



laetus in praesens

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Clustering Questions of Existential Significance

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Introduction

This is an exercise in clustering the 31 questions formulated by [Acarya. Shambhushivananda Avadhuta](#) (*Eternal Philosophy: Questions and Answers*). The document produced for the [College of Neohumanist Studies](#) (Sweden) of which he is rector, and in which capacity he is chancellor of the global education network [Ananda Marga Gurukula](#) (AMGK), which runs over 1,200 educational institutions in over 80 countries. The merit of the document for this exercise is the general nature of the questions as they variously relate to any concern with religion or philosophy. Other questions might of course be added to the 31.

The specific focus of the exercise is to cluster the set of 31 questions in terms of the classic set of 7 "WH-questions" (what, where, when, which, how, who and why) used here to formulate the religion-related concerns. Irrespective of the religious focus here, WH-questions are a common focus of linguistic studies. Of the 31 questions here, 8 were not specified in these terms (those at the bottom of the table). Two of the WH-questions (which and how) are not used in the original 31.

Where possible, it was decided to use any of the WH-questions to reformulate these 8 and distribute them within the relevant clusters, as indicated in the table below (*in italics*). At the end of the table the columns indicate to which of the clusters the 8 have been reallocated. It might of course be fruitful to process those originally associated with a particular WH-question in the same way -- identifying variants to be added to other clusters. This has not been done.

Some possible comments on the process are given following the table.

Clustering of questions

Clustering of fundamental questions							
WH	Specific questions from an Ananda Marga perspective (links are provided to the HTML version of the original PDF document)	WH-questions					
		What	Where	When	Which	How	Who	Why
What	Q1: What is?	.	.	.	.	.	.
	Q8: What is the purpose of it all?	.	.	.	.	.	.
	Q10: What is good and what is evil?	.	.	.	.	.	.
	Q11: What is knowledge?	.	.	.	.	.	.
	Q12: What is Truth?	.	.	.	.	.	.
	Q13: What is Consciousness?	.	.	.	.	.	.
	Q18: What is the meaning of life?	.	.	.	.	.	.
	Q19: What is the root cause of poverty in the world?	.	.	.	.	.	.
	Q24: What is devotion?	.	.	.	.	.	.
	Q25: What are superstitions or dogmas?	.	.	.	.	.	.
	Q28: What is meditation?	.	.	.	.	.	.
	Q30: What is mysticism?	.	.	.	.	.	.
	<i>Q?: What is God?</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.
	<i>Q?: What is free will?</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.
	<i>Q?: What technology is the panacea for solving all the problems facing the planet?</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.
	<i>Q?: What is alone?</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.
	<i>Q?: What is hell or heaven?</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.
Q27: What is the difference between prayer and meditation?	.	.	.	.	.	.

	<i>Q?: What is the necessity of religion in the world?</i>							
	<i>Q?: What is life after death?</i>							
Where	Q4: Where does it all come from?							
	Q5: Where do we come from?							
	Q7: Where are we going to?							
	<i>Q?: Where is God?</i>							
	<i>Q?: Where is there free will?</i>							
	<i>Q?: Where is technology the panacea for solving all the problems facing the planet?</i>							
	<i>Q?: Where are we alone?</i>							
	<i>Q?: Where is hell or heaven?</i>							
	<i>Q?: Where is there a necessity for religion in the world?</i>							
	<i>Q?: Where is there life after death?</i>							
When	<i>Q?: When is God?</i>							
	<i>Q?: When is technology the panacea for solving all the problems facing the planet?</i>							
	<i>Q?: When are we alone?</i>							
	<i>Q?: When is hell or heaven?</i>							
	<i>Q?: When is there a difference between prayer and meditation?</i>							
	<i>Q?: When Is there a necessity for religion in the world?</i>							
Which	<i>Q?: Which God?</i>							
	<i>Q?: Which technology is the panacea for solving all the problems facing the planet?</i>							
	<i>Q?: Which hell or heaven?</i>							
	<i>Q?: Which prayer or meditation makes a difference?</i>							
	<i>Q?: Which religion is necessary in the world?</i>							
How	<i>Q?: Which life is there after death?</i>							
	Q15: How should we act?							
	Q16: How can we be happy?							
	Q22: How do we progress?							
	Q23: How can I achieve mental balance?							
	<i>Q?: How is God?</i>							
	<i>Q?: How is technology the panacea for solving all the problems facing the planet?</i>							
	<i>Q?: How are we alone?</i>							
	<i>Q?: How to get to hell or heaven?</i>							
Who	<i>Q?: How to pray or meditation?</i>							
	<i>Q?: How is there a necessity for religion in the world?</i>							
	<i>Q?: How is there life after death?</i>							
	Q6: Who are we?							
	<i>Q?: Who is God?</i>							
	<i>Q?: Whose technology is the panacea for solving all the problems facing the planet?</i>							
	<i>Q?: Who is alone?</i>							
	<i>Q?: Whose hell or heaven?</i>							
Why	<i>Q?: Whose religion is necessary in the world?</i>							
	<i>Q?: Who has life after death?</i>							
	Q2: Why is there something rather than nothing?							
	Q3: Why is the world the way it is?							
	Q17: Why cannot we live forever?							
	<i>Q?: Why is there a God?</i>							
	<i>Q?: Why is there free will?</i>							
	<i>Q?: Why is technology the panacea for solving all the problems facing the planet?</i>							
	<i>Q?: Why are we alone?</i>							
	<i>Q?: Why is there hell or heaven?</i>							
	<i>Q?: Why pray or meditate?</i>							
Other	<i>Q?: Why is there a necessity for religion in the world?</i>							
	<i>Q?: Why is there life after death?</i>							
	Q9: Is there a God?	What	Where	When	Which	How	Who	Why
	Q14: Do we have a 'free-will'?	What	Where	?	?	?	?	Why
	Q20: Isn't technology the panacea for solving all the problems facing the planet?	What	Where	When	Which	How	Who(se)	Why
	Q21: Are we alone?	What	Where	When	?	How	Who	Why
	Q26: Is there hell or heaven?	What	Where	When	Which	How	Who(se)	Why
	Q27: Is there a difference between prayer and meditation?	What	?	When	Which	How	?	Why
Q29: Is there a necessity of religion in the world?	What	Where	When	Which	How	Who(se)	Why	
Q31: Is there life after death?	What	Where	When	Which	How	Who	Why	

Commentary

One interest in distributing the questions in this way is that it helps to draw attention to the cognitive, philosophical and meditative

implications of a question. This is especially the case when any of the WH-questions effectively determines a manner of thinking and engagement intimately related to a sense of identity and purpose. It is suggestive of an approach to any imponderables.

The document is entitled *Eternal Philosophy: Questions and Answers*. A challenge seemingly absent from the document lies in the nature of a "question" for the person formulating it, the quest for an "answer", and how to engage with any such answer. The latter raises the further question of what it means to be "satisfied" or "dissatisfied" by an answer. It might offer an interesting approach to answers held to be satisfactory in negating the relevance of any imponderable -- as with those of [Richard Dawkins](#) in promoting "science" as of greater adequacy in providing such answers (*The God Delusion*, 2006).

What indeed is an "answer" -- for which other WH-questions could also possibly be added:

- Where is an answer to be found?
- When is an answer satisfactory -- or not?
- Which answer is meaningful?
- How is an answer meaningful?
- Who provides meaningful answers -- and who is it that finds them meaningful?
- Why is an answer meaningful -- and why is a question asked?

Framed in this way, it raises the "question" as to whether there are fruitful ways of thinking beyond the fundamental dynamic of "question and answer" -- even as they may be raised in the widespread worldwide quest for "sustainability", "peace" and "harmony". Is it possible that that dynamic constitutes a form of cognitive entrapment which the future may seek to transcend in seeking more fruitful ways of engaging with reality? The subtle dynamic associated with reflection on a *koan* in Zen suggests possibilities.

Going further, the challenge to identity itself may be provocatively formulated through the speculative "question" as *Am I Question or Answer?* (2006).

Related lines of exploration are possibilities associated with the classic set of WH-questions, including the question of whether there are more than 7 such questions, notably within other linguistic and cultural frameworks. The following papers discuss some possibilities in relation to:

- **answer avoidance:**
 - *In Quest of Optimism Beyond the Edge*: through avoidance of the answering process (2008)
 - *Responsibility for Global Governance*: Who? Where? When? How? Why? Which? What? (2008)
 - *Question Avoidance, Evasion, Aversion and Phobia*: why we are unable to escape from traps (2006)
- **catastrophe theory** (where the cognitive form of particular WH-questions may correspond to elementary catastrophes):
 - *Cognitive Feel for Cognitive Catastrophes*: Question Conformality (2006)
 - *Conformality of 7 WH-questions to 7 Elementary Catastrophes*: an exploration of potential psychosocial implications (2006)
 - *Interrelating Cognitive Catastrophes in a Grail-chalice Proto-model*: implications of WH-questions for self-reflexivity and dialogue (2006)
 - *Towards a Periodic Table of Questions*: strategic opportunities from ordering WH-questions (2006)
- **question dynamics and questions of a higher order :**
 - *Council of the Whys*: emergent wisdom through configuration of why-question dynamics (2006)
 - *Engaging with Questions of Higher Order*: cognitive vigilance required for higher degrees of twistedness (2004)
 - *Functional Complementarity of Higher Order Questions*: psycho-social sustainability modelled by coordinated movement (2004)
 - *Sustaining the Quest for Sustainable Answers* (2003)
- **sets of questions:**
 - *Generating a Million Questions from UIA Databases*: Problems, Strategies, Values (2006)
 - *Preliminary Netmap Studies of Databases on Questions, World Problems, Global Strategies, and Values* (2006)
 - *Questions to which Many deserve Answers* (2000)

It is appropriate to note that the recognition of a set of 31 "eternal questions" is also of interest in its own right. The "question" is what makes for an integrative, complete set of that size in the light of the issues raised elsewhere (*Representation, Comprehension and Communication of Sets: the Role of Number*, 1978). The same question might be asked with respect to the 30 articles of the "eternal values" of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) -- and of possible "extensions" of that pattern (*Universal Declaration of the Rights of Human Organization: an experimental extension of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 1971).

Whether as "questions" or "values" the possibility remains of fruitful representations of sets of that size as argued and depicted elsewhere using the integrity of polyhedra allowing for mapping of 30 elements onto their features (*In Quest of a Strategic Pattern Language: a new architecture of values*, 2008). However, in the case of "questions" so ordered, "the question" is then what is implied in cognition of the pattern as a whole as explored separately (*Metaphorical Geometry in Quest of Globality: in response to global governance challenges*, 2009; *Geometry, Topology and Dynamics of Identity*, 2009; *Geometry of Thinking for Sustainable Global Governance*, 2009).

A further possibility results from framing the question-answer dynamic as a form of cognitive cycle, as is characteristic of learning/action cycles ([Arthur M. Young](#), *The Geometry of Meaning*, 1976). This offers a means of reflecting in mythopoetic terms on the nature of cognitive emergence (*Emergent integrity of a configuration of cognitive cycles -- a "Lord of the Rings"*, 2009).

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