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A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF R. M. HARE'S
PRESCRIPTIVE UNIVERSALISM.

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R. M. HARE'S PRESCRIPTIVE UNIVERSALISM

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
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BY

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1967

Approved by

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Adviser
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CHAPTER I
GUIDING CONDUCT

Hare's theory is an attempt to reply to the claim that ethics is not a rational enterprise. Modern research in logic has led many contemporary philosophers to abandon any further attempt to see moral philosophy as an undertaking in which one can present arguments. The theory suggests (1) that this despair is premature and (2) that there is a way of showing how one can reason in respect to morality, and (3) that prescriptive universalism, a name for Hare's solution, is that way. In this and the chapters that follow I shall examine what I consider to be Hare's most important claims.

The Foundations

The most basic assumption of the whole enterprise of ethics is that moral principles have the peculiar function of guiding conduct. When one is faced with the question 'what shall I do?' and all the facts are in and accounted for, he must then make a decision, one that is based on the moral principles he accepts. The language in which he expresses what it is that is going on in this kind of situation is one kind of prescriptive language. For Hare prescriptive language is a genus under which both ordinary imperatives and value-judgments are

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1 R. M. Hare, The Language of Morals, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1961, 3.4, p. 45. Hereafter this book referred to as LM.
2 LM, 1.1, p. 2.
species. If one can get clear on the logic of prescriptive language in general, and then on the logic of imperatives, he will notice certain common features between ordinary imperatives and non-moral judgments. This will in turn provide him with a clue to the logic of moral value-judgments, the key specifically being those same common features.

Hare used the word 'command' to cover all imperatives (including military orders, instructions for cooking, etc.) and 'statement' to cover all typical indicatives. Both imperatives and indicatives are used for talking about a subject matter, but they say something about it in different ways. Indicatives tell someone that something is the case, while imperatives tell someone to make something the case.

Hare's first task is to determine how moral value-judgments might have meaning. His method is first to examine several suggestions as to how ordinary imperatives might be meaningful.

Two Meaning-Suggestions

There are various possible theories about the way in which imperatives have meaning. Hare wants to examine two kinds of theories and offer reasons for rejecting both. His critique is a bit cumbersome. I shall attempt to clarify the argument that constitutes his objection. Then I shall present an argument to show that his rejection of the second kind of theory is weak.
The first theory claims that imperatives are statements about the mind of the speaker. We shall, for convenience, call this theory (A). By (A) 'shut the door' means 'I want you to shut the door'.

The importance of this theory for Hare is that if it is correct, it will militate against a suggestion his own theory makes about the nature of moral language. For Hare, ethical value-judgments are a species of prescriptive language. If, as the first theory maintains, all imperatives, including moral commands, are reducible to indicatives, then prescriptive moral judgments can be reduced to indicatives (statements of fact) and naturalism is true. Hare will later present an argument to show that naturalism is false.

The first objection to this explanation of the meaning of imperatives is that it is philosophically misleading. It has the following consequence: 'shut the door' and 'do not shut the door' is not a contradiction. "It has the consequence that if I say 'shut the door' and you say (to the same person) 'do not shut the door', we are not contradicting one another; and this is odd."

Hare offers an answer to his own objection in the following way:

The upholder of the theory may reply that although there is no contradiction, there is a disagreement in wishes, and that this is sufficient to account for the feeling we have that the two sentences are somehow incompatible with one another (that 'not' has the same function as in the sentence 'You are not going to shut the door').

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5 LM, 1.3, p. 6.
6 Ibid.
But Hare's objection and answer are both misleading. On the theory in question 'shut the door' means 'I want you to shut the door' and the latter is a statement about the mind of the speaker. But if 'shut the door' means 'I want you to shut the door', then the latter can always be substituted for the former. In that case the sentence "shut the door' and 'do not shut the door'" means the same as the sentence "'I want you to shut the door' and 'I do not want you to shut the door'." But the latter sentence is clearly contradictory since it contains, on the theory in question, two statements having truth value and both conjuncts cannot be true nor can both be false. Statements about the mind of the speaker are true or false. Hare makes his opponent (whom he doesn't name) speak as if the objection makes sense. Hare has created an objection which in fact is not an objection to (A).

But he has another objection to (A). We can put it in the following form. Consider these sentences:

(1) Shut the door.
(2) I want you to shut the door.
(3) You are going to shut the door.
(4) I believe that you are going to shut the door.

To say that (1) means (2), which is what one who holds (A) would say, is like saying (3) means (4). But (3) is not at all about anyone's mind. It is about shutting the door by you. But by (A),

LM, 1.3, p. 5.
(2) is about the speaker's mind. Hare suggests that (4) is not a statement about someone's mind. It is, he says, a more hesitant version of (3).

I have some reservations about Hare's analysis here, e.g., how would one go about reporting a belief (state of mind) if not by saying something like (4)? It may indeed be the case that one uses the same words for saying (4) and for saying (3), but if that is so, then Hare needs to supply criteria for distinguishing in order to make his objection sound. He does not do so. What Hare apparently means is that (4) may sometimes be a more hesitant version of (3).

Further, Hare suggests, (2) is a polite way of saying (1). The logic of (4) is dependent upon the logic of (3), and similarly, (2) is dependent upon (1). Therefore, to say that (1) means the same as (2) is to give no explanation at all, for it is logically necessary to know what (1) means before one can understand (2).

Again, Hare is unclear. If he means that if I do not know what 'your shutting the door' means I cannot logically know what it means to 'want you to shut the door', that is trivially true. But then his objection is unsound. 'Shutting the door' is merely the content of the command. The philosopher (if there is one) who holds (A) could have explicated his theory in terms of variables. He could have said, 'do X' means the same as 'I want you to do X'. Knowing or

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8 LM, 1.3, p. 6.
9 Ibid.
not knowing what X is does not seem relevant to that philosopher's point. The issue is whether or not commands can be explained in terms of statements about the mind of the speaker, and there seems to be no logical necessity of knowing what commands are before one knows what statements about the mind of the speaker are. In context there seems to be no logical necessity of knowing what (1) means before one knows what (2) means in so far as (1) is a command and (2) a statement about the mind of the speaker. I find Hare's objection undamaging to (A).

Hare has a better point when he shifts to an objection against what he calls the "parallel ethical theory". That theory claims that 'I approve of X' is a way of saying 'X is right'. On this theory the value-judgment refers to a state of mind, i.e., approval or disapproval. But, Hare objects, when I am asked whether or not I approve of X, I do not search my mind to discover a state of my mind (an introspectible fact), but my answer is a moral decision about something other than my mind. This is surely an important objection against a moral theory of this kind. But Hare has moved from talk about imperatives to talk about moral value-judgments. I find this whole section rather confusing. I shall try to clarify it. I shall reconstruct the argument by dividing it into two arguments, the first against a theory that imperatives are statements about the mind of the speaker, and the second against a theory that imperatives are expressions of feelings (states of mind) of the speaker.
Argument 1: If imperatives are statements about the mind of the speaker, then 'shut the door' means 'I want you to shut the door'. But then, whenever one utters a command, he is saying something about his own mind and not about that which is commanded, in this case, your shutting the door. To Hare, that seems absurd.

Similarly, when one utters a moral imperative (Hare assumes that moral value-judgments are prescriptive as imperatives are - something he must later prove) he is not introspecting, but is making a moral decision which is about something other than his own mind. To Hare it seems absurd to say that moral judgments, if they are prescriptive, are about the mind of the speaker just as it is absurd to say that imperatives in general are about the mind of the speaker.

Hare is appealing to common understanding as to what it is we are doing when we utter an imperative and/or make a moral value-judgment. What is assumed in the argument is some common element between ordinary imperatives and moral prescriptions.

Argument 2: This argument militates against the view that imperatives are expressions of feelings or wishes of the speaker. On this variation of the same meaning-theory, two imperatives could not be contradictory. Expressions of feeling are not true or false, though statements about those expressions are. But it is odd, Hare argues, that 'shut the door' and 'do not shut the door' are not contradictory. We surely do think that they are. But, the upholder of the theory might reply, a disagreement in wishes or feelings can
account for our feeling that two imperatives are somehow incompatible.

Hare grants the point but suggests that one still would be faced with the problem of saying that the imperatives are not about your shutting the door, but about your frame of mind. Here I suggest that Hare has confused a question about the content of an imperative with a question about the form in which it is expressed. For instance, Hare's opponent might agree with what he has said and maintain that imperatives are indeed about 'your shutting the door' or whatever, but that they are expressions of the speaker's feelings, which feelings (wishes, etc.) are about your shutting the door. Hare has failed to give a sound objection to his opponent's argument.

The general context of this entire discussion is, as I have noted, an assumed similarity between the meaning of imperatives in general and the meaning of moral value-judgments. Keeping this in mind is helpful in following the shifts Hare continues to make between talk about both. Hare again takes up the problem, this time with a reference to the moral theory of A. J. Ayer. I shall here include the passage in Ayer that Hare only cites.

Thus although our theory of ethics might fairly be said to be radically subjectivist, it differs in a very important respect from the orthodox subjectivist theory. For the orthodox subjectivist does not deny, as we do, that the sentences of a moralizer express genuine propositions. All he denies is that they express propositions about the speaker's feelings. If this were so, ethical judgements clearly would be capable of being true or false. They would be true if the speaker had

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LM, 1.5, p. 9.
the relevant feelings, and false if he had not. And this is a matter which is, in principle, empirically verifiable. Furthermore, they could be significantly contradicted. For if I say, "Tolerance is a virtue," and someone answers, "you don't approve of it", he would, on the ordinary subjectivist theory, be contradicting me because, in saying that tolerance was a virtue, I should not be making any statement about my own feelings, or about anything else. I should simply be evincing my feelings, which is not at all the same thing as saying that I have them.  

Ayer's theory assumes, according to Hare, that only proper indicatives are above suspicion. This assumption is due to an indiscriminate use of the verificationist theory of meaning.

The temptation to reduce imperatives to indicatives is very strong, and has the same source as the temptation to analyse value-words in the way called 'naturalistic'. This is the feeling that the 'proper' indicative sentence, of which there is thought to be only one kind, is somehow above suspicion in a way that other sorts of sentences are not; and that therefore, in order to put these other sorts of sentences above suspicion, it is necessary to show that they are really indicatives. This feeling was intensified when the so-called 'verificationist' theory of meaning became popular...But if this criterion of meaningfulness, which is useful in the case of statements of fact, is applied indiscriminately to types of utterance which are not intended to express statements of fact, trouble will result.  

13 LM, 1.4, p. 8, Italics his.
Hare then explicitly cites Ayer's moral theory as an example of the indiscriminate use of the verificationist theory. And then he states the following. "All this might be closely paralleled by a similar treatment of imperatives." Thus, the theory would go, imperatives do not state anything at all, but only express wishes.

The trouble with this kind of theory, Hare suggests, is the ambiguity of the word 'express'. Ayer's "parallel ethical theory" leads one to suspect that "we have welling up inside us a kind of longing, to which, when the pressure gets too great for us to bear, we give vent by saying an imperative sentence." But this surely cannot apply to all imperatives. In the following passage Hare shows why.

Such an interpretation, when applied to such sentences as 'Supply and fit to door mortise dead latch and plastic knob furniture', is unplausible. And it would seem that value-judgements also may fail to satisfy the verification-criterion, and indeed be in some sense, like imperatives, prescriptive, without having this sort of thing said about them.

The point is, of course, that there could be no kind of feeling that the above order or instruction could be expressing.

14 Ibid.
15 LM, 1.5, p. 9.
16 Ibid.
17 LM, 1.5, p. 10.
18 Ibid.
There is one final objection against any theory of meaning about imperatives that seeks to explicate them in terms of wishing or feelings. We know the meaning of ordinary imperatives (i.e., we respond to and issue them) long before we learn the complex notions of 'wish', 'desire', etc. Therefore, Hare concludes, it is perverse to explain the former by the latter.

...it would be perverse to explain the meaning of the imperative mood in terms of wishing or any other feeling or attitude; for we learn how to respond to and use commands long before we learn the comparatively complex notions of 'wish', 'desire', 'aversion', etc.

But it is not clear how it follows from the temporal learning sequence that commands are not explicated in terms of wishes, feelings, etc. Do we not have certain beliefs long before we discover what a state of mind is? Yet we do (partially) explain beliefs by calling them states of mind. For example, a child surely believes that its mother is the one to turn to in time of fear long before he learns that the meaning of a belief is that it is a state of mind. Nothing seems to follow from this about the meaning of a belief. Similarly, nothing seems to follow about the meaning of an imperative from the fact that we learn to respond to particular commands before we can explicate a command or say what a command means in general. Therefore I find Hare's objection inconclusive.

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LM, 1.6, p. 12.
Turning finally to Ayer's moral theory, Hare's claim is that it suffers a similar difficulty. This theory, like the one that suggests moral judgments are assertions of states of mind, suffers from the inability to explain or say what one thinks when one thinks that X is right. To say only that 'X is right' means 'I approve of X' says nothing about what 'X is right' is. What Hare seems to mean by this objection is that if 'I approve of X' is the meaning of 'X is right' and the former utterance is an expression of a feeling or wish of some kind, then one hasn't said anything at all, any more than the expression 'Oh' uttered in surprise means anything at all. It is not a statement. It is not a command. It is only a sound uttered in reaction to some situation. To reduce moral imperatives to this sort of thing is surely absurd.

Another kind of theory Hare wants to reject is (B) a behavior-affection analysis of imperatives. According to (B) the function of imperatives is to affect causally the behavior or emotions of the hearer. I shall suggest that Hare's reason for rejecting (B) is not cogent, and that Hare's own theory of conduct-guidance might well be classified under (B). Hare objects to (B) on the grounds that the "process of telling someone to do something, and getting him to do it, are quite distinct, logically, from each other." Hare thinks that distinction is important for moral philosophy.

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20 LM, 1.6, p. 11, Italics his.
This distinction is important for moral philosophy; for in fact the suggestion, that the function of moral judgements was to persuade, led to a difficulty in distinguishing their function from that of propaganda. Since I am going to draw attention to some similarities between commands and moral judgements, and to classify them both as prescriptions, I require most emphatically to dissociate myself from the confusion of either of these things with propaganda.

I shall try to show (1) that the distinction between telling a person what to do and trying to get him to do it is not in every case a meaningful distinction, and (2) that if one denies the distinction in some instances even in regard to the function of moral principles, he is not thereby committed to a view that reduces moral judgments to propaganda efforts.

Professor Braithwaite is not sure that Hare can make this
distinction go. Is not the process of telling someone to do something a way of trying to get him to do it? I shall examine this possibility.

Hare's view entails that (1) to tell someone to do something, and (2) not to persuade him to do it are at least logically consistent. If he is taking 'persuade as a word, the correct use of

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24 LM, 1.7, p. 15.
which entails that some effect has taken place in the person who hears
the command, then there is surely a distinction and (1) and (2) are
clearly consistent. If I correctly say that I persuaded S to do X,
then it follows that I have done or said something that has in some
way affected S. I may tell someone to do something and not in fact
succeed in persuading him to do it. But if Hare means, as I think he
does, that telling someone to do something is not even to attempt to
persuade him to do it, then I cannot make any sense out of his locu-
tion. Telling someone to do something is one way of trying to per-
suade him to do it. Hare argues against this view in the following
way. Making a statement is one thing, and getting one to believe it
(or trying to get one to believe it) is quite another. No one, in
seeking to explain the function of indicative statements would say
that they were attempts to persuade someone that something is the case.
Similarly, there is no reason to suppose that commands are attempts to
persuade or get someone to do something. We tell someone what to do,
Hare continues, and then, if he is not disposed to do what we say, we
may start on the "wholly different process of trying to get him to do
it."

This argument does not seem to show that the distinction Hare
makes is a valid distinction. Consider the following illustration.
If, in answer to the question 'what shall I do?' I say, 'Get in the

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car.' I am, Hare suggests, telling my hearer what to do, but I am not trying to get him to do it unless I start on a wholly different process. Now it seems to me that if I am not telling him what to do and also trying to get him to do it by issuing the command, I am hard pressed to say what is going on. The question 'what shall I do?' presupposes my advice is being sought. To give advice is to take some responsibility for guiding the action of my hearer, though it is not to make his decision for him. This is conduct-guiding in its most obvious sense.

Elsewhere Hare argues that words like 'advise', 'order', etc. function differently from words like 'persuade', 'cause', or 'get'. The former class of words are used performatorily whereas the latter are achievement words. A performatory utterance is one such that the very issuing of the utterance is to perform the act. By an achievement word Hare means one, the correct use of which entails that some effect has in fact taken place. For example, if I persuade X to do something, then something has changed in X. But if I command or order X to do something, nothing follows from that about X. Braithwaite points out that this in no way goes to show that the process of telling and the process of trying to get one to act are wholly different.

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29 R. B. Braithwaite, loc. cit.
It is trivial to grant Hare his point that because I answer the question 'what shall I do?' my hearer is not by that fact persuaded by my command (moral or otherwise). But Hare does not even want to allow that telling someone to do something, i.e., issuing a command, is ever to try to get him to do it. The two processes are, for Hare, wholly different; "...and there is no...reason for saying that commands are attempts to persuade or get someone to do something;"

By the distinction between performatives and achievement words one can show that imperatives do not entail that some action other than the utterance of the words has taken place. But the question still remains whether or not imperatives are attempts (or can be) to persuade.

Perhaps the issue can be clarified in terms of a distinction between different kinds of sentences suggested by W. P. Alston.

In general, when a person utters a sentence, we can distinguish three sorts of actions that he is performing. (1) He utters a certain sentence, for example, 'Would you please open the door?' (2) He brings about one or more results of this utterance, for example, he gets the hearer to open the door, he irritates the hearer... (3) He does something that falls between (1) and (2), for example, he asks someone to open the door... There is no particular kind of

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30 LM, 1.7, p. 15.
effect that the utterance (3) must have if the speaker is to be said to have asked someone to open a door...

The truth of the claim that an action of this sort has been performed does not depend on the production of any particular sort of effect.

Whether or not imperatives and/or moral commands involve utterances like (2) is not the issue. Hare argues as if that is the issue. But I suspect that even the proponent of (B) theory of meaning would not maintain that imperatives are like (2). Since this is not the issue it seems that Hare has not come to grips with the meaning theory he started out to question.

We have already seen that Hare thinks this distinction is very important for moral philosophy and for his own theory. I believe it is significant only if 'persuading' must be taken in the sense Hare seems to assume it must, i.e., as a kind of propagandizing. If I can show that it can be taken in a way that does not impugn the rationality of moral discourse, then I will have shown that Hare has no worries. That is to say, imperatives and moral judgments if they are like imperatives in this respect, may be attempts to persuade someone to do something (or that he ought to do something) and still not militate against the rationality of moral discourse. Indeed, I shall later maintain that the so-called behavior-affection theory is consistent with Hare's own theory of prescriptive moral language. But this latter suggestion must wait until we have established common elements between ordinary and moral prescriptive language.

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In what follows I shall show why I think Hare's distinction between telling a person what to do and trying to persuade him to do it is sometimes a distinction without a difference, that there is a sense of 'persuade' which does not carry connotations of propaganda (in Hare's sense) and that this sense of 'persuade' is consistent with the rationality of moral discourse.

The analysis of the difference between indicatives and imperatives which Hare makes in Chapter Two of *The Language of Morals* can be briefly summarized in the following way. Indicatives and imperatives can be about the same subject matter. For example, the two sentences 'You are going to shut the door' and 'Shut the door' are both about the same thing, viz., your shutting the door. In this respect there is no difference in the two utterances. The difference lies in what is added in each case to give the idea that the indicative form is telling what is the case and the imperative form, to make something the case. The common element is called the "phrastic" and the part that is different, the "neustic". The following diagram portrays the difference.

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LM, 2.1, p. 18.
The neustic is the way in which one 'nods' or assents to an utterance. Assenting to an indicative statement is what one does when he "believes that it is true." To assent to a second person command addressed to ourselves is to "resolve to do what the speaker has told us to do."

Now we have already seen Hare's argument that there is no reason to think that imperative sentences are attempts to persuade someone to do something any more than there is reason to think that indicatives are attempts to persuade someone to believe that something is the case. We have also suggested with Braithwaite that a distinction between performative utterances and achievement utterances does not go very far towards showing that the process of telling and the process of trying to get are wholly distinct.

In view of Hare's analysis of the difference between indicatives and imperatives I now suggest that the imperative neustic indicates a further argument against his position that telling one what to do is a "wholly different process" from trying to get him to do it. The imperative neustic 'please', whether it is intended to be a technical term or not, places the difference between it and the indicative in the form of a request. And to request (which is surely the least of what one is trying to do when he utters some imperative) is one way of trying to get someone to do something. When I say 'shut the door', if I am not trying to get someone to do just that, I am, again, hard
pressed to say just what I am doing. To say, as Hare does, that I am only telling my hearer what to do, seems, at least in some cases, to be saying the same thing. Hare's distinction may be valid in cases of instruction on how to serve meat or fix door latches. Even granting this, however, one cannot by it show that the two processes in question are wholly distinct.

If we make a close analysis of 'persuading' and 'trying to get' we shall be able to relieve Hare of his worries about the rationality of moral discourse if uttering an imperative is sometimes both telling what to do and trying to get or persuade one to do it. Hare thinks that it is most important to dissociate himself from the confusion between ordinary and moral imperatives on the one hand and propaganda on the other. For Hare, persuading is tantamount to propagandizing and the latter is not a rational approach to conduct-guiding.

But we use the word 'persuade' in a much broader sense than Hare seems to allow. We sometimes say (1) 'I persuaded him to stay overnight' meaning 'I gave him reasons to decide to stay overnight and these reasons influenced his decision to do so'. What is at issue here is whether or not reasons can also be causes. I shall examine this question shortly. We also sometimes say (2) 'I persuaded him to stay' meaning 'I cajoled or shouted at him until he decided to stay'. This connotation of 'persuade' is an appeal to

Ibid.
emotions or something of the sort. There is a third sense of 'persuade' which we might call an inverted comma sense as in the following sentence; (3) 'I "persuaded" him to stay' meaning 'I threatened him with harm if he did not', or even 'I tied him up'.

'Getting one to do something' is broader than 'persuading'. We can use the phrase in the same way as we used to 'persuade' in (1) - (3), but we can also use it with inanimate objects as in 'getting a board to fit'. We can not meaningfully say 'persuaded a board to fit'.

'Persuading', then, need not be taken as propagandizing, if the latter means only some sort of non-rational approach. As we have seen, Hare considers it the function of moral principles to guide conduct. Obviously, to propagandize is to guide conduct also, and Hare wants to be sure that this is distinguishable from guiding conduct as a function of moral principles. If I can show that ethics is concerned with the sort of situation in (1) above (i.e., giving reasons for making moral decisions) and that propagandizing (in Hare's sense at least) involves only (2) and (3), the distinction Hare needs is saved.

Reasons and Causes

It will be remembered that this whole discussion has arisen in reaction to Hare's objection to the suggestion that it is the function
of moral principles to affect causally the behavior of individuals. I shall now suggest that guiding conduct and causally affecting behavior are not necessarily different processes if one understands causes in a particular way, and that this is the very thing Hare himself may be suggesting throughout The Language of Morals and Freedom and Reason. I shall first discuss the problem of whether or not reasons can be causes, and if they can, then how we are to understand 'cause' and what meaning there is for Hare's moral theory in the suggestion that moral principles can causally (in the sense to be specified) affect behavior.

If, in a moral context, I am asked by another person, 'What shall I do?', I may answer him by stating a moral principle or judgment. Hare will later maintain that to utter a moral principle is to prescribe a way of acting. Moreover, it is to give a reason for acting as well. If I read him correctly, this is what Hare means by prescriptive universalism. The question that now arises is whether or not to utter a moral principle in answer to the question, 'What shall I do?' is to try to influence the conduct of my questioner.

A philosophical controversy has raged over whether or not a causal model makes sense in the explanation of meaningful human action. Some philosophers have maintained that there is a logical error involved in the view that actions stand in causal relations in any

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sense in which 'causal' is used in the natural sciences. In a discussion about whether or not decisions are caused there is, according to Melden, no question of a series of mental events leading up to a decision such that these mental events are sufficient for the making of that (moral or other) decision. Although we use the term 'cause' in speaking about the actions of human agents, this in no way shows that those actions are the effects of a series of events which one could call causes in the scientific sense of the word. For Melden, 'cause' is a snare word in our language. When we ask for an explanation of an action, say, a startled jump of a person on hearing a firecracker (Melden's example) we do not ask, 'What caused the jumping?', i.e., the action, but 'What caused him to jump?'. In other words we ask something about the agent. Similarly, I suppose, if we ask a question in a moral context, say, about telling falsehoods, we do not say, 'What caused the lying action?' but 'What caused him to lie?'. In each of these questions it is essential to mention the agent in a way that it is not in speaking of, say, a muscle twitch. These cases all admit of the use of the word 'cause'. The scale from instinctive responses to rational transactions between agents has a very wide range. But, Melden argues, in none of these cases is

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40 A. I. Melden, op. cit., p. 205.
41 A. I. Melden, op. cit., p. 206.
'cause' applicable to the agents in the sense in which it is to physical events. Here Melden stops. "But a detailed inquiry into these uses of 'cause' is not possible within the limits of this essay."

There are other philosophers, sometimes called 'objectivists' who think Melden is wrong. May Brodbeck argues that sometimes motives are causes and sometimes they are not. One example of a motive being a cause is that of Jones buying a house (what he does) in order to get some privacy (why he does what he does). In this case, Brodbeck suggests, the reason for the action is also the cause of the action. Of course, other causes are also operative, e.g., the movement of the hand in paying the bill, the picking up of the telephone to close the deal, etc. But, giving a reason in this case is not merely to explain what happened, but is also to give the cause. Sometimes a reason tells only what happened, e.g., in the case of a signal being given instead of merely an arm being raised.

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42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
45 May Brodbeck, op. cit., p. 321.
46 Ibid.
But explaining what an action is and explaining why it occurred are two different things. Jumping out a window is one action, of which the desire for death might be a cause. On the other hand, we would not say that a man committed suicide because he wanted to kill himself, since this wish is part of the "meaning of suicide." 47

It seems that in some contexts standards and reasons are causes. And in some other contexts they merely describe or explain what was going on. This theory, which Miss Brodbeck calls 'objectivist' can, on her account, at least in principle, provide us with a complete explanation of intentionality and rule-governed behavior without the use of purely mentalistic terms. This means that the presence and efficacy of mind in the world is open to scientific (causal) explanation. 48

Finally, Andrew Oldenquist, in an essay on "Choosing, Deciding and Doing" 49 says that reasons are explanations of actions in terms of goals, principles or habits. One way of distinguishing reasons from causes is to notice that the time at which a reason is given or thought is not relevant to whether or not it is a reason. But a cause must occur before an effect. Reasons are not datable. Causes are.

47 Ibid.
48 May Brodbeck, op. cit., p. 323.
50 Andrew Oldenquist, "Choosing, Deciding and Doing", an unpublished essay.
The issue we are discussing, it will be remembered, is whether or not commands and moral judgments, if the latter are prescriptions, are or can be attempts to persuade another to act in a particular way. I shall later maintain that every command, including moral prescriptions, can significantly be met with the question 'why?'. If this is true, it follows that a reason can be given for every meaningful command. If I can show that one way to persuade someone to act is to give him reasons for acting, then I will have shown that it is at least plausible that commands and prescriptive moral utterances are attempts to guide conduct by a form of persuasion.

The above references to Melden, Brodbeck and Oldenquist have indicated that there is a controversy about the possibility of reasons being causes of action, or of anything else, for that matter. The controversy centers around the problem of actions being analysed in terms of overt events or behavior patterns such that actions are open to scientific investigation. It seems, however, that the outcome of this dispute, whatever it is, is not particularly relevant to the point I am making. But it has served to point out that the word 'cause' is not only used in a way that applies exclusively to space-time events. The dispute between Melden and Brodbeck seems to come down to the question of the meaningfulness of applying the causal (in the scientific sense only) model to actions, intentions, reasons, etc. Our issue has not been whether or not the physical cause model fits the contexts of giving reasons but whether or not reasons can be causes in any sense of that word at all. In the light
of what has been said within the above dispute, it does not seem incorrect to say that X's command caused me to close the door after I had seen that his order seemed sensible, *i.e.*, was reasonable in the circumstances.

What I am suggesting is that when 'cause' is used in this way it means 'persuade' in sense (1) of 'persuade' as I have analysed its use. It may also be used to mean (2) and (3) above, or it may even be used in the sense of 'He got me to open the door'. If it is taken in sense (1) of 'persuade' then we have, plausibly, an instance of a reason being a cause, though it is never necessarily a cause. But surely there is meaning in the following exchange:

'What caused you to go to church this week?' 'He persuaded (got me, caused) me to go by giving me good reasons why I ought to do so.' Of course the person who asks the question is not asking for antecedent sufficient conditions in the same way as he might in the question 'What caused the metal to decompose?' What he is asking for is a reason that would make my decision more than an arbitrary one. If, in fact, in the absence of that reason I would not have made the decision, then it makes sense to say that the reason given had some kind of influence on my decision. It is just that the influence is not the same as in physical cause-effect occurrences. For one may, of course, decide or choose to act or not to act in the presence of a sufficient reason, but an event must occur in the presence of sufficient conditions for its occurrence in the physical world. This
only serves to point to a difference between the logic of persuasive causes and that of purely physical causes. But this difference in no way shows that persuasive causes can not be influential in decision making. It only shows that decision making may not be antecedently determined, though, of course, it does not prove libertarianism true.

There seems to be a certain hesitancy among philosophers about the use of the word 'caused' where 'persuaded' or 'got one to' seems a little more appropriate. This, I suggest, is due to taking the word 'cause' too narrowly. There is some sort of fear about extending the concept of causality to situations not wholly describable as non-mental events. Taken in this latter sense, of course, cause could not be predicated of reasons. But reasons do not have to be causes in the scientific sense in order to be causes. Reasons do not merely explain what has happened in the case of an agent's action. They sometimes also explain why it has happened.

It should be clear that I am not suggesting that this is so in every instance of action. There are other ways of guiding conduct which may be equally or even more effective in getting one to act. Instead of persuading one by reason I could shout or deceive or cajole, but then I would be propagandizing in Hare's sense of the word. It is the latter that Hare wants to dissociate from moral judgments. And with him I readily agree. What I do not agree with is the assumption I believe is implied in his analysis, namely, that moral judgments and
commands cannot be ways to persuade (1) another to act in a particular way. As we shall see, to prescribe universally is to do just that, namely to attempt in a reasonable way to guide conduct by issuing moral prescriptions, thereby affecting causally (in the sense explained) moral behavior. To do this is neither to propagandize nor to determine events or actions or anything at all.

On this kind of account of moral prescription, one need not worry whether choices and/or decisions are events preceded by other events sufficient for those choices and/or decisions. Sometimes the efforts to persuade are successful and sometimes they are not. For we may, instead, speak of having sufficient reasons for acting, which is not at all like a series of events sufficient for the occurrence of another event. Quite incidentally, this may also be one way of showing the libertarian vs. determinist debate to be misconceived. The basis of this suggestion could be the equivocal use of the word 'cause'.

If I am right, then to prescribe is to do more than merely say what to do. It is to take the responsibility for answering the question 'Why?' which can arise in the presence of any prescription. It is to be able to produce good reasons why one should so act. I shall return to this suggestion after examining in some detail Hare's theory of guiding conduct.
CHAPTER II
DECISIONS AND PRINCIPLES

We have noted that moral principles are reasons for acting one way or another in certain situations. We have noted that they are sometimes causes in a specified sense of the word 'cause'. Whatever else we do with moral principles, we use them for deciding whether or not to act in one way or another when a decision is open to us. We also use them to help others decide how to act. When a moral question about doing some action arises, we can deliberate about it by discovering what the facts in the situation might be and what moral principle might be relevant to the situation. Sometimes the process of deliberation is simple and straightforward. I may decide, for example, without much attention, not to kill my grandmother when she gives my children candy before dinner. The reason for my decision is a moral principle which I accept, namely, 'one ought not to murder'. The facts are that this would be murder. In this simple case there is really no doubt about whether or not I should murder my grandmother, and the deliberation, if there is any at all, is minimal. Unfortunately, not every instance in which a moral question arises is all that simple. For example, suppose the question arises 'Should I sell my house to a negro?' If I do sell my house to the negro I will incur the wrath of
my neighbor, for in other instances of such a sale, property values have dropped in the neighborhood. On the other hand, if I do not sell my house to the negro, I think I would be discriminating against a man because of his race, and I happen to believe that one ought not do that.

In this case it seems necessary, other things being equal, that I modify one of my principles, i.e., either I decide that I must make an exception to my principle 'One ought not to cause harm to his neighbor' or to my principle 'One ought not discriminate against a man because of the color of his skin.' In either case I would be modifying a moral principle and the decision I make in such a case is called a decision of principle.

I shall first set forth Hare's account of what it is to make a decision of principle. Then I shall point out difficulties about accepting that account, and offer a plausible suggestion about removing those difficulties.

Hare's Account

If it were possible for a man to know everything about the effects of doing any of the alternative actions open to him at any given time, and if we were to ask him why he chose one of the actions rather than the others, he might answer either (1) 'I can't give any reasons; I just felt like deciding the way I did' or (2) I chose this
action because of such and such (naming a reason or reasons). In one sense we can say that (1) is an arbitrary choice while (2) is not arbitrary. If a man has no principles at all, one can say that by making a non-arbitrary decision he is beginning to form principles. For Hare, to be able to give a reason for one's decisions (over and above 'I just wanted to') is to form a principle, or it is to say that one is deciding to act in such a way according to a principle one already accepts. Thus, if asked why I chose not to kill my grandmother because she gave candy to my children before dinner, I answer 'Because one ought not to murder' I am telling my hearer that I subscribe to a principle, which principle applies in many instances like this one. Most people are taught principles from childhood and as they use these principles to guide their conduct in growing to maturity, there is a tendency to modify them by making exceptions from time to time when they see the need for making those exceptions. Each time an exception is made, one makes a decision of principle. Experience in using these principles to guide conduct teaches one that to follow a certain principle in certain kinds of instances has certain predictable effects and if one acts against the principle in some particular way, certain other effects seem to follow. Hare claims that "we adopt whichever form of the principle leads to the effects which we choose to pursue."

1 LM, 4.2, pp. 58-59.
3 Ibid.
In Chapter III of *The Language of Morals* Hare makes a distinction in the way principles or rules can admit of exceptions and still remain accepted rules. There are (1) those that admit of exceptions by way of number only. For example, the principle 'One ought to go to class (if he is a student)' is considered as generally accepted by a student even if he were to miss one or the other class during a semester. We could still say that generally speaking, he was following the rule. It does not make any difference which class or classes he missed as long as they were few (and, of course, not hours for examination, etc.). On the other hand, there are (2) those principles that admit of exceptions only in peculiar classes of instances. For example, the principle 'One ought not to lie' might admit of an exception, say, when telling the truth might have the effect of permitting an innocent person to be killed. But we do not say that one is following the principle or rule as long as he lies only a few times. In the case of (2) the exceptions are based on the quality of the circumstances rather than on the number of times one makes the exception.

In both these kinds of principles the universality is lacking only because in the exception-cases it is left to the decision of the agent whether to act upon it or not. If he chooses not to act upon his principle then, Hare continues, he is deciding to modify his principle, i.e., make an exception to it. If in my moral system there

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4. LM, 3.6, p. 51.

is the principle, 'One ought not to tell lies' and I am faced with a situation, say, where telling a lie would prevent a horrible crime, I can follow my principle to the bitter end, tell the truth and thus fail to prevent the horrible crime, or I can decide to modify my principle by making an exception in this particular case. In the latter instance I change my principle to read 'One ought not to tell lies except when telling lies will prevent a horrible crime'. For Hare, to decide to do something which is an exception to some moral principle one accepts is to decide to modify that principle. We shall later have to ask whether or not this is true, i.e., if I decide to do some act that is an exception to some moral principle which I accept, am I thereby modifying that principle? It might be the case that I am not modifying my principle, but just acting against it. How does one tell the difference?

To know what effects would in fact follow if I chose to act on the principle in question and what effects would follow if I chose to make an exception to it is to know the facts of the moral situation. In the example given above the facts are that telling a lie will have the effect of preventing a horrible crime, and not telling a lie would permit the horrible crime to be committed. For Hare, the decision seems to be between the two sets of facts or effects. To make the example more realistic, I shall use the illustration mentioned in the very beginning of this chapter. This, it will be remembered, was
the case of the man who is about to decide whether or not to sell his house to a negro buyer. He is faced with a complex situation. If he acts upon his accepted moral principle 'One ought not to cause harm to his neighbor' he judges that he will be discriminating against the negro buyer, thereby acting against another of his accepted moral principles, viz., 'One ought not discriminate against a man because of race.' If he acts upon the latter principle he will be causing economic harm to his neighbor, thus acting against the former principle, which principle, of course, he also accepts. In the more simple case of the lie to prevent, say, the death of an innocent person, which effects one would choose (other things being equal) is a rather simple thing to decide. But in the more complicated case, far more is involved. In the case of either alternative action in the decision to sell the house to the negro or not to sell it to him, one of his accepted principles will have to be modified. We seem to have a situation in which choosing between effects is not only choosing either to modify a moral principle one accepts or not to modify it, but it is also choosing to modify a moral principle no matter which of the effects he decides upon. We shall have to return later to this illustration.

In making some particular moral decisions there may be a question only of the criteria for the application of the principle. There may not be a question of making an exception to the principle. For example, the principle 'One ought not to tell lies' may simply not apply in an instance, say, where I just do not count what I propose
to say as a lie. This may merely be a verbal or terminological matter (what I shall count as a lie). In such a case one might say 'Well, telling a falsehood is not a complete definition of what it is to tell a lie. A lie is telling a falsehood to someone who has a right to know the truth and one who is about to perpetrate a horrible crime has no right to know the truth.' Or in another instance one might define a lie as a falsehood told with the intention to deceive and sometimes one tells a falsehood only to amuse. In these cases there is no alteration or modification of the actual wording of the principle, "out of the conditions under which the principle is held to apply, that is, an alteration of the extension of the crucial word..."

On the other hand, if the principle in question is 'One ought not to tell falsehoods' the indicated instance is an actual exception to the principle and the wording of the principle itself must be modified to something like 'One ought not to tell falsehoods except when telling a falsehood will prevent a horrible crime.' Our interest will now center on the latter kind of instance.

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6 LM, 3.6, p. 53.
7 LM, 3.6, pp. 53-54.
Problems in Deciding

How does one go about deciding whether or not to modify a principle of the latter kind? The suggestion that one has to make a decision at all is an implication that there is some kind of doubt about what one ought to do (we shall confine our attention to moral decisions) or about the sufficiency of the reasons for either doing or not doing some action. Hare believes that principles of conduct entail particular commands and that this is a rigorous entailment. Thus if I believe that 'One ought not harm his neighbor, and selling my house to a negro has the effect of bringing about economic harm to him, I must assent to the command 'Do not sell your house'. Of course, this is not to say that someone is going to utter the command, but only that because I hold the moral principle I must also hold that I must do what it prescribes, which in this instance is not to sell my house to the negro. But by hypothesis in the illustration, I am in doubt about whether or not I ought to sell my house to a negro. The reason for my doubt is another moral principle, 'One ought not to discriminate against a man because he is a negro' and that principle, when taken with a belief that refusing to sell my house to him in this instance is a factual instance of what I mean by discrimination, entails another command, 'Sell the house to him'. The latter command, of course, is incompatible with the command my other moral principle entails.

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8 Cf. Chapter III below.
9 We shall have much more to say about this entailment relation in succeeding chapters.
But Hare says that to be in doubt about a command entailed by some principle is to be in doubt about the principle itself. Though Hare's example is different, the following passage embodies his view.

...if I know that one proposition entails another, to be in doubt about assenting to the second is _eo ipso_ to be in doubt about assenting to the first. For instance, if I know that the proposition 'All mules are barren and this is a mule' entails the proposition 'This is barren'; it follows that if I am in doubt about assenting to the proposition 'This (mule) is barren' I must be in doubt about assenting to the proposition 'All mules are barren and this is a mule'; and this means that I must be in doubt about either 'All mules are barren' or 'This is a mule'. Now if we apply an exactly parallel reasoning to our case about saying what is false, we get the following result. Since I am in doubt, _ex hypothesi_, whether or not to make this false statement, I must be in doubt about assenting to the command 'Do not make this statement'. But if I am in doubt about this command, I must _eo ipso_ be in doubt, either about the factual premiss 'This statement is false' (and this alternative is ruled out _ex hypothesi_), or else as must be the case, about the imperative premiss 'Never say what is false'.

Since our house seller in the illustration is in doubt about which course to take, which command to follow, it follows, according to Hare, that he is in doubt about both principles entailing those commands. He is thus faced with a decision of principle. He must decide which principle to modify. If he chooses to sell the house to the negro, then he will thereby modify his principle 'One ought not to harm his neighbor' by adding 'except in cases where this is necessary to avoid racial discrimination'. If he decides to sell the
house to, say, a white man because of the harm that would result to his neighbor from selling it to the negro, he will thereby modify his principle 'One ought not to discriminate against a man because of race' by adding 'except in cases where this is necessary to avoid harming his neighbor'.

Now it might be suggested that he can solve his dilemma by giving another (third) reason or principle that will enable him to follow one or the other course of action. What decision the moral agent makes could depend upon what other moral principles he can bring to bear on the situation. He might say something like 'Charity begins at home and since I have lived next to my friend and neighbor for so many years, I ought to think of him first.' Here the agent is using 'Charity begins at home' as short for a kind of super principle which he believes has some kind of over-riding role to play in his decision making process. He values the 'Charity begins at home' principle more than he values his principle about discrimination.

But the dilemma may not be solved so easily. Suppose he does not have any so-called super principle, or suppose there is a parallel super principle which can over-ride the 'harm to one's neighbor' principle, e.g., 'Social problems take precedence over individual problems'. This latter super principle cancels the effect of the former over-riding principle. What does the agent do in that case?
There is still another problem involved in trying to solve the agent's dilemma along the lines of the above suggestion about super principles. If the command 'Do not sell the house to someone if it will harm your neighbor is entailed by the principle (along with the facts of the situation) 'One ought not to harm his neighbor' and this principle is entailed by the super principle 'Charity begins at home', then even if there is no question of a parallel super principle that entails 'One ought not to discriminate against a man because of race', the agent has not solved his dilemma. For if Hare is right about these rigorous entailment relations between principles, to be in doubt about the command is to be in doubt about the principle, and if one is in doubt about the principle, he must also be in doubt about the super principle, for it entails the other principle. Therefore, the suggestion that the agent can solve his decision-problem by reference to some kind of super principle does not seem plausible.

In the Chapter on decision of principle in The Language of Morals Hare tells us that choosing to do an action which is an exception to one's accepted moral principle is to modify the principle. To give the reason for doing that action (or for choosing to do it) is to cite a principle which is a modification of the original principle. The principle is modified only because in particular cases it was left up to the agent to decide whether to act upon it or

For another version of this objection, see E. M. Adams, "Mr. Hare on the Role of Principles in Deciding", Mind LXV (Jan. 1956), No. 257, pp. 78-80.
If, from his experience he knows or can predict what effects will follow from acting upon it and what effects will follow from acting against it, Hare tells us, he will simply choose one of the two sets of effects. But doesn't it make sense to ask why he should choose this set of effects rather than that? If he gives a reason, then he is giving another principle, and we have come the complete circle. We are back to our problem with the super principle.

I find Hare a bit confusing on this whole issue. Perhaps we can define the problem more clearly by asking what a decision is, what the procedure leading up to a decision is, and whether or not choosing and deciding are the same thing. A clear analysis of these concepts might lead us to a way out of the dilemma.

Deciding is clearly not the same thing as choosing. The two words are not identical in meaning. For I can choose things and objects, e.g., an apple from a barrel of apples, but I cannot decide objects. It makes no sense to say I decided an apple. Another indication that deciding and choosing are different is the fact that I can decide that some proposition is true, e.g., 'I have decided that the game was played on Dec. 1', but it makes no sense to say 'I chose that...etc.'.

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For a detailed treatment of choosing and deciding, see A. Oldenquist, "Choosing, Deciding and Doing", an unpublished essay.
On the other hand there are some similarities between deciding and choosing. I can choose to do some action and I can decide to do some action. It may be that sometimes choosing and deciding are identical. Neither choosing nor deciding are always identical with doing that which is chosen or decided, but it seems that sometimes choosing is identical with doing. We sometimes say, for example, that a man who is taking a pencil from a jar of pencils is choosing a pencil. In such a case choosing a pencil and taking a pencil seem to be identical. But this is not always the case. If doing x is like breathing, then doing is distinct from choosing, for I rarely choose to breathe, although I always breathe.

Deciding and doing seem to be more different than choosing and doing, however. I can decide to do something long before doing it, and it seems not to make sense to say, when I am taking a pencil from a jar of pencils, that I am deciding to take the pencil. Deciding seems more essentially connected with deliberation than with doing what one decides to do.

On the presumption that the above reflections about the meaning (use) of the words 'choosing' and 'deciding' are correct, we are now in a position to ask some important questions, the answers to which will have a bearing on the above problems about decisions of principle.
Does 'being in the process of making a decision about doing x or not doing x' imply some kind of doubt about doing x? I suggest that it does, for if I am not in doubt about doing x, what is there in the situation about which a decision is to be made? I do not go around making decisions about things I am sure of. I can be said to be in a state of decisiveness, which is to say that if there was a decision to make about doing x, I have already made it. Making a decision seems to imply some sort of deliberation, and deliberating about doing x implies that no decision has yet been made. In this sense 'being in the process of making a decision' implies that I am in doubt about something. I suggest that experience will verify that decision, but not choice, implies doubt. I can be in the process of choosing a pencil from the jar even if I have no doubt about which pencil I am in fact about to take. But if I truthfully say that I am in the process of deciding whether or not to take the red pencil rather than the white pencil, I mean, among other things, that I have not yet made up my mind. I am in a state of doubt.

Does 'being in the process of making a decision about whether or not to do some act x' entail doubt about whether or not x ought to be done? It seems clear that it does not, if being in doubt about this is to be in doubt about the moral principle 'One ought to do x'. For clearly I can be trying to decide whether or not to steal
money from my employer even when I am not in doubt about the principle 'One ought not to steal from one's employer'. If this were not true then I could never decide to do something which I think is morally wrong. If, as Hare seems to imply, I make a decision about some particular action in a moral situation, I am thereby making a decision of principle, i.e., deciding whether or not to modify a moral principle, then it will become impossible to distinguish between moral failure and modification of principle.

If this analysis is correct, then it is suggestive of some important problems about Hare's theory of moral argument in *Freedom* and *Reason*. It suggests, for example, that not to accept some singular prescription (first-person command) may not in every case imply (logically) the rejection of a moral principle which implies the command. We shall have to defer discussion of this important issue until Chapter V.

Consider the following possibilities about the use of 'decide' and 'choose'. If I decide (1) that I ought to do x, then I think that the circumstances in which doing x is relevant are sufficient for the application of the principle 'One ought to do x' and I am deciding that the facts warrant the application of the moral principle which I accept. If I decide (2) that 'One ought to do x', then I accept the principle 'One ought to do x'. Here I decide not

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We shall take up this point in detail in Chapter VI.
to modify the principle. If I decide (3) that I will do x, I am making a decision about a future act. This decision may be with or without some reference to a moral principle. I may merely be making a prediction about how I, in fact, will act. I may be making a decision to do an immoral act (if x happens to be contrary to a moral principle I accept). Or I may be making a decision to do a good act (if x happens to be prescribed by some moral principle I accept). If I (4) choose to do x (where choose is taken in the sense of just doing something), I am just doing x without making any decision about it. To clarify (4), consider the following illustration. Suppose I am trying to decide which pencil to take from a jar of many differently colored pencils. After some deliberation I cannot decide which color I want, so, at random, I just choose one, i.e., I just take one from the jar without having made a decision about which one to take. If I (5) decide to do x, I have deliberated and have made up my mind about doing x. (5) seems reducible to (3).

If I am correct in saying that the process of decision-making implies doubt, and that a decision about something removes the doubt about it, the following possibilities seem to be suggested in respect to decision of principle.

I can (i) be in doubt about whether or not I ought to follow some moral principle I have as a part of my moral system. I can (ii) doubt about whether or not to do x (when x is either contrary to or
according to my moral principle. (i) implies that my doubt is centered around the moral principle itself (a) in so far as I am wondering whether or not the known facts of the case warrant a modification of the principle, or (b) in so far as I am wondering whether or not the known facts of the case are sufficient conditions for application of the principle. But if (ii) is the only kind of doubt I have, then I am not in doubt about accepting my moral principle as it is, nor am I in doubt about the facts being relevant to the principle's application. I am only in doubt about whether or not I am going to break my moral rule. (ia) and (ib) are relevant to decisions of principle. (ii) is not relevant to a decision of principle if by decision of principle we mean that one decided either to modify its wording or to make its application more precise.

Now it seems that typical moral situations involve most, if not all the factors mentioned in the above discussion. Let us now see what the possibilities are when some action x is at issue, i.e., it is possible that I do x and it is possible that I do not do x. Let us further presume that x is contrary to some moral principle or rule that I now hold.

(1) I may decide not to do x, justifying my decision by appeal to the moral principle I hold, which moral principle is 'One ought not to do x'. To give the moral principle is to give a reason for my decision.

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IM, 4.3, p. 62.
(2) I may just choose (without deliberation about it) to do $x$. In this case, if asked why I chose to do $x$, I simply answer, "No reason. I just did it."

(3) I may not make an immediate decision. I may consider that I have a reason for doing $x$ as well as a reason (my accepted moral principle) for not doing $x$. Thus far I am unable to make a decision because I have conflicting reasons. If I have another principle in my moral system which I can bring to bear on the situation, and can find no other reason which conflicts with this second principle, I can make my decision on the basis of it. On the other hand, it might be the case that I can find other principles that are reasons both for and against doing $x$. I can look at the effects of doing $x$ and the effects of not doing $x$, and decide between the two sets of effects, as Hare says. But if I have a reason (principle) for deciding on one set of effects rather than the other set, then I have found a principle that is a reason for doing $x$ rather than not doing $x$, or vice versa. But by hypothesis, I may have no third principle. In that case, i.e., after having noted all the reasons for and against doing $x$ and finding it impossible to make a decision one way or the other, I can still do $x$ or not do $x$. But in either case it seems that I am no longer deciding to do $x$ or not to do $x$, but I just choose one or the other. Though I have reasons for both courses of action, I find

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*I am here ignoring Hare's claim about the implications of logical entailment between principles and commands.*
neither set of reasons sufficient for deciding on one action rather than the other. In choosing one or the other way of acting, I just do x or I just do not do x. If this is in fact what happens in some moral situation, then how do I know whether or not I am altering my original moral principle, or just doing what I ought not do? Since it is not clear what my moral obligation is in the situation (i.e., not clear to me) it seems that I cannot be said to be either altering my moral principle or acting immorally.

One might easily come to just this kind of an impasse in his effort to make some particular moral decision. The illustration given at the beginning of this chapter (the man who wonders whether or not he ought to sell his house to a negro) could be an example of a moral situation in which there is just such an impasse. Whatever course of action he takes, given the conditions mentioned in the illustration, I suggest he does not make a decision, but simply makes a choice, and that he has altered neither his principle 'One ought not harm his neighbor' nor his principle 'One ought not discriminate against a man because of race'. Of course, there is a third possibility. He might decide to continue living there. If we were to put this factor into the decision-making process, we would only complicate the issue, for it would be possible that his reasons for staying might be (to his thinking) neither better nor worse than his reasons for selling, and then we would have the same situation as before, except the third alternative becomes a part of the moral situation.
I conclude that it is possible for a moral agent to choose a course of action which is in fact contrary to some moral principle he holds, in which case, it is also possible that he neither alters his principle nor acts immorally.

Hare does not make the distinction between decision and choice which I have introduced into his argument. This is indicated in the following passage.

But suppose we were to ask..."Why did you choose this set of effects rather than that? Which of the many effects were they that led you to decide the way you did?" His answer to this question might be of two kinds. He might say 'I can't give any reasons; I just felt like deciding that way; another time faced with the same \textit{choice}, I might decide differently'. On the other hand, he might say 'It was this and this that made me decide'.

He goes on to say that the first kind of answer indicates an arbitrary decision (choice) and the second, because he gave a reason, indicates a non-arbitrary decision (choice). Now I am suggesting that there is a third kind of answer that can be given, which answer indicates that the choice was not entirely arbitrary (without deliberation), but neither was it entirely non-arbitrary (since the agent's deliberation ended without it being clear to him what he ought to do). This seems to be a case of acting in good faith contrary to a moral principle one holds, with complete awareness of what one is doing,

\footnote{LM, 4.2, pp. 58-59. Italics mine.}
the choice not entailing a modification of principle. If some choices do not affect the wording of moral principles, even in moral situations, then it is at least plausible that choices in moral situations, even if they are contrary to an accepted moral principle, do not involve a rejection of that moral principle. This suggestion will be important for our discussion of moral weakness as well as for our discussion of Hare's theory of moral argument, which discussion will be taken up in Chapters V and VI below. Meanwhile, I shall turn our focus to the logical requirements of moral argument, according to Hare's theory.
CHAPTER III
PRESCRIPTIVITY

It is essential to Hare's whole ethical theory that one be able to reason about moral matters. We shall see that he needs to show that moral principles entail first-person moral judgments and that the latter entail ordinary singular prescriptions of the form 'Let me do (or not do) x'. His view is that one needs no special kind of logic to follow through with these manoeuvres. There are, therefore, several questions which must be examined in regard to moral reasoning. I suggest these questions are the following.

(1) Is it possible to reason from statements of fact to any kind of prescriptive utterance, i.e., to moral judgments and/or ordinary singular prescriptions? (2) Is it possible to reason from any kind of prescriptive expression to other prescriptive expressions? We can subdivide (2) into (2a) questions about moral principles entailing other (general) moral principles and/or first-person moral judgments and (2b) questions about first-person moral judgments entailing ordinary singular (non-moral) prescriptions. In this chapter I shall treat primarily (1), (2) and (2a). I shall discuss (2b) in some detail in chapter V.
It is Hare's view that no moral rule or judgment could do its job of conduct-guiding if it were only a statement of fact.

...moral judgements cannot be merely statements of fact, and...if they were, they would not do the jobs that they do do, or have the logical characteristics that they do have. In other words, moral philosophers cannot have it both ways; either they must recognize the irreducibly prescriptive element in moral judgements, or else they must allow that moral judgements, as interpreted by them, do not guide actions in the way that, as ordinarily understood, they obviously do.

It is not immediately apparent how prescriptive expressions, moral or non-moral, can function in an argument, for prescriptions are not the sort of locution one can call true or false. It is Hare's opinion that moral judgments not only entail ordinary prescriptions (non-moral), but that moral judgments are themselves a kind of prescription. "Moral judgements are a kind of prescriptive judgements."

It will be necessary to distinguish between ordinary imperatives and moral prescriptions. We must also take into account the requirement of prescriptivity which Hare calls one of the "three most important truths about moral judgments", the others being the universalizability of moral judgments and the possibility of logical relations between prescriptive judgments. Accordingly, I shall first examine what Hare says about ordinary imperatives and their relationship to moral judgments. I shall then discuss the requirement of prescriptivity in

1 LM, 12.6, p. 195.
2 FR, 1.3, p. 4.
3 Ibid.
the light of Hare’s views about imperatives. We shall see what problems are raised, and whether or not there are plausible solutions.

Imperatives and Moral Judgments

Although it is easy to see that imperatives and prescriptive language in general are neither true nor false (what would it be like to say that 'Close the door' is true?), it is not easy to see that they are not sometimes contradictory, at least in some sense of that term. 'Close the book' is in some way clearly and diametrically opposed to 'Do not close the book'. Hare recognizes this fact of language and does not hesitate to use the word 'contradictory' of a conjunction of imperative sentences like the two in the preceding sentence.

Commands as well as statements can contradict one another. Even if this were not a normal way of speaking, we might well adopt it; for the feature to which it draws attention in commands is identical with that which is normally called contradiction.4

There is another way of indicating that simple imperatives are two-valued, which is to say that, sometimes one imperative logically excludes another. The advice given to a chess player, 'At your next move, either move your queen or don't move your queen' is analytic, i.e., "either (1) the fact that a person dissents from it is a sufficient criterion for saying that he has misunderstood the speaker's

4 LM, 2.3, p. 22
meaning or (2) it is entailed by some sentence which is analytic in
sense (1)." There are no substantial instructions for the player
about what to do. There is no third possibility which the adviser
could be suggesting. If simple imperatives were three-valued, the
above sentence would not be analytic. Hare, in saying that simple
imperatives can be contradictory, is not making the claim that they
can be true or false, but only that the logic of imperatives is
(usually) two-valued, and that the two values can be in direct oppo-
sition to each other.

Since this self-contradiction is possible among imperatives,
there must be rules to prevent its occurrence and these are logical
rules for the use of language. If we want to know if a person knows
the meaning (use) of a word, we could ask him what he regarded a
sentence containing that word as entailing. For example, if he said
that 'All x's are y's and this is an x, but that it is not a y' we
would suspect that he does not know the meaning (use) of the word
'all'. Hare defines entailment in the following way: "A sentence
P entails a sentence Q if and only if the fact that a person assents
to P but dissents from Q is a sufficient criterion for saying that he
has misunderstood one or other of the sentences."

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6 LM, 3.3, pp. 41-42.
7 LM, 2.4, p. 25.
Now, Hare argues, since the word 'all' and other logical words are used in imperatives, it follows that there must be entailment relations between imperatives. If this were not the case, it would be impossible to give any meaning at all to such logical words. The validity of this proof that imperatives can entail other imperatives is of utmost importance for Hare's theory of moral argument, as we shall see later.

As long as one clearly sees that indicatives and imperatives are exactly alike in their phrastics there is no reason to suspect that the logic of imperatives can not function just like the logic of indicatives.

It would seem possible in principle, since the ordinary logical words occur in the phrastics of imperatives, to reconstruct the ordinary sentential calculus in terms of phrastics only, and then apply it to indicatives and imperatives alike simply by adding the appropriate neustics.

I shall later examine this claim, but it should be noted immediately that the claim does not mean that there would be no rules peculiar to the logic of imperatives.

All this is a matter for inquiry; but it does not in the least affect the principle that, provided that we either find out what the rules are, or lay down what they are to be, we can study the logic of imperative sentences with as much assurance as that of indicatives. There can be, here as well as elsewhere, no question of 'rival logics', but only of alternative rules determining the use (i.e. the entailment-relations) of our logical signs.

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8 See above, Chapter 1.
9 LM, 2.4, p. 26
10 LM, 2.4, p. 27
Hare does believe such rules are necessary. For how do we know whether or not the conclusion to an argument whose premises include both indicatives and imperatives is to be indicative or imperative? He suggests the two following rules.

(1) No indicative conclusion can be validly drawn from a set of premises which cannot be validly drawn from the indicatives among them alone.

(2) No imperative conclusion can be validly drawn from a set of premises which does not contain at least one imperative.

Rule (2) is important for Hare's theory of moral reasoning since it is, according to Hare, the function of moral judgments to prescribe something in answer to the question 'What ought I do?'. That Hare does indeed think that the rule is important is clear from what he says at the end of Chapter Two of *The Language of Morals*: "A judgement is not moral if it does not provide without further imperative premises, a reason for doing something.'"

Chapter Three of *The Language of Morals* is a discussion of inference inserted into his argument as confirmation of his view that there can be entailment relations between imperatives. Since this chapter is crucial for Hare's account of prescriptivity, I shall take the time to summarize as accurately as possible the moves he makes in that discussion.

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11 LM, 2.5, p. 28.

12 LM, 2.5, p. 31.
The first consideration is a generally accepted rule from traditional logic, viz., "that nothing can appear in the conclusion of a valid deductive inference which is not, from their very meaning, implicit in the conjunction of the premises." It follows from this that "if there is an imperative in the conclusion...that very imperative must be itself implicit in them."

But if, for example "'x = 2' entails 'x^2 = 4'"", we can see the need for a modification of the above rule. The concept of 'squared' is not in the premiss. Hare expresses the necessary qualification by adding "except what can be added solely on the strength of definitions of terms."

There follows a discussion of a possible counter-example in terms of traditional hypothetical imperatives which can be entailed by a set of indicative premisses. For example, 'Jones is the tallest man in town' entails 'If you want to look at the tallest man in town, look at Jones'. Hare's answer to the suggested counter-example is that knowing the meaning of 'want' and other words used in the conclusion is sufficient for making the inference. So it falls under the modification he has introduced. For our purposes it will not be necessary to discuss Hare's detailed analysis of the hypothetical imperative, as it has no direct bearing on what we want to say below.

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13 LM, 3.1, p. 32.
14 Ibid.
If we accept the possibility of a logic of imperatives based on Hare's two specific rules and the modified rule of general logic, then we seem to have a foundation for reasoning with imperatives in spite of the apparent fact that they do not admit of being either true or false. We shall have more to say about the possibility of such a logic later in the chapter.

I shall now attempt to discover the relationship between what Hare has said about imperatives and the logic of imperatives to moral judgments and the logic of moral judgments. Ordinary imperatives and moral judgments, according to Hare, belong to the class of language which he calls 'prescriptive.' The following diagram appears in *The Language of Morals*, 1.1.

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Prescriptive Language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Imperatives</th>
<th>Value-judgements</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Singular</td>
<td>Universal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-moral</td>
<td>Moral</td>
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Similarities between Imperatives and Moral Judgements

One noticeable similarity between imperatives and moral judgments is that in each case they can be inconsistent with one another. One cannot, without some kind of contradiction, say 'In these circumstances always refrain from laughing, but if there are other

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circumstances just like these in all respects, do not refrain from laughing.' Similarly, one cannot consistently say 'This is a good car, but that car, although exactly like this one in all respects, is not.' The requirement of consistency is characteristic of all universal sentences in whatever mood. One cannot, for example, say 'Animals like this one are always barren, but animals like the one next to it, which is exactly like this one, are not always barren.'

For Hare, another obvious similarity between imperatives and moral judgments is the assumption in Chapter One of The Language of Morals that they are both prescriptive. Hare also assumes that value judgments logically entail singular prescriptions (ordinary imperatives). These assumptions remain unexamined throughout The Language of Morals until Chapter Eleven. We shall first examine the latter assumption.

What needs to be shown is that moral judgments, at least in some of their uses, entail imperatives without the addition of an imperative premiss. If one needs an additional imperative premiss, then clearly it may not be the value judgment, but the added imperative premiss that leads to the imperative (or prescriptive) conclusion. A case in which a moral judgment clearly does not entail an imperative is one in which the 'ought' in it is being used to mean

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17 LM, 8.3, p. 135.
18 See the diagram above.
that something is required in order to conform to some standard which people accept. This would be the so-called inverted commas use of 'ought', but not its evaluative use. Hare's claim is that in their evaluative use, moral judgments entail imperatives. For if we assume that moral judgments are action-guiding, then, Hare argues, we must say that they entail imperatives. I believe the following rather lengthy passage is the core of his proof.

But to guide choices or actions, a moral judgement has to be such that if a person assents to it, he must assent to some imperative sentence derivable from it; in other words, if a person does not assent to some such imperative sentence, that is knockdown evidence that he does not assent to the moral judgement in an evaluative sense - though of course he may assent to it in some other sense (e.g., one of those I have mentioned). This is true by my definition of the word evaluative. But to say this is to say that if he professes to assent to the moral judgement, but does not assent to the imperative, he must have misunderstood the moral judgement (by taking it to be non-evaluative, though the speaker intended it to be evaluative). We are therefore clearly entitled to say that the moral judgement entails the imperative; for to say that one judgement entails another is simply to say that you cannot assent to the first and dissent from the second unless you have misunderstood one or the other; and this 'cannot' is a logical 'cannot' - if someone assents to the first and not to the second this is in itself a sufficient criterion for saying that he has misunderstood the meaning of one or the other. Thus to say that moral judgements guide actions, and to say that they entail imperatives, comes to much the same thing.20

It will become evident later that I think Hare is wrong in his analysis of the implication between moral judgments and imperatives. I shall, however, defer this question for the present.

19 Cf. p. 59 below.
Differences between Imperatives and Moral Judgments

But, for all that has been said, Hare clearly does not maintain that moral judgments are imperatives purely and simply. There are some significant differences. The imperative 'No smoking', for instance, has characteristics that differentiate it from the moral judgment 'You ought not to smoke', although both, according to Hare, entail 'Do not smoke'. The imperative 'No smoking' is not a proper universal because it implicitly refers to an individual compartment, room, house, or what have you. On the other hand the moral judgment 'You ought not to smoke (in this compartment)' while it contains references to individuals, must be made with some general moral principle in mind. The 'No smoking' prescription may be a prescription applying directly only to a particular occasion or place. It is like 'Use the key to get into the house'. But 'You ought not to smoke' implies that the one who issues the command is invoking some more general principle, e.g., 'One ought not to smoke in rooms where there is a sign that forbids it.'

Another important difference between imperatives and moral judgments is the fact that the principle of supervenience does not apply to the ordinary imperative, while it does apply to the moral judgment.

21 LM, 11.5, p. 175.
22 Ibid.
One of the most characteristic features of value words is their supervenience. This means that if we attribute some value characteristic to something, it cannot be the case that some other thing can lack that value characteristic and at the same time be identical with the first in all other respects. We cannot say, for example, that P is like Q in all respects with the exception of this, that P is a good picture and Q is not. There must be some other way in which the objects differ. On the contrary, we can and do say things like 'P is exactly like Q in all respects except this one, that P is signed and Q is not.'

Hare then asks if there are any characteristics which may be related to some value characteristic in the same way as there are characteristics which are related to non-value characteristics. For the purpose of illustration he uses 'good' as the value characteristic and 'rectangular' as the non-value characteristic.

Why cannot it be the case that one picture is rectangular and the other not unless the angle-measurements of the two pictures also differ? The answer is clearly that 'rectangular' means 'rectilinear and having all its angles of a certain size, namely 90 degrees; and, therefore, that when we have said that one picture is rectangular and the other not, we have said that the measurements of their angles differ; and if we then go on to say that they do not differ, we contradict ourselves. Therefore, to say 'P is exactly like Q in all respects save this one, that P is a rectangular picture and Q not', may be self-contradictory.25

24 LM, 5.3, p. 81.
25 LM, 5.3, p. 82. Italics his.
If we consider the *in all respects* as including the measurement of its angles, then there is a logical contradiction. We would be saying "the angles of P both differ and do not differ from those of 0". The reason why we can say there is a logical contradiction here is that when we say that something is rectangular we mean that it is rectilinear, etc.

But, Hare continues, value words do not behave in the same way. If we ask whether there are certain characteristics of pictures which are characteristics of good pictures, we discover that there cannot be. For if we say that 'P is a good picture' means that 'P is a picture and has certain characteristics C', 'then it will become impossible to commend pictures for being C'. It is possible only to say that they are C. The reason for this, on Hare's account, seems to be that we would then have no word in our language for commending things. For if, in using the word 'good' or a similar value word, I were only referring to certain describable characteristics of something, if I then want to commend it for having those characteristics, I have no linguistic tools for performing that function. The proposed analysis prevents us from commending P. The suggestion is that what distinguishes value words from non-value words is the function of commending.

Value-terms have a special function in language, that of commending; and so they plainly cannot be defined in terms of other words which themselves do not perform this function; for if this is done, we are deprived of a means of performing the function.28

26 LM, 5.3, p. 83.
28 LM, 5.8, p. 91.
The moral judgment 'You ought not to smoke in the compartment' entails the universal moral judgment 'No one ought to smoke in any compartment exactly like this one'. But the imperative 'No smoking', according to Hare, does not entail anything at all about, say the next compartment, even if it is exactly like the first one. Hare believes that ordinary imperatives do not have to have reasons or grounds (though he says they most often do). But moral judgments do require reasons, which is to say they must be universalizable if they are not to be misused.

Though, however, some philosophers have gone much too far in assimilating 'ought'-judgments (of all sorts) to simple imperatives, it may be that some people do sometimes use the word 'ought' when they should more properly have used a plain imperative, in order to give an instruction without any thought of reasons or grounds. Plain imperatives do not have to have reasons or grounds, though they normally do have; but 'ought'-judgements, strictly speaking, would be being misused if the demand for reasons or grounds were thought of as out of place... 

Further, in Freedom and Reason Hare clearly states that it is not his intention to suggest that imperatives and moral judgements are the same in all respects.

In spite of several explicit disavowals, I have often been accused of wanting to 'reduce' moral judgements to imperatives, or even to orders, or commands in a sense very much narrower than that in which I was using the term (LM, 1.1, 1.2, 12.4). My purpose was rather to show that moral judgements share one important characteristic with imperatives, that of being prescriptive...

29 R. M. Hare, Freedom and Reason. (Hereafter referred to simply as FR), 3.3, pp. 36-7. Italics his.
30 FR, 1.3, p. 5.
Prescriptivity of Imperatives and Moral Judgments

We have now seen that Hare believes that there can be a logic of imperatives. He suggested that this logic, while it needs peculiar rules, is not significantly different from the logic of statements of fact. He also pointed out several important similarities and differences between ordinary imperatives and moral judgments. We have also noted his argument to show that moral judgments entail imperatives. In this section we have one more claim to present, viz., the claim that both ordinary imperatives and moral judgments are prescriptive.

It is a well-experienced fact of human living that we are sometimes called upon to make choices and decisions about what we are going to do (as well as about what we ought to do). Furthermore it is a characteristic of all evaluative language that it is prescriptive. Prescriptions can be of several different sorts. In answer to a question, 'What shall I do?' one can give one or more of the following kinds of prescriptions.

(1) He may issue a (second-person) singular imperative (Type A) like 'Use the starting handle' or 'Pay him the money you owe.' It is characteristic of Type A prescriptions that they apply only on the occasion in which they are issued.

LM, 10.3, p. 155.
(2) He may say, (Type B) 'If one cannot start the engine on the self-starter, one ought to use the starting handle', or 'One ought always pay what he owes'. This kind of prescription applies not only to a particular occasion, but to a kind of occasion.

(3) He may issue a (second-person) prescription using the word 'ought' (Type C), e.g., 'You ought to use the starting handle' or 'You ought to pay what you owe him'. This prescription applies directly to a particular occasion, but also appeals to a general prescription like Type B.

(4) Finally, using the past tense, one might say (Type D), 'You ought to have used the starting handle' or 'You ought to have paid him the money you owe'. Both Type D and Type C prescriptions have the same fundamental relation to Type B in that Type B are principles or rules that could justify Types D or C. Types D and C can also be used to instruct someone in the principle.

In each of the above four types I have extracted from Hare there is one non-moral prescription and one moral prescription (assuming that the context of paying what one owes is always a moral context and that of using a starting handle sometimes is not).

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32 LM, 10.3, p. 156.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
Hare's argument is based on the following. If it were not possible for one to make choices about how one will or ought to act, the kind of language we use in the above prescriptions just would not exist. Both evaluative language and the language of ordinary imperatives imply that we can do what it is that is being prescribed. The claim is that 'ought' implies 'can' and in exactly the same sense, imperatives imply 'can'.

In the case of moral judgments, however, this implication does not always follow, i.e., there are senses of 'ought' which are not prescriptive and are therefore not inconsistent with 'cannot'. Hare suggests the following example of a case in which 'ought' and 'cannot' are consistent.

I may be meaning by 'I ought to go and see' merely that there is, as a matter of sociological fact, a moral convention that people in my circumstances should go and see the man in question; or I may be thinking simply that I have, or shall have, as a matter of psychological fact, feelings of guilt, remorse, etc., for not seeing him.\(^{35}\)

Another sense of 'ought' in which it does not imply 'can' is suggested in the following quotation.

\(^{35}\) FR, 4.2, p. 52.
When I say 'I ought but I can't', I am prescribing in general for cases like mine; I certainly think that a man in my situation ought, if he can, to do the act in question; but the prescription fails to apply in my case because of the impossibility of acting on it. It is as if I said 'If I were able, it would be the case that I ought (full force); but since I am not able, that lets me out'.

But when Hare makes the claim that 'ought' implies 'can', he is not claiming that the implication is logical. On the contrary he tells us that the sense of 'implies' is a weaker relation than logical entailment. The kind of relation he speaks of is suggested in what follows. If one uses the word 'ought' then he gives his listener to understand that he thinks the question arises to which this prescription which he is uttering is an answer. The question is 'What shall I do?' and the answer is the given prescription. The implication is that the question would not arise at all if the person who utters or thinks it did not have a choice or a decision to make. And to be able to make a choice or decision is to have two or more alternative ways of acting. Hare calls this question a practical question. "...without 'can' a practical question cannot arise."

The reason why moral judgments and ordinary imperatives both imply 'can' is that they are both answers to practical questions. Although Hare uses the term 'prescriptive question' specifically for

\begin{itemize}
\item \textbf{36} FR, 4.2, p. 53. Italics his.
\item \textbf{37} Ibid.
\item \textbf{38} FR, 4.3, p. 55.
\end{itemize}
the question one utters if he is wondering what he ought to do (full force?), and the term 'practical question' for the man who is only wondering what to do, his claim is that prescriptivity is characteristic of both.

I ask the reader to note carefully that I have not said that 'ought' itself is used in giving answers to practical questions, in the narrow sense just explained. The question to which 'ought' gives an answer is not that asked by a man who is wondering what to do, but that asked by a man who is wondering what he ought to do. These are different questions; and to keep them distinct I shall confine the term 'practical question' to the former, and use the wider term 'prescriptive question' to cover both, it and the 'ought'-question, when that is prescriptive.

Finally, it is the characteristic of prescriptivity that distinguishes moral judgments and ordinary imperatives from descriptive statements. And to complicate matters for moral philosophy,

there is also another important and contrary analogy between 'ought' and descriptive judgments, which distinguishes both of them from imperatives and decisions — namely that 'ought' is universalizable and they are not. It is the existence of both these analogies, and the need to keep them both in focus at the same time, which makes moral philosophy so difficult and so fascinating a subject.

39 FR, 4.3, p. 36. Italics his.
40 FR, 4.3, p. 56. Italics his. Cf. also Chapter IV below for problems about this view.
The Requirement of Prescriptivity

We have seen in the preceding section of this chapter that Hare thinks moral judgments and ordinary imperatives are related in various ways. Our next task is to put down clearly what he says about prescriptivity itself in both The Language of Morals and Freedom and Reason. We shall then examine some of the claims he has made about imperatives, moral judgments and prescriptivity.

We have noted that Hare considers moral principles as action-guiding rules. The language of morals is one sort of prescriptive language. This is not to say that we always use moral words prescriptively.

It must be emphasized that it is not part of my thesis that moral words are used prescriptively in all contexts; and it makes sense to call them 'moral' even when they are not so used. But on the prescriptive uses the other uses depend (4.7, 5.6 ff.; LM 7.5, 9.3, 11.3). 'Prescriptive' is to be understood here in a wide sense to include permissions (10.5).

It is the function of moral principles to answer the question 'What shall I do?' (or more specifically, 'What should I do?'). If this is true, then it follows that moral principles are prescriptive. No merely descriptive statement can answer that question.

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41 See above, Chapter I.
42 FR, p. 27, footnote. Italics his.
43 LM, 5.3, p. 82. Italics mine.
It will be recalled from what we have said about Hare's view on the possibility of inference involving imperatives that he believes that no answer to the above question can be forthcoming without premisses which contain, at least implicitly, an imperative. Hare, it is clear, commits himself to non-naturalism. Thus he finds it necessary to account for the difference between statements of fact and principles and propositions containing value words. In the context of a discussion about naturalism he says: "What is wrong with naturalist theories is that they leave out the prescriptive or commendatory element in value-judgements, by seeking to make them derivable from statements of fact."

Although this is the only place he makes it explicit, Hare seems to believe that to commend is to prescribe (at least partially), and since it is a function of all value-words to commend, it follows that it is also characteristic of value-words that they are prescriptive. Further since all moral judgments contain moral words and all moral words are value-words, all moral judgments are prescriptive.

But just what does Hare mean by the prescriptive or commendatory element in value (and for our purposes, moral) judgments? We must now consider the distinction between descriptive meaning and prescriptive meaning as Hare discusses it. For this distinction, as we shall later see, turns out to be very important for his whole moral theory.

LM, 5.3, p. 82. Italics mine.
To say a word has descriptive meaning is to say that (among other things) it refers to some property or characteristic of some object or act, e.g., the word 'yellow' has descriptive meaning in that it refers to a property (yellowness) in some object. Hare defines a descriptive term in a somewhat confusing manner.

In general, a person is misusing a descriptive term if in using it he breaks the descriptive rule attaching the term to a certain kind of object; and he does this if he says that an object is of one kind, meaning, or intending to convey, that it is of another kind. A descriptive term may thus be defined as one, to misuse which is to do this.45

"A judgement which contains such descriptive terms only, and is in the indicative mood is a descriptive judgement."46

In a discussion about description and evaluation, Hare indicates that descriptive meaning terms are used to convey information of a purely factual or descriptive character. In a consideration of two judgments, (a) 'M is a red motor-car' and (b) 'M is a good motor-car' he suggests that one similarity between (a) and (b) is the fact that they both can be used to convey information of this sort. When I use (a) I am saying (among other things) that this motor-car has a particular sort of property to which the descriptive term 'red' refers.

45 FR, 2.1, p. 8.
46 FR, 2.1, p. 10.
47 LM, 7.1, p. 112. Cf. also p. 118.
And in answer to a question "What do you mean, good?" about (b) I might say 'I mean it will do 80 mph and never breaks down'. In both cases I am merely conveying some factual information.

But this is not the only similarity between the two judgments. Sometimes we use both (a) and (b) as ways of instructing someone on how to use the word in question, e.g., 'red' in (a) and 'good' in (b). Then I am saying that both words require a consistency of application. There is a standard or rule for their use.

Now when by 'good' said of a motor-car we mean things like 'It will do 80 mph and never breaks down' we are using 'good' descriptively. Hare says: "In view of this undoubted fact of usage, I deem it best to adopt the term 'descriptive meaning'."

But when we are concerned only with the consistency of application of words like 'red' and 'good' (Hare's second similarity above), we seem to be concerned with a characteristic of meaning in general and not with a characteristic of a specified kind of meaning like descriptive meaning. Therefore, when I utter the two sentences above I might be (1) referring to something describable and conveying information about it, or (2) showing my hearer how to use the word consistently, or (3) doing something else. We shall later notice problems about reasoning in moral matters, which problems are the result of confusing (1) with (2). I shall again suggest that (2) is characteristic of meaning in general and that (1) is characteristic only of descriptive meaning.

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LM, 7.3, p. 118.
To say a word has prescriptive meaning is to say something about the logical character of the word. To clarify, let us say that to understand the meaning of a descriptive term is (among other things) to know the rule for applying the term. To understand the prescriptive meaning of the word is, at least, to understand that in using that word the speaker is commending for the purpose of imitation or praise (or condemning in order to suggest that one should not imitate or praise). This can be illustrated in the following way. If we say that a man is tall (descriptive term) we are merely pointing to a characteristic which that man has, viz., his height relative to other men. But if we say that a man is good (prescriptive term) we are in some sense setting him up as an example to be imitated or as an object of praise.

To illustrate further the difference in the two kinds of meaning we can notice that one can identify someone or something by using a descriptive term. But in so far as a term is prescriptive, it cannot be used as a means of identification. We could, of course, use an evaluative term, as pointed out above, in a descriptive way, e.g., if someone asks me which of my two cars I am going to use tonight, I might answer 'the good one'. In this usage there is no indication of commendation or praise.
Prescriptive terms do have descriptive meaning along with prescriptive meaning. We often use the prescriptive word 'good' to describe certain characteristics combined in say, a man. We mean that he follows certain accepted norms for acting. But, according to Hare, that is not all we are trying to say when we normally use prescriptive terms. We are saying that this man has certain characteristic ways of acting and that because of this he is worthy of commendation and praise. The latter conjunct in this statement is the important difference between descriptive and prescriptive meaning. An expression which in a certain context has descriptive meaning and no other is called a descriptive expression. Hare calls a term prescriptive, whether it has descriptive meaning or not, if it has prescriptive meaning.

As we have noted above, all this is of utmost importance for Hare's theory of moral reasoning. We shall see later that it follows from the supervenient character of moral words that judgments containing moral words are universalizable. And we shall have to ask whether to say this is to say that moral judgments are universalizable in virtue of their descriptive meaning. Hare's claim now is that moral judgments are universalizable in exactly the same way as descriptive judgments are. A descriptive judgment is universalizable in the sense that if one says x has a certain descriptive characteristic, then anything else which is exactly like x in all respects.
indicated by the descriptive term y, is also y. So one cannot say that x is yellow and that z is similar in all respects indicated by the meaning of the term 'yellow' but is not yellow. This is an analytically true statement. If one denies it, either (1) he does not know how to use the descriptive term in question, or (2) he is contradicting himself. According to Hare, it is just this characteristic of universalizability that makes reasoning possible. For if we could not universalize or generalize, we could not use the same word about numerically distinct things or actions.

If in view of the universalizability of descriptive expressions we can reason about them, and value expressions are universalizable in exactly the same sense as descriptive expressions, then, Hare continues, it follows that we can reason about value expressions. Moral judgments are then, on Hare's account, both prescriptive and universalizable. As we have noted, being prescriptive does not rule out a judgment's being descriptive. As a matter of fact Hare thinks that all moral judgments are both prescriptive and descriptive, though it is possible to use value words and value-judgments in a way that is not prescriptive. One can use the word 'ought' in a conventional sense, i.e., meaning that most people agree that a certain kind of act is to be done under certain circumstances. This merely conveys a piece of information about what people agree on and prescribes nothing
at all. The importance of this whole discussion can be seen in the following passage.

Let us call the thesis that moral judgements are universalizable, \( u \), and the thesis that they are prescriptive, \( p \). Now there are two theses about the descriptive character of moral judgements which require to be carefully distinguished. The first and stronger of these (\( d \)) is that moral judgements are a kind of descriptive judgements, i.e., that their descriptive meaning exhausts their meaning. This is descriptivism. The second and weaker (\( d' \)) is that moral judgements, though they may possess other elements in their meaning, do have descriptive meaning. I wish to affirm \( p, u, \) and \( d' \)...

The major task of moral philosophy is to show how \( p \) and \( u \) are consistent. This task is not furthered by those who are so convinced that \( d \) is required as the basis of the rationality of morals that they reject out of hand \( p \) because it is inconsistent with \( d \); nor is it helped by those others who are so convinced of the truth of \( p \) that they reject \( u \) (which they wrongly think to be inconsistent with \( d \)).

Criticism of Hare's View

I shall argue that the fact that moral terms and judgments have descriptive meaning is irrelevant to whether or not they can be used in rational argument. In other words I shall maintain that it is not in virtue of their descriptive meaning that moral words and judgments are universalizable even if it is the case that moral words and judgments are universalizable in exactly the same sense as descriptive expressions.

\[ \text{Cf., 2.5, pp. 17-19. Italics his.} \]
It will be noticed that Hare argues that the universalizability of moral judgments follows from the fact that moral terms do have descriptive meaning. But Hare is not a descriptivist, i.e., one who holds that the descriptive meaning of a moral term exhausts its meaning, that it is the meaning.

The difference is that the naturalist thinks that the rule in question is a descriptive meaning-rule which exhausts the meaning of the moral term used; whereas in my own view the rule, though it is very analogous to a descriptive meaning-rule, and though therefore, it is quite legitimate to speak of the 'descriptive meaning' of moral terms, does not exhaust their meaning.51

In the present discussion about the logic of moral reasoning Hare seems to have converted his earlier distinction between the phras tic and neustic of imperatives into a more refined distinction between descriptive and prescriptive meaning. His suggestions about the possibility of inference using prescriptive moral judgments are fundamentally the same as those involved in his account of the logic of ordinary imperatives. Just as he had maintained in Chapter Two of The Language of Morals that one can construct an argument using imperatives by paying attention only to the phrasics of those imperatives (the element which they have in common with indicatives), now he seems to be suggesting that one can construct an argument

51 FR, 2.6, p. 21. Cf. also LM, 7.1 ff.
52 See LM, Chapter Two and also above, Chapter I.
53 In FR, 2.7.
using moral judgments by paying attention only to the descriptive element in them. This is not to say that the prescriptive element in moral judgments does not affect the logical behavior of the moral words in them or of the judgments themselves. On the contrary, Hare says, "what I am asserting is that the character of what happens when the descriptive meaning of a value-word changes is profoundly affected by the fact that it has prescriptive meaning as well as descriptive." But it is precisely because value-words have descriptive meaning that they are universalizable. "...they are universalizable just the same way as descriptive judgments are universalizable, namely the way which follows from the fact that both moral expressions and descriptive expressions have descriptive meaning."

Some philosophers object to the line of argument pursued by Hare in The Language of Morals wherein he intends to establish the possibility of a logic or ordinary imperatives by the distinction between phrasics and neustics. Taking a cue from Garner and Rosen, I shall formulate a similar objection to Hare's account of the possibility of a logic of moral judgments outlined in the above discussion.

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54 FR, 2.3, p. 28.
56 See Garner and Rosen, Moral Philosophy, Chapter XIII. To be published soon.
Being a kind of prescriptive language, it is hard to see how moral judgments can have truth value. If it is a necessary condition of rational argument that premisses and conclusions have truth value, then, of course, Hare is in trouble. In a valid argument we say that the truth of the conclusion is inferred from the truth of the premisses by the rules of logic. That is to say, it is impossible to have a formally valid argument if the premisses are true and the conclusion false. But what if the premisses are neither true nor false? What if they are prescriptions?

In the light of the discussion in the preceding part of this chapter it seems that Hare might suggest the following answer to this problem. Having made his distinction between descriptive and prescriptive meaning, he argued that because moral expressions do have descriptive meaning, they are universalizable and that just as merely descriptive expressions can be used in rational argument, so can partially descriptive expressions. If one can make logical deductions (and we shall see in Chapter V that Hare thinks moral arguments are strictly deductive) with descriptive expressions, there is no reason why he cannot do the same with moral judgments. Consider the following argument.

(1) All men who love their wives are good husbands.

(2) X loves his wife.

(3) Therefore, X is a good husband.
In this argument the first premiss is a moral judgment. The second premiss is a statement of fact (presumably). Now as I have noted above, in a valid argument the truth of the conclusion is inferred from the truth of the premisses. Formally speaking there is nothing wrong with the argument. Therefore, according to the most simple rules of logic, if the premisses are both true, the conclusion must also be true. But therein lies our problem. How can we say whether or not the major premiss is true? It is a value judgment and, as we have seen, a disguised prescription.

Could not Hare say that it is true or false in virtue of its descriptive meaning? Could he not say that the descriptive meaning of the value-term 'good husband' is something like 'a man who has certain describable characteristics relevant to his relationship to his wife'? If so, then the conclusion could be true (or false) in virtue of the descriptive meaning of 'good husband'. For we have seen that value-expressions, according to Hare, have both descriptive and prescriptive meaning.

In the conclusion of the above argument we are not only saying that X is a man who loves his wife, but we are also saying that he is to be commended for it, and even that he ought to be imitated by other men who have wives. The objection can now be precisely formulated.

By what rule can we say that the prescriptive meaning of 'good husband'
carries through the logical process from premisses to the conclusion. Or to put it another way, it seems possible only to say that the descriptive meaning carries through to the conclusion validly and we still have a question to ask when we are finished with the argument. That question is, 'Should we commend X for loving his wife?'

But the descriptive meaning of 'good husband' in (1) is applied to X in (2). What then is there left to be said in the conclusion if the conclusion is to be inferred on the basis of the descriptive meaning of the premisses?

Garner and Rosen suggest the following solution to the same problem in regard to the neustic and phrastic and the logic of ordinary imperatives. They suggest that one can:

provide for logical relations among all sorts of expressions by noticing that validity can be treated as a purely formal relation. Given certain logical rules for the manipulation of symbols, it is possible to derive other sequences of symbols. The expressions which play a part in the inferences do not have to be amenable to the assignment of truth value or even meaningful.57

Therefore in our argument, the suggestion goes, the following logical relations hold no matter what we substitute for the symbols.

57 Garner and Rosen, op. cit., Chapter XII.
(1) All A is B.
(2) C is A.
(3) Therefore C is B.

But what does it mean to call an argument valid if one cannot speak of truth or falsity of the premises? Merely saying that validity can be taken as a purely formal relationship between signs seems not to solve the problem we are discussing. For we started with the suggestion that it is the descriptive meaning of value-expressions that enables one to universalize and argue logically about them. Hare has pointed out that it is in virtue of logical words like 'all' that one can make deductions involving prescriptive expressions. But this is not immediately helpful. For, according to Hare we cannot use 'all', i.e. universalize, in talking about prescriptions except in virtue of their descriptive meaning. The problem about rules for carrying the prescriptive meaning through to the conclusion along with the descriptive meaning remains unsolved.

Consider the following kind of argument.

(1) One ought to do x in circumstance C.
(2) I am now in circumstances C.
(3) Therefore I ought to do x.

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FR, 2.5, pp. 17-18.
Hare suggested that "the combination of $p$ and $u$ (or $d'$) is sufficient to establish the rationality of morals, or the possibility of cogent moral arguments..." In other words, while Hare believes that the thesis $d$ (that value-expressions have only descriptive meaning) is not required for the possibility of moral argument, he requires the thesis $d'$ (that value-expressions have both descriptive and prescriptive meaning). The thesis $u$ (universalizability) is consistent with $p$ because of $d'$.

What could be the descriptive meaning of (1) in the second argument on the preceding page? It might describe, say, a social convention about doing $x$. But if so, then all I mean by (3) is that there is a convention about how I am to act in regard to $x$, i.e., do it. And a conventional meaning of (1) does not prescribe anything at all. If one counters that (1) has both descriptive meaning and prescriptive meaning, and therefore so does (3), then we can ask by what rule? For if we can universalize only in terms of descriptive meaning, we can only be sure of the descriptive meaning of (3).

Perhaps Hare means that value-expressions are universalizable in the same sense as descriptive utterances but not in virtue of their descriptive meaning. What is at issue here is Hare's account of what it is for an expression to have descriptive meaning. As we have seen

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59 FR, 2.5, p. 17.
above, to say that a word or expression has descriptive meaning is (for Hare) to say at least partially, that it refers to some property or characteristic of something. But the use of such a word or expression depends on certain rules governing our language. The kind of rule Hare is talking about is simply the "consistency of practice in the use of an expression which is the condition of its intelligibility." All rules which determine the use of words in our language do not have to be of the same kind. But Hare goes on to say in the same context that there is a connection between the fact that some judgments are descriptive and the fact that they are universalizable. Hare thinks that it is important to emphasize that moral judgments share this feature with descriptive judgments. And then he says that it is in so far as moral judgments have descriptive meaning (though they also have prescriptive meaning) that they share the characteristic of universalizability.

What does Hare mean when he says that descriptive judgments are universalizable? There is a trivial sense of universalizable, the sense in which the speaker of (even) a singular descriptive statement is committed "to the further proposition that anything exactly like the subject of the first judgement, or like it in the relevant respects, possesses the property attributed to it in the first judgement."

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60 FR, 2.1, p. 7.
61 FR, 2.1, p. 8.
62 FR, 2.3, p. 12.
This suggestion, Hare continues, helps us to understand what he means by 'descriptive meaning'. The suggested thesis relies on the notion of similarity. Therefore it is merely a statement that we must apply descriptive terms consistently if they are to be intelligible.

Dr. Andrew Oldenquist has pointed out that singular descriptive judgments can be universalizable in different ways.

If $x$ is yellow, then everything similar to $x$ in the respects indicated by the meaning of 'yellow' is also yellow. (Here the relevant respect is the property yellow.)

If $x$ is yellow, then everything similar to $x$ in the relevant respects (other than being yellow, and from which being yellow is not deducible) is also yellow. (Here the relevant respects are causes.)

Dr. Oldenquist goes on to point out that this consistency of application is a direct consequence of a descriptive term's being a general term. And while all descriptive terms are general terms, it is not true that all general terms are descriptive. Hare has suggested that we cannot say that $x$ is good and $y$ is exactly like $x$ (at least in all the relevant respects) but that $y$ is not good. We cannot say this for the very same reason that we cannot say that $x$ is red and $y$ is exactly like $x$ (at least in all the relevant respects) but that $y$ is not red. Thus in so far as this consistency of application is concerned, 'good' and 'red' function in precisely the same way. Now it

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Andrew Oldenquist, "Can Descriptivism be True?", p. 8, an unpublished essay.
is one of Dr. Oldenquist's suggestions that what Hare means by 'descriptive meaning' is "no more than that words with it thereby must apply consistently on the basis of relevant similarities."

If this is so, then Hare is unclear. For he states explicitly that "meaning of any kind is or involves the use of an expression in accordance with certain rules;" And these "rules", as I have noted above, are simply the conditions of intelligibility, consistency in application. But I fail to see how by 'descriptive meaning' Hare can mean 'no more than the consistent application of the expression'. For this is required for meaning of any kind and has nothing at all to do with whether or not a term is descriptive or prescriptive or anything else.

I must conclude, then, that either Hare has confused 'descriptive meaning' with meaning in general, or that he means something more by it than 'having the common element of the requirement of consistent application' when he says that moral judgments are universalizable in virtue of their descriptive meaning.

If the latter alternative is true, then we still have the problem of explaining how in a moral argument the prescriptive meaning of the moral judgment or word in the premises carries through to the conclusion in the argument. Hare gives us no rule to ensure us that we need not worry.

64 Andrew Oldenquist, op. cit., p. 14.
65 FR, 2.1, p. 7. Italics mine.
One might argue in Hare's behalf that no rule is needed in so far as one cannot use a moral term without its prescriptive meaning unless it is used in an obvious inverted commas sense, and that one can always tell if the moral word is being used in this way by the inflection of voice if it is oral or the use of inverted commas if it is written. On this view, the prescriptive meaning simply is carried along with the descriptive meaning unless there is reason to believe otherwise. The prescriptive meaning is a kind of natural rider through the inference process.

In answer to this counter-objection, one might point out that the prescriptive meaning of a moral word is attached to its descriptive meaning either contingently or non-contingently. If it is non-contingently attached, then the objection mentioned in the preceding paragraph is cogent. But in that case, naturalism would be true, for the meaning of a moral term would be necessarily attached to certain descriptive characteristics of an object or action. This cannot be Hare's view as he has, as we have seen, rejected naturalism.

If the prescriptive meaning is contingently attached to the descriptive meaning, the above objection is not cogent. For in that case it would never be logically inconsistent to say that the prescriptive meaning of the conclusion does not follow from the meaning

66 This reply has been suggested by Robert L. Holmes in an article, "Descriptivism, Supervenience and Universalizability", The Journal of Philosophy, LXIII, No. 5 (March 3, 1966), 113-119.
of the moral premises (together with the factual premises) and that we are therefore not entitled in virtue of the rules of logic, to say that the moral words in the conclusion of a moral argument possess the prescriptive meaning they have in the premises.

If Hare can be understood as using the term 'descriptive meaning' as 'meaning in general', we may still be able to save the rationality of moral argument and just ignore the confusion. For I believe one can show that moral judgments are universalizable whether or not they have descriptive meaning. I think they can be shown to be universalizable in virtue of the supervenient character of value-expressions. In the next chapter I shall examine the possibility of there being two different logical senses of universalizability as well as the relationship between universalizability and supervenience. But for the reasons given above it seems incorrect to say that moral judgments are universalizable in virtue of their descriptive meaning. I shall have more to say about supervenience as the root of the universalizability of moral judgments in the next chapter.

I conclude that if supervenience can account for the rationality of moral arguments, we need not worry about the problems of truth and falsity in the premises and conclusion. What we shall have to establish is that a conclusion in a moral argument can be valid on the basis of its being inferred according to the rules of ordinary logic and the supervenient character of the moral expressions in the premises.
At the beginning of this chapter I noted that there are several questions involved in the general question whether or not moral reasoning is possible. The first had to do with whether or not prescriptive expressions could be entailed by statements of fact. I believe that Hare's arguments against naturalism, which we touched upon briefly in this chapter, are cogent and thus rule out the possibility suggested by the first question. The second question we asked was whether or not prescriptive expressions could be derived from other prescriptive expressions, and more specifically, whether or not moral judgments could function in rational argument. In the next chapter I shall try to give a more complete answer to this latter question. What will be at issue is whether or not the suggestion made above is sufficient to guarantee the rationality of moral discourse.
CHAPTER IV
THE UNIVERSALIZABILITY PRINCIPLE

In the preceding chapter I have examined the logical requirement of prescriptivity and some of its implications for moral theory, and more specifically, the problem of moral reasoning. The present chapter deals with Hare's companion logical requirement, universalizability. I shall first examine Hare's later work, Freedom and Reason, for its doctrine on universalizability. Then I shall examine the roots of this doctrine for his theory in the earlier work, The Language of Morals. I shall raise some problems suggested by Hare's account of the doctrine and point out some issues raised by critics in recent literature on the subject. I shall try to formulate a correct account of the universalizability of moral judgments.

Hare believes that universalizability is a consequence of the meaning of moral expressions. We have seen that, for Hare, the meaning of expressions is their use in accordance with certain rules. And by rules we noted that he means nothing more than a consistent usage of words without which language would be impossible. "...by 'rules' I do not mean very simple general rules which can be formulated in words (3.4), but, rather, that consistency of practice in the use of an expression which is the condition of its intelligibility."
The key word in this account of 'rules' is consistency. As we shall see, universalizability is the property of moral and other expressions which enables us to formulate arguments. It is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for reasoning. The term 'universalizability' is first mentioned in *Freedom and Reason*, 2.2 as a feature which moral judgments have in common with descriptive utterances, and further that it is the descriptive meaning of moral judgments and statements of fact which is the foundation for this commonality.

We must now notice the connection between the fact that some judgments are descriptive and another feature which it has become the custom to call, when we are speaking of moral judgments, universalizability. It is important to emphasize that moral judgments share this feature with descriptive judgments, although the difference between them in other respects are, as we shall see, sufficient to make it misleading to say that moral judgments are descriptive. Nevertheless, in so far as moral judgments do have descriptive meaning, in addition to the other kind of meaning which they have, they share this characteristic, which is common to all judgments which carry descriptive meaning.3

On Hare's account the following propositions entail each other in order from (1) through (3).

(1) This is red.

(2) Everything like this in the relevant respects is red.

(3) There is a property such that this has it and such that everything which has it is red.

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3 FR, 2.1, p. 10. 4 FR, 2.2, p. 11.
Now there is nothing surprising in that sequence. It is trivial. What Hare needs to show is that moral judgments are universalizable "in the same sense".

What is the sense in which descriptive judgments like 'This is red' are universalizable? Hare raises an objection to his own suggestion, an objection which might lead us to determine the precise notion of universalizability that he intends for his theory. In view of the uniqueness of every individual thing, the objection goes, one can say that nothing is ever exactly like anything else. And, if in order to escape the implication of this consideration, one adds to the thesis the qualification 'like in relevant respects' he is then faced with the problem of determining the criteria for what is relevant and what is not.

Hare's reply is that descriptive meaning rules are universal rules of a certain type and that if generality were not a property of descriptive terms, then intelligibility would be impossible. We might here add a counter-objection by questioning whether or not generality is characteristic of any kind of meaning, and not particular to descriptive meaning. If this is so, then why call it 'descriptive' meaning? We shall discuss this problem later in the chapter.

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5 FR, 2.2, p. 12.
6 Ibid.
In answer to the second part of the objection Hare suggests that the criterion for determining relevant respects is identical with the criterion for determining the way in which the speaker is using the term. This is determined by an explanation given by the speaker of what it was about the object that made him apply the descriptive term. It would then be the same characteristic about another object that would make him apply the same term to it. Such an explanation need not be precise.

So far, in spite of the objection, Hare's point seems to be admittedly trivial. It is simply spelling out the obvious fact that in order to have terms in our language which are applicable in more than one instance, it is logically necessary that such terms have the property of generality. But Hare's purpose is to show that evaluative (including moral) words have this very same property of commonality. "If I call a thing red, I am committed to calling anything else like it red. And if I call a thing a good X, I am committed to calling any X like it good." But the particular kind of rule which determines the use of the moral word is different from the rule which determines the use of the descriptive expression;

"...in the case of moral judgements the universal rules which determine this descriptive meaning are not mere meaning-rules, but moral principles of substance.

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7 FR, 2.3, pp. 13-14.
8 FR, 2.4, p. 15.
9 FR, 3.1, p. 30.
Not only are moral judgments universalizable in exactly the same sense as descriptive statements, but they are such in virtue of their possession of descriptive meaning: "a philosopher who rejects universalizability is committed to the view that moral judgments have no descriptive meaning at all." A simple logical maneuver on this sentence suffices to show Hare's position. \( U \rightarrow D \) adequately symbolizes the above statement. By contraposition, \( D \rightarrow U \), and since, according to Hare, moral judgments have descriptive meaning, it follows that they are universalizable. We shall later raise the question whether or not it is also true that if an expression has no descriptive meaning, it is not universalizable.

In Chapter Two of Freedom and Reason then, there are two theses, viz., (1) moral judgments are universalizable in exactly the same sense as descriptive judgments, and (2) moral judgments are universalizable because they have descriptive meaning along with their prescriptive meaning. We shall question both theses. We have already noted in the preceding chapter that there is a problem with respect to inference if prescriptive judgments are universalizable because they have descriptive meaning. Here, however, our intention is only to try to discover what Hare means by universalizability.

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10 FR, 2.5, p. 17.
11 See the discussion on descriptive and prescriptive meaning in Chapter III above.
Ordinary Imperatives and Universalizability

Universalizability, according to Hare, distinguishes moral judgments from non-moral imperatives. If I say 'Do not close the door' I am not, on Hare's account, committed to the same imperative in a similar situation at another time. But if I say 'You ought (morally) to close the door' I am committed to the same moral judgement in similar circumstances on another occasion. Hare also claims that moral judgments are distinct from particular decisions and desires in that neither decisions nor desires are universalizable.

Does it make sense to ask why ordinary imperatives, decisions and desires are not universalizable? If we can discover why this is true, if it is, then we shall have some clarification of how Hare is using the term 'universalizability'. This is not a trivial matter, for I may well say that if I have reason at all to say 'Do not close the door' in C₁ at T₁, then in C₂ at T₂, would not the same reason (C) impel me under pain of some kind of inconsistency to utter or think the same simple imperative? If so, then either we are not yet on to Hare's sense of universalizability, or he has made a mistake. Hare's illustration of a simple imperative is 'Turn left' uttered to a group of marching trainees. The instructor, he goes on to say, is

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12 Cf. FR, 3.3, p. 36. Cf. Also Chapter III above.
13 FR, 4.3, p. 56.
not committed to saying 'Turn left' to the next group of trainees even though the situation is exactly similar. He might just as well say 'Turn right'.

In the same passage Hare goes on to distinguish another kind of imperative from the ordinary imperative just mentioned. He calls this a hypothetical imperative: 'The situation being what it is, you ought to attack on the left.' The instructor may not, without logical inconsistency, tell the next group of trainees to attack on the right in the same situation. It would seem that the difference is in the assumption that the question 'why' arises, or can arise, in the latter case, but that it does not make sense to ask it in the instance of the simple drill instruction.

But, we can ask, is that true? It seems to me that the question might arise in the former case as well, the answer being something like 'Because I said so and I am an authority whom you ought (either a moral or hypothetical 'ought') to obey while in training.' If it be objected that this still does not commit the drill instructor to issue the same command in relevantly similar circumstances with the next group of trainees, one could answer that if all the relevant circumstances were in fact known by the instructor, he would be so committed. What is it that could have committed him to the same command? The instructor might have said 'Turn left'

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FR, 3.3, p. 36.
because the trainees needed to learn both left and right turns and both turns need to be practiced a number of times in order for the soldiers to be well disciplined. Knowing the end or purpose introduces the relevance of a reason for any command. If all the relevant circumstances were known and in the case of the second group of trainees left turns were, fortunately, more easily learned, then that would be a relevant difference releasing the instructor from his hypothetical obligation of giving the same command again. I suggest that the reason why we think simple commands are not universalizable is that we almost never know, nor in practice do we need to know, all the relevant circumstances, i.e., all the reasons for issuing and for not issuing a simple command. The reasons have reference to attaining some end, e.g., well disciplined soldiers. Therefore, since in practice it is inconsequential (even if it theoretically opens one to a charge of inconsistency) whether or not we say 'Turn left' or 'Turn right', 'Close the door' or 'Do not close the door' in different but similar circumstances, we are not worried about taking all those reasons into consideration. But this in no way tells against the possibility that they are universalizable. For when we say that the question 'why' arises, we do not necessarily mean that it will in fact be uttered or even thought by someone who issues a command. We mean only that it can make sense to ask it when any command is utterable.
Every sensible command, since it, presumably, is issued for some end or purpose, is reasonable, contrary to what Hare believes, or one must be committed to the view that to command may sometimes be a non-rational activity in the sense that the question 'why' cannot arise about it.

But suppose when asked why I uttered some ordinary command, my answer is 'Just because I wanted to'. It may be noted here, with some explanation forthcoming, that the question 'why' does not arise about a desire, and this, too, may be a reason for thinking that some commands are not universalizable, viz., those based on whims or desires or wants. For example, I may say 'Close the door' just because I want the door closed. But my desire to have the door closed is the reason for my command and if I am not committed to issue the same command in similar circumstances in the future, it is only because I just may not have the same desire at that future time. Desires are not the sort of thing that are in every instance subject to one's control. But if I happen not to have the same desire at another time, then that is a relevant difference making this instance unlike the former instance, the circumstances no longer being similar in all respects. It is true that I may be at a loss to answer the question 'Why do you have (or not have) such-and-such a desire? This is an

FR, 3.3, pp. 56-57.
indication that desires are not universalizable. But this is a different question from 'Why should I turn right?' or 'Why should I close the door?'. The answer might simply be 'Because I want you to' and though it makes no sense to pursue the dialogue further by asking 'Why do you have that particular desire?', it does make sense, if what I do in reaction to the command happens to be important to me, to continue the dialogue by asking 'Why should I do what you want?'

We shall later have to ask whether or not desires are universalizable.

I have been arguing that one reason Hare gives for distinguishing between simple commands and moral prescriptions, viz., that the former are not universalizable while the latter are, is not sound. Therefore, our task of discovering precisely what Hare means by 'universalizability' becomes more difficult. It might also be possible to show that even if Hare is wrong about this distinction between simple imperatives and moral judgments, the problem lies in the logic of imperatives rather than in the concept of universalizability. It may be that imperatives and moral judgments are universalizable in different ways, i.e., according to different senses of universalizability.

It will not do to object on Hare's behalf that simple imperatives contain references to individuals and are therefore not proper universals. I am prepared to maintain that in all cases of imperatives, including those containing references to individuals, one can
significantly ask for a reason for the command and that this is an indication of universalizability. Commands seem to be universalizable in the same sense as singular moral judgments are universalizable. That is to say only that the question 'why' can arise meaningfully in any given instance of a command. But if the question 'why' can arise for any given individual command, then whenever there are reasons that could be given in answer to that question, the command is universalizable. In Hare's own words, "to universalize is to give the reason." I cannot think of a single imperative about which this question cannot arise, though I can think of many imperatives to which, when they are uttered, the question 'why' is not worth bothering about in practice. But logically it can arise, and universalizability, for Hare, is a logical property.

"The thesis of universalizability itself, however, is still a logical thesis."

If what I have said is true, then it does not help our efforts to discover how Hare applies the concept of universalizability to suggest a distinction between ordinary imperatives and moral prescriptions on the basis of universalizability.

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16 FR, 1.3, p. 5.
17 FR, 3.1, p. 30.
Decisions and Universalizability

There is, as we have seen, reason to say that the 'why' question arises about any imperative or ordinary command. It also arises, in one sense at least, when a decision is made. Whether this is a moral or non-moral decision seems not to be a relevant difference. For instance, if A has made a decision D and thinks he has good reason for it, it is always meaningful to ask A why he has made that particular decision. This would be asking for a reason, not a cause. If A does not have a reason for D and says only that he just decided to do something without having a reason, i.e., on impulse, then we seem to have a case of decision that is not universalizable in the sense we have been discussing (the sense in which something is universalizable if it is based on certain specifiable reasons). But if decisions and choices are distinguishable in the way we suggested, then we do not have to worry about impulsive decisions. I am not sure, however, whether or not this merely is a terminological dispute.

If I have examined my reasons and decide on the basis of those reasons to do act x instead of act y, I would be acting inconsistently if I should (now) think that at another time when I have the same reasons and the same feelings about the matter, I might decide otherwise. In other words I am simply saying that I believe that I have

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18 Cf. Chapter I above.
19 Cf. Chapter II above.
good reasons for doing x now, and that in the future, given all the
same relevant circumstances, I would decide to do x again. If this
were not the case, then I would be admitting that my present reasons
were not really good reasons for my decision. But by hypothesis I
think that they are. To say that decisions are not universalizable
in this sense is to say that I believe both that I have good reasons
and that I do not. That is a contradiction. If my desire to do x
has ceased at some later time, then, of course, I might not decide
to do x at that later time. But then there is a relevant difference
in the two temporally distinct instances of decision. Wants and
desires are usually part of the reasons for making decisions.

The sense of universalizability of which I am now speaking is
implied much later in Freedom and Reason when Hare discusses the uni-
versalizability of aesthetic judgments in reply to an objection that
every work of art is a unique individual and therefore no judgment
about it can be universalizable.

We might put this point in a paradoxical way by
saying that the work has been made a unique in-
dividual only by being turned into a universal.
A universal is necessarily unique; for clearly there
cannot be two numerically different universal quali-
ties, for example, which are qualitatively precisely
similar.20

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FR, 8.3, p. 143.
This is a trivial sense of universalizability and, I believe, identical with the sense I am suggesting, but different from the sense Hare seems to be getting to. Decisions, for Hare, are not universalizable in his sense of the term, whatever that turns out to be, but they are in the sense I have been discussing, as we shall soon see. The reason why decisions are not universalizable, according to Hare, is that if I make a decision D on the basis of a particular set of reasons, I am not prescribing that anyone else make the same decision, given the same set of reasons. Hence it seems that my decisions, in the light of what has been said above, are universalizable (in the trivial sense) with respect to myself, i.e., my future decisions, but they are not universalizable in the sense that they extend to anyone else, even if the same reasons are present. Another's judgment about the sufficiency of the reasons may be different from mine. This might distinguish decision-statements from 'ought'-sentences, for according to Hare, the latter are universalizable while the former are not. If I make an 'ought'-statement I am prescribing for anyone else in similar circumstances, but if I make a decision-statement I am speaking only for myself. We shall have to make this clear.

22 FR, 4.3, p. 56.
Why is it that when I am making a statement of moral principle I am or think I am prescribing for anyone in the same relevant circumstances, but that when I make a (non-moral) decision, I am speaking only for myself? Hare believes that there is an important kind of moral argument in which the factor of universalizability seems to be, but is not absent. These are arguments based on moral ideals and the reason, according to Hare, why the universalizability factor is sometimes said to be absent is that in this kind of question the interests of other people are not always involved. But Hare believes that his sense of universalizability is not absent from arguments involving ideals. He seeks to clarify what the sense is in which even moral arguments based on ideals are universalizable by referring to another class of judgments which people sometimes think are not universalizable, namely, aesthetic judgments.

The following passage is the most explicit statement Hare makes in Freedom and Reason about what he means by universalizability.

I will therefore repeat that by calling a judgement universalizable I mean only that it logically commits the speaker to making a similar judgement about anything which is either exactly like the subject of the original judgement or like it in the relevant respects.

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23 FR, 8.1, p. 138.
24 FR, 8.2, p. 139.
Hare goes on to explain how aesthetic judgements are universalizable in this specified sense. In a case where two pictures are very much alike, if I should call one good and the other not, I am thereby committed to specify some difference in them in respect to aesthetic value. If this is so, then it follows that if I call any picture good I am also committed to calling a picture which is exactly similar to the first one good also. Even if it is not exactly similar to the first, if it is similar in respect of the features of the first picture that lead to my calling the first one good, then I am still committed to calling the second one good.

We have now seen that Hare applies universalizability to moral judgments, descriptive statements and aesthetic judgments. His claim is that this is a logical characteristic which these three linguistic entities have. Hare, however, has also made the claim that in the sense he is using universalizability neither ordinary imperatives nor decisions nor desires and feelings are universalizable. And the sense of universalizability in question is explicitly noted in the immediately preceding passage.

Now I have been maintaining that if the question 'why' can significantly arise about all of the above, then that is indication that they are universalizable, at least in one sense. I have maintained that the question can arise significantly about moral judgments,
descriptive statements and aesthetic judgments. I can significantly ask 'Why ought I do x?', 'Why do you call this red?' and 'Why do you call this a good picture?'. But the same question can also significantly arise about ordinary imperatives and decision statements, but not about desires and feelings. I can ask 'Why did you say "Close the door"?', or 'Why did you decide to do x?', but not 'Why do you have a desire or feeling for doing x?'. I can, of course, ask 'Why do you want me to close the door?', but then the question reduces to a question about an ordinary imperative based on some want or feeling, and not a question about the wants or feelings themselves. I do not see how it could make sense to ask why someone has a particular desire or feeling. He just does, though there may be some psychological or even physical explanation. But to give that kind of answer would be to give a cause, not a reason. In the sense in which I am using it, to ask the question 'why' is to ask for a reason, not for a causal explanation.

I now suggest that Hare's sense of universalizability, as noted above applies in all these cases including desires and feelings. Hare suggests that the reason (legal) decisions are not universalizable is that "a statement of law always contains an implicit reference to a particular jurisdiction;" but just as singular moral judgments contain references to individuals and are yet universalizable in his

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25 Cf. p. 13 above.
26 FR, 3.3, p. 36.
sense, so also are ordinary decisions. For even though one cannot say 'It is illegal (because of a decision of law) in England to marry one's own sister' is universalizable to 'It is illegal for anyone anywhere to marry his own sister', one can say that 'it is illegal in England to marry one's sister' and that this applies universally to anyone in the same relevant circumstances, one relevant circumstance being one's presence in England. And what about a decision made by, say, a world government? This would be a decision that would apply to anyone anywhere. As a matter of fact, even moral principles are not universalizable in the sense in which it is suggested the decision statement is not universalizable. For the moral principle 'One ought not to lie' admits of circumstantial exceptions. Hare admits this when he speaks in The Language of Morals about the process of modifying principles. We might, for example, say that it is not morally wrong to lie in order to save the life of an innocent person. In this case the circumstance of an innocent person's life being at stake makes the principle less extensive, though as Hare wants to suggest, it is still universalizable. I see no relevant difference between this and the instance of a (legal) decision which happens to include a territorial reference as one of the circumstances limiting the extension of its application.

Even desires are universalizable in Hare's specified sense.

For if I say 'X has a certain desire' I am also committed to 'Y has

Cf. LM, Chapter Three. Cf. also Chapter II above.
the same desire' if all of the conditions for having that desire are present in Y as they are in X. That is only to say that if Y is exactly like X in all the respects relevant to having some desire, then if X has it, Y has it. This seems quite trivial.

But if Hare were right about the application of the concept of universalizability we would now have two criteria for determining whether or not some statement or expression is universalizable: Hare's specified sense - (A) in which one can say that a judgment is universalizable if it logically commits the speaker to making a similar judgment about anything which is either exactly like the subject of the original judgment or like it in the relevant respects; My sense - (B) in which a judgment is universalizable if the question 'why' can arise about it.

The following outline summarizes the position I have presented.

Hare believes his sense of universalizability: includes

(A) moral judgments
    aesthetic judgments
    descriptive statements

but excludes ordinary imperatives
              decisions
              desires and feelings

I believe Hare's sense of universalizability: includes

(A') moral judgments
    aesthetic judgments
    descriptive statements
    ordinary imperatives
    decisions
    desires and feelings
My sense of universalizability: includes

(B)  
moral judgments
aesthetic judgments
descriptive statements
ordinary imperatives
decisions

but excludes  desires and feelings

We have now to ask the following question. If, as Hare believes, ordinary imperatives and decisions are not universalizable in the sense in which moral judgments, descriptive statements and aesthetic judgments are, what is that sense? If what I have said is correct, then it cannot be A' above. To say that it is the sense in which desires are not universalizable is of no help since desires are excluded from both (A) and (B). Nor is it helpful to say, as Hare does, that it is the sense which is common to descriptive statements, moral and aesthetic judgements, for all three kinds of judgements are on both (A) and (B) as universalizable. I do not know of any other passage in Freedom and Reason or in The Language of Morals where the notion of universalizability is further distinguished. I conclude that Hare has not made his doctrine of universalizability precise enough to make it the foundation of his distinction between ordinary imperatives and decisions on the one hand and moral prescriptions on the other. Some further delineation of the concept of universalizability is necessary.

28  FR, 5.4, p. 71.
29  FR, 2.2, p. 10.
30  FR, 8.3, p. 144.
To clarify, we take two prescriptive expressions and a decision statement and discuss them side by side.

(a) Close the door. (ordinary imperative)
(b) I ought not tell lies. (moral prescription)
(c) I decided to close the door. (decision statement)

The question 'why' makes sense upon the utterance of any of these three expressions. One's answer in the case of (a) might be 'It's cold in here'. In the case of (b) it might be 'No one ought to tell lies'. And in the case of (c) one might say the same as in the (a) case. Now the universal character of (a) and (c) is limited to the person who issued the command or made the decision, that is, one is committing only himself to issue the same command or make the same decision whenever all the relevant circumstances and reasons are the same. One does not suggest that everyone else issue the same command or make the same decision, except in the trivial sense where the other person might have all the same characteristics, environmental influence, feelings, etc. as the speaker. However one does expect another person, on pain of inconsistency, to issue the same command if he (the other person) once issues it and believes that he has the same sufficient reasons to do so in another exactly or relevantly similar situation. But in the case of (b) one believes that others might act (rightly) as he himself does in some moral situation, even
if the role he plays in another relevantly similar instance is different and, perhaps, distasteful. In the (a) and (c) cases there is only something about the speaker involved in the universalizability, namely one's own view of the sufficiency of the reasons for issuing the command or making the decision. He does not have to consider what others might do if the roles are reversed.

But we can ask whether or not, when one makes a moral judgment, he is also making it on the basis of his own belief about the reasons that justify the moral judgment, i.e., on the basis of, say, his own ideals. This surely seems to be the case, for everyone who makes a considered moral judgment often does so on the basis of the ideals of the moral system he accepts. Are we then saying that in making a particular moral judgment one is also demanding that everyone else make moral judgments on the basis of his (the speaker's) moral ideals?

The type of argument Hare has been proposing throughout his two works is a kind of 'golden-rule' argument. In effect this is to say that when (in a moral situation) I act in a certain way, I am logically committed to accept the principle that others in similar circumstances ought also (or at least consider that they might) act in the same way. In moral situations there is an element of other people's interests in a way that there is not in situations involving, say, aesthetic judgments. As other philosophers have pointed out,

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moral arguments are all, in a way, ad hominem arguments. Neither Hare's suggestion nor mine is what when I make a moral judgment based on my moral ideals, others must also make that same moral judgment (for it might well be that they have different ideals), but rather that I commit myself to accept the possibility of their doing the same thing as I am now doing, even if I am in a different and, perhaps, less desirable, role in the same kind of moral situation. But this is not the case in non-moral judgments, decisions, ordinary imperatives and aesthetic judgments. When I make a non-moral decision, utter an ordinary imperative or make an aesthetic judgment, I do not have to consider whether or not someone else might do the same. This, of course, is just what Hare says. My objection to his analysis is not that this is false, but that the sense of universalizability that Hare intends does not do the job he wants it to do. It does not distinguish moral judgments from ordinary imperatives and decisions.

Hare points out that in the aesthetic judgment the interests of others may well be involved (as surely they also may be when an ordinary imperative is uttered or a personal decision is made) but no non-moral argument can be based on those interests. And it is not Hare's claim that all moral arguments involve other people's interests. Some are based on ideals and ideals are universalizable "in the sense in which I have been using the term". By this Hare means that although

32 FR, 8.6, p. 152. Italics his.
others may not in fact have the same moral ideals as the speaker, the speaker must take into consideration the possibility that they do, and that if he finds himself in a different role in the same kind of situation, others are also right in doing what he does in the present instance - thus the ad hominem character of moral arguments.

The difference between moral judgments and ordinary imperatives and decisions is not the sense of universalizability Hare refers to, for all meaningful expressions are universalizable in that sense. The difference is that in making a non-moral decision or an aesthetic judgment I do not have to consider the possibility of others making the same decision or aesthetic value judgment. It is simply irrelevant to what I want to do. In the moral situation, what others might (or hypothetically will) do is relevant.

What Hare needs is an element in his definition of 'universalizable' that will specify a difference between moral judgments on the one hand and ordinary imperatives and non-moral decisions on the other. For if I am right in what I have said above, then all three are universalizable in the sense that they all logically commit the speaker to make a similar judgment about anything which is either exactly like the subject of the original judgment or like it in the relevant respects. I do not think a specific difference is available if we consider only what it means for an expression to be universalizable. But if we can say that making a moral judgment logically
implies that one consider the possibility of being in different roles in the situation, then we have a basis for a distinction between moral judgments and all the other kinds of expressions we have been considering. But this is not universalizability, whatever else it may be. I conclude that universalizability is not a basis for such a distinction.

Roots of the Doctrine in *The Language of Morals*

Hare does not explicitly use the term 'universalizability' in *The Language of Morals* though there are obvious indications of the doctrine in this earlier work. He states, for example, that "...it is almost impossible to frame a proper universal in the imperative mood." And again, "...ordinary so-called universal imperatives like 'No Smoking' are distinguished from value-judgements by not being properly universal." A proper universal is one that does not refer even implicitly to an individual. Hare suggests that, although particular moral prescriptions do refer to individuals they can always be supported by reasons. The same is not true, he says, of ordinary imperatives. We have seen that there is reason to say that it is true of ordinary imperatives, a reason which suggested the analysis of universalizability I gave in the preceding section of this chapter. Be that as it may, our present purpose is only to show that there are
roots in *The Language of Morals* for Hare's more explicit analysis of universalizability in *Freedom and Reason*.

Another indication of the doctrine of universalizability is notable in the distinction between neustics and phrastics in both the indicative and imperative moods, which distinction we have already noted in several places above. The doctrine, in brief, states that there is a common element in the two moods which enables the same logic to be useful in the case of either or both. The distinction is abandoned in *Freedom and Reason*, but it is clearly a root of the distinction between descriptive and prescriptive meaning in the later work. And, as we have already noted, for Hare, the descriptive meaning of moral expressions enables them to be universalizable.

The primary root of universalizability of moral judgements seems to be the doctrine of supervenience. Supervenience is characterized by saying that "'good' and other such words are the names of 'supervenient' properties." The suggestion that such properties (by definition) follow upon (thus, 'consequential') some other difference between two objects or acts and that this is required for a supervenient term to be applicable to one but not the other, is an implicit indication that the difference is in the object or act.

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38 LM, 5.2, p. 81.
referred to, not the subject (speaker). I call an object good or an act right because there is something about the object other than goodness that prompts me to call it good and something about the act other than rightness that prompts me to call it right. Now if one examines an ordinary imperative, e.g., 'Close the door', which clearly admits of the possibility of the question 'why' arising, one can easily see that if I think I have a reason for accepting or issuing the command now, then it seems clear that I am committed to accept or issue the same command if the same reason and the same circumstances are present at another time, provided, of course, I still think the reason is sufficient. The fact that I have (or think that I have) a reason insures the universalizability of the command. The extension of the universal character of the situation, however, is over all of my acts in the same relevant circumstances in the future. It does not extend to a consideration of another person issuing the same command at another time provided all the relevant circumstances and reasons are the same. This is, of course hypothetical. The hypothesis is that he still thinks the reasons are sufficient. That is to say that supervenience, like universalizability looks two ways. It is horizontal in that it commits the same person under pain of logical inconsistency to say that reasons which are sufficient once for a command like 'Close the door' or a moral prescription like 'You ought not lie' are sufficient always in the same relevant
circumstances. As noted above, the alternative to this view is a contradiction, i.e., believing both that the reasons are sufficient and that they are not. It is vertical in that when I accept a moral judgment I not only commit myself to the judgment whenever circumstances are relevant, but if another person is in the role I am in the present moral situation I must consider the possibility of his doing what I am now doing. The reason for this is the same as that given above in our discussion of universalizability in *Freedom and Reason*. In the horizontal application only something about me (my view of the reasons for the command or decision) is relevant whereas in the vertical application it is something about others in the role I now play. I am not committed to consider the possibility that anyone having the same reasons as I have for giving a command, must take them as sufficient for issuing the command themselves. But if I think that I ought to lie to x in these circumstances, I am also committed to the view that if x's role and mine are reversed, he ought to lie to me.

How does the principle of supervenience relate to the universalizability principle? They are obviously not identical, for descriptive words are universalizable but they are not supervenient. I must apply the word 'signed' consistently, i.e., to all objects characterized by that which the word 'signed' indicates, but it is the case that two things can differ only as regards being signed.
On the other hand moral words are universalizable, i.e., they must be used consistently. As noted above, this is characteristic of any word that has meaning of any kind. But it is also true that moral words are supervenient. We cannot say that two things differ only as regards, say, goodness. There must be some other difference.

We have seen in the preceding chapter that there are problems connected with the view that moral judgments are universalizable in virtue of their descriptive meaning. We have noted that if a judgment is descriptive, whatever else it may be, it is universalizable. Can we say the converse, that if it is not descriptive, it is not universalizable? If universalizable is taken to mean only consistency of application, then obviously we cannot. Let us suppose for a moment that someone has a peculiar moral sense about him such that whenever he sees some object he can tell immediately whether or not it is a good object. It does not matter whether or not anyone actually has such a moral sense. All we have to admit is that it is logically possible. Presumably the person who has this supposed intuitive moral sense does not need to rely on descriptive qualities of the object for application of the term 'good' to it. He just knows. This person would still have to apply the word to objects consistently, i.e., whenever by his intuitive powers he knows that an object is good. He would not have to rely on some prescriptive meaning of the term 'good' to apply it consistently. This
logical possibility suggests that supervenient terms are only contingently connected with some descriptive characteristics of the objects or acts to which we apply them. Suppose someone says that of all the gloricades, there are only three good ones. Now 'gloricade' has no descriptive meaning and I can still significantly ask 'Why are you commending three and not all of the gloricades?' even if I have no idea of what a gloricade is. If someone says 'Of all the pictures, only three are signed, or only three are red, I can also significantly ask 'Why?' But in the latter case, the answer 'I don't know' makes sense. The same answer does not make sense in reply to the former question. In the latter case I am asking for a cause of the three pictures being signed or red. In the former case I am never asking for a cause, but only for a reason. If I call something good without knowing the reason I am not using the term evaluatively, but rather in some inverted commas sense. Therefore to use an evaluative term prescriptively I must know the reason why I am commending (or condemning). This is not true of descriptive terms. To reply to the question 'Why is this red?' I can say, 'I don't know. I just see that it is.' I need to know neither the reason (if there is a reason) nor the cause in order to apply it consistently.

In order to use supervenient terms prescriptively, then, it is necessary to know the reason why the term applies. This factor provides us with a distinguishing characteristic for value terms. It may
be that this is what Hare means when he says that moral judgments have to have reasons and ordinary commands do not. He may mean that I need to know a reason in order to call something good or right meaningfully, but I do not need to have a reason for an ordinary imperative in order to issue it and be understood.

This interpretation would fit well with his statement that to "universalize is to give the reason". But, as we have seen, this is a different sense of universalizability from that given above. And it does seem to distinguish value judgments from expressions using only descriptive terms.

We now have two distinct but related senses of universalizability, both of which are logical characteristics. (1) To universalize is to commit oneself to make a similar judgment about anything which is either exactly like the subject of a judgment now being made, or like it in the relevant respects. (2) To universalize is to commit oneself to give an answer to the question 'why?', i.e., to be able to give a reason for making a judgment.

There is a subtle difference between (2) and (B) on page 105 above. The earlier suggestion is only that the question 'why?' can arise. The present suggestion entails that either an answer to the

39 FP, 1.3, p. 5.  
40 CF. p.101 above.
question 'why?' can be given by the speaker, or he is misusing the term by seeming to use it evaluatively when he is in fact not. I am suggesting that to use a word that is supervenient meaningfully and as evaluative one has to know the reason why the term is applied, i.e., the non-evaluative but value-related characteristics of that to which the term is applied. And the fact that the descriptive meaning of an evaluative term can change while the prescriptive meaning remains the same is proof that the two meanings in value words are only contingently related to each other. One does not have to know the causes of an object's redness to say that it is red. Nor does one need to know the reason why it is red. He only needs to know that it is red.

Universalizability and Impartiality

One of the most serious objections to Hare's view of the universalizability of moral judgements is that suggested by D. H. Monro, and by Dorothy Emmet. Monro takes issue with Hare's claim that the universalizability principle is a logical principle and suggests that the claim rests on a confusion. "Nevertheless, this view seems to be mistaken, and Hare's claim that the principle of universalization is a purely formal and logical one to rest on a confusion."

43 D. H. Monro, op. cit., p. 130.
Miss Emmet takes issue with the same claim, but, as we shall see, for a different reason. Her claim is that universalizability is a substantial principle when applied to a moral context because it requires the admission of the expression 'morally relevant circumstances' as well as the moral idea of impartiality. "But if we say that not only inconsistency in the application of principles, but also arbitrariness in the selection of properties named in them is excluded, then universalizability...is not just the formal criterion of consistency;" It is clear that Hare does not think the principle is a substantial one.

But it simply is not true that the things which I have said about the logic of moral language are peculiarly tied to any particular moral standpoint. To say that moral and other value-judgements are prescriptive and universalizable is not by that alone, to commit oneself to any particular moral opinion.

Hare is not unaware of the possibility of this kind of attack. Put in another way (the way in which Hare himself specifies the objection), if in fact universalizability is absolutely neutral in respect of substantial moral principles, then how can such a doctrine be useful in moral arguments in which there is a disagreement about substantial moral principles? He answers in the following way.

44 D. Emmet, op. cit., p. 220.
45 FR, 10. 3, p. 192.
The answer to this attack is that the type of moral reasoning which I have been recommending is, though all the inferences which it contains are strictly deductive, not of the usual premises-to-conclusion sort like that recommended by the naturalists... The kind of argument which I have been recommending is rather a kind of exploration. We are to go about looking for moral judgements which we can both accept for our own conduct and universalize to cover the conduct of other actual or hypothetical people. What prevents us from accepting certain moral judgements which are perfectly formulative in the language is not logic alone, but the fact that they have certain logical consequences which we cannot accept - namely certain singular prescriptions to other people in hypothetical situations. And the 'cannot' here is not a logical 'cannot'.

Before we examine Hare's reply, it will be helpful to determine whether or not it suffices to answer not only the specific objection he has raised against himself, but also those raised by Monro and Emmet. In the course of the following discussion I shall also add another objection which is similar to Miss Emmet's.

First let us examine Monro's argument. The problem is similar to the one I have raised in the preceding section of this chapter, viz, that there are at least two senses of universalizability. Here, however, the thrust is not only that Hare is not precise enough in his delineation of those senses, but also that he has in fact confused them. Monro distinguishes three senses of universalizability; (1) the sense in which desires, aesthetic judgments and all descriptions

FR, 10.4, p. 193.
are universalizable, (2) the sense in which ideals are not universalizable, but moral principles are, and (3) the sense in which ideals are universalizable, but desires are not. We might add here that Monro does not tell us how desires and aesthetic judgments relate to (2) nor how aesthetic, moral and descriptive judgments relate to (3).

Monro offers no explanation of sense (1). What is not clear is how desires on the one hand and aesthetic judgments and descriptions on the other are universalizable in the same sense. He could mean my own sense (B) above, but then why does he exclude moral judgments? He does offer an explanation for the other senses. In regard to (2) he says, "I do not necessarily prescribe for others my own quasi-aesthetic preference for a given way of life.", and for (3) "if I sincerely accept an ideal, I must be prepared to accept the consequences of others acting according to the same ideal. I suppose Monro means then that I do not have to be prepared to accept the consequences of others having the same desires as I do.

Monro’s objection is that Hare usually means (3), but that universalizability as a purely logical requirement applies only in sense (1). Monro finds Hare’s claim that "because of universalizability, a person who makes a moral judgement commits himself not merely to a meaning-rule, but to a substantial moral principle" puzzling in that

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48 FR, 3.1, p. 30.
he immediately adds that the universalizability thesis is still a logical thesis. But, Monro argues,

...while it is a meaning-rule of the word "moral" (and words like "ought") that we can use it only of principles that are universalizable in all three of the senses above, we use the word "moral" in this sense only because we have already accepted the substantive moral principle that one ought to guide one's life by principles that are universalizable in senses (2) and (3), as well as the purely logical rule that a principle must be universalizable in sense (1). 49

But if this is the case, then Hare has not disposed of the problem of the possibility of moral argument when there is no common moral principle. Senses (2) and (3) embody substantial moral principles in a way that (1) does not. Hare, according to Monro, has made the mistake of supposing a necessary connection between moral judgements and the principle of universalizability. In fact, it is contingent. He has, according to Monro, smuggled in the substantive moral principle that one ought to guide one's life only by universalizable principles. This principle Monro does not regard as obvious. It needs justification, and Hare does not give that justification.

49 D. H. Monro, op. cit., p. 130 f.
50 D. H. Monro, op. cit., p. 133.
Monro is accusing Hare of making the same mistake the naturalist makes when he assumes that the connection between the evaluative meaning of a moral word and its descriptive meaning is non-contingent. He is saying that Hare thinks there is a necessary and logical connection between a principle's being moral and its being universalizable.

Let us consider Monro's objection that Hare has assumed a non-contingent connection between moral judgments and the universalizability principle. If Monro means (A) that the universalizability principle is taken in the moral sense, i.e., that one ought to guide his conduct only by universalizable principles, then indeed Hare has smuggled in a substantival principle. But if he means (B) that there is a non-contingent connection between moral judgments and the universalizability principle in this sense is non-contingently connected with any principle whatsoever, descriptive or evaluative. This is the reason why I have maintained above that it is not in virtue of its descriptive meaning that a moral judgment or principle is universalizable. If in guiding one's conduct it is necessary to use principles at all, or to make judgments, Hare argues, then those principles and judgments must be universalizable. Principles and judgments are the material of reasoning and while this may be a trivial point, when joined with the other elements of reasoning about conduct (prescriptivity, inclination, facts, imagination) it is helpful toward the solution of moral arguments.
But, Monro can counter in the following way:

...it is not true that two men without any "substantial moral principles in common" can have "useful and compelling moral argument" once they have grasped the logic of moral terms. For such argument will be neither useful nor compelling, unless the disputants agree that one ought to guide one's life by (accept as over-riding) only universalizable principles. It is that principle, not the purely verbal point about what most people in our culture call "moral", that gets the argument going: and it is a substantive moral principle.  

Now this seems clearly a misinterpretation of Hare's point. That point is simply that if I can show my opponent in a moral argument that what he is saying entails logically inconsistent statements, then he is forced to abandon what he is saying not because of the moral principle that one ought to guide his conduct only by universalizable principles, but simply because he is being illogical in maintaining his position. If $P$ logically entails $A$ for $S_1$ and there is no relevant moral difference between $S_1$ and $S_2$ and their situations, then $P$ logically entails $A$ for $S_2$. It is then a logical inconsistency for $S_1$ to maintain that $A$ is right for him and wrong for $S_2$. $S_1$, according to Hare's theory, must then abandon his position because of logical inconsistency, not because he is going against some moral principle, even universalizability taken in some moral sense.

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Finally, Monro argues: "If universalizability is taken as the sole defining characteristic of morality, then the question: Why guide our lives by moral principles and not by, e.g., selfish ones? does demand an answer.

First of all, I see no justification for Monro's charge that Hare considers universalizability as the sole defining characteristic of morality. As we shall see later, there are other necessary ingredients to morality, facts, inclinations, imagination, prescriptivity, and further, "It must be pointed out that the absence of even one of these ingredients may render the rest ineffective." For Hare, universalizability is necessary but not a sufficient condition for moral argument.

Secondly, even if one guides his conduct by "selfish" principles, Hare's sense of universalizability still applies. For even if it were plausible that 'one ought always to act so as to please himself', if it can be shown that this entails logically inconsistent statements, then under pain of being inconsistent, one cannot continue to maintain it. Whether or not it can be shown of some particular principle is of no concern to our point here. And that is all that Hare means by his principle of universalizability. As such it is applicable in any science and to any kind of rational argument. Consistency is a property of rationality in applying any sort of principle whatsoever.

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52 Ibid. 53 FR, 6.4, p. 94.
But in getting Hare off one charge (if I am correct) I have raised another, viz., that suggested by D. Emmet. I said above that if P logically entails A for $S_1$ and there is no relevant moral difference between $S_1$ and $S_2$ and their respective situations, then P logically entails A for $S_2$. The objection, which I consider more serious than Monro's, is contained in the following passage.

In fact, the conventions of local mores might be said to be a way of deciding between principles, if the Universalisability criterion itself provides no reason for preferring any one to another, and if any property whatsoever may be selected as the basis for a distinction on which a principle may be based. In application, however, this arbitrariness is avoided because the Universalisability criterion gets conjoined with a notion of relevant likenesses and differences.\(^{54}\)

Miss Emmet's point is that if it is necessary for universalizability that one determine in any two or more instances whether or not there are any morally relevant differences, then the neutrality of the universalizability principle is impugned. The objection, though brought up for a different reason, is fundamentally the same as Monro's. Universalizability can not be a purely formal principle. But since the argument is different, I shall examine it.

\(^{54}\) E. Emmet, *op. cit.*, p. 218, Italics hers.
I shall be concerned in what follows to ask whether this is in effect a neutral and formal criterion of moral judgements; and to suggest that it should be taken as saying, not so much that what has been done on a past occasion should be a binding reason for what ought to be done on similar occasions in the future, as that we must be prepared for any decision to be precedent forming for the future. 55

According to Emmet, universalizability excludes arbitrariness, i.e., inconsistency in application, and principles which include proper names in their reference. But when we say of two instances of application that a particular moral principle applies because there are no morally relevant differences between them, we introduce a morally substantial element, namely, that such and such a property or fact is or is not morally relevant. In order to rule out any arbitrariness in the selection of properties or facts one is willing to count as morally relevant, one must be able to argue about it. Emmet then points out that the precedent forming quality of universalizability imparts to it a 'judicial and legal context. Thus any impartial judgment entails that there be agreement on which qualities are morally relevant and which are not and that in turn necessitates substantial consideration.

The force of Miss Emmet's argument seems to come from the notion of impartiality as a necessary characteristic of universalizability. She goes on to suggest that a characteristic of impartiality as a

56 D. Emmet, op. cit., p. 219.
criterion for universalizability is its connection with the so-called Ideal Observer theory of morality and that if this is so, any solution which is based on universalizability will be partial to moral theories which use the Ideal Observer notion as a criterion for judgment. If I read Miss Emmet correctly she is saying: universalizability entails impartiality which entails a kind of Ideal Observer theory, from which it follows that the universalizability principle cannot be morally neutral.

A similar objection might also arise in the following way. If the universalizability principle entails impartiality, and impartiality entails the principle of distributive justice (one ought to treat all people alike unless there is reason for not doing so), then, if the latter principle is a substantial moral principle, it follows that the universalizability principle cannot be a purely formal principle. Nothing substantial can be deduced from a purely formal principle.

That Hare considers his universalizability principle the same as a principle of impartiality is suggested by what he says in a discussion about the necessity of all factors of moral argument being considered in any moral argument.

For example, impartiality by itself is not enough. If, in becoming impartial, B became also completely dispassionate and apathetic, and moved as little by other people's interests as by his own, then, as we have seen there would be nothing to make him accept or reject one moral principle rather than another. That is why those who
...advocate what have been called 'Ideal Observer Theories' of ethics, sometimes postulate as their imaginary ideal observer not merely an impartial spectator, but an impartially sympathetic spectator.57

Can Hare be got out from under this objection? I believe he can. The impartiality of which he speaks is, as I read him, logical consistency. This, as we noted above, is a non-contingent property of any principle whatsoever in so far as it can admit of several or many particular instances of application. That is what we mean by saying something is a principle. Now it may be the case that the principle of distributive justice also has as one of its properties, impartiality. And, indeed, that may be what we mean by distributive justice. But it does not follow from this that the latter principle is characterized by impartiality in the very same way as the former.

The logical principle of universalizability means nothing more and nothing less than consistency of application for Hare. The moral principle of distributive justice, if it is substantial, means something like the application of goods without prejudice to certain qualities which are considered morally irrelevant. That arguments can and do arise about the application of this latter principle is obvious. One can argue about the moral relevance of black skin, financial status, lack of education, ability to perform, or for that matter, a hairlip.

FR, 6.4, p. 94. Italics mine except the last.
But consistency of application is a logical property, and if one can argue about it at all it must be on the basis of considerations of logic and not of morals or something else.

This distinction between the two kinds of principle suggests that the notion of impartiality in the above objections is taken in two different ways. I suggest the arguments embodied in the objections are invalid because they commit the simple logical fallacy of four terms.

I conclude that if I am right about the sense in which Hare defines universalizability (and applies it), it stands as a necessary but not a sufficient condition for moral argument because it is necessary for any kind of rational argument. That principle alone cannot generate a moral argument, but without it no argument is possible. Just as it is possible to show that some conclusion in any scientific argument or in some other discipline is untenable because in arriving at it one has committed some logical fallacy, so if one can show his opponent in a moral argument that his moral judgment entails a logical inconsistency of some kind, then he is shown to be wrong. This is, of course, not because one agrees or disagrees with another's moral principles in the first place. It is because one contradicts himself by being inconsistent in the application of his judgment.
Therefore, the logical principle of universalizability might be useful in moral argument regardless of the substantial moral principles involved. The fact that two opponents do not agree on what qualities of the situations in question are morally relevant is surely important for moral argument. But that in no way precludes the possibility of argument, for I might be able to catch my opponent from some other angle, say, logical inconsistency. But neither Hare nor I is saying that one can in every instance arrive at a solution to moral disagreement, but only that sometimes one might find a solution in this way. There are other ways.

It is this logical impossibility of combining certain prescriptions with each other that restricts the moral prescriptions that we can accept, and not the impossibility of combining them with certain statements of fact. Facts come into moral arguments in a different way.  

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58 FR, 10,4, pp. 195-196.
Hare's discussion of the problem of making decisions of principle leads to a distinction among ways of teaching principles, which discussion leads in turn to what I shall call the problem of accepting moral principles. If one undertakes the task of teaching the principles, say of good driving, he may go about it in one or both of two ways. He may consider such principles as hypothetical imperatives, having already established certain goals, e.g., safety and comfort. If one wants to be a safe and pleasant driver, then he must learn certain driving practices conducive to these goals. Secondly, he may begin with rules of thumb with the expectation that he will soon discover for himself what results from driving according to those rules. Both methods have their place even for the most intelligent pupils. One obvious general end or principle would be the avoidance of unnecessary inconvenience, but until it is made clear by detailed instruction what actually counts in practice as avoiding unnecessary inconvenience, the general principle remains vacuous. The detailed instruction provides the content for the general principle. If one accepts the general principle that one ought to drive so that

1 LM, 4.4, p. 66.
2 LM, 4.4, p. 67.
unnecessary inconvenience is avoided, then he must accept the de-
tailed prescriptions which tell him how to attain that goal. The
particular ways of driving are justified by the end or goal expressed
in the general principle.

There are, according to Hare, different ways of justifying
particular moral decisions, too. These methods of justification
may all be operative consistently in a man's moral system. In other
words, there is, according to Hare, no unique way of justifying all
decisions. Utilitarian suggest that acts are justified by direct
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reference to a principle. On the other hand some philosophers, e.g.,
Toulmin, suggest that one ought to justify particular acts by noting
the effects of always observing certain principles. Still others
(unnamed by Hare) suggest that effects are irrelevant to the justi-
fication of acts or principles. Hare suggests that each of these
theories is wrong in virtue of a false assumption. "What is wrong
with these theories is not what they say, but their assumption that
they are telling us the only way to justify actions, or decide what
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actions to do." Hare believes that a decision with respect to a
particular act must be based on both effects and principle.

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LM, 4.4, p. 68.
4
Ibid.
The truth is that, if asked to justify as completely as possible any decision, we have to bring in both effects - to give content to the decision - and principles, and the effects in general of observing those principles, and so on, until we have satisfied our inquirer.

To justify a particular moral decision one appeals to a moral principle. To justify my decision to tell this lie to save this innocent person's life, I appeal to the universal moral principle 'One ought to tell lies to save the life of innocent persons'. This process is similar to the method a driving instructor uses, i.e., he justifies a particular way of driving by appealing to an end or goal to which that driving technique leads.

But suppose my questioner asks why I accept the moral principle 'One ought to tell lies to save the life of innocent persons'. Why not accept, he might suggest, the principle 'One ought never to lie'? When he asks this kind of question he is asking for criteria for accepting principles. The problem of what moral principle to accept is the problem of the criteria for accepting one moral principle rather than another. The problem of justification seems, in Hare's account, to refer to the problem of appealing to principles to justify particular moral decisions. But one cannot go on appealing to principles to justify other principles. This process would never end. At one point

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5 LM, 4.4, p. 69.
or another one must decide to accept or reject a principle or set of principles. What the criteria are for accepting a moral principle constitutes the problem we are investigating.

What goes on when one accepts (or rejects) a moral principle? Hare does not think acceptance of principles is an arbitrary decision.

To describe such ultimate decisions as arbitrary, because ex hypothesi, everything which could be used to justify them has already been included in the decision, would be like saying that a complete description of the universe was utterly unfounded, because no further fact could be called upon in corroboration of it. This is not how we use the words 'arbitrary' and 'unfounded'.

The whole context of this discussion in Chapter 4 of The Language of Morals suggests that this is a kind of decision which Hare calls decision of principle. Such decisions are value-judgements and are in effect questions about whether or not one wills that doing some particular act in particular circumstances should become a universal law. To ask this kind of question is to ask about an attitude; "... the same question could be put in other words by asking 'What attitude shall I adopt and recommend towards doing A in such circumstances?'; for 'attitude', if it means anything, means a principle of action."

For Hare, the whole enterprise of living ethically is a proper balance between (a) principles learned from childhood, and (b)}

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6 Ibid. 7 LM, 4.4, p. 70.
decisions made by the individual concerning those principles. The suggestion that one rely on (a) to the exclusion of (b) or vice versa gives rise to what Hare has called the objectivist vs. subjectivist controversy.

The moral words, of which we may take 'ought' as an example, reflect in their logical behavior this double nature of moral instruction. The sentences in which they appear are normally the expression of decisions of principle - and it is easy to let the decisions get separated in our discussion of the subject, from the principles. This is the source of the controversy between the 'objectivists', as intuitionists sometimes call themselves, and the 'subjectivists', as they often call their opponents.  

Hare suggests that if one pays close attention to the logical behavior of moral words, he can discover that the objectivist-subjectivist controversy is partly misconceived. To use a moral proposition containing the word 'ought' is to appeal to a principle. For example, if one says that he ought not tell this particular lie, he is appealing to a principle, 'one ought not to tell lies (at least of this particular sort)'. The principle verifies (sic) the act, but the principle is accepted (or rejected) by a decision (of principle). Hare seems to mean that the principle justifies the particular decision to act or not act in some particular way, but the principle can not be justified. It can only be accepted by a decision of principle.

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8 LM, 4.7, p. 77.   9 LM, 4.7, p. 78.
So far in Hare's discussion, there is no suggestion of an answer
to our problem of just how one goes about making these decisions about
principles. There is only a statement that we do accept or reject the
principle or set of principles by a decision which cannot be taught.

One move that might prove helpful towards understanding how Hare
intends to solve the problem of deciding to accept or reject a moral
principle would be to see what he means by assenting to an imperative.
If Hare holds that value-judgements (which he has identified with
decisions of principle) are a species of prescriptive language similar
to imperatives then it is at least plausible that accepting a moral
principle is like assenting to an imperative.

One common element in statements and commands is that of 'nod-
ding' a sentence. One 'nods' or assents to a sentence when he says
and means it, i.e., does not merely mention it or use it within in-
verted commas. To assent to an indicative statement is to believe that
it is true. To assent to a second person command addressed to our-
selves is to resolve to do what the speaker has commanded us to do.
Further, if now is the appropriate time for doing what is commanded,
we are assenting to the command if and only if we do it. Hare later

10 LM, 1.1, p. 3.
admits that there are degrees of assent to a command and that not all
degrees of assent involve doing what is commanded. We shall dis­
cuss the question of assent to commands and to moral principles in
the next chapter. Meanwhile, we shall let the above account suffice
for what Hare means by assenting to a command, keeping in mind the
unanalyzed restriction about degrees of assent. In first person com-
mands, to affirm and to assent is to do one and the same thing. In
third person commands, to assent is to join in affirming.

Hare also believes that moral value-judgments, since they al­
ways have a bearing on our own way of acting, are such that if we
fully accept them, we thereby conform to them. This he considers a
tautology.

...normally the moral judgements that we make and hold
to, deeply affect the lives of our neighbours; and this
in itself is enough to explain the peculiar place that
we assign to them. If we add to this the logical point
...that moral judgements always have a possible bearing
on our own conduct, in that we cannot in the fullest sense
accept them without conforming to them...then no further
explanation is needed of the special status of morals.
This special status does not require a special logic to
back it up.16

14 LM, 11.2, p. 169
15 LM, 2.2, p. 20.
In Freedom and Reason he says, "...let us insist that a man is not to be said to accept a moral principle unless he is making a serious attempt to use it in guiding his particular moral judgements and thus his actions."

In a discussion about 'Ought and Imperatives' Hare distinguishes various ways of making decisions of principle in terms of kinds of assent to 'ought'-sentences. Such a sentence as 'I ought to do x' may be one or a combination of the following. It may be (1) a statement of sociological fact. Here the sentence means that act x is required if I am to conform to a standard which people generally accept. Or it may be (2) a statement of psychological fact. In this sense 'I ought to do x' means 'I have a feeling that I ought to do x'. It may be (3) a value-judgement. When (3) corresponds with (1) and (2) one does not have to consider which one or more of these three kinds of utterances he is making. Hare's contention is that any utterance which is alleged to be a value-judgement, but not entailing an imperative will be (1) or (2) or both, but not (3). The test as to whether one is using the utterance 'I ought to do x' as a value-judgement is the following question: "Does he or does he not recognize that if he assents to the judgement, he must also assent to the command, 'Let me do x'?" In terms of logic this simply means that if x entails y and I assent to x, then I must assent to y.

FR, 3.7, p. 47, Italics his.
To summarize Hare's position thus far, we can say that to accept a moral principle 'I ought to do x' one must also assent to (accept) the singular prescription 'Let me do x'. If I do not assent to 'Let me do x', i.e., act accordingly when the circumstances are appropriate, then I cannot accept the moral judgement 'I ought to do x'. And this is all a matter of strict deductive logic. If the circumstances are appropriate and one does not in fact act upon it, then one cannot, at least in the fullest sense, be said to be assenting to the singular prescription. Therefore he cannot be said to accept the moral judgement. I believe that this view leads to serious problems about the explanation of moral weakness. I shall discuss these problems in the next chapter.

Granting for a moment that Hare is correct about the logical structure of accepting moral principles, we are now faced with the problem of the criteria for accepting or rejecting moral principles. How does one decide whether or not to accept some moral principle? In setting up this problem we noted that Hare does not believe acceptance or rejection of moral principles is arbitrary. One has to:

decide whether to accept that way of life or not; if he accepts it, then we can proceed to justify the decisions that are based upon it; if he does not accept it, then let him accept some other and try to live by it. ¹¹

¹⁹ ¹⁹ FR, 6.2, p. 88.
²⁰ ²⁰ See page 139 above.
²¹ ²¹ LM, 4.4, p. 69.
But Hare believes that decisions of this sort cannot be taught. What then are the criteria for accepting moral principles? If these decisions are not arbitrary, there must be a reasonable way of making them. What is at issue is the place of reasoning in making moral decisions.

The Argument

We now turn to Chapter 6 of *Freedom and Reason* for an account of Hare's solution to the problem of the criteria for accepting or rejecting moral principles. In that chapter he examines the logical structure of moral argument. The non-naturalist is faced with a problem of explaining the possibility of moral argument, for he rejects the suggestion that moral conclusions can be entailed by non-moral premises. Hare thinks that the suggestion some non-naturalists have made, that there is some kind of non-deductive inference between non-moral premises and moral conclusions is fraught with too many difficulties to be plausible. But that is not, according to Hare, the only other possibility. He cites a parallel from the philosophy of science. Professor Popper has argued that in science all inferences are deductive, from the truth of certain observations to the falsity of an hypothesis. Hare wants to suggest that moral reasoning has

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22 *FR*, 6.1, p. 87. This is implied by his belief that some non-naturalists have considered an erotetic logic as the only other possibility.

similar features. "What we are doing in moral reasoning is to look for moral judgements and moral principles which, when we have considered their logical consequence and the facts of the case, we can still accept." Using this method, ethics is then relevant and neutral to the solution of moral problems just as mathematics is to scientific problems and the rules of a game are to the players.

Hare then suggests two rules of moral reasoning, (1) prescriptivity, and (2) universalizability. "If, when we consider some proposed action, we find that when universalized, it yields prescriptions which we cannot accept, we reject this action as a solution to our moral problem - if we cannot universalize the prescription, it cannot become an 'ought'."

In order to clarify the structure of moral argument, Hare gives a simple illustration. Since this illustration is vitally important for Hare's whole theory, I shall quote it in its entirety.

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24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 FR, 6.2, p. 89.
27 See chapters III and IV for more extended discussion of these.
28 FR, 6.2, p. 90.
A owes money to B, and B owes money to C, and it is the
law that creditors may exact their debts by putting
their debtors into prison. B asks himself, 'Can I say that
I ought to take this measure against A in order to make him
pay?' He is no doubt inclined to do this, or wants to do
it. Therefore, if there were no question of universalizing
his prescriptions, he would assent readily to the singular
prescription 'Let me put A into prison' (4,3). But when he
seeks to turn this prescription into a moral judgement, and
say, 'I ought to put A into prison because he will not pay
me what he owes', he reflects that this would involve
accepting the principle 'Anyone who is in my position ought
to put his debtor into prison if he does not pay'. But then
he reflects that C is in the same position of unpaid credi-
tor with regard to himself (B), and that the cases are other-
wise identical; and that if anyone in this position ought to
put his debtors into prison, then so ought C to put him (B)
into prison. And to accept the moral prescription 'C ought
to put me into prison' would commit him (since, as we have
seen, he must be using the word 'ought' prescriptively) to
accepting the singular prescription 'Let C put me into pris-
on; and this he is not ready to accept. But if he is not,
then neither can he accept the original judgement that he
(B) ought to put A into prison for debt. Notice that the
whole of this argument would break down if 'ought' were
not being used both universalizably and prescriptively; for
if it were not being used prescriptively, the step from 'C
ought to put me into prison' to 'Let C put me into prison'
would not be valid. 29

Before we examine this argument in detail, it is important to
note that Hare includes the following elements as necessary conditions
for engaging in moral argument. (1) The facts of the case should be
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clear. (2) The logical framework of prescriptivity and universaliz-
ability must be followed correctly. (3) One must take note of certain
inclinations he has to accept or reject singular prescriptions. (4) He

30 FR, 6.3, pp. 92-93.
must be able to use his imagination in the following way. If B in the above illustration does not in fact stand in the same relation to C as A does to him (B), he can imagine himself in that relation.

I shall now try to reformulate the argument in propositional form so that its logical structure can be exhibited more clearly. I suggest that the following formulation is accurate.

(1) If B accepts that 'B ought to put A into prison', then B must accept the principle 'Anyone who is in his (B's) position ought to put his debtor into prison if he does not pay.'

(2) But C is in the same position regarding B as B is regarding A.

(3) Therefore, B must accept the singular moral judgement 'C ought to put B into prison.'

(4) Therefore, B must accept the singular prescription 'Let C put him (B) into prison'.

(5) But B cannot accept 'Let C put him (B) into prison'.

(6) Therefore, B cannot accept 'B ought to put A into prison'.

In order to test the argument Hare proposes several moves that B might make to escape the conclusion.

One could escape the conclusion by using the moral words in a different way from that on which the argument relied. One might,
for example, use the word 'ought' in such a way that it is neither prescriptive nor universalizable. 'Ought' in this sense would be used non-evaluatively as simply expressing a moral convention accepted, say, by a certain class of people, but not by the speaker.

Or to escape the conclusion, one might also be using 'ought' prescriptively, but not universalizably. Here the speaker may agree that A ought to be put into prison (singular moral judgement) but may not agree to discuss some universal moral principle about what ought to be done in all cases of a similar sort. This move actually eliminates the possibility of B's morally justifying his putting A into prison and thus he resigns from the argument.

One may be using 'ought' in a way that is not prescriptive. But then the moral principle 'One ought to put debtors into prison' does not entail the singular moral judgement 'I ought to put A into prison' and the latter does not entail the singular prescription 'Let me put A into prison'. In fact, the moral principle becomes irrelevant to the choice of what course of action to take. The disagreement in the argument would be verbal, not moral.

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33 Cf. also LM, 11.1, p. 164.
34 FR, 6.5, p. 99.
35 Ibid.
B could be using the word 'ought' in the same way, i.e., to express a universalizable prescription, but at the same time simply refuse to make any moral judgement at all. But then either B practices this maneuver of moral indifference in all cases or only sometimes. If all the time, he may do one of three things. He may (a) refrain altogether from making moral judgements, or makes only judgements of indifference, or (b) he makes moral judgements like everyone else except when they are contrary to his own inclinations, or (c) he does this about some of his own actions, but not all, and makes moral judgements in the usual way about others. In the (a) case he simply refuses to engage in argument. In the (b) and (c) cases we can demand a basis for the distinctions he makes (a particular application of the universalizability principle).

Still another maneuver B might make is to accept the conclusion that C ought to put him into prison as well. This he might accept on utilitarian grounds, i.e., the effects of not being able to enforce contracts would be far more devastating than his own inconvenience. Or he might accept it on the grounds of an ideal, say abstract justice.

Finally, he might be able to produce new facts that would be morally relevant and suggestive of a difference of treatment for

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36 FR, 6.6, p. 100.
37 FR, 6.7, pp. 103-104.
himself and A. But then one would have to face the issue of which facts are morally relevant.

From the above discussion I believe that the following conclusion is correct. Hare believes that one cannot accept a rule or moral principle that entails a singular prescription to which he has an overriding aversion when applied to himself in another role in the case, e.g., when he is the debtor instead of the creditor. The reason for this is the logic of the word 'ought'. If one cannot assent to the singular prescription, he cannot accept the general ought-rule or principle that entails it when conjoined with the known (or imagined) facts of the case. To do so would be to contradict himself. If 'One ought to put debtors in prison' when hypothetically applied to himself in all the roles, e.g., creditor, debtor, entails 'Let me put A into prison' and 'Let A put me into prison', and I cannot assent to both of the singular prescriptions, then I cannot accept the moral principle either. To accept the moral principle I must be able to assent to all the singular prescriptions it entails. But I cannot assent to 'Let A put me into prison'. Therefore I cannot accept the moral principle 'One ought to put debtors into prison'.

Hare backs his conclusion by referring to what he calls the parallel case of belief.

FR, 6.8, pp. 106-107.
The analogy is between two relations: the relations between, in both cases, the 'mental state' of these men and what they say. If I believe that there is a cat on the mat I cannot sincerely say that there is not; and if I want not to be put into prison more that I want anything else, I cannot sincerely say 'Let me be put into prison'. When, therefore, I said above 'His inclinations being what they are, he cannot assent sincerely to a certain singular prescription', I was making an analytic statement (although the 'cannot' is not a logical 'cannot'); for if he were to assent sincerely to the prescription, that would entail ex vi terminorum that his inclinations had changed - in the very same way that it is analytically true that, if the other man were to say sincerely that there was a cat on the mat, when before he had sincerely denied this, he must have changed his belief.}

If we say 'His inclinations being what they are, he cannot assent (accept) the singular prescription' we are making an analytic statement. But if we say simply 'He cannot accept the singular prescription' we are not making an analytic statement. In the latter statement we may be reporting on a psychological fact.

I shall now return to the argument in order to examine it more closely. There are a number of presuppositions to the argument. It is important to read the argument with these presuppositions in mind. I suggest that they are the following: (Ap) B has some kind of aversion or over-riding disinclination to being put into prison by C. (Cp) Prescriptivity, i.e., universal moral principles imply singular

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39 FR, 6.9, p. 110-111.
40 FR, 6.9, p. 111. Cf. also LM, 3.3.
moral judgements and the latter imply singular prescriptions. (Dp)
Universalizability, i.e., singular moral judgements imply universal
moral principles. (Ep) B wants to test whether or not he ought to
put A into prison. His method is similar to that of a scientist who
wants to test an hypothesis. The scientist looks for observable data
that might falsify the hypothesis. Similarly, B will look for singu-
lar prescriptions which he cannot accept and if he finds that there
is such a singular prescription entailed by the singular moral judg-
ment in question, he must reject the moral judgement. Finally, it
will be remembered that Hare's claim is that the only inferences
which take place in moral reasoning are deductive.

Hare's Justification of the Argument

Premiss (1) is hypothetical. The consequent, "B must accept
the principle 'Anyone who is in his (B's) position ought to put his
debtor into prison'" follows from the antecedent "B accepts that 'B
ought to put A into prison'" by (Dp).

Premiss (2), "But C is in the same position regarding B as B
is regarding A" is factual (or at least imaginable).

Premiss (3), "Therefore B must accept the singular moral judg-
ment 'C ought to put B into prison', follows from the consequent of
premiss (1) and premiss (2) by (Cp).

FR, 6.2, p. 88.
Premiss (4), "Therefore B must accept the singular prescription, "Let C put him (B) into prison", follows from (3) by (Cp).

Premiss (5), "But B cannot accept 'Let C put him (B) into prison'" is true by (Ap).

The conclusion (6), "Therefore B cannot accept 'B ought to put A into prison'" follows by a series of Modus Tollens: (5) entails the denial of (3); the denial of (3) entails the denial of the consequent of (1); the denial of the consequent of (1) entails the denial of the antecedent of (1), all by (Cp).

So far the argument seems quite straightforward, given the stated presuppositions. But there are serious difficulties hidden both in the presuppositions and the argument itself. I shall now turn to these problems.

Singular Prescriptions

What is a singular prescription? What goes on when one says (or thinks) 'Let me do x'? Hare seems to think 'Let me do x' is a kind of verbal expression of an action in circumstances where that action is appropriate.

The answer to the question 'What shall I do?' is not normally expressed in words when the agent answers it, though it is (in the imperative) when someone else answers it by way of instruction, advice, etc. Instead, the agent just acts (hence Aristotle's doctrine that the conclusion of a practical syllogism is an action). But in order to discuss, metalinguistically, the logic of the answer that the agent gives (without which it is
impossible to give a satisfactory account of moral reasoning) we shall require an expression in words of what he leaves unuttered. I shall later use for this purpose the form 'Let me do x' though this has also other and commoner uses.\(^42\)

Hare later calls 'Let me do x' a singular prescription. On this interpretation it would seem that to say that something is a singular prescription is to say (partially) that it is some kind of action, or better, the linguistic expression of an action. The action does not seem to be the mere uttering of words or even thinking them, but doing x itself in the appropriate circumstances.

But if this is correct, then it seems doubtful that what Hare calls singular prescriptions are prescriptions at all. Note that what Hare is talking about is not the "metalinguistic expression" but what that expresses - an action. This seems clear from the above quotation. But prescribing is obviously not the same thing as doing what is prescribed, though there is something (uttering or thinking words) that one is doing when he is prescribing. It does not follow from the logic of 'prescribing' that the person to whom a prescription is issued acts accordingly.

It might be countered that this objection stands only if one is talking about second and third person prescriptions. It is obvious

\(^{42}\) FR, 4.3, pp. 54-55.

\(^{43}\) FR, 6.3, p. 91.
that '(You) do x' and 'Let Jones do x' do not entail that some action will take place on your part or on Jones's part. But if I say or think 'Let me do x' and the circumstances for my doing x are appropriate, then my not doing x would be evidence that I am either insincere or do not understand the words in the expression 'Let me do x'.

Let us grant the counter-objection. What it shows is that first person singular prescriptions differ from both second and third person prescriptions in that the former entail that an action (other than saying or thinking words) follows, and the latter do not. We can now ask whether or not what Hare calls a singular prescription is a prescription at all. Does it make sense to say that one can prescribe for oneself? It is clear that when we use the term 'prescription' of some expression uttered or thought about ourselves, we are using it in a significantly different way from its use when talking about second and third person prescriptions. In the case of the first person singular prescription we are saying something about the mental attitude of ourself. For example, if I say or think 'Let me open the door' I am saying or thinking that I want the door open, and if the circumstances are appropriate, I am proceeding to carry out what I want. One could, of course, use the expression in the sense of requesting a permission. Then, 'Let me open the door' means 'Allow me to open the door'. But this is not the sense Hare is discussing. And if I say that S said

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FR, 4.3, p. 55.
or thought 'Let me do x' I seem to be saying (partially) that S has a resolve to do x if he can. I am saying that S has a certain favorable state of mind about doing x.

In the early parts of The Language of Morals Hare calls the kinds of expression we are discussing ('Let me do x') first person commands, and indeed, say they are "closely similar to" resolves. But he does not tell us how first person commands differ from resolves, if they differ. "In the case of first-person commands ('Let me do so and so') and resolves ('I will do so and so'), which are closely similar to one another, affirmation and assent are identical." I suppose one could take 'I will do so and so' as a prediction about some future action. Then there would be a distinction between resolves and first person commands in that the latter are about the present and the former about the future. But I am using 'resolve' in the sense of 'I am willing to do so and so'.

If so-called singular prescriptions are reducible to statements about the mind of the speaker (that he has a favorable attitude towards doing x) then they are not prescriptions at all. We have already seen that prescriptions are never statements about the mind of the speaker. Rather 'Let me do x' is a kind of decision about an act to be done whenever the circumstances for doing it are

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45 LM, 2.3, p. 20.
46 I shall continue to call 'Let me do x' and similar expressions singular prescriptions.
47 See Chapter I above.
appropriate. It is a resolution to do x in the proper circumstances. But if I am right about singular prescriptions, then they are not entailed by moral judgments. Neither 'one ought to do x' nor 'I ought to do x' implies a resolution or decision to do x. People often decide to do what they ought not do. The only way to escape this conclusion, if I am right in my analysis of singular prescriptions, is to maintain that one always resolves or decides to do what he ought to do. But then there are serious problems about moral weakness, problems we shall have to take up in the next chapter.

We are now in the position to ask another important question bearing on the argument in Chapter Six of Freedom and Reason: What does it mean to accept (assent to) what we have been calling singular prescriptions? It will be remembered that Hare characterizes one difference between statements and commands in the following way. To assent to the former involves believing something while assenting (sincerely) to the latter involves doing something if the circumstances are appropriate and it is in our physical and psychological power to do it. But if singular prescriptions of the form 'Let me do x' are expressions of a decision or resolution to do x in the appropriate circumstances, if they are expressions of a state of mind, what could it mean to accept them? Accepting (assenting to) a state

LM, 2.2, p. 20.
of mind about some act x implies (but is not) doing x if the circumstances are right. If this is correct, then "I cannot accept 'Let me do x'" means "I cannot resolve to do x".

Moral Judgments

'I ought to do x' is a singular moral judgment. By (Dp), the universalizability principle, 'I ought to do x' implies the universal moral principle 'One ought to do x'. Just what is the function of a moral judgment? On Hare's theory that moral judgments (both universal and particular) are answers to a practical question 'What ought I do?', they are action-guiding principles for moral situations; "the function of moral principles is to guide conduct."

If moral principles are for guiding conduct, then what does it mean to accept a moral principle? We have already seen that Hare believes that since moral principles always have a bearing on our own way of acting, to say that we fully accept them is to say that we are, in fact, conforming to them in the appropriate circumstances. We also have seen that Hare believes a man cannot be said to be accepting a moral principle unless he is making a serious attempt to use it in guiding his particular moral judgements and thus his actions. Of these two citations, the first is taken from The Language of Morals.

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LM, 1.1, p. 1
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See above, p. 141
51
See above, p. 143
and the second from Freedom and Reason. The former tells us that we cannot be fully accepting a moral principle unless we are conforming to it by acting accordingly when the circumstances are fit. The latter tells us that accepting a moral principle is making a serious attempt to use it as action-guiding. The former tells us that if one does not in fact conform to a moral principle, he cannot (logically) be said to accept it fully. But the view upheld in Freedom and Reason suggests that acceptance of a moral principle implies that one is making a serious attempt to use it. I am not sure that one can place emphasis on the difference in the formulation of the two implications of accepting moral principles. From all that has been noted about how Hare believes singular moral judgments entail singular prescriptions I am inclined to believe that Hare would consider them as essentially identical formulations. Whether or not Hare has modified his earlier view is not, however, the issue. If we assume a difference and that the latter view is more accurate, we can note that making serious attempts to do something does not always imply success in doing it. To attempt is not always to succeed. The suggestion that the earlier view needs modification in the above manner leads to the suggestion that accepting moral principles does not entail decisions to act in accord with them in every relevant instance. In general, we may say that to accept a moral principle is to believe that it is right that I do what it prescribes and that it is wrong if I am able but do not do what it prescribes.
The Entailment Relation

We are now in a position to examine four slightly different suggestions about entailment relations between moral judgments and singular prescriptions. It is possible to read Hare's argument in Chapter Six in any one of the following ways.

ER1: 'I ought to do x' entails 'Let me do x'.
ER2: 'I ought to do x' entails "I accept 'Let me do x'".
ER3: "I accept 'I ought to do x'" entails 'Let me do x'.
ER4: "I accept 'I ought to do x'" entails "I accept 'Let me do x'".

Are all or any of these really entailment relations? If I am correct in my analysis of singular prescriptions, then I suggest that none of the suggested entailment relations are actually entailment relations. And if that is correct, then Hare's argument in Chapter Six is invalid.

ER 1 is clearly not an entailment relation since I may not even know that I ought to do x. Saying that ER 1 is an entailment relation is like saying I have a thought about closing the door if there is someone out of the range of my hearing who has ordered me (orally) to close the door. This is so even if I happen (as a matter of fact) to be willing to close the door if ordered to do so. Therefore the same objection tells against ER 2. The difference between
ER 1 and ER 2 is that the former proposition says that there is, as a matter of fact, in my mind a resolution to do x because there is an obligation to do x; the latter proposition says I want to do x because there is an obligation to do x. In the former, the thought about resolving to do x just comes to me. In the latter I assent to it. ER 3 seems to suggest that if I am making a serious attempt to use the moral judgment as action-guiding for my conduct, there is, as a matter of fact, a thought in my mind about doing x if and when the circumstances are appropriate. But there is nothing inconsistent in having a thought or state of mind that is at some particular time unfavorable towards doing what I think I ought to do. ER 4 is the most plausible of the four suggestions. The most favorable reading of Hare's argument suggests that this is what he means by the requirement of prescriptivity. For if it follows from "I accept 'I ought to do x'" that "I accept 'Let me do x'", then if I cannot accept 'Let me do x', if follows that I cannot accept 'I ought to do x'. But if accepting a moral principle is only making a serious attempt to use it, then deciding to do x in some particular instance may not follow. It may be the particular instance in which my serious attempt fails. The reason why it fails is irrelevant to the present point, though it may be very important for our discussion of moral weakness. If ER 4 is actually an entailment relation then it must be true that I always do or decide to do what I think I ought. I shall suggest in the next
chapter that this famous philosophical doctrine is untenable. I believe I am now in a position to conclude that unless there is some other suggestion about how moral judgments entail singular prescriptions, they do not do so.

We now return to the argument of Chapter Six. There, it will be remembered, Hare maintained that moral judgments imply (logically) singular prescriptions. Thus I accept 'I ought to do x' logically implies that I accept 'Let me do x'. But if the above analysis is correct moral judgments do not logically imply singular prescriptions. Therefore the step from (5) to (6) and the step from (3) to (4) in the argument are both invalid.

One of the ways Hare suggested someone might attempt to escape the conclusion of his argument was the following: He may be using 'ought' in a way that is not prescriptive. But the price one pays in not using 'ought' prescriptively is that one's moral principles are then completely irrelevant to the choice of what course of action to take.

It could be objected that I have taken this way out and thus must pay the price suggested. But this is not so. I have not denied that moral judgments prescribe what courses of action one should take.

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See above, p. 149
in relevant circumstances. I have denied only that there is a
logical implication between moral judgments and singular prescrip-
tions. I have denied the following proposition: if I cannot accept
'Let me do x' then I cannot accept 'I ought to do x'. It may be
that there is some kind of relation other than entailment between
moral judgments and singular prescriptions. If there is, then we
can still use 'ought' prescriptively, i.e., maintain that moral
judgments do prescribe courses of action. I shall maintain in the
next chapter that holding that the relation is one of logical im-
plication makes it impossible to account for moral weakness.
CHAPTER VI

MORAL WEAKNESS

In the preceding chapter we noticed that it is a very common thing for people to do things that are contrary to their own moral principles. All religions have a concept of sin which entails that sometimes one knowingly and willingly does what he ought not do, or refrains from doing what he ought. The 'ought' in these far from isolated cases of moral failure is a moral 'ought' in the fullest sense of the word, i.e., the person who is guilty of moral failure is one who does not, nor did he in that action, intend to change the moral principles which he has, up to the time of his failure, and even after it, accepted for himself. He clearly recognizes that he has gone wrong, and furthermore, realizes at the moment of his failure that he was committing an act that is inconsistent with those accepted principles.

It is also a common conviction that if one has been really guilty of some immoral action, then he could have avoided the action at the time he committed it. One does not normally accuse oneself or someone else of guilt if in fact he could not have foreseen and could not have avoided the immoral action. For this reason, one who has broken some
law may plead temporary insanity before a judge in order to show that he should not be held responsible for the infraction. He pleads that his insanity prevented him from doing what he ought to have done. This seems to be a case of 'ought but can't'. The very existence of such a plea in our courts seems to be prima facie evidence that we do sometimes think a person does what he ought not have done and that it was within his power not to so act. For the insanity plea suggests a relevant difference between the action of the man who knowingly broke the law and the action of the man who could not have avoided breaking it by reason of temporary or permanent insanity.

The moral philosopher must, in the face of this common belief about moral actions, account in his meta-ethical theories for the possibility of the failure of a man who breaks his moral principles. He must say what moral weakness is. In this chapter I shall examine Hare's explanation of the phenomenon of moral weakness or backsliding. I shall raise some serious objections to his account.

Hare's Account

Hare begins his detailed discussion of the problem of moral weakness with an objection.

This is the objection that, if moral judgements were prescriptive, then it would be impossible to accept some moral judgement and yet act contrary to it. But, it is maintained (in Hume's words), 'tis one
thing to know virtue, and another to conform the will to it; people are constantly doing what they think they ought not to be doing; therefore prescriptivism must be wrong.\(^1\)

Nothing follows about action from a description of facts. It is easily conceivable therefore, on descriptivist grounds, that one can assent to a moral judgement and fail to act on it. Logically, he does not have to abandon the principle in order to remain sincere. 'Ought' does not imply 'can' for the descriptivist and for that reason, Hare believes the descriptivist does not have the problem of explaining moral weakness.

The situation is quite different for the prescriptivist. On Hare's theory, since moral judgements are prescriptions entailing singular prescriptions one cannot assent to a moral judgment and, if circumstances are appropriate, not assent to the singular prescription which the moral judgment entails. And for Hare, as we have seen, assenting to a singular prescription implies doing it in the appropriate circumstances. The prescriptivist thus finds himself squarely faced with the problem of explaining the common experience of backsliding. This is difficult for he maintains that assenting to a moral judgment entails doing what that moral judgment prescribes. Hare describes this problem in terms a case of 'ought but can't'.

\(^1\) FR, 5.1, p. 67.
\(^2\) Ibid.
\(^3\) Ibid.
\(^4\) Cf. III and V above.
Now we shall see that typical cases of 'moral weakness' are cases where a man cannot do what he thinks he ought; but the 'cannot' here requires very careful examination, since in other senses such a man very well can do what he ought. Nevertheless, in discussing moral weakness we have to deal with a special case of 'ought but can't'; and what was said earlier about 'ought but can't' in general will be relevant.

Earlier Hare suggested that "it is because they are prescriptive that moral words possess that property which is summed up, perhaps over-crudely, in the slogan "'Ought' implies 'can'". But, Hare goes on to say, it is not universally true that 'ought' implies 'can'. There are ways that the 'ought' can be weakened so that it no longer retains its full prescriptive force. For example if one says 'I ought to do x' and means merely that there is a sociological convention about doing x, then it is clear that the existence of such a convention does not imply that I can do what the convention prescribes. Or I may take the universal moral principle 'One ought to do x' as prescriptive for most people or for all except myself. The sense of 'imply' in 'ought implies can' is not that of logical implication. The implication is a weaker one - that of thinking that the practical question 'What shall I do?' arises. This same practical question arises with ordinary imperatives, decisions and moral judgments alike.

But, Hare goes on, without 'can' a practical question cannot arise.

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4 FR, 5.1, p. 68. Italics his.
5 FR, Chapter four.
6 FR, 4.1, p. 51.
To say that a question arises means any one of several things. It means (1) that the answer is not already obvious or known. Or (2) it means that the question is actually raised either out loud, in the mind, or it is merely wondered about. Or again (3) it means that the question could be raised significantly or reasonably.

But if a description of an action is such as to rule out a practical question "Shall I?", then it will also rule out the corresponding universally prescriptive "Ought I?" question.

With these suggestions about how 'ought' implies 'can' Hare goes on to explain that one reason why there is a problem of moral weakness is the universalizability of moral judgements. We do not have any difficulty deciding what we want to do, for wanting, unlike doing what we ought, is not universalizable. If there is anything I want to do I do not have to take into consideration the possibility that other persons in the same circumstances as I, might want not to do what I want to do. But if there is something that I think I ought to do, I am, according to Hare, prescribing that anyone else in relevantly similar circumstances, ought also to do it. If I am correct in my interpretation of Hare, he is suggesting that the greater

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7 FR, 5.4, p. 71.
8 For problems about this view, confer Chapter IV above.
9 FR, 5.4, p. 71.
responsibility involved in deciding what one ought to do leads to the
conflict between whether to do act x or not to do x. For it may be
that doing x now is to my benefit and at another time, when I happen
to be in a different role in the same relevant circumstances, doing x
is not in my interests.

In making up my mind what I most want to do I have
to consult only my own desires. But in making up
my mind what I ought to do I have to consider more
than this; I have to ask myself 'What maxim (to use Kant's
term) can I accept as of universal application in cases
like this, whether or not I play the part in the situa-
tion which I am playing now?'

On the other hand, one might simply refuse to pay attention to
the prescriptiveness of moral principles. In that case it would be
relatively easy to say 'I ought to do x' and then not do x since I
would not be regarding the 'ought' as prescriptive for me. I would
then be regarding the 'ought' as indicative only of some accepted
sociological convention about morals or as prescriptive for others,
but not for me. "So difficult is it in fact - so great is the strain
between prescriptivity and universalizability in certain situations -
that something has to give; and this is the explanation of the
phenomenon of moral weakness." Moral words like 'ought', since
they have (in their moral uses) both descriptive and prescriptive

10 FR, 5.4, p. 72. Italics his.
11 FR, 5.5, p. 73.
meaning, can be used in such a way that one of these meanings is
attended to while the other is ignored. Thus one can consider an
'ought'-principle as having only descriptive meaning. When this
happens 'ought' does not imply 'can'.

We see, therefore, that the typical case of moral
weakness as opposed to that of hypocrisy, is a
case of 'ought but can't'. We have therefore to
put it in its place within the general account of
'ought but can't' given above (4.1). What is it
that distinguishes 'psychological' impossibility from
'physical', and this kind of 'psychological' impos-
sibility from others? And what happens to 'ought'
in all these cases?

Hare's answer is that in the case of 'physical' impossibility
the 'ought' is withdrawn altogether as inconsistent with the admission
of impossibility of acting. But in the case of real moral weakness
the 'ought' is not withdrawn altogether, but is only down-graded so
as not to carry its full prescriptive force.

Moral weakness, for Hare, is "the tendency not to do ourselves
something which in general we commend, or to do something which in
genral we condemn." It implies the presence of some obstacle
which prevents the moral judgment from being prescriptive for an in-
dividual at some given time.

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12 Cf. Chapter III above.
13 FR, 5.3, p. 80.
14 Ibid.
15 FR, 5.4, p. 72.
As we have seen, it will not do to quote cases in which people cannot bring themselves to do what they think they ought to do. The fact that in such cases it is often true that a man is physically in a position, and strong, knowledgeable, and skillful enough etc., to do what he thinks he ought, is irrelevant. For whether or not the psychological inability down-grades the 'ought', as I have suggested, it certainly makes it impossible to act on any prescription that may survive, and so explains how prescriptivity, if it survives, is still compatible with disobedience. We may remark that the fact that 'physical' possibility may be unimpaired is the cause of a common initial reluctance to accept the account of the matter which I have given. It cannot be said, it is objected, that the morally weak person cannot do what he thinks he ought, because he is obviously as able as the rest of us. But 'able' here refers only to 'physical ability. In a deeper sense the man cannot do the act. This is clearest in cases of compulsive neuroses in which the 'psychological' impossibility comes close to 'physical'; but it holds also in more normal cases of weakness of will, as the very word 'weakness' indicates.16

Further, if there is no obstacle and a man does what he says he ought not to do, he is guilty of simple hypocrisy, i.e., he does not really mean what he says. On this view, therefore, the man who fails morally is either (1) faced with some kind of psychological obstacle which is impossible for him to overcome, or (2) he is insincere in that he only appears to hold the action that he committed is wrong.

To illustrate Hare's account of moral weakness I shall imagine a concrete situation and attempt to analyze an instance of moral

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16 FR, 5.9, p. 82. Italics his.
17 FR, 5.9, pp. 82-83.
failure as I believe Hare would. Let us say that A is a harpsichord player much dedicated to the art of harpsichording. Unfortunately he is not of sufficient means to buy the expensive instrument. He decides that the company for whom he works would not miss a little money each week. Still, A muses, "I ought not steal. But if I do not take the money, I can not do what I want to do more than anything else, i.e., satisfy my intense desire to play the harpsichord every night." Even though A would not consider allowing anyone else to do the same thing if he (A) had stock in the company, and even though he believes that what he plans to do is inconsistent with the principle 'One ought not to steal', which principle he accepts in general, he looks on his proposed action as being the best for him at this time. He wants to do it more than he wants not to do it.

In this illustration the 'psychological' obstacle is A's intense desire to play the harpsichord. Having this desire makes it impossible for A not to steal if it is in his power to do so. The 'ought', on Hare's account, in the generally accepted moral principle has been downgraded so that it is no longer prescriptive for him.

Problems in Hare's Account

I find this explanation of moral weakness unsatisfactory for several reasons. First of all, it is too vague. An objection along
this line has been raised by another philosopher, C.C.W. Taylor.

According to Taylor, Hare does have a point when he says that "anyone who agrees that the function of moral language is to guide conduct is faced with the problem of accounting for apparently sincere uses of such language which yet fail to fulfill their conduct-guiding role." There is a common conviction among most people who fail morally in some action that it was at that time within their ability not to fail. Taylor thinks that what Hare must show is that "the description which the common conviction embodies is mistaken, and that the situation is more properly to be described in terms of inability to act by reason of psychological compulsion."

But Hare does not even try to do this. Taylor thinks that Hare has simply ignored this common conviction.

It must therefore be concluded either that he has simply overlooked the necessity of disposing of the common conviction or that he does not let it count against his thesis on the ground that, whatever the evidence, it must be the case that the weak-willed man is unable to act on his principle. In the latter case the thesis clearly represents, not a solution of the problem, but a resolution to ignore it. In the former, the thesis, while not indeed empty, is left virtually unsupported.

18 Cf. his article reviewing FR in Mind, LXXIV, No. 294 (May, 1964), 280-298.
19 Taylor, op. cit., p. 283.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid. Italics his.
I do not believe Taylor is correct when he says that Hare has overlooked the necessity of disposing of the common conviction. For Hare believes that, although a person acts contrary to a generally accepted moral principle, the prescription embodied in the principle has a way of surviving through something he calls will-power.

In cases of moral weakness, where the impossibility is psychological, remorse and disapproval are even more in place; for, though unable to overcome this temptation, they keep alive the will-power which may overcome lesser ones. It is therefore not a consequence of our account of the matter which stresses the impossibility of resisting the temptation, that the morally weak man is exempt from adverse moral judgements.²²

I believe Hare is trying to say that the survival of will-power (whatever that is) is sufficient to account for our common conviction that we could have done otherwise at the time of moral failure. We feel we can overcome lesser temptations and may even feel (now) that if we had tried hard enough, we could have overcome the temptation to fail morally even at the time of the failure.

If I read Hare correctly, then he thinks he has given an explanation of the common conviction. Later, I shall take up this concept of the 'survival of the prescription'. Now I shall move on to a more significant objection that Taylor makes in his review.

²² FR, 5.8, p. 80. Italics mine.
Taylor thinks that the main defect in Hare's explanation is the unanalyzed notion of 'psychological compulsion' as well as Hare's failure to offer any criteria for differentiating between the compulsion and just not wanting to act on one's moral principles more than wanting to act against them. He suggests that this defect might be remedied in terms of some theory from the science of psychology, accounting for the force by a given brain state. While there may be some psychologico-scientific evidence in the case, say, of the chronic alcoholic, Taylor suggests, it would be absurd to apply the same to the man who occasionally lies when he accepts the principle that he ought not lie in such circumstances. In any event the suggested solution, Taylor continues, seems no more than unsupported conjecture since an acceptable theory is unavailable in the present state of scientific knowledge.

But there are problems in Hare's account which are, I think, deeper than those mentioned by Taylor. For even if we were to grant that it is plausible that there is some psychological force which at times prevents one from acting in accordance with his accepted moral principles, Hare's solution still seems inadequate. It will be remembered that Hare has suggested that typical cases of moral weakness are cases where a person is acting either (1) under some psychological obstacle which makes it impossible for him to act otherwise, or (2)
he is insincere in saying that he accepts the principle that he seems
to be breaking. If (2) is the case, then there is no problem of
moral weakness (unless it is his insincerity) for actually the agent
does not accept the principle in question and therefore cannot (in
the given context) deviate from it. Further, how do we tell a case (1)
from a case (2)? In either case the action is the same. It is con­
trary to the prescription embodied in the moral principle in question.
And if (1) is true, then there is no way of telling whether or not
there really is a 'psychological' obstacle apart from seeing if the
agent does the action or not. To assume that if he acts according to
his moral principle, he is not faced with some 'psychological' ob­
stacle and that if he acts against his moral principle he is so faced
is to beg the question.

Furthermore, if (1) is true, then it is impossible to make
sense out of our common understanding of responsibility. If the
presence of any kind of obstacle produces a causal 'cannot', then it
would be meaningless to call a person responsible for his action un­
less we change the ordinary meaning of responsibility. For when we
say that a person is responsible for his action we presume that he
could have avoided it if he had so chosen. The distinction in jur­
dicial procedure between punishment and an order for hospitalization is
clear evidence that we do believe there is a difference between one
who commits a crime because of some psychological aberration and one
who does so knowingly and without compulsion. How do we know when a moral prescription survives an instance of failure and when it does not? But if Hare is right, every typical case of moral weakness is an instance of psychological inability to act otherwise.

We can now ask how Hare might escape this objection. His theory puts him into some very respectable philosophical company, for it is not unlike the explanations of moral weakness suggested by Plato and Aristotle.

On at least one interpretation of both Plato and Aristotle on responsibility and punishment the two great Greek philosophers were both sympathetic towards a kind of deterministic view. On this view there are impelling forces such as desire and fear which have a determining effect on what actions one takes in a given moral situation. According to Crombie, the impulsionist holds that "if I want to do X, I can only refrain from doing it if my desire to do not-X is greater." The impulsionist holds that this statement is logically true, i.e., if I do anything at all, then if I did not desire to do that thing more than I desired to do some other thing, I could not have done it. In the Protagoras, for example, "Plato seems to

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25 Crombie thinks 'impulsionist' is a better word than 'determinist' for describing the theory in question, for reasons which are irrelevant to our discussion.
say that a man cannot do what he thinks will be on balance unpleasant, presumably because he can have no impulse towards it." Still, Plato seems to believe that people cannot be blamed (justly) for what they cannot help doing (or not doing) and, Crombie continues, he (Plato) must reconcile this with his apparent conviction that one cannot make a choice out of keeping with his character.

We can note here the similarity between Crombie's interpretation of Plato's problem and the problem that I have suggested follows from Hare's account. For Hare believes that typical cases of moral weakness are cases of 'ought but (psychologically) cannot', and on the other hand he believes that this does not exempt one from adverse moral judgments.

We may also note here that Aristotle seems to have been faced with a similar problem in his explanation of moral weakness. He believes that a man always chooses either what is good or what appears good to him. "Cases of error are most often due to pleasure, which seems to be a good when in fact it is not. (1113b) Pleasure, therefore, is chosen as a good, and pain avoided as an evil." On this analysis, in a moral situation, one always acts according to what he at least thinks is good. Failures to act are accounted for by either ignorance or compulsion. Ignorance is subdivided into culpable

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and inculpable, the former being morally reprehensible. Compulsion is determined by whether or not the source of an action is intrinsic or extrinsic to the agent. If the source is extrinsic, it is not a voluntary act. If it is intrinsic, it is voluntary.

This theory, too, is not unlike Hare's. For an intense desire that would prevent a man from acting according to his accepted moral principles would be (on the above account of Aristotle's theory) voluntary as its source is (it is presumed) intrinsic to the character of the agent.

Thus it seems that Plato, Aristotle, and Hare all have to account for the common conviction of responsibility and application of punishment. Indeed, Aristotle remarks that:

if each man is somehow responsible for his moral state, he will also be responsible for a thing's appearing good to him. If he is not, it will follow (1) that no one is responsible for his own evil doing, but that everyone does evil acts through ignorance of the end, thinking thereby to obtain what is best; (2) that the aiming at the end is not self-chosen, but that one must be born with an eye, as it were, by which to judge aright and choose what is truly good;

Aristotle's answer to his own objection is that we are somehow responsible for our moral states (character) and that it is by

29 John Warrington, *op. cit.*, p. 54.
being persons of a certain kind that we assume the end to be so-and-so. For these two reasons, both virtue and vice are voluntary.

But this suggestion does not close the case. One may still ask whether or not we desire to alter our own character, and if we do, is not this desire itself something which impels us to act in this way rather than that, even in the business of controlling our own character? The problem is fundamentally the same for Plato, Aristotle, and Hare. From the remarks of all three it is obvious that each believes he has left room for a concept of responsibility and punishment. It is to this concept that we now turn.

There are at least two possible explanations of the notion of punishment. One suggests that punishment is retributive, i.e., one makes himself punishable because he does something that deserves blame. The other suggests that punishment must always have a remedial effect, i.e., it has the effect of making the person better so that in the future he will not again easily give in to the temptation to do some immoral act. If it is true that the theories of Plato, Aristotle and Hare are on final analysis what I have suggested above, then it would seem that all three would have to rely on the remedial theory of punishment. By punishing the agent who has perpetrated some immoral act we would hope to introduce into his character a new factor (fear of future punishment) which, hopefully, would alter his
character in such a way that he would not have an over-riding desire to act that way again. The responsible person is thus the man whose character is regarded as changeable by the punishment factor. We do not, then, call a man responsible for doing x if he was physically incapable of not doing x, for no matter what his moral state or character, he was (and presumably always will be) physically incapable of resisting such a physical force. Nor do we call a man responsible if he suffers from some permanent psychological aberration. As Hare suggests, this condition seems to approximate physical impossibility of acting in certain ways.

Is there any way, discernible in Hare's account, that we can say that he has improved upon the theories of moral weakness offered by Plato and Aristotle? It might be possible to suggest that Hare has offered an explanation of the common conviction that it is within our power to act or fail to act according to our accepted moral principles. We are aware that in most cases of moral weakness the prescription embodied in the moral principle we failed to follow somehow survives. Otherwise we would not have feelings of remorse or guilt after such a failure. Because of this rather intense feeling, we believe that we really could have avoided breaking our moral principle. But, Hare seems to suggest, this is not really the case. We were psychologically unable to act according to it if we have failed.

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30 FR, 5.9, p. 80.
Do we now have a way for Hare to escape our objection that his theory of moral weakness cannot account for our common conviction about responsibility? Could we not say that, like Plato and Aristotle (if Crombie is correct), it is possible for him to escape by noting that 'responsible' really means 'cureable'?

We may immediately note that this explanation of 'responsibility' is surely not the common conviction. Ordinarily when we say that a person was responsible for doing x we mean that he could have done otherwise. Now we have seen above that Hare thinks he has accounted for this common conviction in pointing out that our will-power survives an instance of moral failure. We are still willing to attempt to use our accepted moral principles to guide our lives. One can find no further explanation of the common conviction in Hare. Are we therefore to assume that this explanation is adequate? I suggest that Hare's explanation is too vague, that he has not accounted for the common conviction.

One might, on the other hand, maintain that Hare could escape with the following kind of account. We feel responsible when we act contrary to a personally accepted moral principle if the desire impelling us to act in that way is only a mild desire. By analogy this would be like failing to resist a mild physical force, which force we
could physically overcome if we applied with some effort a counter physical force. Thus there is a sense in which one could say he was pushed down an incline, though with a little (or a lot of) effort, he could have overcome the force of the push by application of his own physical strength. Similarly, it might be argued, that although I desired to do x contrary to my accepted moral principle, I could have, with some psychological resistance (or whatever one applies when he resists temptation) overcome this desire. So we consider a man responsible if, having a desire to play the harpsichord, he chooses to embezzle the necessary funds to purchase the instrument. We think he was capable of not stealing in spite of his desire to have a harpsichord. Or we consider a man responsible if he murders another who has merely called him unpleasant names. On the other hand we do not consider someone responsible if he steals money and he is obviously a victim of some psychotic condition called kleptomania. Instead, we put him in a mental hospital.

The suggestion seems less cogent as an explanation of responsibility when one looks closely at what the move has done. It depends upon whether or not one can act freely in the presence of some psychological influence. And the assumed criterion for deciding this is the intensity of the psychological influence. And this, in turn, depends on the ability to measure the intensity of desires and wants,
etc. But even if we could measure such things we are still left with the logic of 'cannot' in Hare's theory. What, on the basis of the above way of escaping, has happened to the force of 'cannot'? To make Hare's theory work, the 'cannot' must be maintained with its full force. For Hare contends that the agent finds acting according to his moral principle impossible. He cannot act otherwise. "In cases of moral weakness, where the impossibility is psychological ..." But if the psychological influence (or whatever) did not make it impossible for the agent to act according to his moral principle, then we would not be able to maintain Hare's point that it was impossible, for that reason, to act otherwise. If it did make it impossible for the agent to act otherwise, we still have to ask how we could then say he was responsible in the ordinary sense of that term.

Hare's position must then be that of what Crombie called the impulsionist, and responsibility can only be explained in terms of cureability. Let us suppose that Hare is right about the common conviction about responsibility, i.e., the notion is just mistaken. Let us also here presume that Hare would agree with the impulsionist dictum that if I want to do x, I can only refrain from doing it if my desire to do not-x is greater. Some very strange things follow from this position.

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FR, 5.8, p. 80. Italics mine.
I suggest that the following argument, using this dictum as the first premiss, is formally valid.

**If it is within my power,**

1) If I want to do x, then I can only refrain from doing it if my desire to do not-x is greater.

2) I can decide to do only what I can do.

3) Therefore I always decide to do x if my desire to do not-x is less than my desire to do x.

4) If I decide to use some moral principle, P, as action-guiding, then I think that I ought to act according to it.

5) Therefore, if I decide to accept P, my desire to follow P, (what I think I ought to do) is greater than my desire to do what I think I ought not do (in the relevant circumstances).

6) Therefore I always decide to do what I think I ought to do.

7) Therefore I always do what I think I ought to do.

8) Therefore I never do what I think I ought not do.

9) Ought implies can.

10) I can do only what I want do do more than I want to do anything else.

11) Therefore Ought implies that I do only what I want to do more than I want to do anything else.

12) Therefore I cannot be morally obligated to do what I do not want to do more than I want to do anything else.

13) What I do not want to do more than I want to do anything else may be any particular thing at all.

14) Therefore I cannot be morally obligated to do any particular thing at all.

15) Therefore there is no moral obligation.
Examination of the Argument

Premiss (2) seems true in that things that are beyond my capabilities are not matters for decision by me. (3) follows from (1) and (2) with some steps involving logical equivalences omitted. (4) it what it means to accept a moral principle (on Hare's account). (5) follows from (3) and (4). (6) follows from (5). (7) follows from (1), (2) and (6). (8) is logically equivalent to (7). (9) is a dictum Hare accepts, as we have seen. (10) follows from (1). (11) follows from (9) and (10). (12) is logically equivalent to (11). (13) is obviously true from experience, i.e., I can want to do anything in my power or not want to do it. (14) follows from (12) and (13) and (15) is another way of saying (14).

If the above argument is formally valid, and if Hare is an impulsionist (accepts premiss (1)) then something has obviously gone wrong, for Hare could not possibly agree with the conclusion of this argument.

Refutation of the Argument

Let us look again at this dictum: (a) if I want to do x, I can only refrain from doing x if my desire to do not-x is greater. Now (b) it seems clearly possible that I can want to do x and at the same time want equally to do not-x. I can want to go to the show tonight
(for specified reasons) and I can at the same time want not to go to the show tonight (for other specified reasons). If I can do such a thing as "consult my desires" to see which of them is over-riding, it is clearly possible that at any given time I can find that I want to do both with an equally intense desire. It follows from (a) and (b) that (c) I cannot refrain from doing x since my desire for doing not-x is not greater than my desire to do x. But it also follows from (a) and (b) that (d) I cannot refrain from doing not-x. But (c) and (d) are incompatible. Therefore, if (b) is true, (a) is false.

Thus if Hare is an impulsionist, then his theory of moral weakness leads to the destruction of all moral obligation. If he is not an impulsionist, then it is impossible to understand his thesis that every typical case of moral weakness is a case of 'ought but can't'.
a person can fail to accept a singular prescription and at the same
time be said to be going against a moral principle which he accepts.
In the previous chapter we also saw that there may be reason to say
that Hare is wrong when he says that moral principles and judgments
entail singular prescriptions. In the early parts of the present
chapter we have seen that Hare believes that the implication in
'ought implies can' is not logical implication. The sense in which
'ought' implies 'can', it was suggested by Hare, is that 'ought'
implies a practical question,'What shall I do?'. Now the practical
question cannot arise in any significant sense if I cannot, for what­
ever cause, do the act prescribed by some moral principle. Hare
would agree, for this is just the test he proposed in Chapter Six
for deciding whether or not to accept some moral principle. If I
find that I cannot, for whatever cause, accept some singular prescrip­
tion, then I cannot, on pain of being logically inconsistent, accept
the moral principle entailing that singular prescription. But then
how can typical cases of moral weakness be instances of 'ought but
can't'? For if I can't do x, then on Hare's view I cannot accept the
moral principle entailing the singular prescription about doing x,
and if I cannot accept the moral principle, then it cannot be a guide
for my conduct. What is it then that I am going against when I am
involved in a case of moral weakness? Unless we are speaking of some
moral convention, when we talk about cases of moral weakness, we are
talking about instances of failure to follow the prescriptions of
one's accepted moral principles.
Moral weakness seems to be one of the following: (1) I do what I think I ought not do (or do not do what I think I ought); (2) I do what someone else thinks I ought not do (or do not do what someone else thinks I ought); (3) I do what I ought not do (or do not do what I ought; (4) (1) plus 'and I cannot, for some psychological reason, act otherwise; (5) (2) plus 'and I cannot, for some psychological reason, act otherwise; (6) (3) plus 'and I cannot, for some psychological reason, act otherwise. In (4) through (6) there is no 'ought', on Hare's analysis, to fail. For if I find I cannot accept some singular prescription the 'ought' entails, then I cannot accept the 'ought' principle and this is merely a testing process similar to that of the scientist who tests his hypothesis by particular experiments. One could, on this account, say that the moral failure is an instance of acting against a tentatively accepted moral principle. Perhaps this is what Hare means. But I am not sure what a tentatively accepted moral principle would be. Does this mean that I accept it so long as I want to follow it? If so, then it would seem that Hare's position leads to a moral relativism of the kind he explicitly rejects. If moral weakness is (3), then it seems there is a problem about knowing really what I ought to do. Is what I ought to do something I can discover in reality or what? Hare rejects (2) as non-prescriptive, so that cannot be what he means by moral weakness. Moral weakness must be exemplified best, then in (1) (or in some unknown suggestion). (1) does seem to be the common understanding of
moral weakness. I believe that one can maintain (1) as best exemplifying an instance of moral weakness and what is more, that (1) is compatible with prescriptivism of some sort.

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I have already suggested that accepting a moral principle is not at all the same kind of thing as accepting a singular prescription. In our analysis of accepting a singular prescription we said that it is deciding or resolving to do whatever act is in question. Notice that when one is talking about singular prescriptions he is talking about particular acts at particular times. Thus if I am questioning whether or not to accept 'Let me go to the theater' I am always concerned with some particular theater at some particular time. This is the nature of a singular prescription. It is about me and some particular act I am deciding or resolving to do (or not do). On the other hand, to accept a moral principle is to decide to use it as a rule for many similar instances throughout my life. Thus to accept a singular prescription is to decide in favor of one action and to accept a moral principle is to decide about a series of acts. Now since a rule by its very nature is about a series of acts, rejection of a singular prescription entailed by it cannot possibly constitute the rejection of the rule. Only rejection of every prescription entailed by it (or at least most of them) would seem to constitute rejection of the rule. It is for this reason that Hare's suggestion that moral rules and judgments logically entail singular

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In Chapter V.
prescriptions seems misconceived. It arises out of a failure to keep in mind that moral principles involve the whole context of one's life and that singular prescriptions, taken individually, do not.

I shall now suggest how a prescriptivist might possibly give an explanation of moral weakness. The best way to do this seems to be by way of illustration. Suppose that at time $T_1$ some moral agent does act $x$, which act is contrary to his generally accepted moral principle. He knows, at $T_1$ that doing $x$ is contrary to his generally accepted moral principle. Sometime later, at $T_2$ he reflects that he at $T_1$ acted against his generally accepted moral principle. Also at $T_2$ he reflects that his reasons for following his moral principle are better than his reasons for not following it. Further, at $T_2$ he reflects that at $T_1$ he ignored those reasons and that if he had not ignored them at $T_1$ he could have (and would have) acted otherwise. He now, at $T_2$ has remorse because he sees the inconsistency between his action at $T_1$ and the way he would now, at $T_2$ act in the same circumstances. He realizes, if he considers himself responsible for his failure, that he could have examined all the reasons for not doing $x$ at $T_1$ but didn't just because he didn't want to. Notice, too, that 'I just wanted to' is never acceptable as an excuse for actions for which one is considered responsible. If I am asked to explain some past action, my questioner is asking for reasons why I acted as I did
and if I can only say 'I just wanted to', my questioner will likely reply, 'Well, obviously, if you did it, you wanted to. I want to know more.'

If I am correct, then moral weakness is never a case of 'ought but can't'. It is simply a case of 'ought but didn't'. To fail then in one act is not to deny the rule. Rules apply to a series of acts, not just to one. A single instance of stealing is not evidence that one does not accept the principle 'One ought not to steal'. Many instances of stealing over some period of time is evidence that one does not accept the principle. We have seen that Hare himself believes that the implication in 'ought implies can' is not logical implication. For Hare (and the writer) 'ought' implies that the practical question arises. When the question 'What shall (or ought) I do?' arises in a particular moral situation common experience teaches that the thinking moral agent looks for reasons for and against doing the action in question. Among those reasons for doing or not doing the action are the agent's own desires, fears, inclinations, ideals and interests. He may also attend to conventional moral standards and, if he is a philosopher, he may even ask whether or not he can universalize the proposed action (as Hare has suggested). He may attend to any number of other reasons that may help him make a decision. He may then weigh the reasons for and the reasons against doing the action in question. There need not be any physical or psychological compulsion that
would force him to act one way or another. The moral agent is simply faced with a choice between two sets of reasons for doing and not doing x. Let us say he chooses the set of reasons for doing the action that is contrary to the prescription embodied in his moral principle or judgment. In that case we say that he had reasons for his choice to act against his accepted moral principle. The reason might be psychological, say, a fear that if he did not tell a lie an embarrassing situation would follow for him. But no matter what the reason or set of reasons might be, they are not (scientific) causes of his action, thought they may be causes of the action in the sense of cause suggested in Chapter I above. Since discerning reasons for acting never causes one to act (in the scientific sense of sufficient conditions for the action) we cannot say that it was impossible for him to act otherwise. He could have chosen not to act, his choice being based on another set of reasons.

Looking at the problem of moral weakness from the point of view of a distinction between reasons and scientific causes enables us to employ the common concept of responsibility. This is not, of course, to say that one can not be the victim of some kind of irresistible psychological influence, but then there is no more a question of responsibility than there is if the agent had been physically forced to act.
It will be remembered that Hare practically identified accepting a singular prescription with doing what is prescribed if the circumstances for doing it are present. He suggested that the expression 'Let me do a' is merely a meta-linguistic way of talking about an action. It seems clear that no prescription, even moral prescriptions (principles) logically implies an action. But this, if it is true, does not suggest that we have to abandon prescriptivism. For one can still maintain that moral principles are prescriptive and that what they prescribe are singular prescriptions and that there is no logical implication involved between moral principles and singular prescriptions. We can maintain this view in precisely the same way that almost all philosophers would maintain the view that imperatives, while being prescriptive, are never logically connected with a corresponding action. My suggestion is that moral principles are short for beliefs about reasons for acting in certain ways. This does not prohibit moral principles from being prescriptive, for part of what one believes when he utters or thinks a moral principle is that the moral principle prescribes ways of acting in relevant circumstances.

It will be remembered that Hare attempted to back up his conclusion that if one cannot assent to the singular prescription 'Let me do x', he cannot accept the moral principle 'One ought to do x'.

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See p. 141 above.
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See p. 152 above.
by way of an analogy between two relations, i.e., between the mental state of the man who believes that there is a cat on the mat and the fact that he cannot sincerely say there is not; and the mental state of the man who wants not to be put into prison more than he wants anything else and the fact that he cannot sincerely say 'Let me be put into prison.' It now seems that this analogy breaks down because of the following difference between believing and wanting in the two cases. In the latter case it is clearly possible that he might believe that he ought (morally) to be put into prison, and still not want to be put into prison more than he wants anything else. In the analogue about believing there is a cat on the mat and the fact that he cannot sincerely say that there is not, there is no question of wanting or not wanting anything. Wanting just does not enter the situation. In the latter case, to the extent that one believes that he ought (morally) to be put into prison, to that extent he assents to the moral principle even if he cannot assent to (act in accordance with) the singular prescription. It is in this way that his moral principle survives a particular instance of failure to act according to it.

It may be trivial to note that at the moment of action contrary to one's moral principle, one does not assent to the moral principle in that instance, for he is, by definition, doing an immoral action.
But it is not trivial, because of the above implications for responsibility and because of the meaning of a moral principle as a rule governing a series of actions, to say that one can assent to or accept a moral principle in general, but at the moment fails to follow its prescription.

There is, however, another possible interpretation of what Hare means by moral weakness. In order to suggest this interpretation it will be necessary to specify several ways in which one might act against some moral principle.

An agent can (1) simply reject a moral principle with or without reason. He may say, for example, "I just don't hold the principle 'One ought not discriminate against a man because of the color of his skin'." One cannot then really accuse such an agent of going against his moral principle, for he does not consider that principle as conduct-guiding for himself.

It may be the case that he (2) believes that he ought to do some action, but says simply that he won't do it. This seems to be a case of malice, and reduces in final analysis to (1). For it seems that in this case he only appears to hold the moral rule for his own conduct when he in fact explicitly rejects it. Note that this is a different sort of thing from the modification of a principle. The agent simply rejects it without any attempt to modify it.
Or the agent (3) is of the opinion that he ought to do some action, wills to do it, but (3a) finds himself unable in some specified instance to follow the principle in practice. Further, the agent might believe that he ought to do some action, will to do it, but (3b) when the time comes for acting on the principle in some specific instance, he just fails to do so.

Hare might be interpreted as talking only about the form of moral weakness as expressed in (3a). As I have noted above, in such a case he obviously is not to be held responsible since he was, for whatever cause, unable to act according to his moral principle which he perfectly well wills to do. It is just that he can't do it.

The view I have been holding suggests that in such a case the moral agent simply cannot apply the principle he holds to this particular instance, and that, therefore, the principle is neither accepted nor rejected by what the agent does, but simply does not apply because of the circumstances preventing its application, namely the agent's inability to act on it. If this is Hare's view (and I do not think it is) then what he says about 'ought but can't' makes a good deal more sense than I have suggested in my analysis.

But if that is what Hare is talking about throughout the chapter on moral weakness and backsliding, then he has left out an important consideration that belongs in every moral theory, viz.

consideration of the possibility of an agent's simple moral failure when there seems to be no inability to act on the principle. In Chapter II above I have already alluded to a distinction between moral weakness and moral failure. The language we use in talking about moral situations is a bit ambiguous on this point. For we sometimes use the term 'morally weak' both for the agent who for psychological reasons cannot act on his moral principles and the agent who simply does not act on them. In the former case we do not blame him for acting the way he does. We pity him. In the latter case we do blame him. If we are correct, then I do not see how one can hold that moral principles logically entail singular prescriptions such that if one cannot assent to or just does not assent to the latter, he must logically reject the former as a rule for his conduct.
CHAPTER VII

CONCLUDING SUMMARY

In Chapter I, I suggested that Hare's moral theory could be construed as a kind of behavior-affection theory. What was meant can now be made clear. Hare rejected any behavior-affection analysis of moral argument on the grounds that this view would entail that moral principles causally affect the behavior of moral agents and that the use of any scientific model in speaking of moral action cannot succeed. What I am suggesting is that, although Hare seems correct in rejecting a behavior-affection theory on those grounds, there are other ways in which one can take the word 'causal' such that one is not committed to talk about necessary and sufficient antecedent conditions for action. I have introduced the notion of 'persuasive cause' which, if correct, might account for some kind of influence on behavior which can be said to be action-guiding. This is only to say that sometimes an agent's knowing the reasons why he ought to act in some specific way has an influence on whether or not he does act in such and such a way. I have suggested that this kind of analysis of 'cause' has been too long overlooked by philosophers who are doing ethics. Moral principles are reasons for acting in some particular
way in relevant circumstances and sometimes to give moral principles is to persuade by means of rational argument. That such efforts to persuade (or even to convince oneself) are sometimes unsuccessful is obvious. This allows us to find a place for moral weakness and failure in a way that Hare's theory does not. For if we consider moral principles as efforts to persuade or convince oneself by reason about actions to be done, we do not have to maintain that moral principles logically entail acceptance of certain singular prescriptions such that if one in fact fails to accept some singular prescription he is logically bound to the position of rejecting the relevant moral rule as a rule. Rather, I have considered moral principles as reasons for acting in particular ways, reasons which can sometimes be 'persuasive causes'. One can consider reasons for doing something, find them to be good reasons for doing it, and still fail to act accordingly. If these reasons were causes in the scientific sense of sufficient conditions for action, then obviously one could not maintain this position. But if they can be persuasive causes, i.e., ways of influencing action, then such attempts may be successful or unsuccessful. The position is at least arguable.

I have suggested that to prescribe for oneself or for others is to assume responsibility for answering the question 'why?'. If one cannot give an answer to that question when it arises about doing some action in a moral situation, then he cannot be said to be acting on
principle. And since, in moral situations, principles are always relevant, one who cannot cite a principle which prescribes, but does not logically entail, an action or resolution to act, resigns from any moral argument.

Hare's doctrine on decision of principle seemed to need some clarification. One must discuss the relationship between decision and choice, and then between these and principles in general. If a moral agent decided to modify a moral principle, his decision itself must be based on principle. But simply to decide to do some action that is contrary to a moral principle one holds is not necessarily to modify that principle. It may be simply to decide against acting according to the principle. Hare does not consider this distinction as a possibility. If, as I believe, the distinction can be meaningfully made, then it is an indication that moral principles and judgments to not logically entail singular prescriptions, if the latter are taken in the sense that Hare takes them. For he calls singular prescriptions metalinguistic expressions for some action, and rules or principles never seem to entail actions. It follows from Hare's entailment theory that to assent to some singular prescription which is contrary to a moral principle is to reject that moral principle. If he means that one cannot act against a moral rule and at the same time be said to accept it for this particular instance of conduct, then,
of course, he is correct, for that seems trivially true. But to refuse to act according to some rule or principle in a particular instance does not entail rejection of it as a rule or conduct-guiding principle in general. Rules and principles govern many possible acts, not merely a single instance. It is one thing to follow a moral principle in every (or most) relevant instance(s) of its application. It is quite another thing to accept it in general. The former entails that one does act according to the principle here and now. The latter does not entail action according to the rule in every instance of its application, though it does suggest a general resolution to follow it. But if every time a person is guilty of breaking a moral rule, he is in fact removing it from his moral system of general rules for conduct-guiding, or modifying it, it then becomes impossible to speak of moral rules and principles as general rules for conduct-guiding. They would apply only to individual action. Thus, I have argued that to reject a singular prescription prescribed by some moral principle is not to reject the general principle except in a trivial sense.

I have tried to maintain prescriptivism without the concept of logical entailment. Some philosophers have maintained that this kind of suggestion leads to a rejection of ethics as a rational enterprise. But there are two distinct questions about the possibility of reasoning
using prescriptive premisses. The first is whether or not prescriptive premisses can function at all in an argument, i.e., whether or not they can entail other prescriptions. The second question is whether or not they can entail acceptance of those prescriptions. I have tried to argue that moral judgments and principles can indeed function in rational argument in that they can entail other prescriptions. But I have also argued that they do not entail acceptance of the prescriptions which prescriptions they do entail. I have suggested that acceptance or rejection of a singular prescription does not, therefore, entail acceptance or rejection of the moral judgment or rule from which the singular prescription follows.

I have pointed out some problems about maintaining that moral judgments are universalizable in virtue of their descriptive meaning. I attempted to show that the descriptive meaning of moral judgments is only contingently related to their prescriptive meaning and that if universalizability is a logical thesis, then moral judgments cannot be universalizable in virtue of their descriptive meaning. Logical properties cannot be founded on contingencies and non-logical relations.

I have also pointed out some unclarities in Hare's account of universalizability. I believe the sense in which he takes universalizability does not do the job he wants it to do, namely, distinguish moral judgments on the one hand from ordinary imperatives, decisions
and desires on the other. I believe Hare's sense, as explicitly stated, applies equally to all of these and to other expressions. I have suggested another logical sense of universalizability, namely, the sense in which the question 'why?' can meaningfully arise, and this on the basis of Hare's own suggestion that to universalize is to give the reason. The two senses (1) consistency of application and (2) the 'why?' sense are not the same, for I have argued that desires (or perhaps better, statements about desires) are universalizable in sense (1) but that they are not in sense (2). Moral judgments are universalizable in both senses as are ordinary imperatives. Therefore, moral judgments are not distinguishable on the basis of universalizability, but are distinguishable only in so far as in the case of moral judgments, it is necessary to consider the possibility of another person acting in the way I propose to act in similar situations, even if at another time I am in a role that is less desirable to me. This consideration is not relevant in the case of ordinary imperatives and commands. This, I suppose, is a kind of universalizability in that moral judgments in some sense (the sense explained) extend to other moral agents or at least to the possibility of other moral agents acting in the same way as the subject. But this is not a logical sense.

I have also taken issue with one of Hare's most important claims, namely, that if one cannot assent to the singular prescription, he cannot accept the general ought-rule or principle that entails it when
conjoined with the known facts of the case. To put this another way, I have shown reason why the suggestion that to accept the moral principle one must be able to assent to all the singular prescriptions it entails, cannot account for moral weakness, failure and responsibility.

I have taken issue with Hare’s scientific model applied to morals, namely, that the moral agent tests his principle by seeing whether or not he can accept the singular prescriptions it entails. I have denied that the only inferences in moral reasoning are deductive, that neither inability to accept the singular prescriptions, nor the simple fact of not assenting to them in some particular instance is sufficient for saying that one cannot or does not accept the relevant moral principle.

I have attempted to broaden Hare’s account of prescriptivity by suggesting that moral judgments prescribe, but the relation between accepting what is prescribed and the principle that prescribes it is not a logical relation. This was indicated by the suggestion that all principles are rules governing many possible instances of action. Therefore, failure to act on the principle in one or a few instances does not entail rejection of the principle as a conduct-guiding rule.
I have also noted problems in Hare's account of moral weakness. If my interpretation of Hare is correct, he leaves no room for our very common concept of responsibility. If his account is only about moral weakness as an instance of psychological inability to act, then he has left out of his systematic account of ethical argument the all important explanation of simple moral failure. No theory of ethics is complete without an account of someone's just failing to act morally.

It is not my intention to suggest that what Hare started out to show, namely, that ethics is a rational enterprise, can not be shown. I have pointed out what I believe are some serious objections to Hare's way of proving that point. I am in sympathy with what he is trying to show, and though I have surely not myself given an adequate account of how moral reasoning is possible, I have hope that some of the suggestions that I have made in this dissertation will open the way to an adequate account. I believe, too, that Hare has made a significant contribution to the issue, but not one which is free of problems. Reaction in current philosophical literature is proof enough of the enthusiasm and interest Hare has generated by these two books. It is to be hoped that this interest will continue.
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