

PIA LAURITZEN

QUESTIONS

BETWEEN IDENTITY

AND DIFFERENCE



Aarhus University Press

Questions

Between Identity and Difference

By Pia Lauritzen

AARHUS UNIVERSITY PRESS

Questions

© 2017 Pia Lauritzen and Aarhus University Press

Cover, layout and typesetting: Carl-H.K. Zakrisson

Cover illustration: Hans-Martin Hansen

Translated by: David Possen

Publishing Editor: Simon Olling Rebsdorf

This book is typeset in Lyon

e-book production by Narayana Press, Denmark

ISBN 978 87 7184 484 9

Aarhus University Press

Finlandsgade 29

DK-8200 Aarhus N

Denmark

www.unipress.dk

Published with the financial support of

CARLSBERG FOUNDATION

International distributors:

Gazelle Book Services Ltd.

White Cross Mills

Hightown, Lancaster, LA1 4XS

United Kingdom

www.gazellebookservices.co.uk

ISD

70 Enterprise Drive, Suite 2

Bristol, CT 06010

USA

www.isdistribution.com



**PEER
REVIEWED**

/ In accordance with requirements of the Danish Ministry of Higher Education and Science, the certification means that a PhD level peer has made a written assessment justifying this book's scientific quality.

Contents

Summary 7

Preface 11

What is a question? 13

How are questions understood and used? 16

Why do we understand ourselves as *some-thing* different from *something else*? 19

How are the limits of our experience determined? 21

Acknowledgments 27

Introduction 29

Thesis 32

A research tradition 38

Plan of the book 40

I. Identity 41

II. Questions 45

III. Difference 50

I. Identity 55

Norms 57

Philosophy 60

Questions 63

Human beings 66

Identity 68

Light 70

II. Questions 75

- Fragstellung*: Posing the question 77
- Taking a position 82
- “Opposite” 85
- Ge-stell* [Enframing] 88
- Structural moments 97
- The structural model 113

III. Difference 119

- Results 121
- Questioning culture 122
- Russian versus Danish 123
- The didactic triangle 138
- Grammar 145
- Economizing 150
- Language 184

Afterword 192

- Philosophy’s question(s) 192
- The question of human being 196
- The human being has no rights 207
- In the beginning was the word 214

Bibliography 220

Summary

Over the past 2,500 years – the years, that is, since Plato founded Western thought on the basis of Socrates’ manifold and insistent questions – hardly any phenomena have managed to elude philosophical investigation. Paradoxically, however, *the question* itself presents us with just such a phenomenon untouched by philosophy. There are no major works today that treat the question as a phenomenon with its own essence and an influence on other phenomena. Articles and books can certainly be found that treat the question in sporadic fashion: for example, by considering the question in relation to broader epistemological or linguistic problems. But no works that address the question systematically – for the question’s sake, so to speak – have yet seen the light of day.

Questions: Between Identity and Difference fills this gap. By appealing to Heidegger, Gadamer, Derrida, and Waldenfels, among others, a phenomenological-hermeneutical analysis is here undertaken of the structure of the question and its impact on the human experience of being *someone* who is different from *any other*. The core argument made in this analysis is that questions are not merely something *we* pose. Rather, questions are what pose or position *us* in a certain understanding of, and in a certain relation to, ourselves and our surroundings.

The basis of this analysis is an understanding of questioning as a certain way of positioning oneself in relation to what

one is questioning about. In posing [German: *stellen*] a question, one takes up a position [German: *Stellung*]. (In my own native Danish, we use the same verb, *stille*, for both “to pose a question” [*at stille et spørgsmål*] and “to take up a position” [*at stille sig*].) That is to say: it is in and through the questions that we pose and do not pose that we position ourselves in relation to our surroundings. But while it may sound as if this taking up of positions is an activity under our control, the matter is not quite so simple. The fact that the questions we pose and do not pose place us in particular relationships with ourselves and our surroundings is not itself a matter under our control. It is not up to us to decide *what* it is we pose questions about, thereby positioning ourselves in relation to this *what*. Gadamer expresses this same point in *Truth and Method*, albeit somewhat differently, when he writes that “*der, der versteht, nicht beliebig seinen Blickpunkt wählt, sondern seinen Platz vorgegeben findet*” [the one who understands does not choose his point of view arbitrarily, but finds it already given].¹

In this book, I show that the relationship between what we do not control or determine (what Heidegger calls the passive *Stellung des Menschen* [human position]), and what it is up to us to decide and take responsibility for (the active *Stellung des Menschen*) is not a matter of culture or religion,

1. Cf. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. W. Glen Doepel, translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald Marshall (2004), p. 325, where this line is rendered: “The interpreter ... finds his point of view already given, and does not choose it arbitrarily.”

but is rather a question of the structure of the question as such. A key thesis of this book is that the concept of culture does not suffice to explain the human experience of being *someone* who is different from *any other*, and so the question to be answered is not “What is culture?” but rather: “How is the structure that establishes identity and difference to be understood?” This is the subject of the book’s first part.

In the second part of the book, I introduce a model for the structure of the question, consisting of three elements that are variously placed, depending on how the question is posed. An analysis of the structure of the question thereby leads to an analysis of the technology of the question, understood as the way in which the question’s structural moments are positioned – as is hinted at in the German words *Fragestellung* (“asking questions”; more literally “question-posing”) and *Ge-stell* (often translated “en-framing”), Heidegger’s term for the essence of technology.

The third part of the book turns to sociolinguistic studies of questions posed in classrooms where Chinese, Russian, Spanish, and Danish children were taught in their native languages. These studies are used to show that the structural moments of the question are not only positioned differently in different communities; they are also conditioned by the grammar of the language in which the given question is posed.

This analysis of the question for the question’s own sake thus also promises to explain why different communities understand and use questions in different ways. What is

more: This book's concretization of the technology of questions (namely, as the various ways in which the question's structural elements can be positioned) also paves the way for an understanding of why different people have different ways of thinking, being, and developing. The latter understanding is developed further in the Afterword, which offers a broader perspective on the book's philosophical-sociolinguistic analysis, exploring its relation to both the Western European tradition and the world community as we know it today.

Preface

The research project on which this book is based was designed to investigate whether different questioning communities have different *questioning cultures*, and to examine what such a questioning culture means for a given society's ways of thinking, organizing, and developing. The working title of the project was "Philosophy of the Question – and its Significance for Culture and Mentality in Selected Language Communities"; the intent was to combine philosophical analysis with empirical studies of school classes in which Japanese, Chinese, Russian, Spanish, and Danish children were taught in their respective native languages. These five languages were selected in accordance with Per Durst-Andersen's theory of linguistic supertypes, which originally categorized Japanese and Spanish as *speaker-oriented*, Chinese and Russian as *reality-oriented*, and Danish and English as *hearer-oriented*.² The results of my research (see Part III), however, contributed to Durst-Andersen's theory or work by revising his categorization of Chinese, in 2015, from reality-oriented to speaker-oriented.³

My reason for focusing these empirical studies on children is that, in previous studies, I had investigated the ques-

2. Cf. Durst-Andersen, *Linguistic Supertypes* and *Bag om sproget* [*Behind the Language*], both published in 2011.

3. See Durst-Andersen, "Introduktion til Det Pragmatiske Hjul – En ny tilgang til Direktiver," *Ny Forskning i Grammatik* 23.

tions that adults ask, in groups of coworkers and interest groups, when they are free to determine whom and what to ask about.⁴ This time, I wished to examine more systematically whether our way of understanding and using questions is something we are *raised* to do – and if so, how.⁵ My aim, in short, was to study questioning behavior at as early a stage of human development as possible. And because I could hardly invite myself into private homes, I decided instead to observe how children encounter and deal with questions during their first years of school – assuming that the way they encounter and deal with questions at that stage shapes the way they do so for the rest of their lives.⁶ Because my analysis is both philosophically and linguistically based, it also made sense to examine how human questioning behavior advances in light of the development of human language use, which is formalized precisely during the first years of school.

Unfortunately, it proved impossible to observe a class on Danish soil where Japanese children are taught in their mother tongue. However, I did succeed, during the spring of 2014, in following four first-grade classes taught in Chinese, Russian, Spanish, and Danish, respectively, for about ten hours per group over a period of about ten weeks. The Chinese and Russian pupils were taught in private schools, namely, the

4. Cf. Stafetanalyse®/Q&A Relay®; see Lauritzen 2008, 2011, and 2012, as well as www.stafetanalyse.com / www.qnarelay.com.

5. Cf. Esther N. Goody (ed.), *Questions and Politeness: Strategies in Social Interaction*, 1978. See also Lauritzen 2015.

6. See, e.g., Jim T. Dillon, “Questioning in Education,” in Meyer (ed.), *Questions and Questioning*, 1988.

Mermaid Chinese Culture School and the Russian Center for Science and Culture in Copenhagen, respectively; the Spanish and Danish pupils were taught in a public elementary school, where they received municipally supported Spanish-for-native-speakers instruction and ordinary Danish lessons, respectively. I recorded the questions exchanged by teachers and pupils in the Danish-language classroom myself, and hired interpreters to record and translate the questions asked in the three non-Danish-language classes. As a result, four different people were involved in the collection of data. It soon emerged that these people had four different views of what a question is, and what was relevant to record (or not). My empirical investigation thus already demanded – after only the first round of observations! – an answer to the philosophical question:

What is a question?

This was the question that my colleagues at the university would ask me when I told them that I was researching questions; and it was my lack of answers to this question that made it difficult for me to collect empirical data. In short, both my philosophical analysis and my empirical studies presupposed that I had previously defined what a question is; but I had not done so – nor did I wish to. My interpreters had the same mother tongue as the teachers and students they observed, and had different ideas of what was relevant and irrelevant to record. This struck me as an observation of great