

CHAPTER VI

HARE'S CRITIQUE OF NATURALISM

I

Moore's heirs are of two kinds. There are those who carry on moral philosophy of the same type as Moore's, the so-called intuitionists, such as Prichard and Ross. And to the other kind belong to the critics of intuitionism, Collingwood and Ayer. The latter contrasted between the factual and the emotive. Stevenson suggested the idea of the moral speech-act in saying that the primary function of moral words was to redirect the attitudes of others. Further, he held that for good and for other evaluative expressions no complete definition in descriptive terms can ever be given. He agreed with Moore that good cannot function as the name of a natural, i.e., empirically descriptive property. The facts are logically divorced from the evaluations for Stevenson as much as for Moore.

Hare paid attention to two intimately related topics, the question of criteria which are employed in calling things, acts, or people good or bad, and the question of moral reasoning. The Language of Morals opens with an identification of moral speech-act. Or, Hare specifies the nature of moral language by means of an initial distinction between prescriptive and descriptive language. Prescriptive language is imperatival, in that it

tells us to do this or that. Apart from imperatives in the ordinary sense, there ^{are} properly evaluative expressions. These are also practical, but ⁱⁿ different ways. Ought sentences, if they are genuinely evaluative, entail imperatives addressed to anyone in the relevant situation, and anyone here includes the person who utters the sentence. The criterion of uttering the ought sentence sincerely is that, on the relevant occasion and if the speaker can, he does in fact act in obedience to the imperative entailed by the ought which he utters to himself. Good, by contrast, is used to commend; to call X good is to say that it is the kind of X we should choose if we wanted an X. The criteria which I employ in calling something good are criteria which, if I am engaged in genuine evaluations, I have chosen, and which I endorse by my very use of them. Evaluative expressions and moral rules are thus both expressions of the agent's fundamental choices. The role of choice in Hare's prescriptivism is far clearer and far less objectionable than the role of attitudes or feelings was in emotivism. It does not preclude the use of argument in morals.

Hare has been a pioneer in the logical investigation of imperatives. He pointed out that in imperatival discourse, conclusions can follow from premises in a straightforward way, violating none of the ordinary rules of entailment. Because

and therefore carry their usual meanings, and genuine moral argument is possible. But, so Hare further holds, the meaning of evaluative prescriptive expressions is such that no evaluative or prescriptive conclusion can follow from premises which do not include at least one evaluative or prescriptive premise. Or, Hare reiterates the thesis that no ought follows merely from is. So far as the doctrine of The Language of Morals goes, it seems to follow that the pattern of moral argument is a transition from a moral major premise and a factual minor premise to a moral conclusion. It may also be mentioned that Hare's view of 'entailment' looks back to C. J. Lewis' notion of 'strict implication'. That is, we may add, moral argument is an exercise in modalities. And further, the form of moral argument, as Hare explicates it, corresponds to the logical equivalence known as the laws of exportation and importation.

Now having established the rationality of moral discourse, Hare proceeds to a critique of naturalism. He shows that logical relations such as entailment and inconsistency may hold between propositions in the imperative mood, as well as between those in the indicative mood. Therefore, to say that an argument contains an imperative is not to say that it is irrational or governed by no logical laws. There occurs a version of the argument against naturalism, in the form of a proof that from indicative premises

nothing but an indicative conclusion can be deduced.

Hare's critique of naturalism lies in the second part of The Language of Morals. It dispenses with ontology altogether, i.e., it is not based, as Moore's critique was, on the assumption that good is a name of a simple, non-natural property. Nor does it presuppose the thesis that whatever is simple is unanalyzable, and that to define is to analyse. Good, being simple, was indefinable since it was unanalyzable. Hare's argument has remotely something to do with descriptive definitions of good. But properly speaking it is concerned with the fact that commendation of a thing for having a certain property would become impossible, if descriptivism were true. And, it is worth reminding that, for Hare, naturalism is a species of descriptivism.

Let us now look at Hare's critique. Naturalistic definitions of ethical terms make ethical propositions a merely factual account of what is, but, as Kant long ago insisted, 'what to be' cannot be reduced to 'what is'. The following may be taken as a statement of Hare's critique : If a naturalist defines 'good' as C we have to ask whether he 'ever wishes to commend anything for being C. If he says that he does, we have only to point out to him that his definition makes this impossible'. For to commend it for being C would then be just to say it is C because it is C. 'And clearly he cannot say that he never wishes to commend anything for being C, for to commend things for being C is the whole object of his theory'.

Hare goes on to formulate his notion of the evaluative meaning. It may be the case that descriptivism makes moral judgments impossible, yet it retains some truth. Descriptive terms and phrases constitute what Hare had earlier called the phrastic, and they refer to actual or possible states of affair. In other words, descriptive force or meaning of 'words and phrases is constitutive of the propositional core of moral language. As Hare distinguishes himself from the emotivists, who had desisted moral language of any descriptive force altogether, he shows that the moral language is a rational discourse and obeys the laws of logic. Accordingly, Hare is careful in his attempt to accommodate the truth of descriptivism in his meta-ethics.

Value words or judgments have two points of meaning, descriptive as well as commendatory. There is a good case of reason giving for our use of value terms. Ascription of value terms presuppose criteria. And criteria are description of good-making properties. But Hare's point is that saying that something is good is to make a choice, but it is hardly the case that 'the criteria, or for that matter, description of empirical properties of a thing logically obliges one to choose or decide in favour of that object. This is what descriptivism asserts and Hare refuses to assent to. Now that value terms or judgments have both descriptive and commendatory meanings, what makes them evaluative is that the commendatory meaning has a primacy, the descriptive meaning

has only a criteria logical significant and is secondary in importance to the commendatory.

II

Hare takes up the issue of descriptivism in the Freedom and Reason. He opens the chapter on "Descriptive Meaning" by making the remark that meaning is rule dependent. Words or phrases can be said to have descriptive meaning if they obey the descriptive meaning rule. A rule is the consistency of practice in the use of an expression. To have a rule is to be able to know beforehand what would constitute a misuse of a certain term. Accordingly, a term is said to be descriptive if its proper use is guided by descriptive meaning rule. A mistaken use of a term becomes possible when the corresponding rule is violated, and this results in a false statement. Hare distinguishes referring from describing. For example, the word 'it' refers but does not describe, while colour words like 'blue' or 'red' describes but does not refer. This means that descriptive terms make a special class of words. Now, more importantly, comes the notion of descriptive judgment, and Hare goes on to say that 'A judgment is descriptive if in it the predicate or predicates are descriptive terms and the mood is indicative'.

Hare, further, points to the connexion between descriptive judgments and moral judgements. Both classes of judgments are

universalizable. This does not mean that moral judgments are descriptive, though they do have descriptive meaning. The point is that all judgments that have descriptive meaning are universalizable. Let us see how does it obtain. 'If a person says that a thing is red, he is committed to the view that anything which was like it in the relevant respects would likewise be red'

(FR II). The point is that the descriptive judgment 'This is red' entails 'Everything like this in the relevant respects is red'. To say that something is red is to say that it is of a certain kind, and therefore, anything which is of that same kind is red. Singular descriptive judgments are then universalizable, because one cannot without inconsistency apply a descriptive term to one thing and refuse to apply it to another similar thing (similar in the relevant respects). This would constitute a misuse of the term.

It should be noticed further that in using a descriptive term one uses some universal rule, and Hare contends that the universal rule which is involved in the use of descriptive expressions is a meaning-rule. This now brings us to Hare's thesis that both descriptive judgments and value judgments carry descriptive meaning. Let us take two instances to show the point: (a) If A calls a thing red, then A is committed to calling anything else like it red; (b) If B says that a thing a good X, then B is committed to calling any X like it good. In the first case 'red'

is used in accordance with a meaning-rule. In the second case the reason for saying that any X like it good is a little complicated. This would not be so for a naturalist, for he considers that the rules for ascribing value words are descriptive meaning-rules; and that the rules completely determine the meaning of value-words. In short, for the naturalist, a value-word is just one kind of descriptive expression.

Hare distinguishes between sorts of descriptivism. Moore, he says was descriptivist of the non-natural sort. It is the presence of a non-natural property alone that makes the ascription of value-words permissible. An ordinary naturalist would say that the property present is describable in empirical, i.e., natural, terms, since the property itself is natural or empirical. Having made the distinction. Hare goes on to characterize his own meta-ethical position as Universal Prescriptivism. This characterization is parasitic of a further distinction between a strong and a weak descriptivism (FR 17). Descriptivism is strong if it is held that moral judgments are descriptive i.e., their descriptive meaning exhausts their meaning. Descriptivism is weak if it averred that moral judgments, besides possessing descriptive meaning have prescriptive meaning as well. For Kant a moral judgment would have no descriptive meaning at all. In his meta-ethical position. Hare seeks to harmonise three theses of universalizability, prescriptivity and descriptivity. These are

mutually consistent, that is, they do not contradict one another. Strong descriptivism is consistent with prescriptivity of moral judgments, but not with the weaker form. Again weak descriptivism entails universalizability. That the language of morals is a rational discourse can only be shown if only prescriptivity and universalizability, or for that matter, weak descriptivism can be combined. What is interesting to note is that Hare is seeking to retain what is sound in descriptivism, and adding to it the element of prescriptivity in the case of moral judgments. 'The truth in naturalism is that moral terms do indeed have descriptive meaning. It is not the only element in their meaning, and it is therefore misleading to refer to it, as do the naturalists, as the meaning of a moral term; but in virtue of possessing this descriptive meaning moral judgments are universalizable, and naturalism has the merit of implying this' (FR 21).

With reference to Hare's critique of naturalism it may now be said that the combining of prescriptivity with weak descriptivism ensures the non-deducibility of ought from is. Since descriptive meaning does not exhaust the meaning content of moral terms, the non-descriptive element in their meaning makes a difference in their logical behaviour. Descriptivism, when it is strong, is moral ineffectual, a matter of talking, poor enough to serve as a moral principle. But weak descriptivism, on the contrary, in conjunction with prescriptivity is a synthetic moral principle to live by. Hare has wanted moral

is true that there exists unanimity of people's evaluations, certain descriptive meaning is often tied securely to value-words. And it becomes possible to derive judgments of value from non-evaluative statements. This is what the naturalist is inclined to do. But no one can be logically compelled to accept the evaluation. What one is compelled to accept is what is implied in the descriptive meaning of the word. The naturalist's conceptual apparatus does not really yield any evaluation. His moral argument is simply a repetition of his premise, what is entailed by the description. Hare's point is that no conceptual apparatus is logically compelling with regard to the acceptance of a certain evaluation.

Logic alone does not matter with Hare, rather it is the logical consequences of the logic of moral language that matters heavily. Whether the logical consequences we can accept or not is the question. The naturalist does not undertake the exploration into the case whether the logical consequences are acceptable to us and also can be extended to other people, actual or hypothetical. This is the core of universalizability. There is a difference between 'verbal legislation' and 'moral thought' (FR 195). And Hare's idea is that one cannot get 'content' into moral judgments by verbal legislation alone, as the naturalist seek to do.

How does facts come into moral judgments? Moral prescriptions can be inconsistent with other prescriptions, but not with

statement of facts. If a prescription is not possible, logically, to be combined with prescriptions of other kinds, we cannot accept or assent to them at the same time. It is never the case with regard to statements of fact. The form of the impossibility of combining inconsistent prescriptions, according to Hare, is as follows: for any prescription P it cannot be asserted that P, but even so — non-P. From Hare's position p and not p are different, one is actual, another is hypothetical, a distinction the naturalist does not abide by. Hence Hare would say, 'If I in another situation assent to the imperative "p", then even so, not-p'. The first imperative is but in quotation marks, that means it is not issued at all.

It is non-contradictory, but morally vacuous. We enter imaginatively into a hypothetical situation, and think about it and as it were going really to happen to us. Our desires in both the actual and hypothetical case are not different. "A hypothetical similar situation is similar" (FR 197). And that is why we do not like our desires even in hypothetical situations to be frustrated. The thesis of universalizability requires that we can not disregard the desires of our neighbours. If we do, then either we shall have to contend ourselves with singular prescriptions, or we have to play the role of fanatics. Hare's concept of a fanatic is applicable ^{to} those who would believe that they were going to suffer evils like those which, for their present ends, they were proposing to inflict on others. A Nazi

is a fanatic if he would want to get rid of Jews more than he wants himself to live. Fortunately such people are rare.

The 'issue between naturalism and prescriptivism may now be stated vis-a-vis facts that one might appeal to in support of moral judgments. The naturalist avers that given certain non-moral facts about an action, a moral judgment is entailed. According to prescriptivism 'there are no non-moral facts' (FR 198) such that it could entail a moral judgment. Non-moral facts can there be as part of the ingredients of a moral judgment. There is no denying that the facts of the case should be given since all moral argument is about some particular set of facts, actual or hypothetical. There is then the logical framework provided by the meaning of the words like 'ought'. But more importantly, there has to be the volitional factor, i.e., the readiness to treat the desires of other as if they were one's own. Moral thinking requires us to universalize our volitions. It is by universalizing one's volitions that one retains one's judgments as prescriptive, and prescriptivity cannot be deduced from any statements of fact.

There has been a gradual shift in Hare's position from The Language of Moral through Freedom and Reason to Moral Thinking. He has gradually come to realise that the possible content of a morality is no more narrowly restricted by the logic of moral

language. In his later accounts of what moral judgements mean he includes an interpretation of their universality amounting to a strong substantive requirement of impartiality among all persons. From the bare universality to a strong form of impartiality is Hare's passage.

The bare universality of moral claims is relatively uncontroversial, and might be called part of the meaning of moral terms. If I make a judgment about what I or someone else ought to do, I am committed to the view that anyone else in the same circumstances ought to do the same. The judgment is a consequence of more general principle. But this by itself yields nothing like impartiality in the content of moral judgments, indeed it tells us very little about their content at all. Ethical egoism, for example, meets the condition of bare universality perfectly. And Hare in his discussion of the 'fanatic' recognized that some appalling positions could be embraced as universal prescriptions, in some sense.

We get impartiality only if we give a particular answer to the question, 'What is the attitude I take towards the acts covered by such a universal principle when I judge that they ought (or ought not) to be done? That is, we need an account of what it is to prescribe that they be done, that everyone act in a certain way. Hare's view is that a prescription that something be done is the expression of a desire or preference that it be done. And

a universal prescription expresses a desire that the thing be done in all similar cases in the actual world, and also in all similar hypothetical cases which differ from the actual ones only in the identities of the participants.