



**A Note on R. M. Hare and the Paradox of the Good Samaritan**

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## A NOTE ON R. M. HARE AND THE PARADOX OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN

APPARENTLY R. M. Hare's theory of imperative inference still is being maintained,<sup>1</sup> despite the many criticisms which have been made of it.<sup>2</sup>

So far as I am aware, no one has successfully brought against Hare a line of criticism such as Gombay urged against Dr. Kenny some years ago, with damaging effect.<sup>3</sup> This would involve showing that Hare sanctioned inferences which it would be downright dangerous to allow people to make.

Some have thought the well-worn problem of the addition of commands provided such a counter-example, given that the "or" of command addition be interpreted as what Professor Rescher has called "choice offering".<sup>4</sup> In that case, carrying out any action whatsoever would seem to be authorized by any order.

(It is reasonable to say that I permit you implicitly to obey any command inferable from those I have given you. Thus, if to do y is to obey "Do x or do y!", and if the latter is inferable from "Do x!", then by giving "Do x!" I tacitly permit you to obey "Do y!".) There is much that can be said against this objection, but what seems to me most convincing is that the "or" of addition cannot be interpreted plausibly as choice-offering. For the separate issuance of one of the disjuncts conflicts with choice-offering "or". I cannot say:

Do your work now, or go in holiday now, whichever you choose,  
but do your work now!

except as a *joke*. This is exactly what is involved with the consequences of "Do x!" on the "isomorphist" view. We have:

Do x! and Do x or do y! . . .

However, it would appear Hare's position does not escape the "Paradox of the Good Samaritan" (which arose in the context of some deontic logics).<sup>5</sup>

Consider:

(S) The Good Samaritan, suffering from the consequences of a robbery, is helped.

<sup>1</sup> Hare's best known presentation of the theory was in *The Language of Morals*, Oxford Press, 1952, and was defended by him in "Some Alleged Differences between Imperatives and Indicatives", *MIND*, vol. lxxvi, July 1967.

<sup>2</sup> Most recently by Alfred F. MacKay in "Inferential Validity and Imperative Inference Rules", *Analysis* 29.5, April 1969, pp. 145-156.

<sup>3</sup> A. J. Kenny, "Practical Inference", *Analysis*, vol. 26, 1966, pp. 65-75; Andre Gombay, "What is Imperative Inference?", *Analysis* 27.5, April 1967.

<sup>4</sup> Nicholas Rescher and John Robison, "Can One Infer commands from Commands?", *Analysis*, vol. 24, 1964, pp. 176-179.

<sup>5</sup> See "Escapism—the Logical Basis of Ethics", P. H. Nowell-Smith and E. J. Lemmon, *MIND*, vol. lxxix, July 1966, pp. 289-300.

and

- (C) Help the Good Samaritan, who suffers from the consequences of a robbery!

which have, on Hare's view, the same phrastic, but different neustics. From S it follows that there is someone who has been robbed. Thus from the phrastic of S and C follows the phrastic:

- (I) There being someone who has been robbed/

From C there can follow only another imperative, according to Hare. If we add the neustic "please" to I, we seem to have the command:

See to it that there is someone who has been robbed! or perhaps:

Rob someone!

Other more complicated—and amusing—examples are constructed easily by further identifying in a command minor premise the subject term of the major, yielding commands to see to it that the subject of the major has the characteristic described by the minor. Thus from: "Serve only those at the party who have broken arms!" and "Serve some of the boys at the party!" we would get: "See to it that some of the boys at the party have broken arms!"

One might suggest that Hare should have explicitly required the addressee to be mentioned as acting if the command were to be "well-formed". But in that case not all phrastics are "neutral". Some are suited for expressing commands; others are not. With that the whole phrastic-neustic distinction loses the theoretical role it plays for Hare, and becomes merely a perspicuous way of indicating what a command and a "corresponding indicative" have in common. Besides, even with the restriction there are counter-examples. From: "Harry, apologize to Tom for insulting him!", we will get the unfortunate phrastic, "Harry insulting Tom/", with a "please" neustic.<sup>1</sup> Clearly, these examples are not consistent with Hare's "speaker commitment" thesis. Moreover, they seem to show there would be considerable practical risk if people were to reason the way Hare says they do. In the literature of the subject such a risk seems to be regarded as good reason for rejecting the theory in question.

If this assumption is sound, these examples count heavily against Hare.

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<sup>1</sup> For this example and for helpful discussion generally I am indebted to Professor Ernest Sosa.