

SARTRE AND HARE ON INDIVIDUAL AUTONOMY

How far and in what sense is an individual free (or 'forced') to choose values for himself? Does evaluation consist in the application of an independently established principle or does it raise questions that every individual has to decide afresh for himself? These are questions that have been answered in a fundamentally similar way by both Sartre and Hare. But the two thinkers depart from each other in significant respects as well. In detail, the problem of individual autonomy receives very different treatment in the context of their respective philosophies. Although both Sartre and Hare can be taken as supporting a kind of evaluative individualism, seeing an individual as capable (and, indeed, as the sole person capable) of making value-judgement for himself, their respective versions of evaluative individualism are significantly different from each other.

I shall first consider the Sartrean approach to the problem of individual autonomy. In what sense does Sartre consider man to be free in choosing his own values? F. A. Olafson¹ has drawn a distinction between two kinds of freedom that Sartre speaks of: 'Causal freedom' and 'logical freedom'. The former is said to stand for the freedom of casual indeterminacy, while the latter for the freedom of autonomous moral legislation. A detailed discussion of what Sartre means by 'Causal freedom'² being beyond the scope of our present discussion, we come back to the question asked just now: what does Sartre mean when he says that an individual is free to choose values for himself? Sartrean autonomy, as has been pointed out,³ has a negative as well as a positive aspect. In its negative aspect autonomy means the absence of any standard to which any evaluation not only 'must' but also 'could' correspond.

Stated in this way, the thesis of autonomy stands closely related to the thesis that no value-judgements can be derived from statements of fact. Autonomy in the positive sense signifies that evaluations are undertakings that every individual performs for himself, and for which he alone is responsible. An individual's freedom, Sartre says, is the unique foundation of values. To quote him: '..... *nothing*, absolutely nothing justifies me in adopting this or that particular scale of values.'⁴

In making value-judgements, an individual is not determined by any previously given norm. Value-judgements, as traditionally accepted, cannot be held to be validated for an individual unless the appropriation by the individual of these value-judgements is itself an evaluation. For Sartre, to say that an individual chooses values is to uphold the 'ideality of values'.⁵ The foundation of values, Sartre says, is not 'being' but human freedom. Value *qua* value has being, but its being is said to be value, that is to say, not-to-be-being. '....the being of value *qua* value is the being of what does not have being.'⁶ What Sartre is at pains to distinguish value from is 'fact'. Value, he says, does not exist as one fact among other facts.⁷ Values are not given to us as facts are. But this does not mean that values have no being. It is true, he says, that one can have institutions of values in concrete examples (grasping the quality of nobility in a noble act, for instance), but the value thus intuited does not have the 'same level of being' as the act thus valued has. 'Value is given as a beyond of the acts confronted...value is beyond being.'⁸ But to be 'beyond being' is not the same as to have a lack of being: the being of value is to be 'beyond being'. The main point behind all these apparently paradoxical statements is the distinction between value and fact. For Sartre, the 'being' of value is distinct from the 'being' of fact. It is the distinction between value and fact that Sartre wants to emphasize when he speaks of the double character of values, as something that both 'is' and 'is not'.

An individual, Sartre says, experiences 'anguish' when he realises that his freedom is the foundation of values.⁹ He is in anguish because values reveal themselves to him as something that can be 'put into question', and the possibility of overturning any scale of values appears to him as *his* possibility. He realizes that he himself has to 'sustain values in being', and that he has to make his own decisions concerning the significance of the world and that of himself. To submit oneself to the traditional hierarchy of values, is, Sartre says, to be possessed by the 'spirit of seriousness'.¹⁰ Individuals possessed by this 'spirit of seriousness' try to renounced their freedom to choose values because they are afraid of bearing the burden of responsibility that accompanies their free choice of values.

I turn now to consider Hare's views on individual autonomy. An individual, according to Hare, is necessarily free to form his own moral opinions, and yet, forming moral opinions is no arbitrary job, but something rational and responsible. The individual who has the freedom to choose his values may feel his freedom not as an emancipation but as a burden.¹¹ The tension he has to face is: how to keep values distinct from facts on the one hand and from 'mere' preferences on the other. Hare's views on individual autonomy are closely related to the fact-value dichotomy or the problem of the autonomy of morals the discussion of which I take up before discussing autonomy itself.

The main contention of the thesis of the autonomy of morals (also known as the doctrine of "no 'ought' from an 'is'") is that there is a fundamental distinction between statements of the facts of any situation and expressions of approval or disapproval of these facts. Two persons may describe a particular situation in the same way, but may evaluate it in different ways. On what grounds does the distinction between description and evaluation rest? Are evaluations distinguished from descriptions simply in view of the obvious differences between attitudes of different individuals? Can disagreement about valuations be traced back

to disagreement in likes and dislikes? This, in fact, is the answer given by logical positivists like Ayer¹¹ and emotivists like Stevenson.¹² For the logical positivists and the emotivists to say that something is 'good' is to say that it is something that someone or other prefers. The main objection raised against the view that value-judgments 'merely' state or express preferences is that on this view value-judgements turn out to be basically irrational. If value-judgments state or express preferences alone, there seems to be no way of explaining (other than in terms of a clash or conflict of preferences) such statements as "I ought to do it, although I don't want to" or "This is 'good' for him, although he may not 'like' it". In fact words like 'ought', 'right', 'good' etc., derive a crucial part of their meaning from a contrast between the language of value and the language of preference. The language of value differs as much from the language of mere preference as it differs from the language of description.

The contrast between value-language and preference-language is often brought out by pointing to the fact that if someone calls something 'good' or 'right', one can always ask him: "What is 'good' or 'right' about it?" But one cannot always ask the same question about one's likes and dislikes. One may or may not have reasons for one's likes and dislikes. One cannot press for reasons for preferences as one can press for reasons for evaluations. What distinguishes value-language from preference-language is the former's commendatory force.¹⁴ To make a value-judgement, Hare argues, is not simply to attempt to persuade others, or to express one's own preferences, but to commend it either to oneself or to others for future guidance. Hare himself has called his view 'universal prescriptivism'. Value-judgments, as distinguished from descriptive statements, have 'prescriptive' meaning. Value-judgments are action-guiding: to make a value-judgment is to offer some guidance in making future decisions. Value-judgments entail imperatives. To speak of any action as

'good' is to impart a certain instruction or to convey a certain advice to the hearer, namely, 'do it'. Anyone who says, "You ought to do X, but don't do it", and who intends the 'ought' to be evaluative, is contradicting himself. Value-judgments, according to Hare, are distinguished from other kinds of prescriptive judgments by the 'universality'. A person who says, "I ought to act in a certain way, but nobody else need act in that way in relevantly similar circumstances" is contradicting himself. If value-judgments are basically prescriptive, can they be said to be capable of being derived either from analytic propositions or from statements of fact alone? For Hare, the answer is obviously 'no'. No value-judgments can be deduced from a set of premises that does not contain at least one value-judgment.¹⁵ Descriptive judgments, unlike value-judgments, do not entail imperatives. If value-judgments entail imperatives and descriptive judgments do not, a value-judgment cannot be deduced from a set of premises that does not contain an imperative.

Hare's views on individual autonomy, as I have mentioned earlier, are closely related to the doctrine of "no 'ought' from an 'is'" which I have discussed above very briefly. An individual according to Hare, has to make his own value-judgments, has to choose values for himself in as much as he cannot deduce an 'ought' from an 'is'. An individual has to make his own 'decision of principle': others cannot make them for him unless he himself first decides to listen to their advice: moral maturity, he says, consists, indeed, in the recognition of this fact. A person has to consider the morally relevant features of a situation and then decide accordingly what ought to be done in that situation. The question as to which principle out of a number of possible principles one ought to choose is one that can only be decided by the person himself as an autonomous person. But to say that everyone has to learn to make decisions for himself does not mean that one must approach every situation with a completely open mind and make

judgments about it *ab initio*. There are moral situations of great complexity for which a lot of consideration is undoubtedly required, but if *all* moral questions were treated like this, no kind of moral development or learning from experience would be possible. What one should rather do, Hare remarks, is to give due consideration to the complex moral questions and to 'crystallize' one's answer to those questions in a not too specific form, so that its basic features may be referred to in similar situations. Learning to make decisions is something one has to teach oneself. What one basically learns from others are certain principles, but how to apply those principles to situations of great variety and complexity is something that mostly the learner himself has to find out. This does not mean, however, that decisions and principles are two separate spheres. All decisions, with the exception of those that are completely arbitrary, are decisions of principle.¹⁶ There is no sharp dividing line above which lies the realm of principles and below which lies the realm of unprincipled decisions. Questions about possible modifications of principles are raised whenever one comes across circumstances having features that were not met before. To raise such questions and to find answers to them is to make a decision, and the decision is one of principle since it is a decision that determines under what circumstances the principle should be modified.

How far, then, on Hare's view, is an individual free to choose values for himself? For Hare, an individual cannot simply create or reject values as a matter of whim: his value-judgments are not mere expressions of likes and dislikes. Thinking about value questions is not a matter of thinking about himself alone. Hare insists on the necessity of integrating personal and interpersonal preferences and also claims that this impartial preferences will be the same for all. The view that Hare sets forth in his book *Moral Thinking* show him, indeed, as moving towards a generalised utilitarian standpoint. To quote him: "We retain, all of us, the freedom to prefer whatever we prefer, subject to the

constraint that we have, *ceteris paribus*, to prefer that, were we in others' exact positions, that should happen which *they* prefer should happen."¹⁷ The universalizability of moral judgments demands that one should adjust one's preferences to accommodate all the (relevant) hypothetical preferences that also have to be taken into consideration as if they were actual cases, and not hypothetical. Each person would thus arrive at a universal prescription that represents a total impartial preference, and this impartial preference will be utilitarian.¹⁸ The requirement to universalize one's prescription amounts to treating hypothetical identical cases on a par with the actual case and this is what substantially reduces one's freedom of choosing values, because all the preferences that one would have in hypothetical situations become as important as the preferences that one actually has. But in spite of this restrictions imposed by universalizability, a person continues, in Hare's view, to enjoy autonomy of evaluation, because universalizability does not put any constraint on the preferences themselves; it only compels one to find such principles as would impartially maximize the satisfaction of these preferences.¹⁹ The autonomy of evaluation does not mean freedom to choose whatever values one prefers: it is rather an awareness of the requirement of co-ordinating one's individual preferences to the preferences of others. It is a freedom that aims at reducing the tension between individual preferences and the preferences of others.

There has, of course, been a gradual change in the Harean line of thinking, although in all his three books — *The Language of Morals*, *Freedom and Reason*, and *Moral Thinking* — his concern seems to be basically the same: how to solve the antinomy which he considers to be the source of nearly all the central controversies of moral philosophy, namely, 'What I think about morals is up to me' and 'I cannot think just what I like about moral questions'. The problem which he faces is how to distinguish 'values' from 'facts' on the one hand and from mere preferences on the

other. Hare's insistence on the necessity of integrating personal and interpersonal preferences and on the claim that a truly impartial preference will be the same for all men has, as I have noted above, led him to adopt a kind of utilitarianism. While in *Freedom and Reason* he merely suggests that he is in sympathy with utilitarianism, in *Moral Thinking*, he firmly asserts his utilitarian standpoint. As J. Griffin puts it: "Hare has in his papers in the last ten years and in his new book *Moral Thinking* provided what, when joined with his earlier work, constitutes the most rigorous and lucid account of utilitarianism in our country. . . ." ²⁰ Perhaps the crucial move from the earlier version of the thesis of individual autonomy to the later utilitarian thinking comes in when in *Moral Thinking* Hare draws a distinction between two propositions [(1) 'I now prefer with strength *S* that if I were in that situation *x* should happen rather than not' and (2) 'If I were in that situation, I would prefer with strength *S* that *x* should happen rather than not'] and claims that one 'cannot know that (2), and what that would be like, without (1) being true'. It would, however, seem that the argument Hare is developing in order to support his newly affirmed utilitarianism is not easily compatible with his earlier full-blooded autonomist position, and indeed, later on in the concluding chapter of the book Hare admits that his autonomist position has been slightly 'dented'. ²¹

Utilitarianism, it is often said, blurs the distinction between individuals. The impartial spectator, as Rawls points out, "is conceived as carrying out the required organization of the desires of all persons into one coherent system of desire; it is by this desire that many persons are fused into one." ²² As I have just noted, Hare himself is not unaware of the discrepancy between his emphatic assertion of individual autonomy in *The Language of Morals* and his equally emphatic assertion of utilitarian thesis in *Moral Thinking*. In *Moral Thinking* ²³ he attempts to answer the objection commonly brought against utilitarianism, namely,

that utilitarianism fails to give due weight to the duties commonly thought to exist towards particular persons, or to ties of affection and loyalty etc., which are supposed to bind us to particular individuals, but not to men in general. Family duties, duties of a citizen to his country, duties of a worker to his union etc. are said to be some examples of such particular loyalties. Hare argues that this objection rests on doubtful claims. Whether family loyalty, for example, is something to be always encouraged, is not established beyond doubt. Hare further argues that even in those cases where one has to choose between family duties and duties to men in general (as in the air-crash example of choosing between rescuing one's own son and rescuing a surgeon, who, if saved, could save many other injured passenger's lives) what one does is to rely on one's 'immediate intuitive reactions', since, the situation being what it is, there is hardly any time to reflect on the matter. Relying on one's *intuitions* does not serve to show what line *critical thinking* would take if there were time for it.²⁴

In the rest of the paper I will try to compare the Sartrean and the Harean approaches to the problem of individual autonomy. Wherein precisely do Sartre and Hare agree and wherein do they differ? For both of them, an evaluation, to be an evaluation in the full sense of the word, must have a fresh endorsement every time. The question as to what values a person should accept is one that is always capable of being 're-opened'. For both Sartre and early Hare (if not for the later Utilitarian Hare), the choice of principles is basically 'criterionless'.²⁵ Although for both of them evaluative choice is ultimately 'criterionless', the way they look at the problem of 'critical choice' is different. For Hare, the situation is somewhat like this: although our evaluations are backed up by arguments (in contrast to being 'merely chosen'), the premises of such arguments must necessarily have an imperative as one of their components (because no 'ought' follows from an 'is'). But this way of supplying imperatives always comes to an end at a point where there

is no further scope for argument. All principles, in the end, have to rest upon 'decisions of principle'. But ultimate decisions, according to Hare, do not become 'arbitrary' or 'unfounded' simply because no further arguments can be offered. To quote Hare: "Far from being arbitrary, such a decision would be the most well-founded of decisions, because it would be based upon consideration of everything upon which it could possibly be founded."²⁶ For Sartre, the 'original' choice which is the source of all our evaluations is not grounded in any reasons. While Hare refuses to call the ultimate choice 'unfounded' or 'arbitrary', Sartre does not hesitate to speak of the original choice as 'absurd'. In the famous Sartrean example of the young man torn between remaining with his ailing mother and going to join the Free French Forces, the final settlement of the question is made not through any rational considerations but through a radical choice.

The main difference between the Sartrean and the Harean versions of evaluative individualism lies in the philosophers' views on the problem of approaching new situations. Does the evaluating individual make his evaluations only for one situation or for all similar situations? For Hare, once a person has made a 'decision of principle', all that he has to do, when faced with other similar situations, is to work out the application of the principle to that particular case. For Sartre, on the other hand, a person has to make a fresh choice in every new situation. Even choices made previously in similar situations provide no guidance whatsoever in making a new choice. It is true that in *Existentialism and Humanism*²⁷ Sartre seems to suggest that particular choices have a general significance. Sartre remarks that if men exist at the same time as they fashion their own image, that image is valid for all men and for the entire epoch in which men find themselves. Every purpose, he says, however individual it may be, has a universal value in the sense that every purpose is, to some extent, capable of being understood by every man. *Existen-*

tialism and Humanism, however, can at best be taken as an atypical piece of Sartrean philosophy. It has been found to be incompatible with many of Sartre's other works. The belief that Sartre emphasizes in this book, namely, the belief that there is something absolutely valuable, something which is always right to aim at, is incompatible with what he says in *Being and Nothingness*. Views stated in *Existentialism and Humanism* were repudiated later by Sartre himself: its publication was regretted by him later. Since Sartre himself later denied what he said in *Existentialism and Humanism*, it seems more plausible to consider him as suggesting that every situation is unique and that every choice is just for one situation and not for other situations similar to it. Sartre may thus be distinguished in this respect from Hare.

How far, then, can an individual be regarded as free to choose his own values? The fact-value problem which we have earlier discussed is not only about the language and terminology of evaluation, but also about the question whether an individual should or should not be regarded as the source of his own values (as distinct from 'mere' preferences). The anti-autonomists do not deny²⁸ that individuals are capable of making preferential choices: what they deny is the capacity of these preferential choices to determine what are values, the latter being distinguished from the former by their consistency, strength, importance, rationality, universality etc. For the autonomists, on the other hand, the very fact that values are stronger, more consistent, and important than preferences makes it all the more urgent to recognise the individual as capable of choosing his values. If values are given to an individual as facts, it means that he is incapable of having his own say on matters that are of the utmost importance to him, and this explains the close relation that the fact-value distinction has to evaluative individualism.²⁹

The doctrine of evaluative individualism cannot develop unless the available language provides a number of non-func-

tional concepts which enable the individual to evaluate independently of those standards of approval or disapproval that are embodied in the descriptive nature of facts. Functional words are roughly speaking 'criteria-setting' words, words which refer to what the objects or persons in questions are supposed to do. An individual would find himself incapable of making value-judgment autonomously if he could not speak from a non-functional point of view, if he could not free himself from the purpose which the objects or persons valued are supposed to reflect. The basic concepts of individualism can develop only if they have their seeds in the existing language and value-system. An individual, however autonomous he might consider himself in claiming his values as his own, can do so only through the common values accepted in his society. Just as individualism can develop only out of a system of common values and language, so it can continue to survive only if certain values have common acceptance.

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NOTES

1. F. A. Olafson, *Principles and Persons*, (The Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1967), p. 145.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 146.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 154.
4. J. P. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (transl. Hazel E. Barnes, Methuen, London, 1969), p. 38.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*, p. 93.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 626.

11. R. M. Hare, *Freedom and Reason* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1965), p. 3.
12. A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1971), p. 142.
13. C. L. Stevenson, *Ethics and Language* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1944).
14. R. M. Hare, *The Language of Morals* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1964), p. 144.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
17. R. M. Hare, *Moral Thinking*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1981), p. 227.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*, p. 226.
20. J. Griffin, Modern Utilitarianism, *Revue Internationale De Philosophie*, (141, 1982), p. 353.
21. Hare, *Moral Thinking*, *op. cit.*, p. 225.
22. J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1973), p. 27.
23. Hare, *Moral Thinking*, *op. cit.*, p. 135.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 139.
25. A. Macintyre, 'Existentialism' in *A critical history of Western Philosophy*, D. J. O'Connor, ed. (Free Press of Glencoe, New York, 1964), p. 528. Cf. G. J. Warnock, 'On choosing values' in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy III*, (University of Minnesota, Morris, 1967), p. 24; and Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (Routledge, London, 1970), p. 35.
26. Hare, *The Language of Morals*, *op. cit.*, p. 69.
27. Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism* (transl. P. Mairet, Methuen, London, 1948).
28. Various objections have been brought against the doctrine of the autonomy of morals a full discussion of which cannot be taken up within the scope of this paper. Here I refer to that objection alone which is particularly relevant to the present discussion of the problem of individual autonomy.
29. A. Montefiore, 'Goodness and Choice: A Symposium', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* (Suppl. Volume 35, 1961), p. 69.

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