Introduction

MORAL PHILOSOPHY is driven by two quests. One is theoretical, the other practical. Philosophers and others who think seriously about ethics want to understand morality: its language and concepts, its requirements and ideals, its evidences and arguments, its connections with human psychology, and many other topics. But they also want to contribute concretely to our morality and to enhance our ability to realize moral standards. This requires determining what those standards are, what they require in specific situations, what factors tend to prevent our fulfilling them, what punishments may be needed for certain violations, and much more. Neither quest can succeed without empirical information, but practical ethics requires much more of that than theoretical ethics. It is also less philosophical, in at least one way; its success depends less on philosophical sophistication. We should not be surprised, then, that moral philosophers have tended to devote most of their energies to theoretical ethics.

There is, however, widespread dissatisfaction with ethical theories and some dissatisfaction with moral philosophy of any kind. This is often perceptible on the part of many non-philosophers who are concerned with the second, practical quest; but there are also many philosophers, including some practitioners of theoretical ethics, who are dissatisfied with ethical theory as they see it. This point applies especially to the dominant kinds of ethical theory in the modern period: utilitarianism and Kantianism. The resurgence of interest in virtue ethics is in part a result of this dissatisfaction.

Another result of dissatisfaction with the recently dominant ethical theories is a renewed interest in intuitionism. Intuitionism has been a force in the history of ethics since at least the eighteenth century, but there are a number of reasons for its growing prominence. One important point is that it speaks directly to both of the driving quests in moral philosophy. It has a theoretical side expressible in a fairly simple metaethics; but in its richest forms it also has a normative core that is, at least in its best-known version, developed by W. D. Ross, close to the kinds of generally uncontro-

versial everyday judgments that any ethical theory seeks to account for. These are the kinds of judgments that match our "intuitions," or, on reflection, at least seem intuitive.

There are subtler reasons for renewed interest in intuitionism. For one thing, a half century's responses to W. V. Quine's attack on the a priori, and indeed on the power of reason to reveal significant truths, have restored in many philosophers a certain sense of epistemological freedom. I am not suggesting that the existence of substantive a priori truths is now uncontroversial. But it is probably uncontroversial that the concept of the a priori has not been clearly shown to be incoherent, or the category of the a priori proven to be either empty or populated only by incontestable truths of formal logic. There is thus more space for a rationalist intuitionism. I hasten to add that there is in any case an empirical branch of intuitionist theorizing, not dependent on any appeal to self-evidence, though it is like rationalist versions of intuitionism in taking some moral judgments to be non-inferential.

This brings us to a second point that partly explains why intuitionism should be an attractive option now. We have also recovered from the attack on the possibility of non-inferential knowledge, something that intuitionism in any major form, whether rationalist or empiricist, is committed to positing for certain moral propositions. Even a noncognitivist metaethics can sustain something similar: a kind of non-inferential justification for moral attitudes. Once that is appreciated, intuitionism can be seen as, in some perhaps attenuated form, a possible position even for those who reject realism in ethical theory.

If these points are sound, one might wonder why there are not more intuitionists—or at least more avowed intuitionists. One reason concerns the notion of self-evidence. What does it come to, and are the kinds of moral principles Ross articulated really self-evident? Second, if they are self-evident, how can there be so much moral disagreement? Third, can moral judgments, given the cognitive background and the sensitivity they often require, really be non-inferential and thus not dependent on premises? And if so, why does the apparently direct grasp of truth in question not lead to dogmatism? If we know something without depending on premises, we would seem to have nothing in the way of reasons to offer to anyone who disagrees. Fourth, why should the short list of principles intuitionists have proposed be the only basic ones? Fifth, what unifies or explains them? And finally, how can we reasonably resolve the kinds of conflicts of moral duties Ross acknowledged as common?

There are, then, both theoretical problems facing intuitionism and difficulties in working out a good intuitionist normative framework—a set of principles stating our moral obligations. This book deals with these major theoretical problems and, on the basis of an integration of everyday intuitionist principles with a wider moral philosophy, puts forward a set of such principles that incorporates but also extends the set proposed by Ross.

Chapter 1 introduces ethical intuitionism, beginning with Sidgwick's account of the position and proceeding, through Moore, Prichard, and Broad, to the position of Ross, which was the most prominent intuitionist view throughout most of the twentieth century.

Chapter 2 sets forth a position that constitutes a broadly Rossian intuitionism, but is developed further than Ross's view, in part by extension in some places, in part by rectifying some errors, and in part by meeting difficulties faced by Ross's intuitionism. It should be obvious that if intuitionism can be taken this far beyond what Ross gave us, it is considerably more plausible than many of its critics have thought and may serve some purposes, particularly those of everyday moral judgment, quite well.

Some ethical thinkers may be content to work with a Rossian intuitionism and may take it to be as systematic a position as we can hope for in ethics. But in the light of the intuitionist resources described and defended by the end of Chapter 2, we can advance the overall intuitionist position by integrating it with an interpretation of Kant's categorical imperative—a project that also serves to clarify and strengthen some major elements in Kantian ethics. This is the work of Chapter 3, which attempts both to preserve the major elements in Rossian intuitionism and to strengthen that view by incorporating it in a broadly Kantian framework.

From the vantage point of the integration between Rossian intuitionism and the framework of the Kantian categorical imperative, Chapter 4 pursues the connection between intuitionism as a deontological (duty-based) position and the theory of value, and thus between the right and the good. The result is a value-based Kantian intuitionism that seeks to combine the best elements in Rossian intuitionism with a version of the categorical imperative understood in the light of a theory of value that provides unifying grounds for all of the moral principles in question, from the loftily general categorical imperative "downward" to quite specific standards of conduct. The Kantian intuitionism defended in Chapter 3 can be developed without conceiving it as groundable in the theory of value proposed in this chapter, but the two combined provide a more plausible, more comprehensive ethical theory.

Even with all of this theoretical work accomplished, there remain problems for the normative position that best suits an overall intuitionist ethics. Chapter 5 explores a version of that kind of theory. The result is to reinterpret and revise some of Ross's principles and to expand his list to include further principles having a similar intuitive plausibility and a comparable basis in the value-oriented Kantian framework developed earlier in the book. That work will complete my presentation of ethical intuitionism: it is a resourceful theory that provides at least as promising a route as any other approach to success in both of the driving quests of moral philosophy.