

A Couple of Questions

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There are so many people asking questions



A pictorial Otomi catechism, 1775-1825. In this manuscript, as in most surviving examples, the drawings have little relationship to the traditional forms of Mexican Indian manuscript painting. Garrett Mesoamerican Manuscripts, no. 3a, fol. 18v-19r (Co744), Princeton University Library.

“Hello there, young man, do you mind if we ask you a couple of questions?”

“Okay.”

Libby Hughes, Serious Fun with White House Secrets and State Department Antics

“I’m DS Clarke, this is DI Rebus,” Siobhan said. “Mind if we ask you a couple of questions?”

Ian Rankin, A Question of Blood

Just then, police chief Ethan Rodgers and sheriff Hal Benson walked into the waiting room. They headed straight for Cate and Rand.

“Morning,” the chief said. “Mind if we ask you a couple of questions?”

Cate looked from one newcomer to the other, then to Rand and finally back to the chief. “You mean me?”

Ginny Aiken, Someone to Trust

There are so many people asking questions everywhere.

There is the bloody blindman, and the angry one,
and the
disheartened one,
and the wretch, the thorn tree,
the bandit with envy on his back.

Pablo Neruda, Ode to Federico Garcia Lorca (Residence on Earth)

Catechism of Coal is intended for that great number of intelligent readers who have no technical training, and yet who prefer to seek knowledge by reading special subjects rather than fiction. A large proportion of these have neither the time nor the inclination to peruse the voluminous geological and statistical reports of the coal industry in the United States, or to study the ponderous volumes of gathered wisdom by technical experts.

Their time is usually fully occupied with the cares of business and often with the fatigue of manual labor, and their hours for quiet reading or study are few and most precious. For these, the following plain questions and direct authoritative answers have been designed with a realizing sense of the readers' wants and aspirations. The task conscientiously assumed by the writer has been to verify all the answers by referring to competent authorities.

William Jasper Nicolls, Coal Catechism

I was questioned several times immediately after my arrest. But they were all formal examinations, as to my identity and so forth. At the first of these, which took place at the police station, nobody seemed to have much interest in the case. However, when I was brought before the examining magistrate a week later, I noticed that he eyed me with distinct curiosity. Like the others, he began by asking my name, address, and occupation, the date and place of my birth. Then he inquired if I had chosen a lawyer to defend me. I answered, "No," I hadn't thought about it, and asked him if it was really necessary for me to have one.

"Why do you ask that?" he said.

Albert Camus, The Stranger

Note—Wherever in the foregoing pages explanations have been omitted after certain questions or answers it is because the matter they contain has been explained in some preceding question, or is to be explained in some following question, or is clear enough in itself without explanation. The explanations of such questions or answers can be easily found by referring to the index.

Thomas L. Kinkead, Baltimore Catechism, No. 4: An Explanation of the Baltimore Catechism of Christian Doctrine for the Use of Sunday-School Teachers and Advanced Classes

Apropos: it's all very well, this instruction of Alana's to look at the thing close up; to look at it dead straight between the eyes; an unflinching and honest stare, a meticulous inspection that would go beyond the heart of the matter to its marrow; beyond the marrow to the root—but the question is how far back do you want? How far will do? The old American question: what do you want—blood? Most probably more than blood is required: whispered asides; lost conversations; medals and photographs; lists and certificates, yellowing paper bearing the faint imprint of brown dates. Back, back, back. Well, all right, then.

Zadie Smith, White Teeth

Where am I?

That's my first question, after an age of listening. From it (when it hasn't been answered) I'll rebound towards others, of a more personal nature. (Much later.) Perhaps I'll even end up (before regaining my coma) by thinking of myself as living (technically speaking).

But let us proceed with method. I shall do my best, as always (since I cannot do otherwise). I shall submit, more corpse-obliging than ever. I shall transmit the words as received (by the ear, or roared through a trumpet into the arsehole) in all their purity (and in the same order, as far as possible). This infinitesimal lag, between arrival and departure, this trifling delay in evacuation, is all I have to worry about. The truth about me will boil forth at last, scalding (provided of course they don't start stuttering again).

Samuel Beckett, The Unnamable

But of what is this knowledge? I said. Just answer me that small question. Do you mean a knowledge of shoemaking?

God forbid.

Or of working in brass?

Certainly not.

Or in wool, or wood, or anything of that sort?

Plato, Charmides, or Temperance (The Dialogues of Plato, Vol. 1)

"The question at stake," said Epictetus, "is no common one; it is this:—Are we in our senses, or are we not?"

Epictetus, The Golden Sayings of Epictetus

My lords, the judges find a difficulty to give a distinct answer to the question thus proposed by your lordships, either in the affirmative or the negative, inasmuch as we are not aware that there is in the courts below any established practice which we can state to your lordships as distinctly referring to such a question propounded by counsel on cross-examination as is here contained, that is, whether the counsel cross-examining are entitled to ask the witness whether he has made such representation, for it is not in the recollection of any one of us that such a question in those words, namely, whether a witness has made such and such representation, has at any time been asked of a witness; questions however of a similar nature are frequently asked at Nisi Prius, referring rather to contracts and agreements, or to supposed contracts and agreements, than to declarations of the witness; as for

instance, a witness is often asked whether there is an agreement for a certain price for a certain article, an agreement for a certain definite time, a warranty, or other matter of that kind, being a matter of contract; and when a question of that kind has been asked at Nisi Prius, the ordinary course has been for the counsel on the other side not to object to the question as a question that could not properly be put, but to interpose on his own behalf another intermediate question, namely, to ask the witness whether the agreement referred to in the question originally proposed by the counsel on the other side, was or was not in writing; and if the witness answers that it was in writing, then the inquiry is stopped, because the writing must be itself produced.

T. C. Hansard, Parliamentary Debates: Official Report of the Session of the Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, June 27–September 7, 1820

“Well, may I give you a couple of recommendations?” I queried.

“Sure!” came the eager response from all group members. They assumed that I must possess that “golden key” to successful witnessing.

“I always like the up-front approach,” I told them. “People here in South Florida are used to that. You might say something like, ‘Hi! We are a group of Christian students who are interested in your perspective on spiritual matters. Do you mind if we ask you a couple of questions?’ Or you could also say something like, ‘Do you mind if we take just five or six minutes of your time to get your opinion about two questions that we think are of ultimate importance?’”

Charles Carmen Mayell, Engage! Having Conversations About God

“Hi. I’m Simon, and we’re taping a new type of show, called, ‘Reality Television,’ it’s kind of like an ad-lib ‘talkumentary.’ Do you mind if we ask you a couple of questions?”

“Who are you again, Dude?” the surfer replied, winking at his friends. “Oh, right, a schlokumentary. Sure, go ahead, ask.”

Robert Greco and Shaun M. Shelton, Motorishi

What am I going to say now? I’m going to ask myself, I’m going to ask questions: that’s a good stop-gap. (Not that I’m in any danger of stopping. Then why all this fuss?) That’s right, questions: I know millions, I must know millions. And then there are plans. When questions fail there are

always plans: you say what you’ll say and what you won’t say (that doesn’t commit you to anything), and the evil moment passes, it stops stone dead. Suddenly you hear yourself talking about God knows what as if you had done nothing else all your life (and neither have you).

Samuel Beckett, The Unnamable

“That’s great,” Hannah said, “Do you mind if we ask you a couple of questions?”

“About what?”

David Lewman, The Case of the Mystery Meat Loaf

A delicate question, to which somewhat diverse solutions might be given according to times and seasons. An intelligent man suggests it to me, and I intend to try, if not to solve it, at least to examine and discuss it face to face with my readers, were it only to persuade them to answer it for themselves, and, if I can, to make their opinion and mine on the point clear.

Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve, What Is a Classic?

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