CHAPTER I

THE DEVELOPMENT OF HARE'S MORAL PHILOSOPHY FROM THE LANGUAGE OF MORALS TO MORAL THINKING

It must be true that few living philosophers have attracted critical comment than he. For a generation, analytical moral philosophers in Britain and America have tended to formulate their own opinions, by action and reaction, in relation to his. In response to all this, the development of Hare's philosophy has been not so much a story of change or accretion, as of definition and defence. To have defined a single position with as much clarity, adhered to it with as much consistency, and defended it against all comers with as much skill and agility as Hare has done, seems to me a remarkable achievement by any standards. I shall in the sequel try to convey some impression of that achievement.

When Hare came into moral philosophy emotivism was in the ascendance. He adopted its central tenent that moral language is at bottom non descriptive in meaning. Stevenson, emotivism's most painstaking exponent, said that he derived it from observation of ethical discussions in daily life and Hare likewise looked to the way ordinary people talk about what they ought to do as the source and test of his moral philosophy. Two features of ordinary moral discourse interested him, as they had interested the emotivists,

namely the connection moral judgements have respectively with the actions they are normally intended to direct and the reasons that are normally given for them. But Hare was dissatisfied with the emotivists' account of these connections. Those who subscribed to a psychological theory of meaning explicitly confused the reasons given for moral judgements with the causes of subsequent activity; and those (e.g. A.J. Ayer and Rudolf Carnap) who assented to the verificationist theory of meaning eliminated, rather than explained, the need for reasons by likening moral judgements to ejaculations or imperatives. Hare saw the basic mistake of emotivism as that of identifying the meaning of moral language with its perlocutionary, rather than its illocutionary, force. He set himself to provide a more adequate account of how moral judgements are connected with actions and reasons by working out 'a rationalist kind of nondescriptivism.

2. Hare's explanation of the connection between moral judgements and actions is briefly as follows: Moral judgements in their central and typical uses are prescriptive, and if a judgement is prescriptive, then, in assenting to it with understanding and sincerity, we necessarily be assenting also to an entailed imperative (*LM* 171-2).

This is what he meant by prescriptivity. Critics have raised two kinds of objection which immediately come to mind. One

is simply that moral language sometimes has descriptive meaning (cf. any descriptivist). In a community, for instance, where there was general agreement that people are good in so far as they tell the truth, etc. one could, in appropriate circumstances, predict that somebody would tell the truth simply by saying that he was a good man-and that whether one approved oneself of truth-telling or not. Hare (LM 111-26) concedes as much from the first, but insists that the prescriptive, or evaluative, meaning of words like 'good' is logically primary in that it remains constant and can be used to change whatever descriptive meanings such words may have acquired.

The other objection calls attention to the wide variety of uses to which moral language may be put-advising, exhorting, imploring, commending, condemning, deploring, resolving, confessing, undertaking, etc. Hare's critics think it implausible to suppose that, in every single instance of all these different uses, there must be an entailed imperative. If Wittgenstein was correct in his opinion that the boundaries of our concepts cannot be strictly circumscribed, there must be some truth in this, but he himself recognized that, in order to avoid philosophical confusion, it is sometimes necessary to draw the boundaries of language more tightly than they are drawn in ordinary use. If that is allowed, Hare is entitled-in the absence of compelling evidence to the contrary-to maintain, as he does, that all the uses listed

above are, in 'typical and central' cases, species of the genus prescribing. In normal circumstances, it would indeed sound unnatural to say, 'I advise you to do X but don't do it', 'I deplore doing X but do it', etc.

Hare's explanation of the connection between moral judgements and reasons is briefly as follows: in offering any such statement of non moral fact as a reason for a moral judgement we are implying a universal moral principle (FR 21 ff). For example, if we give as our reason why X ought to be done the fact that X is the fulfilment of a promise, we thereby imply that all acts which fulfil promises ought ceteris paribus to be done. From the ordinary meaning of 'reason', it undoubtedly follows that a reason must be adhered to consistently. But, according to Hare, there is more to a moral reason than that. From the ordinary meaning of 'moral' it follows that a moral reason must not contain any reference to a particular individual. That is what he means by universalizability. The fact, for example, that she is the particular individual Mary Smith cannot be a moral reason why John Smith ought to help his mother, however consistently he is required to do so, but the fact that John's relationship to Mary Smith is an instance of the relationship between an agent and the person who gave him birth and brought him up could conceivably be a moral reason why he ought to help Mary Smith.

Here again, two criticisms that have been levelled at Hare on this score, come quickly to mind.

One is that he has imported a moral principle-viz. that we ought to be impartial in our moral judgements-into what is supposed to be a logical analysis of the meaning of moral language. But this criticism is groundless. Hare (FR 30) is quite clearly pointing out the indisputable fact that we would not normally take someone's being a particular individual called Mary Smith (or whatever)- in the absence of any description in more general terms-as a moral reason why anyone ought to help that individual. The other criticism is that Hare has overlooked the particularity of some of the situation in which moral judgements have to be made. It is maintained-to take familiar examples -- that if we were in the shoes of Sartre's famous pupil who was torn between looking after his mother or going off to war, or in those of Melville's Captain Vere who had to decide whether or not to condemn Billy Budd to death, we might well make a judgement which we did not want to see universalized but which no one could deny was a moral one. I think Hare (FR 38-9) disposes of this criticism successfully by differentiating the distinction between 'universal' and 'particular' from between 'general' and 'specific'. He points out that a moral reason for action in a given situation could conceivably be so specific that it would not only be improbable, but even false, that any other actual situation instantiated it; and yet that reason could be universalizable in a hypotheical

sense-it would apply to any other relevantly similar situation, if such there were.

Bringing together these two defining characteristics, prescriptivity and universalizability, Hare (FR 123) arrives at the following elucidation of the kind of question which ordinary people are asking when, in a sense that would normally be called moral, they wonder what ought to be done. Any acceptable answer to this question will have to be such that they are prepared to act in accordance with it (prescriptivity) in all similar circumstances whoever occupies the different roles in the situation (universalizability). Universalizability requires us to go 'the round of all the affected parties ... giving equal weight to the interests of all ...', and prescriptivity, to ask ourselves, 'how much (as I imagine myself in the place of each man in turn) do I want to have this, or to avoid that?', where 'this' and 'that' refer to what is involved in acting accordingly. Through this exercise of imagination we are able to weigh the cumulative satisfaction of affected parties if we perform any given action, as against their cumulative satisfaction if we performed any of the conceivable alternative actions. These remarks bring out the other three 'necessary ingredients' (FR 92-3, 97) in moral thinking, which are according to Hare an exercise of imagination, an appeal to interest or inclination, and an investigation of relevant and available matters of fact. In so far as universalizability calls for a consideration of all affected parties, and prescriptivity, of what each wants, we can see why Hare claims that his

analysis of moral thinking provides 'a formal foundation of utilitarianism' (FR 123). He is not, so to speak, proposing utilitarianism as a version of the moral language game, which ordinary people should take up, but simply clarifying the rules which he takes to be implicit in the game which, in his opinion, they are already playing-presumably, in order to help them to play it more effectively.

In addition to the criticisms of prescriptivity and universalizability which I have already mentioned, at least two others have been brought to bear upon Hare's account of moral thinking. One accuses him of assuming falsely that all satisfactions are of the same kind. Is it not clear that the satisfaction to be found, for example, in affectionate family relationships is different from that to be gained by the indulgence of animal appetites; or, that to be felt in doing what one sincerely believes to be one's duty, from that which material prosperity may bring? If the answer is affirmative, how can all these satisfactions be accumulated and weighed against one another? In effect, Hare's (FT 179) reply is twofold. One thing he says is that, despite such differences, it is possible to prefer a given amount of any kind of satisfaction to a given amount of any other kind. Having gone the round of all the affected parties the only question we have to answer is : how much do we prefer - i.e., how ready are we to prescribe - the cumulative satisfaction of the preferences

of certain people to those of others having placed ourselves imaginatively in all their shoes? The criticism we are considering can be pressed most forcefully when the satisfaction concerned is that to be found in doing what one believes to be one's duty. Can this be weighed against any other kind of satisfaction? Suppose a doctor, who believes it morally wrong to perform abortions has to decide whether or not to perform one for a woman who is worried because her standard of living will decline if she has a child. In going the round of the affected parties, is the doctor supposed to throw the satisfaction which he finds in refraining from doing what he believes to be morally wrong into the scales along with that which the woman finds in being relieved from materialistic anxiety, as if they were the same kind of commodity? To say he is, so the criticism goes, is to require him to ignore the significance of moral consideration in the very act of trying to make a moral decision-and surely that is an incoherent, if not a self-contradictory, requirement. Hare's reply, if I understand him correctly, is that it is this criticism itself which is incoherent or self-contradictory. For a method of deciding what ought to be done, which proceeds on the assumption that what ought to be done is already known, is, to say the least, self-stultifying. On the face of it this reply may appear to ignore the fact that we often have to make moral judgements in situations where our minds are already made up about the rightness or wrongness of certain courses of action. Hare can only make his defence at this point effective

by invoking a distinction between what he calls 'critical' and 'intuitive' moral thinking, and to this distinction we shall return in a moment to two.

The other criticism I have in mind is that Hare's elucidation of moral thinking shows him to be himself a naturalist or descriptivist. According to someone like Mrs. Foot, who is indisputably a naturalist or descriptivist, to say that an act X ought to be done means, or implies, that it will satisfy certain wants (i.e. desires). If therefore we (i) understand the logic of the moral concepts (i.e. what 'ought' means) and (ii) assent to the statement that X will satisfy the said wants, we must (logically) deduce that X ought to be done. Well, is not Hare in the same case? Does he not say, in effect, that if we (i) understand the logic of the moral concepts and (ii) assent to the statement that, of all conceivable acts in the given situation, X is the one that will maximize satisfactions among the affected parties, than we cannot (logically) refrain from saying that X ought to be done? As I read him, Hare (MT 218-26) defends himself against this criticism by calling attention to what he considers a crucial difference. On Mrs Foot's account of moral thinking, to work out what will satisfy desires that all men have is to arrive at a description; but on his own account of the matter, to work out what will maximize the satisfaction of preferences among the affected parties is-since to prefer something is to be willing to prescribe it-to arrive at a cumulative prescription. That being so,

the moral judgement at which we arrive by this route is neither descriptive (in the sense that its meaning determines its truth-conditions) nor naturalistic (in the sense that it is derived from a statement of fact).

3. According to Hare (LM 56-78), we are each one free to make our own decisions of principle. We can propose any non-moral statement of act as a possible reason for a moral judgement. All we have to do, in order to determine whether or not we can accept it as an actual reason, is to test whether or not we are prepared to accept the implications of prescribing and universalizing it consistently. Some critics have objected that this makes a mockery of moral reasoning. Consistent prescribing and universalizing is not enough; madmen and criminals could conceivably conform to these criteria and come out preferring the fulfilment of their own crazy or wicked intentions rather than the avoidance of the suffering which the latter will cause. Thus Hare is accused of leaving us free in morality, not only to make up our own minds, but also our own evidence; to decide for ourselves not only what ought, or ought not, to be done, but also what constitutes a sufficient reason why. And this, it is said, is not rationality but the denial of it. What then do such critics think Hare has left out of account? There are at least five answers to that. I will say briefly what they are and how Hare defends himself against each of them in turn.

One is that he has omitted any reference to human wants. The main contention on which this criticism rests is that an agent is given a reason for action, if and only if he is shown that it is the way to something he wants of many wants-so the argument goes- it makes sense to ask why they are wanted; but of some - e.g. those for freedom from boredom, loneliness, physical injury, etc. - it does not. Reasons why we ought, or ought not, to do something are said to be only logically compelling in so far as they are grounded in these ultimate wants. Hare's (1963b;115-34) reply to this kind of criticism-if I grasp it correctly-is as follows. Things are wanted, or thought good, because they have what have been called 'desirability characterizations'. Two senses can be given to this expression. A desirability characterization may be (i) something about an object (e.g. the fact that it tastes sweet) which makes one desire it, or (ii) something about it (e.g. its being said to be pleasant) which implies that the speaker desires it. Equivocation on these two senses leads to the fallacious conclusion that because there are only some words which are desirability characterizations in sense (ii) there must be only some things that can be the subjects of desirability characterizations in sense (i).

A second thing Hare is sometimes accused of overlooking is human needs. Is there better reason to think that moral judgements are logically grounded in needs than in wants? Needs are certainly different from wants. It makes good sense to say that we want - though not that we need - something for its own sake:

the question 'What do you want it for?' can be dismissed with 'Not for anything. I just want it'; but what would we make of somebody who told us that he needed something but make of somebody who told us that he needed something but did not need it for anything? Can it then be argued against Hare that, just as we have reason to do what our doctor tells us because it will fulfil our need for health, so we have good reason to abide by moral judgements in so far as they will fulfil our need for 'human flourishing'? Once again, Hare's defence turns on a distinction between what is true of words and of things respectively. In certain contexts it would be odd for me to say that I needed something but did not think it good. The word 'good' is logically tied to the word 'need' in such cases. But from them it does not follow that 'good' is logically tied to certain things that are generally thought to be needs.

A third thing Hare is criticized for leaving out of account is the true end-that is, nature or function (telos)- of man. Most fundamentally, this Neo-aristotelian attack rests on the contention that the evaluative terms we use in making moral judgements are, in their primary meaning, attributive rather than predicative. In other words, what is meant by, for example, a good character, a right action, a way we ought to live, etc. cannot be understood until we know what human agents are, or are for - just as the meaning of 'a good knife' would not be clear to anyone who did not know that a knife is an instrument for cutting. One obvious

reply to this criticism is that language-users are by no means as agreed about what people are for as about what knives are for. However, the criticism may still be presented simply in terms of beliefs about the nature and function of man. Moral judgement, it is said implies beliefs of three kinds : namely about (i) man as he happens to be, (ii) man as he would be if he realized his telos, and (iii) what must be done, if any given agent is to move from what he is (Cf. (i) to what he could be (Cf. (ii). Moral judgements are beliefs of the third kind, but their significance is parasitic upon beliefs of second kind. If people cease to have any beliefs about man's true nature and function, the bottom drops out of their morality.

In reply, Hare says that this criticism confuses what people can do with what they ought to do. Some beliefs about man's true nature of function - e.g. that it is rational or social-seem compatible with the view that it can be fulfilled in acts which most people would regard as evil no less than in ones they would consider good. Such beliefs are therefore of little use morally. But other teleological beliefs - most obviously religious or political ones-do evidently imply that whatever fulfils their concept of man's true end must be good and not evil. A Christian, for example, would maintain that whatever fulfils man's true end of glorifying God and enjoying him forever must be morally good; just as a Marxist would that whatever helps to bring about the dictatorship of the proletariat must. Hare is entitled to reply,

as in effect he does (H 1957:106-11), that all this proves is that these teleological beliefs, though they may look flatly constative, are in reality also commissive, in their illocutionary force.

Some Neo-aristotelians recommend us to stop thinking about the precise nature of man's telos and to concentrate simply on the fact that the cardinal virtues of justice, prudence, self-control, and courage are necessary conditions of success in 'any large-scale, worth enterprise'. Against this manoeuvre two objections seem self-evident as hardly to need stating. One is that it reduces morality to mere expediency. The other, that it begs the question at issue by its use of the word 'worthy'. In any teleological morality one's beliefs about the particular nature of man's telos necessarily determine what is right or wrong; and so it is self-defeating for any Neo-aristotelian to think that we can bypass the question of what this telos is.

A fourth thing Hare is accused of overlooking is public norms. By the latter are meant generally accepted judgements of what ought, or ought not, to be done in certain kinds of situations. Those who advance this criticism think of rationality as essentially social (which, 1960:24). They contend that a reason for a moral judgement cannot be grounded solely in an individual's decisions of principle, because that would leave unanswered the question as to why he had made these decisions. This reason why-if it is to

be intelligible-will have to refer to some generally agreed 'desirability characterizations' which show it to be, so to speak, decision-worthy. In support of this line of criticism, Wittgenstein's (1974b: Part I, 242) famous dictum - that if language is to be a means of communication there must be not only agreement in definitions, but also in judgements - is widely quoted. In morality, an act is sometimes said to be obligatory because it is courageous, honest, generous, etc. Such expressions are descriptive, but they also encapsulate public approval of acts which conform to the description. As such, it may be so (Norman 1971:67), they are contrary to Hare's opinion-logically more fundamental in moral judgement than purely evaluative words such as 'good', 'right', 'ought'. The meaning of the latter is taken to be parasitic on these descriptive-evaluative words. Even if such criticism implies that the need for 'desirability characterizations' continues to infinity, these critics do not demur (Norman, 1971:65).

Hare (MT 70) in self-defence warns against being misled by Wittgenstein's dictum. He insists that wo people can both use words like 'right' in the same sense and yet disagree fundamentally on what properties of actions make them right. It is, he thinks, a mistake to suppose that words have to have commonly agreed criteria of application before they can be used for communication. Anyone who thinks not is advised to test the point with 'Don't do it', the meaning of which is clearly known prior to any inkling of what-or even what kind of-action is prohibited thereby. It is

worth noting that Wittgenstein himself evidently did not regard his quoted remark as applying to the words 'beautiful' or 'ugly' - a consideration which suggests that he may not have thought of it as applying to moral terms such as 'right', etc. either.

The fifth thing Hare is accused of overlooking is institutional facts. The fact that A promised to do X is said to be an institutional one, whereas the fact that A said 'I promise to do X' is merely a brute fact. Institutional facts do not exist outside th systems of constitutive rules which create new forms of behaviour - e.g. checkmating in chess. The rules for the use of 'to promise' are such that 'A promised to do X' implies 'A ought to do X'. This implication makes promising an institutional fact. Therefore we would appear to have here a reason, which is factual, for a judgement that is plainly moral, apart from any intervening decision of principle. Hare (MT 10-20) does not dispute the linguistic facts on which this argument is based-namely, that in ordinary use, 'A promised to do X' entails 'A ought to do X' - but he contends that no conclusions of moral substance can be deduced from exclusively linguistic premisses. In other words, it would still make sense for someone to ask whether what has been promised ought to be done. Such a questioner would not be asking what implications the word (promise)normally has in our language, but whether or not the institution of promising is morally acceptable. And the answer we would give to this question would in the final analysis depend, not on some rule about the use of words, but on

some decision of principle about what ought, or ought not, to be done in circumstances of the relevant kind. Hare is here insisting once again on the point which is fundamental to his prescriptivism, namely that moral language may always be used in an evaluative sense in order to revise any descriptive meaning it may have acquired.

4. Hare (FR 12) draws a comparison between his elucidation of moral thinking and Popper's of scientific. Just as Popper said that, in science, empirically falsifiable predictions are deduced from universal hypotheses in conjunction with certain initial conditions, so Hare is saying that, in morals, deductions about what ought to be done are derived from universal principles in conjunction with imagined situations. In order to know which moral principles to adopt - just as mutatis mutandis which scientific hypotheses - we must abide by the logic of the discourse concerned and the relevant and available facts which our investigation brings to light. In each case we are free to draw up the major premiss, be it hypothesis or principle, but for the rest our freedom is a 'freedom to reason' (MT 6-7) in the light of logic and the facts.

Again like Popper, Hare, has been criticized for failing to recognize the part played by received opinion in the kind of thinking he is intent upon analysing. We do not work out the answer to every moral - any than to every scientific-question from scratch. We set the question within a context of accepted conclusion and read off the answer from that thereby treating the question as a 'puzzle' rather than a 'problem'. True though that may be, Hare

would claim - as would Popper-that his philosophy brings to light the possibility of revisionary critical thinking in the field which he is concerned to elucidate. We always can go back and start again from scratch. Rationality-freedom to think and think again in accordance with logic and the facts-both constrains and liberates. To accommodate this two fold conception of rationality within his 'rationalist kind of non-descriptivism', Hare in his most recent writings, like many a philosopher before him, distinguishes two 'levels' of moral thinking from each other. He calls them the 'intuitive' and the 'critical' respectively. On the former level, we think in accordance with the hitherto deliverances of logic and the facts; on the latter, we undertake revisionary exposure to them.

The utilitarian confidence that all moral questions can be answered through felicific calculation has come in for fierce criticism recently. Conviction and conflict are said to characterize the ordinary man's moral thinking and experience much more radically than calculation. Hare wonders if much of this criticism is not over-dramatized, but he is ready to concede that ordinary people may well not be any happier than Miss Anscombe with the idea that the judicial execution of the innocent could conceivably be justified on grounds of utilitarian expediency. To find room for such truth as there may be in these anti-utilitarian criticisms, he (MT 44-5) draws his distinction between the moral thinking of 'proles' and 'archangels'. 'Archangels' are completely rational,

omniscient, and free from partiality; they have therefore a perfect command of logic and the facts. In consequence, according to Hare, they always get the correct answers to moral questions and-this is more surprising-the same ones to boot (MT 46). 'Proles' are the very opposite of archangels. Their only hope of thinking in accordance with logic and the facts is to go by what others have told them. These two classes of moral thinker are not such that one must be either the one or the other. Each of us is part archangel, part prole. In so far as we rely in our moral thinking upon received opinion, we are on the intuitive level. In so far as we re-examine it as fully as our capacity allows in the light of logic and the facts, we are on the critical level. Our convictions on the intuitive level serve us well enough in most of life's ordinary situations. But where they conflict, where we are uncertain whether or not they apply in a given situation, where we wonder whether they are worth passing on to our children, critical thinking comes to our aid (H 1976a:124). Both levels of thinking are therefore required by the exigencies of daily life.

Hare (MT 46) accords 'epistemological priority' to critical thinking. It alone has complete overridingness (MT 24, 53-62). Intuitive moral thinking has only a derived overridingness, in so far as the convictions which guide it have 'acceptance utility' (MT 50ff)- i.e. in so far as their general acceptance is calculated to achieve the fulfilment of principles which have been adopted at the critical level. Hare's opinion that all who think with complete

clarity and honesty at the critical level will arrive at the same moral judgements is evidently grounded, in the last analysis, on a matter of purative empirical fact. What he (MT 170-82) calls 'pure fanaticism' he regards as a logical, but not an empirical, possibility. It is logically conceivable that someone could in complete accordance with logic and the facts arrive at conclusions which were justifiable by utilitarian reasoning provided he was a fanatic with incredibly strong and eccentric desires; he could end up thinking, for example, that all Jews ought to be exterminated, or even adhering to such up-market versions of fanaticism as that a doctor ought to prolong the lives of his patients as long as possible, however great might be the consequent suffering that they had to endure. But Hare (MT 182) is quite sure that such cases 'are not going to occur' in real life.

5. Hare is still at the centre of critical attention, defending the twin foundations of his universal prescriptivism, namely that 'the freedom which we have as moral thinkers is a freedom to reason' (MT 6-7) and that 'we remain free to prefer what we prefer' (MT 225).