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| *Exploring Ethics:*  **Teaching Materials** |
| 5th Edition |
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| Edited by Steven Cahn |
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**Chapter 1: Morality and Moral Philosophy**

William K. Frankena

Describing Socrates as the “patron saint of moral philosophy,” Frankena uses the scenario of the *Crito* as a paradigmatic example of moral reasoning. Socrates insists on approaching the moral question at hand—Should Socrates escape from prison?—without giving any weight to his (or Crito’s) feelings, to the opinions of others, or to the cost of remaining faithful to moral principle, which in the present case could not be any higher. He appeals to a general rule, determines that his situation falls under that rule, and finally draws a conclusion about what he must do—namely, refuse Crito’s suggestion that he escape.

Here, Frankena explains, Socrates is engaged in ethics, the branch of philosophy dealing with morality, moral problems, and moral judgments. More specifically, he is engaged in normative reflection, which attempts to identify what is right, good, or obligatory. This is distinct from both descriptive inquiry, which attempts to describe or explain moral phenomena, and meta-ethics, which seeks to answer questions about the meaning or use of moral terms such as “right” or “good.” On Frankena’s view, ethics is concerned primarily with normative inquiry and secondarily with meta-ethics, but it also involves occasional forays into ethical description.

Essay

1. According to the Socratic view of morality summarized by Frankena, is a person brought up by immoral parents in a corrupt society capable of making correct moral judgments? Why or why not? Do you agree?

2. In defending his decision about whether to escape, Socrates offers three arguments that demonstrate a typical pattern of reasoning. Which of these arguments do you find most compelling? How might you rationally convince Socrates to change his mind?

3. People commonly choose to act to conform to popular opinion. If popular opinion led to the same conclusions arrived at through moral reasoning, would it still be important to engage in moral philosophy? Why or why not? Support your answer with an example.

Multiple Choice

1. A sociologist would typically be most concerned with which of the following?\*

A. empirical inquiry intended to describe or explain moral phenomena

B. normative inquiry into what is right, good, and obligatory in general

C. normative inquiry into what is right, good, and obligatory in a particular case

D. analytical or critical inquiry into how ethical values are established or justified

Ans: A

2. Which of the following reasons does Socrates NOT give for obeying the law?

A. keep your promises

B. the larger community usually knows best

C. obey one’s parents and teachers

D. never harm others

Ans: B

3. A typical pattern of moral reasoning involves which of the following?\*

A. a general moral rule or principle

B. a premise that involves a statement of fact

C. a meta-ethical question

D. both A and B

Ans: D

4. Frankena claims that we have begun to engage in moral philosophy when

A. we have begun to behave according to the rules of our society.

B. we have completely internalized the rules of our society.

C. we have learned to act according to our feelings.

D. we have begun to think for ourselves about moral questions.

Ans: D

5. To say that it is always wrong to harm someone is to make which of the following\* kinds of claims?

A. normative

B. meta-ethical

C. empirical

D. descriptive

Ans: A

6. Someone who reflects on whether our moral judgments have any ultimate justification is engaged in what type of inquiry?

A. normative

B. meta-ethical

C. religious

D. descriptive

Ans: B

7. Descriptive claims are relevant to ethics because\*

A. facts about what humans desire determine what makes an act right.

B. facts about psychological and anthropological theories bear on some normative and meta-ethical questions.

C. facts about the past may falsify some normative theories.

D. None of the above

Ans: B

True or False

1. Socrates believes that it is appropriate to act immorally if by doing so we can save\* ourselves from serious harm.

A. True

B. False

Ans: B

2. Normative ethics has to do with what people generally think about moral issues.

A. True

B. False

Ans: B

3. According to Frankena, moral philosophy arises when we no longer rely upon tradition to direct our behavior.\*

A. True

B. False

Ans: A

4. The question “What does it mean to say that something is morally ‘right’ or good?” is meta-ethical.

A. True

B. False

Ans: A

5. According to Socrates, moral questions can and should be settled by reason.\*

A. True

B. False

Ans: A

6. Socrates believes that doing the right thing means doing the thing that is most likely to maximize pleasure and minimize pain in any given situation.

A. True

B. False

Ans: B

7. Socrates gives a threefold argument to show that he ought to break the laws by escaping.\*

A. True

B. False

Ans: B