Old English unembedded -questions are almost exclusively V2, as in (2). Polar questions (without -questions) are almost exclusively V1. In embedded -questions and in embedded polar questions introduced by gið if -wax the verb surfaces in a later position as in (3). This general system looks like what we find in present-day German or Dutch.

Questions with -wax as in (3) are different, as they are never V2, and instead exceptionless V1, as in (4). Allen 1980; Kiparsky 1995; Fischer et al. 2000; van Gelderen 2009; Bateni 2012; Parra-Guáñuldo 2013; Wulff 2014: 94:4. Typical analysis: -wax is in C, which prevents the verb from moving.

It's widely acknowledged that questions with -wax as in (3) serve as an alternative to V1 for unembedded polar questions. Large unaddressed issue: what conditions this variation? Is it free, or is there a meaning difference?

**Force of -question-questions: previous research**


- Difference in verbal mood: unlike V1-questions, -question-questions are almost always in the subjunctive.
- Many of the questions with the present subjunctive are rhetorical (1985: 682) – though he claims that they can also be genuine.
- No consistent bias: some -question-questions demand a negative answer, some a positive.

Mitchell gives one example of a -question-question without the subjunctive: (4).

4. hwæþer þe þin eage manful ys … ?

(hwæþer-questions in the Consolation of Philosophy)

(If of the 43 -question-questions, all are asked by Philosophy (not by Boethius).

- 17 go completely unanswer.
- 12 are answered by Philosophy itself (often seen, ‘now, ‘no’)
- 14 are ‘answered’ by Boethius, but usually not straightforwardly (example: the dialogue on the right).

Boethius said: ‘There is no doubt of the good fate that often comes to good men in this world, as if it were a foretoken of eternal good! Can people say that this is a bad fate?’

At this I smiled and said: ‘No one says that …’

Philosophy said: ‘What do you think of the less promising fate that often afflicts the evil as punishment?’

Do people think that this is a good false?

At this I said: ‘They don’t at all think that this is a good fate. I don’t think that people are miserly.”

Philosophy is certainly not seeking information with these questions.

Other ‘answers’ from Boethius:

- (in response to “Does anyone think that anyone is so powerful that they can do everything they want?”)
- ‘Now here divine men must not be his guest’

- ‘In one of their right mind thinks that’ (coboth,Bo.36:11.3 216)

- ‘In response to “Do you think that those who are worthy of punishment are poor and unhappy”’
- ‘We must not be in love with power’

- ‘I don’t think at all. I – know it very well’

- ‘In (response to “Does a beautiful landscape please you?”)
- ‘How could such a man lose favor?’

- ‘In (response to “What do you think of the love that is often given to beautiful things”)
- ‘I don’t know if it all. I know very well’

- ‘Surely I am in love’

- ‘In (response to “What do you think of the love that is often given to beautiful things”)
- ‘Surely I am in love’

- ‘In (response to “What do you think of the love that is often given to beautiful things”)
- ‘Surely I am in love’

- ‘In (response to “What do you think of the love that is often given to beautiful things”)
- ‘Surely I am in love’

- ‘In (response to “What do you think of the love that is often given to beautiful things”)
- ‘Surely I am in love’

**References**


Battye & Ian Roberts (eds.), 2010. Old English unembedded -questions are deliberate questions that can be used when the relevant knowledge and beliefs of the interlocutors are identical.

Could this be a way to think about what it means to be a ‘theoretical’ question in general?

**Conclusion:** Old English -question-questions are not information-seeking. They are plausibly both deliberative and rhetorical. More work needed – input welcome!