



Caspar Hare, *On Myself, and Other, Less Important Subjects*
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Hare, Caspar. *On Myself, and Other, Less Important Subjects*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009. Pp. 144. \$30.95 (cloth).

I. OVERVIEW

Caspar Hare's *On Myself, and Other, Less Important Subjects* is charmingly and clearly written, accessible, clever, and wry. I enjoyed working through this rich and stimulating book.

Hare presents a variety of axiological, metaphysical, epistemological, and linguistic theses and arguments in a reasonably compact treatise. I'll now list some of the central theses. The exact wordings of the theses are for the most part mine, but page references to Hare's formulations will be provided. I will also introduce names for those unnamed by Hare; I'll mark those names with an asterisk.

Harmony: A pleasure had by me is (noninstrumentally) better than an equally intense and lengthy pleasure had by someone else simply because it is mine; a pain had by me is (noninstrumentally) worse than an equally intense and lengthy pain had by someone else simply because it is mine. (2–8, 10–13, 18–19, 30–40)

Rational Egocentric Hedonism*: Each one of us should pay special attention to our own well-being. (57, among others)

Insight 1: There is a metaphysically irreducible monadic property, the property of *being present*; some things have this property. (21)

Hare suggests that this property is analogous to the property of being *temporally present* cherished by defenders of the so-called A-theory of time (46: on the A-theory of time, some moment of time is metaphysically distinguished; it, out of all the other moments, is the sole one that is temporally present). Being present is not equivalent to existing: Hare is not a solipsist and, in fact, positively affirms the existence of other minds and thoughts. However, none of those other minds or thoughts enjoys presence.

Insight 2: All and only my perceptual objects are present; among my perceptual objects are physical objects such as stars and hands, as well as 'mental states' such as pleasures, pains, acts of will, and so forth. (21)

Egocentric presentism is in effect the conjunction of insight 1 and insight 2.

Points of View*: There is a series of metaphysically important intensional sentence operators of the schema *from the point of view of x*.

For each person *k* (and perhaps for each conscious being and perhaps for more things than that), there is an intensional operator 'from the point of view of *k*'. Although it is true that all and only my perceptual objects are present, from your point of view, it is true that all and only your perceptual objects are present. More generally, for each *k* for which there is a corresponding point-of-view operator, it is true from the point of view of *k* that all and only *k*'s perceptual objects are present (22–30).

What “I” Means*: The word “I” is synonymous with a modally and temporally nonrigid definite description that refers to whoever it is that has present experiences. (21–22, 52–55, 82–86)

The Difference*: There are two important kinds of questions that one might initially take to be about personal identity that one can ask: questions from the inside and questions from the outside.

Consider your favorite puzzle about personal identity, and let Kris McDaniel be the exemplar of the puzzle. We can ask the outside question, which is, “what will happen to Kris McDaniel?” But each one of us can also put ourself in Kris McDaniel’s shoes and ask the inside question, “what will happen to me?” The answers to these questions needn’t be the same, even though I am Kris McDaniel (chap. 5).

Just listing (some of the) theses defended in this book underscores how rich the book is. Briefly, the theses are connected to one another in some of the following ways. If Harmony is true, we can see why Rational Egocentric Hedonism is true: we have reason to prefer our own comfort to the comfort of others, other things being equal, because by doing so we thereby bring about a (noninstrumentally) better state of affairs. Harmony is put forth without argument, but Hare is aware that there are worries about Harmony; egocentric presentism purportedly has the resources to defuse these worries (30–40). According to Hare, this provides one with a reason to believe egocentric presentism (57), but in case you are not convinced, he has a second argument, one that appeals to The Difference: if What “I” Means and egocentric presentism are true, then we can see how it is that questions from the inside can have different answers than questions from the outside (81–86); it is hard to see how else we could explain how these questions can come apart, given that I am Kris McDaniel. It turns out that, although questions from the outside really are questions about personal identity, questions from the inside are not (84–86). There are worries about egocentric presentism, though. For one thing, if egocentric presentism is true, Hare’s experiences are not present, regardless of what he says to the contrary. *Points of View* comes in to play here. Although Hare’s experiences are not present, from Hare’s point of view, Hare’s experiences are present. And when we judge whether Hare’s claim that his experiences are present is correct, we judge whether it is correct from Hare’s point of view (22–23). And so we judge that Hare’s assertion that his experiences are present is correct.

II. HARMONY

Many philosophers and other more ordinary individuals believe that, when considering the consequences of one’s possible actions, it is often permissible to give special weight to those consequences that directly affect oneself. For example, there can be pairs of actions such that one of them results in a higher aggregate amount of pleasure minus pain than the other; the latter action can be permissible to do because it is better for the agent. And this is so even if hedonism is the correct axiology, in which case the former action results in consequences that are noninstrumentally better than the consequences of the

latter action. In short, many of us are not (agent-neutral value-maximizing) consequentialists.

But Harmony does not have the same *prima facie* plausibility as the claim that it is sometimes permissible for me to favor myself (and, let me add, those in special relations to myself) over others. Actually, I think Harmony is absurd, and so the (alleged) fact that egocentric presentism saves it from certain objections doesn't move me. However, if you are tempted to accept both (i) hedonistic consequentialism and (ii) the view that it is sometimes permissible for me to act so as to favor myself even though some alternative action has a higher net balance of pleasure minus pain, then Harmony might be appealing to you.

As a side note, the hedonistic flavor of the consequentialism that seems to be implicit in Hare's book seems to be not essential. One tempted by a different base axiology could make similar claims, such as the satisfaction of one's desires is intrinsically better than the satisfaction of the desires of others, one's knowledge that *P* is intrinsically better than someone else's knowledge that *P*, and so forth. Whatever the respective kinds of goods might be, Hare could argue that present goods of those kinds are better than absent goods of those kinds, other things being equal.

We'll return to the question of whether egocentric presentism does appropriately ground Harmony in Section III. For now I want to raise the question of whether one should appeal to an axiology in order to explain why claims about the permissibility of apparently self-interested actions are true. Let's say that an agent's action is *optimal* just in case, out of all the alternative actions available to the agent, none of them bring about better consequences; an action is otherwise *suboptimal*. Say that an action is *self-serving* just in case it is suboptimal but has better consequences for the agent than any optimal alternative. The ordinary view is that some (but not all) self-serving actions are morally permissible. Consider an action that is apparently self-serving but is permissible according to the ordinary view. Someone might demand an explanation of why this self-serving action is permissible. As I see things, we meet this demand by explaining what other *prima facie* obligations might be in play. In this, I follow W. D. Ross (*The Right and the Good* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930]), who claimed that we have a nonderivative *prima facie* obligation to produce optimal actions but who also argued that we have other nonderivative *prima facie* obligations. Perhaps one also has a nonderivative *prima facie* obligation to care for oneself, or perhaps such an obligation derives from other *prima facie* obligations. But at some point we are going to have to stop with our list of nonderivative *prima facie* obligations, and perhaps just as we cannot explain why we have a *prima facie* obligation to act optimally, we cannot explain why we have a *prima facie* obligation to care for ourselves. That these are our *prima facie* duties are ultimate normative facts. On this kind of Rossian view, we do not tinker with our axiology to explain why one has a *prima facie* obligation to care for one's well-being. Rather, either we derive this *prima facie* obligation from more fundamental *prima facie* obligations, or we take it as a fundamental *prima facie* obligation. A similar story must be told about why we are permitted to favor the well-being of those we care about over the well-being of others with whom we do not have special emotional bonds.

I like the Rossian view. But it is also worth noting that the consequentialist

has not traditionally moved toward Harmony. Rather, the typical consequentialist explanation of why we ought to give special attention to our own well-being (as well as the well-being of those who are more socially proximate with us) is that doing so is typically instrumentally better; on this line of thought, we are more likely to engage in actions that are optimal, or at least closer to optimal, if we give special weight to ourselves. Although Harmony is false, we might behave better if we act as though Harmony is true. Similarly, we might be more likely to do the best we can do if we focus on the well-being not only of ourselves but of those we care about.

Given Harmony, allegedly permissible self-serving actions aren't self-serving. They are optimal. And so there is less pressure to explain why they are permissible. That's neat. But it doesn't make Harmony seem less implausible to me. And Harmony does not provide an explanation of why we are permitted to give special consideration to the well-being of those we care about, a fact that Hare is explicitly up-front about (37–40).

III. PRESENCE AND POINTS OF VIEW

In what follows, I'll provisionally grant Insight 1, that there is a special monadic property of presence that only some things have. I'm interested in Insight 2, the claim that all and only my perceptual objects are present. We should be worried about this claim.

First, let's note that someone's being aware of an object does not suffice for that object to be present. Other people are aware of the objects of their perceptions, but given Insight 2, none of them is present (unless, perhaps, I am aware of those objects too; 42–46). Does an object's being present suffice for me to be aware of it? If the answer is that it does not, Hare should be less confident of Insight 2. Perhaps other persons have present experiences, even though I am not aware of them.

Among the objects whose presence Hare grants are physical objects, such as stars (46; see esp. n. 1). Question: If x is present, are each of x 's parts present? Although being present is a primitive property, it is fair to ask how it works. There is little in Hare's text to guide us. If the answer is no, then the property of being present is very different from the property Hare analogizes with it, namely, the property of being temporally present postulated by A-theorists in the philosophy of time; being present also functions differently than the property of being actual postulated by certain modal theorists. If something is *now*, each of its parts is *now*, and if something is *actual*, all of its parts are *actual*. (On versions of modal realism with absolute actuality, see Phillip Bricker, "Island Universes and the Analysis of Modality," in *Reality and Humean Supervenience: Essays on the Philosophy of David Lewis*, ed. G. Preyer and F. Siebelt [Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001], and Kris McDaniel, "Modal Realisms," *Philosophical Perspectives* 20 [2006]: 303–31.) It is not devastating for the view if these analogies do not hold, but insofar as we understand Hare's primitive by way of these analogies, we should be troubled.

More worrisome for Hare is if the answer is yes. Consider a present table, which I am also aware of. I am not aware of many of the table's proper parts; I can think of no sense in which, say, an electron is one of my perceptual objects.

And yet some electrons are present. And so Insight 2 is false. If there can be present objects that I am not aware of, what reason do I have for thinking that there can't be present objects that other people are aware of? If other people have present experiences, the project of metaphysically grounding Harmony is unlikely to succeed. (Does the worry here dissipate if we deny that, e.g., tables are 'perceptual objects'? Not obviously; even if the only objects that are 'perceptual objects' are 'mental' in some way, we still need an argument that such entities have no 'hidden' parts, sides, or aspects.)

But let's suppose that Hare is correct and that only my perceptual objects are present. This is not enough to ground Harmony. For although the experiences of others might not be present, they might still be metaphysically distinguished in a way that is as axiologically relevant as presence. Perhaps being present is actually a determinate of a hitherto unnamed determinable. For each individual, there is some determinate of this determinable and some set of perceptual objects that has it. Hare has no independent argument that this is not the case.

Hare might be sanguine about this in absence of any positive reason to rule this in. So let's first note that there is a respect even on Hare's theory in which every person is metaphysically special in his or her own way: for each person, there is a point of view. Note that Hare does not equate "from the point of view of *k*, *P*" with "it seems to *k* that *P*"; all point-of-view operators are primitive (23). (Moreover, Hare [34] asserts that the standard of correctness for a claim *P* is that *P* is true according to the asserter's point of view; this view would be extremely implausible if this amounted to nothing more than that *P* seems to be true to the asserter.) Even though these operators are primitive, we might still want an explanation of why it is true that, from the point of view of *x*, *x*'s perceptual objects are present. Here's a stab at such an explanation. There is a determinable, presence*, of which presence is a determinate. There is a 1:1 correspondence between distinct points of view and distinct determinates of presence*. Propositions of the form "from *x*'s point of view, *x*'s perceptual objects are present" are true if and only if *x*'s perceptual objects have the determinate of presence* corresponding to *x*'s point of view.

This is a tidy explanation of what grounds truths statable using point-of-view operators, but if it is true, then Harmony is threatened. If being present is merely one determinate among many, and each of these many determinates is exemplified by the perceptual objects of some other cognizer, there is no ground for saying that my pleasures are, all other factors being equal, worth more than the pleasures of others.

The argumentative structure of Hare's book is complex, and parts of it are not transparent to me. If one of the goals of Hare's book is simply to argue from Harmony, which itself is taken merely as a given, to a particular metaphysics, then the above consideration might not trouble Hare much, at least insofar as Hare is focusing on that goal only. But if one of the goals is to present the reader with a systematic package of positions in axiology, normative ethics, metaphysics, and philosophy of language, then he should be concerned about the extent to which the elements of the package hang together.

IV. QUESTIONS FROM THE INSIDE AND THE OUTSIDE

I'm lying in the hospital bed, about to undergo a fantastic operation. Perhaps the thing that will wake up will be me; perhaps not. I wonder what will happen to me. You observe from the outside; you decide to call the thing that wakes up "Kris*" and wonder whether Kris = Kris*. According to Hare, from the inside it seems as if there are two genuinely *metaphysically possible* scenarios; either I will wake up, or I won't. According to Hare, from the outside there is only one genuinely metaphysically possible scenario, although in some sense it is both *epistemically possible* that Kris = Kris* and epistemically possible that this is not the case. Given that I am Kris, how can there be two metaphysically distinct possible answers to the inside question but only one for the outside question?

Briefly, Hare claims that only questions from the outside are about personal identity. According to Hare, it is not metaphysically necessary that Hare be the one who has present experiences; it is not even metaphysically necessary that anyone have present experiences. (Is it metaphysically necessary that only one person has present experiences? Hare is not explicit on this point, but it seems that it will be harder to defend Harmony as a necessary truth if it is not metaphysically necessary that at most one person has present experiences.) Moreover, at one time, one individual might have present experiences, while at a later time a numerically distinct individual might have present experiences. Let's return to my story. Suppose that Kris* will see a blue wall after the operation. There are two metaphysical possibilities; either Kris*'s experience of seeing the blue wall will be present, or it won't be. If it will be present, then it is true that I will see a blue wall, regardless of whether Kris* = Kris. In general, given Hare's view that the word "I" is really a disguised definite description, the following two sentences are equivalent: (1) At *t*, I see a blue wall. (2) At *t*, the thing that has all and only present experiences sees a blue wall. And this is why, given that Kris* will have present experiences, it is true that I will see a blue wall, even if the true theory of personal identity implies that Kris is not Kris*.

Hare never explicitly argues for the claim that "I" means "the thing that has present experiences"; the closest to an argument for What "I" Means is that it plays a role in explaining The Difference. When I first encountered What "I" Means, I thought it was bizarre and unmotivated by anything yet encountered in the text: when, for example, Hare says, "I am hungry," what he says is true, as a matter of fact, if and only if Kris is hungry. If you say to me, "you are not I," what you say is false since "you" when uttered by you refers to me, but so does the word "I" when uttered by you. On pages 54–55, Hare suggests that he is not actually committed to this view; one option he considers is that these sentences are context sensitive. Suppose Kris is hungry and Hare is not. Suppose they each token the sentence "I am hungry." What propositions are expressed? On the context-sensitive view, Kris expresses the (true) proposition that the one with present experiences is hungry, while Hare expresses the (false) proposition that, from Hare's point of view, the one with present experiences is hungry. In effect, what the context-sensitive proposal does is ensure that, in typical cases, when one asserts a sentence in which the word "I" is used, one succeeds in referring to oneself. (Of course, this is so only on the assumption that it is never

true of some nonidentical x and y that, from the point of view of x , y 's experiences are present. More on this assumption in a moment.)

Let's consider how the context-sensitive proposal handles the inside question. First, consider a proposal about how the point-of-view operators work. Some propositions imply facts about which things are present (call these *biased propositions*), while others are neutral on which things are present (call these *unbiased propositions*). For any unbiased proposition P and any object x (that can have a point of view), from the point of view of x , P is true if and only if P is true. In other words, prefacing a sentence that expresses an unbiased proposition with a point-of-view operator never results in a sentence that expresses a proposition with a different truth value. (So, if $2 + 2 = 4$, it is true for each k that, from the point of view of k , $2 + 2 = 4$.) This proposal is not explicitly stated by Hare, but it is very plausible and seems to be a consequence of the semantics suggested in section 3.2.

Now let's stipulate that the correct theory of personal identity implies that Kris is not Kris*. When Kris utters "I will see a blue wall," is this true? It seems to me that, given the context-sensitive semantics, the answer is no since it is not true from Kris's point of view that Kris will have a present experience of seeing a blue wall; even according to Kris's point of view, Kris won't see a blue wall since Kris won't be around. The argument goes as follows. First, "Kris wakes up and sees a blue wall after the operation" expresses an unbiased proposition, and so it is true if and only if "From Kris's point of view, Kris wakes up and sees a blue wall after the operation." Since the former is false, the latter is as well. Second, necessary truths are true from every point of view, and so facts about entailment relations are true from every point of view. Third, Kris has present experiences after the operation entails that Kris exists after the operation. So from Kris's point of view, Kris has present experiences after the operation only if Kris is around after the operation. But, fourth, Kris won't be around after the operation, and since this is an unbiased proposition, it is also true that from Kris's point of view, Kris won't be around after the operation. Finally, I assume that if, from the point of view of k , P only if Q , and from the point of view of k , $\sim Q$, then from the point of view of k , not $\sim P$. So it is not true that, from Kris's point of view, Kris will have a present experience of a blue wall.

And for any nonidentical x and y , it is never true that, according to x 's point of view, y 's experiences are present. (Just as it is never the case that, from time $t1$'s perspective, time $t2$ is now, and it is never the case that, from world $w1$'s perspective, world $w2$ is actual.) So I conclude that the context-sensitive proposal undercuts Hare's solution to The Difference.

Similar remarks apply to the second alternative Hare entertains, namely, that people other than Kris fail to express any proposition at all when they use the word "I." I conclude that Hare's solution to The Difference requires him to take a stand on something he was provisionally neutral about in earlier chapters, specifically that when other people use the word "I," they refer to Kris. What "I" Means is so astonishing that I find myself unable to accept any solution to a puzzle that requires it.

I suggest that the answers to the inside question and the outside question do not actually diverge but merely seem to diverge. However, egocentric presentism might still play a role in explaining why the answers seem to diverge and

might thereby receive some evidential support by virtue of playing this role. Here is how such an explanation might go. Perhaps when we ask the inside question, we envision two genuinely distinct metaphysical possibilities, such as the possibility that Kris*'s experiences become present and the possibility that no one's experiences become present. Given egocentric presentism, both of these are distinct metaphysical possibilities. There are also two different epistemic possibilities that concern what happens to Kris: there is the epistemic possibility that Kris persists through the operation, and there is the epistemic possibility that Kris perishes. Only one of these epistemic possibilities is genuinely metaphysically possible. Perhaps we unwittingly confuse the two genuine metaphysical possibilities with the mere epistemic possibilities for Kris. Perhaps the genuine metaphysical possibility that Kris*'s experiences become present is confused with the (mere) epistemic possibility that Kris persists. And perhaps the genuine metaphysical possibility that no one's experiences become present is confused with the epistemic possibility that Kris perishes. That those metaphysical possibilities should be conflated with these epistemic possibilities should come as no surprise if (i) what it is to imagine being someone simply is to imagine someone's experiences as being present (43) and (ii) what it is to imagine perishing is to imagine no one's experiences as being present. (Although Hare does not explicitly endorse the second clause, it is plausible given the first clause.) So, even if the answers to the inside and the outside questions do not diverge, it might well seem to us that they do diverge. This purported explanation of The Difference does not require any fantastic semantic claims about the meaning of the word "I."

As my terse remarks above indicate, this is indeed a very rich book, worthy of study. (I thank Ross Cameron, Mark Heller, Hille Paakkunainen, Mark Murphy, Brad Skow, Jason Turner, and Robbie Williams for helpful comments.)

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Hurka, Thomas. *The Best Things in Life: A Guide to What Really Matters*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. Pp. 200. \$18.95 (cloth).

This engagingly written work is addressed to a wider audience of nonprofessional readers and students, but it also represents an important contribution to value theory and ethics that should engage the interests of professional philosophers. Its author, Thomas Hurka, is a distinguished philosopher who is known for his many significant contributions to the theory of value and to moral and political philosophy, including such notable works as *Perfectionism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) and *Virtue, Vice, and Value* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). Some of the original ideas in these earlier works appear in this book, but they are further developed here in interesting ways. Hurka is a gifted writer as well as a fine philosopher, and he has a knack for explaining things clearly and engagingly for nonspecialists.

He states the main question of his book in a number of ways: "Which states