

On Questions

1. Human beings ask both vital questions and theoretical questions.

1.1. **Vital questions** are the questions they ask on the primary level of living understandingly, i.e., the level of "interaction" (Habermas), or, alternatively, the level of self-understanding and life-praxis.

1.2. **Theoretical questions** are the questions they ask on the secondary level of living understandingly, i.e., the level of "discourse" (Habermas), or, alternatively, the level of critical reflection and proper theory.

2. The vital questions human beings ask include both existential questions, in a broad sense of "existential," and intellectual questions.

2.1. **Existential questions** in a broad sense of "existential" ask concretely about the meaning of reality for us—immediate, empirical-categorical reality as well as ultimate, existential-transcendental reality.

2.2. **Intellectual questions** prescind from the meaning of reality for us in order to ask abstractly about the structure of reality in itself—both immediate, empirical-categorical reality and ultimate, existential-transcendental reality.

3. The theoretical questions human beings ask include both questions about meaning and questions about validity.

3.1. **Questions about meaning** ask either about the "surface (or semantic) meaning" of what is thought, said, and done on the primary level of living understandingly or about its "deep (or logical *kind* of) meaning."

3.2. **Questions about validity** ask about the validity of the claims made or implied by what is thought, said, and done on the primary level of living understandingly. To ask, for example, whether a claim to truth is valid is to ask a question of validity.

4. Human beings ask both existential questions and intellectual questions about immediate, empirical-categorical reality and ultimate, existential-transcendental reality.

4.1. **Existential questions** in a broad sense of "existential" ask about the meaning of reality for us—immediate, empirical-categorical reality as well as ultimate, existential-transcendental reality—whereas existential questions in a

strict sense of "existential," ask only about the meaning of ultimate, existential-transcendental reality for us.

4.2. **Intellectual questions** prescind from the meaning of reality for us in order to ask abstractly about the structure of reality in itself—immediate, empirical-categorical reality as well as ultimate, existential-transcendental reality.

5. Paradigmatic for questions about the meaning of immediate, empirical-categorical reality for us are axiological questions and technological questions, even as scientific questions are paradigmatic for questions about the structure of immediate, empirical-categorical reality in itself.

5.1. **Axiological questions** ask primarily about the ends of life-praxis, whereas **technological questions** ask primarily about the means of attaining its ends.

5.2. **Scientific questions** prescind from all questions about ends and means in order to ask abstractly about the structure of immediate, empirical-categorical reality in itself, be it the reality of nature generally, as in the case of the natural sciences, or the reality of distinctively human nature and history in particular, as in the case of the human, or social, sciences. (*N.B.*: "Scientific: is used here in the strict sense of "empirical scientific." In a broader sense, not only mathematics but also metaphysics and ethics could well be said to be "scientific," in that they, too, in their ways, are concerned with *structure in itself*: mathematics, with the structure of the possible in itself; metaphysics, with the structure of the necessary in itself; and ethics, with the structure in itself of the meaning of the necessary for us. Also, there is arguably a fourth way of prescinding from meaning for us to ask abstractly about structure in itself—namely, that instanced by the science of hermeneutics, as distinct from both the other human, or social, sciences, on the one hand, and the natural sciences, on the other.)

6. Paradigmatic for questions about the meaning of ultimate, existential-transcendental reality for us are religious questions and philosophical questions, even as metaphysical questions are paradigmatic for questions about the structure of ultimate, existential-transcendental reality in itself, and ethical questions are paradigmatic for questions about the meaning of ultimate, existential-transcendental reality for us, in *its* structure.

6.1. **Religious questions** and **philosophical questions** both ask about the meaning of ultimate, existential-transcendental reality for us: religious questions, by privileging some special, decisive disclosure of its meaning; philosophical questions, by privileging only the disclosures of all religions as well as of culture generally.

6.2. **Metaphysical questions** ask about the structure of ultimate, existential-transcendental reality in itself: metaphysical questions in the broad sense, by asking about the necessary conditions of the possibility of distinctively human reality; metaphysical questions in the strict sense, by asking about the necessary conditions of the possibility of any reality simply as such.

6.3. **Ethical questions** ask about the meaning of ultimate, existential-transcendental reality for us, but only by prescinding from its meaning as such in order to ask abstractly about the *structure* of its meaning in itself, whereas religious questions and philosophical questions, in their different ways, both ask about its meaning for us concretely.

7. Since—in the cases both of immediate, empirical-categorial reality and of ultimate, existential-transcendental reality—the meaning of reality for us and the structure of its meaning in itself both depend on the structure of reality in itself, human beings naturally ask intellectual questions because they want only valid answers to their existential questions.

7.1. In asking **existential questions**, they seek wisdom and know-how.

7.2. In asking **intellectual questions**, they seek knowledge.

8. Since the validity of the answers to any of their vital questions depends on critical reflection and proper theory, they naturally ask theoretical questions because they want the answers to their vital questions to be only valid.

8.1. In asking **vital questions**, they seek to live, and to live well.

8.2. In asking **theoretical questions**, they seek to live better.