MORAL THEORY AND ACTUAL PERSONS

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A THESIS

Submitted to Michigan State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the **MASTERS OF ARTS**

Department of Philosophy

1990

AN ABSTRACT

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One of the primary functions of traditional moral theory is to provide a method for resolving moral conflicts, these resolutions taking the form, for the most part, of prescriptions for and judgments of the actions of persons involved in such conflicts. In this essay, an attempt is made to provide the beginnings of a detailed exploration into the applicability of moral theories to actual situations involving actual persons. The aim of such an exploration can be characterized by posing two questions: 1) To what extent are moral theories capable of rendering reliable resolutions to actual moral conflicts and 2) Given that actual moral conflicts involve actual persons, to what extent are these persons capable of being understood or conceived by moral theorizing? Providing answers to these questions will inevitably lead to both an examination of the nature of moral theorizing itself and a description of the very identity and integrity of the individual human being.

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Chapter 1
Introduction: On Rationalistic Morality

In almost every discipline, theories seem to play a rather significant role in both the expression of the end(s) of that discipline and the ways in which the discipline is practiced by its participants. One discipline in which theory is frequently afforded such a lofty status is moral philosophy. One of the primary functions of traditional moral theory has often been to provide a method for resolving moral conflicts, the resolutions to these conflicts often taking the form of prescriptions for and judgments of the actions of persons. According to many of these theories, "These judgments...[and prescriptions]...can be thought of as consequences of applying abstract principles to moral problems in an almost computational way giving a procedure for deducing the morally correct answer in any given circumstances."(1) My concern is with the resolution of moral conflicts as a function of moral theory and my aim is to call into question the computational or mechanical means often employed by many traditional moral theories in fulfilling this function.

In this introductory chapter, I want to describe precisely what kind of theory I am targeting in this thesis.

This will involve a general characterization of traditional moral theory and a brief statement of what is meant by the "rationalistic morality" which I observe in many of these theories. I will end this chapter with an example of the kind of moral theories at which I am taking aim in this essay.

I wish to investigate such theories from two viewpoints. First, I will claim that these rationalistic moral theories possess two characteristics that, upon scrutiny, may lead us to question the extent to which such theories are reliable instruments in the resolution of moral conflicts. I will label these characteristics the reductionism and staticism of moral theory. The second chapter of this thesis will be devoted to explication and illustration of these characteristics. I will also, at that point, identify these characteristics in the example at the end of this introductory chapter.

In Chapter 3, I will concentrate on the sorts of difficulties presented by theories exhibiting the characteristic of reductionism. I shall note two facets of the life of the individual often overlooked by such theories. I will focus on one of these (the sentimental) to illustrate the sorts of advantages one can gain by taking these frequently neglected elements into consideration. Chapter 4,

which will focus on the staticism of moral theories, will examine what sorts of factors are overlooked in moral theories which manifest this characteristic and how such considerations might contribute to our moral thought.

A second viewpoint is adopted in Chapter 5. In this chapter, I will argue that actual persons, objects, and situations are such that the theoretical standpoint will never yield a completely efficient and accurate way of resolving moral conflicts. Specifically, there are two characteristics of actual persons (which I shall label character and dynamism) that generate difficulties for the theoretical standpoint. These characteristics will be hinted at throughout the essay and a full description of their nature will be given in Chapter 5. Also, at that point, I will give an account of the kinds of difficulties these characteristics provide for moral theories of the sort I am about to describe.

Chapter 6 will be devoted to answering possible objections to the thesis and to summarizing some of its more essential claims.

Rationalistic Moral Theories

I wish to identify at the outset what kind of 'moral

theory' I will be targeting in this thesis. As already noted, I want to scrutinize those theories which purport to offer a procedure for resolving any and all of our moral conflicts given certain relevant facts of the conflict in question. In the introduction to the anthology, Antitheory In Ethics and Moral Conservatism, Clarke and Simpson describe a rationalistic moral theory as one which, "requires a set of normative principles governing all rational beings and...[provides]... a dependable procedure for reaching definite moral judgments and decisions."(2) Thus, if such a theory is given enough input in the form of the "facts of the case," it will be able to generate or compute or calculate the resolution to the conflict at hand. It is these moral theories at which I take aim.

Besides the characteristics of reductionism and staticism (which I later identify, describe, and criticize in this paper), there are some basic characteristics of such theories which allow one to identify them easily and quickly:

1. Such theories are often foundational. In other words, the theories at which I am taking aim will appeal to or be grounded upon a single principle (or set of principles). According to Clarke and Simpson, these theories assert that, "morality is rational only insofar as it can be formulated in or grounded on a system of universal

principles."(3)

2. Such theories are rationalistic in that they claim that, "the intellectual virtues of theorizing (such as universality, explicitness, consistency, and completeness) are essential to the moral life."(ibid) That is, these qualities are not only required in our moral thinking but, too, they must be exhibited in our daily moral living.

3. Such theories are monistic. That is, rationalistic theories of the sort I am targeting advocate only one supreme good such as utility.

A rationalistic theory of the kind I wish to target in this essay must exhibit all of the above characteristics. The reductionism and staticism of such theories, even though they may appear as obviously related to the above characteristics, will be kept separate from them.

In addition to these characteristics, I want to suggest that such rationalistic moral theories entail a moral psychology. That is, such theories, implicitly or explicitly, offer an analysis or description of the primary factors which shape and the overriding propensities that guide the life of the individual. Many readers will say that I am targeting a particular brand of moral psychology (rather than a kind of moral theory) in light of the amount of time

I spend discussing the various facets of the life of an individual in Chapter 3 and in my considerations involving the identity and integrity of an individual in Chapters 4 and 5. I have no objection to this view so long as its advocates are willing to admit that a moral psychology is a component of a moral theory to which, either in part or in whole, such theories appeal for their justification or explanation.

An Example: Hare's Universal Prescriptivism

I now want to supply an example of the kind of theory I have been describing and at which I will be aiming in this paper. In Moral Thinking: Its Level, Method, and Point (4), R. M. Hare claims that it is possible to derive a normative moral theory from the logical properties of the vocabulary of our everyday moral language. Given the manner in which we use such terms as 'ought', 'must', and 'right', one can generate a method of moral reasoning which dictates a particular ethical standpoint. In Hare's own words, "My own strategy has been to expose the logic of the moral concepts as we have them and show that they generate certain canons of moral reasoning which will lead to our adopting a certain method of substantial normative moral thinking [i.e. utilitarianism]."(5) The theory of universal prescriptivism

and the supposed generation of utilitarianism by said theory can be accurately sketched by elaborating on three pairs of terms which appear throughout Hare's book: 1) prescriptivity and universalizability, 2) the facts and logic, and 3) preferences and utilitarianism.

I should make clear from the start that I will be speaking of what Hare calls the method of critical thinking or the critical level of moral thinking throughout this presentation. The critical level of moral thought is responsible for sorting out moral conflicts and justifying our everyday moral intuitions. At this level, then, we are concerned with the very essence of moral reasoning.

We begin by exploring the notion of prescriptivity. "We say something prescriptive if and only if, for some act A, some situation S, and for some person P, if P assents orally to what we say and not, in S, does A then P logically must be assenting insincerely."(6) There are a wide variety of prescriptive expressions. Simple examples include commands such as, "Close the door!" If, in response to this command, someone were to say, "Okay," and then not close the door, the respondent would have, on Hare's view, acted inconsistently or, at least, insincerely.

An example which illustrates the class of prescriptive expressions which Hare has in mind might run as follows.

Suppose someone were to say to me, "Mike, you are sick and you ought to rest." I respond, "Yes, you are right. I ought to rest." If, after this conversation, I do not rest, then I have assented insincerely for I have acknowledged that I ought to rest yet I have not done so. Thus, the person with whom I had this conversation has, to a certain extent, been misled by my response. (Of course, I may have other obligations to fulfill but the expression of these obligations, too, would utilize moral terms possessing this same prescriptive sense.) In this example, then, the expression 'ought' is prescriptive for it informs my listeners as to what I believe I should do in my particular situation.

Now my situation consists, in part, of properties (that is, various factors, circumstances, states of affairs, etc. of my particular situation) which present themselves to anyone who encounters me in my situation. These properties make up the <u>facts</u> of the case. One would risk uttering absurdity if one were to offer a prescription of any kind without taking note of certain facts circumscribed by the content of that prescription. If someone tells me, "You ought to rest because you are sick," the prescription is made with certain facts in mind such as my being sick and my recovery from said ailment requiring rest. Even a simple

command such as, "Close the window," would be made absurdly if one were to utter this command knowing that the window refered to were already closed.

Moral judgments, which comprise a subset of prescriptive expressions, are used in order to commend or condemn certain actions or persons in light of certain descriptive properties about said actions or persons. "All this would come to nothing if our moral judgments were unrelated to the facts about the situation on which we were commenting...It is possible to go further and claim that the requirement to make our moral judgments in the light of the facts is related to a requirement of rationality which governs any prescriptions we issue..."(7) The possibility of encountering absurdity exists whenever we make our prescriptions without first considering the facts of the situation about which the prescription is concerned.

In any situation, however, there will be an infinite number (or, at least, a very great abundance) of facts to consider. We must, therefore, decide which facts will be most relevant to our moral judgments. Hare posits the effects of possible actions on persons in light of these persons' experiences and preferences as one class of facts which are obviously relevant to moral thinking. We must, as much as possible, know what it is like for some person P with

a particular set of past experiences and present preferences to experience some result X of an action A (which we are prescribing). Thus, for example, I cannot say, "Yes, I know how terrible it must be for Smith to be excluded from these activities but I would not mind if someone did the same to me if I were in Smith's shoes." If this is the case, then I must not really know what it is like for Smith (i.e. how terrible it really is for him) to be in that particular situation with his preferences. "Unless I have an equal aversion to myself suffering forthwith what he is suffering or going to suffer I cannot really be knowing (or even believing) that being in his situation with his preferences will be like that."(8) Thus, by attaining knowledge of another's preferences in some particular situation, I can know what it is like for that person in that situation. Put another way, if I want to know what it would be like for P if X were to occur in S then I need only know P's preference toward or aversion to X in S.

Let us turn to the second property of moral concepts, universalizability. "Universalizability...comes to this: If we make different moral judgments about situations we admit to be identical in their universal descriptive properties we contradict ourselves."(9) For example, suppose Jones and Smith have children swimming in a pool. Jones' child begins

screaming for help at the same time at which Smith's child begins screaming for help. Both Jones and Smith are able swimmers and neither person has any obstacle which would impede the saving of his/her respective child. According to the property of universalizability (which the term 'ought' possesses), it would be inconsistent for someone to say, "Jones ought to save his/her child but Smith need not (or ought not) do the same." The universal principle to adopt here is, "If P has the ability and the required knowledge, then P ought to save his/her child from drowning," where P refers not to any particular individual but to any individual in this situation or one relevantly similar to it.

Moreover, suppose I have both the ability and required knowledge necessary to save a child from drowning and that I admit the above principle. If, then, a situation arises in which my child is drowning and I do not save him/her, I am acting inconsistently or insincerely. Once the accepted universal principle is localized to my particular situation, I am bound by the prescriptivity of 'ought'. Thus, the term 'ought' is said to be universally prescriptive since it demands certain behavior from me or from others in relevantly similar situations.

With this property in mind, then, let us examine an example offered by Hare which will serve to illustrate his

conception of the logic of a moral conflict. Smith wishes to park his car and, in order for him to do so, I must move my bike. I want to leave my bike where it is (call this preference p1). Now, if I were the only person involved in the situation at hand, the problem would be easily put to rest -- If I do not want to move the bike, then I ought not move it. This train of thought might be schematized as follows:

1. I would prefer not to move the bike (the preference p1 of strength s1).
2. I ought not move the bike.

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3. The bike ought not to be moved.

However, there is one other person involved in this situation, Smith. In order for Smith to park his car most conveniently, I must move my bike. Thus, Smith will want the bike moved and, if he were the only person involved in the situation (e.g. if the bike belonged to him), Smith would think that if he wants the bike moved then he ought to move it. Now, I can be aware of Smith's preference to have the bike moved (call this preference p2) in any number of ways. For instance, I may notice his frustration at having to wait to park his car or in his circling the parking lot for another place to park or, again, Smith may simply ask me to move my bike. At any rate, this knowledge of Smith's own situation and preferences would not be difficult to acquire.

Hence, I might represent Smith's train of thought as if I were in Smith's situation:

1'. I would like to have the bike moved
(preference p2 of strength s2).
2'. I ought to move the bike.

3'. The bike ought to be moved.

Now both (3) and (3') cannot be issued simultaneously for 'ought' remains universalizable and we cannot say, of a single situation, that the same thing both ought and ought not to be done -- a choice or a resolution of the conflict is in order.

It has been assumed that I have attained knowledge of Smith's preferences and, hence, that I know what it is like for Smith in this situation. I could, theoretically, gain knowledge of preferences had by anyone who happened to be in this situation with me. "So we have, in effect, not an interpersonal conflict of preferences of prescription but an intrapersonal one; both preferences in the conflict are made mine."(10) In other words, the expression 'I' in the above logical expressions is an 'I' qua person having a moral conflict and not an 'I' qua Mike Squillace or an 'I' qua Smith. That is, though each schematization above is presented as if there were only one person involved in the situation, the actual situation involves two persons and, hence, any 'I' in the given situation will realize the

soundness of both schematizations, this recognition yielding the conflict at hand.

Hare also argues that whether it be my bike in the way of my parking my car, my bike in the way of Smith parking his/her car, or Smith's bike in the way of my parking my car, there will be a preference p1 of having the bike remain where it is and a preference p2 of having the bike moved. These preferences, as we have already seen in the discussion above,are all we need to be aware of in order to resolve the conflict at hand. How, then, do we resolve the conflict?

Hare asserts that the action yielding the greatest overall preference satisfaction wins out.(11) The preference p1 has strength s1 and the preference p2 has strength s2. If s2 is greater than s1, then we will move the bike. Hare seems to think, in fact, that this is the case. For instance, if the bike and the car were both mine, it seems plausible that I would get out of the car and move the bike since the preference to conveniently park my car would outweigh the slight inconvenience of or aversion to move my bike. Why should the weighing of preferences be any different for any other ordering of individuals? It is not. Treating the conflict as one which is intrapersonal, I realize that, given the situation, s2 will be greater than s1 and the action generating preference p2 will, therefore, win

out. The universal properties of this reasoning are the same for any persons involved and for any ordering of said persons. The conclusion, in any case, will be, "The bicycle ought to be moved."

If, then, we are only concerned with the maximization of preference satisfaction (as it appears we are) then this is obviously a form of utilitarianism. Notice that Hare is not summing units of pleasure but computing and comparing the quantities or strengths of preferences. Thus, if we acknowledge the prescriptivity and universalizability of moral concepts, if we consider the facts of the case and regard this information in a logical fashon, and if, in enumerating the facts, we include preferences in comparison with other preferences, we will be forced to accept the normative theory of utilitarianism.

Chapter 2
The Reductionism and Staticism of Moral Theory

We may now turn to identifying and explicating the reductionism and staticism of moral theories in general. Though I believe such characteristics are made manifest in most of the traditional moral theories, I shall frequently draw on the given example to illustrate claims made throughout the discussion. The task, then, at this point, is to identify, elaborate, and illustrate both the reductionism and staticism of moral theory.

Reductionism

Reductionism is a particular kind of treatment of actual objects, situations, events, or persons. This treatment involves reducing the situation or person or event in question to a new entity which possesses a characteristic or set of characteristics observed in and taken from the original situation, person, or event. It is then this newly constructed entity on which some discussion or inquiry will often focus. That is, though one may be primarily concerned with the original or actual object, event, or person, the

inquiry or discussion considers the newly formed entity as playing the part of the actual object, event, or person; the constructed is treated as if it were the actual entity.

Let me provide an example of the kind of reductionistic treatment I wish to target. Suppose one is analyzing a note played on a violin. Using an osciliscope, the waveform of the actual sound will be recognized as a sine wave. Various other properties of this wave can also be determined such as its frequency, amplitude, and wavelength. Now, suppose that a soundwave with these characteristics is constructed and that this information is utilized for some other purpose such as to create a simulation of the compatibility of the acoustics in a small room with the quality of this particular sound. At this point, the actual sound of the note has been reduced to a set of characteristics which describe a particular soundwave. That is, the sound of a note played on a violin is treated as a soundwave with a given set of characteristics and not as the particular sound generated by the violin -- the sound is reduced to a soundwave. Put another way, one may still be primarily concerned with the compatability of the actual sound and the actual room but this newly formed entity, the soundwave, is allowed to play the part of the actual sound of the violin.

A distinction is needed, I think, between the reductionistic treatment thusfar discussed and mere abstraction. In abstraction, I would argue, the result is not the formation of any sort of new entity formed from characteristics observed in and taken from the original event, object, etc. We simply "lift" properties or characteristics from some object or person or event and work with these characteristics in isolation from all others ascribed to the phenomenon in question (or those ascribed to some other phenomenon). Thus, consideration of the various properties of the actual sound in the preceding example is a case of abstraction.

It is only when these characteristics are combined to form a new entity and when this entity is taken in the place or as playing the part of the actual sound that we have a case of reductionism. In a reduction, a new entity is formed and it is this new entity which is the primary target of scrutiny. Refering again to the given example, the primary object of study is the soundwave with a given amplitude, wavelength, frequency, and waveform as opposed to a characteristic (e.g. the wavelength, frequency, etc.) of the actual sound. Of course, because one cannot construct any new entity out of characteristics or properties observed in and taken from some actual object, person, or situation

without first acquiring an understanding of these characteristics, we may want to view abstraction as a necessary component of any reduction. Nonetheless, it seems as if abstraction should not be identified with it.

Reductionism is evident in Hare's theory of universal prescriptivism. Hare claims that he is concerned only with logic and the facts and, in particular, preferences and quantitative comparison and aggregation of these preferences. Regarding the facts of any given situation, Hare admits that there are any number of relevant candidates for consideration. The focus, however, is on, "one class of features of actions and situations," which may be provisionally characterized as "the likely effects of possible actions in those situations on people (ourselves and others), that is to say on their experiences and on whether those experiences are such as the people prefer to have or the reverse."(12) The theory of universal prescriptivism, then, reduces discussion and description of some actual situation to a new situation, the description of which is exhausted by the enumeration and intensity of the various preferences of the persons involved. Moreover, discussion and description of these persons is reduced to their preference towards or aversion to a possible result of a possible action in that situation. In short, within the

attempt to resolve a conflict, the given situation is not viewed as the particular situation that it is but as a source or cause of possible actions with possible effects and, furthermore, the actual persons involved in the given situation are treated not as the full, multi-dimensional persons that they are but, rather, as simple beings with preferences towards or aversions to these effects. This thesis will be primarily concerned with the latter reduction.

Staticism

In order to accurately convey what I mean by the "staticism of moral theories," I will borrow a few concepts from Henri Bergson as they appear in An Introduction to Metaphysics.(13) These notions include 'intuition', 'analysis', and 'duration'.

For Bergson, there are two ways in which we may gain knowledge of a thing: analysis and intuition. Intuition is the way of knowing a thing from a view of the object from within that object. It is grasping all that is unique and particular to that object. "By intuition is meant the kind of intellectual sympathy by which one places oneself within an object in order to coincide with what is unique in it and, consequently, inexpressible."(14)

The example which immediately comes to mind is the knowledge I have of my own self. I know myself from within and could never express all of the knowledge I have of myself in symbols. I have knowledge not only of my past experiences, plans, and projects but also of my experiencing, my planning, and, in short, my living as it presents itself to me now. This phenomenon of my presently experiencing, encountering, and existing is continuous, persistent, and, in short, dynamic. It is what Bergson calls <u>duration</u> and such knowledge is only possible via intuition.

Analysis, on the other hand, is knowledge of a thing from a position outside the thing itself. Because it does not enjoy the privileged view of intuition, analysis cannot obtain that which is unique in objects and, in the case of persons, their duration,their continuity and dynamism. Furthermore, because analysis does not generate that which is unique, it is able to express all of its products in symbols (e.g. language, formulas, drawings, etc.). That is, analysis manufactures those ideas which are generally or commonly recognizable. Thus, when that which is commonly or generally recognized in some notion or idea is obliterated, so, too, is the potential for expressing this idea or notion. The term 'blue', for example, conveys a general notion to those who encounter the term but if I wish to describe a particular

blue in a particular lighting on a particular photograph, this color may be inexpressable via any amount of linguistic elaboration. (Indeed, the particular blue in question may be best conveyed by an actual encounter with it.) Thus, a sure mark of analysis is the presence of symbols.

Let me present an example offered by Bergson to make this distinction quite clear. Suppose I take a trip to some town. Upon my return, someone asks me to describe my journey as fully and completely as possible. I can offer descriptions of the various cites I encountered, show any number of various photographs which I took, discuss the different people and situations with which I met, and all of these descriptions and exhibitions will not fully account for my <u>experiencing</u> the town. The various ways in which I related my journey to my audience (e.g. photos, descriptions, etc.) are all symbolizations and the products of knowing the town via analysis. "Were all the photographs taken from all possible points of view to go on indefinitely, this would still not be equivalent to the solid town in which we walk about."(15) Again, the point here is not to advocate either intuition or analysis as the prefered methods of acquiring knowledge. The point here is only that intuition and analysis yield very distinct brands of knowledge.

The <u>staticism</u> of moral theories is the tendency of these

theories to attempt to acquire knowledge about or give accounts of the world (and, in particular, of actual persons) via analysis. Analysis, like the camera in the above example, takes snapshots and, in doing so, eradicates dynamism. The point here is not to suggest that such theories ought to attempt to gain knowledge via intuition. I merely point out that they do, in fact, attempt to acquire knowledge by analysis and that, by proceeding in this manner, theories leave the dynamism of actual persons (a characteristic which is dealt with in detail in Chapter 5) only faintly (if at all) noticeable.

Staticism is made manifest in the theory of universal prescriptivism in the very manner in which Hare discusses preferences. It is most pronounced in discussions involving talk of "a preference of strength s." Consider what such a phrase entails. Hare is literally attempting to measure the intensity of a preference in the same way we might measure the length of a line or, better still, the intensity of a sound. Anything which can be measured is measured "in a frozen position" or "at an instant." The line which has its length taken is "frozen" and the sound which has its intensity measured has it done "at some instant;" "the sound has intensity of x units," is taken to mean, "At time t (some instant of time), the sound was measured at x units." Thus,

the attempt to measure the strength of preferences implies staticism. Or, in short,measurements, because they are forms of Bergsonian analysis (i.e. they are points of view taken from outside the object and the results are codifiable), yield the static rather than the dynamic. Later, in Chapter 4, I shall argue that talk of the intensity of preferences is Hare's way of expressing the phenomenon of preferring as it is perceived by the individual in question. It is, in short, a way of viewing the phenomenon of preferring from without and, as I shall try to show, such a tactic is extremely misleading for it grossly oversimplifies the matter.

Chapter 3
The Problems of Reductionism

In the preceding chapter, I tried to explain and illustrate the characteristics of moral theories which I have been calling reductionism and staticism. It is now time to examine what sorts of problems the presence of such characteristics may precipitate. In this chapter and the next, this is what I wish to accomplish. Both chapters (this chapter dealing with reductionism and the next with staticism) have two tasks to perform:

1. describing what sorts of considerations are being neglected by moral theories which exhibit the characteristics of reductionism and staticism. Doing so should provide a partial understanding of what is meant by the dynamism and character of actual persons. (A detailed discussion of these characteristics is left for Chapter 5.)

2. showing why neglecting these considerations throughout the course of our moral thinking may lead to problematic moral conclusions or, at least, a kind of "incomplete" moral thought.

Let us begin, then, with reductionism. Recall that reductionism is a kind of treatment of some actual situation,

object, person, or event. The actual entity is reduced to a new entity, a constructed entity, possessing a characteristic or set of characteristics observed in and taken from the situation, event, person, or object in question. This newly constructed entity then serves as the focal point for some investigation or inquiry. What sorts of considerations are being overlooked in such reductionistic treatments and what kinds of problems emerge due to this neglect? In this chapter, these questions are examined with a special emphasis on reductions of actual persons. Specifically, then, we shall be concerned with the various elements or facets of the life of the individual which may be overlooked or neglected in reductions of actual persons and, too, with the problems which such neglect might precipitate.

When we consider a theory like Hare's, we note several instances of reductionism. For example, we have already seen that actual persons are reduced to entities with various quantifiable preferences and aversions which are to significantly contribute to the resolution of moral conflicts. However, preferences are not the only phenomena capable of contributing to deliberation about what ought to be done. Preferences and aversions, in fact, make up only a small part of the psychical life of the individual. We shall see that the mental life of the individual is much fuller

and much more dynamic than presenting it as a series of quantifiable preferences and aversions would suggest. (More shall be said on this in Chapter 4.) For now, I am primarily concerned with the sentimental facet of the life of the individual in general (that is, with emotion, feeling, and passion in general without concerning myself with preferences and aversions in particular).

Moral theories exhibiting the characteristic of reductionism often ignore other aspects of the individual as well. Stuart Hampshire, for instance, identifies two elements of human life: the natural (i.e. the biological) and the conventional. For the most part, moral theories tend to focus on aspects of the natural element, producing moral judgments based on facts which hold for all human beings (or human beings and animals). Certainly it is possible to discuss an individual in terms of his/her natural makeup but we cannot ignore that individual's social and historical setting. In Hampshire's words, "The cycle of appropriate activity within an individual's life is being presented as a feature of the species to be properly studied by biologists but surely it is also a feature of particular populations whose differences are studied by historians and anthropologists."(16) There may be moral claims such as, "Prevent pain whenever possible," which may be derivable from

biological characteristics of the speceis but, "On the other hand, some injunctions and prohibitions (as in duties of kinship, of politeness, of many kinds of loyalty) are traced back, when challenged, to a particular <u>way of life</u> in which these duties are essential elements."(17)

There is one plausible objection which proponents of Hare's theory might raise to the charge that universal prescriptivism ignores the conventional facet of the life of the individual. They might point to the intuitive level of moral thought as an element of universal prescriptivism which, in fact, acknowledges considerations of this sort. The intuitive level, according to Hare, is the level at which most of us function during our everyday lives. Intuitions or dispositions make living the moral life much simpler than would be possible if such intuitions and dispositions were not present within each of us. "If it were not possible to form such dispositions, any kind of learning of behavior would be ruled out and we should have to meet each new situation entirely unprepared and perform an existential choice or a cost-benefit analysis on the spot."(18) Thus, the conventional facet of the individual's life is, indeed, an important consideration in Hare's eyes. This would be realized, my antagonists might argue, if I did not restrict myself to the critical level of moral thought in the

exposition found in Chapter 1.

There are two answers to be given to such an objection. First, the reader must remember that my concern in this essay is with the resolution of moral conflicts as a function of moral theory, these resolutions often taking the form of prescriptions for and judgments of conduct. For Hare, refusing to venture from the intuitive level is part of the problem for, at this level, a great many moral conflicts are frequently disguised as irresoluble. "Those who say (wrongly) that there can just be irresoluble conflicts of duties are always those who have confined their thinking about morality to the intuitive level. At this level, the conflicts are, indeed, irresoluble."(19) Thus, those who wish to appeal to the intuitive level as a way of considering facets of the life of the individual akin to the conventional as a part of our moral thinking will be dissappointed. The intuitive level, in fact, offers us a way of living conveniently and not of thinking coherently. For Hare, intuitions or dispositions (or 'prejudices', as he refers to them on the first page of his book) present obstacles to rather than instruments of clear and coherent moral thought. (The critical level, in fact, must remain untainted with intuitions if it is to perform its task efficiently and accurately.)

The critical level of moral thought is the level at which clear and coherent moral thinking (i.e. deciding what, all things considered, ought to be done) is done. It is this level which not only allows us a tool for resolving moral conflicts which arise at the intuitive level but, too, it allows for the justification of our intuitions (which are not self-justifiable). "The intuitions which give rise to a conflict are the product of our upbringing and past experience of decision-making...We can always ask if the upbringing was the best we could have or whether the past decisions were the right ones..."(20) I focus on the critical level because it is where the possibility of resolving conflicts resides for Hare. The intuitive level, while having the capacity to generate various prescriptions for and judgments of conduct in some situations, cannot handle all situations nor is it itself justified. If it is pure and clear moral thinking in which we are interested, then, an appeal to the intuitive level will not do. We must (as I have done) focus on the critical level of moral thought.

Sentiments (other than preferences and aversions) within an individual and the conventional element of the life of the individual, then, are two facets of the individual often overlooked in many accounts of the resolution of moral

conflicts (these accounts being implicitly or explicitly given by various moral theories). There are, very likely, many others. I restrict my attention to the sentiments of individuals. It remains to show why such considerations are important to our moral thought. The discussion of sentiments which is to follow will, I think, serve as an example of the significance of factors often neglected in our moral thinking.

Sentiment

The task of this section is to present the sentimental element of the life of the individual as a necessary and useful tool in moral thinking. Of course, not all moral theorists have overlooked the role of sentiment in moral thought. Two such philosophers are Hume (21) and Aristotle.(22) I shall rely on their work in this section to do two things: 1) to narrow the gap so often posited or assumed between the rational and the sentimental and 2) to describe what sorts of work considerations of the sentimental element of the individual can do in moral thinking. I will begin by introducing the Humean notion of sympathy and argue that it yields a different sort of perception or view of the situations of persons than does pure and abstract reason. I

will then try to clarify precisely what sort of view this is and why it is important. I will end this section by listing various ways in which sentiments (and the products of sympathy) are necessary and useful considerations in actual moral thought and discourse.

Let us begin, then, with sympathy. According to Hume, sympathy is, "that propensity we have...to receive by communication their [others'] inclinations and sentiments however different from (or even contrary to) our own."(23) Thus, sympathy is not a sentiment but the capacity to receive or, more precisely, to perceive the sentiments of others in their situation. Hume is concerned, for example, with the sorrow we feel due to a detailed account or perception of another's grief or, again, the joy we experience at the prospect of another's good fortune. Sympathy, therefore, yields a very different perception of another's situation than that offered by reason which, in fact, could never generate as lively a perception of such sorrow or joy. For Hume, I think, the difference between the products of reason and of sympathy could be summed up by saying that reason gives a lively conception of an idea whereas sympathy ultimately yields a lively perception of an impression.

Let me provide an example to illustrate the kind of perceptions yielded by reason and sympathy. Suppose I am

listening to the radio when an announcement telling of a devastating earthquake in San Fransisco is broadcast. Listeners are taken live to the scene of the quake where fires rage, people scream and cry, and sirens roar through the streets. In the background, one can just make out a child screaming for her mother. Needless to say, I am touched by this situation and the child's predicament. I understand that there has just been a devastating quake, that people are scrambling everywhere, that the child is, most likely, completely disoriented and terrified, and that there is no one, at the moment, tending to the needs of this child. In short, I understand (in a rational manner) the child's situation; the fear and anxiety experienced by the child seem reasonable to me. (Of course, I do feel some uneasiness or discomfort due to this situation but, I think, my distance from the situation and the fact that it is coming to me via radio prevents this uneasiness from reaching any substantial intensity.)

On the other hand, the newswoman doing the broadcast witnesses this child first-hand. She sees the child crying for help, stumbling on large pieces of debris left from the quake, bleeding slightly from the mouth and hands, and desparately looking for her parents. The newswoman recognizes the chaos which envelopes the area and, in this

light, is struck with the incredible hopelessness and anxiety which the child must feel. The newswoman understands the child's situation because she sympathizes with the child; she can, to a great extent, feel the child's hopelessness, anxiety, fear, and terror. (This is possible, in part, according to Hume, because of her proximity to the situation at hand, a proximity not present in the relationship I myself have to the situation.) I and the newswoman have a very different perception or view or understanding of the child's situation -- my perception or understanding is a product of reason while the newswoman's is one of sympathy. (Again, there may be some amount of sympathy contributing to the formation of my perception as well as some reason to hers. I am concerned, at this point, with the primary contributant to each perception.)

Examples such as these offer a way to narrow the gap between reason and emotion. Sympathy and reason are ways of perceiving or considering or understanding another person's sentiments in some situation. Hume summarizes this point nicely: "Now there is nothing more natural for us than to embrace the opinions and inclinations of others...both from sympathy which renders their sentiments intimately present to us and from reasoning which makes us regard their judgment as a kind of argument for what they affirm. These principles of

sympathy and authority influence almost all of our opinions..."(24) (At this point, advocates of Hare's theory will want to say that Hare is trying to utilize just this sort of notion in the theory of universal prescriptivism. These persons should consult the second set of objections in Chapter 6.)

Words such as 'thoughtful' seem to imply such an intimate relationship between considerations offered by sympathy and by reason. When one is thoughtful, one thinks of or takes into consideration another. The word seems to imply a kind of "rational consideration" of another's predicament yet the term is used to convey a kind of "sentimental concern for" or an attempt to understand the feelings of another person. Words like 'understanding' and 'considerate' are often used in this two-fold manner as well.

Hence, one can begin to see an end to the opposition between sympathy and reason, between the rational and the emotional. In considering the manner in which we think and speak about others, in admitting the similarity between sympathy and reason (insofar as they are both ways of perceiving or understanding another's situation), and in weakening the opposition between reason and emotion, we begin to realize, I think, the narrowing gap between reason and emotion, between the sentimental and the rational. In this

light, to exhibit partiality to either side is to practice a kind of epistemological prejudice which is arbitrary and without ground.

What, then, is the significance of this novel perception afforded to us by sympathy? First, if moral philosophy has to do with the actions of persons, Hume would argue, it is not always reason which initiates and motivates action in the human being -- it is, more often than not, sentiment. "What is honorable, what is becoming, what is fair, what is noble, what is generous takes possession of the heart and animates us to embrace and maintain it. What is intelligible, what is evident, what is probable, what is true procures only the cool assent of the understanding..."(25) Hume's point is well-taken especially when we stop to consider that we are more often overcome with desire and love, more frequently set into fits because of extreme anger or outrage than we are blinded by consistency or driven by intelligibility. Not even truth can claim to steer our ways for it is the passion for the truth, a love of wisdom (as the name 'philosopher' suggests) which keeps us steadfast in the pursuit of knowledge.

Perhaps we have all felt the conflict which emerges due to the presence of both the pull of some universal, rational principle and the sometimes irresistible tug of a strong

feeling or emotion. It is this tension between our rational and sentimental elements, between the desire to do what we think is right and the temptation to do what we want or what "we feel like doing," which generates so many moral problems. (I use the term 'moral problem' to refer to moral conflicts in which the person reflecting on the moral conflict in question is him/herself involved in said conflict.) Thus, if we are to be as informed as possible concerning such conflicts in others, we must not only be aware of the universal or rational principles to which they adhere (this awareness being possible via reason or simple communication) but, also, we must sympathize, we must, so much as possible, know how the other feels. (Again, for those who hear the voice of Hare ringing loudly in these few sentences, see the appropriate passages in Chapters 4 and 6.) Some sort of sympathy, then, is necessary for a truly informative perception of another's situation.

Furthermore, in the consideration of human action, we are concerned with the actors -- human beings. Human beings are rational beings but they are also social, personal, and sentimental beings. If, as Kant suggested, 'ought' implies 'can', we ought not require that the moral life be in accordance with one faculty or aspect (e.g. the rational, the sentimental, the conventional, etc.) and with no other

faculty or facet of human character. Hume reminds those who wish to emphasize the rational element, for example, that, "We may easily observe there is no man so constantly possessed of this virtue [strength of mind] as to never, on any occasion, yield to the solicitations of passion and desire."(26) Sentiment and emotion are as much (and, arguably, even more) a part of the human life than reason. Hence, any discussion of the good life or the moral life for persons -- a life so obviously characterized by action -- must include some account of the role of sentiment and, too, of sympathy.

Aristotle offers one further reason to employ considerations involving sentiment in our moral thought and discourse. The person having the appropriate feelings over right and wrong acts will be the virtuous person. That is, the one who delights in doing right and is pained by doing wrong is the one whom we dub 'virtuous'. Aristotle says, "The man who does not rejoice in noble actions is not even good since no one would call a man just who did not enjoy acting justly nor any man liberal who did not enjoy liberal actions and similarly in all other cases."(27) In the same way that the musician enjoys playing and performing music (and is made better by doing so), the virtuous or good person enjoys or takes delight in performing the virtuous act. Such

considerations will contribute to the knowledge of another's situation.

Feeling delight over right acts or discomfort in doing the wrong is an indication of character. The character of the good person, because such a person enjoys performing right and noble deeds, permits him/her to do so more easily and efficiently. This is a reminder of what we have already noted in Hume concerning sentiment as a primary spring of action. Hume's indebtedness to Aristotle reveals itself when Aristotle asserts, "Moral excellence is concerned with pleasures and pains. It is on account of the pleasure that we do bad things and on account of the pain that we abstain from noble ones."(28) Hence, virtue is intimately connected with pleasure, pain, and sentiment in general.

The opposition often posited or assumed between sympathy and reason, between the sentimental and the rational will, I think, be less pronounced at this point. Furthermore, it should be plain that sentiments can and must have a role to play in our moral deliberations. In order to appreciate the conflict within another, to gain a significantly informative view of another's situation, to acknowledge that it is actual persons and not theoretical persons with whom we are dealing, to grasp the multi-dimensional human being, and to understand the character of another, we must offer sentiment its proper

place in our moral thought.

Chapter 4
The Problems of Staticism

Recall that the staticism of moral theories is their tendency to employ the method of Bergsonian analysis. In Hare, this tendency led to talk of "a preference of strength s." In this chapter, we shall see just how misleading such talk can be and what sorts of problems arise due to staticism. I will begin by returning to Hare's bike-car example and try to show that, even in this simple case, "a preference of strength S," is a far cry from the phenomenon of preferring. I will argue that the former is really a way of viewing the latter from a position outside the individual. The phenomenon of preferring is a glance at the component of the life of the individual which I shall call the history in the making, this component being distinguished from another which I label the history made. Finally, the possible difficulties of staticism are discussed by elaborating upon the various relations which exist between these two components.

First, let us return to the example in which there is a preference to have the bike moved in order to conveniently park the car. If the bike belongs to Smith and I wish to

park my car, Hare will claim that I have a preference p of strength s to have the bike moved. I, however, have more than "a preference." I prefer or, more precisely, I am preferring that the bike be moved. The phenomenon of preferring (as opposed to a single, discrete preference) is comprised of many, "states of mind" -- I am desiring that the bike be moved, I am irritated for having to wait for the bike to be moved, I am frustrated with the person for having parked the bike there to begin with, I am concerned that I may not find another parking space if the bike is not moved, I am frustrated with the entire situation after a long day of work, and so forth. And, of course, each of these "states of mind" is a dynamic and continuous phenomenon in itself, comprised, in turn, of any number of simpler feelings and perceptions. As Bergson puts it, "...Whilst I was experiencing them [the various 'states of mind'], they were so solidly organized, so profoundly animated with a common life that I could not say where one finished or where another commenced..."(29) The point is that there is a very big difference between the phenomenon of preferring and a single, discrete preference.

Thus, because the phenomenon of preferring is distinct from a simple preference, Hare cannot simply utilize the latter without regard for the former. The phenomenon of

preferring is a continuous and dynamic process, the elements comprising it swelling into and shrinking out of one another -- such a process resists quantification. Quantifying such a process would be like trying to quantify the swelling of a wave or the formation of a cloud. (The possibility of quantifying or weighing preferences will be taken up in an objection in the final chapter of this essay.) In short, if Hare wishes to utilize this notion of "a preference of strength S," he must do a great deal of work in order to show how such a quantity could be extracted from the complex and dynamic phenomenon of preferring. (The distinction is not between the phrases 'a preference' and 'preferring'. The reader should consult objection (1) to the staticism of moral theory in Chapter 6 for a discussion of how this argument goes beyond a mere linguistic confusion.)

The phenomenon of preferring and the difficulties it presents for Hare make up only a small part of a much larger picture. The phenomenon of preferring is, I believe, a part of that component of the life of a particular individual which I shall call the <u>history in the making</u> as opposed to a second component which I term the <u>history made</u>. The former component consists in all those things which I am currently experiencing and encountering (e.g. the writing and thinking of this essay, the tiring of my mind, the hearing of the

traffic outside my window, etc.). It is, in essence, not my life as it is but my living, my existing.

The history made consists in all those past experiences and encounters which I have had and which are present in my memory. They are, to some extent, capable of being described and expressed by me or identified and discussed by others. Thus, it is the history in the making which is completely overlooked by analysis and the history made which is codifiable (though not necessarily completely so).

Thus, as Bergson puts it, "The inner life is all of this: variety of qualities [i.e. the history made, the formed person or character], continuity of progress [i.e. the history in the making, the forming character], and unity of direction."(30) The life of the individual is not only a set of characteristics and past experiences but, in addition to this, it is a forming character, an experiencing, a living. The life of a musician, for instance, consists not only of past performances, acquired knowledge of music, and previous encounters with other musicians but also in performing and learning music and encountering other musicians. Following Aristotle, we might simply say that a good part of the musical life is living musically and that, in general, a good part of any life is living.

Let me offer an analogy which, I think, will drive home

this distinction. Consider the very act of drawing a line. In this case, the very act of drawing itself can function as a representation of the history in the making -- the act of drawing itself is continuous, mobile, and dynamic. The line which is left behind may serve as a counterpart to the history made. The line represents that already drawn and, to a greater or lesser extent, is codifiable (as an equation of the form 'x = c'). Now, of course, the very drawing of the line effects the line as a whole, it changes the appearance and dimensions of the line. Moreover, the line itself partially determines the kinds of maneuvers the drawing can perform (that is, if the resulting picture is still to be of a line). For instance, if the drawing were to suddenly project upward or downward, this would "kill" the line (i.e. the very drawing of the line is no longer a drawing of a line but a drawing of, say, a rounded right angle). Thus, the history made and the history in the making (like the line drawn and the drawing of the line, respectively) should not be thought of as two separate and distinct components -- they guide and determine each other in the life of an individual.

This distinction between a history made and a history in the making reaches its climax in a distinction between what Hampshire calls a <u>way of life</u> and what I term a <u>way of living</u>, respectively. I have had certain beliefs, held up

certain projects and plans, and adhered to certain interests in the past. These past interests, plans, projects, and beliefs, along with my past experiences, historical and social setting, and religious upbringing (among other things), comprise a way of life. Furthermore, in my everyday pursuing of such interests, projects, and plans, and in my daily adhering to these beliefs, I manifest a way of living. The way of life is like the line drawn in that it is partially codifiable and in that it partially determines the way of living (in the way that the line drawn determined the drawing of the line) -- if the way of living were to suddenly and abruptly change, the way of life which has been portrayed will be, in Hampshire's words, "killed."(31) Thus, the way of life and the way of living are both components of any particular individual's living or existing in much the same manner that the line drawn and the very drawing of the line are components of the act of drawing the line.

Let me offer a concrete example of the interaction between a way of life and of living. I am a vegetarian. I have read literature on the mistreatment of animals, had beliefs about pain and suffering in animals, taken interest in the waste inherent in the mass-production of meat in this country, etc. These particular interests, beliefs, and encounters comprise one component of my way of life. (For

Hampshire, a "way of life" consists of much more than just my vegetarianism.) Furthermore, I have a way of living which is revealed, primarily, in the fact that I continually avoid meats. The vegetarian component of my way of life, in short, is revealed in the vegetarian way of living (i.e. in my continually avoiding meat).

What is the point of all of this chatter? Simply this: Not only is my policy of avoiding of meat (to stick to the example at hand) a complex swelling and shrinking of the elements which comprise it (e.g. the knowing of the process which produced the meat, the being aware of the unhealthy chemicals within the meat, etc.), but it is also a manifestation of an entire way of life, a manifestation of a complex web of beliefs, interests, goals, plans, and past experiences. In short, the phenomenon of avoiding is, in many cases, a complex, continuous, and dynamic manifestation of an entire host of interdetermining and interlocking beliefs, interests, projects, plans, and past experiences -- the phenomenon of avoiding is much more than, "having an aversion."

Given this discussion, I think that there are two potential difficulties yielded by the tendency of moral theories (or the moral psychologies of these theories) to overlook or only slightly acknowledge the dynamism of actual

persons. First, overlooking dynamism blatantly disregards one important facet of the life of an individual. A person, in this light, is seen as an entity with beliefs, interests, sentiments, plans, and goals which never change. That is, these beliefs, interests, etc., are supposed to be fixed; the mental life, in effect, is not alive at all -- the person is seen only in terms of a history made.

On this view, then, my vegetarianism is a mere collection of beliefs, interests, and sentiments. It is, in fact, not "my vegetarianism" at all but, rather, vegetarianism in general. Such a perception is simply inaccurate and very superficial. I am a vegetarian not only because I have certain beliefs and interests but, also, because I try to live according to these beliefs and interests and, furthermore, because such beliefs and interests can be modified or altered. My vegetarianism is mine precisely because it is I who exhibit, modify, alter, and share these beliefs and interests. "Life is activity," says Aristotle, and it is this fact which we are blatantly disregarding if we adhere to this perception of actual persons.

As I have already conceded, the history made and the history in the making, though spoken of as distinct elements, are not to be taken as such. The individual is the result of

the interaction or interplay which occurs between these two elements. Hence, another difficulty which might emerge due to staticism is the neglect of such interaction. That is, we must now briefly consider the disregard for the interaction or interplay between both features of the life of an individual whereas, in the preceding few paragraphs, discussion was limited to the history in the making in isolation. (In saying that these two features are to remain tied to each other, I do not want to discredit the preceding discussion of the history in the making in isolation. I direct the reader to objection (3) in the first set of objections in the final chapter of this paper.)

Let us consider the influence of the history in the making on the history made. Recall that it is the latter feature which is the describable or codifiable feature of the life of the individual. If the history in the making is suddenly filled with phenomena which are "against the grain" of the history made (e.g. I begin eating meat, I change my field of study from philosophy to business, I no longer practice music, etc.), the latter facet will be remarkably altered. That is, a description or account of the history made before and after such occurrences will be significantly distinct -- I will, in one sense, be a different person. In terms of the analogy given above, there is no longer a

drawing of a line but, rather, of some other very different figure.

On the other hand, let us consider the possible influence of the history made on the history in the making. We have already seen that sentiments can (and often do) act as the springs of action. The same is true of a history made. Beliefs, interests, plans, goals, experiences, and the like will (and often do) determine future actions. It is just such an influence to which we refer (at least in part) when we speak of the character of a person. Thus, for example, getting me to eat meat on some occasion is, as the saying goes, much easier said than done. The request is not only for a particular action but, more importantly, it is for an alteration in beliefs, interests, and, in short, in character.

I realize that the previous few pages offer only a rough sketch of a very complex issue (i.e. personhood and self-identity). Nonetheless, my point here is only to make it clear that disregarding dynamism is disregarding matters of vital importance to actual persons. Considerations of particular beliefs and interests as they reveal themselves in various individuals, the influence of particular actions on the life of an individual, and the character of an individual are all significant factors which are overlooked in the

disregarding of dynamism of actual persons. It is no wonder that, even though Hare employs a notion of sympathy in his theory, universal prescriptivism remains grossly inadequate. In Hare's account of how we are to know or be aware of another's situation, he overlooks the very identity and integrity of an individual. Such considerations are crucial for the simple reason that prescriptions for and judgments of actions of actual persons will be made in vain or issued without regard for factors which could significantly alter said prescriptions or judgments. Again, if it is the actions of actual persons in which we are interested, let us not prescribe or judge actions for or of theoretical persons.

Chapter 5
Particulars, Persons, and Conflicts

I have already tried to explicitly characterize and identify the characteristics of staticism and reductionism in moral theories. However, such an explicit characterization of the characteristics of dynamism and character has yet to be given. I now wish to attempt such a characterization in two ways. First, I will consider the notion of a 'particular'. I will present the particular as an entity which possesses both the characteristics of dynamism and character. Such a characterization is, by no means, meant to be complete. It will serve, however, as a way of summarizing (and, perhaps, further clarifying) these two characteristics. I will also provide a concrete moral dilemma taken from my own life which will, I think, exhibit not only the limitations of theory but, too, the importance of these characteristics in terms of the particulars of the dilemma.

Let me first adopt a general characterization of the 'particular' utilized by Gorovitz & MacIntyre in an article entitled, "Towards A Theory of Medical Fallibility." "A particular occupies a region of space, persists through time,

has boundaries, has an environment, has peripheral and more central areas, and, characteristically, can spread over two or more parts."(32) Thus, ice cubes, snowflakes, crowds of people, states, soda cans, and bags of soda cans are all particulars on this view. (Notice that some collectives count as particulars as well.)

What distinguishes one particular from another is a distinctive property or combination of properties. Such a distinctiveness may be as simple as one particular occupying a different region of space from that occupied by another (such as two distinct, yet identical, ice cubes) or as complex as two distinct persons each of which possesses a whole conglomeration of unique features. The distinctive features, attributes, and behaviors of a particular together with the history of contingencies which formed and maintain that particular (what I have been calling the "history made") makes up the <u>character</u> of that particular. The character of some particulars (e.g. a soda can or an ice cube) is rather simple. One could, it seems, give a complete description of the character of particulars such as soda cans or ice cubes.

"The basic mistake made by the interpretation of science...is to suppose all particulars are of this kind."(33) Persons and hurricanes are examples of

particulars with complex characters. Such particulars have a very complex history and, as we shall see, are constantly interacting with their environments to modify and alter this history. As Gorovitz & MacIntyre rightly point out, persons (and animals) are much more akin to hurricanes and tornados than they are to ice cubes and soda cans (at least with respect to the character of these entities).(34)

Another interesting feature of particulars such as ice cubes and soda cans is that their interaction with their environment is rather limited. The interaction is either comprised of only a few variables (as in the case of the ice cube) or is negligible (as in the case of the soda can). On the other hand, tornados, hurricanes, and persons have a very active interaction with many other particulars in their respective environments. This ongoing, persisting, and continuous interaction with surroundings is what I call the dynamism of the particular. In persons, this is characterized by what I have termed the, "history in the making." (Of course, in the case of persons, there is the additional factor of "the will"; what one wills for oneself is another factor in the history in the making of a particular individual.)

Now, keeping in mind the discussion of my vegetarianism, suppose I visit a friend's house. My friend's mother is a

sensitive woman who is easily offended or upset when any guest will not eat some of each part of a dinner which she has laboriously and lovingly prepared. The night I visit dinner consists of a main course of roast beef. I do not wish to offend my friend's mother for I like the family very much yet I am a vegetarian and will have great difficulty in eating this meal. The question, then, is whether or not I ought to eat the meal as it stands.

Let us first recognize that there are at least two particulars involved in this dilemma. (I shall, for the time, exclude my friend from consideration though she was, in fact, present at this meal.) As actual persons, my friend's mother and I each have our own character. That is, we each have our own sentiments, beliefs, and interests and our own history made. Now, if I am to adopt Hare's methodology for thinking about this moral problem, I must make the preference of the mother to have the meat eaten my own. The preference to not have the meat eaten, which is my own preference, is, presumably, fully-known by me.

It does not seem to me that I have access to such detailed information about my friend's mother. Besides not knowing the woman all that well, I cannot expect to be able to accurately extract a preference with a certain intensity from such a complex character. Moreover, even if I am able

to arrive at some provisional estimation of the intensity of the mother's preference to have the meat eaten, comparing it to the intensity of my own preference to not have the meat eaten could be rather difficult. These difficulties are due, in part, to the complex, multi-dimensional characters of the persons involved. At bottom, we are not comparing the intensity of preferences in dilemmas like the one given here but, rather, the identity or integrity of individuals. Quantifying and weighing such characteristics will, I think, appear much more troublesome than quantifying and weighing the intensities of preferences.

Moral theory tends to extract outstanding features of the characters of individuals via the moral psychology present within the given theory. Hume focuses on sentiments, Hobbes (though a political theorist) on our self-interestedness, Bentham on the capacity to feel pleasure or pain, and Hare on the capacity to have preferences and aversions. All of these, I think, grossly underestimate the character of an individual. Nonetheless, they all have important features in mind and said features certainly deserve our attention. The character of any individual, in short, is complex and we should not hope to ever acquire a complete understanding of any character especially when given the other feature of the particular upon which we have been

focusing, the dynamism.

I said earlier that the dynamism of the persons involved in this dilemma is their constant, ongoing, and continuous interaction with their surroundings (together with the effects of "the will," which I pass over for now). The dynamism encompasses what I have been calling the history in the making. In this example, for instance, we recognize that the various preferences are going to be changing as the situation intensifies. The mother is growing more anxious about the meal and its acceptability to her guest and I grow more and more concerned about how to deal with the situation. Yes, the intensity of the mother's anxiety or distress becomes more evident to me but so does my own concern about the prospect of eating meat.

Such dynamic and ongoing tension, this continuing, palpable tension between these two particulars due to their separate characters and dynamisms, is, in part, what contributes to the formation of a <u>moral conflict</u>. If it were not for dynamism, if the history in the making were not, in fact, a part of the individual life, it is difficult to see from whence conflict would arise. Though I do not have the space to argue for such a claim here, I would assert that, due to the very nature of persons as particulars, as entities which exhibit the characteristics of character and dynamism,

conflict is, to some extent, inevitable. The resolution of moral conflict is not as simple as some might have it.

Chapter 6
Objections and Conclusions

In this final chapter, I will consider some possible objections to my thesis. I am especially concerned with those which might be raised with regard to the positing of the staticism and reductionism of traditional moral theories. Thus, I shall divide the objections into two groups: those concerning the reductionism and those concerning the staticism of moral theories as presented in the previous chapters. I note such objections not only to make my own view clearer but to assure the reader of my awareness of the extreme complexity of the issue with which I have been occupied in this essay. Hence, I wish to provide substantial answers to these various objections knowing all too well that said answers will be far from complete.

Objections Concerning Staticism

I will begin with some objections which might be raised to the account of the staticism of moral theories given above:

1. The staticism of moral theories makes itself manifest in these theories due to the inadequacies of our

language. Granted that discussions of 'preferences' might be misleading with regard to, say, someone's psychical life, most of us know that "having a preference" is a very complex and dynamic phenomenon for we have all "had preferences." Bergson himself says, "concepts layed side by side never give us more than an artificial reconstruction of the object of which they can only symbolize certain general and, in a way, impersonal aspects. It is, therefore, useless to believe that with them we can seize a reality of which they present to us the shadow alone."(35) The word 'preferring' may, indeed, convey a better sense of what is meant by one's "having a preference" but it is still a concept which, due to its very nature, hides the dynamism of actual persons.

Moreover, moral theorists are aware of such inadequacies. Hare, in Freedom and Reason, writes, "In learning it [some moral concept like 'good']...[one]...will be learning to use a word in a certain way and to commend or prescribe for imitation a certain kind of man. A man who whole-heartedly accepts such a rule is likely to live (not merely talk) differently from one who does not."(36, my emphasis) It is false to say, then, that such theorists are neglecting the dynamism of actual persons for, on the contrary, they are, as moral philosophers, concerned with actions of persons and actions are dynamic by nature. Hare

introduces the concept of prescriptivity, in fact, to get beyond the staticism of moral concepts implied by those who purport to exhaust the meaning of such terms by elaborating upon said terms' descriptive meaning.

In response, let me first acknowledge that at least part of the problem which stems from the staticism of moral theories is linguistically oriented. I agree with Bergson concerning the inadequacies of symbols in the expression of certain phenomena. Whether we express someone's preferring as a sort of 'preferring' or as that person's, "having a preference," we are still confronted with the hard fact that language can only convey so much dynamism.

Nonetheless, I do not think we need to abandon all attempts to ease such difficulties. There is, one must admit, a difference between the object of 'a preference' and that of 'preferring'. The latter term does convey a more continuous and dynamic phenomenon than does the former. Even in speaking of a person's, "having a preference," we emphasize the phenomenon of preferring via the term 'having' rather than some continuous or ongoing possession of this thing called, "a preference." This distinction, I have tried to argue, is especially clear when we contrast between comparisons of preferences and those of "preferrings" (if I may use the term) -- the former can be compared precisely

because it is made discrete and static via its expression while the latter is much more troublesome in this regard.

As I have also tried to demonstrate, however, the problem extends beyond the inadequacies of language; the problem is not just with the way we talk. Moral theories tend to acquire knowledge by way of analysis which is a view taken external to some object, person, or situation. This external standpoint inevitably leads to a static view of actual persons, situations, and objects. This is particularly evident in the case of persons since, in viewing them from without, we must completely overlook their duration (i.e. their experience of their own being, encountering, preferring, and so forth). Nevertheless, as I said earlier, I do not mean to suggest that theories ought to acquire knowledge via intuition. This seems, to me, in light of the discussion above, impossible.

Given these considerations, then, I propose that we not reject a theory merely on the presence of staticism. This would entail the rejection of most (if not all) moral theories. Our language and methods of acquiring knowledge are such that staticism is inevitable in any account of morality. Thus, let us consider the degree to which staticism is present in a given moral theory. Put another way, one moral theory may be more or less static (or reveal

more or less staticism) than another. We cannot eliminate the presence of staticism altogether but we can strive to overcome its effects on our moral thinking. Doing so may not help us to solve our moral problems more quickly or efficiently but it will, I think, provide for a clearer and more comprehensive understanding of the complexities of the conflict at hand.

2. Let us grant the response to objection (1). That is, some degree of staticism will inevitably be present in any moral theory due to the very nature of our language and our methods of acquiring knowledge. Perhaps, then, we could construct a sort of calculus for a more precise extraction of the knowledge on which we wish to focus. For instance, suppose a preferential calculus could be invented to obtain the intensity of a person's preferring and this value we shall call, "a preference p of strength or intensity s." In this case, we would preserve the dynamism of the original phenomenon yet the information with which we will concern ourselves will be usable. Such a calculus is obviously possible since, for instance, we can compute the speed v or accelaration a of some free-falling body at some instant of time using the infinitesmal calculus.

The problem with such a proposal is that its adherents are forgetting two important factors. First, when we use the

infinitesmal calculus to determine the speed or accelaration of the free-falling body at some instant, we are not generating differentials from the falling itself but from an equation which expresses the falling (and, I might add, in a very static manner). The equation must suppose the position-time relation of the free-falling entity before any calculations can be made.(37) The differential is of a "curve drawn" (employing the terminology from the analogy above) and not of the "drawing of the curve."

This point leads us to the second factor forgotten by proponents of the preceeding proposal. A method akin to a preferential calculus would not, in fact, give us precisely that for which we are asking. In the case of the free-falling body, it is apparently acceptable to take differentials of drawn curves (or equations expressing such trajectories). In the case of persons, however, it is the preferring, the encountering, the reacting, the experiencing with which we are to be concerned. In short, adherents of such a proposal are forgetting the dynamic component of the life of the individual; they are forgetting the "very drawing of the line," in terms of the analogy above.

Now, the possibility of developing such a calculus for the computation of past phenomena (e.g. what persons did prefer) seems plausible. The "history made," though

intertwined and constantly interacting with the "history in the making," might feasibly be codified in the manner just described. However, one must realize that, in adopting such a method, one would only be considering past moral conflicts. Again, though, we see the usefulness of such methods as Hare's -- we do not wish to totally scrap moral theory merely on the presence of staticism. Consideration of previous moral conflicts will not, of course, completely resolve our present moral dilemmas but it can, I think, lend a hand to our current moral thought.

3. Perhaps the case for staticism is overstated. Is there really a need for one to persist in all of this talk about dynamism, continuity, and the like? Such matters are obvious to anyone who has given any thought to the matter.

Yes, I may have overstated my case in places throughout this essay. There are, nonetheless, two characteristics of philosophical writing which I would like to identify here in support of this possible overstatement. First, many philosophers overstate their case to overcome the intense adherence to the opposing point of view. This, to me, is most clear in the case of staticism vs. dynamism where, as already noted, our own language seems to favor the side of the former position. If my case is severely overstated, it is to impress upon my readers that there is a factor of the

life of the individual which, though difficult to discuss, must be reckoned with.

The second feature of philosophical writing which I have often encountered is the tendency to treat particular properties, features, or events in isolation. I have done this with the history made and the history in the making even though I maintain that they are, in actuality, inseparable features. I separate these elements of the individual life in writing, however, to be as clear as possible. I think that my constant reminders throughout the discussion will be sufficient to overcome most accusations of carelessness or inconsistency. I believe that the concept of 'dynamism' is such that it demands treatment in isolation from other concepts and, furthermore, that this treatment be characterized by intense scrutiny.

Objections Concerning Reductionism

Now, let us consider some possible objections to the presentation of the reductionism of moral theories:

1. Moral theory cannot be responsible for generating a methodology of moral thinking capable of taking into consideration all facets or properties of a given situation. The great number of properties and aspects of a situation, a

person, an action, and/or an event is simply beyond the scope of any moral theory or system of moral thought. Reduction, then, is necessary in order to acquire the most relevant aspects and properties of a given situation. Moral thinking would be fruitless if such a complete and all-embracing acquisition of facts were required.

Again, as in the case of staticism, I do not advocate the rejection of moral theory based on the mere presence of reductionism. I admit that a certain amount of reduction is needed in order to do useful and fruitful moral thinking. There is, nonetheless, one important point to consider along with this concession.

The degree to which a reduction is carried must be considered. I have tried to argue, for example, that Hare goes entirely too far in his reduction of the mental life from what it is to a series of quantifiable preferences and aversions. I have tried to show that such a reduction is misleading and breeds serious difficulties. I said that the acceptability of a reduction is determined, in part, by the aim of the discussion or inquiry at hand. Since Hare seems to be concerned with prescribing and judging the actions of persons in real-world situations, he cannot reduce the psychical or mental life of persons to the degree he does and expect plausible results. The possibility of a level of

reduction which will yield plausible results (i.e. not be too much of a reduction) while, at the same time, not be unusable (i.e. too little of a reduction) must be considered.

2. The characteristic of reductionism is more a result of a reader's choosing to focus on a particular facet of the presentation of a moral philosophy than a characteristic of the philosophy itself. For example, Hare presents a theory with clearly rational elements (e.g. the quantitative comparison of preferences) and elements which are sentimental in nature (e.g. the discussion of the sorrow of others). It is not the fault of the theorist that a reader does not carefully note the plethora of concerns in a given moral theory. At any rate, even if these concerns are only briefly mentioned or completely overlooked, one should give the theorist in question the benefit of the doubt.

Obviously, giving the benefit of the doubt to anyone in philosophy is a rather questionable procedure. (This should be evident in my devoting all of this time and space to answering possible objections and shortcomings of my account.) Readers do not read minds and if a relevant feature or consideration is missing from an account, we have, I think, no choice but to assume the ignorance or negligence of the author. The fact that such careful consideration and intense accounts is possible is evident in such philosophers

as Aristotle.

I should say something concerning the presence of both a rational and a sentimental element in Hare's theory. This is a case of a philosopher wanting the best of both of these worlds (i.e. the rational and the sentimental). In speaking of the quantitative comparison of preferences, I have already noted that Hare preserves a staticism which enables just such a comparison. Yet, at the same time, Hare wants us to arrive at the preferences involved in such a comparison by a kind of sympathy much like that spoken of in the section, "Sentiment." In short, Hare can have the static interpretation of preferences and aversions but cannot simultaneously preserve the phenomenological preferring or avoiding experienced by actual persons for it is not the latter that can be quantified. On the other hand, if Hare's sympathy yields this phenomenological preferring or avoiding of the actual person, such phenomena are not quantifiable and we can no longer speak of quantitative comparison of preferences. Thus, though both elements are present, they may, in fact, not be compatible.

Conclusion

I have been discussing rationalistic moral theories --

moral theories which purport to provide a dependable and efficient procedure for the resolution of moral conflicts and which do so in a rational, foundational, almost mechanical manner. I have claimed that such theories exhibit two characteristics which I have termed 'reductionism' and 'staticism'. The presence of the former points to the treatment of some actual object, person, event, or situation as something that it is not, as a constructed entity formed out of characteristics and properties of the actual entities. We saw that Hare's treatment of actual persons as entities revealing a mere series of quantifiable preferences and aversions in the resolution of moral conflicts exemplified this characteristic. Furthermore, I tried to show two facets of the life of the individual often overlooked due to the presence of this characteristic and to what sorts of problems the neglect of such considerations may lead.

Staticism, I said, was the tendency of these rationalistic moral theories to attempt to acquire knowledge via Bergsonian analysis. That is, such theories viewed actual persons from a point outside the individual in question. One consequence of such a viewpoint, we noted, was Hare's discussion involving talk of, "a preference of strength *s*." I tried to make clear that, in proceeding in this fashion, theorists not only neglect the dynamism of

actual persons but, more importantly, they are overlooking the very identity and integrity of an individual.

I also identified two characteristics of actual persons which I called 'character' and 'dynamism'. The living, experiencing, and encountering of an individual comprised the essence of his/her dynamism while the particular behaviors, properties, and distinguishing features of that individual together with the host of contingencies which formed and maintain that individual made up the character of that individual. I argued that, if one admits the presence of these characteristics, then one must also admit that rationalistic moral theories are going to have great difficulty in providing a procedure for resolving everyday moral dilemmas.

Again, the aim of this thesis is not to scrap moral theory entirely. Though I have not done so, it is certainly possible to enumerate various ways in which moral theory may be useful to us. My only contention is that we must beware of how far we allow moral theory to guide us in the resolution of moral conflicts. These theories and the full, dynamic, multi-dimensional persons they often target exhibit characteristics which must be taken into account when doing moral thinking.

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