RICHARD HARE

Richard Mervyn Hare
1919–2002

RICHARD HARE left behind at his death a long essay titled 'A Philosophical Autobiography', which has since been published.[1] Its opening is striking:

> I had a strange dream, or half-waking vision, not long ago. I found myself at the top of a mountain in the mist, feeling very pleased with myself, not just for having climbed the mountain, but for having achieved my life's ambition, to find a way of answering moral questions rationally. But as I was preening myself on this achievement, the mist began to clear, and I saw that I was surrounded on the mountain top by the graves of all those other philosophers, great and small, who had had the same ambition, and thought they had achieved it. And I have come to see, reflecting on my dream, that, ever since, the hard-working philosophical worms had been nibbling away at their systems and showing that the achievement was an illusion.

Yet his imagination could also be less modest: a gaggle of moral philosophers is trapped beneath the earth in a smoke-filled chamber; they talk at cross purposes, and refuse to take the way out into the open air that he alone has discovered. It was his ambition to have united elements from Aristotle, Kant, and Mill in a logically cogent way that solved the fundamental problems of ethics (though with unfinished business); and he usually believed himself to have achieved this. For much of his career, his 'prescriptivism' formed an important part of the curriculum, certainly in Britain. His disappointment was not to have persuaded others (an occasional 'we prescriptivists' was always uncertain of reference), and to have

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[1] *Utilitas*, 14 (2002), 269–305. I shall draw on this pervasively for biographical information, in which it is far richer than its title suggests.

left no disciples; he once told John Lucas that this made his life a failure.[2] Yet he leaves behind generations of pupils grateful for the transmission not of a doctrine but of a discipline; and posterity, while unlikely to ratify the logical validity of his theory, will admire it for its uniting of apparent opposites: freedom and reason, tradition and rationalism, eclecticism and rigour.

I

Richard Mervyn Hare was born at Backwell Down, outside Bristol, on 21 March 1919. He was to be known professionally as 'R. M. Hare', and personally as 'Dick Hare'. His father, Charles Francis Aubone Hare, was director of a firm, 'John Hare & Co.', making paint and floorcloth; his mother was Louise Kathleen Simonds, of a brewing and banking family. The family firm was hit by the recession of the 1920s, when it was liquidated or merged. His father died of the strain when Dick was ten, and his mother, who tried carrying on as director, died five years later. He was then cared for chiefly by guardians and relatives on his mother's side (one of whom, Gavin Simonds, became Lord Chancellor). He was sent to school first at Copthorne in Sussex, and then, from 1932 to 1937, as a classical scholar at Rugby. He was awarded a scholarship to Balliol College in 1937, where he read two years of Greats before the outbreak of war.

Despite a largely classical education (which left its mark in the forceful felicity of his prose), Dick's mind was already turning towards moral philosophy. He ascribed this to two things: the need to define an attitude towards fighting, and a feeling of guilt at living in moderate comfort. He spent much time while still at Rugby working with the unemployed, and finally decided not to be a pacifist, but to join the OTC. When war broke out, he characteristically volunteered for service in the Royal Artillery, and circumvented the results of a medical test in order to be permitted active service overseas. He was eventually put on a ship for India in autumn 1940. He had a year (which he described as one of the happiest of his life) training Punjabi soldiers, and enjoying some adventures (twice finding his own way back through the jungle, once after losing his guns to the Japanese). He was finally taken prisoner when Singapore fell in February 1942. He then suffered a long

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[2] Obituary in *Balliol College Annual Record 2002*, pp. 30–2.

march up the River Kwai to near the Three Pagodas Pass, with a group
of officers whose task was to work as coolies building the railway from
Siam into Burma. So he knew too well the 'violent untiring labours'
that Aristotle associates with virtue in an ode to a dead friend that was
dear to Dick's heart. He writes in his autobiography, 'I prefer to pass
over our sufferings during the eight months we were there';[3] he rarely
mentioned them (except when more fortunate critics of his views rashly
imputed to him the exemption from other experience that can be the
privilege of an Oxford fellowship). He was eventually imprisoned with
fellow officers in Singapore, whence he was released after exactly three
and a half years when the war ended.

Astonishingly, those years already bore philosophical fruit. While on
leave in 1940, he wrote twenty pages setting out 'my philosophy'. When
Singapore fell, he looted a ledger from Changi jail, and started writing a
monograph called 'An Essay in Monism'. He carried this on his back dur-
ing the march, and completed it just before being released. He later dis-
missed it as 'containing mostly rubbish';[4] and it is indeed largely
homemade (with some influence from Whitehead, Eddington, and—
indirectly—Russell's neutral monism), though already characteristic in
its lucidity and confidence. It remains virtually unknown, and connects
with his maturer thinking in ways that deserve mention.[5] A central
notion, initially put to work in relating mind and matter without dualism,
is *rhythm*: 'Goodness is Rhythm *willed from within* by a Person'; 'Beauty
is something we perceive, whereas Goodness is something we do.' Hare
already adopts the dichotomy, fundamental to his later philosophy,
between cognition and will: 'We say that a man cognises something when
he is consciously affected by it; we say that he wills something when he
consciously causes it . . . Cognition is the passive, will the active function
of personality.' There is also already an emphasis upon the importance,
which he later took for granted, of the word 'ought'. Criticising 'materi-
alists' (among whom he counts utilitarians) for letting 'the word "ought"
slip out of their vocabulary', he remarks, 'Both the Greeks of the Fourth
Century BC and we in our own times have seen how quickly people like
Thrasymachus spring up, and with what dire results, once men have

[3] 'A Philosophical Autobiography', 283.
[4] D. Seanor and N. Fotion (eds.), *Hare and Critics: Essays on Moral Thinking* (Oxford, 1988),
p. 201.
[5] It is now accessible among a mass of typescripts lodged in Balliol College Library by John
Hare, by whose kind permission I draw on them here.

forgotten the meaning of "ought".'[6] Very much later he was to regret his inability to convey more than 'feebly and aridly' supplementary reflections such as these: 'The quality of mutual love and affection between people, without which our life would have few joys, cannot be had without the right dispositions; and these dispositions, therefore, are the condition of both happiness and morality.'[7] Here, within a chapter on 'sin', he is happy to follow Plato: 'Successful tyrants—that is, those who use other people solely as means to their own selfish ends—have been few in history, and it is open to question whether any of them have been happy. For no man can be truly happy by himself; most human happiness is a function of our association with other men . . . Such association is barred to the man who has made other men hate him. The person of a tyrant is inevitably stunted.'

The writing of 'An Essay in Monism' was an heroic exercise in detachment. Did Dick's sufferings do more to colour his later ethics? His reticence leaves the question open, but the evidence is that the after-effect was profound.[8] Lucas states this well: 'There were no external supports for morality in a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp. Moral principles could not be argued about with one's captors, only affirmed in the face of them by an act of will: "Here stand I, I will no other." There was an existentialist strain to Dick's moral philosophy.'[9] And David Richards writes, 'I was struck in our correspondence by how important to him his terrible war experience was (thus, his feeling for the limits of reasonable discussion with fanatics).' The fanatic, in Hare's usage, is the man so committed to some ideal that he is willing to sacrifice even his own interests to it; hence appeal to the interests of others is not going to move him. (If that was Hare's interpretation of the motives of his tormentors, it was surely a generous one.) After visiting Japan many years later, he spoke appreciatively of the courtesy of his hosts and the elegance of their customs; being rational, he nursed no resentment against a nation. When he wanted an example of counter-suggestibility put to sadistic purposes, he would cite the schoolmaster who tells his charges to be silent as he leaves the room

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[6] This illustrates how a philological training could produce an attitude anticipatory of Oxford 'ordinary language' philosophy. It was in the early years of that, within his unpublished essay 'Practical Reason' (1950), that Hare was to write, 'It is on the difference in meaning between the sentences "What shall I do?" and "What am I going to do?" that the case against determinism largely rests.'

[7] Preface to *Moral Thinking: Its Levels, Method, and Point* (Oxford, 1981), p. vii.

[8] See also note 42 below.

[9] *Balliol College Annual Record 2002*, p. 31.

with the intention that they should disobey him and get beaten.[10] For illustrating a conceptual point, he preferred a prep school to a slave-camp; he was too English to dine out, or support a thesis, upon horrors endured. Yet a heroism infuses both the content and the manner of his mature philosophy. A postcript to 'An Essay in Monism' contains a sentence initially disconcerting: 'There are circumstances—and I have had my fill of them—in which one becomes absolutely convinced of the contemptibility of the human race in general, and of the supreme importance of oneself in particular.' Yet this is not a confession of egotism, but a declaration that each man has to answer for himself, and maintain his own integrity. It may in part be good luck that preserves most of us from behaving badly, and he had paid for the moral bad luck of others. Though he later licensed the commonplaces of ordinary ethical thought within an 'intuitive' level of thinking, he could never trust them to remain undistorted and efficacious; as Plato had written, 'True opinions, as long as they remain, are a fine thing and all they do is good; but they are not willing to remain long, and they escape from a man's mind, so that they are not worth much until one ties them down by giving an account of the reason why.'[11] Philosophers are as subject to fashion as other men, and, when fashion turned against him with arguments that he thought confused, he stood firm as Hare *contra mundum*. His *anima* (if not *mens*) *naturaliter Christiana* gave him a sense, in philosophy as in life in general, of the symptomatic importance even of minor achievements and misdemeanours. This gave an intensity to his writing, as to his living, that was striking within the gentler ambit into which fate transported him. Within argument, syntax, conduct, and prosody mistakes mattered. It was equally Christian that he believed in putting them right.

II

After the war, Hare returned to Balliol to complete the four years of Greats. Even before he sat Finals, he was offered a lectureship at Balliol, which almost immediately became a fellowship. Philosophically, he had the good fortune to come under two influences that together led him to views that he could always retain. One was emotivism. He never adopted

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[10] See, e.g., *Sorting Out Ethics* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 108–9. This book contains a complete list of Hare's publications up to that date.

[11] *Meno* 97e6–98a4, trans. Grube.

the verification principle of meaning dogmatically, and recoiled from any causal account of 'emotive meaning' that reduced moral discourse to emotional manipulation; yet he accepted a broadly empiricist view of facts that excluded moral facts in any unetiolated sense of 'fact'. The other influence was Kantian. From H. J. Paton's lectures on Kant, and articles by Reginald Jackson, he learnt that imperatives fall within the realm of reason. This led him into a study of imperative logic, a topic already being explored in Scandinavia (especially by Alf Ross), but unfamiliar in Britain. In his first published article, 'Imperative Sentences',[12] in his essay 'Practical Reason' entered for the T. H. Green Moral Philosophy prize in 1950, and in his first book, *The Language of Morals*,[13] he explored the possibilities of inferring imperative conclusions from imperative, or imperative and indicative, premises.

The Language of Morals introduced a distinction between prescriptive and descriptive meaning. Prescriptive meaning is defined in relation to imperatives: a statement is prescriptive if it entails, if necessary in conjunction with purely factual statements, at least one imperative; and to assent to an imperative is to prescribe action. Descriptive meaning is defined in relation to truth-conditions: a statement is descriptive to the extent that factual conditions for its correct application define its meaning. It is taken for granted, in the tradition of David Hume, that the factual is only contingently motivating: desire is no part of sincere assent to a purely factual statement. A moral statement has prescriptive meaning, but may also be partly descriptive. Thus '*A* [a person] ought to φ' entails the imperative 'Let *A* φ', so that to assent to it sincerely is to have an overriding desire (which in application to oneself will amount, if its satisfaction appears practicable, to an intention) that *A* φ. If there are agreed reasons for φ-ing within a linguistic community, say that it is enjoyable, '*A* ought to φ' may take on the descriptive implication of 'φ-ing is enjoyable'. '*X* is a good *F*' prescribes choice within a certain range (e.g. for someone who is choosing an *F*); it takes on a descriptive connotation if there are agreed standards for assessing *F*'s.

Hare never said that ethical statements *are* imperatives; however, it is striking that non-descriptive or evaluative meaning is defined in terms of imperatives. This at once gave a clear sense to his endorsement of Hume's denial that one can derive an 'ought' from an 'is'. It also coincided, at least in appearance, with Kant, and was to become essential for later

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[12] *Mind*, 58 (1949).
[13] Oxford, 1952.

developments that brought results comparable to Kant's. However, a Humean who lacked Kant's belief in a purely rational will might prefer to make ethical statements more loosely expressive of wish or desire, or even aspiration; and this could avoid what is everyone's first objection to prescriptivism, that, intuitively, 'I ought to φ' does not entail 'I will φ' (expressing intention).[14] Hare took courage from the fact that Socrates and Aristotle incur much the same objection; as he liked to urge, Socrates wasn't simply making a mistake. His initial reply was that cases of failing to try to do what one admits one ought to do may involve psychological incapacity, or an off-colour use of 'ought' that sheds its full prescriptive meaning. He was to return more fully to the issue in a chapter of his second book, *Freedom and Reason*,[15] and again in a late encyclopedia article, 'Weakness of the Will'.[16] In this last piece he recognises, wisely, that different things go wrong in different cases. At times, the true story may even involve something like Plato's partition of the soul (which was designed to accommodate conscious self-contradiction).

The two features of prescriptivity and universalisability remained the twin pillars of Hare's theory ever afterwards. The term 'universalisability' was to become the title of a slightly later paper which also sorted out a confusion that causes real trouble in Aristotle and Kant.[17] 'General' *terms* (such as 'man' or 'Greek') contrast with 'singular' ones (such as 'Socrates'). However, in the case of *maxims*, one needs to keep two distinctions apart: a maxim may be 'universal', rather than 'singular' or (ambiguously) 'particular', in referring to no individuals (unless within the scope of a preposition such as 'like' which converts the name of an individual into the vague specification of a kind); a maxim may also be 'general', rather than 'specific', in identifying a *wide* class of agent or act—a difference that is one of degree (so that the universal rule 'Always give true evidence' is more specific than 'Always tell the truth', and more general than 'Always give true evidence on oath'). Any discussion of the

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[14] It is characteristic of Hare's respect for linguistic intuitions (which he trusted more than moral ones) that the nearest the present author ever came to troubling him was by noting the evident and plausibly analogous failure of 'He ought to have got home by now' to entail 'He has got home by now.' 'He *must* have got home by now' is another matter; and one may wonder whether, in (effectively) equating 'ought' with 'must' in practical contexts, Hare was misled by his own conscientiousness.

[15] Oxford, 1963.

[16] This is reprinted in Hare's last collection, *Objective Prescriptions and other essays* (Oxford, 1999).

[17] 'Universalisability' (1955), reprinted in *Essays on the Moral Concepts* (London, Macmillan, 1972).

practicality and acceptability of 'general principles' needs to keep these distinctions apart. Hare's clarity on the matter is his most important non-disputable contribution to philosophy.

In his essay 'Practical Reason', he had already argued that many decisions are decisions of principle not in deriving from a principle, but in establishing one. As he remarked there, 'It is not easier, but more difficult, to decide to accept a very general command like "Never tell lies" than it is to decide not to tell this particular lie . . . If we cannot decide even whether to tell this lie, we cannot, *a fortiori*, decide whether to tell lies in innumerable circumstances whose details are totally unknown to us.' What, then, is to guide decision? In the second part of his essay, he attempted to find a secure basis for moral reasoning in such concepts as 'friend'; but he discarded that approach before trying it out in print. His paper 'Universalisability' (1955) stressed one's personal responsibility in making decisions that are also decisions of principle. The next important development came in a second book, *Freedom and Reason* (1963), in which the formal features of prescriptivity and universalisability generate a 'Golden Rule' form of argument. Hare offers a simple scenario: suppose that A owes money to B, who owes money to C, and that the law allows creditors to exact their debts by putting their debtors into prison.[18] If B simply decides 'I will put A into prison', there may be nothing to say to him. But can he say 'I ought to put A into prison'? If he does, he commits himself to a principle such as 'If this is the only way to exact the debt, the creditor should imprison the debtor.' B is unlikely to be willing to prescribe a likely implication of this, 'Let C put me into prison', since that would frustrate his own interests. Hare argues that the form of argument retains its force even if, in fact, B is not himself a debtor; for the judgement 'I ought to put A into prison', and the principle that it invokes, will still entail conditionals, such as 'Let me be put into prison if I am ever in A's situation', to which B is unlikely to be able honestly to subscribe.

In *Freedom and Reason*, Hare allows the argument to be evaded by the 'fanatic' who is so committed to some impersonal ideal (say that debtors deserve a hard time) that he is willing to disregard his own personal interests (including the interests that he has himself as a debtor, or would have if he were a debtor). A later tightening of the argument, first set out fully in 'Wrongness and Harm' (1972),[19] hoped to close off this possibility. In their practical force, ideals are equivalent to universal preferences that dif-

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[18] *Freedom and Reason*, pp. 90–1.
[19] First printed in *Essays on the Moral Concepts*.

fer from personal preferences in their content, but owe their moral weight to the prevalence and intensity of whatever preferences their realisation would satisfy. That B would really rather go to prison himself than have debtors be treated leniently is possible, but improbable. A more likely fanatic is guilty of a kind of imprudence in failing to give due weight to his own interests, actual or counterfactual. The emergent ethical theory is a distinctive variety of utilitarianism, one that identifies the moral good with the maximisation not of some subjective state such as happiness, but of the satisfaction of preferences.

The argument excited much attention, and some scepticism. It seemed implausible that the very activity of prescribing universally should commit a speaker to a substantive ethical position, let alone one so distinctive. However, the logic of Hare's position became perspicuous in his third book, *Moral Thinking: Its Levels, Method, and Point*.[20] It is now set out as follows. In wondering whether he should assent to the statement '*A* ought to φ', the speaker has to reflect whether he can prescribe that everyone should act in the same way, whatever his own situation. 'I' connotes no essence (e.g., human): each of us *might* be anything, and so has, when prescribing for all situations, actual or possible, to be concerned on behalf of *everybody*. There is further a prescriptive aspect to the meaning of 'I': to take a role to be possibly *one's own* is to give weight to the preferences of the occupant of that role as if they were actually one's own. Hence, the speaker can rationally assent to a particular 'ought'-statement only if it is derivable from some universal principle that he will accept if he gives impartial and positive weight to all preferences whose satisfaction would be affected by its observance. Thus moral reflection generates a universalised prudence. Moral ideals register within this framework simply as universal preferences; to allow one's own ideals to override the stronger or more prevalent desires and ideals of others is a kind of egoism, and so excluded. Human decision remains free, however rational and informed, because anyone can avoid the constraints of morality by declining to moralise; for this reason, it remains true that no 'is' entails an 'ought'.

This is an extraordinary intellectual construction, and invites debate at many points. Zeno Vendler urged that we keep apart the semantic thesis (which may be true or nearly true) that 'I' is a pure indexical, from any metaphysical claim (which may baffle us) that it denotes a pure subject which can take on *any* state or role.[21] In his reply, Hare clearly shies away

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[20] Oxford, 1981.
[21] 'Changing Places?', in *Hare and Critics*, p. 181.

from adopting a metaphysical position stranger than Vendler's own (which rejects Cartesian egos but does admit a transcendental ego). Yet he still supposes it to be true that 'I might be Napoleon', and that 'the world in which I was Napoleon would be a different world than this, though not in its universal properties'.[22] He even supposes that I can consider situations in which I am a stove, a mountain, or a tree—although, since I cannot care what happens to me if I become such a thing, the consideration is idle.[23] Hare seems here to have entered rather unexpected territory. It would have suited his usual common sense to permit me to imagine not *that I am* Napoleon, but *being* Napoleon, i.e. what it was like to be Napoleon; and that can suffice to incline one to ambivalence about the outcome of Waterloo. But he requires there to be a possible situation in which I am, at any rate, relevantly *just like* Napoleon if he is to maintain that prescribing, say, 'All men like Napoleon should receive their come-uppance' applies even *to oneself*, and so may be imprudent.

A danger remained of deriving a kind of imperative from an indicative. No doubt Napoleon very much wanted to win the battle. Does awareness of that fact commit me to prescribing, on the counterfactual supposition that I am Napoleon, that Napoleon be victorious? The answer came to Hare in a particular room in Stanford in the middle of the night (an hour that he usually thought unfitted for philosophy).[24] It was to suppose, further, that the meaning of 'I' is partly prescriptive; hence to hypothesise 'if I were Napoleon' is *already* to 'identify with his prescriptions', in the sense of prescribing that, other things being equal, they be satisfied within the scope of the hypothesis.[25] The solution is equally elegant and audacious. It may confirm doubts whether the situation of my being Napoleon is a *situation* at all. It also throws open questions about what identifying with Napoleon's prescriptions comes to. One might think that, if 'I' is *fully* prescriptive, I cannot prescribe that Napoleon be defeated in the situation in which I am Napoleon, since that is certainly not what he wanted or would ever have wanted; and, if so, I cannot honestly prescribe that all men like Napoleon be defeated, since, for one case (that in which I am Napoleon), I do *not* want that. What Hare requires is

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[22] *Hare and Critics*, p. 285. This comes soon after a disclaimer that I have respected: 'I wish I had kept off the "possible worlds" terminology. It often sheds more darkness than light.' Yet, evidently, 'I might be Napoleon' is not a possibility realisable in the actual world (where that position is already occupied).

[23] Ibid., p. 283.

[24] 'A Philosophical Autobiography', 301.

[25] *Moral Thinking*, pp. 96–9.

a weaker identification: given that I am moralising, and hence prescribing for all situations of a given general kind, I must give *some* weight to the preferences that are mine in the situation in which I am Napoleon, but not *more* weight than I give to the preferences that are mine in any of the other situations; hence, in deciding what to prescribe universally, I must weigh all relevant preferences equally (relative to their prevalence and intensity). This is exactly where Hare intends to lead us; but he invites the question how he can prove that one is *taken* that way by the logic of 'ought' and 'I'.

A related query (which *Moral Thinking* leaves as 'unfinished business')[26] arises about the range of preferences that prescribing universally commits one to taking on board. If 'I' is fully prescriptive, it may further follow that to suppose that I am some person is to take on board *all* his preferences, including 'external' ones about matters (say his neighbours' sexual or dietary practices) that may never impinge upon his consciousness. Yet sometimes Hare only stipulates impartiality between interests, which is narrower. To accommodate precisely that, we might distinguish a sympathetic 'I': to suppose that I am some person might be to give full weight to his desires for his own happiness; this would still leave open whether I should take into account his prudential desires (now for then) for future happiness, or only his synchronic desires (now for now) for present happiness. Alternatively, we might admit an egocentric 'I': this would let us give weight to Cheops' desire that *he* receive a big funeral, but not to external desires that do not essentially refer to their possessor. Yet such options embarrass if the aim was to derive a precise ethical theory from the very logic of the concepts.

Outside *Moral Thinking* itself, a striking application of Hare's framework was to possible people, that is, to people who may exist, with preferences and interests to be satisfied, if we choose to bring them into existence. Ought we to do so, so long as this will increase the total satisfaction of preference? A positive answer has implications—though not, Hare argued, very radical ones—for population policy, and the morality of such practices as abortion and IVF. Hare reasons that, if I am glad that I exist, I tenselessly prescribe, *ceteris paribus*, that my parents bring me into existence; universalising the prescription, I must prescribe, *ceteris paribus*, the bringing into existence of others relevantly like me.[27] The

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[26] Ibid., p. 105. Hare's final discussion is 'Preferences of Possible People', in *Objective Prescriptions*.

[27] See 'Abortion and the Golden Rule' (1975), and several later papers collected in *Essays on Bioethics* (Oxford, 1993).

argument is the most intriguing and ingenious of all Hare's contributions to practical ethics.

A different feature of his theory, first presented (in different terminology) in 'Ethical Theory and Utilitarianism' (1976),[28] and fully explored in *Moral Thinking*, is a distinction between a 'critical' level of thinking, conducted by 'archangels' with the use of 'Golden Rule' arguments, and an 'intuitive' level, conducted by 'proles' with the use of simple principles (often articulating emotional responses) whose acceptance can be justified at the critical level. These two levels define not two social castes, but two roles between which each of us learns to alternate as appropriate. The complication is actually inevitable within consequentialism, which has to separate the question *how one should act* from the question *how one should think* about how to act—for ways of thinking have consequences no less than ways of acting. A utilitarian assessment of practical principles has to consider not only their *observance utility* (OU), which is what good will come of enacting them, but also their *acceptance utility* (AU), which is (roughly) what good will come of intending to enact them. A broad generalisation that Hare favoured is that the highest OU is likely to attach to highly specific principles, though a higher AU may attach to some fairly general ones. This comes of human ignorance and self-deception. A principle, say, permitting adultery when a marriage is breaking up anyway might have a higher OU than one simply forbidding adultery; but, if there are potential Don Juan's around with a talent for false rationalisation, its AU may be much lower. This complication was both convenient, and problematic. Hare had long been wearied by familiar objections citing concrete cases where utilitarian theory appears to conflict with moral intuition, as when an American sheriff might judicially execute one suspect in order to prevent a mass lynching of others. He could now hope to accommodate these at the 'intuitive' level of thinking. An inability ever to countenance judicial murder may be recommendable *by* critical *to* intuitive thinking as a constraint upon practical reflection in an emergency. And given that the attitude is approved, if not reasserted, by critical thinking as Hare conceives it, how can it in itself tell against his conception of critical thinking? (It would be a case, so to speak, of biting the hand that fed one.)

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[28] This is collected in *Essays in Ethical Theory* (Oxford, 1989).

However, there is a difficulty.[29] It is one thing to *make do* with intuitive ways of solving problems that are the best available within limits of time and information, while leaving them subject to correction at leisure or in retrospect; it is another to accept a theory that approves one's actually *assenting* to certain principles whose contents it cannot endorse. And yet a rule that is a mere 'rule of thumb' is a paper shield against temptation. All is well if the theory can be self-effacing, so that the agent discards it as and when he adopts an intuitive viewpoint; but, in Hare's scenario, in which he has internalised both critical and intuitive ways of thinking, how is he to keep out of mind, as he tests his practical commitment to some intuitive principle, that it is simply not of a form (being absolute, and yet evidently equivalent to no principle of utility) to be critically endorsable? Hare's way out requires a *tertium medium*: perhaps the agent may sincerely *accept* the guidance of a rule (with the effect that he can intentionally infringe it, if at all, only with compunction) to whose content he cannot strictly *assent*. It becomes a question, and a very interesting one, whether Hare's conception of prescriptions—and of moral judgements, no less than principles, as being prescriptive—can accommodate such a distinction.

Utilitarianism, of any variety, is not at present generally fashionable; yet one may be sure that it will never go away. Future reconsiderations of it may well return to these, and other, more commonsensical, aspects of Hare's intensely meditated elaboration and defence.

III

Hare always claimed to have learnt a lot from his pupils, and his early years at Balliol granted him outstanding ones—three of whom, Bernard Williams, Richard Wollheim, and John Lucas, were to join him both as professional philosophers, and as Fellows of the British Academy. Lucas gives a delightful account of how he and his contemporaries would plan a day's campaigning, with a succession of tutees concerting, through the day, objections to some settled opinion of Dick's, and replies to his replies—with Williams sent in last to deliver the *coup de grâce* that was never, in the event, fatal. Those who never experienced Hare's impromptu fielding of objections can really understand the resilience of even his less

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[29] See Bernard Williams, 'The Structure of Hare's Theory', in *Hare and Critics*. Hare's reply is characteristically robust (ibid., pp. 287–93).

plausible convictions. And yet, despite some impressions, he was quite capable of admitting the force of fair counter-arguments. Neil Cooper, who warmly recalls Hare's personal kindness, also remembers an admission after an exchange at the Jowett Society about 'ought' and 'can': 'You thrashed me.' Hare had a faith that apparent disagreements can usually be resolved once confusions are removed;[30] this did go with a presumption that objections to his views rested on confusion. The style of his responses to essays can partly be gauged—except that he was kinder to pupils than to colleagues—from his 'Comments' within *Hare and Critics*, whose brusquely economical format he recognised might be taken amiss: 'In case anybody thinks that I have been discourteous to my critics in writing notes instead of essays, I must point out that this is what we commonly do to Plato and Aristotle (as in the Clarendon series of commentaries), taking their arguments one by one and treating them briskly but seriously.'[31] (What his critics did not occasion, as his students did, was equally precise and emphatic correction of vocabulary and syntax.) He was generous of his time but not a philosopher of the pub, deprecating discussions lasting more than an hour and a half on the sensible but sober ground that it is difficult to keep a clear head for much longer.

There could be a complaint that Hare was most interested in his own ideas. John Lucas had from Tom Braun a Balliol rhyme dating from soon after the publication of *The Language of Morals*:

> My pupils I have always taught
> You cannot get an 'is' from 'ought'.
> This is the burden of my song:
> 'It's in my book, or else it's wrong.'[32]

A contrasted experience is that of David Richards, who was never a pupil, but wrote a doctoral thesis that Hare examined: 'His comments on my dissertation were remarkably extended and detailed, always reasonable, and sometimes persuasive. I was struck in my correspondence with Hare by how seriously he took my discussion of his views and how much he was willing to enter into mine; indeed, he probably thought more of my dissertation than I (then) did, which is a bit amazing.' (The result was a book, *A Theory of Reasons for Action*,[33] that Hare recommended to his

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[30] Whence the over-sanguine title of his last book, *Sorting Out Ethics*.
[31] *Hare and Critics*, p. 201. Hare was honestly disappointed that Oxford University Press refused him the title 'Hare and Hounds'.
[32] By mistake, *Balliol College Annual Record 2002* prints an earlier variant.
[33] Oxford, 1971.

pupils as the best defence he knew of the other side.) It is true that Hare was most appreciative of points helpful to his own reconsiderations; he could then be depended upon to be overgenerous. He always disparaged his own scholarship, though from a demanding point of view. (Few writers of long books on Plato can have first reread the whole of Plato in Greek, as Hare did before writing his very short one.)[34] Yet his interests were wider in range than his publications. I remember, in the years around 1970, classes focused on Frege, Wittgenstein, and more recent philosophy of mind and language. Though he was keen to claim ancestry (counting Socrates and Aristotle as, in part, the first prescriptivists),[35] his love of philosophy did not reduce at all to a love of his own philosophy.

His most amiable aspects were apparent to the undergraduates (by preference) whom, from early on, he invited to one of his reading-parties, first at Plas Rhoscolyn in Anglesey, and later also at Saffron House in Ewelme, beneath the Chilterns. It was there above all that he vividly communicated a sense of how worthwhile and enjoyable it is not just to read but to *do* philosophy. He was thus, however exacting his standards, a tremendously positive figure as a mentor. Some of his distinguished colleagues could be inhibited by a concern not to say anything that might not stand up to examination; Hare gave of himself in discussion in a manner that could be self-opinionated but was also self-forgetful. Though he was a man of his own generation in lacking the indiscretion that is now almost *de rigueur*, he could soon be enjoyably candid about other philosophers (though never about his pupils). If his tenor was then somewhat partisan, that increased the fun. His sense of humour was less distinctive than his sense of mission, but equally characteristic. Though I must keep back one *gaillardise* (not, indeed, an habitual vein), I can mention a long vacation, spent mostly on his back with a slipped disk, that was redeemed by Lady Longford's life of Wellington, from which he particularly cited the one lady of easy virtue able to make a comparison with Napoleon: 'Le duc était beaucoup le plus fort.' Hare was a Puritan of the traditional kind who shared Dr Johnson's approval of 'harmless pleasures'. His reaction to the relative austerity of Corpus after Balliol, in the 1960s, was of equal amusement and regret. He was concerned about the case against eating meat; but his eventual virtual vegetarianism was rather caused, he said, by gardening than by argument. Unusually for a philosopher, he had a strong practical bent, and rather

[34] *Plato* (Oxford, 1982), in the 'Past Masters' series.
[35] See his article 'Prescriptivism', in E. Craig (ed.) *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London, 1998).

wished he had been an inventor; for Plas Rhoscolyn he created a bed on a design he had known in Burma. Some of his dislikes were distinctive: the music of Beethoven (which he came to find superficial), wearing socks (which he blamed on commercialism), drinking coffee (which he said affected his temper), travelling by train (which caused him anxiety), giving and receiving presents (when the recipient best knows what he wants). Ved Mehta recalls his working, for freedom from interruption, in a caravan on the front lawn of his house in Oxford. He had the courage, though not the extravagance, to be an eccentric.

It was initially at reading parties that his pupils encountered a part of his life equally important to him as philosophy: his wife and children. What he describes as 'a night of mostly bad dreams', starting with his mother's death in 1935, ended with his marriage in 1947 to Catherine Verney, which he calls 'the best thing I ever did, and a source of lasting happiness'.[36] Catherine connected him to a family with whose long distinction his egalitarianism had to come to terms. She also brought him a richly human affection and devotion, and a Christian heart and mind to which his home life owed a saving grace. They further shared a love of traditional Anglicanism (though her beliefs were more orthodox than his), and of music (especially choral and *a cappella*). A Hare reading party at Ewelme was always in part a music camp, with (for all those able to join in) a piano to play and madrigals to sing. Everything equally involved their four children, one son, John (who now unites parental influences by teaching ethics and religion at Yale), and three daughters, Bridget (who now works for the Bach Choir of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania), Louise (who took a doctorate in animal husbandry, but now practises speech therapy), and Ellie (who makes films). Without them, he would have felt incomplete even as a moral philosopher; for Aristotle's question 'What sort of person should I be?' gave way, for him, to the question 'What sort of person should I bring up my children to be?'

IV

John Hare's own words at the memorial service that took place in Oxford at the University Church of St Mary the Virgin in May 2002 expressed the judicious loyalty of a fully believing son to a quasi-believing father.[37]

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[36] 'A Philosophical Autobiography', 272, 292.
[37] They too were published, as 'R. M. Hare: A Memorial Address', *Utilitas*, 14 (2002), 306–8.

Dick did not suppose that the modern thinking man could long remain what he called a 'simple believer'; so he welcomed attempts by R. B. Braithwaite and others to empty religion of dogmatic content. He called himself a 'Christian empiricist', but thought the question whether he was really a *Christian* terminological. What he retained for himself was what he once called a 'blik', an attitude to the world which somehow gave him confidence to live and think morally, trusting (as he put it) 'in my own continued well-being (in some sense of that world that I may not now fully understand) if I continue to do what is right according to my lights', as also 'in the general likelihood of people like Hitler coming to a bad end'.[38] John connects the inhibitions that held his father back from belief not just with modern scepticism, but with 'a philosophical doctrine about meaning which he inherited from Carnap and the logical positivists'; for 'he thought he could not make meaningful assertions about subjects, like God, which lay beyond the limits of possible sense experience'.[39] Thus he denied that the transcendental has anything to do with prayer, asking 'What is the difference between there being a transcendental God who listens to the prayer and directs events accordingly, and it just being the case that the events take place?', and answering 'None at all.' The upshot is fatal to the orthodoxies of belief as of unbelief: 'Where the transcendental is concerned, there is no difference between a true story and a myth; it is therefore wrong to speak of the person who prays having an *illusion* that there is somebody that he is praying to.'[40] Simple belief, it turns out, lacks even a content.

Also traceable to positivism was a recurrent tendency to doubt the substantiality of philosophical disagreement. Presumably Plato was making a mistake of a kind when, as Hare diagnosed it, he 'interpreted the experience which *we* call "having a particular mental image of a square" as "having, on a particular occasion, a mental look at the Square"'.[41] Within metaethics, however, Hare was inclined to suppose that such variations fail to be more than verbal. This suspicion was first expressed in an unpublished paper 'Moral Objectivity' (1949–50). Here Hare imagines a White (an objectivist) who calls 'a moral intuition' what a Black (a subjectivist) calls 'a feeling of approval', and wonders about the point at

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[38] 'Theology and Falsification' (1950), collected in *Essays on Religion and Education* (Oxford, 1992), p. 38.
[39] 'A Memorial Address', 307.
[40] 'The Simple Believer', in *Essays on Religion and Education*, p. 27.
[41] 'A Question about Plato's Theory of Ideas' (1964), collected in *Essays on Philosophical Method* (London, Macmillan, 1971), p. 67.

issue: 'Now we may well ask, seeing that we are all agreed that there *is* this experience, no matter what you call it, what on earth is the point of having long philosophical arguments about what you do call it.' Take a case of disagreement about pacifism: 'The Whites describe this situation by saying that there is a difference of opinion between us as to whether fighting does or does not possess the quality right; the Blacks, on the other hand, describe it by saying that we have different feelings about fighting. But the situation which they are both trying to describe is precisely the same, and they know it . . . They are disagreeing merely about words.'[42] Hare pursued this scepticism in two published papers, 'Nothing Matters' (1957), and 'Ontology in Ethics' (1985).[43] Here he suspects of vacuity certain terms that get overworked: 'true', 'fact', 'world', 'objective', 'realist', 'cognitivist'; hence he thinks it much harder than many have done to define a position that is distinctively objectivist. (It is certainly not enough to reassert 'Murder is wrong' in a peculiar and, as it were, metaethical tone of voice, firm and yet unemotive.) What I have traced back to a verificationism that may now seem dated becomes well grounded when applied to abstractions that, as appropriated by philosophers, await a clear sense.[44] This is not the most familiar aspect of Hare's thinking, but it is one that retains a potential to be salutary.

V

Hare remained a tutor at Balliol for twenty years, and always felt attached to that institution above all others (whence the bequest of his *Nachlass*).

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[42] Hare proceeds to confirm the connection drawn by John Lucas between his war experience and a vein of existentialism. He imagines being an interpreter in a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp who is trying to persuade the Japanese commander not to send sick people out to work on the railway: 'I ask him to visualise, not certain non-natural properties, but the very natural, real properties of the situations that the alternative courses of action will bring about . . . It is not by any appeal to intuition that I can conduct my argument; . . . it is by revealing to him the nature of his choice, and showing him what it involves, what in fact he is choosing. And when I have done all this, I can only leave him to choose; for it is after all his choice, not mine . . . At any rate I have myself chosen, so far as in me lies, my own way of life, my own standard of values, my own principle of choice. In the end we all have to choose for ourselves; and no one can do it for anyone else.' There is nothing comparable to this remarkable and poignant passage in anything that Hare put into print.

[43] The first is collected in *Applications of Moral Philosophy* (London, Macmillan, 1972), the second in *Essays in Ethical Theory*.

[44] One may compare the 'quasi-realism' of Simon Blackburn, which purports to ape the language of realism without incurring its ontology—but also, and perhaps better, the 'quietism' that Blackburn deprecates for reasons not altogether clear.

It was still during his time there, in 1964, that he was elected a Fellow of the British Academy. However, ineluctable promotion eventually removed him, in 1966, to the White's Chair of Moral Philosophy at Corpus Christi. There he took on a responsibility for the supervision of research students. (Balliol and Corpus Greats pupils still had the benefit of his reading parties, which for a time, while John was at Balliol, became biennial.) He also took his turn as chairman of the Philosophy Panel, which admits and oversees graduates, and chairman of the Faculty Board. His hopes of reforming the position of Philosophy within the framework of the University came to nothing, as such things do. He was more successful in raising the money to set up the Radcliffe Fellowships, which have benefited both the recipients (college tutors relieved of teaching for up to two years) and their replacements (temporary lecturers in need of teaching experience). Administration, it may be said, was a task with which he coped admirably, but, also admirably, refused to identify.

He recalls that most of his cousins on his mother's side were Americans; and two of his children emigrated to America and married Americans. Like all distinguished Oxford philosophers, he received many invitations there (of which the most welcome—to him as to others—was to the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford, where he wrote both *Moral Thinking* and his little book on Plato). All this made less improbable his early retirement from Oxford in 1983, and his appointment as 'Graduate Research Professor of Philosophy' at the University of Florida at Gainesville. One desire was to escape from faculty politics at Oxford. A contributing factor was the publication of *Moral Thinking*, which left him immediately, he told me, nothing new to say in his staple lectures. Yet his main motive was the prospect of helping to set up a 'Center for Applied Philosophy'. Thumbnail sketches of philosophical change exist to mislead, and this is certainly true of a blinkered *aperçu* that recent moral philosophy, *post* but not *propter* Hare, has shaken off its dry dust and reconnected with the real world. The very phrase 'applied ethics', now so familiar (and yet, one may think, tendentious), presupposes a tradition of ethical theories, such as his, that invite practical applications. In fact, he published his first paper in practical ethics in 1955.[45] Better known is the last chapter of *Freedom and Reason*, which addressed the issue, then (it seemed) wholly recalcitrant, of

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[45] 'Ethics and Politics', part of which is collected, under the title 'Can I Be Blamed for Obeying Orders?', in *Applications of Moral Philosophy* (London: Macmillan, 1972). There it is followed by three papers originally published in the 1950s, and more from the 1960s.

apartheid.[46] And much else followed, with a stream of papers, and memberships of various advisory bodies.[47] He was engaged especially by urban planning, where he favoured radial over ring roads, and biomedical ethics, in which he laboured to be logical and not just *bien pensant*. When a Society for Applied Philosophy was formed, he became its first President. So he looked forward to a profitable refocusing of his energies, and this, to an extent, occurred, even when the Center partly disappointed: as he notes, three out of four volumes of essays published between 1989 and 1993 fall within practical ethics.[48]

Dick and Catherine's translation from Oxfordshire to Florida had, to their friends, an appearance of paradox. Stephen Spender, who taught at Gainesville in 1976, describes in his *Journals* not only alligators whose snouts pointed just above the water-line like periscopes, but also 'brilliant green trees' that 'were white with ospreys, and looked like green hats dripping with ostrich feathers'; yet he calls Gainesville itself 'the most perfect non-place I have ever seen', a paradigm of American cities 'that have stopping places but no centres'.[49] The Hares, however, were well suited. They retained their house in Ewelme, and spent half the year (the warmer half) there, and half in Florida, where they acquired a spacious bungalow that cost less for its lack of shade. For an Englishman a visit was in part uncanny: as one saw a pile of copies of *The Times*, with shelves of English books and music, and heard the BBC World Service, one could wonder whether one was back in England.[50] And yet they were multiply social, joining *three* local choirs, including (as at Ewelme) that of their local Anglican church. Dick kept up a passion for walking, missing the hills of England, but savouring the natural novelties. An actual taste for tutoring marked him off from his un-Oxonian colleagues. Were his new pupils up to the standards of post-war Balliol? He did not complain. At least Floridan legislation made the timing of retirement a matter of choice.

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[46] Yet candour lightens commitment on the very last page: 'When South African believers in white supremacy read this book, will they at once hasten to repeal the pass laws and make the blacks their political equals? This is highly unlikely; and in any case they will not read the book.'

[47] On this, see 'A Philosophical Autobiography', 294–5.

[48] Besides *Essays on Religion and Education* and *Essays on Bioethics*, already mentioned, there was *Essays on Political Morality* (Oxford, 1989).

[49] *Journals 1939–1983* (London: Faber & Faber, 1985), p. 318.

[50] Anyone who remembers Alan Bennett's play *The Old Country*, whose skill is to disguise until the end of the first act that the location is not the home counties but somewhere outside Moscow, will know just what I mean.

Their Indian summer was disturbed by the first, and slightest, of Dick's strokes. When they returned fully to Ewelme in 1994, further attacks cheated him of his hopes of continuing to combat 'the usual misunderstandings'.[51] He gave his last paper, appropriately, to an undergraduate audience at King's College London; its content was as lucid as ever, though his delivery was less fluent. He was still able to put together *Sorting Out Ethics* (1997), deriving from the Axel Hägerström Lectures that he had given at Uppsala University in 1991 (when he also received an honorary doctorate—his first doctorate—from the University of Lund). Their taxonomy of metaethical options rather reflected their origins in the 1960s than the state of play current in the 1990s (part of which blurred his boundaries). Yet as a final statement of Dick's own position, and a lucid mapping of the topography of ethics from his point of view, it enjoys a special status among his books.[52] His eightieth birthday was marked by the publication of a final collection of papers, *Objective Prescriptions and other essays* (1999).[53] As is common, his last months, up to his sudden but peaceful death on 29 January 2002, were not his happiest, for all Catherine's care. And yet we may be sure that he would still have testified, as he had written thirty years before, 'I do believe in divine providence (that, incidentally, is the main reason why I have such a firm conviction that the truth will prevail in philosophy, despite all the manœuvres that are available to falsehood).'[54]

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[51] A phrase applied, alas, to Philippa Foot; 'A Philosophical Autobiography', 304–5.

[52] The book also collects a paper intriguingly titled 'Could Kant Have Been a Utilitarian?' (1993).

[53] Perhaps the most ingenious and enjoyable of these is 'Some Subatomic Particles of Logic', first published in 1989 but drafted long before that. To it an anecdote attaches. Hare first offered it to a *Festschrift* for his old Corpus colleague J. O. Urmson. But when he was unable to prevail over the American publisher in the matter of punctuation, he preferred to have it printed (of course, with a gracious note of explanation) in *Mind*.

[54] 'A Simple Believer', in *Essays on Religion and Education*, p. 33.