

## A NEW LOOK AT EROTETIC COMMUNICATION

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Recently, attempts have been made to analyse discourse involving questions and answers, and thus to develop its logic. These efforts assume either that questions must be *interpreted* as propositional functions (with answers being instantiations into these functions),<sup>1</sup> or questions *imply* propositions,<sup>2</sup> or questions are *hidden* commands.<sup>3</sup> By adopting one of these views, analysts have sought calculi of interrogatives which work with the precision of propositional logic. The shortcomings of these efforts stem from the very assumption that questions must be reduced to some other "equivalent" grammatical form. In this writers have failed to consider the irreducibility of questions in erotetic communication. Thus their logics have resulted in calculi which do not deal with questions at all, but involve only declaratives of some sort. Moreover, their emphasis upon developing logics which parallel the "true-false" logic of propositions has limited them to the consideration of questions having only "yes" or "no" answers. For they assume that such answers are somehow like the truth values assigned to statements.

This study analyses from a pragmatic viewpoint the unnoticed and multi-faceted nature of discourse concerning questions and answers. Such communication is presented as an interconnected series of sententialized relations between a language user and the language he employs. At every stage it will be shown how key efforts of the past are limited in the way they conceive this communication activity. Significantly, the advantage of seeing responses to questions as distinct assertions of belief sheds new light upon how erotetic communication can be handled without destroying the questions it involves. Finally, some comments will be offered as to how a logic of questions can be developed which does not compromise the role of interrogatives, and which avoids all use of modal operators. In the latter case, the logic of questions will be sketched on the basis of a logic of physical events.

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1. [2], p. 353.

2. [5], p. 30.

3. [1], p. 142.