



Moral Thinking: Its Levels, Nature, and Point.

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poraries which he clearly rejected. But the main official theme of Norton's book, Hume's bifurcation of moral truth from metaphysical truth, is not persuasively presented. It is about as likely that this is a Humean doctrine as it is that Cleanthes is the hero of the *Dialogues*.

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Moral Thinking: Its Levels, Nature, and Point. R. M. HARE. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1981. Pp. viii, 242.

Professor Hare's *Moral Thinking* (hereafter 'MT') is a spirited and intelligent exposition and defense of a well-articulated set of views in moral philosophy. Although Hare has presented most of these views elsewhere, in this book he fits them together in an enlightening way, replies to some objections, and offers some needed modifications of earlier formulations. The reader cannot fail to be impressed by the systematic unity and breadth of Hare's thought, as well as by the charm of his writing style.

Part I

Although Hare might not organize things in just this way, I think it may be convenient to summarize the main topics of MT under six headings.

1. 'Oughts' are universalizable and prescriptive. Hare's view seems to be that 'ought', in its central moral use, is both universalizable and prescriptive. To say that moral judgments are universalizable is to say this about them: 'if we make different moral judgements about situations we admit to be identical in their universal descriptive properties, we contradict ourselves' (21). Hare takes this to imply that if I say that I ought to do a certain thing to you (and I use 'ought' in the sense in question) then I am committed to the view that, if our roles were reversed, you ought to do it to me (108). To say that moral judgments are prescriptive is to say that each such judgment 'entails at least one imperative' (21). If you sincerely assent to something prescriptive, then there is some action and situation, such that you have committed yourself to doing that action in that situation.

2. The primary moral 'ought' is the universalizable, prescriptive, and overriding 'ought'. If some use of 'ought' is not only universalizable and prescriptive, but is also "overriding", then that use is a moral use. But what does 'overriding' mean? One 'ought'-statement overrides another for me iff they conflict, and I think that I ought to act on the former rather than the latter (55). An 'ought'-principle is overriding (in general) for me, if I always let it override other principles when they conflict (56). Although all 'ought'-principles having these features are moral, some "lower level" moral oughts fail to be fully overriding. These, however, are all ones that have been selected in a certain way that Hare describes, 'in the course of which use is made of moral principles of the first subclass' (60).

3. The proof of utilitarianism. Hare defends a form of utilitarianism. The sort of utility may be identified (I think) as "expected preference utility". That is, we evaluate alternatives by noting, for each, the extent to which it is likely to satisfy the preferences of those affected by it. (see esp. 133 ff) We do not take into

account such factors as whether these preferences are good ones or evil, whether they are rational or irrational, or whether they are “high” or “low”. Hare prefers to assess preference-satisfaction in an ‘impartial and content-indifferent way’ (146). Thus, one morally ought to perform an act if and only if it would maximize expected preference utility. This is, clearly enough, a form of act utilitarianism.

One of the most intriguing arguments of MT is the argument that takes us from Hare’s views about the logic of the moral words to this form of utilitarianism. It is clear that he thinks that there is a very important and close connection here. At one point, he says that if his argument is correct, one cannot admit the former (“universal prescriptivism”) and reject the latter (‘our utilitarian prescriptions’) (176). In another place he says that ‘the requirement to universalize our prescriptions generates utilitarianism’ (111). The argument in question is somewhat complicated. I shall discuss it further in Part II.

4. The two levels. One of the most pervasive themes of MT is the idea that there are two “levels” of moral thinking (see esp. chaps. 2 and 3). Utilitarianism is true at the higher, or “critical” level. At this level, one’s obligations cannot conflict; one’s principles may be of any complexity; one cannot have genuine weakness of the will; and the principles are all about all-in obligation. Such principles would be equally applicable in any possible world.

A lower level is required for use by ordinary people dealing with the ordinary moral problems of this world. Such people cannot formulate and apply enormously complex principles. They do not have enough empirical knowledge properly to apply such principles anyway. They have unfortunate tendencies to “cook” their data. Hence, at the lower, or “intuitive” level, we use relatively simple principles. These are fairly easily learned and applied. However, they may yield conflicting prescriptions, and so they are viewed by Hare as being only *prima facie* principles. These are the moral principles we try to teach our children, and which are reflected in the deepest moral feelings and intuitions of good people. Such principles are designed for use in our world, as it is, and might not be appropriate for use in others.

One of the most important connections between the levels is this: we ought to choose intuitive level principles in accordance with critical level thinking. So Hare’s view is that we ought to choose an intuitive level principle if the utility that would be produced by the acceptance of that principle is at least as great as that which would be produced by the acceptance of any alternative. Hence, our intuitive level principles may be justified by appeal to our critical level principle. Hare maintains that, in general, it is a good thing that we have the moral intuitions that we in fact have. It is good, for example, that we favor honesty, nonviolence, courage, familial affection, generosity, etc. The acceptance utility of the associated intuitive level principles is therefore quite high. So we have a sort of rule utilitarianism here, too.

After reading and rereading the relevant passages in MT, I find myself puzzled about a crucial feature of Hare’s view. I cannot determine whether he means to assert (a) that we are justified in performing any act permitted by our *de facto* intuitive level principles, or (b) that we are justified in performing any act permitted by the set of intuitive level principles (*de facto* or not) whose acceptance in our society would maximize preference satisfaction. He might mean to claim that our *de facto* intuitive level principles in fact have been

selected in accordance with perfect critical thinking, and so their acceptance does maximize preference satisfaction. In this case, Hare might mean to claim (c) that we are justified in performing any act permitted by the set of intuitive level principles that is both *de facto* and ideal.

5. The defense of utilitarianism. Several chapters of MT consist largely of replies to various traditional criticisms of utilitarianism. So, for example, in chapter 7 Hare attempts to give an account of a way of making interpersonal utility comparisons. At the intuitive level, such comparisons are irrelevant. We make our moral choices by appeal to well-entrenched principles. At the critical level, such comparisons are required, but Hare thinks they can be made. In chapter 8, he discusses such objections as these: utilitarianism cannot explain why we should not chop up one healthy person so as to provide organs for transplantation into the bodies of those in need (130-35); utilitarianism cannot account for the special obligations we have to members of our families (135); utilitarianism cannot explain our duties in cases in which various trolley cars are hurtling down various tracks toward various groups of innocent persons (139-40); utilitarianism cannot explain the importance of the distinction between higher and lower pleasures (140-42), or the wrongfulness of a life on the pleasure machine (142-44). In chapter 9, Hare develops a utilitarian account of rights and justice. In these and the preceding cases, Hare's basic strategy is rule utilitarian in spirit. Act utilitarianism (true at the critical level) justifies the adoption of various principles (correct at the intuitive level). These, in turn, tell us that we must not kill people to get transplantable organs; that we ought to love those close to us; that we ought to respect the rights of others; that we ought to seek the higher pleasures; etc. Hare's conclusion in the "pushpin/poetry case" is typical:

Critical thinking will result in *prima facie* principles which discriminate quite sharply between good and evil desires, and between higher and lower pleasures, even though at the critical level no discrimination is allowed on grounds of content. This is because in the world as it is, the encouragement of good desires and higher pleasures will maximize preference-satisfaction as a whole in the long term, even when preference-satisfaction is assessed in an impartial and content-indifferent way. (146)

6. Two objections to Hare's theory of moral reasoning. In chapter 10, Hare attempts once again to deal with the problems presented by fanatics and amorlists. He admits that there could be an "impure fanatic" — one who rejects the conclusions of critical thinking because he cannot or will not think carefully enough about the questions. However, he denies that there could be a pure fanatic. He claims that anyone who attends to and fully understands all the arguments of chapters 5 and 6 has to end up accepting principles yielding prescriptions equivalent to those yielded by Hare's form of utilitarianism.

The possibility of there being an amorlist, on the other hand, is admitted. One could simply refuse to make positive moral judgments. In this case, Hare's system of reasoning is inapplicable. We cannot argue the amorlist into accepting utilitarian prescriptions. However, Hare tries to show that even an amorlist has good prudential reasons for being moral anyway.

MT contains interesting discussions of other topics, too. But this survey, I hope, will provide a useful account of some of the main points.

Part II

Although there are passages that suggest otherwise, I think Hare does not take himself to have proven that his form of utilitarianism is true. Rather, his point seems to be that if one were fully informed and always did perfect critical level thinking, then one would never endorse an 'ought'-judgment incompatible with the requirements of utilitarianism. Since Hare uses 'archangel' to indicate an imaginary being who is fully informed, and who always does perfect critical thinking, we can formulate what I take to be his central thesis in this way:

HT: An archangel would never endorse a counter-utilitarian 'ought'-judgment.

The basic strategy of Hare's argument may be brought out by appeal to one of his examples (107-11). Suppose A, an archangel, wants to park his car in a space occupied by B's bicycle. A prefers that the bicycle be moved. B more strongly prefers that the bicycle remain where it is. Assuming that there are no other relevant preferences, Hare's utilitarianism implies that the bicycle should not be moved. Can A nevertheless endorse:

(1) I ought to move the bicycle?

Since A has archangelic insight, he knows how strongly B prefers that the bicycle not be moved. Let us say the strength of this preference is +5. Hare maintains (5.3) that if I know your preference, then I must have an equally strong similar preference concerning what happens to me, should we swap roles. More exactly:

TP: If A knows that B prefers, with strength S, that p occur, then A prefers, with strength S, that if A swaps roles with B, then p occurs.

In the example, we may conclude:

(2) A prefers, with strength +5, that if A swaps roles with B, then the bicycle is not moved.

Hare argues, now, that A cannot endorse (1). For if he did, we could infer, by appeal to the principles of universalizability and prescriptivity, that:

(3) A prefers that, if A swaps roles with B, then the bicycle is moved.

This last conditional preference is incompatible with the one mentioned in (2). In order to avoid this "contradiction of the will," the archangelic A must avoid endorsing (1). Similarly, any archangel must avoid endorsing any counter-utilitarian 'ought'-judgment. Thus, HT is allegedly proven.

I have to admit that I am puzzled by this argument. One main stumbling block for me is the principle TP. If this is intended to be a truth about people in general, it is surely false — and obviously so. Whenever I think your preferences are misguided (you prefer something I take to be contrary to your interest) I may fail to have similar preferences concerning what happens to me, should we swap roles. For example, you may prefer to smoke, but I prefer that, if I were in your place, then I do not smoke.

Another problem with the argument is that it seems to be formulated in such a way as to lead to the conclusion that an archangel would never endorse an

'ought'-statement that runs counter to anyone's preferences — even if the 'ought'-statement is consistent with utilitarianism. To see this, one needs only to change the relative strengths of the preferences given in the bicycle example, and then run through the argument again. I think it will be found that, if the argument worked before, it will still work in the revised case. Thus, it appears that if the argument works at all, it works rather too well.

In spite of my reservations concerning some of the argument, I remain impressed by MT. I am sure it will be widely read and appreciated. It deserves the attention of anyone interested in modern moral philosophy.

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Animal Rights and Human Morality. BERNARD E. ROLLIN. Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1981. Pp. xii, 182.

Rollin is an unabashed advocate of animal rights, and his book is as much a call to action on behalf of animals as it is a theoretical discussion of the issues. Rollin holds a joint appointment in philosophy and veterinary medicine, and his discussion is informed not only by his philosophical background, but also by his scientific and medical contacts. His book is aimed at the general public as well as at professional scientists and philosophers. The tone throughout is informal, technical jargon is avoided where possible, and common sense and everyday experiences are frequently appealed to.

The book is divided into four parts. The first two consist of a general discussion of the place of animals in our moral and legal scheme. Rollin thinks animals have moral rights and should have legal rights. No new arguments are advanced here, but this is no failing as there are plenty of well-known and compelling arguments in behalf of animals, and Rollin presents them vividly. In particular, he notes that anybody who wants to put animals outside the sphere of morality must be able to cite morally relevant differences between us and them; that animals pretty clearly have interests from which follow moral rights; and that being an object of moral rights does not entail being a moral agent (which Rollin admits animals are not). Rollin emphasizes the notion of an animal's nature or *telos*, and argues that an animal has a right not just to life but to a life in accordance with its *telos*. Anybody who has seen a declawed cat or a devoiced dog (just two of the many examples Rollin mentions in this connection) must feel the force of this claim.

Rollin then turns to some particular uses of animals in the last two parts of the book. He wisely does not try to cover the waterfront, but rather concentrates on just two areas: animals in research, and pets. (This reviewer appreciated Rollin's decision to discuss pets and not food animals, so much being available elsewhere on this latter topic). With respect to our use of animals in research and testing, the numbers are staggering. Rollin tells us that current estimates are that between 200 and 225 million animals are used in research annually, world wide. Most of these, of course, are killed, and many die painfully. Rats and mice constitute the majority of these animals, and due to our peculiar bias against rats and mice, these animals get no protection under the Animal Welfare Act (which, although woefully inadequate, does provide some protection in theory