

Unzipping the Zetetic Turn

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Abstract

Zetetic norms govern our acts of inquiry. Epistemic norms govern our beliefs and acts of belief formation. Recently, Jane Friedman (2020) has defended that we should think of these norms as conforming a single normative domain: epistemology should take a zetetic turn. Though this unification project implies a substantive re-elaboration of our traditional epistemic norms, Friedman argues that the reasons supporting the turn are robust enough to warrant its revisionary implications.

In this paper, I suggest we should read Friedman's proposal as a dilemma. Either we believe the zetetic turn is well-motivated and undertake the task of looking for the proper revision of our traditional epistemic norms, or we take the revisionary implications of the turn to be unacceptable, in which case our challenge is to show why a zetetic epistemology is not a well-motivated project after all. After presenting this dilemma, I make a case for endorsing its second horn by presenting a two-pronged argument against Friedman's project. First, I show that the revisionary implications of the zetetic turn are more far-reaching than expected. Second, I defend that the most persuasive reasons for endorsing the turn are not strong enough to support it. Taken together, these considerations speak against accepting the zetetic turn and the revisionary implications that come with it.

Keywords: norms of inquiry; epistemic norms; zetetic epistemology; testimony; normative authority; normative correctness

1. Introduction

What is normative epistemology about? Finding an answer to this question that satisfies all epistemologists may well be impossible. However, something along these lines should sound good enough to most of them: normative epistemology is concerned with how we should go about in our endeavor to align our cognitive systems with the world.

This ecumenical characterization can be fleshed out in several ways. The one that seems to have been preeminent in contemporary epistemology contends that, since beliefs are the mental attitudes that exhibit a mind-to-world direction of fit, epistemology, at its bottom, is about *what we should or should not believe*.¹ Jane Friedman calls this view *the doxastic paradigm*,² and according to it, epistemic norms are those norms that are concerned with what beliefs we ought to have in the light of our truth-related circumstances.³

¹ To be more precise, epistemology would be concerned with the full range of our doxastic attitudes, which, apart from belief, also includes disbelief, a neutral attitude commonly called agnosticism or suspension, and degrees of belief or credences. For simplicity, in what follows, I will sometimes use 'belief' as a shorthand for all this variety of doxastic attitudes.

² This label was coined by Hookway (2006), from whom Friedman borrows it.

³ A common assumption holds that epistemology also studies the norms governing belief formation, revision, and maintenance. However, some philosophers believe that epistemic norms focus exclusively on the synchronic rationality of belief states (Feldman, 2000; Hedden, 2015; Thorstad, 2021, 2022).

In recent work, Friedman has expressed discomfort with this picture (Friedman, 2020, forthcoming). She argues that normative epistemology should rather be conceived as follows: given that inquiry is the activity we engage in when we try to fit our minds to the world, epistemology ought to be concerned with *how we should inquire*. Using a new term of art, Friedman claims that epistemology should take a *zetetic turn*:⁴ epistemic norms, she says, bear on the whole stretch of inquiry, and the norms that govern inquiry (i.e., zetetic norms) are by and large epistemic. She calls the resulting view *the zetetic paradigm*.

According to Friedman, the zetetic turn finds motivation in foundational considerations about the epistemic normativity of belief that should be familiar to the doxastic epistemologist. She claims that the reason epistemic norms governing belief have a hold on us is that we are inquirers, and epistemic norms are precisely the norms that bind us *qua* inquirers. However, she also acknowledges that taking the zetetic turn will require us to revise our traditional conception of these norms: the norms usually considered by epistemologists, she contends, *are not* norms that can guide us in inquiry. Accordingly, we can read her recent work as presenting the following dilemma. If we want to follow her in endorsing the zetetic turn, we must find the proper revision for our traditional epistemic norms. On the other hand, if we find such revisionary implications unacceptable, we must strive to show why a zetetic epistemology is not a well-motivated project after all.

This paper aims to support the second horn of this dilemma by presenting a two-pronged argument against Friedman's project. The plan is as follows. In §2, I review Friedman's original case for the zetetic turn. The first stage of my argument takes place in §3, where I argue that the revisionary implications of the zetetic turn run deeper and are more far-reaching than Friedman acknowledges. The second stage of my argument occurs in §4, where I defend that the most compelling reasons for the turn are insufficient to vindicate it. §5 concludes that a zetetic epistemology ultimately fails to offer a convincing account of the nature and scope of the epistemic domain.

2. **Z=E**

By taking the zetetic turn, one is essentially endorsing the following claim:

Z=E: the epistemic and the zetetic conform a single normative domain.

That claim, in turn, is the conjunction of these two:

ZCE: All norms of inquiry are epistemic.

ECZ: All epistemic norms are zetetic.

Even though she does not develop a full-fledged defense of these assertions, Friedman gives some brief arguments on their behalf (2020, 526-28). In support of **ECZ**, she points out that the authority of epistemic norms would be left mysterious if they were not grounded in our interest in figuring out questions through inquiry. What makes epistemic norms important for us? Why do we care about following them? One ready answer is that by conforming to adequate epistemic norms, we promote the appropriate resolution of our inquiries. This explanation offers a concise and compelling account of the source of epistemic normativity, and Friedman claims that the burden is on her opponents to find a better alternative. As for **ZCE**, she defends it by stressing that inquiry is a kind of activity directed at an

⁴ 'Zetetic' derives from the Greek verb ζῆτέω, which means 'seek for' or 'inquire after' (Friedman, 2020).

epistemic goal, and the norms that guide and constrain our efforts in acquiring epistemic goods must count as epistemic.

I will have more to say about the underlying motivations of the zetetic turn in §4. For now, let us concede that **Z=E** is a well-motivated thesis. What would follow if we accepted it? According to Friedman, the result would be a substantive revision of how contemporary epistemology understands the norms of belief. The reason for this is quite simple: if the epistemic norms of belief are zetetic norms, then they must be in harmony with the rest of the norms governing inquiry. However, the kind of norms suggested by contemporary epistemologists do not harmonize at all with zetetic norms. On the contrary, they are in tension with them. Consequently, they must be replaced by suitable, *zetetically grounded* norms.

In what follows, I reconstruct the two arguments in favor of this revisionary conclusion that I discern in Friedman's original presentation (2020).

2.1. Two Arguments for Revision

To expose the tension between zetetic norms and traditional epistemic norms, Friedman points out that inquiry must be governed by some strategic norm that requires us to use the appropriate means to achieve the goals of inquiry. As a plausible candidate to fulfill this role, she proposes the following *Zetetic Instrumental Principle (ZIP)*:

ZIP: If one wants to figure out Q' , one ought to take the necessary means to figuring out Q' .⁵

Friedman argues that **ZIP** is inconsistent with the following *permission norms (P_a-norms)* governing belief formation:⁶

EP_a: If one has excellent evidence for p at t , then one is permitted to judge p at t .

KP_a: If one is in a position to come to know p at t , then one is permitted to come to know p at t .

This inconsistency can be brought to the surface by reflecting on cases such as the following:

Window Count: Mar needs to figure out how many windows the Picasso Tower has. Counting the windows by herself is the optimal available strategy to settle her inquiry. While counting, she has much evidence at her disposal that she could use to form new beliefs and acquire new knowledge.

ZIP and the **P_a-norms**, says Friedman, provide incompatible normative verdicts in **Window Count**. From Mar's evidential situation and the **P_a-norms**, it follows that she is permitted to make plenty of new judgments and come to know many new things, either by processing the vast amount of perceptual information available to her or by drawing conclusions from the beliefs and knowledge she already stores in her mind. However, from Mar's zetetic situation and **ZIP**, it follows that she has a duty to focus her attention on counting the windows of the Picasso Tower. Since this takes time and requires attention,

⁵ I reproduce Friedman's original statement of the principle. **ZIP** has raised some criticism for being formulated as a narrow-scope requirement (Steglich-Petersen, 2021) and as an anankastic conditional (Dutant, J., Littlejohn, C., and Rosenkranz, S., "On the zetetic and the epistemic", unpublished ms.). I will deal with some problems arising from **ZIP**'s formulation in due course (see §3.3). Still, for most of the paper, I will take **ZIP** at face value and assume, for the sake of argument, that the prescription in its consequent detaches in the relevant cases under discussion.

⁶ Friedman says that **ZIP** is also in tension with epistemic norms that issue *obligations* instead of permissions and norms that govern *belief-states* instead of acts of judgment or belief formation. For the purposes of this paper, though, it will suffice to focus on the tension between **ZIP** and the **P_a-norms**.

properly fulfilling the task is incompatible with simultaneously forming new beliefs or acquiring new knowledge about other topics. Consequently, conforming to **ZIP** makes it impermissible to make the judgments or acquire the knowledge that the **P_a-norms** deem permissible. What the former norm prescribes is inconsistent with what the latter permit.

Though Friedman acknowledges several possible pathways to confront this tension, she argues that a commitment to **Z=E** leaves us no other option but to revise the **P_a-norms**. Call this result **Revision**:

Revision: The **P_a-norms** should be replaced by *zetetically grounded* norms for settling questions in inquiry.

If we generalize the moral of examples like **Window Count**, the main argument Friedman offers in support of **Revision** can be reconstructed as follows:

ARGUMENT FROM NORMATIVE TENSION

NT1. **ZIP** is an epistemic norm.

NT2. If a belief is based on sufficient evidence, the **P_a-norms** permit forming it.

NT3. **ZIP** sometimes forbids the formation of beliefs that are based on sufficient evidence.

NT4. **ZIP** and the **P_a-norms** are normatively incoherent with each other.

[By NT2, NT3]

NT5. The domain of epistemic normativity is coherent.

NT6. Either **ZIP** or the **P_a-norms** are not epistemic norms.

[NT4, NT5, MT]

NT7. The **P_a-norms** are not genuine epistemic norms.

[NT1, NT6, disjunctive syllogism]

Friedman further argues that we should have been suspicious of the **P_a-norms** all along, for these norms are not zetetically grounded. But if they are not zetetic norms, then (given **Z=E**) they are not epistemic either.⁷ We could reconstruct this second argument as follows:

ARGUMENT FROM ZETETIC UNGROUNDEDNESS

ZU1. A norm N is epistemic if and only if it is zetetically grounded.

ZU2. A norm N is zetetically grounded if and only if it regulates our φ -ing in a way that promotes correctly settling the questions we try to figure out in inquiry.

ZU3. If a belief is based on sufficient evidence, the **P_a-norms** permit forming it.

ZU4. Many of the beliefs that we have sufficient evidence to form do not promote correctly settling the questions we try to figure out in inquiry.

ZU5. The **P_a-norms** permit forming beliefs that do not promote correctly settling the questions we try to figure out in inquiry.

[ZU3, ZU4, MP]

⁷ The attentive reader may have noticed the somewhat indistinct manner in which I've been using the terms 'zetetic' and 'zetetically grounded' up to this point. To be clear, this aligns with Friedman's usage of these terms: a norm is zetetically grounded just if it qualifies as a zetetic norm—in the sense of being a norm whose purpose is to guide us in our efforts to resolve our inquiries (see Friedman, 2000, 532). In §4, I will suggest that we should understand what it is for a norm to be zetetically grounded in a more nuanced way. Thanks to an anonymous referee for prompting me to clarify this point.

ZU6. The **P_a-norms** do not regulate belief formation in a way that promotes correctly settling the questions we try to figure out in inquiry.

[By ZU5]

ZU7. The **P_a-norms** are not zetetically grounded.

[ZU2, ZU6, MT]

ZU8. The **P_a-norms** are not genuine epistemic norms.

[ZU1, ZU7, MT]

Both arguments push us to the same conclusion: if the **P_a-norms** are in tension with **ZIP**—which, given **Z=E**, has an independent claim to be epistemic—, and if they are not zetetically grounded themselves, then they are not genuine epistemic norms. From this, **Revision** follows: the norms governing belief formation must avoid conflict with **ZIP** by being zetetically grounded. Friedman does not detail how this could be achieved. However, she suggests that "a zetetically grounded E[pistemology] will presumably include permissions to believe what the evidence supports and permissions to come to know in cases in which doing that *serves one's inquiries in the right sorts of ways*" (2020, fn. 37, emphasis mine). In the resulting picture, zetetic interests will constrain what we are and what we are not epistemically permitted to believe or come to know. More specifically, if forming the belief that *p* may hamper some inquiry we are engaged in, we will not be epistemically permitted to judge that *p*—even if its evidential standing is impeccable.

2.2. Assessing **Z=E**

Now that we have briefly reviewed Friedman's case for a zetetic epistemology, we can proceed to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the view. On the one hand, **Z=E** encapsulates a clear and attractive demarcation of the epistemic domain with the potential to solve important foundational issues in epistemology. On the other hand, a result like **Revision** raises severe concerns about the extensional adequacy of such a demarcation. The zetetic turn is not a mere expansion of the scope of epistemic normativity beyond the domain of belief: accepting it would also force us to revise our previous understanding of the epistemic normativity of belief itself. As a result, some assessments traditionally regarded as epistemic would need to be excluded from the epistemic domain altogether.

Let us suppose that we are sympathetic to the considerations Friedman raises in support of **Z=E**, but, at the same time, we are wary of accepting any substantive revision of our extant view about the scope of our old epistemic norms governing belief. Since **Z=E** and **Revision** seem to come in tandem, we are confronted with a dilemma. If we take the reasons in support of **Z=E** to be decisive, we must commit ourselves to **Revision** as well and try to explain—to ourselves and others—why is it that we had been so misled about the actual extension of epistemic normativity. In other words, we would need an error theory that explains away the apparent legitimacy of many of our ordinary epistemic assessments. But if, on the other hand, we take the picture that results from **Revision** to be extensionally inadequate, then we would have to reject **Z=E** and attempt to explain why the reasons provided by Friedman are insufficient to support her project of unifying zetetic and epistemic normativity.

In what follows, my aim will be to ease the way for this second path. I believe that **Z=E** is false. To support this contention, I intend to do two things. In §3, I will show that the consequences of accepting a zetetic norm such as **ZIP** as epistemic are even more revisionary than the arguments presented in §2 might suggest. Then, in §4, I will argue that our best reasons for avowing the zetetic turn are not strong enough to support it. The arguments presented in both sections will provide a cumulative case against **Z=E**, giving us powerful reasons to reject the zetetic turn.

3. Can ZIP be an epistemic norm?

This section presents two case-driven arguments against ZIP's standing as an epistemic norm. Whatever the revised standards of belief envisaged by Friedman might look like, it is clear that they must allow ZIP to constrain our belief-forming activities. I hope to show that granting this role to ZIP leads to a problematic picture of epistemic normativity, one that we should not accept and that should lead us to question ZIP's epistemic credentials—and, consequently, Z=E.

3.1. Pragmatic collapse

One concern that may be raised about ZIP is that it has a practical flavor to it. At first glance, ZIP looks like a restricted instance of the general principle of instrumental rationality that requires us to take the necessary means to our ends, and this seems to be a practical principle if there ever was any. However, simply stating this concern as an objection would beg the question against Friedman, who has provided reasons to believe that ZIP is epistemic. Here I will defend the position that ZIP is indeed practical. To support this claim, though, I will try to show how taking ZIP to be epistemic leads to a notion of epistemic permissibility that intertwines and overlaps in worrying ways with practical permissibility, effectively collapsing into it.

Since the charge I want to advance is that Z=E commits us to an objectionable form of pragmatic encroachment, it will be helpful to rely on a couple of cases tailored to the image of those that underwrite the classic discussions about the influence of practical considerations on the epistemic status of our beliefs.⁸ Let's take this as our basic scenario:

Idle Walk: Being idle at home, Erika decides to go for a walk. While wandering around the streets and in her thoughts, she suddenly remembers that the local cinema will offer a rerun of her favorite movie. She wonders whether there will be a showing this evening (*Movie?*), so she decides to figure it out by using her cell phone. She checks the information on a website that she knows is a highly reliable source (it is run by the company that owns the cinema and is updated daily). Based on seeing this very same information on the site, Erika comes to judge that *there will be a showing today at 8.00 PM* (that *p*), and she settles her inquiry.

In **Idle Walk**, Erika conducts an inquiry into *Movie?* that appears to be unobjectionable, all zetetic-and-epistemic things considered. As a result, her belief that *p* seems to be a paradigmatic example of what would count as a permissible belief under Z=E.

Now, consider a situation where someone else carries out the same inquiry into *Movie?* in exactly the same way, leading to the same belief that *p*. However, the overall context in which their inquiry takes place is somewhat different. Specifically, their inquiry into *Movie?* interrupts a previous, more relevant inquiry:

Reckless Realtor: Eric is a real estate agent who has a meeting with two potential buyers in one of the properties on his list in just five minutes. Following company policies, he has come to the property in advance to ensure there isn't any unexpected problem that might make the meeting go astray. While he's in the endeavor of figuring out whether there is any such problem (*Problem?*), he suddenly remembers that the local cinema will offer a rerun of his favorite movie. He wonders whether there will be a showing this evening (*Movie?*), so he decides to figure it out by using his cell

⁸ In what sense the phenomena I aim to discuss here amount to a kind of pragmatic encroachment is something I will clarify later in this section.

phone. He checks the information on a website that he knows is a highly reliable source (it is run by the company that owns the cinema and is updated daily). Based on seeing this very same information on the site, Eric comes to judge that *there will be a showing today at 8.00 PM*, and he settles his inquiry. By the time he does this, the two clients are approaching the front door. The meeting is about to start, and Eric has run out of time to check the bathroom.

What are we to make of this second case? Was Eric permitted to judge that p ? Friedman's original treatment of **ZIP** relies on cases where there is just one inquiry in progress. Here, on the other hand, we are considering two inquiries, *Movie?* and *Problem?*, the first of which occurs while the latter is still in progress. Friedman acknowledges that her original formulation of **ZIP** is too simple to handle cases like this, and she suggests that it should be modified by adding a *ceteris paribus* or a *pro tanto* rider to tackle them (2020, 511). That said, we need not wait for the precise formulation of the modified norm to infer what the resulting normative verdict would be in **Reckless Realtor**. Presumably, Eric has *pro tanto* requirements to take the necessary means to figuring out both *Problem?* and *Movie?*. But it is his *overall* requirements and permissions that concern us, and given the (we assume) prime importance and urgency of *Problem?*, *aliis* is *non aequis* regarding his *pro tanto* requirement to figure out *Movie?*: his overall zetetic situation suggests that this is something that he should have postponed until his inquiry into *Problem?* was settled. And, since taking the necessary means to figuring out *Problem?* is incompatible with figuring out *Movie?*, his resulting judgment that p was (*overall*) epistemically impermissible.

We can all agree that Eric did something impermissible by interrupting his inquiry into *Problem?*. However, some of us will recant against the suggestion that the impermissibility of inquiring into *Movie?* and judging that p in **Reckless Realtor** is epistemic. Our intuitions against this verdict are triggered by the fact that all the epistemically relevant parameters look identical in this case and in **Idle Walk**: both Eric and Erika inquire into *Movie?* in precisely the same way, and their resulting judgment that p is based on the very same evidence in both cases. In light of these facts, Eric's judgment that p should be given the same epistemic standing as Erika's. The only differences between **Reckless Realtor** and **Idle Walk** seem to be purely practical in nature.

As I said before, though, we should bear in mind that the defender of **Z=E** will not accept that the only differences between the two cases are non-epistemic. Eric and Erika differ in their *research agendas* (i.e., the set of their open inquiries). And, in Friedman's picture of the epistemic domain, that makes a difference in what they are and what they are not epistemically permitted to do. A subject's research agenda is therefore a thoroughly epistemic parameter in the zetetic framework. If we want to deny that Eric's judgment is *epistemically* impermissible, this is the assumption that we must challenge. In what follows, I will argue that granting this point would commit us to a collapse of epistemic normativity into practical normativity.

As inquirers, our zetetic interests are manifold. But as bounded agents, there are important cognitive and temporal restrictions to the information we can effectively access through inquiry. A case like **Window Count** highlights that inquiring into some matter involves refraining from learning many things that we could come to know spontaneously. Cases like **Reckless Realtor**, on the other hand, illustrate how we cannot satisfy all our zetetic interests at once: engaging in a specific inquiry involves sacrificing others, and it is essential that we choose well. Inquiring agents with multiple zetetic interests and cognitive and temporal bounds must establish a hierarchy within their research agenda, deciding which questions are most relevant or urgent and prioritizing them over the others (Friedman, 2020, 524). Maybe Eric has as much reason as Erika to want to figure out *Movie?*, and his desire to do so is just as strong as hers. However, his research agenda includes a much more urgent question that he should have resolved first.

It is this difference in the order of priority within their research agendas that explains the different epistemic assessments that Eric and Erika's judgments receive, given how their overall evidential situation regarding p is nevertheless equal.

Now, I worry that if we accept that this difference is epistemic in nature, we are making epistemic permissibility overlap with practical permissibility in a deeply problematic way. The reason for this is that the order of priority among questions within our research agendas is ultimately determined by practical considerations. Therefore, by making our epistemic assessments dependent on the hierarchy of our ongoing inquiries, we indirectly make them dependent on our practical situation.⁹

This, I submit, commits us to a more extreme kind of pragmatic encroachment than the ones discussed in the recent literature.¹⁰ When philosophers debate whether practical factors can affect the epistemic status of a doxastic attitude towards p , what they usually ask is whether non-truth-relevant factors (i.e., factors that don't affect the probability that p) can shift the evidential thresholds that separate partial belief from full belief that p , unjustified belief from justified belief that p , or justified belief from knowledge that p . In these discussions, the practical factors usually considered concern the practical stakes of acting as if p were true. Here, on the other hand, we are dealing with a picture where practical considerations (via their influence on our research agenda) can neutralize all too easily the normative import of the evidential factors on our epistemic assessments of someone's judgment that p . What is more, the practical considerations that exert this influence are not related to the practical consequences of acting on the belief being assessed. Instead, what matters here is whether our practical situation determines the existence of other zetetic interests that are more pressing than those that could be served by judging that p . The presence or absence of such interests can make our epistemic verdicts shift dramatically. And, given how unstable and contingent our practical situations are, adopting such a framework commits us to a high level of fickleness in our epistemic assessments.

In sum, if **ZIP** is epistemic, a judgment cannot be epistemically permissible if it goes against our overriding zetetic interests. But what zetetic interests are overriding (what questions come first in our research agenda) is determined by our practical situation. Consequently, if **ZIP** is epistemic, judging that p is epistemically permissible only if judging *whether* p is practically permissible: the evidential considerations that epistemologists have long held dear become normatively moot in the absence of a practical license to form a judgment. For reasons explained above, I find this picture deeply troubling: it downplays the autonomy of the epistemic domain, making it overly dependent on practical considerations, and it attributes too much volatility to our epistemic assessments.

True, this does not mean that taking **ZIP** to be epistemic makes epistemic normativity *entirely* collapse into practical normativity. Even if no judgment can be epistemically permissible without also being practically permissible, this does not immediately license us to make any judgment that serves our practical interests: we must still judge by the evidence. However, this observation cannot save Friedman's view from the objection I'm trying to advance here. If anything, it puts it under additional pressure.

⁹ The claim that our research agendas are ultimately shaped by our practical situation sounds quite natural to me, and I am not aware of any author who argues otherwise. Friedman herself suggests that the most straightforward reason why an inquiry might be temporally urgent is "because we need some information *in order to act*" (2020, 509, emphasis added). While it is true that sometimes we can prioritize some inquiries "because we're just deeply curious about some question" (ibid), these cases seem to be outliers in the cognitive life of most individuals. Moreover, even for those who devote most of their time to intellectual endeavors, practical considerations still dominate in at least two respects. First, the decision to embrace a contemplative life is fundamentally a practical choice about how one wants to live. Second, dedication to contemplation can only happen in the absence of more pressing practical concerns.

¹⁰ For a helpful survey of the recent literature on pragmatic encroachment, see Kim (2017). Classical discussions can be found in Hawthorne (2003), Stanley (2005), DeRose (2009), and Fantl & McGrath (2009).

Because once we grant that judging whether p is practically permissible, what makes the distinctively epistemic job of determining whether we are permitted to judge that p is not **ZIP**, but our old evidential standards of belief formation. It would be more reasonable to believe that these standards perform an independent job.

In light of all these problematic consequences of taking **ZIP** to be epistemic, it would be better if we considered it a practical or prudential norm operating at a different level than our traditional epistemic norms. To press this point further, the following subsection will explore some additional problems that arise when **ZIP** is used as an epistemic norm in assessing testimonial exchanges.

3.2. Testimony

Testimony is considered an epistemically relevant practice in contemporary epistemology for two main reasons: first, it is a potential source of epistemic justification for the hearer who forms her belief based on the speaker's say-so; second, the speaker's speech act of assertion in testimony appears to be constrained by epistemic norms. Many philosophers nowadays go so far as to defend that assertion is governed by a constitutive epistemic norm.¹¹

How would the study of testimony fit within a zetetic epistemology? Giving a zetetic treatment to the hearer's performance is a straightforward matter: asking for testimony is a move within inquiry. But what about the speaker? On the face of it, giving testimony is not a move in inquiry. What relevance could zetetic norms like **ZIP** have in assessing the speaker's performance? The only epistemic role **ZIP** could play here would be that of constraining the information that the speaker can transmit through her acts of assertion. Let us suppose that one of the necessary conditions set by the epistemic norm of assertion is that you may assert that p only if you are epistemically permitted to judge that p . As we already know, if **ZIP** is epistemic, any judgment made by means of a violation of **ZIP** would be an epistemically impermissible one. Consequently, if **ZIP** is epistemic, we can expect it to constrain the information we can share through testimony.

However, it does not seem that this will usually be the case. For instance, consider the following scenario:

Pickpocket: It is late in the evening. Marcus knows that he should be at home, doing research for a school assignment that is due tomorrow. However, he finds the task deeply boring and is insufficiently concerned about the looming deadline. Instead, he sits on a street bench, his gaze wandering through the urban tapestry. As he lingers there, a figure in rapid motion suddenly emerges from a distant corner. Intrigued by this unfolding scene, Marcus tracks the man's course with an intent gaze, following his swift trajectory down the street until he sees him vanish through the entrance of one of the nearby buildings. Mere moments later, two policemen arrive and approach Marcus. They explain that they are chasing a pickpocket and inquire whether he witnessed anyone suspicious running down the street. Marcus confirms that he saw the man and knows his whereabouts: he tells the police officers that *the man hid in the number 12* (that p).

If **ZIP** is an epistemic norm, and we grant that Marcus is violating it by not focusing on his school assignment, then Marcus was not epistemically permitted to judge that p when he saw the man entering the building. And if **ZIP** constrains the information we can transmit through testimony, then Marcus' assertion that p when the police ask for his testimony would be impermissible as well. However, p is a

¹¹ Williamson's seminal treatments in (1996) and (2000) have spawned a sprawling literature on the epistemic norms of assertion. For useful overviews, see Brown & Cappelen (2011), Goldberg (2020), and Pagin & Marsili (2021).

potentially correct answer to the inquiry conducted by the police. Not all epistemologists may agree that the police are warranted to take Marcus' testimony at face value. Still, I take it that even those with a more stringent account of testimonial justification will concede that the police may be justified in accepting it, provided that certain conditions are met. Maybe they should check for signs of deception. They might also need to consider some reasons to suspect that his judgment that p was based on insufficient evidence or formed through an unreliable process (Is the street sufficiently illuminated? Might Marcus be nearsighted? Does he look sober?). But if they find no signs of deception or unreliability in his testimony, most of us will agree that the police are permitted to judge that p based on Marcus' assertion. Crucially, whether Marcus abided by **ZIP** will be utterly trivial in this regard. And still, his violation of **ZIP** makes Marcus' judgment and assertion that p impermissible.

Is the latter conclusion inescapable? Before proceeding further, it is worth considering whether we could read this case in such a way that Marcus doesn't count as violating **ZIP**. While I concede that such an interpretation is possible, I'll offer two rejoinders suggesting that proponents of **ZIP** should not find this possibility appealing.

Indeed, it is possible to read **Pickpocket** differently. Maybe when the police question Marcus about the suspect, their query prompts a new inquiry for him. Once he learns that it was a pickpocket that he saw running down the street and that the police are after him, a new question pops up in his research agenda: "Where was it that the man hid?". If that were the case, it is highly doubtful that Marcus would be violating **ZIP** in responding to the police: the stakes of apprehending a criminal would outweigh the importance of his school assignment, and the question about the suspect (prompted by the police's query) would now take precedence within his research agenda. By promptly retrieving his memory of seeing the man entering the number 12 and basing his judgment and assertion on this evidence, Marcus would clearly comply with his zetetic obligations.¹²

Now, my first rejoinder is this: though it is indeed possible that this is what is going on in **Pickpocket**, this interpretation is by no means an unproblematic one, and embracing it would commit the proponent of **ZIP** to some substantive and controversial views. To see why, it is worth highlighting an important feature of the case at hand: Marcus has a settled mind about whether p . What is more, he *knows* that p . Given this fact, the analysis of the case that this objection proposes would imply that Marcus is inquiring about a matter already settled for him. Many philosophers, including Friedman, have questioned the rationality of double-checking when one is already settled, so I'm not sure that we should grant that this is the best way to read what is going on in Marcus' case (see Friedman, 2017, 2019a, 2019b; Armour-Garb, 2011; Whitcomb, 2010; Millson, 2020; McGrath, 2021).

To retain the plausibility of this reading of **Pickpocket**, we should refrain from accusing Marcus of irrational behavior. To my knowledge, the literature on double-checking suggests two broad ways to do this. A first possibility would be to claim that Marcus engages in inquiry because he has lost the knowledge he initially gained. But since Marcus receives no evidence countervailing his initial belief that p , this view can only be defended from a previous commitment to some sort of epistemic contextualism (see Lewis, 1996; Armour-Garb, 2011), or to an impurist view about knowledge that claimed that Marcus no longer knows that p because once he's been questioned by the police the practical stakes of the question of whether p raise significantly, and practical stakes encroach on knowledge (see Fantl & McGrath, 2009). Alternatively, one could claim that Marcus does retain his initial knowledge, but the stakes associated with the police's query prompt him to wonder about his actual confidence regarding whether p . If that were the case, though, his new inquiry would be about a slightly different question: rather than asking

¹² I'm thankful to an anonymous referee for suggesting this interpretation of **Pickpocket**.

“Where was it that the man hid?”, he would be asking himself whether he really knows that p (thus aiming for higher-order knowledge) or whether he is certain that p .¹³

In either of these interpretations, it would be rational for Marcus to engage in inquiry after the police’s query, and he would not be violating **ZIP** by so doing. However, I see several problems with these readings of **Pickpocket**. The first one is that they require us to accept some controversial views about the nature of knowledge and the rationality of double-checking. Second, they don’t address the issue that Marcus’ inquiry would have to rely on evidence he acquired through a prior violation of **ZIP**: under **Z=E**, Marcus’ knowledge that p is *epistemically impermissible knowledge*. But most importantly—and here is where my second rejoinder comes—, if one wants to deny that Marcus violates **ZIP** in **Pickpocket**, the crucial question is not whether interpretations such as these are plausible, but whether they embody *the only possible* way of understanding the case at hand.

Now, when asked about something we already know, is it always necessary that we engage in inquiry to retrieve that knowledge? This strikes me as implausible, and I think we should not concede that Marcus *necessarily* engages in inquiry in **Pickpocket**. Let us stipulate that Marcus is highly confident in his belief that p : the street was well-illuminated, he possesses keen eyesight, and he clearly saw that p . If this holds true, it is not far-fetched at all to conceive that, when questioned by the police about the suspect, Marcus doesn’t engage in inquiry, but just asserts what he previously came to know. This interpretation dovetails better than the former two with Friedman’s contention that it is irrational to adopt an inquiring attitude towards a question one has already settled (2019a, 2019b), and the mere possibility of interpreting the case in this manner suffices to raise concerns for **ZIP**.

If all this is correct, **Pickpocket** illustrates how having complied with **ZIP** in acquiring some information is orthogonal to the potential value that such information may have for our peers. More crucially, complying with **ZIP** is also orthogonal to the epistemic standing that others may attribute to us in relation to that information. But if this is indeed the case, a new form of conflict arises between **ZIP** and other epistemic norms: **ZIP** can issue epistemic prohibitions to make judgments and assertions that our peers, when they ask for our testimony, would assess as epistemically faultless.

This is an unwelcome result, and even more so if we bear in mind that the strategy that Friedman pursues to solve the tension in cases like **Window Count** seems hopeless in a case like **Pickpocket**: the tension would persist even if we revised the **P_a-norms**, because the police are not violating **ZIP** by judging that p based on Marcus’ assertion. Remember that p answers an important question they are trying to figure out. Judging that p , then, serves their inquiry “in the right sorts of ways”.

Based on these observations, it appears highly unlikely that **ZIP** can constrain our acts of assertion. To think otherwise would require us to accept an implausible explanation of how testimony works. In response to this, one could claim that even if **ZIP** does not constrain assertion, it is nevertheless an epistemic norm capable of constraining our acts of belief formation. However, I believe such a view is untenable for two reasons. First, there is a paradox that would remain unexplained: what Marcus is not epistemically permitted to judge, the police are permitted (maybe even required) to judge *based on Marcus’ say-so*. This is, I believe, a hard pill to swallow. Second, we would need to ask ourselves how it can be that **ZIP** constrains what Marcus is permitted to judge but not what he is permitted to assert. Though this result admits several possible explanations, they all seem to leave us with unconvincing accounts of the normativity of belief and assertion. To illustrate, I will just mention three potential resolutions.

A first possibility would be to point out that, even if Marcus was not permitted to *judge* that p , his resulting belief that p is nevertheless on good epistemic standing. Since the usual candidates for the norm

¹³ This is how Christoph Kelp accounts for cases in which one continues inquiring after having settled (2021, 59-60).

of assertion only take into account the epistemic status of our doxastic attitudes, but are silent on the status of the acts whereby we adopt them, the fact that Marcus should not have judged that p would leave the assertability of p unaffected. However, as Friedman herself has stressed, claiming that "I'm allowed to have beliefs that according to **ZIP**, I'm not allowed to come to have" delivers "an uncomfortable set of normative verdicts" (2020, 522).

A second option would be to weaken our epistemic constraints on assertability by endorsing the Belief Norm of Assertion: the *only* necessary condition on the assertability of p is that one believes that p . But one concern with this solution is that the Belief Norm seems too permissive to most epistemologists—and reasonably so: the norm of assertion should not open the door to assertions of unsupported beliefs that are intuitively defective.¹⁴

Finally, we could endorse a stronger norm of assertion, such as the Knowledge Norm or the Justified Belief Norm, while at the same time stressing that, under **Z=E**, there can be cases of epistemically impermissible knowledge or impermissible justified belief.¹⁵ In Marcus' case, if his judgment was reliable or based on sufficient evidence, we can say that it was justified. But even if he *knew* that p , his judgment was still impermissible because it did not conform to **ZIP**. However, this doesn't affect the normative status of his assertion, because assertion is governed by the Knowledge Norm or the Justified Belief Norm, and neither knowledge nor justified belief entail epistemic permissibility. Now, while this solution may look more promising than the other two, it does not give us much in the way of solving our initial perplexity: if there is epistemically impermissible knowledge or impermissible justified belief, shouldn't that undermine our reasons to endorse the Knowledge Norm or the Justified Belief Norm? We still need an explanation for why it is acceptable to transmit information that we were not *epistemically* permitted to acquire in the first place.

Taking stock, it appears that denying **ZIP**'s ability to place epistemic constraints on our assertions would require us to reject the idea that it can impose epistemic constraints on our acts of belief formation. Again, it is reasonable to conclude that **ZIP** is not an epistemic norm.

3.3. ZIP is not an epistemic norm

The preceding discussions indicate that accepting **ZIP** as an epistemic norm leads to highly problematic consequences. On the one hand, it blurs the boundaries between epistemic and practical normativity; on the other hand, it muddles our ordinary epistemic assessments of testimony in deeply troubling ways. A preliminary conclusion that we could draw from this section is that if we commit to **Z=E**, we arrive at a doubly problematic picture of the epistemic domain: one that compromises the autonomy of the epistemic with respect to the practical, and that proves incapable of rationalizing some kinds of normative assessment that appear to be genuinely epistemic, such as those that take place in testimonial exchanges. These assessments seem to lie beyond the grasp of a thoroughly zetetic epistemology like the one Friedman advocates.

Before moving forward, I will consider two potential responses to these worries on behalf of the zetetic epistemologist. The first one suggests that I have misunderstood the way **ZIP** imposes obligations on inquirers. The second response concedes that **ZIP** generates the problems I discuss but contends that these can be easily solved if we embrace a modified version of this norm. I will argue that both responses

¹⁴ Actually, those who explicitly endorse the Belief Norm (e.g., Hindriks, 2007; and Bach, 2008) tend to supplement their accounts with the proviso that a belief is normatively appropriate only if it complies with an epistemic norm (paradigmatically, the Knowledge Norm of Belief).

¹⁵ The Knowledge Norm has been defended, among others, by Williamson (1996, 2000), DeRose (2002), Hawthorne (2003), Stanley (2005), and Engel (2008). Defenses of the Justified Belief Norm can be found in Lackey (2007) and Kvanvig (2009).

fail and that we would be better off rejecting the claim that **ZIP** (or any putative sibling norm) is epistemic in nature.

First objection: One may worry that I have not correctly interpreted the antecedent in **ZIP**. Remember that **ZIP** is formulated as an anankastic conditional: it prescribes taking the necessary means to figure out $Q^?$ if we *want* to figure out $Q^?$. Now, what does it take to truly *want* to figure out a question? A possible rejoinder would be that I have not answered this question properly. I have just assumed that because Eric's inquiry into *Problem?* and Marcus' school assignment were particularly important and urgent, they had the zetetic obligation of prioritizing them. But one could endorse a revealed preference theory of sorts here and argue that any shift in attention allocation reveals a change in zetetic interest. If this is correct, then the fact that they shifted their attention to a different question indicates that they didn't truly want to resolve those inquiries—or, at least, that those inquiries didn't enjoy a real priority for them. But if that were the case, we would avoid the problematic impermissibility verdicts in **Reckless Realtor** and **Pickpocket**: once Eric's attention turns to *Movie?*, and once Marcus becomes interested in the man running towards the building, these matters take priority in their respective research agendas, and their judgments—based as they are in excellent evidence—are perfectly permissible.

I have three things to say in reply to this objection. The first is a familiar concern: if this is what it takes to desire to figure out a question, it is implausible that zetetic obligations can be derived from our desires in such a straightforward manner. Reading the antecedent of **ZIP** in this way plunges us directly into the well-known bootstrapping problem.¹⁶ Second, I worry that accepting such a view commits us to a deeply impoverished conception of human motivation and agency. If it were true, it would be impossible for an inquirer to exhibit akratic behavior—i.e., to act against their best judgment or their most treasured desires. But this is precisely how I think that we should understand Eric and Marcus' irrationality as inquirers. In giving priority to inquiries that do not serve their deepest needs and desires, they incur in some kind of zetetic akrasia. Third, and more importantly, Friedman cannot afford such a liberal interpretation of **ZIP** if she wants to defend that there is normative tension in cases like **Window Count**. Her diagnosis that **ZIP** and the **P_a-norms** are incoherent hinges on the possibility of impermissible shifts of focus while inquiring into a question one wants to figure out. But in the picture proposed here, it becomes impossible to shift focus impermissibly. For instance, if Mar lost track of her window count because her curiosity was drawn to something happening in the street, that would just mean that her inquiry into the number of windows of the Picasso Tower has lost prevalence in her research agenda. There would be nothing epistemically impermissible about her behavior. In conclusion, Friedman needs a more stringent account of what it takes to desire to figure out a question (and of how to weigh the relative force of these desires) if **ZIP** is to perform the kind of normative work she intends it to.

A different way to address the concerns pressed in this section could be to replace **ZIP** with a slightly different zetetic norm. Couldn't the consequent of **ZIP** be formulated in terms of *permission* instead of obligation? Let us suppose that we replace **ZIP** with the following permission norm:

Permissive Zetetic Instrumental Principle (PZIP): One may take the necessary means to figuring out $Q^?$ if and only if one wants to figure out $Q^?$.

If **PZIP**, rather than **ZIP**, is the correct strategic norm of inquiry, then Eric's and Marcus's judgments are epistemically permissible, and Marcus' testimony to the police would be warranted even if we grant

¹⁶ See Bratman (1981). For arguments that intentions or aims cannot generate obligations, see Broome (2001), Brunero (2007), and Kolodny (2011).

that **PZIP** can constrain our acts of assertion. Eric wanted to know the movie's showtime, and maybe Marcus was interested in knowing where the hurried man was heading, so they were both permitted to take the means to resolve their inquiries.¹⁷

The main problem with this proposal is that **PZIP** lacks clear motivation. Why should we think that **PZIP** is a genuine norm of inquiry? In its defense, it might be argued that permission norms enjoy a significant pedigree in recent normative epistemology, where it is commonly held that there are no positive epistemic duties.¹⁸ However, we should bear in mind that the main arguments in favor of this contention have been formulated within the doxastic paradigm and therefore refer to the norms that govern the formation and revision of our doxastic attitudes. For instance, according to Nelson (2010), we cannot have positive epistemic duties regarding belief formation because our perceptual and propositional evidence is infinitely fertile: we just cannot come to believe every single proposition that our evidence supports. Our only epistemic obligations (at least in the doxastic realm) are negative: we must not believe against the evidence.

The problem is that this line of argument does not necessarily carry out to the zetetic domain. More crucially, zetetic normativity seems to be ripe with positive obligations. Inquirers have a duty to gather enough evidence before making a judgment. They ought to put off their judgments if new evidence is forthcoming, or double-check their conclusions if they have strong evidence that their initial inquiry might have been defective. They also have a duty (which **ZIP** intends to capture) to properly allocate their limited cognitive and non-cognitive resources and select suitable methods to thrive in their inquiries. Philosophers may debate whether these zetetic duties are practical or epistemic, but their existence seems uncontroversial.¹⁹

Now, if this is how the domain of inquiry looks like, it is not clear what role could permission norms like **PZIP** play in it. According to Friedman, a zetetic epistemology should aspire to guide inquirers in pursuing their epistemic goals. But **PZIP**'s normative verdicts seem too uninformative to offer proper guidance, especially in cases of conflicting zetetic interests such as **Reckless Realtor**. There seems to be a fact of the matter about what Eric ought to do, all zetetic things considered, but **PZIP** leaves us in the dark about it. An obligation norm like **ZIP** would be needed to account for this requirement. If we endorse **Z=E**, this norm would count as an epistemic one. And if it is epistemic, it will have to face the challenges I've laid out in this section.

In conclusion, then, there are strong reasons to reject that **ZIP** or any similar norm can be epistemic in nature. But if this is right, **Z=E** is in serious trouble: if **ZIP** is a zetetic norm, and **Z=E** is true, **ZIP** *must* be epistemic. Consequently, if we want to deny that **ZIP** is epistemic, we must reject **Z=E** as well: the epistemic and the zetetic do not constitute a unified normative domain.²⁰ In the remainder of the paper, I will further support this conclusion by examining the theoretical motivations that underlie Friedman's project.

¹⁷ I'm thankful to an anonymous referee for suggesting this possibility.

¹⁸ See Wrenn (2007), Nelson (2010), Littlejohn (2012), and Nottelmann (2021). Relatedly, in response to worries raised by Bykvist & Hattiangadi (2007), Whiting (2010, 2013) defends that the Truth Norm of Belief should be stated in terms of permissibility: One *may* believe that p iff it is true that p .

¹⁹ For defenses that there are epistemic norms on evidence-gathering, see Hall & Johnson (1998) and Flores & Woodward (2023). Relatedly, one can read the literature on normative defeat as implicitly defending that there are duties to gather evidence that have a normative import on the epistemic status of our beliefs (see Lackey, 2014; Goldberg, 2017, 2018). For a recent defense that there is an epistemic duty to double-check in light of countervailing higher-order evidence, see Palmira (2023).

²⁰ One could try to salvage **Z=E** by arguing that **ZIP** is not a genuine zetetic norm. Though there are grounds to pursue this strategy, I will set it aside in what follows and take issue with **Z=E**.

4. $Z \neq E$

In this section, I will argue that our best reasons in favor of the zetetic turn fall short of providing a rationale for it. I will begin by laying out what I consider the strongest considerations supporting Friedman's project. Then, I will explain why they fail to warrant $Z=E$.

4.1. *The case for a zetetically grounded epistemology*

To make the most compelling case for the zetetic turn, we must avoid presenting it as a mere change in subject matter for epistemology. Instead, we must put to the forefront those aspects of Friedman's proposal that might appeal to the epistemologists working within the doxastic paradigm. This is precisely what I aim to do in this section: in what follows, I try to provide a rationale for the zetetic turn that presents it as an attempt to solve some problems that arise within the doxastic paradigm itself.

First, I will consider $Z \subset E$, i.e., the claim that zetetic norms are epistemic. The doxastic epistemologist has an excellent reason to have reservations about this claim: inquiry and belief belong to different ontological categories. Doxastic attitudes are commonly conceived as states we *are* in, rather than things we actively *do*.²¹ Accordingly, within the doxastic paradigm, it is customary to construe epistemic norms as state-focused norms that tell us what kind of doxastic attitude we ought to *be* in, in the light of our overall epistemic situation. On the other hand, inquiry is an activity, even if its aims are epistemic. Whatever norms govern inquiry, it seems they must include action-oriented norms that tell us what we ought to *do* to achieve the aims of inquiry. Prima facie, then, it seems that the norms of belief and the norms of inquiry will fall widely apart: the former govern mental *states*, while the latter are concerned with *actions*. Hence, it should come as no surprise that zetetic norms don't strike many of those committed to the doxastic paradigm as distinctively epistemic norms.

The zetetic turn will appear as a non-starter unless we are offered a principled way to bridge this gap. Friedman, however, thinks this jump is unproblematic. She believes that doxastic epistemology is already concerned with norms that govern acts of *belief formation*, such as the **P_a-norms** we discussed above (Friedman, 2019, p. 689). While some have expressed concerns about the revisionary character of this claim (e.g., Thorstad, 2021, 2022), I don't believe that it represents a particularly radical departure from common conceptions about epistemic normativity.

Let us assume that the norms of belief are not merely evaluative, i.e., they don't only tell us what beliefs are good or bad *qua* beliefs. Many epistemologists claim that epistemic norms have a deontological component: they tell us what we are *required*, *permitted*, or *prohibited* to believe. True, the problem of doxastic voluntarism looms large once we adopt a robustly deontological conception of epistemic normativity.²² But let me set that question aside and focus on a more immediate concern: how can we make sense of the idea of a prescription to *have* an attitude? Can we be held responsible for just *being* in a mental state?

At first glance, our duties and responsibilities pertain to *what we do*, rather than to *how we are*. If we are to be held responsible for the latter in a meaningful way, it seems to me that this can only be done indirectly, by holding us responsible for leaving or entering the corresponding states. If this is correct, the proper way to account for the prescriptive force of our state-focused norms is to connect them, through suitable bridge principles, to norms governing the actions whereby we enter or leave the corresponding states.

²¹ Against this, philosophers like Boyle (2009, 2011) or Hieronymi (2009) have argued that we exercise some kind of agency in believing. See Chrisman (2018) and Setiya (2013) for arguments against their views.

²² See Alston (1988) for a classical attack on the deontological conception of justification built upon the thesis of doxastic involuntarism. Influential responses include Steup (2000), Feldman (2000), and Kornblith (2001).

To illustrate, let us suppose that I am bound by some prescription to be in state s . How can I comply with it? Imagine, first, that I am not currently in state s . In that case, I would be under the prescription to take action to bring myself into that state. But what if I am already in state s ? In that case, I am prescribed *not to abandon* that state. The takeaway is that complying with the norm that prescribes me to be in state s always requires following additional prescriptions for actions and omissions. By complying with the latter, we manage to comply with the former. The same considerations apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to the norms of belief: if I don't yet believe that p , but I ought to believe that p , then I ought to *form* the belief that p . And if I believe that p , and this is what the norms say that I ought to believe, then I ought to *maintain* that belief, *refraining from revising* it unless my evidential situation changes in a significant way. Consequently, I comply with the prescriptive norms of belief only insofar as I comply with related norms on belief formation, revision, and maintenance.

In the resulting view, the deontological aspect of the epistemic normativity of belief is accounted for indirectly through a set of neighboring norms governing our doxastic agency. Call this thesis *action-norms* (**AN**):

AN: in order to conform to deontic epistemic prescriptions on our doxastic attitudes, we must comply with norms governing our doxastic agency.

It is important to note that endorsing **AN** does not entail prioritizing norms governing actions over state-focused norms about belief. The thesis is perfectly compatible with holding that the norms governing our attitudes are explanatorily fundamental.²³ **AN** just claims that any prescriptive consequence of the norms that govern our doxastic attitudes can only be enforced through norms governing the actions that constitute adopting, revising, or maintaining those attitudes. Again, I believe this is a natural way of unpacking a deontological conception of the epistemic normativity of belief, and I don't think it is such an unorthodox view within traditional epistemology.

With **AN** in place, it seems that the first obstacle to the convergence of epistemic and zetetic norms dissolves: the room is now open for considering some norms governing actions as thoroughly epistemic. However, as I have stated and defended it, **AN** is too weak to vindicate zetetic norms as epistemic. It certainly gives epistemic credentials to those standards—such as the **P_a-norms**—that govern the acts whereby we adopt, maintain, or abandon a doxastic attitude. But zetetic norms also govern actions that occur upstream from the moment of belief formation and revision. They should also regulate what strategies or methods we should select and deploy in inquiry, or how much evidence we should gather before making a judgment. Consequently, for **ZCE** to hold, the following precisification of **AN** must be true:

AN*: in order to conform to deontic epistemic prescriptions on our doxastic attitudes, we must comply with the norms that govern those actions that promote the adoption of the epistemically correct doxastic attitudes.

Something like **AN*** lurks in the background of Friedman's arguments for **ZCE**. In her view, if φ -ing leads to the acquisition of those beliefs we ought to have (i.e., true or knowledgeable answers to our questions), then φ -ing is an activity that falls under the purview of epistemic norms. Indeed, if we accept

²³ This is actually the most natural reading, as Friedman herself points out: “isn't the best explanation of one's having a requirement to form a belief that one has a requirement to have that belief?” (2020, 520).

this picture, restricting the scope of the epistemic to just our doxastic states (or extending it only to acts of belief formation, revision, and maintenance) would be "unprincipled and parochial" (2020, p. 527). On such an account, zetetic norms would also have to count as epistemic.

This is undoubtedly a highly controversial view, and I'll explore some of its problematic consequences in §4.2. However, I hope to have shown that it is a view that can be argued for from within the doxastic paradigm, based on considerations about the epistemic normativity of belief and what it requires from us. If we make the crucial assumption that the norms of belief have a strong deontological component, guiding and constraining us in our cognitive endeavors, the issue of how the norms that govern our doxastic attitudes relate to those that govern our doxastic agency comes up naturally. Here, I submit, lies our strongest reason to believe that zetetic norms might be epistemic.

Let us turn now to **ECZ**. In what sense might epistemic norms count as zetetic? The way I see it, Friedman's argument for this claim rests on taking a particular stance about the source of the authority of the epistemic norms that govern belief.

In epistemology, as in any other normative domain, we can distinguish two types of questions about norms. On the one hand, we can ask what our epistemic norms require, permit, or forbid us to believe. These are questions about the conditions of epistemic *correctness*, and we answer them by providing the best possible formulations of the epistemic norms that we hold to be true. On the other hand, we can also ask what grounds the *authority* of these epistemic norms. Even if we knew full well what the true norms of belief are and what they require of us, we may still wonder why we should conform to them. Why do we care about following epistemic norms? What explains their normative force? These are *metanormative questions* that we must answer through an account of the source of epistemic normativity.

Friedman's preferred account ties the authority of epistemic norms to our zetetic interests (2020, p. 526). Simply put, epistemic norms are authoritative because they help us to achieve our goals as inquirers. The viability of the zetetic turn depends crucially on this account of the source of epistemic normativity, which I will call—following Friedman's own lingo—*zetetic grounding* (**ZG**):

ZG: The authority of epistemic norms is grounded in our local interest in settling the questions we want to figure out in our inquiries.

Before moving on, I want to highlight two things about **ZG**. The first one is that **ZG** is a type of *instrumentalism* about the source of epistemic normativity. Epistemic instrumentalists explain the authority of epistemic norms by the fact that conforming to them is an instrumentally rational means to the satisfaction of some end.²⁴ In the zetetic version of instrumentalism, epistemic norms are authoritative because they help to achieve the aim of inquiry: conforming to them is a means to settling the questions we are curious about.

The second point I want to emphasize is that while Friedman clearly endorses **ZG**, she does not provide much in the way of a justification for it. Her only argument on its behalf seems to be that denying **ZG** would render the authority of epistemic norms mysterious: "if epistemic norms are not norms of inquiry, then what are they, and why should we conform to them?" (2020, p. 533). Much more could be said in support of **ZG**. Conversely, many objections could be raised against it. However, I am going to remain silent about these matters. For the purposes of this paper, it will suffice to grant that **ZG** is a serious contender in the debate about the source of epistemic normativity.

²⁴ Important defenses of epistemic instrumentalism include Foley (1987, 1992), Kornblith (1993), Leite (2007), Schroeder (2008), Cowie (2014), Steglich-Petersen (2018), Sharadin (2018, 2021), Dyke (2021), and Willoughby, (2022). For criticisms, see Kelly (2003, 2007), Lockard (2013), Côté-Bouchard (2015, 2016), and Buckley (2021).

More importantly, **ZG** is a crucial ingredient in any defense of the zetetic turn: if it is true, then the authority of epistemic and zetetic norms stems from the same source, namely, our local zetetic interests. Adherence to **ZG** seems necessary to defend that epistemic norms are zetetic—and this, in turn, is necessary if we want to defend that epistemology is the theory of inquiry.

To conclude, I contend that the conjunction of **AN*** and **ZG** gives us the strongest possible rationale for embracing the zetetic turn. Both claims are undoubtedly controversial, but they are also appealing and well-motivated. I want to argue now that they are nevertheless insufficient for vindicating **Z=E**.

4.2. Against the unity of the epistemic and the zetetic

To see why **AN*** and **ZG** don't give enough support to **Z=E**, let us revisit Friedman's zetetic norm of choice, **ZIP**. What would warrant that zetetic norms like **ZIP** are epistemic, whereas norms such as the **P_a-norms** are not? We would have to read the claim that all and only zetetic norms are epistemic in quite a strong way, i.e., as stating that all and only the norms that promote achieving the aims of inquiry belong to the epistemic domain. Following this reading, I propose to reconstruct Friedman's argument in defense of the epistemic nature of **ZIP** as follows:

ARGUMENT FOR THE EPISTEMIC NATURE OF ZIP

EZ1. An action norm *N* is epistemic if and only if it regulates our actions in a way that promotes our having the beliefs that we epistemically ought to have.

[**ZCE**]

EZ2. A belief is one that we epistemically ought to have if and only if it correctly settles some question we try to figure out in inquiry.

[**ECZ**]

EZ3. An action norm *N* is epistemic if and only if it regulates our actions in a way that promotes correctly settling the questions we try to figure out in inquiry.

[**EZ1, EZ2, substitution**]

EZ4. **ZIP** is a norm that regulates our actions in a way that promotes correctly settling the questions we try to figure out in inquiry.

EZ5. **ZIP** is an epistemic norm.

[**EZ3, EZ4, instantiation**]

I believe that no weaker version of **ZCE** and **ECZ** than the ones captured in **EZ1** and **EZ2** can secure the result that **ZIP** is an epistemic norm. But if this is right, the defender of **Z=E** faces a problem, for **AN*** is insufficient to motivate **EZ1**, and the force of **EZ2** rests on an excessively strong reading of **ZG**.

Let us consider **EZ1** first. Recall that **AN*** says that in order to conform to deontic epistemic prescriptions on our doxastic attitudes, we must comply with the norms that govern those actions that promote the adoption of the epistemically correct doxastic attitudes. Now, this just expresses the idea that to make sense of the existence of norms that tell us what we ought to believe, we must posit the existence of further norms prescribing actions that promote that we end up believing as we ought. Indeed, **AN*** implies that there is a close link between the norms of belief and the norms of inquiry. Still, it does not necessarily follow from it that we must include both under the umbrella of a single normative domain. One could resist this conclusion by arguing that the ontological differences between doxastic states and acts of inquiry give ground to different profiles of normativity, thereby delivering two different, albeit interrelated, normative domains.

Crucially, even within the broad ontological category of actions, the disanalogies between acts of inquiry and acts of belief formation may be strong enough to recommend against such an amalgamation. True, gathering evidence on whether p and judging that p can both be means that (if performed correctly) promote the end of believing as we ought about whether p . However, the two have very different relationships to that goal: while evidence-gathering is part of the causal process that leads to the fulfillment of the aim of believing as we ought about whether p , judging that p *constitutes* the fulfillment of such aim²⁵. To this, we should add that we do not exert the same kind of control over our acts of belief formation as we can exert over acts of inquiry. While the latter can be controlled voluntarily and can respond to reasons of the wrong kind, the former seem to escape voluntary control and respond only to the right kind of reasons²⁶. These differences suggest that inquiry and belief formation also have distinct normative profiles, and that simply sharing a goal may not be enough to place them in the same normative domain.

The upshot of these remarks is that **AN*** alone seems insufficient to support **EZ1**.²⁷ The zetetic epistemologist owes us additional reasons, beyond **AN***, to convince us that **EZ1** is true. The dialectical burden is strong because the claim has some counterintuitive consequences that many epistemologists would prefer to avoid. A usual concern in this regard is that the criterion embodied by **EZ1** seems to over-generate epistemic norms.²⁸ For instance, activities such as taking a nap if you are tired or eating a sandwich if you are hungry might enhance your ability to adopt accurate beliefs: they can *promote* our having the beliefs that we ought to have. But it is implausible that there are epistemic norms governing these activities.²⁹

At this point, one may wonder whether **ZCE** could be defended on a different basis. Recently, some philosophers have pursued alternative strategies to establish the existence of distinctively epistemic norms of inquiry.³⁰ However, while these epistemologists claim that *some* zetetic norms are epistemic in nature, they also acknowledge that *not all* are.³¹ Consequently, they all reject **ZCE**. Defending the idea that *all* zetetic norms are epistemic seems to require the teleological approach encapsulated by **EZ1**. But as I have tried to show, even if we remain committed to **AN***, **EZ1** can and *should* be resisted.

If we reject **EZ1**, that alone would suffice for the ARGUMENT FOR THE EPISTEMIC NATURE OF **ZIP** to fail. And since the claim that **ZIP** is an epistemic norm is one of the fundamental premises of the

²⁵ This is terminology I borrow from Steglich-Petersen (2021).

²⁶ For an overview of the right kind of reasons/wrong kind of reasons distinction, see Gertken & Kiesewetter (2017).

²⁷ Indeed, **AN*** would be perfectly compatible with alternative pictures that don't make the norms of belief and inquiry coalesce. One such picture could be Baehr's (2011) account of the relationship between character-based virtue epistemology and traditional epistemology. Thorstad's (2021, 2022) contention that epistemologists should study zetetic norms, *even though* these norms are not *stricto sensu* epistemic, could also be rationalized by **AN***.

²⁸ Another concern I won't develop here is that the view might generate problematic epistemic trade-offs. For discussion, see Falbo (2023, Sect. 5.1.)

²⁹ This problem was first pointed out by Horowitz. For discussion, see Horowitz (2019), and Thorstad (2022). In contrast, see Singer & Aronowitz (2022) for a defense that we can indeed have epistemic reasons to eat sandwiches.

³⁰ For instance, Flores and Woodward (2023) have recently defended that there exist epistemic norms on evidence-gathering on the ground that poor evidence-gathering practices are subject to a distinctive kind of epistemic blame. Following Kelp (2021), Palmira (2023, Sec. 2.2) conceives of inquiry as an activity with a constitutive epistemic aim that determines a critical domain and takes the norms that assess those things that are distinctive of this domain to be epistemic.

³¹ It is quite telling that these authors make considerable efforts to show that their proposals don't deliver epistemic norms on eating sandwiches (see also Fleisher, 2023, Sec. 5.2). In a sense, one could read these accounts as aiming to give us criteria to distinguish those zetetic norms that are distinctively epistemic from those that are not, and leaving putative sandwich norms out of the epistemic is one of the main desiderata that motivates their respective accounts.

ARGUMENT FROM NORMATIVE TENSION, if **ZIP** is not epistemic, one of the two key arguments for **Revision** would be undermined.

That being said, it is worth examining premise **EZ2** as well. This claim captures Friedman's understanding of what it means for epistemic norms on belief to be zetetically grounded. In a zetetic epistemology, these norms are reinterpreted as norms for question-settling. They are zetetically grounded because they are thoroughly zetetic: they are norms for closing inquiry (see Friedman, forthcoming). We should recall that this contention also underpinned the second argument for **Revision**, the ARGUMENT FROM ZETETIC UNGROUNDEDNESS. That argument was independent of the claim that **ZIP** is epistemic, so it is crucial to investigate whether it can be resisted.

I will now show that we can unpack **ZG** in a different way than Friedman does.³² To see how, notice that **ZG** claims only that *the authority* of epistemic norms is grounded in our zetetic interests. It is crucial to bear in mind that this doesn't necessarily entail that a belief or an act of belief formation needs to respond to a zetetic interest to be correct. We should be careful to distinguish two different kinds of claims:

Correctness claim: According to norm N, φ -ing is correct under conditions C.

Authority claim: Norm N is authoritative under conditions C*.

Recall that **ZG** is a thesis about the source of epistemic normativity, i.e., about the conditions under which epistemic norms enjoy authority or genuine normative force, not about their correctness conditions.³³ What I want to stress now is that, while these two sets of conditions might very well coincide, it is *prima facie* possible that they do not fully overlap: a norm may not be authoritative in all situations in which it issues a verdict of correctness.

The alternative way of unpacking **ZG** that I'll suggest builds on this distinction between correctness and authority claims. Even if the authority of the norms of belief and belief formation derives from the fact that they are instrumental in resolving our inquiries, it can be argued that the epistemic correctness of our beliefs and judgments depends on objective standards that are entirely independent of our zetetic interests. When we ask what it takes to settle a question *correctly*, plausible answers are that beliefs are properly question-settling when they are true, constitute knowledge, or are based on sufficient evidence. These lead us directly into the usual debates about the fundamental norm of belief that contemporary epistemologists are so fond of. Although it may be true that inquiry is the only context where it matters whether our beliefs are true, knowledgeable or justified, that doesn't force us to restrict conditions of epistemic correctness to the context of inquiry.

If these considerations are sound, we could endorse a picture where the norms of belief are the traditional ones, and what **ZG** says is just that the authority of such norms is restricted to contexts of inquiry, without thereby constraining the conditions of epistemic correctness in any relevant way. In contexts where no zetetic interest is served, epistemic norms may enjoy no authority, but it is nevertheless possible to believe correctly. This picture would deliver an independent domain of epistemic normativity with its own objective criteria for correctness, which would hold regardless of the conditions that make it worthwhile to follow epistemic norms.³⁴

³² The following discussion is deeply indebted to similar proposals advanced by Côté-Bouchard (2021), Maguire & Woods (2020), and Sharadin (2022).

³³ For arguments against this distinction, see Paakkunainen (2018).

³⁴ More precisely, it would constitute an independent *critical domain*, in the sense advanced by Sosa (2007).

Importantly, the view preserves the intuition behind **ZG** without thereby committing us to the stronger claim that epistemic norms on belief are just a subset of zetetic norms. In this way, it allows us to sidestep the complications that arise from Friedman’s more stringent proposal. As I will now argue, one of the consequences of embracing this account is that neither the ARGUMENT FOR THE EPISTEMIC NATURE OF **ZIP** nor the ARGUMENT FROM ZETETIC UNGROUNDEDNESS would follow. Consequently, if we unpack **ZG** in the alternative way I propose, we can resist the conclusion that **ZIP** is epistemic and that we should revise our traditional epistemic norms.

Let us focus first on the ARGUMENT FOR THE EPISTEMIC NATURE OF **ZIP**. Notice that once we acknowledge that claims of normative authority and claims of epistemic correctness can diverge, the phrase “epistemically ought to have” in the first two premises of the argument becomes ambiguous. Should we read this “ought” in terms of normative authority or in terms of epistemic correctness? If we opt for the former, **EZ2** would come out true (given our previous commitment to **ZG**), but **EZ1** would become highly contentious. Whether a norm is epistemic or not is something that should depend on its connection to epistemic correctness, regardless of the factors that confer normative authority upon epistemic correctness. However, if we read “ought” as denoting mere correctness, then it is **EZ2** that begins to look suspicious: *ex hypothesi*, the epistemic correctness of a belief is detached from the specifics about our zetetic interests that may make its correctness authoritative. Given that “ought” must maintain a consistent interpretation in both premises for the argument to come out valid, it becomes apparent that the conclusion that **ZIP** is epistemic would not logically ensue.

Turning now to the ARGUMENT FROM ZETETIC UNGROUNDEDNESS, recall that it rested on the following crucial premise:

ZU2. A norm *N* is zetetically grounded if and only if it regulates our φ -ing in a way that promotes correctly settling the questions we try to figure out in inquiry.

In Friedman’s understanding of **ZG**, it follows from **ZU2** that the **P_a-norms** are not zetetically grounded, since they permit us to form beliefs that don’t serve the actual goals of our inquiries. In my alternative proposal, however, this conclusion does not follow: the beliefs under contention are permitted because they are epistemically correct, even though the absence of a zetetic interest that these beliefs could serve deprives such verdict of permissibility of strong normative authority. And, since following the **P_a-norms** *does* serve the goals of inquiry when the propositions under purview are potential answers to questions we want to figure out, these norms are zetetically grounded, and there is no need to revise them.

Gathering these threads, we can see how both **AN*** and **ZG** can be unpacked in ways that make it unnecessary to adhere to the stronger theses of **ZCE** and **ECZ**. The arguments presented in §3 gave us independent reasons to believe that **ZCE** and **ECZ** are false. If these claims were true, **ZIP** would be an epistemic norm. From this, **Revision** would follow, as well as the problematic consequences I explored in §3. But with **ZCE** and **ECZ** out of the table, our reasons to believe that zetetic norms like **ZIP** are epistemic would be undermined, and Friedman’s two arguments for **Revision** would fail. Consequently, even if we believe that **AN*** and **ZG** are true, we have strong reasons not to adhere to **ZCE** and **ECZ**. Or what is the same, we should not take the zetetic turn.

5. Concluding remarks

In the previous pages, I have tried to assess the prospects of Friedman’s proposal for a zetetic turn in epistemology. On the positive side, I have acknowledged that there is a plausible rationale underwriting this proposal. Indeed, it might be the case that epistemic norms bind us because we are inquirers

interested in figuring out a myriad of questions about the world that surrounds us (**ZG**). Maybe it is precisely by engaging in inquiry that we comply with such norms (**AN***). One could take these facts as a cue that the norms that govern our doxastic attitudes and the norms that govern our inquiry-related activities conform a single, unified normative domain. However, I have tried to show that if we take this suggestion to its last consequences, we are left with an unmanageable picture of the domain of epistemic normativity—one that blurs the boundaries between the epistemic and the practical and which struggles to make sense of fairly unproblematic kinds of epistemic assessment such as the ones that go on when we exchange information through testimony. Given this predicament, it seems wiser to keep the epistemic and the zetetic at a safe distance, even if we acknowledge that they interact in deep and interesting ways.

Fortunately, this can be achieved without sacrificing the intuitions that underlie Friedman's proposal: even if **ZG** and **AN*** are true, we don't need to endorse **Z=E**. Furthermore, if our best reasons for the zetetic turn are insufficient to vindicate it and its consequences are so unwelcome, it seems clear that we should reject **Z=E**. Epistemology should not take the zetetic turn.³⁵

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