

Asking and Answering

Rivalling Approaches to Interrogative Methods

Call for Papers

(standalone volume; submission deadline: March 31st, 2021)

Questions are everywhere and the ubiquitous activities of asking and answering, as most human activities, are susceptible to failure – at least from time to time. Thus, the systematic study of questions and the surrounding activities is desirable as it may work toward supporting and improving these activities. – Following a conference on the topic in September 2020, a volume is projected which, in addition to conference contributions, includes original articles on the asking and answering of questions.

Topic Outline

The reflection on questions and their systematic employment are activities which have been pursued long before the modern era in philosophy, as is evident, for instance, from Plato's framing of Socrates' style of conversation, from Aristotle's eighth book of the *Topics*, from the style of oral and written philosophy in the scholastic era, from Kant's three/four leading questions of philosophy, and from the empiricists's criticism of traditional problems as pseudoquestions. Hence, one may expect that for a long time there has been an implicit or explicit need to provide frameworks for the methodic use of questions in science, philosophy, and everyday life. Such framework may take or, in fact, took the shape of categorizations of questions and answers or of the elucidation of their systematic relations or the reconstructive or stipulative setting of rules which regulate the practice of asking and answering.

In more recent times, scholars developed various question logics by providing (i) ways to formalize ordinary language questions, (ii) semantics for (formalized) questions, and (iii) rules for (formalized) questions. (An incomplete list: [1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8].) These efforts largely agree on the relevance of questions in many areas and on their general amenability to methodic treatment, which is either supported or even enabled by their formalization. Obviously, questions, and their answers, are considered cognitive entities at least in the sense that their utterance is part of human efforts to achieve knowledge, truth and other epistemic goods. As proposals from logicians they are to be distinguished from similiar efforts in psychology or linguistics, although the lines may blur depending on the approach. However, most question logicians are not in the business of making claims about what role questions play in our minds nor do they set out to formally reconstruct all aspects of ordinary language questions (rather they focus on those aspects that are ›cognitively relevant‹ or ›epistemically relevant‹).

Despite these common features, the efforts have not yet lead to a ›mainstream‹ in question logic – erotetics remains “multi-paradigmatic” ([7, p. 14]). On the one hand, this pluralism is fruitful with regard to research, since it provides for so many different ways to investigate questions. On the other hand, the result of (mostly) mutually incompatible approaches is dissatisfying. It also raises the question of *who is right* or, more circumspectly, which proposal is the preferable one with regard to certain aims which one supposedly wants to achieve by a formal treatment of questions.

This state of affairs calls for investigations aimed at getting justifications. One can assess a given framework for questions in various dimensions in order to contribute in this regard. Here are some suitable suggestions or requirements:

- R1. The given framework for questions shall be closely aligned to standard declarative logic. If possible, new syntactic categories shall be avoided; continuity with deductive and model theoretic apparatuses of standard first-order logic shall be supported; etc.
- R2. The given framework shall be as simple as possible. It shall allow for a straightforward formalization of questions and answers and it shall allow for an intuitively accessible use of formal questions and answers.
- R3. The given framework shall represent the full spectrum of kinds of questions (wh-, yes/no-, choice-, how-, why-questions etc.), while representing their peculiarities in an adequate way.
- R4. The given framework shall reflect practices of asking and answering questions in science, philosophy, and ordinary life, at least with respect to the epistemic dimension of these practices.

Although these desiderata are very vague, it is to be expected that different frameworks, e.g. different question logics, satisfy them to different extents and that no one single framework can *fully* satisfy *all* the requirements. One main aim of the volume is to compare different approaches to questions with regard to the listed and similar requirements or, if applicable, to propose modifications of known frameworks which improve these frameworks in relevant respects.

A certain emphasis shall be put on the fourth requirement and its role in developing question logics. It seems that the relevance of a logic of questions to actual practices of asking and answering can be convincingly defended only if such practices are given an appropriate formal counterpart. The conditions under which one may ask a question present a fundamental issue for this function of question logics. Some of the following conditions have been discussed in recent years:

- C1. One may ask anything.
- C2. One may ask only those questions whose presuppositions are satisfied.
- C3. One may ask only those questions which have not yet been answered.
- C4. One may ask only those questions whose answering will help with the answering of a superordinate question.

- C5. One may ask a (new) question only if no other question is currently unanswered.
- C6. One may ask a (new) question if a preceding question is answered in the negative.

In question logics such conditions of asking can assume the form of rules of posing questions. Such rules may lead to erotetic calculi, but they may also function as a guidance system for actual natural-language acts of asking without forming a calculus whose properties can be investigated by logicians. In either case, they can be amended by rules of answering which may relate to rules of assertion, rules of inference, and more, as employed in standard declarative logic and as discussed in the philosophy of logic and language. In fact, it seems that a question logic without a logic of answers is incomplete.

Based on these considerations, specific topics to be addressed in contributions to this volume can be suggested thus:

- T1. formulating general problems for a formal treatment of questions,
- T2. comparing different frameworks for formal questions with regard to above requirements,
- T3. comparing different frameworks with regard to how they regulate the asking (and possibly the answering) of questions,
- T4. investigating specific kinds of questions (why, how, wherefore, programmatic questions etc.) and how they can be treated in a given framework,
- T5. situating the activities of asking and answering in a wider framework of cognitive/epistemic discourse.

This list is not exhaustive and contributions that enhance it along the lines sketched by above outline are welcome.

Format of the Volume

The volume will be a standalone book published by Narr/Francke/Attempto. It will be available in print as well as digitally (open access). The book will have two parts: The first part comprises contributions to a preread-based conference that has been conducted in September 2020, including comments to these contributions. The second part comprises peer-reviewed contributions as specified in the topic outline above. **This call for papers concerns the second part, exclusively.**

At the time of writing this call for papers the following authors are confirmed as contributors to the first part:

- Ivano Ciardelli
- Moritz Cordes (editor)
- David Hitchcock

- Catherine Hundleby
- Manfred Krifka
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- Jared Millson
- Floris Roelofsen
- Andrzej Wiśniewski

Specification for the Contributions

Please submit your contribution at askandanswer2021@gmail.com as **anonymized** PDF or DOC/DOCX. Accepted contributions need to be submitted as **DOC or DOCX** files. The maximum length of a contribution (including footnotes, references, appendixes etc.) is 50,000 characters (including blanks). Contributions are welcome from philosophy as well as from any discipline which can profitably add to the topic. If you feel uncertain about whether your contribution suits the volume, feel free to contact above email address. **The deadline for submission is March 31st, 2021.**

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