand and convention or etiquette on the other. All of these systems are social in a way in which prudence is not, and some of the same expressions are used in all of them, for example, the words "right" and "should." But convention does not deal with matters of such crucial social importance as those dealt with by law and morality; it seems to rest largely on considerations of appearance, taste, and convenience. Thus, morality is distinguished from convention by certain features that it shares with law; similarly, it is also distinguished from law (with which it overlaps, for example, in forbidding murder) by certain features that it shares with convention, namely, in not being created or changeable by anything like a deliberate legislative, executive, or judicial act, and in having as its sanctions, not physical force or the threat of it but, at most, praise and blame and other such mainly verbal signs of favor and disfavor. Some writers have even held that the only proper motives or sanctions for morality are purely internal ones like the sentiment of benevolence or the desire to do what is right for its own sake; there is much to be said for this view even if it hardly describes the whole practical working of morality. At least it highlights the fact that physical force and certain kinds of prudential considerations do not strictly belong to the idea of a moral institution of life.

However, morality, at least as it has developed in the western world, also has a more individualistic or protestant aspect. As Socrates implied and recent philosophers have stressed (perhaps too much), morality fosters or even calls for the use of reason and for a kind of autonomy on the part of the individual, asking him, when mature and normal, to make his own decisions, though possibly with someone's advice, and even stimulating him to think out the principles or goals in the light of which he is to make his decisions. Even as a social institution of life, morality is thought of as aim-

ing at rational self-guidance or self-determination in its members. In Matthew Arnold's words, it asks us to be "... self-govern'd, at the feet of Law."

Accordingly, it has been usual for moral philosophers to distinguish stages of morality, which can be more or less clearly traced both in the history of our culture and in the life of the individual, to distinguish, for instance (a) "pre-rational," "customary," or "group" morality and (b) "personal," "rational," or "reflective" morality. Improving on this in an interesting and instructive way, David Riesman, a social scientist, has recently portrayed four moral or social types in *The Lonely Crowd*:

1. The tradition-directed individual and/or society.
2. The inner-directed individual and/or society.
3. The other-directed individual and/or society.
4. The autonomous individual and/or society.

The general idea here, and in much recent social psychology and moral philosophy, is that morality starts as a set of culturally defined goals and of rules governing achievement of the goals, which are more or less external to the individual and imposed on him or inculcated as habits. These goals and rules may and generally do, at least to some extent, become "internalized" or "interiorized," that is, the individual takes them as his own and regulates his own conduct by them; he develops a "conscience" or "superego." This process of internalization may be quite irrational but, as we shall see, it is typical for morality to accompany its inculcations with at least a modicum of reason-giving. Thus, we (and even the Navaho) tend to give reasons with our moral instructions as soon as the child has attained an age at which he is capable of something like discretion, and we even lead him to feel that it is appropriate to ask for reasons. That is why it seemed appropriate to Socrates, at his juncture in the history of Greece, to ask for definitions and arguments in matters of morals.

We may then, without leaving the moral fold, move from a rather irrational kind of inner direction to a more rational one in which we achieve an examined life and a kind of autonomy, become moral agents on our own, and even reach a point when we can criticize the rules and values of our society, as Socrates did in the *Apology* and the *Crito*. Some find too much anxiety in this transition and try to "escape from freedom" in one way or another (including other-direction), some apparently can make the transition only with the help of psychoanalysis, but for others it involves no major difficulties other than the use of some hard thought such as Socrates engaged in.

Clearly, it is in the last stages of this process that moral philosophy plays its natural role. We are then—or from now on may imagine ourselves to be—in the middle or later stages of the moral life as these were just outlined. It is the thinking to be done here that we mainly wish to help on its way, although we also hope, in spite of the element of danger involved, to pull

those who are not so far along out of their unreflective nest and its dogmatic slumber.

FACTORS IN MORALITY

The institution of morality contains a number of factors: (1) certain *forms of judgment* in which particular objects are said to have or not to have a certain moral quality, obligation, or responsibility; (2) the implication that it is appropriate and possible to give *reasons* for these judgments; (3) some rules, principles, ideals, and virtues that can be expressed in more general judgments and that form the background against which particular judgments are made and reasons given for them; (4) certain characteristic natural or acquired *ways of feeling* that accompany these judgments, rules, and ideals, and help to move us to act in accordance with them; (5) certain sanctions or additional sources of motivation that are also often expressed in verbal judgments, namely, holding responsible, praising, and blaming; (6) a *point of view* that is taken in all this judging, reasoning, and feeling, and is somehow different from those taken in prudence, art, and the like. For our purposes, we may center most of our discussion on the moral judgments involved in factors (1), (3), and (5). These have a central place in morality, and the main questions of normative ethics and meta-ethics relate to them.

KINDS OF NORMATIVE JUDGMENT

Moral or ethical judgments are of various kinds. As has been indicated, they may be particular or general. They may also be stated in different persons and tenses. These differences are all important in their places, but here we must stress another difference. In some of our moral judgments, we say that a certain action or kind of action is morally right, wrong, obligatory, a duty, or ought or ought not to be done. In others we talk, not about actions or kinds of action, but about persons, motives, intentions, traits of character, and the like, and we say of them that they are morally good, bad, virtuous, vicious, responsible, blameworthy, saintly, despicable, and so on. In these two kinds of judgment, the things talked about are different and what is said about them is different. (We do also speak of "good actions" or "deeds," but here "good" is not properly used as a synonym of "right," as it often is; properly used, it seems to mean either that the action has a good motive or that it has good consequences.) I shall call the former *judgments of moral obligation* or *deontic* judgments and the latter *judgments of moral value* or *aretaic* judgments.

There are also *judgments of nonmoral value*. In these we evaluate not so much actions, persons, motives, and the like, but all sorts of other things: cars, paintings, experiences, forms of government, and whatnot. We say they

are good, bad, desirable, undesirable, and so on, but we do not mean that they are morally good or morally bad, since they are generally not the kinds of things that can be morally good or bad. A study of these judgments is not, as such, a part of ethics or moral philosophy, though it is part of the theory of value in general. But since it will turn out that a consideration of what is good (nonmorally) is involved in determining what is morally right or wrong, we must include a discussion of such value judgments anyway.

For the sake of completeness, we must also recognize another kind of normative judgment, which I shall call *nonmoral judgments of obligation*. Examples appear in the following outline, but, as these examples will make clear, judgments of this kind have no special interest for *moral* philosophy and so do not call for discussion in a book on ethics, even though they are of considerable practical importance.

We obtain, then, the following outline of kinds of *normative judgments*:

I. Ethical or moral judgments proper:
   A. Judgments of moral obligation (deontic judgments):
      1. Particular, e.g. (assuming terms are used in their moral senses),
         a. I ought not to escape from prison now.
         b. You should become a missionary.
         c. What he did was wrong.
      2. General, e.g.,
         a. We ought to keep our agreements.
         b. Love is the fulfillment of the moral law.
         c. All men have a right to freedom.
   B. Judgments of moral value (aretaic judgments):
      1. Particular, e.g.,
         a. My grandfather was a good man.
         b. Xavier was a saint.
         c. He is responsible for what he did.
         d. You deserve to be punished.
         e. Her character is admirable.
         f. His motive was good.
      2. General, e.g.,
         a. Benevolence is a virtue.
         b. Jealousy is an ignoble motive.
         c. The man who can forgive such carelessness is a saint.
         d. The good man does not cheat or steal.
II. Nonmoral normative judgments:
   A. Judgments of nonmoral value:
      1. Particular, e.g.,
         a. That is a good car.
         b. Miniver Cheevy did not have a very good life.

      2. General, e.g.,
         a. Pleasure is good in itself.
         b. Democracy is the best form of government.
   B. Judgments of nonmoral obligation:
      1. Particular, e.g.,
         a. You ought to buy a new suit.
         b. You just have to go to that concert.
      2. General, e.g.,
         a. In building a bookcase one should use nails, not Scotch tape.
         b. The right thing to do on fourth down with thirteen yards to go is to punt.

It should be mentioned here that many writers use terms differently. Where I speak of normative judgments, some prefer to say "value" judgments or "evaluative" judgments or simply "ethical" or even "moral" judgments. For moral philosophy it is important to distinguish the above four kinds of judgments, however one labels them, and in general I shall try to use terms as indicated. Sometimes, however, especially in Chapter 6, it will be convenient to use the phrases "ethical judgments" and "value judgments" in a more general and usual way, even at the risk of some vagueness.

PROGRAM FOR REST OF BOOK

In *normative ethics* we try primarily to arrive at a set of acceptable judgments (1) of moral obligation, (2) of moral value, and secondarily (3) of nonmoral value. In *meta-ethics* we mainly seek to work out a theory of the meaning and justification (1) of judgments of moral obligation, (2) of judgments of moral value, and also (3) of judgments of nonmoral value. Chapters 2 to 5 will consist chiefly of normative ethics treated along general lines, although some analysis and clarification will come in also. Chapters 2 and 3 will deal with normative theory of obligation, Chapter 4 with normative theory of moral value, and Chapter 5 with normative theory of nonmoral value. In Chapter 6 the central problems and theories of meta-ethics will be taken up.