

Should Epistemology Take the Zetetic Turn?

Arianna Falbo

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Abstract

What is the relationship between inquiry and epistemology? Are epistemic norms the norms that guide us as inquirers—as agents in the pursuit of knowledge and understanding? Recently, there has been growing support for what I, following Friedman (2020), will call the *zetetic turn* in epistemology, the view that all epistemic norms are norms of inquiry. This paper investigates the prospects of an inquiry-centered approach to epistemology and develops several motivations for resisting it. First, I argue that the norms of inquiry are most plausibly seen as practical, not as distinctively epistemic. Second, I argue that a zetetically-grounded epistemology is unable to properly account for the rationality of belief. It fails to account for cases where intuitively irrational beliefs promote inquiry, or where intuitively rational beliefs are zetetically useless or counterproductive to inquiry. The main upshot is this: there must be a source of epistemic normativity that isn't ultimately zetetic.

1 Introduction

Here's a fact about life. It's often *really* important to figure out the answers to our questions. Where are my keys? What time is it? Is the tumor benign or malignant? Should I have children? Is this love or just lust? Am I doing my part to combat climate change? Inquiry is a ubiquitous part of everyday life. Before many of us walk and talk, we inquire: we explore and learn about the world around us and our place within it.

Here's another fact, not about everyday life, but about the current state of contemporary normative epistemology. For the most part, it appears to have ignored inquiry. According to a fairly prevalent view, the fundamental question at the heart of normative epistemology is: *what is rational belief or what is knowledge?* A common orthodoxy has it that epistemic normativity is, by and large, the normativity of belief, and doxastic states more generally. Following Hookway (2006) and Friedman (Forth), let's call this approach the *Doxastic Paradigm* for normative epistemology.

Recently, however, the tides have begun to turn, and the Doxastic Paradigm has come under serious scrutiny. A forceful challenge to this view flows from a worry that the Doxastic Paradigm is myopic. According to this approach, epistemic norms only kick in at the point of belief formation and they only concern the evidence that one happens to have, not the evidence one might want or need. But, the argument goes, shouldn't epistemic norms guide us in the pursuit of evidence too?

The Doxastic Paradigm fixates upon the end point of a much more robust and temporally extended process. But, what about the initial questioning itself? What about the

figuring-things-out part of the equation? Shouldn't the pathway leading up to belief—that is, shouldn't *inquiry*—also fall under the purview of normative epistemology? The journey should be (at least) as important as the destination, or so the challenge goes.

If this is right, then the fundamental question at the heart of normative epistemology is not *what is rational belief*, but instead something potentially more inclusive, namely: *what is rational inquiry*. Let's call the norms governing inquiry *zetetic* norms.¹ Should epistemology take the zetetic turn? Are all epistemic norms zetetic? We can formulate the zetetic turn more precisely in terms of a commitment to the following thesis.

THE ZETETIC TURN

All epistemic norms derive from, or are grounded in, zetetic considerations.²

This paper investigates the prospects of a zetetically-grounded epistemology and cautions against it. Here's the plan. In §2, I outline motivations for taking the zetetic turn. In §3, I consider the normative status of zetetic norms, and I suggest that they are most plausibly understood as practical, and not distinctively epistemic. In §4, I consider a recent proposal for taking zetetic norms as epistemic, without accepting that all epistemic norms are zetetic, and I raise some challenges that this view faces. In §5, I draw out some of the consequences of taking the zetetic turn, and I defend several motivations for resisting it. These arguments stem from a common concern that zetetic norms can't properly explain the rationality of belief. In §6, I draw some lessons concerning the relationship between inquiry and normative epistemology and consider how we might still recognize important epistemic dimensions of our inquiring practices, while nonetheless resisting an inquiry-centric approach to normative epistemology.

The main upshot is this: epistemic normativity is not zetetic normativity. There must be epistemic norms that aren't ultimately zetetic.

2 Why take the Zetetic Turn?

A growing number of epistemologists have begun to take the zetetic turn. [Hookway \(2006\)](#) characterizes the goal of normative epistemology as follows:

The core question concerns how it is possible to be good at inquiry rather than, more simply, what it is to have justified beliefs or knowledge. . . Epistemology is primarily concerned with how it is possible for us to engage in activities such as inquiry and deliberation, and *questions about knowledge and about justification should be seen as subordinate* to these concerns ([2006](#), 100-101, 109, italics added).

Similarly, [Ballantyne \(2019\)](#) argues for the view that: "Epistemology is careful reflection on inquiry" ([2019](#), 1). More recently, [Kelp \(2020, 2021\)](#) has developed a view of epistemic normativity which takes inquiry as the starting point for epistemological theorizing. He

¹This terminology follows ([Friedman; 2020](#), 501). 'Zetetic' means roughly 'proceeding by inquiry', but for our purposes, it will mean something looser like, having to do with inquiry.

²The phrase "zetetic turn" can also be used in a broader way, to refer simply to turning our attention more towards zetetic norms (see [Thorstad \(2021\)](#); [Flores and Woodard \(forthcoming\)](#)). Here I'll use it to refer to the more ambitious program of grounding all epistemic norms in zetetic ones, see [Friedman \(2020, Forth\)](#), [Steglich-Petersen \(2021\)](#), and [Kelp \(2021, 2020\)](#).

defends the position that epistemology is *the theory of inquiry*.³ In a similar spirit, [Friedman \(2020\)](#) defends the *unity of the epistemic and the zetetic*, namely: that all epistemic norms are norms of inquiry and that all norms of inquiry are epistemic norms.⁴ Relatedly, [Fleisher \(Forthcoming\)](#) argues that: “the domain of epistemic normativity should be understood as the entire domain of inquiry.” And [Steglich-Petersen \(2021\)](#) defends a distinct but related view: that epistemic reasons are a subclass of zetetic reasons, and hence, that all epistemic norms are zetetically grounded.

According to all such views, the project of normative epistemology is first and foremost to offer an account of the norms governing rational inquiry. The main task is to delineate a distinctly *epistemic* dimension of normativity, as importantly different from other kinds of normativity. The zetetic turn promises to accomplish this task by putting inquiry center stage. What makes epistemic norms distinctive is their role in helping us to achieve zetetic success ([Friedman; 2020](#), 527). This is in contrast to a more traditional approach, for example, an evidentialist approach, on which epistemic norms rationally evaluate beliefs, and doxastic states more generally, in relation to the evidence.⁵

Why take the zetetic turn? A forceful argument in favor of the zetetic turn stems from an apparent tension between plausible zetetic norms and more traditional norms from contemporary epistemology. To get a sense of this tension consider the following case adapted from ([Friedman; 2020](#), 502-503).

DISTRACTED DARIUS

Darius runs a window washing business and it’s crucial for him to figure out *exactly* how many windows the CN Tower has. Let’s assume that the best way for him to do this is to count all the windows himself. This task requires his sustained attention. But, because the CN tower is a busy tourist attraction, he keeps getting distracted by the constant hustle and bustle. As he’s counting, he notices the light-up shoes of a small child running past him. And he comes to believe that the child is wearing light-up shoes. He counts a couple more windows, but then his focus shifts to a mysterious smudge of pink goop in the corner of his visual field and he comes to believe that it’s old gum. These fluctuations in and out of attention continue to the point where Darius completely loses count of the windows.

Obviously, if we ever want to find out how many windows the CN tower has, we can’t be like Darius. We are finite creatures with limited time and cognitive resources. Inquiries like this require us to apportion our time and resources judiciously. Darius’ constant distractions prevent him from successfully completing his inquiry. He’s failing to take the means necessary to figure out the answer to his question.

However, putting the window washing business aside for the moment, there is also a sense in which we might want to be *just like* Darius. After all, Darius is attending to his evidence and coming to have rational beliefs and knowledge on the basis of it. How could we, as epistemologists, fault him for that? Epistemic norms don’t ever seem to prohibit

³[Kelp \(2020, 2021\)](#) indirectly argues for this view. He takes this position for granted, and uses it to address a number of debates in epistemology concerning the nature of epistemic phenomena, the value of knowledge, and skepticism. I discuss Kelp’s approach to zetetic epistemology in §3 and §5.

⁴[\(Friedman; 2020, 526\)](#) argues for the view that zetetic norms and epistemic norms are identical. I will be targeting a weaker claim in the paper, namely, that all epistemic norms are zetetic. This leaves open the possibility of non-epistemic zetetic norms (e.g., moral norms of inquiry which tell one to inquire into the well-being of a loved one).

⁵For influential defences of evidentialism see: [Conee and Feldman \(1985, 2004\)](#); [Feldman \(2000\)](#).

coming to have rational beliefs or knowledge on the basis of one's evidence. So, while Darius is clearly a bad inquirer, he appears to be a good believer.

How does DISTRACTED DARIUS motivate a tension between traditional epistemic norms and zetetic norms? Friedman considers the following two norms, which she classifies as belonging to the Doxastic Paradigm (Friedman; 2020, 514).

EPISTEMIC PERMISSION (EP)

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

KNOWLEDGE PERMISSION (KP)

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

Friedman argues that EP and KP are broadly in the spirit of traditional evidentialist norms.⁶ To motivate EP and KP it's helpful to consider what their rejection would entail. Rejecting EP would entail the possibility of one's coming to believe that p on the basis of excellent evidence where this constitutes a genuine epistemic mistake. Similarly, if one were to reject KP, then it's possible for one to acquire knowledge they were in some sense not epistemically permitted to acquire. But, it's *knowledge!* It seems like gaining knowledge is always a good thing from the epistemic point of view.⁷

Next, consider a plausible zetetic norm.

ZETETIC INSTRUMENTAL PRINCIPLE (ZIP)

If one wants to figure out the answer to a question, then one ought to take the means necessary to figure out the answer to that question (Friedman; 2020, 503).

ZIP is a straightforward instrumental principle which enjoins inquirers to pursue the means necessary to accomplish their zetetic goals. If you want to figure out how many tentacles a cuttlefish has, you can't just sit around waiting for one to crawl into your living room. Instead, you need to take meaningful action towards resolving this question—you need to inquire!

With these norms in place, let's return to DISTRACTED DARIUS. A tension among these norms emerges as follows:

1. EP says Darius is *permitted* to come to believe that p (e.g., that the pink goop is old gum) at t , since he has excellent evidence for p at t .
2. ZIP requires Darius to focus his attention on his present inquiry.
3. It's not possible for Darius to stay focused on his inquiry at t while coming to believe that p at t .
4. So, Darius is rationally *prohibited* from coming to believe that p at t .
5. Result: ZIP sometimes *prohibits* what EP *permits*.

Taken together, ZIP and EP lead to normative incoherence. So, something's got to go, but what? Friedman (2020) argues that we should take the zetetic turn: we should reject traditional epistemic norms like EP and KP and adopt zetetic norms like ZIP.

⁶However, Friedman notes that EP and KP are diachronic norms that concern acts (i.e., the processes of coming to believe or know that p), opposed to synchronic norms which evaluate epistemic states directly at a time (Friedman; 2020, 504). For related discussion on the relationship between norms of inquiry and more traditional evidentialist norms, see Haziza (2022).

⁷Friedman (2020), fn. 34, notes that Lasonen-Aarnio (2010)'s account of "unreasonable knowledge" might open up space for the rejection of KP.

3 Are zetetic norms epistemic?

At first, a tension between ZIP and EP might not seem all that worrying. If the norms governing inquiry are *practical* norms—which just happen to have epistemic ends like knowledge or rational belief—then this tension is familiar. It’s an instance of a well-known clash between epistemic rationality and practical rationality. Consider an influential example from Nozick (1993):

... a mother is presented with courtroom evidence that her son has committed a grave crime, evidence that convinces everyone else but, were she to believe this, that would make her life miserable thereafter (1993, 69).

The mother has strong evidence which indicates the guilt of her son, but, given that this belief would hurt her, she also has a strong practical reason against believing in accordance with the evidence.⁸ Conflicts between the epistemic and the practical are well-trodden territory.⁹ So, if zetetic norms are practical norms, then the tension between ZIP, EP, and KP poses no serious threat to the coherence of contemporary normative epistemology.

However, Friedman (2020) argues that ZIP is a genuinely *epistemic* norm. She says:

ZIP strikes me as a distinctively epistemic norm: it’s the sort of norm the conforming to which makes for good inquiry; it’s a norm that rational subjects in pursuit of knowledge and understanding are going to conform to; it’s a norm that we’ll follow if we want to successfully move ourselves from ignorance to knowledge or from confusion to comprehension; it’s a norm of inquiry (2020, 505).

Why is ZIP epistemic? Because it’s central to our epistemic pursuits. Agents who are trying to gain epistemic goods like knowledge and understanding will conform to ZIP. But, is the fact that the aim of inquiry is epistemic (e.g., knowing the answer to one’s question) sufficient to establish that ZIP, and zetetic norms more generally, are epistemic too? Perhaps not.

Consider the following analogy.¹⁰ Charlie is hungry and he has the goal of making a gourmet dinner. Given this goal, we might describe him as having a *gastronomic* reason to go to the grocery store. This reason aims towards the gastronomic end of cooking a gourmet meal. Or consider Lee, a life-long gardener. Summer is coming, so as usual Lee has the goal of growing a lush vegetable garden. Given this goal, we might describe her as having a *horticultural* reason to water her plants.

One might reason as follows: given that the activity of grocery shopping is aimed at a gastronomic end, it follows that this activity is governed by gastronomic norms. Similarly, given that the activity of watering one’s plants is aimed at a horticultural end, it follows that this activity is governed by horticultural norms. So, on this basis, should we conclude that there are two unique normative domains which govern horticultural activities and gastronomic activities, respectively? It seems not. This would carve up the normative landscape

⁸Here I am granting, for the sake of argument, that there are instrumental or practical reasons to believe. However, see, for example, Berker (2018) and Arpaly (ms.) for arguments against this view.

⁹This traces back most prominently to the debate between Clifford (1877) and James (1897). For a contemporary overview of this debate see Marušić (2011) and Chignell (2018).

¹⁰This analogy follows arguments given in Arpaly (ms.), which argues that there are no epistemic reasons to perform actions. Also see related arguments from Kelly (2003); Raz (2009); Nelson (2010); Cohen (2016) and Simion (2018) against epistemic reasons to act.

much too finely. It's far more simple and straightforward to interpret Charlie's and Lee's actions as governed by the *same* domain of normativity, which guides all goal-directed activities, regardless of their more specific aims, namely: practical normativity.

Let's reconsider the DISTRACTED DARIUS case. Darius has an *epistemic* goal: he wants to know how many windows the CN Tower has. But, does it follow that the norms governing his activity are *epistemic* norms? For the same reason that we can't infer that Lee's actions are governed by horticultural norms, or that Charlie's actions are governed by gastronomic norms, so too should we resist the inference from Darius' having an epistemic goal, to the claim that his goal-directed actions are governed by epistemic norms.

We can press this worry further by considering an over-generality problem that Horowitz (2019) has recently raised. We're better and more productive inquirers when we're not hungry. So, if one is trying to figure out the answer to some question, it would be a good idea to eat a sandwich. Does this mean that there are epistemic reasons to eat sandwiches? Horowitz argues, quite plausibly, that epistemology shouldn't tell us to eat a sandwich (2019, 116).¹¹

Expanding the reach of epistemic normativity to apply to the activities that one will conform to when successfully resolving one's inquiries—things like paying attention to relevant evidence, but also: staying hydrated, eating your fruits and vegetables, drinking coffee, getting a good night's sleep, and so on—seriously risks inflating epistemic normativity beyond recognition. The norms governing goal-directed activity don't inherit their normative status via the subject matter of the specific ends that such actions are directed towards.

How might the zetetic epistemologist respond? Recently, Kelp (2020, 2021) has argued that the zetetic constitutes a unique domain of normativity, distinct from the practical and moral domain. Kelp's argument centers upon the idea that inquiry is an activity with a *constitutive* aim, and that the aim is to settle the answer to a question by coming to have knowledge of the answer.¹²

To get a grip on Kelp's view it's helpful to return to the case of Charlie. Charlie has a gastronomic aim: he wants to cook a gourmet dinner. In order to achieve this aim, he engages in the activity of grocery shopping. But, notice that the connection between Charlie's gastronomic aim and his goal-directed activity is merely *contingent*. It's possible to engage in the activity of grocery shopping without having a gastronomic aim. For instance, you might be grocery shopping in order to relieve a guilty conscience after having eaten all of your roommate's snacks, or maybe it's laundry day and you need detergent.

Inquiry isn't like grocery shopping. One can't inquire without having an epistemic aim. Imagine a detective who shows up to the scene of the crime, takes out her magnifying glass, and begins to look at the blood-spattered wall. It would seem as though she were inquiring. But, if the detective doesn't have an epistemic aim—if she isn't trying to figure out who committed the crime—then we should no longer think of her as inquiring (perhaps she's

¹¹See Fleisher (2018, Forthcoming), Singer and Aronowitz (Forth); Thorstad (2022) and Arpaly (ms.) for discussion of "sandwich reasons."

¹²There is an ongoing debate in the literature concerning what the aim of inquiry is. For defences of the view that the aim of inquiry is true belief see, for example, Kvanvig (2003). For a defence of the view that the aim of inquiry is knowledge see, for example: Sartwell (1992); Whitcomb (2010); Rysiew (2012); Kelp (2014, 2020); Saporin and van Elswyk (Forth). This view is also suggested in Friedman (2017). Also see, for example, Falbo (2021, 2022); Archer (2021); Woodard (2022) for defenses of the view that inquiry aims at epistemic improvement, and Goodman and Holguín (Forthcoming) who argue that inquiry aims at being sure, as well as Beddor (Manuscript), who argues that inquiry aims maximizing epistemic value (and on the view Beddor favors you only get maximal epistemic value if you have credence 1). For a critical discussion which casts doubt upon whether inquiry has a constitutive aim see Friedman (Forthcoming). The paper remains neutral on what the aim of inquiry is.

trying to be deceptive).¹³ Having an epistemic aim is *essential* to the activity of inquiry.

So, one might argue, inquiry is crucially different from other goal-directed activities, like grocery shopping and plant watering, which have their aims only contingently. Indeed, Kelp argues that this feature of inquiry—that it's an activity with a constitutive aim—is crucial to explaining why the zetetic is a distinct normative domain.

More broadly, Kelp argues that activities with constitutive aims constitute unique normative domains, which are associated with constitutive norms and central values. He draws a comparison between inquiry and chess. The constitutive aim of chess is to checkmate your opponent, and checkmating is also a central or final value relative to the domain of chess. Chess also has constitutive norms, for example, norms which specify the starting position of each piece and the directions they can move in. Similarly, Kelp argues that inquiry is also an activity with a constitutive aim. And just as there are constitutive norms that specify different kinds of moves in chess, there are constitutive norms which specify different moves in inquiry; for instance, norms for when one should open or close inquiry into a question (Kelp; 2021, 52).

Let's reconsider the explanatory challenges that zetetic epistemology faces. A defender of zetetic epistemology needs to explain: (1) why the norms of inquiry are distinctively *epistemic* (and not practical), and (2) why zetetic epistemology doesn't implausibly over-generalize (i.e., why it doesn't include norms that require inquirers to eat sandwiches).

Kelp's framework provides some resources for responding to these challenges. Why think that the norms of inquiry are epistemic? Kelp's answer is that inquiry is an activity with a constitutive aim, and that such activities constitute unique normative domains.¹⁴ This view highlights important differences between activities with constitutive compared to merely contingent aims, but worries for zetetic epistemology remain.

There are *many* activities (hundreds, and plausibly thousands, if not more) that have constitutive aims. Here are a few examples that Kelp discusses: chess, archery, baseball, snooker, and trick-taking card games (e.g., Solitaire or Pokémon) (2021, 46). If the zetetic is a distinct normative domain because inquiry is an activity with a constitutive aim, then, by similar reasoning, there is a distinct normative domain for every single one of these activities. But, as we saw, this would proliferate normative domains excessively, while individuating them in an overly fine-grained way. We should resist any view which characterizes epistemic normativity as on a par with baseball or Pokémon normativity. A simpler and more straightforward explanation is to understand all of these activities as governed broadly by the same kind of normativity: practical normativity.

If this is on the right track, then the kind of normative clash displayed in cases like *DISTRACTED DARIUS* is plausibly an instance of a more garden-variety clash between the epistemic and the practical. And, if so, it poses no major threat to the coherence of contemporary normative epistemology. Instead, it serves as a helpful reminder that practical rationality and epistemic rationality aren't always harmonious.

What about the over-generality worry? Kelp's framework suggests the following response. Chess has constitutive norms (or rules) which determine the range of permissible moves in chess. Importantly, these norms never specify that chess players should eat sandwiches, even when their blood sugar levels are low, and this would help to vastly improve their game play. The same is true, one might argue, in the case of zetetic epistemology. Zetetic norms don't ever say that inquirers should eat sandwiches, even if doing so im-

¹³For a related discussion of similar detective-style cases see (Friedman; 2019b, 300-306).

¹⁴When defending this point Kelp draws upon the work of Sosa (2007).

proves one's skills as an inquirer.¹⁵

The strength of this response rests heavily upon how the norms of inquiry are specified. While there are some striking similarities between chess and inquiry, this comparison has significant limitations. Chess is a manufactured game with circumscribed rules. More generally, games have the constitutive aims and norms that they do precisely because they have been designed that way. Inquiry isn't like this. Given these differences, we should be cautious when drawing inferences from facts about the norms governing games, like chess, to claims about the norms governing inquiry, a much more natural social practice.¹⁶

Additionally, when we reflect upon our social practices as inquirers, it's not clear that they would rule out "sandwich"-style (and related) norms. For instance, in the United States there is a robust set of standards (in accordance with the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program) which regulates the distribution of meals in public and nonprofit private schools. Programs like this are implemented to ensure that students will have access to healthy and nutritious foods in order to promote their learning.¹⁷

Without a full picture of how the zetetic norms are determined, it's unclear how the zetetic epistemologist will overcome the over-generality worry. This is not to say that such a picture can't be developed, but until such an account is given, we should not assume that appealing to constitutive norms can solve the overgenerality problem. Again, a more natural and straightforward approach, which avoids the over-generality worry, is to view the norms of inquiry as primarily practical, not epistemic.

4 Making Peace with Normative Incoherence?

So, one way to resist the zetetic turn is to interpret the tension between ZIP, EP, and KP as a tension involving distinct normative domains. But, suppose that one rejects this view and insists that the norms of inquiry are genuinely epistemic. If that's right, then normative incoherence persists. How should we respond to this incoherence? Friedman's response is to take the zetetic turn, and to thus radically reject traditional epistemic norms. However, Thorstad (2021) has recently taken a more sanguine approach, arguing that the tension between zetetic norms and traditional epistemic norms is not a cause for concern or radical revision—even if zetetic norms are epistemic.

Thorstad defends a *focal point view* on which the norms of inquiry and the norms of rational belief concern distinct evaluative focal points.¹⁸ Norms of inquiry evaluate inquiring activity, and norms of belief evaluate belief states. Given this difference in evaluative focus, Thorstad argues that conflicts across focal points are to be expected and don't demand revision. We should thus make peace with normative incoherence, so long as it concerns norms which involve distinct focal points.

Thorstad defends the focal point view by showing how analogous tensions arise, and are taken to be commonplace, in practical philosophy. Consider the following case.

LAKE: Mudge passes a child drowning in a lake. She decides to flip a coin and save the child just in case the coin lands heads. The coin lands heads, so Mudge forms an intention to save the child, and acts upon it (Thorstad; 2021, 2918).

¹⁵Thank you to an anonymous referee for encouraging me to consider this response.

¹⁶For a compelling defence of this point see Friedman (Forthcoming).

¹⁷United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/>.

¹⁸Thorstad (2021)'s discussion of evaluative focal points draws upon terminology developed in Kagan (2000).

Thorstad argues that cases like LAKE illustrate that the normative status of one's intention can deviate from the normative status of the inquiry that produced that very intention. Mudge's inquiry is irrational despite the fact that her intention is rational. Recognizing two distinct evaluative focal points—*inquiry* and *intention*—allows us to capture this difference (2021, 2919).

Is the same true for *inquiry* and *belief*? Thorstad says yes. We can apply the focal point view to the DISTRACTED DARIUS case as follows. Darius violates ZIP and inquires irrationally, but this doesn't settle whether his resulting beliefs are also irrational. According to the focal point view, normative verdicts about the rationality of belief aren't always in sync with normative verdicts about the rationality of the inquiry that resulted in the belief. Given this, such tensions don't motivate the need for radical revision because: "We have not made the contradictory claim that one and the same state or action is at once rational and irrational" (2021, 2923).

Can we make peace with normative incoherence in this way? A major strategy of the focal point view is to cordon off norms of inquiry from norms of belief. This approach requires that zetetic norms never have normative implications for the rationality of belief—zetetic norms are one thing and norms of belief are another.

However, one might argue that zetetic norms *do* apply to belief and, hence, that zetetic norms and more traditional epistemic norms on belief may sometimes apply to the *same* evaluative focal point. For instance, if having a belief would frustrate or detract from one's inquiry, then a zetetic norm might plausibly require an inquirer to not have that belief. In DISTRACTED DARIUS, ZIP plausibly prohibits Darius from having certain beliefs because they would hinder inquiry (e.g., beliefs about the random piece of gum), although traditional epistemic norms would allow them. Conversely, if having a belief promotes the success of inquiry, then a zetetic norm might plausibly require or permit an inquirer to be in that belief state, even if traditional epistemic norms would prohibit this. (An example of this is discussed in detail in §5.)

If zetetic norms also apply to belief, then the rationality of inquiry and the rationality of belief are more interconnected than the focal point view suggests.¹⁹ This gives way to the contradictory result that this approach was aiming to avoid, namely, that a belief—a single evaluate focal point—might be evaluated as *rational*, according to a zetetic norm and *irrational* according to a more traditional epistemic norm (like an evidentialist norm), and vice versa. We cannot, and should not, make peace with this form of normative incoherence. If these norms give conflicting normative verdicts with respect to one and the same belief, then they can't peacefully co-exist under the same normative roof—they can't both be epistemic.

One might push back against this view by claiming that zetetic norms are epistemic because they concern epistemic ends like knowledge or understanding. Indeed, when arguing for the focal point view Thorstad adopts a *value-based* conception of epistemic normativity. According to this approach, a norm counts as epistemic if it promotes some epistemic value such as: true belief, knowledge, or understanding (Thorstad; 2021, 2924-2925).²⁰ However,

¹⁹See the discussion in (Friedman; 2020, 521-522) which suggests a close connection between epistemic norms on belief states and norms on when one is permitted to inquire such that one enters into a belief state, and for related arguments see Steglich-Petersen (2021). Also see Fleisher (Forthcoming), which argues that there are zetetic reasons (or what he calls *inquisitive reasons*) to be in belief-like states such as acceptance or endorsement.

²⁰While Thorstad (2021) adopts a value-based conception of epistemic normativity, in other work, Thorstad (2022), he is critical of this view. There is debate in the literature concerning what kinds of things count as having final epistemic value. For a sample of this debate see: Lynch (2009); Ahlstrom-Vij (2013); Pritchard (2014); Khalifa and Millson (2020). Also see Friedman (2019a) for related discussion. A value-based approach is also central

the reasoning underlying a value-based approach to epistemic normativity is vulnerable to a worry we saw previously in §3. If all it takes for a norm to count as belonging to a distinctively epistemic normative domain is for it to promote some epistemic value, then, by similar reasoning, so too would a grocery shopping norm count as belonging to a distinctively gastronomic normative domain, if it promotes gastronomic value (e.g., achieving the perfect balance of acid, fat, salt, and heat in a meal). We should thus resist the claim that a norm is epistemic if it promotes epistemic value. Crucially, the focal point view faces this objection regardless of whether zetetic norms apply to belief.

As we saw, we can avoid this result if we understand these conflicts as not involving distinct evaluative focal points, but entirely distinct *normative domains*. One may be an epistemically rational believer, while being a practically irrational inquirer. And, similarly, one might be a practically rational inquirer, while coming to have epistemically irrational beliefs.

So, one particularly attractive way of overcoming the tension is to understand it as a clash between the demands of practical and epistemic rationality. This is in contrast to the focal point view, which understands the tension as involving different focal points within a single normative domain. Or, one might reject both of these views and defend a more ambitious response to the conflict. They might take the zetetic turn and argue that all epistemic norms are norms of inquiry. Should epistemology take the zetetic turn?

5 Resisting the Zetetic Turn

In this section I motivate several reasons to resist the zetetic turn, all of which are unified by a concern that zetetic epistemology can't properly account for the rationality of belief.

5.1 Zetetically Useful, yet Irrational

Consider the following case.

MR. CONGENIALITY: ENZO, a scientist, is a very self-conscious guy. After a heated falling-out with colleagues at his last job, he has become incredibly paranoid that his new colleagues don't like him. In the past, similar worries have led him into spirals of depression and self-doubt, making it impossible for him to conduct his research. He's begun to notice that his colleagues have started to avoid him in the lunchroom and have stopped making small talk with him at the water cooler. However, reflecting upon his past, Enzo ignores this. It would destroy him if he were to find out that his co-workers disliked him, and he needs to stay laser-focused on his research.

So far, this case closely resembles the DISTRACTED DARIUS case. Just as it was distracting to attend to the inquiry-irrelevant evidence in Darius' environment, so too is it distracting, and hence, counter to his zetetic goals, for Enzo to consider his evidence which suggests that he is disliked by his colleagues. Let's add some further details to the mix.

MR. CONGENIALITY (CONTINUED): Because his research excels when he thinks that everyone around him likes him, through wishful thinking, Enzo comes to believe that he's Mr. Congeniality—that everyone in the lab thinks he's the

to defences of epistemic consequentialism. I discuss this view in §5.1. For an overview of this debate, see the collection of articles in [Ahlstrom-Vij and Dunn \(2018\)](#).

friendliest guy around. This belief prevents him from becoming consumed by worries that he's disliked, and it even gives him a much-needed boost of self-confidence while conducting his experiments. However, in reality, Enzo *really is* a complete jerk: he's obnoxious, rude, and inconsiderate, and his colleagues genuinely dislike him because of this. Moreover, he has overwhelming evidence which decisively indicates as much.²¹

From the perspective of normative epistemology, how should we evaluate Enzo's belief that he's the friendliest person in the lab? Well, on the one hand, Enzo's belief obviously fails to fit the evidence. So, standard evidentialist norms can easily classify his belief as irrational. But, on the other hand, this belief helps to promote the success of his zetetic goals. We can imagine that, given his incredibly fragile ego, the success of Enzo's inquiry requires that he guard himself against finding out that his colleagues dislike him, and having the belief that he's the friendliest guy in the lab effectively does this. From the perspective of zetetic epistemology, given that this belief helps to promote successful inquiry, it appears to be rational.

In some cases, then, it seems that zetetic norms may not just require that one ignore their available evidence (as the *DISTRACTED DARIUS* case illustrates), but they might also rationalize beliefs which go *against* the evidence, namely, when such beliefs promote the success of inquiry. While an epistemic requirement to ignore one's evidence might have seemed only somewhat uncomfortable, a view of epistemic normativity which evaluates blatantly counter-evidential beliefs as rational is clearly unacceptable.

MR. CONGENIALITY is a familiar kind of case. It traces back to at least Firth (1980), who had used this style of case to argue against epistemic consequentialism, which claims that epistemic norms are genuinely normative to the extent that they are conducive to obtaining some epistemic value (e.g., true belief or knowledge). Just as it seems morally impermissible to harvest the organs of a healthy patient to save five dying patients, trading off the life of one to save five (Foot; 1967), it seems epistemically impermissible to trade off the epistemic goodness of one belief in order to improve one's overall doxastic state (e.g., trading one false belief for many true beliefs).²²

Given that counter-evidential beliefs can sometimes promote successful inquiry, it looks like zetetic epistemology is subject to problematic trade-off cases. It allows inquirers to trade off the epistemic goodness of one of their beliefs for the overall success of inquiry.

One might object that zetetic epistemology can classify Enzo's counter-evidential belief as unjustified after all. Here's how. Zetetic epistemology doesn't just provide norms for how to conduct individual inquiries, but it also cares about *all* of one's zetetic pursuits. So, to the extent that this belief will impede Enzo's other inquiries, zetetic norms may prohibit him from having this belief. For example, having a false sense of his friendliness might detract from Enzo's ability to successfully inquire into whether he's a good person or why his romantic relationships don't ever manage to last beyond the first date.

A complete picture of zetetic epistemology plausibly includes norms which promote

²¹ (Friedman; 2019, 680-681) discusses a similar example where a boss ignores strong evidence that he's not loved by his employees, and refrains from coming to know this because it will interfere with his inquiry. She argues that the Boss isn't rationally permitted to come to know that he's unloved, despite being in a position to know this. MR. CONGENIALITY takes this style of case a step further, by highlighting how the success of inquiry can be promoted by believing *against* the evidence too. See (Thorstad; 2021, 2915-2916) for related discussion of this case.

²² For further discussion see the collection of papers in Ahlstrom-Vij and Dunn (2018). And for further discussions of epistemic trade-off cases see, for example, Christensen (2004) Ch. 6, Berker (2013a,b); Jenkins (2007); Littlejohn (2012); Singer (2019) and Aronowitz (Forth).

the success of all of an inquirer's zetetic goals, or at least those which are the most important or urgent. However, it's worth emphasizing that one's *zetetic profile* (as we might call it)—roughly, what questions one wants to answer, how important each question is, one's available evidence, one's ability to answer these questions, and so on—is largely a contingent matter. It depends upon the idiosyncratic features and aspirations of an individual inquirer and the resources that they have at their disposal. Friedman describes inquirers as having their own *research agendas* which “record our epistemic goals by way of the questions we wish to answer” (2017, 308).²³

So, in MR. CONGENIALITY, it's possible that absolutely none of Enzo's other zetetic goals are likely to be affected by his belief that he's the friendliest guy in the lab. He may not care one iota about figuring out whether he is a nice person, or a good friend, or why he hasn't found a romantic partner. Furthermore, this belief might give him the boost of confidence he needs to not just be a focused scientist in the lab, but also a confident and productive inquirer in all of his other zetetic pursuits.

In response, a defender of the zetetic turn might raise the following objection. They might argue that zetetic norms can evaluate Enzo's belief as justified because it fails to respect a very general zetetic goal of his. Enzo wants to have true beliefs about the world. And he's not alone. All of us, one might argue, have an interest in having an accurate picture of the world and, hence, we all have the default zetetic goal of having true beliefs on the basis of our evidence.

Let's assume that Enzo has the very general zetetic goal of having true beliefs about the world. This zetetic goal, however, doesn't entail that he should treat all of his inquiries as on a par or as equally important. He shouldn't. He cares a lot more about figuring out the answers to some of his questions compared to others. Other things being equal, it seems that inquirers should prioritize the questions that are among the most important and urgent, given their interests and goals.²⁴

So, even if Enzo has the general zetetic goal of having true beliefs about the world, this goal doesn't always take precedence. It might be locally overridden, when having a false belief helps him to conduct his scientific inquiries, and when this helps to promote his zetetic success in the long run. If Enzo brings himself to believe that he's the friendliest guy in the lab, then he will be a much more efficient and productive inquirer. And given his other zetetic ambitions, having this false belief isn't likely to lead to any further downstream false beliefs. It's the opposite: this belief helps him to sustain a degree of self-confidence that's needed to reach his full potential as an inquirer. It helps him to figure out the answers to many of the questions that matter to him, thereby acquiring many true beliefs.

Compare this to the DISTRACTED DARIUS case. Darius needs to figure out exactly how many windows the CN Tower has, and he needs figure this out soon. This inquiry is more important to him than figuring out whether the pink glob in front of him is old gum. According to ZIP, it's perfectly rational for him to ignore the evidence about the gum, and focus on his counting. Even if Darius would come to have a true belief, Friedman argues that he should still ignore this evidence because it would prevent him from successfully figuring out how many windows the CN Tower has (2020, 504). So, while we might describe Darius as having the general zetetic goal of wanting to have true beliefs about the world, according to ZIP, it's sometimes rational for him to ignore some of his evidence and not come to have true beliefs on the basis of it. It's an effective zetetic strategy for Darius to ignore some of

²³Also see: Friedman (Forth); Olsson and Westlund (2006); Enqvist (2012) for further discussion of research agendas.

²⁴See Dallman (2017) for a discussion of how to prioritize our inquiries given our cognitive limitations.

his evidence because this is needed to resolve the inquiries that matter to him. Similarly, it's an effective zetetic strategy for Enzo to bring himself to have a false belief, because this belief will help him to carry out the inquiries that matter to him.

So, even if all inquirers have the general zetetic goal of wanting to have true beliefs about the world, it's still sometimes rational for them to ignore some of their evidence and not come to have true beliefs on the basis of it. And, in some cases, it may even be rational for an inquirer to have a belief that goes blatantly against the evidence.

A defender of zetetic epistemology might argue that Enzo's belief isn't rational given the process or manner in which he came to have it. An approach along these lines is defended by Kelp (2021), who argues that justified belief is *competent* belief, where competent belief is understood to be a move in inquiry. On this view, a belief is justified just in case it is produced by an exercise of an ability to attain the aim of inquiry, which Kelp argues is knowledge (Kelp; 2021, 78-85). Accordingly, because Enzo's belief is the product of wishful thinking, and because wishful thinking typically won't dispose one to acquire knowledge, then this belief is unjustified. Compare the following: if you form the belief that it's snowing outside as result of a coin toss, your belief would be unjustified on this view because it doesn't result from an ability to gain knowledge. Just as it's a poor zetetic strategy to form beliefs on the basis of coin tosses, so too, one might argue, is it a poor zetetic strategy to form beliefs on the basis of wishful thinking. Neither method is an effective way to achieve the aim of inquiry (Kelp; 2021, 79).²⁵

Should we think of justified belief in terms of the ability to achieve the aim of inquiry (i.e., the ability to acquire knowledge)? Perhaps not. On this view inquiry is a regimented activity, which is structurally analogous to a game: it involves moves or rules that are akin to those found in chess. But, as we saw earlier, we should be skeptical of the analogy between inquiry and games, as inquiry appears to be a much more natural social practice (Friedman; Forthcoming). Relatedly, this approach to justified belief also relies upon an understanding of epistemic normativity as flowing from the constitutive aim of inquiry. But, if epistemic normativity, and species of normativity more broadly, aren't individuated via the constitutive aims of goal-directed activities (as was argued in §3), then this casts doubt upon this approach to justified belief as well, since it relies upon this assumption.

More generally, one might argue that this response to MR. CONGENIALITY requires a view of zetetic epistemology on which epistemic norms are related to inquiry in only an attenuated sense. It's notable that this view includes epistemic norms governing the justification of beliefs which have nothing to do with our specific zetetic goals, and it deems justified beliefs which are not involved in inquiry at all, so long as they result from an ability to know. This style of view thus allows for a significant amount of distance between epistemic norms and the pursuit of inquiry. This perhaps unsurprising given that this view of justified belief is structurally similar to more traditional approaches within the Doxastic Paradigm, like virtue epistemology and reliabilism, insofar as it focuses upon the abilities or skills of an epistemic agent.²⁶ But one might argue that if we adopt this approach to justified belief, understood in terms of the ability to acquire knowledge, then we seem to lose sight of the initial conflict between traditional epistemic norms and zetetic norms from Friedman (2020), which motivated the need for a zetetic turn in the first place. If the zetetic turn is significant—if it puts pressure on us to reorient epistemology to better serve our zetetic ends—then it can't just be a turn to reliabilism (understood in terms of the ability to gain knowledge). So, while this view of justified belief can properly classify Enzo's belief

²⁵Thank you to an anonymous referee for encouraging me to consider this objection.

²⁶See (Kelp; 2021, 196-202) Appendix 2 for further discussion of how this view relates to virtue epistemology.

as unjustified, it doesn't seem to be deeply zetetic. (I consider this point further in §5.2.)

Relatedly, cases like MR. CONGENIALITY also assume that zetetic norms must be sensitive to the contingent goals of inquirers. But why think this? Perhaps they don't have to be. [Steglich-Petersen \(2021\)](#) defends the view that epistemic reasons are a subclass of zetetic reasons, and that both reasons for belief and reasons for inquiry flow from the same general normative principle, namely, a transmission principle for instrumental reasons. According to this general principle, "we have reason to perform some action, because that action is a means for something else that we have reason to do or achieve" (2021, 11). For example, you might have a reason to call a pest control service because this is a means to getting the pesky squirrel out of your attic. Or, applied to the case of inquiry, you might have a reason to inquire into when the staff meeting is because you have a reason to do well at your job.

On Steglich-Petersen's view, wanting to know the answer to a question and having a reason to pursue the means to figure out the answer can come apart. For example, Jack might really want to know how many blades of grass are on his lawn, but his wanting to know this doesn't thereby give him a zetetic reason to inquire ([Steglich-Petersen; 2021, 8](#)). It's also possible on this view, to have a zetetic reason to inquire, even when one *doesn't care at all* about the answer to the question (2021, 21). There is thus some crucial independence between one's contingent zetetic goals and the zetetic reasons that one has to engage in inquiry.

More broadly, Steglich-Petersen's view aligns with what we might call an *Anti-Humean* approach to zetetic normativity on which one's contingent zetetic goals—i.e. the questions that the inquirer is interested in and wants or needs to answer—don't always determine the zetetic reasons one has to inquire. This is in contrast to a *Humean* approach to zetetic normativity, where zetetic reasons to inquire are primarily sensitive to and guided by the contingent goals of inquirers.

Should we prefer a Humean or an Anti-Humean view of zetetic normativity? Providing a full answer to this question is far beyond the scope of the paper (though this question is important and it deserves much more attention in the literature). However, one initial concern with an Anti-Humean approach to zetetic epistemology is that it may become overly demanding and restrictive. Should epistemology really tell us which questions we have reason to investigate—even when we don't care *at all* about them?

Moreover, moral and practical norms already seem to impose ample constraints upon our inquires which are independent of our cares and wants. For example, you might have practical reason to inquire into your gum health, even if you really don't want to go to the dentist. Or you might have a moral reason not to inquire into the contents of your friend's diary, even though you're itching with curiosity. Why should epistemology impose even further constraints upon our inquiries? It seems like this is well taken care of by practical and moral normativity. Indeed, if zetetic norms are primarily practical norms, then it's unsurprising that the Humean/Anti-Humean distinction applies, given that it is already well established that this distinction arises in the case of practical reasoning more generally.

Furthermore, a Humean approach to zetetic normativity seems to be implicit in the motivations given by some defenders of the zetetic turn. Here's [Friedman \(2020\)](#) (*italics added*):

Why should epistemology care about what to do with the information we happen to get but not about our getting the information *we actually want and need*? I take it that the feeling that epistemology should be able to tell us how to come to know *what we want to know*—from start to finish—is not misplaced (2020, 527).

So, at least a part of what's so attractive about the zetetic turn, at least for some, is that

zetetic norms are sensitive to the actual wants and needs of inquirers.²⁷

More generally, within a zetetic framework the connection between evidence and the rationality of belief will always be mediated by zetetic considerations. Usually, when we fit our beliefs to the evidence, we are in the best position to successfully accomplish our inquiries, but not always. In some cases, counter-evidential beliefs may promote successful inquiry and, as a result, zetetic norms risk rationalizing beliefs which go blatantly against the evidence. Zetetic epistemology thus faces a challenge: it seems unable to account for how a belief may be *zetetically useful*, yet clearly *irrational*.

5.2 Zetetically Useless, yet Rational

Zetetic epistemology is aimed at giving advice to agents who are engaged in inquiry. This is precisely what it's designed to do, and where much of its motivation is rooted. After arguing for a zetetic turn in epistemology, Friedman (2020, 533) ends her article by asking the following: "if epistemic norms are not norms of inquiry, then what are they, and why should we conform to them?" Zetetic epistemology promises to provide us with straightforward answers to these questions. It says that the purpose of epistemic norms is to guide inquirers in their pursuit for epistemic goods like justified belief, knowledge, and understanding. And, hence, we should conform to epistemic norms because they will aid in the successful resolution of our inquiries.²⁸

But, should epistemic norms be understood in terms of the norms that we will follow to resolve the questions we care about? Perhaps not. Reflection upon the etiology of our beliefs reveals that many—indeed, *the majority* of them—aren't the outputs of inquiry. As I'm writing, a fly lands on my arm, and I come to believe that there's a fly on my arm. This belief doesn't resolve any of my inquiries. Normally, the beliefs we have are not the answers to questions that we were previously investigating or even remotely curious about. As we go about our daily lives, we passively absorb vast amounts of information and come to have beliefs as a result. We can't help it—we're not inquiring, we're living. So, a wide range of our doxastic states and, hence, a significant portion of our epistemic life, has nothing to do with inquiry.

Recall that those who defend the zetetic turn in epistemology had expressed worries that a more traditional approach, the Doxastic Paradigm, was too parochial, given its focus upon the rationality of doxastic states (Friedman; 2020, 527). But it appears that a purely zetetic epistemology, given its sole focus upon inquiry, is not without parochiality worries of its own. How does zetetic epistemology epistemically evaluate beliefs that aren't the

²⁷Though, I acknowledge that some might want to allow for more distance between zetetic reasons and the contingent goals of inquirers, as Steglich-Petersen (2021) does. Thank you to an anonymous referee for encouraging me to consider this point.

²⁸Also, cf. (Friedman; 2019, 684-685): "It's understandable, I think, to want some sort of explanation as to why we should conform to our central epistemic norms." And also: Friedman (Forth): "If our traditional epistemic norms are not the sorts of norms we ought to conform to in order to successfully figure things out, then why should we conform to them at all?" It's worth reflecting upon whether the epistemologist is on the hook to answer the *why conform* question. Consider an analogous question in the moral domain: why should we conform to moral norms? We don't conform to moral norms because they advance some antecedent goal of ours or because it's always in our personal interest to do so. Indeed, moral norms apply to us regardless of—and even when they go *against*—our personal interests and goals. A similar point seems to hold in the epistemic domain: epistemic norms apply to us regardless of—and even when they go *against*—our personal interests and goals. Epistemic norms aren't beholden to our wants and needs. So, one might plausibly resist the claim that epistemologists should be expected or able to provide an answer to the *why conform* question. See Kelly (2003) for related discussion. This topic merits further consideration, but taking it up would take the paper too far afield. Thanks to [redacted] for helpful discussion, and for pointing out the comparison to the moral domain.

outputs of inquiry? For instance, imagine that Giada is reading under a tree outside, where there happen to be lots of birds. She looks up and comes to believe *that a bird just flew by*. How does zetetic epistemology explain the rationality of Giada's belief?

A defender of the zetetic turn might resist the claim that Giada's belief isn't the result of inquiry. Indeed, Kelp takes a fairly broad view of inquiry on which even beliefs formed automatically result from inquiry (Kelp; 2021, 57-58). One might also argue that inquiry isn't solely a matter of conscious and deliberate investigations into questions that one is explicitly curious about. It also involves more low-level patterns of attention and what is salient to the agent in perception and thought.²⁹

The case of Giada thus helps to make vivid important questions concerning the *metaphysics* of inquiry. What conception of inquiry must the defender of zetetic epistemology be committed to if they are to explain the rationality of beliefs like Giada's? It's noteworthy that a broader conception of inquiry, which includes beliefs formed automatically via perception, is at odds with a very prevalent approach to inquiry as an intentional and goal-directed activity that involves *inquiring attitudes*, such as curiosity and wonder (Friedman; 2017; Whitcomb; 2017; Sapir and van Elswyk; Forth; Willard-Kyle; forthcoming).

If the zetetic turn requires one to reject the view that inquiry always involves inquiring attitudes, then the view has significant theoretical commitments that many in this debate might not be willing to endorse. This broader approach to inquiry also seems to be in tension with our more common and every-day conceptions of inquiry, which appear to track an important division between active and passive forms of learning.³⁰ So, while a more inclusive approach to inquiry may better explain the rationality of Giada's belief, it also brings with it some serious theoretical costs.

Alternatively, Kelp is also willing to grant that inquiry is a species of the more general activity of figuring things out. According to this view, epistemic normativity is grounded in the broader activity of finding things out about the world, an activity which subsumes, and thus shares a constitutive aim with, inquiry. However, even this broader conception doesn't seem to fully capture the rationality of Giada's belief. She doesn't seem to be engaged in the activity of figuring things out about the world, unless we are *always* in some sense engaged in this activity so long as we are conscious. If so, then this activity bears little resemblance to what we would typically count as being engaged in a goal-directed activity, which seems to require some kind of intentional action.³¹

Another strategy is to argue as follows: beliefs which aren't the outputs of inquiry are still relevant to inquiry because they serve as possible *inputs* into future inquiry (Hookway; 2006, 105-108).³² Let's consider how this response applies to Giada's belief that a bird just flew by. Perhaps Giada's belief is rational because it can be expected to be useful as a resource to help promote future inquiry. But what future inquiry exactly? It can't be inquiry into the question: *Did a bird just fly by?* That would be redundant, given that Giada already knows the answer to this question (and similarly related questions). Perhaps this belief is a resource for future inquiry into more general questions: *'what are birds like?'* or *'how do*

²⁹There is a growing literature of fascinating work on salience and norms of attention. See, for example: Siegel (2017, 2022); Irving (2021); Yumusak (2022); Munton (2023, forthcoming); Gardiner (Forthcoming); Saint-Croix (Forthcoming).

³⁰For further discussion see Friedman (Forth) on the distinction between accidental and intentional forms of learning. Friedman's discussion draws upon a much earlier distinction between experiment and observation found in Hershel (1831).

³¹Thank you to an anonymous referee for encouraging me to consider this point.

³²Hookway is primarily concerned with the value of knowledge, though his arguments carry over to the case of rational belief. Also see the related discussion in (Kelp; 2021, 57-58).

birds fly?’, and so on. But, regardless of which future inquiries this belief might aid in, it’s always completely possible that Giada does not expect to have any desire, need, or inclination whatsoever to actually engage in them. So, it’s perfectly possible, especially given the triviality of this belief, that she should not expect to inquire into any questions for which this belief would be a resource.

One might argue that Giada’s belief is rational on socio-zetetic grounds. Through Giada’s testimony, this belief helps to promote the inquiries of others within her social milieu more generally (Hookway; 2006, 106). But, just as before, it’s perfectly possible that Giada has no reason to expect that there will be an occasion to share this belief with others, or that others within her social milieu will ever inquire into this subject matter. What will zetetic epistemology say about the epistemic status of her belief then?

As we saw previously in the Mr. CONGENIALITY case, one might argue that Giada’s belief is rational because it helps to advance a very general zetetic goal of hers, namely, the goal of having true beliefs about the world. However, we should question whether this is the best way to explain the rationality of her belief. There seems to be a more straightforward explanation available, which doesn’t need to posit the existence of a default zetetic goal and attribute it to all epistemic agents. This is that Giada’s belief is rational, not because it advances some zetetic goal, but because it fits with her evidence.

It is also important to remember that for some a strong motivation for the zetetic turn was that, unlike a more orthodox approach, zetetic norms care about the evidence *we actually want or need*, so that we can better resolve the questions we *in fact* care about (Friedman; 2020, 527). On this picture, epistemic norms are the norms that provide guidance for rational inquiry; they are the norms that help us to advance our research agendas (Friedman; 2017, Forth). But Giada doesn’t want or need to have beliefs about the random bird that flew past her. We don’t necessarily want or need to have many of our beliefs, but such beliefs are rationally held regardless. If we are to account for the rationality of inquiry-irrelevant beliefs, it can’t be via norms that are designed to guide us in the pursuit of our specific zetetic goals.

A dilemma thus emerges for the proponent of the zetetic turn. On the one hand, one could acknowledge non-zetetic epistemic norms, specifically, norms which evaluate doxastic states *independently* of inquiry considerations. This would help to generate the right normative verdicts in cases like Mr. CONGENIALITY, where a belief helps to advance inquiry, but goes blatantly against the evidence. This would also have the benefit of helping to assess the rationality of beliefs which are not involved in inquiry. But, taking this route doesn’t seem to really be *taking the zetetic turn*—it’s not reorienting epistemology to be about the pursuit of our inquiries. If we adopt a view of epistemic norms on which the epistemic norms have nothing to do with our specific zetetic goals, or on which a belief’s furthering our zetetic goals doesn’t make it justified, or on which a belief’s frustrating our zetetic goals doesn’t make it unjustified, then in what sense is this really taking the zetetic turn? Such an approach seems to draw us towards a view of epistemic normativity which closely resembles those already found within the Doxastic Paradigm.

On the other hand, one can take the zetetic turn; they can maintain that all epistemic norms are zetetically grounded, including norms which evaluate the rationality of beliefs. But, in so doing, they inherit a significant explanatory challenge. Zetetic epistemology appears unable to explain the rationality of beliefs that are perfectly rational, yet zetetically useless, such as Giada’s belief that a bird just flew past her, as well as beliefs that are clearly irrational, yet zetetically useful, such as Enzo’s counter-evidential belief that he’s the friendliest guy in the science lab. Unless and until this explanatory challenge is met, the

zetetic turn should be resisted.

6 Inquiry & Normative Epistemology

An important lesson to draw from the previous discussion is that it is unlikely that all epistemic norms can be derived from purely zetetic foundations. The epistemic rationality of beliefs appears to depend not on whether having a belief contributes to the success of one's zetetic pursuits, but instead upon whether the belief fits with the evidence—regardless of one's zetetic aims. In some cases zetetic success and rational belief come apart, and as a result, so too does epistemic normativity and zetetic normativity. So, there are bound to be epistemic norms that aren't ultimately zetetic, and we shouldn't understand epistemic norms exclusively as the norms that guide us as inquirers.

But, if that's right, how should we understand the relationship between inquiry and normative epistemology? What place (if any) does inquiry have in our epistemic theorizing? While I can't do full justice to this question here, in what follows I canvas some of the logical space that is left open to theorize about inquiry, even if we resist the zetetic turn.

Proponents of zetetic epistemology have rightly emphasized that inquiry is central to our epistemic pursuits. We're not mere "information filter-feeders", making do with whatever evidence happens to come our way (Friedman; Forth). Instead, we actively pursue the answers to our questions. Inquiry is an important part of what it takes to secure epistemic goods like rational belief, knowledge, understanding, and more.

With this in mind, one possible way to think about the relationship between inquiry and the epistemic is as follows. We want, and sometimes might gravely need, to know the answers to our questions. So, what grounds zetetic norms is not only their connection to the truth, but also their connection to *us*—to our desires, needs, wants, cares, and concerns. ZIP doesn't forbid Darius from coming to have beliefs based upon inquiry-irrelevant evidence because such beliefs are likely to be false, but because coming to have such beliefs is counter to the success of his zetetic goals.

Furthermore, knowing the answers to our questions is but just one of our needs and wants. We don't only have epistemic pursuits, we also want, and again sometime may gravely need, a range of other things too: health, wealth, happiness, and more. If I desire to be healthy, then there is a sense in which I have a health-related reason to quit smoking, exercise regularly, and get a good night's sleep. Similarly, if I want to know the answers to my questions, there is a sense in which I may have an *epistemic* reason to take the means needed to answer them.

Accordingly, one might describe a reason as "epistemic" when it relates broadly to the promotion of an epistemic goal. But, as we saw in §3, the subject matter of one's goals—whether they're epistemic, gastronomic, horticultural, or health related—doesn't determine the domain of the norms which govern one's goal-directed activity. Nonetheless, one might still loosely describe a detective as having an "epistemic" reason to investigate a crime scene, given her goal of wanting to know who the culprit is, just as we might describe someone as having a health-related reason to exercise, given their personal health goals.

So, resisting the zetetic turn doesn't require denying that zetetic norms are "epistemic" in this looser sense. But, crucially, this usage of "epistemic" shouldn't be confused with other uses of "epistemic" that pick out a unique domain of normativity (as distinct from practical, moral, or aesthetic normativity), or which describe norms for evaluating the rationality of belief in relation to the evidence.

Resisting the zetetic turn also doesn't entail that our zetetic needs will be neglected or somehow left unaccounted for. Along with all of our other goal-oriented needs, they can comfortably find a home within the domain of practical normativity. And, importantly, this also isn't to say that epistemologists shouldn't care about zetetic norms. They should. For instance, investigating the relationship between epistemic rationality and practical rationality has proven to be a productive field of study and there are deep and ongoing conversations in the literature concerning whether and, if so, how to weigh practical reasons against epistemic reasons.³³ Considering the relationship between zetetic norms and strictly epistemic norms is a natural extension of this discussion. Epistemologists might also naturally find that they're interested in, and especially equipped to, investigate zetetic questions on topics like: evidence gathering, the nature of curiosity and other inquiring attitudes, norms governing the asking of questions, the dynamics of large-scale collaborative inquiries in fields like science, and much more.³⁴ All of these topics are important, and epistemologists have much to offer in investigating them.

Moreover, having two different systems of normative evaluation for rational belief and rational inquiry, respectively, is theoretically useful. Consider Kelly (2003) who demonstrates this point by contrasting two characters, taken to an extreme.

... we can imagine a being who is perfectly epistemically rational (in the sense that at any given moment she believes all and only those propositions which it is epistemically rational for her to believe at that time) but who constantly fails to undertake those mental activities which she needs to undertake in order to achieve her cognitive goals. On the other hand, we can imagine a being who, being fully instrumentally rational, does undertake the needed mental activities but fails to achieve his cognitive goals in virtue of being pathologically epistemically irrational (2003, 637).

Kelly emphasizes that it's possible to be an epistemically rational believer without being an instrumentally or practically rational inquirer. Successfully achieving our epistemic goals requires that we conform to both practical and epistemic norms. It's thus theoretically advantageous to have two distinct systems of normative evaluation, one pertaining to the practical rationality of goal-directed activity (of which inquiry is an instance), and the other pertaining to the epistemic rationality of belief. This needed separation is not possible if we take the zetetic turn, which forces us to run these evaluations together and gives unwarranted priority to zetetic success.

Let's take stock. Several reasons have been put forth which motivate a need to resist the zetetic turn. If zetetic norms are practical norms, which happen to have epistemic ends, then the tension between zetetic norms and more traditional epistemic norms isn't threatening. Instead, it's an instance of a well-known clash between practical rationality and epistemic rationality. We considered the focal point view, an alternative way of responding to this conflict. However, this view requires that zetetic norms don't apply to belief, but they do. Since beliefs can aid or obstruct inquiry, zetetic norms will apply to them after all.

We also considered a more ambitious way of responding to the tension: the zetetic turn. However, in order to be a compelling alternative, a zetetically-grounded epistemology must

³³See, for example, Feldman (2000); Kelly (2003, 2007); Berker (2018); Steglich-Petersen and Skipper (2019) and Howard (2020).

³⁴A useful list of topics is given in the "Inquiry" page on PhilPapers, which was created in 2020, and is edited by Joshua Habgood-Coote. URL: <https://philpapers.org/browse/inquiry>.

include norms which evaluate the rationality of belief (otherwise it would be radically incomplete). But, given that there can be zetetically advantageous, yet clearly *irrational* beliefs, as well as beliefs which are zetetically worthless and unproductive, yet clearly *rational*, zetetic epistemology faces a significant explanatory challenge. In light of this challenge, there is little reason to suspect that norms for evaluating the rationality of belief will be derivable from purely zetetic foundations.

Despite the recent and growing movement towards a zetetic revolution in epistemology, the zetetic turn should be resisted: there is a distinctively epistemic sort of normativity that is not ultimately zetetic.³⁵

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