

## Why Do We Ask Questions?

*Inquiry, Language Games, and the Virtuous Inquirer*

### I. Introduction: *Why Ask?*

#### Terminological Distinctions:

- ❖ Interrogative sentence - the linguistic form ("Is it raining?")
- ❖ Proposition - the meaning of the assertoric counterpart of an interrogative sentence ("It is raining.")
- ❖ Question - the content of what is being asked; distinct from the proposition
- ❖ Asking - an act; not necessarily conversational; can be done in silent soliloquy, toward nature, toward God

#### Motivation:

- ❖ Practical value - inquiry is constitutive of science, law, medicine, education, ethics
- ❖ Theoretical value - what guides and governs the asking?

**Plan:** *A Modified Quaestio Method*

### II. Clarifying the Question

Asking *intentionally*: What we are looking for are *reasons* for why we ask. To ask intentionally is to answer the why-question.

→ So, another way of understanding the question is: What are the reasons for which we ask?

Functions of Reasons:

1. Explanation -
2. Justification -
  - a. Favors (motivating reasons)
  - b. Guides (normative reasons)

→ **The Question (narrowed):** *What are the reasons that guide our asking?*

### III. Answers as Reasons?

Aristotle, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, says that every inquiry is aimed at some good. The good, at least in epistemology, refers to the epistemic status brought about by answers: Belief? Knowledge? Understanding?

**Two Problems:**

1. Initiation problem: If one does not know whether there is an answer, or an idea of what the answer would even be, then how can an answer justify one's asking?
2. Termination problem: If one already knows the answer to their question, it seems irrational to keep asking.

**IV. Reflecting on the Game**

- What questions did you ask?
- What constrained your asking?
- What were you trying to accomplish?

**V. Inquiry as a Practice: Language Games and Virtues**

→ The reasons that guide our asking are given by the question being asked and the attitude one takes toward it

❖ **Language Games:**

- Games as a model for inquiry
- Rule-following
- Institutions
- Different communities, different conventions

❖ **Virtue Theory:**

- Institutions and Reasons
- Character and the virtuous inquirer

→ The question and one's attitude toward it are themselves shaped by the practice of inquiry itself.

**VI. Upshots and Conclusion**

**Theoretical:** The discussion opens further questions: what does character require of the inquirer? What is the role of institutions?

**Practical:** Inquiring well is a skill and disposition that applies across domains.

*We leave with more questions than answers, and that is generally okay. Part of learning, and part of philosophy, is developing a feel for what it means to inquire well: to ask the right questions, in the right way, with the right sensibility.*