Questions

About

Philosophy

Mr. Incognito

Introduction

i)
What is philosophy? What is it not?

The latter question is where one must begin.

ii)
The following paragraph contains an interesting expression:

O. K. Bouwsma was born in Muskegon, Michigan, in 1898, and died in Austin, Texas, in 1978. He started in philosophy with a strong interest in Hegel, writing his doctoral thesis on idealism – later, he came to reject Hegelianism. Bouwsma remarked that at first he read philosophy as if it were a kind of information.[1]

"At first he read philosophy as if it were a kind of information." Is philosophy *not* a kind of information?

Not, of course, in the sense that you can be *told* what the correct philosophy is. Philosophy is not information in the sense that the natural sciences are. To study philosophy is not like studying geology or chemistry. Chemistry is a kind of information. There is a body of knowledge and attempts to make that body larger. There are teachers who tell students what the right answers are in the subject of chemistry, both with regard to matters of fact and with regard to matters of method. There are researchers who try to provide new answers that the teachers can teach.

Philosophy is not like that; not information in that sense.

iii)
Still, it can hardly be denied that philosophers aim to provide information. They try to say true things and things that help us to increase our understanding. Philosophy, it might be said, is a kind of information – only not information there is or is likely to be universal agreement about. Not *plain* information. There are *qualifications* to the information. There are disagreements about the accuracy, the relevance and the value of the information.

No decent lecturer in philosophy would fail to inform his or her students about the problems affecting our subject in this respect: "In philosophy you will not be taught things in the way you are taught things in chemistry. Here, you must *think* about everything you hear." It is an important piece of philosophical information that philosophy is not information *simpliciter*.

iv)
"Philosophy is not after all a kind of information" was Bouwsma's message, and he seems to have had a point, since philosophy is not after all information like chemistry is information. But how could he ever have thought that it was? Even Hegelians do not usually think *that*. Was that point even worth remarking?

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[1] This is from J. L. Craft's and Ronald E. Hustwit's introduction in: O. K. Bouwsma, *Toward A New Sensibility*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982, p. xi.

What is more puzzling with that remark is that if you look only a little differently at the case, you see that philosophy *surely* is a kind of information. Only not the kind he apparently must have thought of when he said that philosophy is not a kind of information.

For how would philosophy be something *else* than 'a kind of information'? Would it be 'non-information'? Anything we say is, *qua* sensible talk, 'a kind of information'. Even information-sceptics presuppose that there is such a thing as a more accurate account. They think that the curious piece of information "there is no philosophical information" somehow helps philosophy forward. Philosophy, from this point of view, is *nothing but* information. So, when Bouwsma remarked that 'at first he read philosophy as if it were a kind of information' – what did he imagine to be the alternative?

v)
Maybe he proposed that philosophy properly is about communicating something other than information, some non-information; something *deep*, mystical, but non-sensible? Did he believe that he could, by approaching matters in a 'profound' way, overcome the wavering and clenching movements of philosophical truth-seeking altogether? Did he think he could abandon the quest for correctness, and thereby avoid difficult confrontations with the hard and smooth matters of philosophy?

If this was the later Bouwsma's approach to philosophy, it must be deemed confused and unserious. It is not O.K. Some people, for sure, did judge Bouwsma so. The mistake seems to be a product of indolence or complacency, perhaps the result of disappointment: One is tired of hard work, maybe discouraged by never finding the final position in which one can relax – but then at the same time one is frightened by the threat from scepticism and relativism. One finds that there is no safe harbour to sail to within philosophy. Mysticism then presents itself as a rear exit. It offers, it seems, shelter from sceptics and relativists, by some super-philosophical nonsense account. One finds oneself a way of thinking which is out of reach for those who have only ordinary rational tools, and observe the ordinary limitations of knowledge. A safe harbour in nonsense. From a philosophical point of view one must deem this to be despicable; there you have an 'epistemic vice'.

vi)
I shall propose a more sympathetic reading of Bouwsma's remark.

Imagine that someone who knew much about running remarked: "At first I took running to be a kind of movement of the feet."

What does this person try to say? It could be a confession of having imagined that cyborgs could really *run*. If a machine attached to a human body could provide the same 'movement of the feet' by means of electric power and mechanics as the runner did by means of training and enhancement of his own powers, then the work of the machine would count perfectly well as 'running'. That would be a kind of misunderstanding. It would reveal blindness to an important distinction within the notion of 'movement' – between 'automotion' and 'heteromotion'. The cyborg, one could say, in not *really running*.

Let us not assume that the person speaks of *that* misunderstanding. That would be much like not seeing the difference between the information of chemistry and the information of philosophy. The latter is not *really* what the former is. It lacks something important that the former has.

But what then? Is running *not* a kind of movement of the feet? Of course it is. That is what it is. So, the man who remarks that he only thought that *at first* seems to be a very confused man.

Now, imagine that this man was a top athlete, a runner. He, if anyone, knows what running is. So, we must show enough confidence in his rational powers and understanding of running to let him speak again. Maybe he then would say, "At first I took running to be a kind of movement of the feet, but later I understood that running is about competition, about *victory* and *glory*." Again, imagine that this man was a shepherd or a hunter: "At first I took running to be a kind of movement of the feet, but later I understood that running is about survival." In neither of the cases the initial understanding is *overcome* in the sense that it has been replaced by another understanding, a more correct one; it is overcome in the sense that a judgement of value has altered or developed. What seemed first to be the *essence* of the activity – movement of feet – turned out to be not so essential after all. A transition has happened, from seeing the point of the activity in the activity itself, to seeing the point of it beyond it. At first, that is, running was just running, just *playing around* – then it got serious. Running became more than just running.

vii)
The description of running as 'a kind of movement of the feet' is not one that we would want to get rid of. If the runner or the shepherd wanted to 'rise to a new level of understanding', where running was no longer thought of as movement of the feet, they would obviously be absurdly confused and deteriorate as runners. I imagine that physical trainers actually from time to time may have to tell their athletes to remember that running is a kind of movement of the feet: "Don't dream about victories; just concentrate on moving your feet." There is a temptation connected with fixing one's eye on the *point* of an activity rather than on the *way* of it. A temptation to think and talk rubbish: "What is it to open a jar?" – "Marmalade." There is the risk of confusing the point of the activity with the way of the activity.

On the other hand, it is worth remembering that not many jars would have been opened if it were not for marmalade. If it were not for marmalade (and similar things), there probably would not even be any jars. If there were not a point *beyond* the activity or the thing itself, there would not be activities or things.

viii)
Bouwsma's remark could be interpreted as meaning that communicating and providing information is not the *point* of philosophy, though he would not deny that it is the *way* of philosophy. When philosophers gather and spread their various sorts of information their purpose it not really to heap up and provide information. There is a point beyond this business with information.

The question is what *would* count as the point of philosophy. This, notice, is a question we pose not because we want to find an answer to it and then forget about the *way* of philosophy – but because without a point, there is hardly any reason to continue with doing philosophy at all. Without a point beyond philosophy, philosophy would be just a game.

ix)
This negative assessment of the *meaningfulness* of philosophical information-seeking in itself is of course something that needs closer examination. It is fully possible that information could be *both* the

way *and* the purpose of philosophy, despite all the problems with getting philosophical information-structures to stand stably like the information-structures of chemistry. Maybe Bouwsma was wrong, even on my 'sympathetic' reading. This possibility will be examined in the first three chapters of this book.

Another question is what positive things could be said about the point of philosophy. How should Bouwsma continue his remark if he were to explain himself further, like a runner or a shepherd could explain himself in regard to running? "At first I took philosophy to be a kind of information, but later I understood that philosophy is about..."

How could one finish that sentence in a reasonable way? That will be my main question in the last part of the book.

Question 1: What role do question marks play in philosophy?

1.

The following passage is from Bouwsma's report of talks he had with Ludwig Wittgenstein during the latter's last years:

> I asked him whether the pursuit of philosophy required any special gifts. At first he was sure not. What is required is a passionate interest and one that does not fail. ...A philosopher is someone with a head full of question marks. This seemed to him the essence.[2]

My spontaneous understanding is that Wittgenstein here provides us with a neat image of the starting position of philosophical enquiry: A philosopher's head is full of question marks – first of all by some very big and tenacious question marks, but also by an indefinite number of connected question marks lesser in size.

A question mark in this image is a symbol, and what it symbolises is wonderment, or uneasiness of mind. One wonders at something, or is perplexed or disturbed by something, saying to oneself, "I don't know my way about."

A cartoon philosopher could be depicted as someone looking at the starry sky, his own hand, or a billiard table – equipped with a thinking bubble containing nothing but a question mark. In or out of an armchair; this thought-content is the starting position of philosophy.

2.

If we were to describe the *aim* of philosophy on the basis of this remark, we should say that the point must be to *deal* with this disturbing content of the head, or perhaps to *use it* for something. Just to *have* the question marks in one's head is not philosophy; having them does not make one a philosopher. To be a philosopher is not the same as being confused. One must *do* something with what one has. Analogously, if you were to be called – with a colloquial expression – an 'itcher' you would need to be doing the act of itching; you do not become an 'itcher' just by *having* an itch. Even if an itch as it were *demands* itching, having the itch still is not the same thing as the itching, and it does not make one an 'itcher'.

One may very well have an itch without doing any itching. For instance, if one's hands are tied, one cannot be an 'itcher'. So, analogously, with regard to philosophy we ought probably to say that the philosopher is called a philosopher because of *philosophising*, not because of the question marks that might *incite* or *provoke* the philosophising.

Still, I think the point in the remark is important; the question marks are essential – because, as in the case of itching, without an itch there will not truly be itching, only perhaps 'imitation of itching', i.e. itching with another aim than to relieve an itch. The aim is essential. The point is the point. It is the presence of question marks that makes philosophy alive and sincere.

The person we call a "philosopher" is called so because he is *doing* something, namely "philosophy",

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[2] O. K. Bouwsma, *Wittgenstein Conversations 1949 – 1951*. Edited by J. L. Craft and R. E. Hustwit, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1986, p. 48.

and not because he *has* something, namely "question marks". But philosophising properly is provoked by question marks.

3.

Evidently Wittgenstein's remark is only a metaphorical picture of, not a theory about, philosophical activity. There is no sense in researching some alleged philosopher's head in order to check out whether or not there are really any question marks there. "Maybe he just pretends to philosophise; let's look into that." If someone tried to make a theoretical distinction between real and apparent philosophy from this remark, an answer in Bouwsma's humorous spirit would be to enquire about how *big* these question marks in the head were, how they were distributed, and what font they were in. The point is not to build some theoretical conception of philosophy on this snappy generalisation, but only to give a loose image.

Still, I think the remark could be useful in connection with the question of how to end Bouwsma's sentence about philosophy not being a kind of information. As a preliminary suggestion about what philosophy is, we could say: "At first I took philosophy to be a kind of information, but later I understood that philosophy is about *making something out of the question marks in my head*." And I am (at the time of writing this) tempted to say that this first suggestion is already fairly close to what I am after; it is close to what I think is true about philosophy.

4.

The suggestion that philosophy is about "making something out of the question marks in one's head" is metaphorical and vague. This vagueness in itself is not an error. The suggestion is clear *enough*. I doubt that the point could be made significantly clearer. A vague picture might be just what we need. The greatest problem with a vague picture is not that we cannot see clearly something that we *ought* to be able to see clearly – but that we might *imagine* to see a clear picture which is actually not there. Metaphors and analogies become misleading whenever this happens. The vague picture is o.k., but it invites misuse.

5.

There is the problem of what it is to understand a picture or a metaphor. If it is okay in itself, quite innocent, there is the challenge of *understanding* it okayly. What is it to *understand* a picture? What is that, if not to remodel or translate or expand on the picture so that it becomes a kind of theory about how the world is?

I think it would be unwise to give any general answer to that question.

6.

I propose that one way to work one's way forward with *this* picture, the picture of a head full of question marks, is to consider closely its central element, namely the question mark. The picture of question marks lingering in a person's head is only a metaphorical picture, but it is of course not at all arbitrarily chosen. If there is something in this metaphor, then whatever that is, it must have something to do with what we know the question mark to be in our lives, which is to say in human language. The question mark has something to it that is important in this connection. But what is that? What is a question mark? What role do question marks play in philosophy?

7.

Question marks are a feature of *written* language. There is no equivalent to "?" in spoken language. It is not a sign that we hear or see or smell when people *talk*, but a sign that we see in *writing*.

The relation between written and spoken language is complicated. One issue is whether there is something loosely corresponding to question marks in spoken language. And obviously, there is. There are non-verbal techniques of communication such as eyebrows raised, jaw dropped, palms turned upwards or a certain intonation. These might be referred to as "question marks", or perhaps rather as question *markers*. In many circumstances such techniques do much of the same work as the "?" does in writing. Often we understand the "?" in writing as intended to mimic a tone of voice, or a gesture. If I write "It's a cat?", and then read what I wrote as if it were part of a conversation, I will read it in a certain tone that reflects the presence of the question mark.

8.
Still, it would be strange to claim that the question mark *generally* imitates something in spoken language. One should be careful not to think of the written mark *generally* as an imitation of something in a language that is more basic than written language. The question marks do whatever they do *in the writing*. They are of course not disconnected from 'question markers' in spoken language or non-verbal communication, but spoken and written language is not connected in any fixed and uniform way. Sometimes a "?" imitates something in situations of speech, sometimes it does not.

9.
The next thing I think of when considering the case, is also quite straightforward: The question mark is used for marking a question. This is what you can do with a question mark: You mark that here is a question. But what is it that is marked? What is a question?

Arguably, the better way to approach such a question as "What is a question?" is to look for examples. So, here is a small collection:

1) "How many inhabitants are there in Norway?"
2) "Why don't we go to Mars for the holidays?"
3) "What is the capital of El Salvador?"
4) "How deep should I drill this hole?"
5) "Oh, when will I have some relief from this terrible itch?"
6) "When is the best time to go fishing?"
7) "How on earth will I be able to keep my job?"

10.
When we ask about what a "question" is, it seems that what we wonder about is how these sentences (and indefinitely many more) resemble each other. We notice some things quite easily: the mark at the end is obviously common to all. Also, all of these sentences begin with words that are counted among some of a limited number of question words. Also the structure of the sentence, verbal before subject, in some of the cases indicates that here is a question. These are different signs that what we have before us is a question.

While question words may be used in non-questions (e.g. "What I just said, was: ..."), and the structure of sentences may vary, the "?" appears to be crucial: without it, it seems hard to label a written sentence

as a question, but with it, it seems hard to avoid.

11.
The circular definition that we get from this little linguistic analysis [a question mark shows that a sentence is a question, and a question is a sentence equipped with a question mark] is obviously not of much help when it comes to sorting out what we normally understand 'questions' to be. The definition must be lacking something, as it is not hard to make up a sentence that has all specific signs of being a question, but still is not a 'question' in the ordinary sense, for example: "What is the bird lower under upon over?" If this were a sentence in a textbook for children, I would probably read it twice, and then consider it as a misprint. Then it is not a question, but a misprint. If it were a sentence in a poem, I would consider it as deliberate nonsense, intended to have some sort of special effect in the poem. Then it is not a question, but poetry. If it were a spoken sentence, said by someone approaching me during a walk, pointing at the sky, I would consider it as a confused way of using language. Perhaps it was an ill-formed attempt to ask something, but it was not a question. I would not think of it as a question; that is, I would not treat it as one treats questions. I would not treat the person who utters it as I treat someone who asks me something.

12.
The linguistic analysis in section 10, however, has a point that we should not overlook. For one might say about the sentences above that they are a misprinted *question*, or an avant-garde poetry *question*, or an ill-formed *question*. So, they *are* in a way questions. The mark alone is enough to make it so, at least in one quite important sense.

The important point here seems to be that it is possible to place question marks *anywhere*. The question mark can make any sentence into a kind of 'question'.

You may equip any sentence with a question mark. For example assertive sentences:
- "The current government has achieved little on GNP per capita, on average income, on employment rates, and on foreign debts."
- "Your prognosis is terrible."
- "I love you."

Any of these assertions may be equipped with a question mark, and thus be transformed into a question. The effect of the question mark in such cases is that the assertion is itself questioned, so that one asks something like: "Is the assertion "..." true?"

13.
Concerning exclamations, like "Ouch!", or "watch out!", the conditions are similar. "Ouch?" means something like "Why 'Ouch!'?", which could be "What hurt you?" Concerning commands, the same thing applies: "Come!" could be questioned by means of a question mark. "Come?" could mean, "Why should I come?" The question mark produces this kind of effect. Curiously, it seems to be at home anywhere.

14.
The fact that the question mark is the kind of thing that might turn one's attention so to speak 'in the opposite direction', for example *against* an assertion – might suggest an alternative way of

understanding Wittgenstein's image of the philosopher as someone with 'a head full of question marks': One might imagine that a philosopher is someone who is in possession of a large stock of these little things that may be attached anywhere, transforming something that one felt certain about into something that one has to consider again. The philosopher has question marks, and is not afraid to use them.

This is a rather different idea than the previous one, where the question marks in the head symbolised a kind of sentiment in a person; wonder or bewilderment. Here, the question marks do not symbolise a certain state of mind, but rather *tools* possessed and used by the philosopher. What the philosopher 'is' and 'feels' is not important; what matters is his or her use of these tools.

15.

We could check and see if this does not fit someone like Socrates fairly well: putting a question mark behind assertions like "Of course I know what 'justice' is". Consider if it does not fit Wittgenstein: putting a question mark behind an assertion like "Of course a word has a meaning." There is something in this image that fits many philosophical achievements. The philosopher is someone who questions our assertions. Moreover, the philosopher is someone who questions our *questions*, as the question mark is just as much at home behind questions as behind assertions. One example would be: [Where is that impression in the senses that connects the cause and the effect?]? The philosopher's question was: Is that a sensible question?

16.

Philosophers are questioning suspicious assertions, or suspicious questions, and one might therefore imagine them to be people who have as it were the head full of question marks that they pick and distribute freely, often surprisingly. If this image is to be reasonable, there is, however, an important qualification. The freedom with which one distributes these question marks must have some limitations or rules. There is a good and a bad use of any tool, these too.

If I am putting a question mark in the margin of a book that I am reading, I signify that what is said on that particular place is something I do not understand, or something I believe is in need of closer examination. Maybe it is something I find dubious. Under normal circumstances, this is an honest approach and a good use of that mark. Someone could, however, come to think of putting question marks after every sentence in a whole book, even without reading it. Imagine, for instance, that we put a question mark behind every single sentence in Hume's *Treatise*. We might think of printing a new edition of the work, 'enhancing it' this way. That, one might think, would be an extremely philosophical book! "Is this true?" "Is this true?" "Is this true?" Very serious! Would not such a book so to speak contain philosophy in the second degree?!

I suspect that some of us sometimes feel that we are behaving very philosophically when we distribute question marks liberally. We *ask*, for *we want to get to the bottom of things*. But not all questions are good questions. Not all questions make sense, even if they can apparently be sensibly asked. Putting question marks behind every sentence in Hume's book would *not* make sense because it would make one blind to how the different assertions of the book are connected. Questioning every aspect of every one of Hume's sentences at every little junction would make it impossible to understand what the book is about. We would become unable to understand Hume's concern and the general direction of the discourse, and to participate in it, because we would never resolve what these question marks stir up. We would not understand Hume, and therefore we would not really be able to *question* Hume. If one

thinks that all mud should be removed from every sentence by means of questioning, then one has a wrong idea and will never get started; neither with making assertions, nor with any well-directed questioning.

There is nothing deep in questioning and quarrelling *per se*.

17.
The image of the philosopher as someone with a head full of question marks ready for distribution has something to it, but one must remember that there is a difference between good questions and bad questions. Questioning must be directed wisely; otherwise, confusion will only grow. Evidently, the discussion about what 'wise questioning' comes to is not easily settled. It is probably as difficult as the discussion about what good and bad philosophy is. The question marks that Socrates or Wittgenstein placed are surely important ones, but even those are not universally accepted as well-placed. Just think of how critical *Wittgenstein* was to how (Plato's) Socrates conducted his questioning.

Therefore, even if this image of a person with a special resource at first might seem to give more of a direction for the aspiring philosopher than did the image of a person struck by wonder or bewilderment, in fact it does not. One could get the impression that the task of the philosopher was here fairly well defined – as being a gadfly on the lazy horse – but in effect the idea (or the sensible version of it) is extremely vague. There is *something* with gadflies and philosophy, but it is not clear exactly *what*, and to have them everywhere is really not the point.

Again, vagueness is no reason for regarding the image useless. Vagueness is okay when okayly understood. So, we *could* attempt to conclude Bouwsma's remark in the following way: "At first I read philosophy as a kind of information, but later I understood that philosophy is *the art of questioning*; of putting to good use all the question marks stored up in my head." That is vague, but it touches something.

18.
Does this bring us closer to the end of explaining the sense of Bouwsma's remark? Not much. The problem with this last conception is mainly that it is too narrow as a description of philosophy. Philosophy is more than questioning. Hume's work, for example, does not focus much on questioning; it consists almost entirely in setting forth various positive views. There are very few question marks in Hume's books. As Hume was decidedly a philosopher, this could be enough to show that philosophy cannot reasonably be thought of as 'the art of questioning'. That art is undoubtedly a part of it, but it is not the whole thing. As an overall conception, it seems like a better suggestion to say that a philosopher is wondering or bewildered, a person who will do various things for dealing with that wonderment or bewilderment – questioning being one of them.

19.
The idea that philosophy might be the art of questioning came up because we noticed that question marks are at home anywhere. Linguistically, there seems to be no limitations to what sentences may be equipped with a question mark, so that it can somehow technically be labelled "a question".

Beyond linguistics, however, I might *deny* that some specific sentence directed to me is a question, despite the fact that it has a question mark attached to it: I will not understand it as a question. If it were directed to me, I would simply not treat it like a question is treated.

This is to say that I recognise that there exists a specific way in which one treats a question; there is a way to respond to a question, and not all question-marked sentences should be treated in that way. The examples 1) – 7) can be treated as questions, but the misprint and the nonsense cannot. I cannot furnish a situation that would make "What is the bird lower under upon over?" a question in this sense. Assuming normal semantic conditions, as far as I can imagine there is no way to *answer* it. "It is lower upon over...??" The same holds for questions deliberately asked in order to be difficult. If we rewrote the *Treatise* so that it had question marks everywhere, a reader would soon not respond to my 'questions' as he or she would respond to questions. It would not make any sense. There would not be any *use* in answering.

20.

I believe it would be reasonable if we said: "The way to treat a question is to answer it, or to try to answer it, or to admit that one cannot answer it." 'Questioning' and 'answering' go together in a pair; questioning is a search for an answer. If someone questions me, answers are what he or she is after. If I question myself, I try to answer my own questions. To pose a question is to act with an aim, and the aim is to get the answer that one needs.

This is one natural way to understand what a question is. On this understanding, the question mark becomes as it were the symbol of a blank spot in our knowledge about the world. When we ask questions, it is in order to fill that blank spot. When we ask questions we presuppose that this is in some way possible. We expect that the blank spot in our 'map' or 'picture' can be filled. If we treat the above questions 1) to 7) as 'questions' in this practical sense, the fill-ins of the blank spots could for example be something like this:

1a) Norway has a population of approximately 5 millions.
2a) We won't go to Mars in the holidays because it is for the time being not humanly possible.
3a) The capital of El Salvador is San Salvador.
4a) The hole should be an inch deep.
5a) You'll have relief from the itch eventually, although it is hard to say exactly when and how.
6a) One should go fishing at rising tide, in rain.
7a) In order to keep your job just do whatever is expected from you.

21.
"These answers are the right way to fill in the blank spots. These are the 'correct answers'." Does that sound reasonable?

If such a claim should be reasonable, we would obviously need to provide a context for each question. The answers must be answers to a specific questioner in a specific situation. There is no such thing as a generally correct answer concerning the depth of a hole. The idea of correct answers presupposes a situation for each of these questions, and that the answers are the correct answers for these particular situations. For example, the question about the hole might be the question of an apprentice carpenter to his tutor about a specific hole. The question about the capital of El Salvador might be the question in a trivia game produced in the early 21st century. If there is for each question a sufficiently specified questioner – if we know the situation, or *take part in* the situation – there is good sense in calling these answers 'the correct ones'.

22.

In many cases different from questions of capitals or depths of holes, any answer that could realistically be provided would seem to be insufficient. At best, they would be a long shot, or only one among many possible answers. It is not really conceivable that there can be a 'correct answer' to such questions as 5) and 7), at least not in most cases. Concerning 5) for example, it would be equally 'correct' to say: "Itching comes and goes", or "An itch will not last forever", or "I don't know." But what sense is there in calling such answers 'correct' at all? Did they fill the blank spot in the picture? Such answers are not 'correct' in *that* sense. The 'correct answer' would have another form. An omniscient person could tell you: "It will increase a little for the next 32 seconds, but then it will decline slowly until if you ask yourself in 5 minutes and 37 seconds whether it still itches, you will answer negatively." This would probably count as a 'correct answer', if the events proceeded that way. That would have filled the blank in a proper manner.

23.

In many cases it is obviously more appropriate to speak of 'good answers' or 'decent answers' than of 'correct answers'. There could be better and worse ways to fill in a blank spot in a picture, even if there is not a *correct* way. Think of a landscape picture. Imagine that for some reason it had a blank spot, say in a part of the sky. Obviously there would be *better* and *worse* ways to complete that painting – but no *correct* way, as long as we didn't possess an original to measure against.

In many cases of questioning we would seem to be asking another person to *make up* a *good* answer, while in other cases we ask them to provide the *correct* answer. If the correct answer is available, like in a trivia game, the situation is obviously very different from when it's not, like in most instances when someone poses a questions like 5). So, it seems one might talk of an art of answering *well* whenever there is no way to get the answer *correct*.

24.

But if very many answers are available and working as a fill-in, then why ask? Why not just answer it yourself, if you have the resources to do it? If one answer to 7) about keeping one's job was "do whatever is expected from you", one could add, "Why ask?" "Didn't you know?" Obviously, the answer would not enlighten the questioner in the way a really good fill-in of a blank spot in a picture could. It does not seem to be at all like completing a picture. Rather, one must say that in terms of what I know and not, it leaves everything as it was; it is more like just telling me that all the sky in the picture should be 'skyish'. In terms of knowledge or understanding, it is not particularly helpful.

25.

Questioning is a highly diverse category of communication. One thing we do through questioning is to get and give *reminders* of important points that we already know. A question puts an emphasis at something. An answer puts an emphasis, maybe a different one. Also, social interactions, like humour or encouragement or compassion, often come about through questioning and answering. As a matter of fact, the sentences 1-7 could be fittingly responded to in the following way:

1) "How many inhabitants are there in Norway?"
      1b) Ok, I see your point.
2) "Why don't we go to Mars for the holidays?"

   2b) [laughter]
3) "What is the capital of El Salvador?"
   3b) Do you think I am stupid?
4) "How deep should I drill this hole?"
   4b) Just hand me the drill.
5) "Oh, when will I have some relief from this terrible itch?"
   5b) Remember the proverb, *amor fati.*
6) "When is the best time to go fishing?"
   6b) You moron! Fishing!
7) "How on earth will I be able to keep my job?"
   7b) I understand you have a hard time, but keep your spirit up.

However adequate these responses might be; I want to contend that none of these responses are properly "answers". And, one could add that if these responses were adequate, then the questions were not questions either, strictly speaking. If getting *the answer* is the central point of *asking*, then the answer must be a piece of information.

26.
It is obviously not true that whoever poses a question – as we ordinarily use that word – does so because he or she lacks a piece of information and tries to fix this problem by asking.

Still, there is in fact a use of the word "question" in which a "questioner" is someone who lacks *knowledge*, and *only* that. This can be shown by pointing to some common phrases or expressions, such as: "That is not an answer to my question". The posing of a question is sometimes done with the definite aim of having an answer, and not all responses count as an answer. If a patient asked the doctor about when the itch would stop, and the doctor replied "*amor fati*", then the patient might complain that he was not getting an answer. If the answer was "never", he might not say that.

Another expression that is sometimes used is: "That's not really a question." In connection with rhetorical questions, for example, one could give the comment: "I take it that what you just said was not really a question, but rather a statement of your opinion." Sometimes one has to ponder over a question for a little while before one realises that it was not a *question*. If a mother asks "When will you learn???" then a young boy might need a moment or two before understanding that he is not actually supposed to *answer* that. Sometimes one is not sure how to take something that is linguistically a question: "Are you asking me something, or are you insulting me?"

Such examples show us that there is a way to use the word "question" that makes it a certain kind of item in human communication, defined by other considerations than linguistic ones. Any question is not really a *question*. The meaning of a "question" in this strict sense is found in the *point* of the sentence, in how the sentence works or ought to work; it is part of the activity of *gathering information*. From here on I shall mainly talk about "questions in the strict sense", and what role questions in *that* sense play in philosophy. Likewise, I shall also mainly talk about "answers in the strict sense" – answers that aim at providing the knowledge that the questioner is lacking – and about the role answers in that sense play in philosophy.

27.

A question in the strict sense is posed in order to fix something – namely a lack of information. A "question in the strict sense", that is to say, could be termed a certain kind of *problem*. "To have a question" is a case of "having a problem". The problem that one has is that there is a blank spot in one's knowledge.

A "question in the strict sense" is one special kind of "problem", the one that has to do with lack of knowledge. So if I ask someone "can you help me?" then this is not a question in this sense. If the answer was "no", I would not rejoice over having 'filled a blank spot' in my knowledge. If the answer was "yes", I would rejoice, but not because of the knowledge I gained. My problem was not a lack of knowledge, but something practical I needed aid with. The aid would be the solution of the problem. So, there are different kinds of problems, with different kinds of solutions. "Questions" in the sense I am interested in are the kind of problems that consist in a lack of knowledge.

An "answer in the strict sense" then could be termed as a certain kind of *solution*. Problems long for a solution, and the solution for this specific kind of problem is to have an answer that fills the blank spot.

28.
It is appropriate here to issue a warning. The warning concerns my current philosophical enterprise, which is that of building a technical vocabulary. I have said that the word "question" shall have a specific, strict meaning; that the word "answer" shall have a specific, strict meaning – and now that these terms relate to the terms "problems" and "solutions" in a specific way. I am, as it were, about to brush off the dirt that these words have in their everyday use and make them neat and ready to be applied in a philosophical discussion. In my mind they shall now be more even and symmetrical, ready to do their part in clearing up philosophical mess.

The problem of technical language in philosophy goes deep, and I am not going to treat that problem right here. I will just point out that I am in the process of building a vocabulary that is *artificial*. We do not learn to discern in the manner I propose here when we learn to speak. To say that we have "questions" and "problems" as two distinct types or sets that relate to each other in a specific way, is at odds with how we normally use these terms. For example, we often find them used interchangeably. We do in many circumstances say that we have a problem when we might just as well have said that we have a question, or *vice versa*. For example: "Listen, here's a problem for you:..." Or: "The question is how we shall survive this." In such cases the meaning would not change if one substituted the one word for the other.

The reason why I find it necessary to issue a warning about this is that technical language, if it is not understood as artificial, tends to be misleading. It is very easy to let the idea slide into one's mind that some words describe 'real properties of reality'. This, in turn, leads one unconsciously into a particular ontological perspective. We easily come to search for a set of correct propositions about reality in a language that has no use beyond the philosophical discussion, while still thinking that we investigate things of utmost, universal importance. Only as long as we keep in mind that our vocabulary is technical – that it is made for a special, restricted purpose – we can escape this trap.

So, remark that here is technical vocabulary, and remember that technical vocabulary in philosophy can very easily mislead.

29.

I have come to think that there is a connection between technical distinctions in philosophy and metaphorical images: A technical distinction should, at least in many cases, be understood as a kind of metaphor or analogy. Instead of saying (technically) "some sentences with question marks are questions in the strict sense, and some are not", I could have developed the point in the form of a *simile*:

"Let's say that we started to organise *all sentences* that are written or uttered. We would write every spoken sentence down on a piece of paper in order make all the sentences comparable. All relevant information about the context of each sentence shall be recorded and schematised. We grant that every sentence would be sufficiently described in this manner. Some sentences end with a question mark. We put all those slips of paper into a large basket. Then it is as if there were two boxes available for those question marked sentences; one labelled 'questions in the strict sense' and one for the rest. Some skilled workers, or more ideally some machine, decide according to a set of criteria whether each sentence is a 'question in the strict sense' or not."

Another way of imagining the case would be:

"We all know what it is 'to have an intention'. Let's now imagine that all the intentions of human acts were in some mysterious way materialised so that they became *balls* of different sizes and colours depending on their nature. We could now *see* intentions. One ball of a certain size and colour would be chosen as a paradigmatic example of the 'question-intention' [*I need information*], and all balls within a certain range in size and colour from that ball should be put into a big container, marked 'potential questions'. Then, from those balls there could grow, like a germ from a seed, a sentence with a question mark. These sentences, which originate only in *these* balls, are 'questions in the strict sense'."

These are only tales: Everyone understands that there are no boxes or containers of these kinds, and no such organisation of sentences – but we may *imagine* that there were such things. Everyone knows that we cannot find either a set of outer criteria for "questions", or *see* the intentions that spark "questions", but we may *imagine* that we could.

The point of this is that a technical distinction might be regarded as an illusion in the sense that a metaphor is an illusion, but also as meaningful in the same way as a metaphor is meaningful.

I am not certain about whether this holds for technical distinctions in philosophy generally. Perhaps it does. What I say is only that I would like that the technical language I am developing *here* should be understood in this way. It is neither more, nor less, than a metaphor.

30.

What I have been trying to establish is a way of using the word "question" which is technical and artificial in the sense that it does not coincide with all ordinary uses of that word. The technical concept is not equivalent to the everyday concept; therefore it is 'artificial'.

It is not, however, artificial in the sense that it is 'made up', as one can make a spoon, or just about anything, from a material like plastic. Rather, it is 'made', like one can make a spoon from some wood that has already got a shape akin to a spoon. One cuts it off from the branch, hollows out a natural curve, and sands it down.

Everyday language – being as it were the material for technical language – is natural in the way *trees*

are natural, not in the way sand or clay or oil is. Everyday language is already full of shapes and figures.

31.

I said that "questions (in the strict sense)" are a "special kind of *problem*". So now I want to turn to the word "problem", and to the question about what it is that would make "questions" a special kind of "problem".

Could I make a technical distinction between "problem" and "non-problem", as I have tried to do between "question" and "non-question"? Could I develop and expand my technical language in that direction?

I cannot see any reasonable way to do that. There *is* a distinction between "problem" and "non-problem", for we do have expressions like "that's not really a problem" – as we have the expression "that's not really a question". We discern between problems and non-problems. But the case of "problems" is clearly different from that of "questions".

One might say about an apple-like object lying at the table: "That is not really an apple, for it is made of gold and skilfully painted." In a case like that the difference between real and apparent is clear. About a sentence with a question mark, one might say: "That is not really a question, for it was posed for invoking laughter, not for getting an answer." Here, too, the reason for discerning is clear. But what reason can there be for saying "that is not really a problem"? For example if someone says: "Your mother's opinion isn't really a problem."

There seems to be some foundation for making general rules for when we shall correctly call something an "apple" or a "question". These rules could be described as grammatical rules, and we learn such rules when we learn how to use the words in various connections. When it comes to "problem" the case is different, for the sentence "that is not really a problem" is not a remark about the grammar of a word. It is not as if you said "you've misunderstood the word 'problem' if you call this a 'problem' – for 'problem' is not a word to be used about a mother's opinion."

One way of putting this point would be: If a problem is really, really small, it should not be considered a problem at all. One could for example say: "Your mother's opinion isn't really a problem; she'll get over it." And if she will get over it, in this particular situation it is too small to be considered a problem at all, according to the speaker. It is in comparison with something else, by the practical judgement of the person who says it, that this is not important. To hold that something is a "non-problem", then, is a practical judgement – not a grammatical observation.

(It is of course possible to misunderstand the *word* "problem" too, like if a child says "the problem arrives!" taking the word to be the name of a person. But that is another type of misunderstanding.)

The problem of discerning real problems from apparent problems is very different from the problem of discerning real questions from apparent questions – and it would be absurd to propose a technical method for making this distinction.

If the word "question" is like a part of a branch on the tree of language, a natural material for an artificial word in a technical language, then the word "problem" is more like a part of the trunk, 'the trunk of

language'. It is a natural word that could not be turned into an artificial word without becoming unrecognisable (and without seriously harming the tree).

32.
If we were asked to explain what a "problem" is, we might say that a "problem" is "a bump in the road". This expression is both a standard example and a standard metaphor. Other familiar ways of talking about problems include: A "problem" is something I need to *overcome*; something that I *face*; something that is now in front of me, but will later in some way or another be behind me. A "problem" is something I may circumvent, turn away from, crack, disassemble, move, or be freed from.

We know what "problem" means, for we all have problems. To "have a problem" is a basic human experience. An animal or a plant too, if they learned to speak, would surely understand that word without any difficulty at all, for they too have 'bumps in their roads'. We understand the word, and we can explain it by a collection of examples or common expressions. This does not necessarily mean, however, that we know how to assess well what is a problem and what is not, or that we are good at handling them. As we grow more experienced, we understand that there are problems of different kinds, and this will be of help in assessing and handling them. We start to discern between, say, 'a problem of understanding something' and 'a problem of corporal health'. If a mother tells a child that it is to keep the beanie on in order not to get ill, then we would say that the problem she is concerned with is the health of the child. She is not concerned, for example, with the problem of understanding why the child constantly keeps taking the beanie off. That is something different; it is a problem that is approached in a different way.

33.
It is very often important to recognise the different kinds of problems one is involved in. To learn about different "kinds of problems" is a process that is connected to the process of learning to speak. When we speak we draw distinctions between different kinds of problems, and we would deem it mistaken to say for example that "keep your beanie on" is a "problem of mathematics". It is not solved by doing equations. Mathematics and mathematical language cannot help with *that* problem.

The point is that there are delineations between different kinds of problems. Here, therefore, it might once more make sense to elaborate some distinctions in order to make them technical. While an attempt to define "problem" generally, or to delineate between "problem" and "non-problem" is bound to fail, it may be more sensible to try to define for example "health-problem" in order to distinguish it from all *other* problems.

34.
On noticing a son's habit of taking off his beanie, there is a plain difference between a mother who conceives the problem as a problem of *health*, a mother who conceives the problem as a problem of *discipline*, and a mother who conceives the problem as a problem of *understanding why* the child has this habit. To see something as a problem, and as a *kind of problem* is a matter of approach. Here one might speak of 'seeing an aspect' of reality. One *must* not see bareheadedness as a problem at all, but if one does there is a range of *different* problems one might see. Such differences of approach are possible to describe, and therefore it is also possible to make technical distinctions between different kinds of problems.

35.

I defined "question" as "a kind of problem". If the mother with the "beanie-problem" posed the question "Why does he always take that beanie off?" then we could say that she had the problem of lacking understanding or knowledge. If this *question* was her problem, then the solution to the problem would be to have an answer to this question – the right answer, of course. And whatever that correct answer would be, it would make her itch completely disappear.

36.

What is it that characterises a "question-problem" specifically, so that we recognise it as a certain type of problem?

Notice first how "lacking knowledge" is different from having other problems. I said earlier that lacking knowledge is somehow like working with getting a map or picture right. If my problem is that I caught a cold, then the problem is not a mapping-problem. If I have a hole in the roof of my house, then the problem is not lack of knowledge. Too much snow on the road; bad feelings *et cetera*. Most problems have very little or nothing to do with 'getting a map right', or with having an 'unfinished picture of the world'.

It should therefore be fairly uncontroversial to say that "lack of knowledge" is a special kind of problem, discernable from various other problems, such as "health-problems", "technical problems", or "climate-problems". Of course problems are interrelated; of course transitions between different 'kinds' are in many cases sliding; of course the problem of *knowing* and *understanding* enters into most human activities at some point. Still, at least when one sticks with examples like 'water dripping from the ceiling', and 'the capital of El Salvador', it should not be difficult to spot the distinction. One may group a problem together with others that resemble it. I suppose it is not *necessarily* unreasonable to make such a distinction technical, at least for a little while.

37.

"To lack knowledge" is a problem that can be discerned from problems of other kinds, and to "have a question (in the strict sense)" is to have *that* specific kind of problem.

One further thing here is that "to have a question" is not the *only* way to "lack knowledge". "To have a question" (or several) is to have a definite *number* of problems. Each question is one particular question that one has. It is the answer to this *one* question that one seeks. If one gets the answer, then the problem is solved. Perhaps other questions grow from that answer – but the answer of the question is the solution of *that* problem, so that one may go on to the next. For example, the mother's question of why the boy takes the beanie off could be answered by saying that he thinks it is not a cool thing to wear. Then *that* information problem is solved, but another arises, say, "What is not cool about it?", or "Is there a product that can keep the boy's ears warm and his head cool?". Information accumulates as particular answers to particular questions.

However, there are other ways to "lack knowledge". For example, one can be perplexed, confused or mistaken. If any of these are one's state, one does not "have a question". One lacks knowledge, but one has no question. In such cases maybe one does not see what sort of *answer* it is that one lacks – and therefore one is unable to formulate what is properly a question. The hunt for an answer cannot start before one has an idea of what *kind* of answer one is looking for. One must as it were understand the

basic logic of the game before one can start playing it.

If someone is confused they probably do not understand what kind of answer will bring them forward. The confused person may express the problem in various ways, for example by saying: "How does all of this hang together?" But then it will not be a "question in the strict sense". The sentence "How does all of this hang together?" would not be a "question", but rather an expression of the confusion that one is filled with. It would do the same work as the sentence "I don't see the way out of this." It is not an attempt to fill a 'blank spot on a map', but rather something like an expression of doubt about whether one is looking at the right map-sheet, or about how one should read the signs of the map. If someone is to help a confused person, then the helper must first teach the 'grammar of investigation' before he or she can start to give out answers. The problem is one of getting the confused person to accept a way of looking at the case – to accept certain *confines* of thinking. This problem has to be solved before one can go on to "answer the questions". "Questions" can only exist where some limitations are already in place.

When talking about "having a question" as opposed to "having other kinds of problems", it is not therefore as if we contrast the theoretical, the "question", with *practical* issues, like dripping water. There are problems that are cognitive, pertaining to the subject of knowledge, without belonging to the class of "questions".

38.
Generally speaking, when one has a problem one has considerable freedom in deciding how to present what it is that one has. For example, if I need help with my car, and would like to communicate this to somebody else, then there are various ways in which I could present that problem. I might wave with my hands, scream something, ask "can you help me?", or state "I need help". Such acts and speech-acts are examples of what would count as the 'name' of the problem. The 'naming' is a communicative act, made in order to make clear what one's problem is.

39.
A "question" is a type of problem, but the only type that does not need 'naming'. A "question" does not need an expression because it already has one. It *cannot be given* another expression than the one it has already got. If I 'have a question', then *that* question that I have is the only conceivable name of the problem that I have. "What is the capital of El Salvador?" means "What is the capital of El Salvador?" and nothing else than that.

Conversely, "may you help me?" means "I need help", means "I have a problem with my car", means "Help!" means "Do you have a minute?" means [waving], and so on. The car-problem that I have might be equally well expressed by all these expressions.

While problems are generally expressible in many ways, a "question" is the one exception, the only problem that is only expressible in one way. This is one suggestion about how one may discern "questions" from all other problems.

40.
I immediately come to think of a counter-example to that suggestion. For what should we say about: "What's the capital of El Salvador?" Or: "What is the capital of ElSalvador?" Are these questions not

equivalent with "What is the capital of El Salvador?"

Practically, of course they would be equivalent in almost any conceivable situation. They are, in a practical sense, 'slightly different formulations of the same question'. But the point I wanted to make is formal, rather than practical. It has to do with the idea I tried to describe before, that a question is strictly a request for an answer that is *correct*, or *very good*; the idea of a *correct version* of a map, or a *very good* and *enlightening version* of a picture.

As a "question" in the sense I currently use it is a request for a "correct answer", one might imagine that there is an invisible tie between the question and the answer. Questions and answers come together in pairs, and even if there are naturally many questions tying with the same answer, each question is formally unique, with its own link to the answer. When one poses a question, it is this link one tries to follow. When one poses another question, one tries to follow another link.

Think of this as a *simile* for what is the formal side of the matter. It is from this perspective that I think it is right to say that 'a question is a problem with only one expression'.

41.
The picture I propose, could be something like this:
Let us say that we started to collect all kinds of expressions of problems, together with their circumstances, writing them down on paper and putting them in a large basket. All of these expressions would be of "problems", some of them of a subtype of "problems" called "questions". Now some workers or some machine would pick out, according to a set of criteria, those expressions of problems that we would call "questions", putting them into a box with the label: "Questions". The rest would go into the "Other problems"-box.

This is one way to express what it is that we do when we apply this technical distinction. Another one, more elaborate, would be:
Imagine that problems were different physical objects with shape and colour. The surface of any problem would be thorny and unpleasant. Imagine, too, that for any problem there were some physical solution, a kind of sticker or piece of cloth that could be attached to the problem so that it was transformed into another kind of thing, one that was no longer unpleasant. Now let us say that most problems were three-dimensional, that their appearance changed according the spectator's position. In order for the problem to disappear entirely, the sticker or the cloth would thus have to wrap the problem, and cover it. Only one kind of problem deviated from this: the "question". "Questions" would be two-dimensional, only visible from one side. The sticker that fitted them would of course have the same property. This two-dimensionality would make the product of problem-solving uniform in the sense that these could all be laid down on a floor and studied alongside other answers. Answers could be patched together with other answers. We would get a kind of puzzle. There would be small questions posed in order to fill in a tiny hole in some bigger puzzle, and there would be great questions that required an enormous number of patches or pieces in order to be solved. The important thing is that any question would have the quality that it was part of this two-dimensional reality; they themselves would as it were voice the problem that there is a hole in a puzzle, and their solutions – the answers – would be patchable. When we use the word "question" here, it is as a name for a hole that needs to be patched.

Of course it is impossible to write down expressions and circumstances in a satisfactory way, and to sort

them according to a set of criteria (this is impossible for more than one reason). Also, there is no such thing as a visible (two- or three-dimensional) problem, or a sticker-solution. Still, we may *imagine* that there were. We may, that is, make up and make use of this technical distinction, and see what it can do for us.

42.
I take it that the distinction I have tried to establish between "question" and "problem" ("other problems than questions", that is) is now fairly clear. It is important to keep in mind that both "question" and "problem" have been artificially trimmed, but I believe that the terminology is ready for use: A "question" is "a special kind of problem", while "problem" now denotes all other problems than "questions".

43.
We all have problems, and we know exactly what it is to have a problem. We all live in a problem-filled world; we notice problems as we go along in that world. We could imagine that we said a sentence like "Here is a situation," or "Here is a problem" to ourselves every time we faced something we recognised as a problem. "Here is a bump in the road." We could also imagine, for the sake of convenience, that instead of saying a sentence at such occasions, we just scratched a nail against the cheek or the hand. The point is that we could make a note every time we came upon a problem. It is of course impossible to tell how often that would be, and it probably varies much how often people recognise something as a problem. But for an example, think of the situation when you realise that you are about to miss the bus, in some situation when you cared for not missing it. Then you say to yourself: "Here is a situation." You start to run, and you catch it. The problem is solved.

44.
When somebody has noted a problem, however big or small, however 'real' or 'apparent' – he or she might for various reasons try to express that problem. This may be done in various ways, one alternative being to utter a sentence ending with a question mark, e.g. "How shall I get to this meeting in time?". In such cases, the utterance would resemble a question without really being one; it would be a "question" only in the linguistic sense.

Therefore one might in some cases ask: "Did you now pose a question, or were you naming a problem?" For example upon hearing "How deep should I drill this hole?": Is that a question, or an expression of a problem? Is it a request for a missing piece in a puzzle, or does it express another kind of want?

Imagine that one man utters this sentence to another man at a building site. Would we say that this man has a question, or that he has a problem? It depends, obviously. We might very easily conceive the sentence as a question, so that if the other said "One inch", the man no longer had a problem. The authoritative answer would as it were remove the question mark that had been hovering in the man's head; it would be the piece that filled in an empty space in the puzzle the man had lying on his mind's floor.

But what about "how deep should I drill this hole?" understood as the name of a problem? We could imagine that sentence used for expressing some *other* problem, for example this:

A newcomer at the building site, an apprentice who did not pay enough attention at school, asks this to

an experienced worker. The boy was put to this work by the boss, who already told him that the holes should be an inch deep. Now, he has a problem, which is that he does not know his way about at this building site. He does not even know how to use the drill properly. He confuses drilling down and screwing up, and ends up doing the latter. He is terrified of this whole situation. So, he asks a question he already knows the answer of. That is how he expresses his problem. But an answer will not resolve it.

45.

The young boy stands, the drill in his hand, awaiting the answer. What does he try to attain by asking about the depth of the holes? Maybe he does not even know, but we could imagine that one thing he is trying to find out is what kind of guy this colleague of him is. Whether he is friendly or not. The tone of his answer would give a valuable clue. If the guy is friendly, then perhaps he can help him through this enormous mass of trouble that dawns in front of him.

So, why does he not just ask: "Are you friendly?" – as *that* seems to be the 'piece of the puzzle' that he is currently lacking most?

This shows a difference between 'having a problem' and 'having a question', between having "are you friendly?" as a problem, and having it as a question. Even if the boy were naïve enough to actually ask this (imagining that it was the most 'correct description of the problem') it would still be an expression of a problem, rather than a question. For his purpose was something very different from attaining a missing piece. Whatever the colleague would *answer*, it would not be of any help. The only thing that could resolve the problem would be that he turned out to *be* a friendly and helpful person. What he lacks is not information; what he lacks is a friend.

If someone confused these types of problems, we should call it a sort of category mistake.

46.

The technical distinction between "questions" and "problems" is made in order to fix our gaze at a specific type of difference: differences like the one between the boy who needs to know a fact, and the boy who needs a friend. Clearly these are two different types of problems. All cases are not like that; one does not always have *either* the one *or* the other type of problem. Things hang together, so my intention is not to assert a *schism* in the world between having "problems" and having "questions". Still, some cases are like that, and perhaps any case can be fruitfully analysed from this perspective.

The point is that people may on occasion be asked: "What is it you want? Are you searching for an answer – for some specific combination of words or signs – or are you searching for something else than that?" Sometimes when people utter a sentence ending with a question mark what they want is words or signs, at other times they want something else.

47.

At this point we finally arrive at the question I have wanted to pose by means of the technical distinction I have been developing:

If "How deep should I drill this hole?" can be both a question and an expression of a problem, then the same might be the case with "What is time?" or "What is knowledge?" or "What is virtue?"

So, when a *philosopher* asks, or treats, such philosophical issues – what is it that he or she is doing? "What is knowledge?" is *linguistically* a question – but is it also a question 'in the strict sense'? What is the questioner in lack of? Is it *information*, or is it something else? What it is that he or she wants to attain, or do, by means of that sentence? Does the philosopher have a "question", or a "problem"?