

# Intentions and Inquiry

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This paper defends the Intention Account of Individual Inquiry. On this account, inquiry is best understood by appeal to a ‘question-directed intention’ (QDI), an intention to answer a question broadly construed. This account’s core commitments help meet recent challenges plaguing extant approaches to characterizing inquiry. First, QDIs are the type of mental state central to inquiry, not attitudes like curiosity or wonder. Second, holding a QDI towards a question and acting in service of it constitutes the start of inquiry. Third, controversial norms which mandate a rational inquirer’s ignorance towards the answer to her question can be reformulated and defended by appeal to rational constraints on intention. Fourth, instrumental pressures inquirers face are the standard pressures of plan-rationality. In defending these theses, I show that the Intention Account provides compelling explanations to standing challenges, in ways competitors cannot. It does so by advancing understanding of how our epistemic and practical agency are intertwined.

## 1. Introduction

Some inquiries are modest: ‘Who is the Pope?’ Some less so: ‘How will the universe end?’ Sometimes you inquire alone, sometimes with others. Understanding inquiry in its varied forms is an important philosophical task. Inquiries structure our interactions with our environment, engender cooperation, and impose practical and epistemic demands. But what is inquiry’s nature? What are its norms? Who are inquirers?

One approach to these questions appeals to the question-related attitudes agents possess. Call the attitudes which are definitive of inquiry the *inquiring attitudes*. Inquirers, then, are agents who hold such attitudes towards questions into which they inquire. Which attitudes? On a prominent view, the inquiring attitudes are interrogative attitudes. These are question-directed attitudes like being curious or wondering. They directly embed interrogative complements (Friedman 2013a, 2019, 2020).

The Interrogative Attitude Account of Individual Inquiry (hereafter, the Interrogative Attitude Account) builds on this insight. It takes all inquiring attitudes to be interrogative attitudes. It also takes holding

the relevant token interrogative attitude to be sufficient for inquiring. It claims:

*Exhaustivity*: All inquiring attitudes are interrogative attitudes.

*Sufficiency*: Where  $S$  is an agent,  $Q$  is a question, and  $t$  a time, if  $S$  holds an interrogative attitude towards  $Q$  at  $t$ , then  $S$  inquires into  $Q$  at  $t$ .

Proponents of the Interrogative Attitude Account also defend norms governing inquiry (zetetic norms). Here are two examples (where  $Q$  is a question, to figure out  $Q^?$  is to figure out the answer to  $Q$ , and  $p^Q$  is an answer to  $Q$ ):

*Don't Believe and Inquire (DBI)*: One ought not inquire into/have an interrogative attitude towards  $Q$  at  $t$  and believe  $p^Q$  at  $t$ . (Friedman 2019, p. 303)

*Zetetic Instrumental Principle (ZIP)*: If one wants to figure out  $Q^?$ , then one ought to take the necessary means to figuring out  $Q^?$ . (Friedman 2020, p. 503)

The Interrogative Attitude Account is said to respect pre-theoretical intuitions and offer concrete guidance to inquirers.

Recently, however, the Interrogative Attitude Account has been attacked. Critics have denied Exhaustivity (Woodard 2021; Falbo 2022). Further, 'ignorance norms', like *Don't Believe and Inquire*, have been subject to scrutiny and counterexample (Archer 2018; Sapir and Elswyk 2021; Falbo 2021, 2022; Woodard 2021) or critical re-interpretation (Lee 2020). If these critics are right, the Interrogative Attitude Account will not do.

My aim in this paper is to provide a new conception of inquiry. It focuses on different core commitments than *Exhaustivity* and *Sufficiency*. It defends ignorance norms and vindicates *Zetetic Instrumental Principle*. My strategy will be to meet recent challenges head on by turning to intentions. I sketch the Intention Account of Individual Inquiry (hereafter Intention Account), on which the central state of mind for inquirers is a plan-state, a specific kind of intention. Call such an intention a *question-directed intention* (QDI). QDIs are of the following form: 'S intends to answer a question  $Q$  by forming a settled attitude  $A$  towards a proposition  $p$  which is a (complete) answer to  $Q$ '.

QDIs are intentions: they involve plans, inherit distinctive rational pressures, and guide action.<sup>1</sup> On the Intention Account, QDIs are central in understanding the nature of inquiry. This centrality is exemplified in two claims which constitute the core of the account:

*Intention-Exhaustivity:* All inquiring attitudes are either QDIs or QDIs paired with interrogative attitudes.

*Intention-Sufficiency:* If an agent *S* acts on a QDI towards *Q* at *t*, then so long as *S* retains and is guided by this QDI, *S* inquires into *Q*.

As I argue, the Intention Account helps explain attractive norms of inquiry. It straightforwardly motivates *Zetetic Instrumental Principle* and allows for a flexible defence of ignorance norms (including variations of *Don't Believe and Inquire*). For a settled attitude *A*:

*Intention Ignorance-Norm:* Rationality requires that (if you hold a QDI (settled by *A*) towards *Q* at *t*, then it is not the case you hold *A* (as specified by your QDI) towards  $p^Q$  at *t*).

I turn now to defend the Intention Account by showing how it overcomes extant challenges to competitors. The Intention Account neatly accommodates propositional inquiring attitudes (§3). It cleanly demarcates inquiry's start (§4). It offers a new way to defend ignorance norms (§5). It grounds norms like *Zetetic Instrumental Principle* (§6).

## 2. Intention account of inquiry

In this section, I develop the Intention Account. This requires understanding intentions (§2.1), explicating QDIs (§2.2), and clarifying the account's scope (§2.3).

### 2.1. Intention

Intentions are mental states that help agents plan individually, socially, and cross-temporally. Accordingly, they are governed by constraints of instrumental and plan-rationality (Bratman 1987).

Intentions involve (sometimes partial) plans of action towards goals. I intend to go to the supermarket later, but haven't yet decided by which route. Of course, intending needn't mean I go now to the supermarket.

<sup>1</sup> I discuss the nature of intentions further in §2.1.

But by so intending, I acquire rational pressures towards planning and taking further steps towards my goal. Since plans must be co-realizable, it matters rationally how agents fill in the details of currently vague intentions. Agents face rational pressures towards means–end coherence, consistency, and stability. It is, in part, this functional profile which separates intention from other states like desires and wishes. This profile also reflects intention’s importance in the rational behaviour of goal-oriented agents.

Intentions play an important role in the cognitive economy of planning agents; they are also important in our attributions of intentional action. Prominent views in action theory take the difference between intentional acts and mere happenings to turn on an agent’s intentions. This suggests intentions will be central in our account of inquiry. After all, inquiring is an intentional activity. Part (though not all) of what characterizes genuine inquirers is that inquiry is no accident. Actions constituting inquiry occur in controlled fashion, in service of a general aim to answer a question.<sup>2</sup> In this way, intentions help explain the relationship between aim and action. They help govern the course inquiry takes, and help identify the activity it is.<sup>3</sup>

The type of mental state characteristic of inquirers is only part of the story, however. We must also understand the content of such intentions.

## 2.2. *Settled attitudes*

The Intention Account claims that inquirers have intentions of a certain form. These QDIs are directed towards questions. These are the questions into which an agent can be said to inquire.<sup>4</sup> It is the answer to their question that inquirers are after. We can model this by understanding the QDI as aiming towards the formation of a settled attitude towards an answer.

‘Settled attitude’ is a place-holder for a certain set of propositional mental states. These are the mental states which involve commitment to the truth of an answer. Commitment to truth involves appropriately using such an answer in downstream thought and action. When we settle on an answer to our question (by forming a settled attitude) we take ourselves to be entitled to *use* it.

<sup>2</sup> The Intention Account explains the tie between agential activity and inquiry by reference to a mental state of an inquiring agent, *pace* Smith (2020).

<sup>3</sup> The conception of intention employed here is non-cognitivist. Both cognitivists and non-cognitivists broadly agree on intention’s norms, they just ground them differently. Thus, both can accept the conclusions below.

<sup>4</sup> For two prominent conceptions of questions see Hamblin (1958) and Groenendijk and Stokhof (1984).

Such commitment is familiar. We resolve questions by settling on answers all the time. You form a settled attitude when you accept that Francis is the Pope. I form a settled attitude when I believe that Szilárd has the uranium. We then usually take ourselves to (and often do) use these answers appropriately.

Settled attitudes will share distinctive features. They will be the kinds of attitudes for which folk-talk of ‘making up one’s mind’ is appropriate. They will involve a commitment-to-truth towards propositions taken as content. They will possess mind-to-world directions of fit. Potential settled attitudes include belief, acceptance, knowledge, understanding, certainty, and so on. Middling credences or mere hunches, say, do not possess those features.<sup>5</sup> On the Intention Account, which settled attitude settles *this* inquiry is fixed, in part, by the inquirer’s QDI.<sup>6</sup> That is, when someone forms a QDI, its content specifies which settled attitude(s) they plan to form towards an answer to their question.<sup>7</sup> This (they take it) will legitimize relying on that answer as correct. When an inquirer forms such an attitude, they close their inquiry. Settling conditions are thus *flexible* on the Intention Account. Of course, my simply intending to, say, believe an answer to my question doesn’t mean belief is the optimal stopping point for my inquiry. Rationally settling inquiry in epistemically appropriate fashion may be more demanding than the settling attitude my QDI sets out. We often hold epistemic agents accountable for having not gathered more evidence, or not having settled their inquiries sooner. Accordingly, our ordinary practices of epistemic evaluation and accountability are attuned to which kinds of settled attitudes are appropriate and when (Kauppinen 2018).

So, QDIs will pick out the settling attitude for that inquiry. Now to broader reflection on the Intention Account.

<sup>5</sup> See similar discussion of affirmative attitudes in Millson (2020, p. 686).

<sup>6</sup> Is it plausible that inquiries come with such settled attitudes pre-specified? I suspect so. First, in general, intentional actors have a sense (even if vague; see note 7) of the success conditions for their activity. Here, those success conditions just are the settled attitudes towards an answer. Moreover, at early stages of inquiring, evidence necessary for believing *p* is usually also necessary for knowing or becoming certain that *p*. As the epistemic landscape becomes clearer, however, we readily observe that the paths of those who seek mere true belief and those who seek genuine understanding seem to differ. This is understandable if we have a sense of where we want our inquiries to terminate (with which attitude). Finally, enculturation into epistemic practice involves sensitivity to expectations concerning when to settle inquiry (Tomasello 2020), and thus with which attitude. All this I take to render plausible the idea that we set out to form beliefs or come to know answers to our question even at inquiry’s beginning. Thanks to helpful discussion from editors here.

<sup>7</sup> Is this overly intellectualized? Not necessarily. The content of these intentions need only be implicitly or tacitly grasped (Bratman 2014, pp. 104–5). Intentions must be understood functionally, and their precise content needn’t always be available for occurrent reflection.

### 2.3. *The account*

The Intention Account claims that we can pick out inquirers and understand inquiry by looking to QDIs and the activity they license. These intentions set out a plan (partially specified) to answer a question by forming a certain settled attitude towards an answer.

*Intention-Sufficiency* codifies this claim. To inquire into *Q*, it is sufficient to hold a QDI towards *Q* and take steps in service of this intention. Indeed, agents engaged in active directed pursuit towards answers to *Q* are paradigmatic inquirers into *Q*. This is the kind of behaviour we'd expect from an agent holding a QDI. *Intention-Sufficiency* as formulated also helps capture as inquirers those who aren't at that very moment investigating. This too seems right. Even inquirers must nap.

*Intention-Exhaustivity* highlights the inclusion of QDIs in the set of inquiring attitudes. Importantly, it does not deny that interrogative attitudes are often part of everyday inquiring life. It claims, however, that interrogative attitudes will play a role in inquiry to the extent that they accompany QDIs. No more, no less.

Perhaps, however, QDIs only come alongside an interrogative attitude. Plausible cases tell against this. A disenchanted scientist may not be curious nor wonder at all about the question assigned to her to solve. Stipulate that she has no interrogative attitude. Nevertheless, she may carry out experiments intentionally in service of an intention to answer the question. The disenchanted scientist is appropriately considered an inquirer, but only her QDI explains why. Perhaps many of our actual inquiries come by way of some interrogative attitude motivating a QDI, but the connection is not one of necessity.

Conversely, the Intention Account is not overly inclusive. Consider Friedman's (2019) Detective Morse Cases. Friedman considers 'believing-Morse' and 'knowing-Morse', cases in which Morse goes through the motions of inquiry into a murder whilst believing or knowing that he himself is the culprit. The intuition is that these cases are not genuine inquiries, and the worry that the Intention Account may treat them as genuine inquiries. Fortunately, we can understand these cases as those in which Morse acts in service of an intention to 'appear as though he genuinely inquires whilst covering up his crimes'. The difference is clear in counterfactual scenarios where Morse gets closer to 'smoking gun' evidence implicating him as the culprit. Genuinely inquiring-Morse with a QDI will continue gathering this evidence. Believing-Morse and knowing-Morse will take steps to cover up this evidence. This indicates the intentions they possess here are different, as *Intention-Exhaustivity* suggests.

We started with the intuitive idea that inquiry is an intentional activity and moved to a natural implication: intentions are central in understanding inquiry's nature. The Intention Account made good on this thought. In the rest of this paper I'm going to deploy the Intention Account to solve challenges for competing views of inquiry.

### 3. QDIs and propositions

An important challenge to the Interrogative Attitude Account concerns *Exhaustivity*. Philosophers have articulated the need to recognize 'propositional inquiring attitudes', attitudes whose content includes 'verifying that  $p$ ' or 'being sure that  $p$ ' (Falbo 2021, 2022; Woodard 2021). These attitudes do not take interrogative complements and are not easily amalgamated to standard interrogative attitudes like wondering or being curious whether  $p$  (Friedman 2013b).

At first glance, this worry equally troubles the Intention Account. While many take intentions to be propositional attitudes, such a view is not without detractors (Campbell 2019). After all, intentions do not normally embed 'that-clauses' in the way that other straightforwardly propositional attitudes like belief do. Usually, I intend *to* do something.

In response, consider the following intentions: 'I intend to verify that  $p$  (by answering question  $Q$  with attitude  $A$ )' or 'I intend to answer question  $Q$  by becoming sure that  $p$ '. Such intentions set out plans which require experimenting, evidence-assessment, and other familiar forms of inquiring. Such intentions guide agents on a course of action towards verifying or becoming sure that  $p$ . They specify how verifying or becoming sure that  $p$  is to be understood (that is, via which settled attitude). Furthermore, they seem like perfectly straightforward intentions. So QDIs can accommodate propositional inquiring attitudes.<sup>8</sup> I turn now to consider how the Intention Account characterizes the start of inquiry.

### 4. The start of inquiry

Recall that on the Interrogative Attitude Account, possessing an inquiring attitude alone suffices to constitute one as an inquirer (Friedman 2013b, *forthcoming*). When I adopt an interrogative attitude towards a question, it becomes open for me in thought, and is added to my

<sup>8</sup> Another is to simply recognize intentions 'that', that is, 'I intend that I verify that  $p$ ' (Bratman 1999, 2014).

‘research agenda.’ Thus, I can wonder about Q and, without doing much else, inquire into Q. In so wondering, I am subject to inquiry’s normative pressures. Call this the passive conception of inquiry.

This passive conception will strike many as just too passive. Consider an agent daydreaming about charges of subatomic particles, but who knows they have no plans to learn anything on the matter. Clearly, if such an agent is an inquirer at all, they are an inquirer in an importantly different sense than the particle physicist whose central research is on this topic. Moreover, this is an important distinction to track. Marking out who inquires seriously into what and when is important for ensuring that important socio-epistemic practices run smoothly. Consider the inefficiencies if collaborative epistemic efforts were geared equally towards the daydreamer and the particle physicist alike. The former’s lack of commitment to take further steps suggests she need not merit important resources for inquiry in the way the physicist might. This is so even if they are equally epistemically capable. Only one stands to make real progress on the question.<sup>9</sup>

Intuitively, a crucial mechanism in our epistemic communities concerns identifying who inquires into which questions so as to mark them as fitting targets for deference, collaboration, or support. In so far as the passive conception threatens to collapse the sharpness of boundaries here, it threatens the efficacy of these important socio-epistemic practices.

The passive conception also renders inquiring seemingly fickle. If mere wonderment or curiosity is sufficient for inquiring, we each inquire into countless questions in a single daydream. If inquiring is governed by norms like *Zetetic Instrumental Principle* which tell us to take steps towards answering our inquiries, we are then irrational in countless instances across our daily lives.<sup>10</sup> Failing to carry out an investigation into a matter on which one had some curiosity is enough to render one rationally criticizable. This would mean hapless day-dreamers are constantly

<sup>9</sup> Of course, norms like *Zetetic Instrumental Principle* may put pressure on even the daydreamer to inquire further. But the claim under scrutiny is *Sufficiency*, that mere wondering or curiosity is enough for an agent to be an inquirer. In so far as *Sufficiency* can come apart from *Zetetic Instrumental Principle*, the threat described above concerning the efficacy of deploying zetetic and epistemic resources remains. I raise a challenge for the combination of the passive conception and *Zetetic Instrumental Principle* below.

<sup>10</sup> We also want an account of inquiry that respects the dispositional sense in which the physicist on her lunch break still inquires into the mass of a lepton. The suite of dispositions a QDI engenders can capture this.



irrational. It is a difficult implication to swallow indeed that we are so frequently and profoundly irrational simply for daydreaming.<sup>11</sup>

Consider then an ecumenical response: inquiry is a broad tent. The Interrogative Attitude Account is committed only to both passive and active inquirers meriting the title. We can still distinguish between more ‘serious’ inquirers and mere daydreamers by identifying paradigmatic instances of inquiry and those further to the margins. If this is all the defender of the Interrogative Attitude Account wants, so be it. What I take to be in dispute are the conditions for identifying the kind of inquiring that matters in our socio-epistemic practices. For those attracted to a broader-tent approach to inquiring, what I’ll argue is that the Intention Account does the epistemologically important job: correctly identifying serious inquirers.

Those worried about stretching our notion of inquiry beyond its natural bounds should read the foregoing discussion and what follows as an argument in favour of the Intention Account. As I’ll argue, by turning to intention, we can demarcate a clearer starting point for inquiry.

On *Intention-Sufficiency*, one inquires after one has acted on a QDI and continues to hold and be guided by it. In so intending, one commits oneself (in a way merely passive wondering or curiosity need not) to a plan to answer this question. This means that one has taken (and will take) steps to investigate answers to this question. These are the functions intentions typically fulfil. So, we can secure a degree of activity in inquiring that the passive approach misses. We can also accommodate worries about fleeting inquiry by recognizing general pressures towards intention-stability and against constant revision (Bratman 1992). Further, we need not think that inquiring requires always at that moment actively investigating. Our intentions commit us to fixing further details of how we will pursue our questions. This captures the kind of commitment to further pursuit characteristic of genuine inquirers. The Intention Account offers the intuitively correct verdicts about these cases.

We might worry, however, that this turn to QDIs fails to mark a distinction between ‘having a question on one’s research agenda’ and the active pursuit of a question. That is, when one engages in active experimentation one isn’t simply planning to answer a question, one

<sup>11</sup> Friedman (forthcoming) suggests we hold interrogative attitudes (and inquire) for very short periods of time. Perhaps daydreamers are then full, but fleeting, inquirers. This manoeuvre, however, abandons inquiring as involving commitment towards taking steps to answer the question. The worry about over-inclusivity threatening the efficacy of important socio-epistemic practice remains.

is working on answering it. Fortunately, the Intention Account can respond.

First, the move to QDIs involves a commitment stronger than merely having a question open on one's research agenda. When I form a QDI, the pursuit of an answer starts to play a different role in my mental economy. Now, plans incompatible with answering that question are filtered out or adjusted. Now I'll start, on the pain of plan irrationality, taking further steps towards answering the question. Neither of these is the case simply in virtue of having a question open on my research agenda.<sup>12</sup>

Second, the Intention Account can respect the distinction this objection targets. Of course, there is a difference between having a plan to *X* and *X*-ing itself. But the active investigation partially constitutive of inquiry is started and governed by the QDI. The reason subsequent actions constitute inquiring actions, to the extent that they do, is because they stem from this QDI. Thus, the QDI will help bring under the description of inquiring those bodily and mental movements which we intuitively want to include. Throughout the process of inquiry, then, we have a QDI guiding and controlling conduct in service of the plan to answer the question. Our inquiries start with QDIs (and incipient actions in service of them) which then help guide the course of inquiring. The Intention Account is in a position to articulate this distinction in intuitive fashion.

Ultimately, this is the kind of Goldilocks position we should embrace. Those unhappy with the broad tent approach to inquiring implied by the Interrogative Attitude Account can avoid it by denying *Sufficiency* (the principle that having an interrogative attitude towards *Q* is sufficient for inquiring into *Q*) and demanding more of inquirers than the mere possession of interrogative attitudes. Those attracted to the broad tent approach can still pick out inquirers who are central to our socio-epistemic practices (even if not actively experimenting) by embracing the Intention Account. I turn now to consider further progress the Intention Account can yield concerning ignorance norms.

## 5. Ignorance norms

Ignorance norms tell against inquiring when one has a certain attitude towards an answer to the question of inquiry. Such norms constrain

<sup>12</sup> Friedman (forthcoming) notes the same when she recognizes that there will be no straightforward connection between having a question on one's research agenda and active inquiring.

inquiry's course, and dictate how inquirers should revise or abandon their mental states. They face numerous objections. I claim that by turning to the Intention Account, we can rescue a general strategy for motivating various ignorance norms. In so doing, we acknowledge what recent criticisms get right, while defending the spirit of such norms.

To start with, recall:

*Don't Believe and Inquire (DBI)*. One ought not inquire into/have an interrogative attitude towards  $Q$  at  $t$  and believe  $p^Q$  at  $t$ . (Friedman 2019, p. 303)

*Don't Believe and Inquire* is commonsensical. Why inquire if one already has an answer to one's question?

*Don't Believe and Inquire* also explains the oddity of the following utterances:

- (1) The door is open, but I wonder whether it is.
- (2) The answer is  $p$ , but I am curious about what the answer is.

These utterances are infelicitous. Proponents of the Interrogative Attitude Account have an easy explanation for why: they represent an agent as inquiring whilst believing an answer, thus violating *Don't Believe and Inquire*. We can also develop variants of *Don't Believe and Inquire*, concerning knowledge, for example. In whichever form such norms are cast, however, they have been subject to criticism for delivering incorrect verdicts in a variety of cases. For example:

*Kidney*. Evelyn, an expert surgeon, is scheduled to perform an operation this afternoon. She has gone over the patient's file in detail and knows that the patient's left kidney needs to be removed. Nonetheless, before the surgery, she turns to her resident Ava and says: 'Now, of course I know we're taking out the left kidney, but I'm going to check the chart one last time to be absolutely sure' (Falbo 2022, p. 303).<sup>13</sup>

*Lupo*. Seamus loves wolves. Over the years he's collected a variety of fun and quirky wolf facts. For instance, he knows how to say 'wolf' in over twenty languages, including Italian. While waiting in line at the bookstore, he notices an Italian-English dictionary on the shelf

<sup>13</sup> Adapted from Brown (2008).

beside him. He thinks: I know ‘wolf’ in Italian is ‘lupo’, but I’ve got time to kill so I might as well check to be sure. He flips to the ‘wolf’ entry and thinks: That’s what I thought, it’s ‘lupo’.<sup>14</sup>

*Locked Door.* Kinga wonders whether her door is locked because she fails to realize she knows that her door is locked.<sup>15</sup>

*Change In View.* Zsombor knows what year *Change In View* was published but is having trouble recalling it, so he wonders whether it was published in 1986.<sup>16</sup>

In *Kidney* and *Lupo*, agents know (and a fortiori believe) an answer, yet nevertheless double-check. Such double-checking plausibly constitutes an inquiry, so Evelyn and Seamus thereby violate *Don’t Believe and Inquire*. Yet this inquiring is not immediately objectionable. Similarly, in the latter two cases, agents seem to inquire to a degree whilst knowing the answer. Here too, it is not clear they are irrational. Such cases thus constitute counterexamples to ignorance norms. They highlight the normative compatibility of inquiring and knowing or believing an answer.

In response, defenders employ a strategy of re-description. They understand these cases as genuine inquiries, but into new questions. For example, we could re-describe Evelyn as inquiring into the question ‘What further evidence can I gather to legitimate certainty that I am operating on the left kidney?’ In Seamus’s case it would involve ‘Can I be sure that ‘lupo’ is Italian for ‘wolf?’<sup>17</sup>

Re-description may initially defuse the threat such counterexamples pose, but the strategy quickly runs into difficulty. These re-described questions are difficult to embed as content for standard interrogative attitudes. Are agents really curious, do they really wonder, about whether they can gather further evidence or come to be certain?

Further, as Elise Woodard (2021) convincingly argues, any re-description strategy will need both to offer a plausible account of the different question which is now the inquirer’s focus and to do so without resorting to ad hoc manoeuvres that attribute to inquirers ‘questions

<sup>14</sup> Adapted from Falbo (2022, p. 307).

<sup>15</sup> Adapted from Woodard (2021).

<sup>16</sup> Adapted from Archer (2018).

<sup>17</sup> We may balk at describing Seamus as inquiring into this question as opposed to ‘What does this dictionary give as the Italian word for wolf?’ or ‘Does this dictionary give the same definition as other ones?’ Whichever way one describes the question, the arguments below apply.

that they are not clearly inquiring into' (Woodard 2021, pp. 4–5). Given the spectrum of cases requiring re-description, the task is difficult.

So much the worse, it seems, for ignorance norms. Fortunately, the Intention Account can motivate a more promising defence.

Consider first how the turn to QDIs informs such norms:

*Intention Ignorance-Belief.* Rationality requires that (if you hold a QDI (settled by belief) towards a question  $Q$  at  $t$ , then it is not the case that you believe  $p^Q$  at  $t$ ).

*Intention Ignorance-Knowledge.* Rationality requires that (if you hold a QDI (settled by knowledge) towards a question  $Q$  at  $t$ , then it is not the case that you know  $p^Q$  at  $t$ ).

*Intention Ignorance-Belief* and *Intention Ignorance-Knowledge* are ignorance norms, but ones which do not concern interrogative attitudes. They are specific formulations of *Intention Ignorance-Norm*, concerning belief and knowledge, respectively. They tell against intending to answer a question whilst believing or knowing an answer to that very question.

What might motivate such norms? How do they meet the challenges discussed above? The thought here is to turn a plausible rational requirement on intention:

Rationality requires that if you intend an end  $E$  at  $t$ , then it is not the case that you take  $E$  to be achieved at  $t$ .<sup>18</sup>

From this general condition on intention, it's a rather small step to the Intention Account's formulation of ignorance norms. The idea is this: it is irrational to intend to do what you take to be done. On the Intention Account, inquiring involves holding a QDI, which picks out forming a settled attitude towards an answer to one's question. When an agent has formed such a settled attitude towards an answer but nevertheless continues to inquire (understood by reference to a QDI), she intends to do what she takes herself to have already done.<sup>19</sup>

As we noted, this is irrational. This irrationality in inquiry follows from the more general rational requirement on intention. Given that

<sup>18</sup> By 'take  $E$  to be achieved' here I mean the kind of end one thinks, believes, knows or has evidence indicating that one has already accomplished or secured.

<sup>19</sup> Thanks to editors for helping me clarify my argument in this section.

some of the most frequent settled attitudes for inquirers will be knowledge or belief, we should (and do) observe the ubiquity of norms which counsel against inquiring whilst believing or knowing an answer to your question, like *Intention Ignorance-Belief* or *Intention Ignorance-Knowledge*. This approach leaves room, however, for the settled attitude in question to, sometimes, change. This in turn helps explain cases of seemingly further inquiry, like those above.

To defend this way of motivating ignorance norms, I'll offer some reason to accept both the general requirement on intention and the idea that forming a settled attitude, often belief or knowledge, towards an answer will commonly achieve the end an inquirer's QDI sets out.

For expository ease, I will defend these considerations as they apply to the belief-specific version of the ignorance norm, *Intention Ignorance-Belief*.

### 5.1. Futile intending

The injunction against intending an end one takes oneself to have achieved follows from our plan-theoretic conception of intentions. An agent planning to do something they take themselves to have accomplished is supremely bizarre. With limited time and resources, why intend to achieve the achieved? What would a plan to do what is presently done even be? Such a plan seems so trivial (the intention satisfied in the instant of its genesis) that it casts doubt on the possibility of existence at all, or at least highlights the severe irrationality involved.

Consider the oddity of a president, having just been sworn in, intending 'to become president'. Of course, the president might intend to 'become president *again*', if she thinks she will leave office or not be re-elected, but this is a different matter from intending to be president while currently holding the office. Such a president would be accused of having missed something—either of missing a crucial belief or of severe irrationality with respect to their plans. Intentions do not persist in perpetuity as goals are achieved and ends realized, but dissolve upon their successful execution, or at least they do so within the cognitive life of a rational agent.

This oddity is germane to our particular context. Consider central inquiring vocabulary like 'answer the question', 'verify that *p*', 'figure out whether *p*'. Such verb phrases (VPs) are telic: they characterize ongoing processes with built-in stopping points (Vendler 1957). They are also central VPs in characterizing the kind of active inquiring which has been our focus. That such inquiring vocabulary comes with a built-in end point reinforces the idea that inquiries have a goal to be achieved.

If it's odd to plan to achieve the achieved in general, this applies specifically to our inquiries.<sup>20</sup> Countenancing such oddity as rational would do violence to natural ways of talking and thinking about inquiry.

Of course, an agent may not recognize that her end has been achieved, that is, that she believes the answer. In such cases, our rational constraint needn't apply (it concerns agents who take their end to be achieved). Fortunately, such cases will be rare, given the important role settled attitudes like belief play in guiding downstream thought and action. If they do arise, however, it would be better still for the planning agent to nevertheless not intend. Bizarre epistemic circumstances may, perhaps, offer an excuse, without casting doubt on the injunction itself.

I take this to render compelling the rational requirement on intention discussed above. Intending to do what is taken to be done is deeply misguided. Arguments to the contrary would require drastic revision to our conception of intention and its role in our planning agency. We are agents who (try to) do things in the world and move forward. Denying the rational requirement above would have us legitimate as rational those agents who remain constantly jogging in place.

### 5.2. *Beliefs commonly settle questions*

As discussed in §2.2, the Intention Account embraces flexibility with respect to which attitudes settle an inquiry. With such flexibility, we can vindicate the idea that across many of our standard epistemic contexts, belief will be a fairly ubiquitous settled attitude to which inquirers turn. After all, many think inquiry aims at knowledge (Kelp 2021; Carter and Hawthorne 2024). Conditions appropriate for forming beliefs are, usually, conditions appropriate for thinking you've come to know.

Further, beliefs involve the kind of commitment, stability, and direction of fit characteristic of settling attitudes. In many contexts across our socio-epistemic lives, believing an answer is seen as sufficient reason for using it in downstream thought and action. We should not be surprised then that beliefs often feature in QDIs. When agents pick out beliefs as settled attitudes in their QDIs, and come to believe, they'll have achieved what they set out to do. Thus, if belief is typically taken as a settling attitude for inquiry, *Intention Ignorance-Belief* will be a fairly ubiquitous zetetic norm.

<sup>20</sup> Friedman (2024) argues that much zetetic vocabulary will be atelic. Even if not all zetetic VPs are telic, that such central ones for active inquiry are bodes well for the argument above.

Still, this thought may be subject to a certain kind of challenge, constituted by *Locked Door* and *Change In View*.<sup>21</sup> In *Locked Door*, knowledge seemingly does not settle for Kinga the question of whether the door is locked. Yet it is not immediately clear that Kinga's further inquiry is problematic.

Depending on how we fill in details, Kinga's situation may be rationally regrettable. We can understand Kinga as failing to have the appropriate epistemic access (as discussed in §5.1) to having accomplished her intended goal. The same goes for Zsombor. We can also emphasize the importance of distinguishing some kind of psychological malfunction or limitation which generates an excuse for Kinga from a case in which all is rationally kosher. Cases which highlight this aspect of *Locked Door* and *Change In View* are best understood as cases of poor epistemic access, and thus perhaps excusable breakdowns, not invariably cases where everything goes right. Were Kinga's capacities for self-knowledge working properly, were Zsombor's memory retrieval procedures more effective, we would expect them not to pursue the questions to which they know the answer. Further fleshed out versions of the cases bear this out.

Consider, for instance, that it is Kinga's poor performance which renders her unable to recognize that she knows her door is locked (and use this knowledge appropriately). Perhaps she took an unfortunate pill or has failed to keep her epistemic house in order. In such a case, Kinga is perfectly deserving of criticism, precisely the kind of criticism incurred by preventing her knowledge from playing its settling role. She might have inappropriately provided some kind of masker for the dispositions associated with her knowledge being exercised, and thus for her to have appropriately treated the question as settled. She should have maintained the epistemic access that would normally allow her to recognize that her goal of answering her question, by coming to know, had been satisfied.

If we knew Kinga was responsible in this way, we would hold her *epistemically* accountable—she would merit criticism, a reduction in trust, we would become less willing to inquire with her (Kauppinen 2018). This suggests there is a genuine rational breakdown in play, and that rather than such cases serving as counterexamples, they are best understood as reflections of our cognitive limitations. Cases in which

<sup>21</sup> Of course, we needn't countenance such cases as counterexamples if we embrace *Intention-Sufficiency*. Still, it would be helpful to address cases in which it seems like knowledge (let alone belief) does not play the typical settling role we might expect, even if this is the settled attitude specified in the QDI.



agents lack the epistemic access to recognize they have already accomplished their zetetic goals by forming certain settled attitudes needn't stand as counterexamples to the role beliefs play as settled attitudes. In such cases, at best, certain breakdowns are excused; in others, rational criticism may yet find application.

### 5.3. *Long live the ignorance norm(s)!*

With the claims above defended, we get *Intention Ignorance-Belief*.

However, it should be clear that the Intention Account does not claim that *Intention Ignorance-Belief* is the one true ignorance norm. For, if we understand question-settling as turning on an inquirer's QDI, in certain contexts attitudes other than belief will be intended. This is a straightforward consequence of the commitments detailed in §2.2. We need not abandon the idea that there is some ignorance norm operative in every zetetic endeavour, but must understand the attitude as incompatible with further inquiring as specified by the relevant QDI. Such a norm will be a specification of *Intention Ignorance-Norm*.

In most ordinary contexts it is likely that beliefs will do the necessary settling job and are thus often taken as the implicit standard. This is why so much of our ordinary discourse and theorizing involves belief. Still, the flexibility to accommodate cases where belief is not the settling attitude is a feature of the account, I take it, and not a bug.

The Intention Account's modular approach to ignorance norms is what we should want. The force of recent challenges can be deflected, but not entirely ignored. The point is to recognize that inquiry occurs in various ways in differing contexts, which may call for different settled attitudes. An approach to ignorance norms with some degree of flexibility bears this out in satisfying fashion.

### 5.4. *Double-checking*

I turn now to cases of double-checking. Recall, cases like *Kidney* and *Lupo* involve double-checking (thus inquiring) which seemed appropriate, despite violating some ignorance norm (Woodard 2022). In these cases, responses involving poor epistemic access or excuse-worthy behaviour may not apply as readily. Nor can we exclude such cases as inquiries; they seemingly involve more than just an interrogative attitude.

The Intention Account has a few responses available. First, the contexts where double-checking seems appropriate are those in which the settled attitude under discussion has changed. *Kidney* is such a case.

Given the high stakes, Evelyn needs more than just belief, or even knowledge. Here genuine certainty, or knowledge that she knows, is what fits the bill. In response to this pressure (likely impressed upon her by various external epistemic pressures) we can understand Evelyn as forming a different QDI which sets out answering her question with a different settled attitude. Similarly, Seamus wants to ‘be sure’ that he knows the Italian word for wolf. An eminently natural way of understanding him here is as forming a new QDI, one which is settled by an attitude of certainty or knowledge that he knows (as opposed to mere first-order knowledge).<sup>22</sup>

This strategy constitutes improvement in two ways. First, on the Interrogative Attitude Account, it’s harder to make room for interrogative attitudes to embrace such *flexibility*. If knowledge resolves curiosity, it seems that it would do so across the board. The sophisticated content made available by a QDI, however, can handle this flexibility with ease, and thereby render plausible the shift in inquiry. A different attitude is needed to settle the question for the double-checking inquirer.

Furthermore, this strategy helps avoid challenges plaguing re-description. Rather than model an agent as now curious about a much more sophisticated (and increasingly implausible) question, here the question remains the same. QDIs leave room for different attitudes to come to be part of how we plan to settle (and re-settle) a question.

This doesn’t mean every case of double-checking is best accommodated in the way just described. Cases in which an agent is genuinely inquiring into the same question *again* with the same QDI, are cases of an agent engaged in behaviour that is ‘a serious misuse of time and energy and [potentially] pathological’ (Friedman 2019, p. 84). The Intention Account helps us see why this might be so. If inquiry is to be understood by appeal to intention, so too might inquiry’s norms, and plan-theoretic norms tell strongly against this kind of wasteful double-checking. This response allows us to push back on other cases of double-checking. Sometimes it will just be problematic to double-check, and once we take interrogative attitudes off the table it is clearer to see why. Of course, in some cases double-checking will be permissible. My claim is that cases which fall on the right side of this line are captured by the Intention Account.

<sup>22</sup> As an anonymous reviewer helpfully notes, Seamus might be doing something epistemically laudable: forming a more resilient belief. This should be, on the Intention Account, reflected in his revised QDI. If it isn’t, even if his epistemic environment is sparse, it seems as though Seamus could better deploy his epistemic resources, say, learning new Italian words from the dictionary.

Does the Intention Account sacrifice the intuitive linguistic evidence with which we started? Certainly not. Rather it accommodates contrasting data points. Recall our initial intuition that, for many of our daily inquiries, knowledge or belief will be the settled attitude we employ. When we express an interrogative attitude it follows that in many cases (though not all) we also possess a QDI towards that question, one likely embedding knowledge or belief as the settled attitude in question. So, in the data-points described above, it seems natural to think that an agent is expressing both that they hold a settled attitude towards their answer and that they retain a QDI towards it.<sup>23</sup> This will likely be a violation of the standard ignorance norms defended above. But not always; and indeed there are contrasting pieces of linguistic data that don't sound so infelicitous, such as those described by Woodard (2021, §3).<sup>24</sup> But we've seen that the Intention Account can easily make sense of this felicity. Such data indicates a QDI into the same question, but one which sets out a different settling attitude.

So there is no universal injunction against inquiring while believing. Still, because beliefs play an important and standard role in settling questions, they will often feature in QDIs, and thus frequently in operative ignorance norms. However, the Intention Account is committed to the claim that there will always be *some* operative ignorance norm for each and every inquiry. Its commitment to flexibility (the intended settling attitude for inquiry can vary) allows the content of such an ignorance norm to vary across inquirers and inquiries. This is a result we should welcome—it reflects the complexities of zetetic life.

## 6. Inquiry and ZIP

Recall *Zetetic Instrumental Principle*:

*Zetetic Instrumental Principle (ZIP)*. If one wants to figure out  $Q^?$ , then one ought to take the necessary means to figuring out  $Q^?$ . (Friedman 2020, p. 503)

*Zetetic Instrumental Principle* states that if inquirers want to answer their question, they should take a necessary means towards answering

<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, cases in which an agent explicitly disavows a QDI but expresses a settled attitude and an interrogative attitude don't sound quite that bad.

<sup>24</sup> For example, 'Although he knows he turned the stove off, he's double-checking just to be certain' (Woodard 2021, p. 326). This can be modelled as seeking out a different settling attitude, certainty.

it.<sup>25</sup> Motivating *Zetetic Instrumental Principle* is straightforward on the Intention Account. A key tenet of plan rationality is the following:

*Take a Means.* Rationality requires that (if you intend *E*, believe that a necessary means to *E* is *M* and that you will *M* only if you intend to *M*, then you intend to *M*).

*Zetetic Instrumental Principle* follows as a close cousin of *Take a Means*. Differences remain. *Take a Means*, unlike *Zetetic Instrumental Principle*, requires taking a means only if one believes that it is necessary. How then do we get the more demanding *Zetetic Instrumental Principle*? We can construe such a means rather widely. If I intend to answer a question, then I ought to take a necessary means towards answering it, that is, conduct some investigation (broadly construed). It seems as though it will be difficult to imagine how, in normal circumstances, a question will be answered absent any kind of investigation. So to be a rational inquirer one should take some course of investigation to answer one's question, where such investigation is just a necessary means to answer the question. There are likely complexities about what counts as an appropriate means (to rule out thumb-twiddling as genuine investigating) but none we must settle definitively here. If we think *Take a Means* is a very plausible norm, then we should think *Zetetic Instrumental Principle* is too.

The close connection between *Take a Means* and *Zetetic Instrumental Principle* also offers a response to the conflict between zetetic and epistemic norms. Recent work has argued that zetetic norms like *Zetetic Instrumental Principle* conflict with canonical epistemic norms. This conflict may mandate drastically revising epistemic normativity's scope, and even abandoning canonical epistemic norms (Friedman 2020; Thorstad 2021, 2022; Falbo 2023). On the Intention Account, the kind of normativity undergirding zetetic norms is practical. Grounding *Zetetic Instrumental Principle* occurs via a canonically practical norm. This helps alleviate a chief source of the purported epistemic–zetetic tension. Thus, turning to intention offers a way of retaining recent insights about inquiry and its norms, without legitimizing radical revisions to the canons of epistemic normativity.

<sup>25</sup> *Zetetic Instrumental Principle* may need to be refined to accommodate cases in which wanting to answer the question is low on an inquirer's list of wants, and thus *Zetetic Instrumental Principle's* consequent does not clearly follow. Thanks to editors for discussion here.

## 7. Conclusion

I have argued that in understanding inquiry we do well to turn to intentions. The Intention Account allows us to accommodate propositional inquiring attitudes, demarcate inquiry's start, defend ignorance norms, and motivate norms like *Zetetic Instrumental Principle*. This is all, I take it, promising ground for further inquiry. I hope to have convinced the reader to intend to explore it.<sup>26</sup>

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