

# FROM ASKING TO ANSWERING: MAKING QUESTIONS EXPLICIT

\* Action simply translates an initially  
*implicit* being into a being that is made  
*explicit*. Hegel.

\*The question and answer method seems  
suitable for introducing almost any one of  
the fields of human endeavours. A.M.  
Turing.

Teaching writing is always, at some level and some way, *making it explicit*.<sup>1</sup> 1  
And *making it explicit* essentially involves asking for, and giving reasons for, a particular  
stretch of discourse (word, phrase, sentence, etc.), the choice of the subject, or title,  
length of a paragraph, or text, punctuation, probable audience response to the text, and so  
on. In my years of teaching the several major genres of writing (creative, expository and  
technical), I have put a special emphasis on Questions and the various forms they can  
take in *text-times*, the various times associated with composing and reading the text<sup>2</sup>

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1 In most pedagogical situations, the terms "local" and "global," levels are useful. "Local" refers to  
anything *not* "gobal," that is, not the complete text.

2 Questions have, of course, received a great deal of attention by teachers of composition: see, e.g., Fred D.  
White and Simone J. Billings, *The Well-Crafted Argument: A Guide and a Reader* (Boston: Houghton

Salient among them are 1) **composing time** (Questions as seen from the perspective of the writer in the process of composing, revising, etc. the text), 2) **timing** (essentially, how Questions affect the "speed" of the reading time of the text, its structure, duration, etc.) and 3) **comprehending time** (how Questions influence the reader's understanding of the text, information in it and its overall intelligibility). With both 2) and 3) the perspective is generally that of the reader, who, of course, can also be the writer of the text. With all of these "**times**," however, we can speak them as authorial "destinations" of Questions—where "destination" is thought of as both a "goal" of Questions and as an effect of them. Judgment about the success, or failure, of such effect is usually the collaborative work of student-writer, instructor and class peers.

#### ASKING AND ANSWERING

The "big picture" about Questions, I tell my students, lies in what precedes and follows them—in Asking and Answering. Questions are not only the middle ground between Asking and Answering, but, more importantly, the "way" we get from one to the other; and, in the process, execute such vital writing procedures as structuring information, stating problems, or creating dialogue. This means, essentially, that we take the view that Questions have their main value to writers, not as something in themselves, but, like a coin, in the "exchange" of information between Asking and Answering. But coins, to continue the analogy, also have value in themselves. And so, as I try to show throughout this essay, that this is also true of Questions. For one thing, it allows us to

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Mifflin, 2002), p. 155 ("audience-based"), p. 156 ("subject-based"), p. 155 ("writer-based") and pp. 156-57 ("purpose-based") Questions; Joseph M. Williams *et al.*, *The Craft of Argument with Readings* (New York: Longman, 2003): 80-83; Gary Goshgarian, *et al.*, *An Argument Rhetoric and Reader* (New York: Longman, 2003): 69-70, 109, 205. Each of these is motivated by a desire, not so much as to make Asking itself explicit, but more what explicit role Asking may take for text-construction in such important matters as finding a subject, understanding audience etc. Williams has an important section on "So What"? Questions. Goshgarian makes useful observations about "interview Questions."

isolate, and discuss, Questions as they are (presumably) in themselves plus the force they exert on things "around" them. In this, we are reminded of a statement from the Book of Changes (*I-Ching*) that "by observing what each gathers to itself, it is possible to understand the inner nature of all things in heaven and earth." <sup>3</sup>

Intuitively, terms for Asking might include ones like "ground" of Questions, "context" for Questions or "frame" for Questions. But recently we have to come to think of Asking as the "initial conditions" of Questions. When we "ask a Question" we essentially do two things: first we reveal that "ask" is prior to "Question," not just in its syntactical position, but also (as I will try to show) is prior in our knowledge and representation of the world.<sup>4</sup> When a Question "no longer needs to be asked," then the priority of Asking disappears. But when we "ask a Question" we also establish a relationship, largely implicit, of the relationship that exists between Asking and Questions. When we revise a Question, or substitute another for it, then we revisit, or "go back to," Asking in order to understand what conditions make up our last Question. Such Asking to Questions process may be likened to how the "hardware" of Asking can be modified, or changed, by some specific intention, with the "software" of Questions. That is, Asking can be thought of as "programmable" by the need to execute a specific

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Earlier, well known treatments of Questions in the teaching of thinking and writing are by, e.g., Michael J., Fitzgerald, "Asking Questions with the Help of Pictures and Slides: Some Language Games," *English Language Teaching Journal*, 34 (1980): 277-281. M. J. Francoz., "The Logic of Question and Answer: Writing As Inquiry," *College English*, 41 (1979): 336-339. Lawrence T. Frase, "Effect of Question Location, Pacing, and Mode Upon Retention of Prose Material," *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 59 (1968): 244-249; Frase, "Questions as Aids to Reading: Some Research and Theory," *American Educational Research Journal*, 5 (1968):319-332; Berthoff, Ann, *Forming, Thinking., Writing* (Rochelle Park, N. J.:Hayden, 1978). Useful discussions of Questions by linguists and philosophers are in *Questions*, ed., Henry Hiz (Dordrecht/Boston: D. Reidel, 1978), 227-228.

<sup>3</sup> Hexagram 45, p. 174.

<sup>4</sup> The expression, "raise a question" also presupposes this priority of Asking. The notions of *apriori* and *aposteriori* knowledge originate, of course, in Aristotle who wrote treatises on both notions.

linguistic act with discrete utterances.<sup>5</sup> This means, to continue the analogy, that the "initial states" of Asking exist as pure potentiality.<sup>6</sup> What makes them actual, working toward some end, are the Questions that rise from them.<sup>7</sup> Obvious examples of Questions, as the result of programmed activity, are direct Questions like yes-no Questions, "Should we have invaded Iraq?" "Is it raining outside?" etc.; wh-Questions, "What, who, how? etc. and any utterance that expresses *doubt* and *neediness*. So we commonly employ sentences like "I wonder if I should shop today," "They want to get more rest," etc. Such utterances are often formed from what some linguists refer to as Question-embedding verbs, "doubt, need, desire, " and the like<sup>8</sup>

In general, then, we can say that the conditions named by Asking decompose into three main "groups," (a) needs and doubts, (b) sense data, and (c) memory.<sup>9</sup> So a typical Question from (a) might be, "Would you pass the butter?" from (b) "What are those men doing at the irrigation ditch?" (a scene I'm now viewing from my window while I write

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5 To those familiar with stratificational grammar, the "idea" of the present paragraph might seem reminiscent of the downward and upward processes of "tactic patterns" and "realization portions." Intuitively, it seems true to say that Asking is a "tactic" that finds, or can find, its "realization" in first a Question and then an Answer. But there is, to my knowledge, no empirical evidence that this is the case—nor that it increases the *explicitness* of Asking-Question-Answer by putting it in the such grammar .

6 In Aristotle's famous phrase, the potentiality of a thing is to its actuality, its "end," as the acorn is to the oak.

7 The reader may recognize that certain notions expressed here—as well as elsewhere in this paper—are reminiscent of similar ones of A.M. Turing. See his classic paper, "Computing Machinery and Intelligence," *Mind*, 59, no. 236 (October, 1950): 433-460.

8 Comorovski, p. 172

9 Cf. "Questions are the grammaticalization of the feature of doubt." John Lyons, *Semantics*, 2 vols (Cambridge University Press, 1977): II: 754; Charles E. Osgood, "Where do sentences come from?" in *Semantics: An Interdisciplinary Reader in Philosophy, Linguistics and Psychology*, eds., Danny Steinberg and Leon Jakobovits. Cambridge, 1971. 497-529; cf. Marvin Minsky, "Here is the essence of the frame theory: when one encounters a new situation (or makes a substantial change in one's view of a problem), one selects from memory a structure called a *frame*." *Thinking*, ed., P. N. Johnson-Laird (Cambridge, 1977): 355.

this) and from (c) "Do you remember where I put the book on Venice I was reading?" In these examples, the Questions from (a) and (c) are represented as being addressed to some second person, the "you," or addressee. ([b] is addressed to the reader of this text). But Questions from any of the "groups" can also be addressed to oneself. And one must also admit that there is considerable overlapping of the groups. The main reason for this is that most Questions, perhaps all, (with the exception of rhetorical Questions) have one of their origins in group (a). All Questions, that is, express doubt or neediness residing in Asking<sup>10</sup> We may go further and say that such *neediness* is akin to a feeling of emptiness, of rooms missing expected occupants, of objects without places, or impermanent, transitive, things, a topic given special attention by Aristotle in his treatment of "privation."<sup>11</sup> The need to "fill" such emptiness, or satisfy some "need," gives Asking, through Questions, the general quality of "moving into" some other, new, state or action. Seeking an answer to a Question is always accompanied by this "moving into" feeling.<sup>12</sup> The answer, we believe, is out "there," in some yet inexperienced spatio-temporal field. Like any utterance, a Question can have a past, and prior, reference (see REFERENCE/ANAPHORA; BALANCE/BRIDGING below), but unlike any other utterance it is always carries—as part of its "moving into" quality—a "preview" of the "next" thing, the next set of words, the next piece of information, the next problem. Thus is it common to find, as in the following example, such a "preview" in the middle portion

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10 *Neediness*, we might notice in passing, is expressed in the word for "ask" or "Question" in most European languages. Cf. Latin, *cupere, desiderare*, Italian, *desiderare, bramare*; French, *desire souhaiter*; Greek, *epithuke, potheo*.

11 For example, *Metaphysics*, 4.22.1022b-1023a.4; *Physics*, 1.9.192a.5.

12 Samuel Todes, *Body and the World* (Cambridge: MIT, 2001).

of a text. The example is from a novel about mountain climbing and the mystery surrounding the death of an experienced climber:

Could the veteran climber have been trying to commit suicide?

It's a question for which the bulk of the novel is designed to provide an answer to.<sup>13</sup>

Questions can be left unanswered, as many of Hamlet's are. But where the intent is to answer them, the case in most pedagogical situations, instructor and student need some guidelines to go by in understanding, and manipulating, Answering. What, in other words, constitutes an answer and how do we use it in an effective way? Not every string of words following a Question can be its answer. Nor, it seems fair to say, can a Question following another Question be an answer. What needs to happen for Answering to occur is for a string of words after a Question to settle the doubt, or eliminate the neediness, expressed in the Question. This is perhaps best seen in answers given to yes/no

Questions:

Are you married?	No
Are you divorced?	Yes.
Would you lend me some money?	No.

Insofar as yes/no Questions can be seen as propositions, then we can say that Answering such Questions always presupposes certain truth-conditions. The Answerer, that is, is obliged—whether or not he or she actually executes it—to utter the truth. Truth is also an issue with answers to wh-Questions. But here the answer, in order to raise to full answerhood, must supply enough information to eliminate the ignorance (need for

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<sup>13</sup> *The New York Times Book Review*, January 5, 2003, 7.

information) expressed in the Question. A brief list of the types of information for such Questions would be the following:

What?	Name of subject, substance, matter, of subject, etc.
Who?	Name of person, gender, etc.

And so on through the rest of the Questions, "How, Where, When, How much (many)" and "Why."<sup>14</sup>

Answers to the third class of Questions, utterances that lack the "?" in written discourse, but contain question-embedding verbs ("wonder," "surmise," etc.) are under the same constraint as answers to the other classes of Questions. Responses to them, in order to constitute a full answer, must minimally (a) eliminate doubt (or need), (b) eliminate ignorance with information. And (c) be truthful—where being truthful would include a "I don't know" answer. .

Yogi Berra. once observed that "it's tough to make predictions, especially about the future." The same may be said about Answering. From one perspective, the "future" of a Question is its answer. But from another perspective, depending on the nature of the Question, there may not be an answer. Alternatively, there may not be, particularly in the case of wh-Questions, any principled way of determining what the details of the answer will be. This is especially true of modal-Questions, ones containing verbs like "may, must, should" and the like.<sup>15</sup> These, it seems fair to say, have set the essential agenda for

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14 "Which," which has the form of a wh-Question is excluded from this list.

15 No one, it seems fair to say, has discussed the "difficulties" of the future, and so those of answers, as tellingly as Aristotle—especially, in his famous "sea-fight tomorrow" topic. The substance of this topic figures largely in my (forthcoming) book on Questions.

As a rule, one begins with a "top-down" approach to making Asking explicit. That is, one begins with a particular instance of Asking and then decomposes it in order to make particular *aspects* of it explicit. So with Heidegger's classic Question, "What is Metaphysics," we would want to begin with the asking about

many, perhaps most, discussions of the future and raised such questions as "Is the future determined? What does individual choice play in our attitude toward the future?" and "Is the present always contingent and the future determined?"<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps the most celebrated Answer to what seems to be a Question about the future is Aristotle's passage on "a sea-fight tomorrow."<sup>17</sup> In it, Answering takes the form of a "frame" to discuss the nature of what is "necessary" and what is not.

A sea-fight must either take place tomorrow or not,  
but it is not necessary that it should take place tomorrow,  
neither is it necessary that it should not take place, yet it is  
necessary that it either should or should not take place  
tomorrow....

This passage also brings up two other important questions about Answering. For Answering to occur, should it be preceded by a text-Question, a Question that actually occurs, as a text-utterance? Secondly, can every utterance, identified as an Answer, be paraphrased as a Question? With both Questions the quick Answer would seem to be "yes." Aristotle's sentence, "A sea-fight must either take place tomorrow or not" can easily be paraphrased as "Is it true to say that a sea-fight must either take place tomorrow or not? Must a sea-fight take place tomorrow or not?" or several other variations. With the first Question, the issue is more problematic. In both the original and translations (that

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the subject of the utterance, then move on to Questions about its text-location, if it is answered in the text and so on. This is certainly not a hard and fast rule. But, for reasons given throughout this text, I prefer it to a "bottom-up" analysis, one that starts by looking at individual, generally linguistic, components of Asking, tense, gender, aspect, etc.

16 E.g., A. N. Prior, *Past, Present and Future* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1967); Paul Fitzgerald, "Is the Future Partly Unreal?", *Review of Metaphysics*, (March, 1968); Richard Sorabji, *Time, Creation and the Continuum* (London, Duckworth, 1983).

17 *On Interpretation*, 18b23-25, 30-35.

I am aware of) the "sea-fight" utterance is a statement, not a text-Question. So are we then justified in taking the words that follow it as an Answer? Where is the Question that called it into being? One reason for taking it as an Answer to a Question is that most commentators on the passage take it as such.<sup>18</sup> The other reason, following Collingwood's lead, is to take *every* utterance, with the exception of every Question, as an Answer to a Question.<sup>19</sup> If so, then where is the Question it answers? If we don't "see" the Question, then how can we determine that the Answer satisfies (resolves, settles) the Question? Discussion of such Questions, in my experience, is best left to conferences with one's best and brightest students. For all the others, the Questions are best left unasked

Answering implies "being silent." That is, in order to answer a Question one have to first be "silent" in order to hear the Question—one has to "listen" to the Question.<sup>20</sup> On this view, Asking a Question and Answering it appear as terms for talk followed by silence followed by more talk. Neither can exist, or be significant, without the other, the main evidence for this (at least to my mind) being that every known language has words for "being silent" which, in turn, stand as synonyms for "listen."<sup>21</sup> Such talk:silence:talk has a parallel in the written text whenever we interpret a text-Question as opening up a zone of silence. Someone, including the writer, has to listen to the Question. Answering it, by closing the zone of silence, signifies that someone has listened. This process is most noticeable, perhaps, when the Question forms the title of a text. The reader is cautioned,

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18 E.g., Paul Fitzgerald, "The truth about tomorrow's sea fight," *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 66 (1969): 307-29.

19R. G. Collingwood, *An Essay in Metaphysics* (Chicago: H. Regnery, 1972): 23. "Every statement that anybody ever makes is made in answer to a Question."

20See Buck. 18:23, entry "Be Silent."

however, that this line of reasoning works best with professionals in the field or one's best students.

My immediate purpose here is not to attempt to give all the details of how this model of Asking and Answering works in class and conferences with students. (That is part of the subject of a forthcoming book).<sup>22</sup> Rather I would like to present, in rather skeleton form, two procedures for making all the above more explicit. The first is what I called "The Categories" approach. The second is the "Crime Scene" one. Colleagues who have read this essay tell me that the "Categories" approach appeals more to the linguistic (theoretical?) mind; the "Scene" one more to the practical (traditional rhetoric) one. The present reader, depending on his or her preference, might then chose to skip one of the approaches—or come back to it later. It's all up to you.

### THE CATEGORIES

These, eleven in all, exist in non-hierarchical form; that is, none is "more important," or more salient, than any other one and one may start with anyone of them. But all, to some degree, presuppose the existence of all the others. Some instructors, depending on time, the experience of their students, or genre of writing they are teaching may want to reduce the number, or modify them in some way. But I am convinced, after more than thirty years of teaching writing, that they are essential in the pedagogy of any

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21 Buck, 1821-18:25.

22 In the book, *Answerhood*, like Asking, is represented, and discussed, as a "programmable" activity. Unlike Asking, however, answers to Questions do not possess the quality of *neediness*, doubt or ignorance. Answers "settle" things and are always have the linguistic representation of a proposition or declarative sentence. A good example of this appears in the language of patents: "No. 6,484,443, Method of covering a potted plant," "No. 6,467,634, Casket-display system," or "No. 6,481,341, Antiburnd toaster." See *The New York Times Magazine*, December 15, 2002, "A sampler of this year's crop of patents."

instructor who believes, as I do, that *making it explicit* is what teaching writing is, in large part, all about.<sup>23</sup>

(Readers will have noticed by now that this text is replete with text-Questions, utterances that actually occur *in the text for the reader to see*. They are invited to take these as illustrative of the relationship between Asking, Answering and Questions being discussed here and part of the process of making that relationship *explicit*.)

The names of the categories are these: 1) EXEMPLIFYING/CLASSIFYING, 2) STRUCTURE/INTENTION, 3) REFERENCE/ANAPHORA, 4) CLAIMS/COMMITMENT, 5) ENTITLEMENT/INFERENCE, 6) DOSAGE/DISTRIBUTION, 7) SCOREKEEPING, 8) SCALE, 9) SUCCESSION, 10)

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We may also speculate that Questions are answered when the need they expresses is satisfied—analogue to satisfying hunger with food in which food stands as a complete "answer" to the "hunger" of a Question. But successful answers, it seems fair to say, presuppose a *localized* and *determined* object of Questions.. The thing we ask about, say, cat food at the local grocery store, means we possess a *determination* of cat food (what it is) but we do not know *where* it is—its *location*. Or, conversely, we may know the *location* of the *object we seek*, but we don't know what it is, it is *undetermined*. Someone may say to us "There's an easy-out in the garage on the red shelf." We know where the shelf is in the garage. We may not know, however, what an "easy-out" is, what it looks like, feels like and so on. So we may be required to ask more Questions of the person who told us where it is. Finding the easy-out (responding to a need) corresponds to a successful answer to the Question of *determination* and *location*.

It follows from this that a successful response to Questions cannot occur without this tripartite condition of need, *determination and location* of an *object* of Questions. It is perhaps not something an instructor would want to bring up in every class, but we can go further and say that there are *antiobjects* that deny existence to a successful response to Questions—*objects* that have no *location, determination* or do not satisfy some need; alternatively, express a need that is *undetermined* and *unlocalized*. In this category are things denoted by terms like "truth, virtue" or "freedom," plus what Todes calls "inconceivable conditions," conditions like those at Auschwitz. Such conditions, being unimaginable and inconceivable, are "holes in the world."<sup>23</sup> This does not mean, of course, that we cannot ask about them—only that responses to our Questions will be *undetermined*, subject to objection, controversy or mere opinion. Questions that leads to more Questions, rather than a closing response, seems to presuppose an *undetermined* object—as seems to be the motivation for unfavorable reviews of Steven Pinker's *The Modern Denial of Human Nature*, a book that attempts to answer the Question, "What is human nature?"<sup>23</sup> Human nature, to the reviewers, is not only an *undetermined object* but also an *undeterminable* one.

<sup>23</sup> The thinking used to make Questions *explicit* owes much to Robert B. Brandom, *Making It Explicit* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1994). The categories themselves be seen as Questions about the writer's Questions, ones that may or may not appear in the text. In the process of using Questions to perform all the tasks a writer normally has to do (develop a subject, topic, or theme t, structure information in it, etc.) the categories may be employed to "revisit" the Questions in order to delete, modify or expand them.

CONTEXT/GOAL, 11) BALANCE/BRIDGING, 12) VOICE/PERSONA and 13) TIME-SENSITIVITY. As I alluded to earlier, each of these can be thought of as a "control" on how Questions can be discussed with student writers in class or conference. I return to this topic after a survey of the categories.

Henceforth, Questions will be written as Qs or Q.

EXEMPLIFYING/CLASSIFYING. Asking, Answering and Q are a linguistic universal.<sup>24</sup> And Qs exist, in three different forms, in all languages: direct Qs, (yes/no, wh-Qs and tag-Qs) and utterances with Q-embedding verbs. Utterances that have the outward form of a Q, an "?" or rising intonation, do not necessarily constitute a Q—as in the case of the rhetorical Q. Qs, in order to be genuine, must express need and the response, or answer, to it must be "outside," or never presupposed, by the Q.<sup>25</sup> (For more on this point see BALANCE/BRIDGING below.)

I introduce, and later discuss in classes and conferences, these kinds of Qs in the following general way.

(a) Use a *yes-no* Q to state a proposition that you want to debate; say, "will India and Pakistan begin a nuclear war?"; to take issue with a proposition of someone else, "is that right?"; or to repeat, or paraphrase, an earlier point (thesis or proposition). A Q, like

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24Russell Ultan, 1978. Some general characteristics of interrogative systems. In *Universals of human language*, vol. 4, *Syntax*, edited by Joseph H. Greenberg, pp. 211-248. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press. Carl Darling Buck, *A Dictionary of Selected Synonyms in the Principal Indo-European Languages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949). Entries under Asking, Answering and Questions (18.31, 1832)

25 An utterance like "Why we love war" (*Utme Reader*, Jan-Feb, 2003: 53-58) seems, insofar as it calls for a response, to have a quasi-status as a Question. Its relationship with the "initial conditions" of Asking, however, seems much weaker than in an utterance like "Do we love war?"

all sentences, can occur anyplace in the text, in the title, the first sentence of a section or paragraph, in the middle or end, and so on.

Tag-Qs. The name comes from the fact that the Q part of the utterance comes at its end and "Qs," just *as yes/no Qs* do, the proposition of the utterance. Jill, a character in Hemingway's *The Hills Like White Elephants* asks her male companion this tag-Q:

"That's all we do, isn't it—look at things and try new drinks?"<sup>26</sup> All tag-Qs can be paraphrased (are reducible to) as ordinary yes/no Qs. "Isn't that all we do, look at things and try new drinks?"

An important sub-set of yes/no Qs are "modal" yes/no Qs. The most important of these are: "can," "should" ("must"), "may" and "will."

(b) *Wh-Qs*: Use these to alert readers to the kind of information you are going to supply them with. "How?" for example tells them that you are going to discuss how to do something, perform an action, complete a task, etc; "why?" makes them expect a discussion of the causes of something. Note that this is not the usual motive for verbal *wh-Qs*. In this case, assuming that we are not being ironic, we seek usable information—such as in Asking for directions to a particular place.

(c) Use *Q-embedding verbs*, like "wonder," "suppose," "suspect" and the like to express doubt, uncertainty or problems.

STRUCTURE/INTENTION: Qs have both a local and global structuring effect. That is, they structure elements like the sentence, paragraph and section plus that of the whole text. In this we should always note the *internal* as well as the *external* effects of

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Qs. The *internal* effects are those that influence readers' expectations about what comes next—or what the writer's rhetorical intention is with a Q or series of them. This is equivalent to knowing how it would be correct to enact the action given in a Q or believe what is being stated in it. Intention finds its goal in its fulfillment by readers. The intention of "Would you please pass the salt?" for example is fulfilled in the appropriate action as is belief in the truth of "Is the universe infinite?" by how it is answered—by evidence used to support either a "yes" or "no" answer. This means that to grasp a writer's intention with a Q is to be able to distinguish a correct, from an incorrect, use of such Q. This view is not restricted to meaning and belief but extends as well to actions and the success, or failure, of such actions. A writer's intention may or may not settle how readers think, or act, but the content of a Q will always determine whether or not it was appropriate to think or act a certain way.

The *external* effects of a Q appear in what it causes to happen with readers, both in their beliefs about the subject and their (including physical) response to it. A Q may alert them to what comes next, what the writer promises, as well as standards for judging what the correct response to a Q is. In this the written and the verbal Q exhibit the same relationship between the intention of the Q and our understanding of its intention and our response to it. Walking out of the room after being asked to pass the salt shows either a misunderstanding of the intentional content of the Q, a defect in hearing, or an ironic attitude toward the person asking. But none of these possibilities deny the fact that a normative condition (a "must") exists between the intention of a Q and the way we respond to it. That is, either in an appropriate (correct) or inappropriate (incorrect) way.

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26 A *rhetorical Question*, "Who's buried in Grant's tomb?" contains its own answer. It is no part of Asking in this book.

Another way of stating the above is that Asking, as the initial states of a Q, resides in the doubts (or ignorance) of a community. Without such a community there would be no Asking, nor any understanding of why people deliberately refuse to ask. Asking is a social, human, construct and does not, and never can be, a spontaneously occurring natural event, like snow or a change of barometric pressure.

REFERENCE/ANAPHORA: This feature of a Q appears as relation between a pronoun and its antecedent. In the following example "it" is an anaphoric relationship with "car":

Bob worked on my **car**. Is that why **it** won't start?

The usual situation is for the antecedent to occur, in writing and reading time, *before* the pronoun. But the antecedent can also come *after* the pronoun:

Is that why **it** won't start? Because Bob worked on my **car**.<sup>27</sup>

Anaphora thus serves the function of *economy* and *repetition* by the pronoun not overtly replicating its antecedent. The pronoun also adds gender (neuter in the above example), number (singular) information to a Q and so plays an important role in its unity and the way the reader understands the utterances. But anaphora may also be seen as a form of *substitution* (one term *substituting* for another one) and, by extension, as possessing *inferential* content. A Q is always directed at some object, usually some *determined object*, "car," "Bob" and the like. For this to happen, some understanding of how the object stands to a description of it (usually the predicate of a sentence representing the description). So a reader *infers* from the above that **it** and **car** are the same *object* and that in any application of the terms one can replace the other without any loss of meaning.

Note also that an object like **car** can change its properties, lose its color say, without our losing a sense that it is the same object as **car** before the change in its properties.

For the anaphoric relationship to exist, and be successful, it must cause the reader to form a *recognition-judgment*. Such *judgment* presupposes an *identity claim*, a *claim* that (in this example) **it** and **car** refer to the same object. Moreover, the *claim* is subject to true and false determinations. Is it true to say that, in this particular instance, that **it** and **car** are the same *object*? Or can it be shown that they are not the same? Such Qs, at one level, may sound trivial, but they have consequences for the survival of the written text. *Hamlet* exists, in part, today because playgoers (and readers) have determined, over the centuries, that the "objects" of Hamlet's attention (Ophelia, his mother, or his thoughts) represent those *objects* are they really are. They may not be, from a historical point of view, "real," but they are "realistic."

The truth or falsity of an *identity-claim*, that **it** and **car** refer to the same object, ultimately involves recognizing them as the same *after* substituting one for the other. The relationship between **it** and **car** must have the form of  $a=b$ ,  $b=a$ . Note also that a writer can introduce a new term, say, **vehicle**, for **it** and **car**, and feel confident that the *identity-claim* does not change for the reader. He or she still recognizes the object as the same as a condition for distinguishing it from all other objects. In most cases, the new term is a singular term already available in the language. Place or proper names, "Logan, Utah," "Gene Washington," and so on, can be made to obey the *identity-claim* as long as they distinguish themselves by means of spatio-temporal characteristics: "Gene Washington just came through the door," "Logan, Utah is a university town of 55,000 in northern Utah." Later references to them would be made by singular terms, **he** and **it**,

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27 The term "cataphora" is sometimes used to designate this arrangement.

insofar as the writer's aim is to link a new term to a familiar (given) one and have the reader recognize it as referring to the same object. Such new/familiar referring are subject, of course, to the memory of the reader. The terms, using an earlier example, **it** and **he**, must be "close" enough (in a given stretch of text) for the reader to remember which comes first and where it occurs in order to relate the second term to the first on the basis of the *identity-claim*.

All the above can be read as implicit *directions* to the reader of the following sort:

\*Take **car** and **it** to refer to the *same* object.

\*Ignore the fact that they occur at different places in the text.

\*Read them as  $a=b$ ,  $b=a$ .

\*Understand the content of "a" as being identical with that of "b."

\*Understand **it** and **car** to be the *determined object* each refers to. Something is the *object* because **it** and **car** refer to it.

\*Take the *object* as *information*.

\*Recognize that **it** and **car**, if they occur in an utterance where doubt is being expressed in a specific example of Asking, that it, that it is the attributes of **car** (*red car*, *old car*, etc.) that help us identify the intention of the Q.

CLAIMS/COMMITMENTS: With every Q a *claim* is made. And a *claim* is essentially a belief which always, in turn, presupposes some linguistic social practice. A *claim*, in other words, can only be understood as a relationship between persons and not as that between natural events. A *claim* does not raise the temperature in the room or cause a barometer to rise or fall.

With every Q, the speaker makes a *claim* about the subject, promises to do something or states what he is going to do with it. With "How much should we love love?" the speaker claims, among other things, that he is an authority on "love" and that he intends to discuss the consequences of it and also at what point it may become a problem to the lover. "Can I help you?" carries the *commitment* to do something. One can say that the speaker is taking *responsibility* for asking the Q as well as the answer he gives to it. Answers always "carry over" the *responsibility* raised in the Q. This is tantamount to following a rule, which is to say it specifies what ought to be done to satisfy the claims of the Q. The Qer's *claim* is that he will make true the content of the Q. "Why then publish?" makes true its promise by following the Q with the pros and cons of publishing together with the rewards, risks and failures of so doing. Although making true is the principal constraint of the speaker, of "Why then publish?" its intelligibility depends directly on the reverse, the possibility of making false or failing to rise to the level of making true.

Note that a speaker can have two attitudes toward his or her *commitment*. He or she can *acknowledge* it or *attribute* it to someone else. With "Is there a hot potato in your pocket?" the speaker acknowledges, from the behavior of the addressee, that something is amiss and that he has a suggestion (not yet uttered) on what it is. (This rises from a possible social situation.) With "Did you say that you were blinded by the light?" on the other hand, the speaker denies that a *commitment* (that the light is blinding) is his and, by so doing, hands the responsibility for it over to the other's *commitment* (in a previous utterance). Attribution, in this sense, presupposes responsibility for a *commitment* and tacitly acknowledges that this *commitment*: responsibility for the *commitment* is a social

norm. Whatever ensues from "Did you say that you were blinded by the light" ideally (if consistent with a social norm) is obliged to make true the *commitment* while at the same time being denied by the speaker as his own and attributed to an earlier utterance of the speaker.

An important kind of Q is that which inquires about the *behavior* of a thing, procedure, or system. "Why does my truck pull to the right?" This is equivalent, no matter how we may answer the Q, to ascribing to "truck" an intentional nature. Had the Q not been asked, the intentional nature of "truck" would not exist and no description of its behavior possible. This does not mean that we have to act on the need to describe "truck" but simply that attributing an intentional state to it involves us in giving reasons for asserting that "my truck pulls to the right." The Qing element of this adds the constraint—amount to a virtual command—to give reasons for its pulling to the right as the principle substance of the answer.

We take it as axiomatic, then, that no distinction needs to be made between a system (a thing, event, procedure) *with* an intentional character and one without it. Whatever we consciously treat as having an intention has, *ipso facto*, an intention and consequently a ground for describing its behavior. This is our *claim* about the behavior of a system and our *commitment* to making its intention intelligible. What subjects an intention to a role in giving reasons, however, is our *personal* knowledge and history. What we know and what we have experienced is, at some level, unique, unshared by anyone else, living or dead. (This was expressed, metaphorically, by Wescott's characterization of life as more like a "perch" than a "nest."). What's out there, facts, the given and the like can never override *personal* knowledge in the manner and way of our

Asking. It exists at the highest level (however defined) of our consciousness and descends to the most minute part of syntax—whether or not, say, an instance of Asking begins with "is," "should," or "why."

ENTITLEMENT/INFERENCE: With *entitlement* the Q is always what warrants a particular Q. What reasons can he, or she, give for raising a Q? In this *entitlement* differs from *commitment* in the appropriateness of a certain utterance. With *commitment* we are constrained to give reasons for the utterance—it always involves a *must* or *have to*. The constraint, however, does not apply to *entitlement*. We may be *entitled* to ask a Q, but it does not mean that we have to give reasons for asking it, or even to ask it. *Entitlement*, unlike *commitment*, does not necessarily lead to a performance.

What, or who, we are *entitled* to ask about depends on what we know, plus what we take to be answerable. No doubt there is a considerable amount of person to person variation in this. What a detective asks about differs from what a farmer does and so on throughout the variables of human nature and history. But facts are only part of what we ask about. We can ask Qs of the unreal, the unseen, the things (presumably) no longer *here*. Here are some Qs the poet Stephen Knight asks of the dead: "Are you well?" "Would you like to look around?" "What did you lose? Where?"<sup>28</sup> Nor does *entitlement* presuppose hierarchy of authority. Every subject of a king, say, is as *entitled* to ask Q as the king himself and about the same thing. "Is it raining?" can be asked by a peasant without requesting permission of his king or any of his representatives. This, in essence, points to a rule of incompatibility. If we are committed to the belief that only a king has the right to ask about the weather, then we are of necessity committed to the view that no

one but a king is *entitled* to ask about the weather—though he may not, in his entire reign, ask the Q. If, on the other hand, we make the claim that everyone is *entitled* to ask about the weather, then a claim about who cannot raise the Q makes one claim incompatible with the other. One claim stands in an incompatible relationship with the other if either one denies *entitlement* to what can be asked.

*Inference* involves, as we all know, the Q of what follows from what. Or what *should* come *next* after what is *now*. But the relationship between *now* and what comes *next* (as the futurity of *should* demonstrates) is always contingent. Rain may or may not follow from thunder, lightning and an overcast sky. Even though probability and contingency rule *inference* in the world of fact, they are essential in the construction of a text more than one Q (or assertion) long. At one level, every answer to a Q is an *inference*, of what the answer *can* and *should* contain in order to constitute a sufficient response to the *inference*. From "Is Sparrow a horse?" we may not only *infer* that Sparrow is a mammal of a certain sort but also we may also acknowledge the possibility that Sparrow may be something else. We ask both that the addressee verify or deny the proposition of the Q by *inferring* from it information that precludes that both "yes" or "no" be true.

DOSAGE/DISTRIBUTION: With DOSAGE we ask the Q of how many Qs should occur in a text. What is not enough and what is too much? The answer, in most cases, depends on the genre, and the intention, of the text. Qs, for example, would not ordinarily appear in an obituary, a manual or a web-site giving travel instructions. A few examples might appear in an elegy, more in an interview and still more in a philosophical

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28 "Lost Things," *TLS*, June 7, 2002, p. 24.

text. Where speculation, doubt and the like exist so do Qs. Conversely, where there is certainty, or an inconvertible fact, there is the absence of Qs. Death, the subject of an obituary, is an obvious example.

The DISTRIBUTION of Qs in a text depends, by inference, not only on where the author wants need (or doubt) to appear but also the scope of such need. Where the scope is global (over the entire text) then a Q, or Qs, form the title; where scope is local, limited, say, to a particular section, then they form the initial sentence of the section and so on. Again, the rules for determining both DOSAGE and DISTRIBUTION are, at times, fuzzy. What makes them less so are teacher and peer reviews of texts in their beginning stage and author revision—plus the author's study of texts that have a similar format and INTENTION as his or her own.

I find it is often useful to begin by dividing all Text-Qs into the title and non-title positions. Title-Q, inasmuch as it is unique in the text, can be said to have a one-to-many relationship with all other (including all non-title examples of Qs) text-utterances. The title (the one) refers to all other text-utterances (the many) This allows the reader to "access" the utterances and, consequently, evaluate them for the quality of their Answerhood, on how well they answer the title-Q.<sup>29</sup> On this reading, the title-Q stands as the "unique initial" sentence which give meaning to all succeeding sentences by laying down conditions for Answerhood.

If the reader chooses to follow the procedure recommended in this essay, then he or she would also subject the title-Q to the remaining "terms" of explicitness.

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<sup>29</sup> An analogy here would be to any kind of "relational data base" in which various sorts of information about a person (name, address, credit rating, etc.) can be accessed by one unique number.

DISTRIBUTION can also be seen, perhaps more abstractly, as a unique position in a text-structure, a sentence, paragraph, etc. It has no existence, or significance, independent of the structure. An obvious analogy is with the natural numbers. The number 3, for example, does not exist independently of its position in a succession of numbers, 1, 2, ...4, 5, etc.<sup>30</sup> If the replica of a Q occurs in another text-structure, as is the case in quotation, then its meaning is similarly set by its position in that structure. The pitcher in one baseball game may pitch in a second, third, and so on game. But his role in any of these games is uniquely determined by his position in the game, the pitcher *as* pitcher. Thus the relationship of a Q to text-structure, discussed often by linguists, is the one-over-many. Redness is the property of all red things. Asking is the (underlying) property of all texts that have Text-Qs.

SCOREKEEPING: With this we keep *score* on the *claims* and *commitments* we make—both the speaker and the addressee—with Qs. More specifically, we keep *score* on the norms, implicit in any social interaction, that govern Qs. Norms, as has been mentioned, are a form of *promise*, to either do something or say something. From the writer's side, this means following up, or satisfying, the *claims* and *commitments* of a particular Q. The reader cooperates in this by checking to see if they have been satisfied, how they have been, and where in the text they have been satisfied. Readers do this, on the whole, in an implicit way. But it always involves readers checking to see if every Q in the text has been either answered or reasons given why it cannot be answered. This, in turn, minimally involves keeping track of such matters as 1) where the writer has put a Q,

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<sup>30</sup> For more on this general idea see Stewart Shapiro, *Thinking About Mathematics: The Philosophy of Mathematics* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2000).

or Qs, in the text (title, section, beginning, middle or end of a paragraph, etc.), 2) what kind of Q, or Qs, they are, wh-, yes-no, or a Q-embedded verb like "wonder" and 3) at what level of specificity the Qs have been answered—or what reasons have been given for not answering them. In all this, we surmise, the reader would keep *count*, at some level of consciousness, of the number of Text-Qs. Such counting, depending on the reading competence of the reader, has the form of "first," "second," and "third," rather than "1," "2," and "3" and will be ranked by varying kinds of importance, that is, how specific, or how "long," the answers to each Q ought to be.

1), 2) and 3), above, can be considered, in large, by the following examples:

A). Got the Giggles? Join the Club<sup>31</sup>

B). Porter necessarily begins by formulating the key conundrums for any history of this subject [madness]: What is the meaning and mystery of mental illness?<sup>32</sup>

C) Have You Ever Faked an Orgasm?<sup>33</sup>

A) and C) function as the title of the text; B) constitutes the first sentence of the third paragraph. The task of the writer of A) is, minimally, to define and exemplify the salient nouns "Giggles" and "Club." Here, answering implicit wh-Qs about the nouns, would yield information about such matters of a) who has, or had, the "Giggles," b) where did they have them, or c) when.

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31 *The New York Times*, July 27, 2002, A13.

32 *TLS* May 17, 2002, p. 6.

33 Molly Peacock, *The Best of the Best American Poetry*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Scribner, 1998): 223.

SCALE: One can ask about a tree and a forest, a drop of water or the ocean. Each of these "subjects," ideally, constrains the answer to a Q.. One of the constraints is *knowing* something of the nature of the individual subject. And this, in turn, presupposes *knowing* what it is *not*, that a tree is *not* a forest, a drop of water is *not* an ocean. Each has different *qualities* and these, and only these, as discussed above, generate Qs. This is equivalent to saying that doubt, a main condition of some Qs, can only operate on the qualities, or "accidents," of a thing, not on the thing as a whole. Different "accidents" of a tree—its appearance, its size, its healthy or diseased condition, etc.—result from time passing, the weather, certain animals, etc.

If a Q does not conform to the constraints of SCALE, then confusion may result. There are an infinite number of "places" in a country, an infinite number of "places" within each of these "places" and so on. Any Q about any one of them, presupposes knowledge of SCALE. If you are in the train-station in Munich, Germany, for example, you would always ask the "where am I?" Q (assuming you have an intact mind) in order to elicit information about a place you want to go. You have, in addition to a sense of where you are (you're in a train-station, not just in Munich or in Germany) an "image" of where you want to go—you have a goal in mind. Any answer that informs you that you are "in Munich" or "in Germany" violates the constraints of SCALE.

SUCCESSION: From the reader's point of view this is the Q "what follows the Q?" Additionally, one of expectation: "Is it what I expect to follow the Q?" From the writer's point of view, the Q is more the "should" type, "what should follow this Q? Will it satisfy the expectations of the reader?" None of this is as straightforward as "I expect 3

to follow 2," or "I expect night to follow day, or vice versa." We expect, minimally, a Q to be followed by a string of words that add up to an answer, reason given for no answer or one given for replacing one Q with another.<sup>34</sup> Any string of words that settles doubt raised by the Q, in theory, satisfies the criterion of Answerhood. With it, belief replaces doubt and with it, a more pleasant feeling. But there is always the option of answering the same Q in several different ways. Three options, QA, Q(c)A, and Q(d)A, are especially common. Variations on these can usually be made intelligible in terms of them.

1)QA. In this the Q is succeeded by a direct answer with eliminates all other possible answers.

Should I get married? Yes.

2) Q(c)A: Here a "commentary" on the Q succeeds the Q and

serves as an answer to the Q. Any sentence like "the Q is unanswerable," "the Q should be raised?" etc. falls under this category.

Should I get married? That Q can only be answered if you think you are financially able to support and wife and family, if you complete your degree....

3) Q(d)A. In this pattern, a "delay" to answering the Q is executed

before the Q is answered.

Should I get married? Before answering that, we need to consider what may happen if you do get married now....No,

I don't think you should

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<sup>34</sup> The replacement of one Question by another is a strategy, of Turing in his classic article, cited above.

Note that the first Q of a text—often the title—is not the successor of any other Q or answer to a Q. In this, it is like the zero ("0") of the natural number or the initial position of a chess piece.

SUCCESSION defines Qs that succeed Qs and answers used to create a flow-chart like the following:

### **TO SCHMOOZE OR NOT TO SCHMOOZE**

Emrys Westacott, an associate professor of philosophy at Alfred University in south central New York, developed this flowchart to help people navigate the protocol of morally acceptable and unacceptable gossiping.

Is it a lie? → Yes (unethical)

↓ No

Does it violate someone's rights? → Yes (unethical)

↓ No

Does it disregard someone's claims? → Yes (unethical)

↓ No

Does it directly promote more harm than good? → Yes (unethical)

↓ No

Does it directly promote more good than harm? → Yes (ethical)

↓ No

Is it contrary to the wishes of the subject? → No (ethical)

↓ Yes

Is it merely contrary to the subject's hopes? → Yes (ethical)

(From *The New York Times*, August 10, 2002, p. A15)

CONTEXT/GOAL. Here we are concerned about answers to Qs like "Where am I?" and "Where am I going?" Ginzburg gives these examples:<sup>35</sup>

Jill is exiting a plane that has just landed in Helsinki:

Flight Attendant: "Do you know where you are?"

Jill: "Helsinki."

Jill is about to step out of a taxi in Helsinki.

Driver: "Do you know where you are?"

Jill: "Helsinki."

Only in A is the Q of "where?" resolved. Jill, by answering "Helsinki," shows that she possesses knowledge of a preexisting GOAL. Such knowledge, partly from memory and partly from sense data, is sufficient to settle the attendant's Q. In B, however, Jill obviously doesn't have enough GOAL information to satisfy the driver's Q—which obviously requires Jill's answer to contain "facts" about some particular place (area, street, building, etc.) of Helsinki. In this, CONTEXT/GOAL have an immediate correlation with SCALE as determined by CONTEXT. If we don't know where we are, where as fixed by the specifics of a CONTEXT (a plane or a taxi), not just any CONTEXT, then we have no way to determine if we have reached our GOAL. In this, CONTEXT seems to serve as a causal force in reaching a GOAL or destination.

With the issue of CONTEXT/GOAL we alter the balance between Qs about the nature of answerhood and ones about the *resolvedness* of a specific Q.<sup>36</sup> That is, the

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35 J. Ginzburg, "Resolving Questions" *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 18 (1995) I:465.

36 See, for a discussion of "resolvedness" and "exhaustiveness," *Resolving Questions*, I:460

salient Q becomes, not *what* answer "meets" the Q, but *what* and *how* the Q was *resolved*—one that no longer needs to be asked. In this view, although both in A and B (above) the "where" Q asked of Jill raises from Doubt, only in A is the Q *resolved* and doubt turned to belief. Minimally, *how* Jill *resolved* the Q in A was by her understanding of a destination plus *what* was previously known to her about Helsinki and how it presented itself to her as she about to step out of the plane at its airport.

But aren't there Qs that cannot be resolved? Consider, for example, King Lear (Shakespeare) standing over the corpse of his beloved Cordelia. The Earl of Kent, observing the scene, asks "Is this the promised end?" Kent's Q, by not being resolved (at least by Shakespeare), raises the situation to a universal, but at the same time, a highly personal, one.

BALANCE/BRIDGING: A Q, like any utterance, can be likened to the upright posture of the body in its gravitational field. While our body maintains its upright posture (even though we may take it completely for granted), we can be said to be balanced. BALANCE, in this sense, presupposes all parts of the body working together, as a coordinated unit, to perform basic actions like walking, running, throwing a ball, etc. Loss of BALANCE, by contrast, results in an inactive body, an odd assortment of parts, "parts outside of parts," or a body that "gets in its own way." A Q, to continue the analogy, is constantly subject to gravity, to maintaining its BALANCE, always intent on not losing it. When we see a Q in control of itself by itself we see it in a balanced state<sup>37</sup> BRIDGING is the Q of whether or not a particular Q successfully "bridges" the gap between a past and a future time—where time is conceived of as a "container" of

information. Here we enter the realm of "shoulds." Past time *should* contain *given* information (information known to the reader/addressee). Future time *should* contain "new" information (that unknown to the reader/addressee). In terms of cause and effect, *given* information is the immediate cause of a Q while *new* information is its effect. A Q, as a bridge, then allows the reader to *move over* from state of lesser, to greater, information about the subject of the Q. In this, BALANCE, on an analogy the body in a gravitational field, plays the essential role of seeing that the two salient parts of BRIDGING, past and future, distribute the "weight" of information equally. A Q, in perfect BALANCE, often occurs midway in the text. A case in point is Jonathan Swift's Q (in *A Modest Proposal*), "The Q therefore is: How this Number shall be reared, and provided, for?," where "this Number" refers back to *given* information about the population of Ireland and "reared and provided for" points forward to promised *new* information about how to deal with that population.

The BALANCE of a Q, however, does not depend on its text-position. Qs often, of course, appear as a text-title. Such is the case with Louis Menand's Q, "Does evolution explain who we are?" (*The New Yorker*, November 25, 2002.). "Evolution," though it has no direct reference (as Swift's Q does) to previous stretches of text, forces our attention on *given* information from memory and hands us on to *new* information, promised, but not yet presented, in "who we are." "Evolution," whether we have it right or not, evokes a repository of facts, opinions, theories, etc. about evolution.

So, with BALANCE, the Q is always "Does this Q gain or lose *explicitness* by its treatment of *given-new* information?" With BRIDGING, a related notion, the Q is always how well a Q allows the mind to move from *given* to *new* information. Obviously, with

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37 The preceding paragraph owes much to Todes, 46, 65-66, 72.

both of these "categories" most instructors would want to make a correlation with the categories of REFERENCE/ANAPHORA. .

VOICE/PERSONA. This, essentially, is the question of what the writer, Asking and Answering "sounds like" to the reader, ironic, whimsical, serious, and so on. Where the author's VOICE is not his or her own, or one manufactured for a particular genre of text, then we refer to it PERSONA or "mask." An author may create a PERSONA in order to make a specific point, establish a tone, or tell a story with a particular slant. PERSONAE are especially important in satire and various forms of comedy. A PERSONA can also appear in memoirs and autobiographies, forms of writing that purport to tell the story of the writer's life, family, or some personal experience—like a bout with cancer. But it is important to keep in mind that the PERSONA and the writer are often separate *selves*. They do not live the same lives and they are not obliged to express themselves in the same way. On a memoir she wrote about her mother, herself and a friend, Vivian Gornick has this to say: "I soon discovered that if I wanted to speak truthfully in this memoir—that is, without cynicism or sentiment—I had to find a tone of voice normally not mine. The one I habitually lived with wouldn't do at all: it whined, it grated, it accused; above all it accused. Then there was the matter of syntax: my own ordinary, everyday sentence—fragmented, interjecting, overriding—also wouldn't do; it had to be altered, modified, brought under control...I had a narrator on the page who was telling the story that I alone, in my everyday person, would not have been able to tell.

Devotion to this narrator—this persona—became, while I was writing the book, an absorption that in time went unequaled." <sup>38</sup>

A passage (below) from Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince* illustrates what one kind of VOICE sounds like with Asking and Answering. Others may be found, for example, in classic texts like Turing's (the scientific VOICE), Plato (Socrates' ironic VOICE) or a modern text like an author interview (the fact-find VOICE) in *The Paris Review*.

Grown-ups like numbers. When you tell them about a new friend  
They never ask questions about what really matters. They never ask:  
"What does his voice sound like?" "What games does he like best?"  
"Does he collect butterflies?" They ask: "How old is he?" How many  
brothers does he have?" "How much does he weigh?" "How much  
money does his father make?" Only then do they think they know him. <sup>39</sup>

SPATIOTEMPORAL SENSITIVITY. Asking a Q, as mentioned earlier, is an act that reveals our ignorance plus our need to know. Such ignorance-knowledge is typically specific to a particular place and time. A thirteenth-century person could not have knowledge, or be ignorant of, a computer nor could he or she possess the need to have a TV. So neither machine could be the subject of his or her Qs. Present concerns, memory of recent events, and sense perception, generate most Qs. This does not mean, of course, that we can't, or shouldn't, ask Qs like "What is truth? Are we really free? or "Is beauty truth, truth beauty?" Such Qs, being free of common concerns, "float" over specific

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<sup>38</sup>"A Narrator Leaps Past Journalism," *The New York Times*, May 6, 2002, p. B2.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted, *TLS*, December 20, 2002, p. 26

places and times. Rather, what meaning and force SPATIO-TEMPORAL SENSITIVITY has lies mainly in pedagogical situations. We want student-writers to be "sensitive" to present concerns, recent (as opposed to distant) memory, and to sharpening their sense-impressions, all things that make up what we call Asking. We also want them to ask Qs that they can "handle," typically those that originate in the consensus, and communal affairs, of their time and place.

### CATEGORIES AS INSTRUCTIONS

Once the categories of *explicitness* have been introduced, and briefly discussed, the instructor will want to move on to their application to examples of Asking. These, obviously, can start from this text (as mentioned above) a student text or from existing (classical) texts, like *A Modest Proposal* or A.M. Turing's "Computing Machinery and Intelligence." My preference, however, is to start with the latter. Such forms of Asking have survived in repeated readings. The Q from *Proposal*, recall, is this: "The Q therefore is: How this Number shall be reared, and provided, for?" Turing Q, a yes/no one, is "Can machines think?" The procedure is then to ask the students to read the text and then to apply the categories, one by one, to a Q like Swift's and Turing's. The second phase is to go on to an analysis of a complete text and then, finally, on to the students own texts.<sup>40</sup> The categories, discussed in class, then can be "tweaked" in conferences with the instructor. What often happens here is that a student can be lead to see that a category that may not seem applicable (or included in other categories) can, with deliberation, come to be vital in making a Q sharper or more accessible to the reader.

In essence, what we are doing here is to take each category of explicitness as an *instruction* to perform a certain task with Qs. In order to make the task as intelligible as possible, the Qs we put to students (in class and conference) are of the sort, "Do you understand what COMMITMENT you are making with your Q? Is it one you can satisfy? As the reader of your text, are you keeping SCORE on the Qs you have asked? Are any of your Qs ones designed to BRIDGE the gap between present and future, given and new information? Qs like these are necessary to impress on students the importance of what we characterized earlier as "asking for, and giving, reasons" where "asking" is broadly defined as student asking student, instructor asking student and student asking instructor. This three-way process further heightens the push towards making Asking, Answering and Questions more *explicit*.

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40 The genre of the text, obviously, might call for a reversal of this order. That is, the instructor of technical writing might want to begin with a complete text, a "model," and then proceed to an individual Question—or even ignore the Question completely.