

# On instrumental zetetic normativity<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** Jane Friedman claims that when we inquire, there is a tension between the instrumental normativity of our inquiries and some basic epistemic norms: The former forbids what the latter permit. Moreover, she argues that since the instrumental normativity of inquiry is epistemic, the previous tension shows that our current conception of epistemic normativity is incoherent and needs to be revised. To solve the problem, she suggests that all our epistemic norms should be considered “zetetic”, namely, norms of inquiry. In this paper, I will argue that the instrumental normativity of inquiry Friedman depicts is inaccurate. I will propose the following alternative picture: All our reasons to inquire and take means to answer our questions are instrumental and can be derivative from the epistemic, the practical, or both. However, developing this alternative view, I will argue that our duties to inquire and take means to answer our questions are just practical in nature. Based on this, I will show that the tension between the epistemic and the zetetic Friedman depicts is just a conflict between the practical and the epistemic: A conflict that does not show per se that the current conception of epistemic normativity is incoherent and needs to be revised.

**Keywords:** Inquiry; Epistemic Norms; Instrumental Transmission; Zetetic Duties

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## 1. Introduction

Recently, Jane Friedman (2020) argued that our inquiries into questions are governed by the following norm:

<b>Zetetic Instrumental Principle (ZIP)</b>
If you want to figure out the answer $A$ to the question $Q$ , you ought to take the necessary means to figure $A$ out.

Moreover, she claims that ZIP is an *epistemic principle* since it tells us how to achieve our *epistemic goals*.

However, she notes that ZIP is in tension with our traditional and basic epistemic norms:

<b>Evidential Permission (EP)</b>
If one has excellent evidence for $p$ at $t$ , then one is permitted to form the belief that $p$ at $t$ .

<b>Knowledge Permission (KP)</b>
If one is in a position to come to know $p$ at $t$ , then one is permitted to come to know $p$ at $t$ .

Specifically, she argues that if we accept ZIP and EP-KP within the domain of epistemic normativity, they systematically give *incoherent advice* to the epistemic agents inquiring into a given question.

To illustrate the tension and the related normative incoherence, consider a very average inquiry: You are outside Grand Central Station in New York and want to answer the question, “How many windows does the Chrysler Building have?” (Friedman, 2020). At any time during your inquiry, given the evidence

or knowledge you already have and the perceptual information you constantly receive, there is a myriad of propositions you are in a position to know or have excellent evidence for. Based on this, EP-KP would allow you to come to know or believe *all* the previous propositions.

Nonetheless, note that among these propositions, some can be relevant to your inquiry, but a huge amount is also *irrelevant*. Intuitively, to succeed in your inquiry, it is a *necessary means* that you display a form of *focus* on the relevant information and, therefore, you are not systematically distracted by the huge amount of irrelevant information accessible to you. Indeed, imagine you were systematically distracted by coming to know or believe every irrelevant proposition you are in a position to know or for which you have excellent evidence: It would be impossible for you to answer the previous question about the Chrysler Building's windows. Hence, given this, ZIP would intervene by requiring you to stay focused on the relevant information and, therefore, forbidding you to come to know or believe all the previous things irrelevant to your inquiry that, instead, EP-KP would permit you to come to know and believe.

In Friedman's words:

So, it looks as though according to KP and EP, it was perfectly permissible for me to come to know anything at all that was available for me to know while I was outside Grand Central, and perfectly permissible for me to follow any excellent evidence I had during that time. But to succeed at my count I needed to stay focused and do my best to ignore much of what was going on around me, as well as much of the other evidence I came with—evidence that's just not relevant to this task. So according to ZIP, it wasn't permissible for me to come to know all sorts of things I was in a position to come to know over the stretch of time during which I was inquiring (and I had all sorts of excellent evidence that I had to ignore). ZIP declared it impermissible for me to do things epistemology never declares impermissible. (Friedman, 2020, p. 504)

Therefore, given this perspective, we can intuitively see that ZIP would prohibit what EP-KP would instead permit.<sup>2</sup>

After describing this tension, Friedman argues that it indicates that our current conception of epistemic normativity is *intrinsically incoherent* because three epistemic norms give us incoherent normative advice. As is intuitive, this incoherence calls for revision of our epistemic normativity: Incoherence is not desirable in our normative theories. Given this, it follows that ZIP or EP-KP should be reformulated or even refuted to have a coherent set of epistemic norms. Regarding this issue, Friedman ends up with the suggestion that not ZIP but our traditional basic epistemic norms EP-KP should be reconsidered. In particular, she proposes that all our epistemic norms should be reformulated as *norms of inquiry*. Namely, she suggests a radical revision of our current epistemic normativity: It should be considered essentially *zetetic*.<sup>3</sup>

### *1.1 Is the tension real, and does it show that the current conception of epistemic normativity is incoherent?*

Epistemologists have reacted in different ways to the tension Friedman detected. For example, Steglich-Petersen (2021) agrees with Friedman's perspective and develops it: The tension is real and problematic and a promising way to reconcile the epistemic and the zetetic is to unify our epistemic and zetetic reasons

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<sup>2</sup> It is relevant to remark that if we imagine ideal inquirers who are not limited in their cognitive capacities and available time, they would never find themselves in a scenario in which ZIP would prohibit what EP-KP would permit. Indeed, we can imagine that they can form any belief that their evidence excellently supports and come to know any proposition they are in a position to know without losing any focus on what matters to solve the question they want to answer and without preventing them from doing what is necessary to achieve this aim. Friedman (2020) is well aware of this possibility and indeed restricts her discussion to limited agents such as us: Human beings who inquire with their limited cognitive resources and amount of time. Therefore, Friedman's discussion and the present work concern real inquirers rather than ideal ones and analyse the instrumental normativity of inquiry and the epistemic norms that apply to them. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pressing me to clarify further the tension between the zetetic and the epistemic Friedman presents.

<sup>3</sup> From Friedman (2020, p. 501): "The Greek verb 'ζητέω' means 'seek for' or 'inquire after'. The adjective 'ζητητικός' is formed from the verb and means 'devoted to inquiry' or 'disposed to inquire'. The word is used in this paper in a slightly different way, to mean 'related to inquiry'".

by grounding the first in the second—our epistemic reasons are just a subclass of zetetic reasons.<sup>4</sup> Instead, Thorstad (2021) argues that the tension is real but does not reveal any incoherence because it is just a *tension* between two different levels of normative evaluation: The level focused on our doxastic or epistemic states and the level whose focal point is the processes that generate the previous states. Finally, Haziza (2022) defends the position that it is possible to reconcile the epistemic and the zetetic by revising EP-KP because they are incorrectly formulated epistemic norms.

In this work, I will follow a fourth path. I will criticise ZIP as a correctly formulated principle of inquiry and offer an alternative one I call the “Zetetic Transmission Principle” (ZTP), which is a reformulation of Kiesewetter and Gertken’s (2021) “Generic Instrumental Reason”:<sup>5</sup> If one has a final reason to figure out the answer  $A$  to the question  $Q$ , then one has a reason to take means to figure  $A$  out, the strength of which depends on the strength of the final reason for one to figure  $A$  out.<sup>6</sup>

In proposing this alternative principle, I will explore ZTP’s advantages over the “Zetetic Instrumental Transmission” (ZIT) Steglich-Petersen (2021) has recently presented for both solving and explaining the tension between the epistemic and the zetetic by subsuming all our epistemic reasons to zetetic reasons: If there is reason for one to pursue the aim of figuring out the answer  $A$  to  $Q$ , and there is positive probability conditional on one’s  $\phi$ -ing, that one’s  $\phi$ -ing helps figuring out  $A$ , then that is a reason for one to  $\phi$ , the strength of which depends on the reason for one to pursue the aim and the probability. I will show that while ZIT is a controversial principle due to the “Too many reasons objection” (Broome,

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<sup>4</sup> See also Fleisher (2022) for a perspective that is sympathetic to Friedman’s position to defend the existence of inquisitive reasons that are epistemic.

<sup>5</sup> Here is Kiesewetter and Gertken’s (2021, p. 277) original principle: “If  $A$  has a final reason to  $\phi$ , then  $A$  has a reason to take means to  $\phi$ -ing”.

<sup>6</sup> As Kolodny and Brunero (2013) note, “means” is usually understood as tools or resources. However, following them, I will more specifically intend with “means” the actions we take in order to achieve an end that might make use of the previous tools or resources. Moreover, here I adopt Kiesewetter and Gertken’s (2021, p. 273) terminology: “We call a reason to  $\psi$  an instrumental reason if and only if it is explained by the fact that  $\psi$ -ing is a means to something else that there is reason to do. A reason that is not explained in this way is a final reason”.

2005; Kiesewetter & Gertken, 2021; Rippon, 2011), ZTP can avoid this problem and jointly capture all ZIT's theoretical virtues in describing the instrumental normativity of our investigations. Moreover, I will underline how the refutation of ZIT in favour of ZTP blocks Steglich-Petersen's unification and, therefore, his solution and explanation of the tension between the zetetic and the epistemic.

Finally, by exploring further the normative nature of ZTP, I will conclude that the normative principle regulating the instrumental rationality of our inquiries makes the tension Friedman detected just a conflict between our practical duties to inquire and our epistemic permissions to know or believe.

## **2. Zetetic transmission principles**

Let us begin by considering that ZIP, *as stated*, is highly implausible. Indeed, it explicitly holds that our desire to figure out  $A$  to  $Q$  generates an obligation to take the necessary means to acquire  $A$ . However, this is put into question for the so-called "Bootstrapping problem" (Bratman, 1981; Raz, 2005; Way, 2012): Simply desiring something does not generate a duty to take the necessary means to realise the previous desire. Indeed, there are cases in which we ought not to desire something and, therefore, also ought not to take the necessary means to realise the desire we ought not to have. Moreover, there are cases in which we are permitted to desire something, but we ought not to take the necessary means to realise the desire we are permitted to have.

For example, applying the previous considerations to inquiries, one can maliciously desire to know how to kill one's business partner and hide her body because one is planning her murder to take over her business. Clearly, in this case, one would have an evil desire to figure out something that one ought not to have. In this scenario, given one's murderous intent, no reason could justify one to take the necessary means to figure out how to kill one's business partner and hide her body. Moreover, imagine another case

in which one desires to know the personal life of a very reserved business partner. And suppose one is aware that the *only way* to know something about one's partner is to access her personal data without permission. Clearly, one might be free to have the previous curiosity, but one does not have any ought to violate one's business partner's privacy by accessing her data without permission. From these considerations, it follows that ZIP, as stated, is highly implausible.<sup>7</sup>

Friedman is aware of this complication and accounts for it as follows:

In the case of practical rationality, some have suggested that instrumental requirements are triggered only when we have good reason to pursue our ends (or at least are allowed to). In light of this, it's worth making clear that all of the cases I discuss in this paper can easily be thought of as ones in which inquirers are allowed and have excellent reason to pursue the questions they are pursuing. (Friedman, 2020, pp. 508-509)

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<sup>7</sup> An anonymous reviewer pointed out that wants do not only express desires but also *needs* and that needs naturally generate oughts. Intuitively, if I need to eat, I ought to eat. Given this, ZIP might be read as follows: If there is a need for *S* to figure out *A* to *Q*, then *S* ought to take the necessary means to figure *A* out. And, since needs intuitively can generate duties, this version of ZIP might not be subject to the "Bootstrapping problem". However, even if this might appear correct at first sight, it is not so clear that it is the case if we explore in detail the space of possibilities. Indeed, like desires, there can be needs that one ought not to have and, therefore, one ought not to satisfy by taking the relevant necessary means. Moreover, there can be cases in which one has a legitimate need, but one ought not to take the necessary means to satisfy it. Regarding the first possibility, imagine a serial killer: He psychologically needs to find out someone to murder. Intuitively, nothing can justify the serial killer taking the necessary means to find his next victim: He cannot have any type of ought to do that. Regarding the second possibility, imagine you have a moderate physical need to find some food because you are a little hungry. However, suppose you are at work and cannot leave your workplace to buy some food in the next hour. Moreover, imagine that the only food available at your workplace is in your colleague's cabinet, but he would never give you his food. Given this, the only way available to you at the moment to find some food would be to access your colleague's cabinet without authorization. Reading this latter case, intuitively, you can have the previous need to find out some food, but you do not have any type of ought to open your colleague's cabinet without authorization in the context you find yourself in. Therefore, we can see that even the revised version of ZIP does not easily escape the "Bootstrapping problem". Rather, this problem retains its bite. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for bringing this issue to my attention.

Namely, in this passage, Friedman is telling us that we can easily consider the cases she analyses as scenarios where one has *excellent reasons* to answer a question  $Q$  one wants to settle, and these reasons generate a duty to take the necessary means to answer  $Q$ .

However, as Steglich-Petersen (2021) notes, this defence of ZIP suggests that the instrumental principle governing our inquiries and conflicting with EP-KP is better captured by a form of *transmission principle*. Namely, a principle that describes the intuitive *factum* that reasons transmit from ends to means: We often have reasons to do something because it is a means for realising a goal for which we have reasons. Following this insight, Steglich-Petersen reformulates Kolodny's (2018) principle called "General Transmission" and offers the following intuitive one to capture the instrumental normativity of our inquiries:<sup>8</sup>

<b>Zetetic Instrumental Transmission (ZIT)</b>
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If there is reason for one to pursue the aim of figuring out the answer $A$ to $Q$ , and there is positive probability conditional on one's $\phi$ -ing, that one's $\phi$ -ing helps figuring out $A$ , then that is a reason for one to $\phi$ , the strength of which depends on the reason for one to pursue the aim and the probability.
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As Steglich-Petersen remarks, a transmission principle like ZIT has many theoretical advantages over a principle like ZIP. First, it avoids the "Bootstrapping problem". Indeed, ZIT does not imply that our desire to figure out an answer to a given question generates any duty to take means. Second, ZIT "affords the possibility of reasons to take means, even when we do not want to pursue the relevant aim, namely when we have reason to pursue the aim" (p. 12). Third, "it is thus also compatible with holding,

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<sup>8</sup> Here is Kolodny's (2018, pp. 752-753) full principle: "If there is reason for one to  $E$ , and there is positive probability, conditional on one's  $M$ -ing, that one's  $M$ -ing, or some part of one's  $M$ -ing, helps to bring it about that one  $E$ 's nonsuperfluously, then that is a reason for one to  $M$ , whose strength depends on the reason for one to  $E$  and the probability, so long as the reason for one to  $E$  is not explained by an application of General Transmission to reason for one to achieve some distinct  $E$ ".

as Friedman does, that wanting an aim can give one reason to take means to it” (pp. 13-14). Fourth, “it yields reasons rather than obligations to take means as its output (...) It allows the principle to cover cases where there is reason to inquire without there being an obligation to inquire, for example because the reasons are weak or outweighed by other reasons” (p. 15). Finally, Steglich-Petersen argues that ZIT can even capture, solve, and explain the tension Friedman detected by unifying our epistemic and zetetic reasons, therefore giving substance to Friedman’s suggestion that epistemic normativity should be considered ultimately zetetic.

Indeed, regarding this latter point, he argues that ZIT allows reasons for pursuing the aim of inquiry to be transmitted not only to the acts of inquiry but also to specific beliefs—to those beliefs that are likely to *constitute* the aim of inquiry of figuring out the answer to a given question. Specifically, he holds that believing the proposition that is the true answer represents a *constitutive means* to the aim of inquiry. As a matter of fact, one could not accomplish the previous inquiry aim without believing the proposition that is the true answer. Based on these considerations and ZIT’s functioning, he proposes the radical perspective that epistemic reasons to believe are just a *subclass of zetetic reasons*:

Here is a radical proposal for a zetetically grounded theory of epistemic reasons: epistemic reasons for belief are simply a subclass of the reasons that are transmitted from the aim of inquiry to the means that will promote that aim, namely that subclass that speaks in favor of beliefs in virtue of the beliefs being likely to constitute the aim of inquiry. (Steglich-Petersen, 2021, p. 19).

Having this perspective at hand, he can propose a solution and an explanation of the tension between the epistemic and the zetetic: It is just a tension within the zetetic, given that the epistemic reasons are a subclass of the zetetic ones. In particular, taking into account ZIT, it is a tension that can be solved just by

*weighing* the different zetetic reasons one has. Indeed, in this perspective, one has an epistemic reason to believe a certain proposition  $p$  *provided that* one has reason to find out whether  $p$  (or the answer to a question relevant to  $p$ ). Moreover, given ZIT, the weight of this epistemic reason to believe is partially provided by the weight of one's reason to figure out whether  $p$ . Hence, considering Friedman's case again, the solution and explanation to the tension it exemplifies would be pretty straightforward. One has an epistemic reason to come to know or believe any proposition  $p$  irrelevant to one's inquiry because one is in a position to know it or has excellent evidence for it. However, one has a stronger reason to stay focused on one's count and not get distracted by all  $p$  because one's reason to find out how many windows the Chrysler Building has is stronger than one's reason to establish whether  $p$ . Given this, when inquiring into how many windows the Chrysler Building has, one should just stay focused and not get distracted by coming to know or believe every  $p$  one is in a position to know or has excellent evidence for.

In conclusion, by using ZIT, Steglich-Petersen provides us with an intuitive solution and explanation of the tension by following the idea Friedman suggests: Considering zetetic what is epistemic.

### *2.1 Liberal, conservative, and generic transmission principles*

It is important to underline that ZIT is explicitly a form of *liberal transmission principle*. Specifically, ZIT is liberal because, in contrast with *conservative transmission principles*, it is not restricted to the idea that reasons for ends are just transmitted to *necessary means*.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, ZIT holds that reasons are also transmitted to all the *non-necessary means* with the positive probability that, by taking it, one is helped in achieving one's goal: Figuring out  $A$  to  $Q$ .

The reason Steglich-Petersen offers to accept a form of liberal principle is the following:

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<sup>9</sup> See Bratman (2009), Darwall (1983), Kiesewetter (2015, 2018), Kolodny (2018), Scanlon (2014), Schroeder (2009), Setiya (2007), Way (2010), and White (2017) for critical discussions about conservative principles.

Often, when we have reason to pursue some aim, there will be many different ways of achieving that aim, but in that case, none of those different ways will be necessary for the aim. For example, I might achieve relief from a tooth-ache by having a filling, or alternatively by having the tooth pulled out, or alternatively by drinking a bottle of whisky. Indeed, for many of the possible aims that one can adopt, it is hard to think of *any* means that would be strictly speaking necessary. Nevertheless, it seems that we can have reason to take means to such aims by virtue of having reason to pursue the aim. This suggests that we should adopt a more ‘liberal’ transmission principle that allows reasons to transmit from aims to any of the means that would help bring about the aim. (Steglich-Petersen, 2021, p. 12)

However, even if one can generally agree with Steglich-Petersen’s reason, it is notable that liberal transmission principles are far from being uncontroversial. Indeed, they have to face the “Too many reasons objection” (Broome, 2005; Kiesewetter & Gertken, 2021; Rippon, 2011).

To illustrate this objection applied to ZIT, imagine that I have a final reason to discover how much sugar kills a person with diabetes mellitus: I promised my best friend who suffers from this disease an answer to this question.<sup>10</sup> A means that gives me a positive probability of figuring out the answer is making an *extremely immoral experiment*: Giving an increasing amount of sugar to a statistically relevant number of subjects who suffer from diabetes mellitus until they die. This would give me a number that would reliably represent the amount of sugar that would kill my best friend. Given this, ZIT would tell me that I have an instrumental reason to give an increasing amount of sugar to a statistically relevant number of subjects with diabetes mellitus until they die. However, this is a more than evil and unconceivable thing

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<sup>10</sup> As Kiesewetter and Gertken (2021) do, I maintain here that keeping one’s promise is an uncontroversial final reason.

to think of doing. *Intuitively*, it does not seem true that there is a genuine reason to take the previous means *just because* I made a promise to my best friend, and the means are likely to accomplish the goal. Namely, it seems that the mere fact that these actions are a means that can likely make us do what we have final reason to do is not enough to give us a genuine reason to perform them. In a nutshell, the problem with ZIT and any liberal transmission principle is that if you have a final reason to do something or specifically an inquiry, they imply that you have instrumental reasons to take extremely objectionable and immoral means that, intuitively, you have no reason to take.<sup>11</sup>

Considering these complications and in an attempt to avoid *ad hoc* solutions to them, Kiesewetter and Gertken (2021, p. 277) propose a more *general* principle they call the “Generic Instrumental Reason” (GIR), “If  $A$  has a final reason to  $\phi$ , then  $A$  has a reason to take means to  $\phi$ -ing”, which has a twofold advantage over liberal principles. On the one hand, GIR is *less controversial* than liberal principles because it is not subject to the “Too many reasons objection”: It does not imply that one’s final reasons to pursue a goal transmit to each specific course of action that is a means to the aim that has a conditional

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<sup>11</sup> Reading this case, one might object: Why not simply say that, in this case, the intuition is wrong, and one does have the reason, but it is just massively outweighed? As Kiesewetter and Gertken (2021, p. 275) note, “according to this strategy, our intuitions about whether there is a reason for an action in a particular context do not reliably differentiate between circumstances in which we have no reasons at all for a given action and circumstances in which we have massively outweighed reasons for this action”. However, those who want to use this intuition debunking strategy should provide an account of why this should happen. By analysing the popular account put forward by Schroeder (2005, 2007), Kiesewetter and Gertken show that the previous strategy is not as straightforward as it might appear at first sight. Indeed, in Schroeder’s perspective, “asserting the existence of a reason standardly carries the conversational implicature that the reason is not massively outweighed. That it seems odd to assert the existence of a reason is thus taken to be compatible with there being such a reason” (Kiesewetter & Gertken, 2021, p. 276). Applied this reasoning to our case, what would make it unnatural to assert that I have a genuine reason to give an increasing amount of sugar to a statistically relevant number of subjects with diabetes mellitus until they die would be simply the fact that this reason is massively outweighed. Nonetheless, Kiesewetter and Gertken underline the fact that one can cancel the previous conversational implicature. For example, in our case, this would imply that, in assessing whether or not I have a reason to give an increasing amount of sugar to a statistically relevant number of subjects with diabetes mellitus until they die, I could assert that I have such a reason. However, the existence of such a reason would still remain highly counterintuitive and controversial in the context the case represents. And, as Kiesewetter and Gertken (2021, p. 276) write, “it is difficult to see why intuitions about whether or not one has such a reason should not be reliable under these circumstances, when the suggested conversational implicatures that might lead us astray in our judgment have been explicitly cancelled”. Given this, they argue that the popular proposal put forward by Schroeder does not really work. Hence, they conclude that the intuition debunking strategy lacks a proper explanation to hit the target and, therefore, that the “Too many reasons objection” retains its bite. Thanks to two anonymous reviewers for bringing up this potential issue.

probability of realising it, including those courses of actions that are extremely objectionable and immoral. It just says that if one has a final reason to pursue a goal, one has a reason to take means.<sup>12</sup> On the other, it retains the *intuition* for which philosophers are disposed to accept and defend liberal transmission principles: It seems evident that the reasons we have to pursue an end are not just transmitted to necessary means. Hence, by adapting Kieseewetter and Gertken's more general principle to the aim of answering questions and slightly revising it in order to capture ZIT's theoretical virtues, we can propose a transmission principle that can less controversially capture our intuitions about the instrumental normativity of our inquiries than ZIT:

<b>Zetetic Transmission Principle (ZTP)</b>
If one has a final reason to figure out the answer $A$ to the question $Q$ , then one has a reason to take means to figure $A$ out, the strength of which depends on the strength of the final reason for one to figure $A$ out.

Following Kieseewetter and Gertken's (2021, pp. 277-278) explanation of their GIR, ZTP simply says that whenever we have a final reason to figure out the answer  $A$  to a given question  $Q$ , then we have a reason to take an action of the type *taking means to figure  $A$  out*. Expressly, ZTP does not state that we

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<sup>12</sup> But what happens if there is just one possible way of taking means, and this is extremely objectionable and immoral? Wouldn't GIR give one reason to take the previous extremely objectionable and immoral means? To answer these questions, imagine that the only means available to eat a piece of cake with your friend is to launch a nuclear missile that would kill millions of people: If you took means to eat a piece of cake, you would be bound to launch this missile. Intuitively, given the extreme and inconceivable immorality of the means, you could not really have a genuine reason to take means and, therefore, launch the previous nuclear missile to eat a piece of cake with your friend. Given this, in accordance with our intuitions, the reverse form of GIR (if  $A$  has no reason to take means to  $\phi$ -ing,  $A$  has no final reason to  $\phi$ -ing) would tell us that you would have no final reason to eat a piece of cake with our friend. Indeed, note that in the previous situation, even a simple promise could not work as a final reason: You could not say that you have a reason to take means and, therefore, launch a nuclear missile that would kill millions of people just because you promised your friend to take a piece of cake with him. Therefore, contrary to what is put forward by the initial questions, GIR would imply that we would not have a final reason to pursue an aim if the only way to take means is something extremely objectionable and immoral. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for bringing this problem to my attention.

have a reason for each action that is a means to figure  $A$  out with a conditional probability of leading to  $A$ . It merely claims that we have reason to perform the act of taking means to figure  $A$  out, period. However, differently from GIR and similarly to ZIT, ZTP has a condition about the strength of the transmitted reason: Not only does it say that the reason transmits to the action of the type taking means to figure  $A$  out, but also its *strength*. Indeed, intuitively, if one has a strong or weak reason to figure out the answer  $A$  to  $Q$ , this strong or weak reason transmits, at least prima facie, to the action of taking means to figure  $A$  out.

For example, imagine that you are a scientist and you have a strong reason to discover the definitive cure for cancer: It would save millions of lives. Intuitively, the force of this reason would also transmit to the action of taking means to discover the cure: You would also have a strong reason to do something to discover the cure for cancer. In the same fashion, imagine that you are a scientist, but you have a weak reason to discover how many grains of sand are on a certain beach: This is not an important discovery, but your best friend is strangely interested and begs you to give him at least a statistical answer. Intuitively, the force of this reason would also transmit to the action of taking means to discover how many grains of sand are on a certain beach: You would also have a weak reason to do something to find out the statistical number of these grains of sand.

Moreover, similarly to its original form GIR and consistent with our intuition that our reasons for ends are not just transmitted to their necessary means, ZTP captures a type of transmission open to both necessary and non-necessary means. And also, it is not subject to the “Too many reasons objection”. Indeed, take the previous example in which I promised my friend affected by diabetes mellitus to answer her question of how much sugar would kill her. For this case, ZTP would simply tell me that I would have reason to do something to keep my promise and, therefore, answer the previous question. However, it would not provide me with any reason to take specific actions that are highly controversial or even

immoral, such as doing an experiment on a statistically relevant number of subjects suffering from the same condition as my friend.

Finally, to support ZTP further, it is notable that it captures all the advantages ZIT was supposed to have over ZIP. First, it is not subject to the “Bootstrapping problem”. Indeed, ZTP does not claim that our desire to figure out an answer to a given question generates any duty to take means. Second, ZTP affords the possibility of reasons to take means, even when we do not want to pursue the relevant aim, namely when we have reason to pursue the aim. Third, it is also compatible with holding, as Friedman does, that wanting an aim can give one reason to take means to it. Fourth, it yields reasons rather than obligations to take means as its output: It allows the principle to cover cases where there is reason to inquire without there being an obligation to inquire, for example, because the reasons are weak or outweighed by other reasons. Finally, it can capture the tension between the epistemic and the zetetic: Even ZTP can create the normative conflict Friedman detected.

Regarding this last point, note that one can have *decisive final reasons* and, therefore, a duty to figure out the answer to a given question. Given ZTP, these decisive reasons would transmit to the action of taking means to figure the answer out. Indeed, imagine that you ought to figure out whether your niece is allergic to sesame seeds because you gave her some sesame cookies and, a second after she eats them, you realise she is allergic to many seeds, but you do not know which ones. In this case, you have a decisive reason to inquire whether your niece is allergic to sesame seeds: If she were allergic to them, she might have go into anaphylactic shock, and you ought to do something immediately to avoid a tragic consequence you would be responsible for. But also, in this case, it seems intuitive that you would have the same decisive reasons to take means to find out the answer: You ought to do something to figure out the answer because if your niece were allergic to sesame seeds, she would be in serious danger for something you are responsible for and you ought to do immediately something to avoid a possible

anaphylactic shock. In a nutshell, using *deontological terminology*, if you ought to figure out the answer to the previous question, you ought to take means to figure out its answer.

Given this, the previous scenario generates a conflict between ZTP and EP-KP. Indeed, consider that displaying a certain degree of focus on the relevant information and, therefore, not being systemically distracted by coming to know or believe *all* those irrelevant propositions you are in a position to know or for which you have excellent evidence appears *constitutive* of the action of taking means. As a matter of fact, if you were constantly distracted by all the irrelevant information surrounding you, as just described, you could not take means to settle the question you ought to answer. Given this, ZTP would require you to stay focused to a certain degree on the relevant information to answer whether your niece is allergic to sesame seeds and, hence, forbid you to get distracted by all the irrelevant information around you. Therefore, given this, we can see that, again, a basic zetetic principle like ZTP would be in tension with our basic epistemic norms like EP-KP: ZTP would prohibit something EP-KP would permit.

However, it is notable that the refutation of ZIT in favour of ZTP blocks Steglich-Petersen's solution and explanation of the tension between the zetetic and the epistemic Friedman brought to philosophical attention. Indeed, ZTP is *neutral* about the transmission of reasons *from* the goal of figuring out the answer to a given question *to* those beliefs that are likely to constitute the aim of inquiry. Namely, it does not say anything about whether the reasons for figuring out the answer to a given question transmit to *beliefs*. Moreover, it does not even have this potentiality since ZTP is not about the specific *occurrent means* one can take to realise one's inquiry aim, including the specific constitutive means to this goal that it is represented by believing the proposition that is the true answer. Rather, as we saw, it is just about the general action of taking means to figure out the answer to a given question. Specifically, ZTP simply says that if you have a final reason of some strength to inquire into a given question, you have a reason of some strength to do something—without saying which specific means you have reason to take, whether a belief

or a course of action. Therefore, given this, there are no obvious ways to draw from ZTP the unification of the epistemic and zetetic reasons Steglich-Petersen derived from ZIT and, hence, apply his explanation to the tension Friedman detected.

In conclusion, taking together all our considerations, the refutation of ZIT in favour of ZTP leaves open the question of how to correctly account for the tension Friedman brought to philosophical attention. As we will see in the following two sections, ZTP and its normative features will capture the tension between the zetetic and the epistemic as just a tension between our practical duties to inquire and our epistemic permission to know or believe.

### **3. Reasons to inquire are instrumental**

Going back to the example about your seed-allergic niece, it gives us more material to reason about the nature of normativity of inquiry than just reinstating the tension between the zetetic and the epistemic Friedman detected. Indeed, it clearly shows that you have reason to inquire into a given question because you have a reason for avoiding a tragic consequence that would be directly caused by your action: You have the *moral duty* to take care of your niece and avoid a possible fatal anaphylactic shock caused by your negligent behaviour. Namely, your *final reason* to inquire whether your niece is allergic to sesame seeds is *practical* in nature.

But also, your reason to inquire is clearly *instrumental*. Indeed, determining whether your niece is allergic to sesame seeds is a *good*, the *best*, or the *only way* you have at your disposal to take care of her and avoid the tragic consequence of a fatal anaphylactic shock you would be responsible for. Indeed, by figuring out whether your niece is allergic to sesame seeds, you can discover if you gave her the wrong kind of seeds and behave consequently to take care of her and prevent her from being severely harmed by

your actions. Hence, in the previous case, your final reason to inquire and find out the answer to the question of whether your niece is allergic to sesame seeds is practical because of your moral duty to care for her and avoid a tragic consequence caused by your actions. But also, your reason to inquire is instrumental because figuring out the answer to the previous question is a good, the best, or the only means you have to comply with this duty.

However, it is also *plausible* that our final reasons to inquire are not just restricted to the practical realm but can also be *epistemic*. Generally, epistemologists tell us that knowledge, true and/or justified beliefs, and understanding are *epistemically valuable states*. Moreover, we also intuitively say that knowing is *epistemically better* than being ignorant, having true and/or justified beliefs is epistemically better than having false and/or unjustified beliefs, and understanding is epistemically better than being confused.<sup>13</sup> Plausibly, these normative statements can provide us with epistemic reasons to improve our epistemic positions by acquiring these valuable epistemic states if we lack them or have their negative counterparts. In particular, they can give us epistemic reasons to improve our epistemic status to remove our ignorance, our false and/or unjustified beliefs, or cognitive confusion and acquire more epistemically valuable states like knowledge, true and/or justified beliefs, or understanding.

Indeed, putting aside the practical reasons one might have, one can intuitively mention as a reason to improve one's epistemic position the *epistemic betterness* of certain cognitive states over their defective

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<sup>13</sup> Here, one might ask: What makes understanding, knowledge, justified or true belief epistemically valuable states and what makes them epistemically better than confusion, ignorance, unjustified or false beliefs? A simple answer to this question is their relation with truth: Truth is the fundamental value of epistemology, and if a certain cognitive state is true or promotes truth, then it is epistemically valuable. Roughly, this is the perspective that is usually called "Veritism" or "Truth value monism". However, this position has been a matter of debate between the pluralists who argue that there is a plurality of epistemic values beyond truth (Brogaard, 2009; DePaul, 2001; Elgin, 2017; 2019; Kvanvig, 2005; Matheson, 2011; Pedersen, 2017; Perrine, 2020) and the truth monists who defend the idea that truth should be considered the most fundamental epistemic value (Ahlstrom-Vij, 2013; Engel, 2017; Khalifa & Millson, 2020; Nawar, 2021; Pettigrew, 2019; Pritchard, 2021; Sylvan, 2018). Here, I do not take a stance between monism or pluralism: The readers are free to read the normative statements about doxastic and epistemic states in this paragraph as they are more inclined to an epistemic value monistic or pluralistic perspective. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pressing me to clarify this point.

counterparts or their *epistemic value*. For example, one might answer the question of why one is trying to improve one's epistemic position as follows: "Because, by improving my epistemic position, I can remove my cognitive defects like ignorance, false or unjustified beliefs, or confusion and acquire epistemically better states like knowledge, true or justified beliefs, or understanding", "Because, by improving my epistemic position, I can acquire epistemically valuable states like knowledge, true or justified beliefs, or understanding that I do not currently have". Therefore, given this, we can see that the previous epistemic normative statements can plausibly work to provide us with epistemic reasons to improve our doxastic or epistemic positions.

Notably, we can often improve our epistemic positions through our cognitive system's simple and correct functioning. But many other times, making an inquiry is a *good*, the *best*, or *only means* we have to do that. Namely, figuring out answers to questions is often a good, the best, or the only way to remove our epistemic defects and acquire more epistemically valuable states. Given this, it turns out that we can have reason to inquire because we have an epistemic reason to improve our epistemic position. In this eventualities, our final reason to determine the answer to a given question would be epistemic. But also, our reason to inquire is *instrumental* because figuring out the answer to a given question is a good, the best, or the only instrument we have available to improve our epistemic positions.

### 3.1 *A sui generis zetetic normativity?*

I want to underline that the previous examples do not seem an *exception* to why we have reason to inquire. But rather, they seem more like the *rule*: All the reasons we have to inquire are instrumental, and our final reasons to figure out answers to our questions are practical or epistemic.<sup>14</sup> Specifically, we aim to

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<sup>14</sup> Here, the disjunction should be understood as inclusive: We can also have both epistemic and practical reasons to inquire, as we will see in a bit.

determine the answer to questions because it is a good, the best, or the only means we have to realise more fundamental goals or effects for which we have practical or epistemic reasons. If this is true, then all our reasons to inquire are just instrumental, and our final reasons to figure out answers to our questions are practical or epistemic in nature. Namely, we are always tied to instrumental, practical, and epistemic reasons to determine when to inquire and aim to find out answers to questions.

In support of this, note that there appear to be no questions that *per se* give us reasons or even require us to figure out their answers. Indeed, what might be the question that, as such and without being tied to the epistemic or the practical, provides us with reasons or even requires us to answer it? I do not find any candidate here. Instead, it is an intuitive phenomenon that we have reason to answer questions because they are instrumentally and essentially tied to the practical and the epistemic: Figuring out answers to questions is a good, the best, or the only instrument we have to realise some goals or effect for which we have practical or epistemic reasons. This latter phenomenon and our intuition that there are no questions that *per se* give us reasons or even require us to answer them directly favour the perspective that there is no *sui generis zetetic normativity* regarding when to inquire: The reasons for figuring out answers to questions are always *instrumental* and ultimately *practical* or *epistemic*.

Moreover, consistent with this conclusion, it seems that, in deciding whether to inquire or not into a given question, both the practical and the epistemic contribute to establishing our reasons to inquire. Namely, the epistemic and the practical *interact* to provide an *overall reason* to figure out or not the answer to a given question.<sup>15</sup> For example, imagine that one is certain that a specific answer to a given question *Q* is true and fully understands why it is so. Intuitively, this is an epistemic reason not to inquire

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<sup>15</sup> It is important to note that this claim, if correct, gives direct support to Thorstad's (2022) idea that the normativity of inquiry is all things considered. However, as we are going to see in the next section, even if the previous might be generally true for most of our inquiries, I will argue that our duties to inquire and take means to figure out the answer to a given question are just practical. Namely, the normativity of our duties to inquire and take means is just a practical matter.

into  $Q$ .<sup>16</sup> Indeed, from an epistemic perspective, one might argue that one would have already achieved the maximal epistemically valuable state and inquiring into  $Q$  to reach a more valuable one would be epistemic nonsense: What would be the epistemic improvement one might gain from one's inquiry? Hence, broadly speaking, the latter can be considered a *negative epistemic reason* regarding when to inquire: It speaks in favour of *not inquiring* into a given question.

However, let us suppose that you are a surgeon and that your *professional ethics* requires you to double-check any patient's file before proceeding with any surgical procedure: If you do not comply with your work rules, you will be fired. Moreover, imagine that requesting a motivated dispensation from double-checking your patients' files is possible, but it would take longer than just doing it. Given these conditions, take the case you have certainty that you have to remove the left kidney from one of your patients and fully understand why.<sup>17</sup> What should you do? Intuitively, you should just follow your professional ethics and double-check the answer to the question, "Is the left kidney I have to remove from my patient?", despite your certainty and understanding giving you reason not to double-check. Indeed, by doing so, you avoid being fired or wasting more time asking for a dispensation than doing a simple double-check. Namely, in this case, you intuitively have a *positive practical reason* that *surpasses* your epistemic one: A reason that speaks in favour of making an inquiry that surpasses your negative reason not to inquire. Ultimately, taking into account your *divergent* epistemic and practical reasons, you would have an overall reason to inquire.

However, we can also imagine cases in which one's epistemic and practical reasons are *convergent* in suggesting whether or not to inquire. For example, imagine that you are ignorant about who the actual President of the United States is. Knowing the actual US President is epistemically better than remaining

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<sup>16</sup> See Friedman (2017) for a similar but stronger normative position: If one knows the answer to a given question, one ought not to inquire into it.

<sup>17</sup> This is a variation of Brown's (2008) case. See also Falbo (2021, 2023).

ignorant about it: This gives you an epistemic reason to improve your epistemic position by removing your ignorance and acquiring knowledge. Moreover, suppose you must pass a Contemporary American History exam to graduate and knowing the actual US President is essential not to fail: This gives you a practical reason to remove your ignorance and acquire knowledge. Hence, in this imaginary scenario, you have both an epistemic and a practical reason that, considered together, provide you with an overall positive reason to remove your ignorance and acquire knowledge of who the actual US President is.

Given this, imagine further that you cannot learn who the actual US President is just by the default functioning of your cognitive system and that making an inquiry into the question, “Who is the actual President of the United States?”, is the only means to remove your ignorance. In this case, you have then an overall positive reason to inquire into the question, whose *sources* are both epistemic and practical. Namely, your final reasons to figure out the answer to the question, “Who is the actual President of the United States?”, are both practical and epistemic. Indeed, if you removed your ignorance by making an inquiry, which is the only means you would have to do so, you would improve your epistemic position by achieving a more epistemically valuable state. But also, you would gain a piece of knowledge that is essential to passing your exam and graduating. Hence, we can see a case in which one has both an epistemic and a practical reason to inquire that converge in providing an overall positive reason to figure out the answer to a given question.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> It is important to note that, despite our discussion being mostly based on our intuition about the relation between our epistemic and practical reason to inquire, it opens some philosophically relevant questions about their relation: How do we *compare* our epistemic and practical reasons to figure out what, all things considered, one has most reason to do regarding whether to inquire or not? How do we *weigh* our practical and epistemic reason to inquire in order to establish what we have most reason to do regarding whether to inquire or not? These are important questions that need to be investigated and need a full paper to be explored: I leave them open for another work. However, philosophers debate the comparability and weighing of epistemic and practical reasons for beliefs (see, for example, Bradley, 2024; Howard, 2020; Meylan, 2021; Reisner, 2008; Steglich-Petersen & Skipper, 2019). This debate might be an excellent theoretical place to approach the problem of the comparability and weighing of epistemic and practical reasons to inquire. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pointing me out these important issues.

In conclusion, taking stock of our considerations in this section, we can claim that the reasons we have to inquire are always instrumental, and their final sources are generally practical or epistemic. Namely, there does not exist a *sui generis* zetetic source that gives rise to a distinct normativity of when to inquire. We have reason to inquire because making an inquiry is a good, the best, or the only instrument we have to realise effects or goals for which we have epistemic or practical reasons. From this perspective, the reasons we can have to inquire are just instrumental and have their sources in more basic normative domains, like the epistemic or the practical. In other words, our reasons to inquire are instrumental but also ultimately practical, epistemic, or both practical and epistemic in nature.

#### **4. Duties to inquire are practical**

A question becomes relevant at this point: If all our reasons to inquire and take means to realise our inquiries are instrumental to goals or effects for which we have practical or epistemic reasons and, therefore, are ultimately epistemic or practical in nature, what are we talking about when we say that the zetetic and the epistemic are in tension because the former forbids what the latter permits?

Given ZTP, the epistemic and practical reasons one has to inquire into a given question  $Q$  transmit to the action of taking means to answer  $Q$ . Hence, the instrumental reasons we have to take means can be epistemic, practical, or practical-and-epistemic. In general, the point of the last statement is that ZTP is a principle with a *multiple normative nature* dependent on the type of final reasons that appear in its *antecedent*. Given this, on the one hand, the tension between the epistemic and the zetetic can be totally internal to epistemic normativity if the final reasons in ZTP's antecedent are decisive and exclusively epistemic. On the other hand, it can be a tension between the practical or the practical-and-epistemic and the epistemic if the reasons in ZTP's antecedent are decisive and just practical or practical-and-epistemic.

Note that only in the first option would the tension display an incoherence in the epistemic that would require a revision of our current epistemic normativity. Indeed, in the other remaining options, the tension would be just one that goes beyond what is exclusively epistemic.

#### *4.1 Epistemic reasons do not contribute to generating a duty to inquire*

Considering our epistemic reasons to inquire, it seems that none of them can be decisive and, therefore, generate per se a requirement or a duty to figure out the answer to a given question. Expressly, the following epistemic normative facts:

- Knowledge is epistemically better than ignorance,
- True and/or justified beliefs are epistemically better than unjustified and/or false beliefs,
- Understanding is epistemically better than cognitive confusion,
- True and/or justified beliefs, knowledge, and understanding are epistemically valuable states,

do not seem to create per se a duty to inquire.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Here, one might object that there might be other epistemic reasons to inquire than those I mentioned that might generate a duty to inquire. For example, adapting a case from Fricker (2007), an anonymous reviewer proposes a case in which epistemic justice can generate an epistemic duty to inquire. Here is the case: “The court will prosecute Tom Robinson, a black man, for raping Mayella Ewell (from *To Kill a Mockingbird*). Their reasons seem prejudicial. The prosecution indeed believes that he is probably innocent, but following the detectives, they are highly practically interested in closing the inquiry. The defence knows they will likely lose the case, but in order to give Tom Robinson the epistemic justice he deserves, and thereby treat his testimony as credible, recognizing him in his capacity as an epistemic agent that he deserves to have recognized, gives them a duty to keep the inquiry open.” The problem with this type of case is that the source of duty is not strictly epistemic, but it appears more practical. Indeed, the value of recognising Tom’s capacity as an epistemic agent is to recognise the value of a person *qua* person and, therefore, not damage his personal dignity. Moreover, its value is also practical for the defence: If Tom Robinson were treated as credible, they could increase the probability of winning the case. Finally, there is also an ethical aspect: Tom could appropriately defend himself from an unjust prosecution that would reinforce an existing state of injustice. Namely, even in the case of epistemic justice, the source of the duty to inquire would not be strictly epistemic. Rather, the duty to inquire would stem from the practical aspects of the injustice one commits in not recognising one’s capacity as a knower. Notably, the objector should find a source whose epistemic attributes do generate the duty to inquire. However, it relies on the objector to disclose the existence of these epistemic reasons and motivate why they can generate a duty to inquire. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for bringing this possible case to my attention.

Indeed, take the case that you are ignorant about the carbonara recipe. *Per se*, this ignorance together with the better epistemic quality of knowledge would not generate any decisive reason and so duty to search for the carbonara recipe. As a matter of fact, none of us has the duty to know this recipe *per se*, even if it might be a good thing to know just to enjoy one of the traditional Roman recipes. At most, one's ignorance conjoined with the better epistemic quality of knowledge can plausibly provide a non-decisive epistemic reason to search for the carbonara recipe. For example, one might think: "Since knowledge is epistemically better than ignorance, and I am actually ignorant about the carbonara recipe, I could inquire to improve my epistemic position by removing my ignorance and coming to know how to make a good carbonara".

Moreover, imagine you discover you have a false and/or unjustified belief about the procedure of voting for the next political election. The *sole* fact that you have the previous epistemically defective belief and that it is epistemically better to have true and/or justified beliefs does not generate any decisive reason or duty to inquire about the right procedure. Rather, it appears that one should have a correct perspective on the procedure and keep up to date about it to be a good citizen and correctly express one's vote. However, in this latter case, it would not be the epistemic value of the true and/or justified belief and its epistemic betterness over the false and/or unjustified belief that would create a duty to inquire. But rather, it would be the *practical importance* of having an accurate perspective on the voting procedure to comply with one's citizenship values and rights. At most, one's false or unjustified belief conjoined with the better epistemic quality of a true or justified belief can plausibly provide a non-decisive epistemic reason to inquire about the right voting procedure. For example, one might think: "Since a true/justified belief is epistemically better than a false/unjustified one, and I actually have a false/unjustified belief about the voting procedure, I could inquire to improve my epistemic position by removing my false/unjustified belief and acquiring a true/justified belief about how to vote".

Finally, consider a scenario where you do not understand the conceptual coherence of the Bigfoot conspiracy theory. Again, it seems that, in the absence of any other positive reasons, it is not so problematic to remain conceptually confused about it: Your confusion and the higher epistemic value of understanding per se do not appear to generate a decisive reason and, therefore, a duty to inquire about it. Indeed, you might reasonably respond to someone who requires you to inquire just based on your confusion and the epistemic betterness of understanding: “I am totally uninterested in the Bigfoot conspiracy theory, and so I do not care about my lack of understanding: If it is so important to you, you inquire!”. At most, one’s confusion conjoined with the better epistemic quality of understanding can plausibly provide a non-decisive epistemic reason to inquire into what makes the Bigfoot conspiracy theory conceptually coherent. For example, one might think: “Since understanding is epistemically better than confusion, and I am actually conceptually confused about the Bigfoot conspiracy theory, I could inquire to improve my epistemic position by removing my confusion and acquiring a proper understanding of this conspiracy theory”.

Hence, we can see that, *alone*, the epistemic reasons we can have to figure out the answer to a given question do not appear decisive. Namely, they are *insufficient* to generate a duty to inquire. Note that this conclusion directly supports Thorstad’s (2022) idea that there are no purely epistemic norms of inquiries and, therefore, no purely epistemic duties to inquire. Moreover, considering the examples we have just provided in support of the previous conclusion, it also appears to be in accordance with Thorstad’s perspective that all the norms of inquiries are *all things considered* and, therefore, that any reason matters in generating a duty to inquire, from the practical to the epistemic. Indeed, following this insight, we can appreciate that if we combine a practical reason with our epistemic reasons, we can generate a decisive reason to inquire and, therefore, a duty to figure out the answer to a given question.

For example, reconsidering the previous cases, imagine that you are a new chef who is working in an Italian restaurant specialising in carbonara: Your work requires you to be able to prepare the previous dish. This latter condition would give you a decisive reason to master the carbonara recipe and, therefore, figure out the answer to the question, “What is the carbonara recipe?”, since you do not know it. Moreover, imagine that you recognise that our democratic values require you to express your vote to be a good citizen. This would provide you with a decisive reason to learn the correct voting procedure and so figure out the answer to the question, “What is the right procedure to vote?”, since you do not have it. Finally, imagine that you are a researcher studying the Bigfoot conspiracy theory: You are paid to understand its conceptual features and coherence in detail. This would give you a decisive reason to study the Bigfoot conspiracy theory and determine the answer to the question, “How can the Bigfoot conspiracy be conceptually coherent?”, since you do not have it.

Ultimately, we can see that if we combine a practical reason to inquire with our previous non-decisive epistemic reasons, we can generate a decisive reason to inquire and, therefore, a duty to determine the answer to a given question. Namely, by considering the cases just presented, it appears that we can have an epistemic and a practical reason that together can generate an *all-things-considered duty* to inquire into a given question.

However, even if the previous conclusion seems intuitively correct, it is not so if we go a little deeper into what counts to generate a duty to inquire. Indeed, in all the previous cases, if we focus our attention, we can note that the epistemic reasons, albeit conjoined with your practical reasons to inquire, do not contribute to generating your duty to inquire. Rather, the practical reasons *alone* are decisive and do generate the duty. Specifically, your professional ethics and democratic values give you a decisive reason to figure out the carbonara recipe, how the Bigfoot conspiracy can be conceptually coherent, and how to vote correctly. The epistemic normative fact that knowing is better than ignoring, having justified and/or

true beliefs is better than having false and/or unjustified ones, understanding is better than being confused, or just the normative fact that knowledge, justified and/or true beliefs, or understanding are epistemically valuable states do not do any work here. Indeed, we can fully explain why you have a duty to inquire just by appealing to your practical reasons: You ought to inquire because you need to acquire a doxastic or an epistemic state you are required to have for practical reasons.

Hence, given these considerations, we can see that it does not seem true that epistemic and practical reasons *together* can generate a decisive reason to inquire. Indeed, even when we have both epistemic and practical reasons to inquire, the previous cases show that practical reasons *do* the work and generate a duty to inquire. Namely, they make manifest that our epistemic reasons to inquire can only be conjoined with practical ones but are neither *necessary* nor *participate* in generating the duty to inquire. Ultimately, based on this, our positive duties to inquire do not appear all things considered. But rather, they reveal themselves to be *all practical things considered*.<sup>20</sup>

To sustain this conclusion further, consider the case in which you are a surgeon who is certain that she has to remove the left kidney from her patient and understands perfectly well why. As we have already seen, since you have certainty and full understanding, you have no epistemic reason to double-check whether it is the left kidney you have to remove from your patient. However, despite this, you have a decisive practical reason to do so. Indeed, based on your professional ethics and the practical costs of not double-checking or asking for its dispensation, you just ought to double-check the answer to the question,

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<sup>20</sup> What about negative duties to inquire? Here, I remain open to the possibility that just epistemic reasons or a mixture of epistemic and practical reasons can sometimes be decisive in generating a duty not to inquire. For example, in the absence of a relevant practical reason to inquire, it is intuitive to think that if one is certain that a particular proposition *p* is true and fully understands why *p* is true, one has a decisive epistemic reason not to inquire into whether *p*: There would be no other epistemically valuable state that could improve one's epistemic position. Moreover, imagine that one already knows the answer *p* to a given question but is not certain of it. Furthermore, imagine that one has another important issue to solve other than inquiring into whether *p* is the right answer. The fact that one already has a valuable epistemic state regarding *p* combined with the importance of solving the other issue can provide one with a decisive epistemic-and-practical reason and, therefore, a duty not to inquire into whether *p*. However, despite these intuitive examples, I leave the question open for a future occasion.

“Is the left kidney I have to remove from my patient?”, no matter your epistemic state. In other words, this scenario depicts a situation in which one has a decisive practical reason to inquire but lacks any positive epistemic reason to do so. Namely, it shows a case in which one ought to inquire just for practical reasons.<sup>21</sup>

Taking together all the considerations in this section, we can appreciate that only practical reasons seem to generate a duty to inquire. Specifically, it appears that there is no epistemic reason that, *by itself*, can generate a duty to figure out the answer to a given question. Moreover, even if conjoined with our practical reasons to inquire, the epistemic reasons appear to play no role in generating a duty to inquire. Namely, from our perspective, it follows that we only have practical duties to figure out answers to questions.

#### 4.2 *What about Friedman’s tension?*

If the conclusions we made are true, then the tension between the zetetic and the epistemic Friedman detected turns out to be a just tension between the practical and the epistemic: A tension that cannot show per se that our current conception of epistemic normativity is incoherent and needs to be revised.

Indeed, given ZTP and our conclusion that there are only practical duties to inquire, it follows that we have a duty toward the action of taking means to figure out the answer to a given question because we have a practical duty toward the end of inquiring into it. Namely, our practical duty to answer a given question generates the duty to take means to find out its answer. Or said differently, it transmits from the

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<sup>21</sup> As an anonymous reviewer underlines, someone following Friedman (2017) would deny that the inquiry one ought to pursue in the proposed scenario could be a case of genuine inquiry since the subject could not suspend her judgment about the question “Is the left kidney I have to remove from my patient?”. Indeed, Friedman claims that when one inquires into a given question, one suspends one’s judgment about it. However, this claim has been challenged by many philosophers: There are cases, like double-checking, in which we can be considered as genuinely inquiring into a given question without suspending our judgment about it. See Archer (2021), Falbo (2021, 2023), Feldman and Conee (2018), Millson (2020), Palmira (2020), Raleigh (2021), and Woodard (2021, 2022) for examples of inquiries without suspension of judgment.

end of answering a question to the action of taking means to figure out its answer. In this picture, the resulting duty to take means is ultimately practical in nature. Given this, it follows that the tension between the zetetic and the epistemic Friedman detected, and we captured by a conflict between ZTP and EP-KP, displays just a tension between a practical duty and some basic epistemic permissions.

In conclusion, taking stock of our results, we can appreciate that the zetetic normativity regarding when to inquire is instrumental and can generally be practical or epistemic in nature: A normativity that broadly serves our practical or epistemic final reasons to figure out answers to questions. However, when we turn to the duty to inquire, we can note that the instrumental zetetic normativity appears just practical. Namely, all the duties to inquire and take means to answer our questions fall under the practical domain. Given this latter point, the tension between the zetetic and the epistemic detected by Friedman turns out to be just a tension between the practical and the epistemic: A tension that does not display per se any incoherence in our current conception of the epistemic normativity. But if it is true, then the tension between the zetetic and the epistemic cannot be used to motivate a radical revision of our traditional epistemic norms into zetetic norms. Another path should be pursued to claim that epistemic normativity is just zetetic normativity.

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