I have recently re-started work on a study of Tolerance and rummaging through my books for any which I might usefully read or re-read as back­
ground or foreground picked out R. M. Hare's 
Freedom and Reason, chapter 9 of which has the 
title 'Tolerance and Fanaticism'. I have now read 
the book through, which is something I did not do 
in my time as a Philosophy student; marginal 
annotations to my copy (purchased for seven 
shillings and sixpence) show that in the past I 
read only chapters one, two, three and five. 

I was impressed in my reading by the presence in 
Hare's book of explicit, substantive moral argu­
ment conducted from the point of view of a liber­
al, protestant morality and directed, principally, 
against positions attributed to Nazi and racist 
'moralities' and to a lesser extent against those 
who would make crimes of sins. Whil Hare does 
makethe common distinction between the activi­
ties of moral philosophy, on the one hand, and 
and the moral life on the other, his book does not, either in intention or execution, 
include only the former to the exclusion of the 
latter. The image I had of Hare's work as typi­
cal of an academic philosophy which eschewed sub­
stantive moral discussion or action was false. I 
think part of the explanation for this is that 
teachers of philosophy, working in exam-oriented 
systems which attach immense importance to 
objectivity, neutrality etc exclude from their cur­
ricula the substantive (first order) moral dis­
cussion contained in books like Hare's. I doubt 
if I was the only student to read only the analy­
tical (second order) bits of Freedom and Reason. 
I think that my image of Hare was probably a cre­
tation of the system which first mediated his work to me.

Whatever mediators might do, Hare has and states 
a clear conception of his readership and what he 
wants from it, and the kind of reading which he 
thinks it ought to give. The most important 
feature of this conception is a negative one, for 
Hare never addresses himself as addressing either 
students or teachers of Philosophy (or any other 
subject), but rather as writing for and being read 
by liberal members of the professional classes: 
judges, stockbrokers, army officers and leaders of 
moral philosophers - it would be likely to answer 
the essay question 'Is the principle of universaliza­
bility a purely formal principle?' in the nega­
tive, though I don't think it would have to in 
order to count as a radical work.

The way in which Hare relates the (formal) prin­
ciple of universalizability to the (substantive) 
principle of toleration is something I should 
like to comment on, both as illustrative of re­
marks in the preceding section and as relevant to 
my own concerns.

Consider the following passage: 
Suppose that somebody argues as follows: according 
to the universalist, when a man makes a moral 
judgement he is committed to saying that anybody 
who says something different about a similar case 
is wrong; therefore, according to the universal­
ist, toleration in moral matters is impossible. 
In order to understand this matter clearly, it 
is necessary to distinguish between thinking that 
somebody else is wrong, and taking up an in­
tolerant attitude towards him. The universalist 
is committed to a denial of relativism ... he 
holds that if anybody disagrees with me about a 
moral question, then I am committed to disagree­

ing with him, unless I change my mind. This 
appears harmless enough tautology, and need hard­
ly trouble the universalist. But the universal­
list is not committed to persecuting (physically 
or in any other way) people who disagree with him morally. If he is the sort of universalist that
I am, he will realize that our moral opinions are liable to change in the light of our experience and our discussion of moral questions with other people; therefore, if another person disagrees with us, what is called for is not the suppression of his opinions but the discussion of them in the hope that we may come to know the reasons for his, and we for ours, we may reach agreement. Universalism is an ethical theory which makes moral argument both possible and fruitful; and it enables us to understand what toleration is, as we shall later see.

[p49-50]

I don't think this passage is a model of clarity; I think it can be read as saying or suggesting that the principle of toleration can in some way be derived from the principle of universalisability, perhaps in a way which would flout 'Hume's Law' and perhaps in a way which would cast doubt on the claimed formal status of the universalisability principle, or which would lead to an ideological claim for formal status for the substantive toleration principle. It need not be so read, but then it has to be said that Hare is wrong at one point. He writes 'Universalism is an ethical theory which makes moral argument both possible and fruitful'. 'Universalism' is true that universalism makes moral argument possible (we are not obliged to agree to differ, as emotivism would require if it were correct), it is false that it makes argument fruitful, except in a most trivial, tautological way which Hare does not have in mind, for he also writes 'If he is the sort of universalist I am, he will realize that our moral opinions are liable to change in the light of our experience and our discussion of moral questions with other people'. But this realization can only be based on evidence, or it is a matter of (liberal/Enlightenment) faith. It does not follow from the thesis of universalisability, though that thesis explains the logical possibility that what Hare asserts is empirically liable to happen. That Hare does or tends to jump from proving a logical possibility to asserting it as an empirical fact is evident from the text of chapter 9, in which he sets out to show the liberal how to deal in argument with the Nazi. He suggests that but for a hard-core of 'really intractable Nazis' [p171] the rest will be motivated not by moral ideals but by self-interest and for such a person 'if his conduct is interpreted in this way, he is open to arguments' [p171]. Here 'open' can only mean 'logically open' which is not the same as 'empirically open'. It cannot and does not solve the practical problem of the liberal faced by the Nazi. For people logically open to argument in virtue of the structure of their beliefs may nonetheless refuse to argue, fail to accept the outcome of an argument, fail to act on such an outcome etc. Hare recognises this (see, e.g., chapter 5 on 'Backbuilding') but does not consider the empirical consequences of such empirical facts. For example, Clear Thinkers in the nineteen thirties, in whose steps Hare follows, were not (I imagine) notably successful in stopping the spread of Nazism and Fascism by separating the confused from the fanatics whose logic was impeccable. What has to be asked and found out is how successful they actually were, which means looking at how they worked and with whom. Contrasts should be made with the work of those who had different strategies for halting the Nazis and Fascists and their relative successes and failures. At a minimum, if he were writing today, Hare would need to read and comment on Reich's Mass Psychology of Fascism and What is Class Consciousness? I think he could accept this, for there is no doubting the seriousness of his intent (try pp177-85 of the book if you doubt this). On the other hand, the astounding failure in a book so preoccupied with Nazism, racism and even world war to discuss the relation of moral and political philosophy, morals and politics, must be attributed to a structural weakness of Hare's liberal-individualist morality rather than to any personal failing on Hare's part.

Whilst Hare's moral philosophy either proves that rational moral argument is possible over a much wider area than had previously been thought, or (to put it relativistically) sets out to create the conceptual conditions in which such argument is possible, it does leave open the possibility of rational disagreement. There are those who disagree with 'us' whose logic is impeccable, and whom Hare christens 'fanatics' when they allow their ideals 'to override all considerations of people's interests even the holder's own in actual or hypothetical cases' [p176]. These people cannot believe in the liberal ideal of toleration, 'that is to say to readiness to respect other people's ideals or interests - TP as if they were his own' [p177].

Hare defines the limits of this tolerance in classically Millian terms [p178]. The liberal 'tolerates other people's pursuit of their ideals provided that, where the pursuit of one ideal hinders the pursuit of another, there shall be, as in the cases of conflicting interests discussed above, a just distribution of advantages and disadvantages. It is only the last proviso which prevents the liberal from allowing even the fanatic to pursue his ideals without impediment; but the liberal is not required by his own ideal to tolerate intolerance [p180].

This, in the context of a discussion of Nazism, would seem to put Hare on the side of the International Socialists and other groups intolerant of the National Front and wishing to smash it by their own action if it isn't banned by the State. Interestingly, in the recent Socialist Worker pamphlet Organise against the National Front, the new Nazis, distinctions analogous to Hare's are drawn between National Front sympathisers and new members with some of whom 'discussion is worthwhile', and the 'hard core fascist members of the National Front' for whom 'only one argument is successful: physical force' [p9]. The pamphlet is only less 'philosophical' than Hare's book in its greater concreteness - the National Front rather than Hare's sometimes indeterminate 'Nazis' and its sensitivity to the actual empirical possibilities of argument - whereas Hare tends to relate toleration to the bare logical possibility of argument. (I am intrigued to know if the author(s) of this pamphlet have read Hare, and whether Hare has read this pamphlet.)

To recapitulate, I suggest to anyone reading or re-reading Freedom and Reason that he or she focus not just on the narrowly philosophical theses for which Hare is famous (universalisability, prescriptivity), but on the detailed conception and exemplification of a moral practice which he advances. I think Hare is wrong in substance and form, but I do think his book could only have come from the pen of an educator who had himself been educated; and Hare tells us whereabouts in the last sentence on page 183.

Trevor Pateman