The Rules and Aims of Inquiry

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*This is a draft of an article published in the *Philosophical Quarterly*, **https://doi.org/10.1093/pq/pqae100**. Please refer to the published version when possible.

Abstract: Are norms of inquiry in tension with epistemic norms? I provide a (largely) negative answer, turning to a picture of epistemic practices as rule-governed games. The idea is that, while epistemic norms are correctness standards for the attitudes involved in epistemic games, norms of inquiry derive from the aims of those games. Attitudes that, despite being epistemically correct, are inadvisable regarding the goals of some inquiry are just like bad (but legal) moves in basketball or chess. I further consider cases in which the aims of inquiry recommend breaking epistemic norms. I compare them to strategic infractions, which are common in many coherent games. Finally, I explore the connections between rules and aims in games and in inquiry. I show that in both cases respecting the rules is constitutively required for satisfying the aims of the practice.

Keywords: inquiry; epistemology; zetetic norms; epistemic norms; games

1. Introduction

Norms of inquiry govern the activity of inquiring into some question. These include norms about gathering evidence, about how to open and close investigations, or norms concerning the management of cognitive resources.[1] What I will call epistemic norms, on the other hand, specify what doxastic attitudes are justified, rational or appropriate in a given situation. Evidentialist norms are a prominent example.

[1] For recent discussions on inquiry and its norms, see among others Archer (2021), Falbo (2023a, 2023b), Friedman (2019, 2020, 2024), Haziza (2022), Kelp (2021), Steglich-Petersen (2021), Thorstad (2021, 2022), Woodard (2021).

Friedman (2019, 2020) has influentially argued that the norms of inquiry (which she calls zetetic norms) are in tension with traditional epistemic norms. Friedman claims that attitudes that satisfy the relevant epistemic norms are often forbidden by zetetic norms (for instance, a norm of inquiry that prohibits getting distracted by following evidence about trivial issues). Moreover, in some cases zetetic norms seem to recommend forming attitudes that violate plausible epistemic norms (say, because this enhances the chances of fulfilling inquiry goals). According to Friedman, these tensions between zetetic and epistemic norms are problematic, since they mean that a normative system including these two types of norms will be incoherent. The revisionist solution suggested by Friedman (2020: 530-532) is to get rid of traditional epistemic norms, at least insofar as they clash with plausible norms of inquiry.

My aim is to argue that there is no problematic tension between epistemic and zetetic norms. The apparent conflict disappears if we regard them as norms of different natures – something suggested by their different ways of behaving, in particular in interaction with practical considerations. Following Friedman, I will think of zetetic norms in teleological, consequentialist terms, as derived from the aims of inquirers. However, this teleological framework should not be extended to epistemic norms. Rather, these are to be seen as constitutive standards of correctness for doxastic attitudes.

Considered under this light, the interactions between epistemic and zetetic norms cease to look problematic. Indeed, analogous interactions can be found in many coherent goal-directed practices governed by correctness standards. To show this, I turn to a picture of epistemic practices as rule-governed games. I will take epistemic norms to be the rules of epistemic games of inquiry, determining what moves are correct in those games. Meanwhile zetetic norms are instrumental norms generated by the aims of games of inquiry, that is by zetetic aims. The crucial point is that moves that respect the rules of a game can be detrimental to the aims of players of that game. This does not mean that rule-governed games constitute incoherent normative systems. So, correct doxastic attitudes that are inadvisable regarding the goals of some inquiry are just like bad (but legal) moves in games like basketball or chess.

I will further argue that cases in which zetetic aims provide incentives to break epistemic norms are analogous to strategic infractions in games – that is, situations in which violating the rules of the game fosters the ultimate goal of winning. Clearly, games

are not rendered normatively defective by the possibility of strategic infractions. The same happens with epistemic practices.

The paper concludes by noticing another relevant similarity between games and inquiry. In both cases, achieving the aims of the practice constitutively requires respecting its rules. It is in this way that inquiry is constrained by epistemic standards of correctness – that is, by the rules of inquiry games.

2. The epistemic and the zetetic

Epistemic norms, understood in a narrow sense, are standards of normative assessment for doxastic attitudes. So, epistemic norms, understood in this sense, specify whether beliefs are permissible, justified, rational or appropriate. Think of knowledge norms for belief (e.g. one is permitted to believe only if one is in a position to know), or evidentialist norms like the following:

> **Evidentialism**: A belief that *p* is permissible for S at t if and only if S has sufficient evidence for *p* at t.

For the sake of brevity, I will refer to these narrow epistemic norms just as 'epistemic norms' (which should not be taken to rule out that other norms, in particular zetetic norms, have an epistemic character). Epistemic norms can be formulated as assessing doxastic states, for instance the state of having a belief. But I will also use this label to talk about norms targeting the formation of doxastic attitudes, for instance norms for the adoption of beliefs – in other words, norms for judging.

Norms for judging can be seen as norms governing a (mental) act involved in inquiry – judging is, after all, a central part of inquiring. If we understand zetetic norms as norms for our activities as inquirers, then these epistemic norms are a type of zetetic norm. However, our activities as inquirers go far beyond judging. Inquirers also gather evidence, direct their attention selectively, double-check their conclusions or communicate their results to their peers. Zetetic norms concern all these activities.

The variety of zetetic norms can be expected to be vast. However, for our purposes here it is enough to focus on a generic instrumental norm of inquiry, according to which one ought to take the necessary means to one's ends as an inquirer. This is how Friedman (2020: 503) formulates such a norm:

> **ZIP**: If one wants to figure out $Q^{?}$, then one ought to take the necessary means to figuring out $Q^{?}$.

ZIP is controversial on several scores. It is questionable that just wanting to do something (in this case, figuring out some issue) always gives us reasons to take the means to do it. I will therefore work with a version of the norm restricted to valuable zetetic aims.[2]

> **ZIP***: One ought to take the necessary means to achieve one's valuable aims as an inquirer.[3]

I am assuming that some goals of inquiry are valuable. I think this is hard to deny. Clearly, obtaining knowledge or understanding about certain issues is valuable. But I am not making presuppositions about what makes them valuable. For all I am saying it could be that these goals are ultimately valuable in a practical sense – that is, we have practical reasons to pursue them. But I leave open as well the possibility that the relevant goals of inquiry have some type of final, epistemic value.

I will also remain as neutral as possible about what the aims of inquiry are.[4] Everything I say will be compatible with a pluralistic view of zetetic aims. Moreover, I will not assume that inquiry has constitutive aims, but only that normal inquirers typically have certain goals characteristic of inquiry (Friedman 2024 argues against the idea that inquiry has a constitutive aim).

3. The conflict

Once we have this expanded picture of the norms of inquiry, a natural thought is that traditional epistemic norms form a subset of them. Indeed, one could expect a close relation between epistemic norms for belief and judging and zetetic norms for other activities involved in inquiry. For instance, it can be thought that we act well as inquirers

[2] Steglich-Petersen (2021) puts forward a more general instrumentalist norm for inquiry. The arguments in this paper could be equally made using that norm.

[3] This should be read as a pro tanto ought, which can be overridden by stronger requirements.

[4] The recent literature on the aims of inquiry includes Archer (2021), Falbo (2023b), Friedman (2024), Kelp (2021) and Woodard (2021).

insofar as our actions tend to produce correct doxastic attitudes, that is attitudes that meet (traditional) epistemic norms.

However, Friedman (2019, 2020) has argued that epistemic and zetetic norms are often in conflict.[5] There are at least two types of conflicts. In the first type, zetetic norms prohibit the adoption of some attitude despite it satisfying all plausible epistemic norms. In the second type of conflict, zetetic norms recommend violating some epistemic norm (see Firth 1981). I start by discussing the first type of conflict, which is the main focus of Friedman's recent work. In the last part of the paper I go back to the second type of conflict.

Consider the zetetic norm ZIP*, which requires doing what is necessary to achieve one's valuable zetetic goals. From this we can derive a zetetic norm to avoid preventable obstacles to one's valuable goals as an inquirer. For instance, one ought to avoid getting distracted from important investigations by trivial issues, if these distractions are incompatible with one's success in achieving the valuable goals of such investigations. However, while being distracted by trivial issues one can still be forming attitudes that are perfectly adequate according to plausible epistemic norms. Think of this case (a variation of the example used by Friedman 2020):

(TRIVIALITY**)**

> While engaged in an important, time-sensitive investigation with valuable goals, Elsa gets distracted by counting the number of tiles in the room. This distraction prevents her from getting to close her important inquiry.

Counting the number of tiles distracts Elsa from her (valuable) goals as an inquirer, and therefore is something zetetic norms advise against (in particular, it is forbidden by ZIP*, insofar as this distraction threatens the achievement of her valuable zetetic goals). Yet it can be that the adoption of the resulting distracted beliefs is permitted by plausible epistemic norms. The relevant beliefs about the number of tiles can be perfectly supported by her available evidence, so they would be allowed by evidentialist norms. The adoption

[5] For discussion of the conflicts presented by Friedman, see Falbo (2023a), Haziza (2022), Steglich-Petersen (2021), Thorstad (2021).

of these beliefs could also satisfy a knowledge norm for believing, insofar as Elsa is in a position to know the contents of these beliefs.

Thus, we have a situation in which zetetic norms forbid the adoption of beliefs that meet plausible epistemic norms. Of course, I have not shown that all possible epistemic norms count these beliefs as permissible. Yet many plausible candidates do. I am going to assume that for any plausible epistemic norm it will be possible to come up with examples of this this type, in which something permitted by the epistemic norm is prohibited by a zetetic norm.

In examples like TRIVIALITY epistemic and zetetic norms seem to issue conflicting verdicts: the former treat as permissible something prohibited by the latter. According to Friedman this is a problematic form of incoherence. She claims that if a (coherent) set of norms includes a (non ceteris paribus) permissibility norm allowing one to *F*, then no other norm in the set can make *F-ing* impermissible (Friedman 2019: 679). Friedman (2020: 529) considers that the incoherence between zetetic and traditional epistemic norms calls for revision of at least one of these sets of norms – her suggestion is to reject traditional epistemic norms, at least when they conflict with zetetic ones.

A possible response to cases like TRIVIALITY is that they show that epistemic and zetetic norms belong to different normative domains – to different sources of normative, authoritative reasons. For instance, one could maintain that epistemic norms have to do with the agent's epistemic reasons, while zetetic norms concern the agent's practical reasons as an inquirer (see Falbo 2023a). So, we would have a tension between normative pressures from different domains, the epistemic and the practical. These examples would not tell us that our conception of the relevant normative domains has to be revised, but just that norms from different normative domains are often in tension.

This is not, however, the response I will explore here. I have two main reasons for this. First, I want to be able to tackle Friedman's puzzle even without assuming that zetetic norms are non-epistemic (see Falbo 2023a for an argument for this assumption). Second, if we take zetetic norms to be practical, then Friedman's puzzle seems to show that conflicts between practical and epistemic norms are ubiquitous in our epistemic practices, and that the latter norms are often overridden by the former (for instance, ZIP* would override evidentialist norms in TRIVIALITY). This is a radical, revisionary picture of the role of epistemic norms in our intellectual lives. I want to propose an alternative view, on

which epistemic and zetetic norms cohabit more harmoniously, regardless of whether the latter are ultimately of an epistemic or practical nature.

Note that in doxastic deliberations we do not typically balance epistemic considerations against zetetic ones, and then form the doxastic attitude that, all things considered, receives stronger normative support from the different normative domains in play.[6] Rather, doxastic deliberation seems to be driven, at least in ordinary cases, exclusively by epistemic considerations. This suggests, as I explain below, that epistemic norms are constitutive standards of correctness for doxastic deliberation. These standards determine, independently of any further consideration, what attitudes constitute correct conclusions of doxastic deliberative processes.

With this view of epistemic norms as correctness standards in mind, my proposal is to analyze the normative structure of inquiry taking rule-governed games as a model. Games involve both rules that determine what moves are allowed and aims that fix what counts as winning. I will suggest that in practices of inquiry epistemic norms correspond to the rules specifying what moves are correct, while zetetic norms derive from the aims of agents as inquirers. The interaction between rules and aims in games, I will argue, is analogous to that of epistemic and zetetic norms. In particular, by considering the example of games we can see that cases like TRIVIALITY do not generate problematic conflicts between different norms. Situations analogous to those examined by Friedman are pervasive in games, without making their normative structure defective or in need of revision. It is a standard feature of games that moves that respect the rules can be inadvisable given the aims of the game. The same happens in epistemic practices of inquiry.

So, my claim is that epistemic and zetetic norms are normative standards of different natures, which interact in non-problematic ways in the examples discussed by Friedman. In the next section I motivate this claim by looking at how these norms interact with practical considerations.

4. Practical trade-offs

[6] See Maguire and Woods (2020). For an alternative view that allows weighing epistemic and practical reasons for belief, Steglich-Petersen and Skipper (2020).

Zetetic norms interact with practical considerations in ordinary ways. By this I mean that, in deliberations about how to act when inquiring, the reasons provided by zetetic norms can be balanced against other normative considerations, in particular other practical reasons. These deliberations can be appropriately concluded by endorsing the option that is recommended by the overall balance of reasons, even if perhaps this option would not be optimal if one only considered the aims of inquiry.

For instance, one can have practical reasons to close some investigation when this goes against valuable zetetic goals. Think of a scientist who stops pursuing an interesting line of research due to lack of funding. This scientist may be breaking zetetic norms, but clearly her behavior can be rational and well supported by her reasons. Similarly, one may be offered a reward to investigate a trivial issue, despite the low chance that it will contribute to valuable goals of inquiry (say, the low chance that this investigation will provide relevant knowledge). To some extent, many of us have been in this situation when applying for funding: we balance our aim to engage in worthy investigations with our financial needs and other practical concerns.

Thus, zetetic concerns can be weighed straightforwardly with other types of considerations, including practical incentives. This suggests that zetetic norms are only pro tanto, in that they can enter in trade-offs with normative pressures from other sources (in particular, practical reasons unrelated to the aims of inquiry). A plausible way of understanding zetetic norms is as teleological, instrumental norms. These norms derive their strength from their contribution to promoting some valuable end – in this case, the valuable ends of inquiry.[7] But there can be trade-offs among the different ends of an agent, as a result of which the recommendations of a norm serving one of these ends may be qualified or overridden by competing norms derived from other ends (see Steglich-Petersen 2021).

Things are different when we turn to epistemic norms. Epistemic norms govern doxastic deliberative processes that seem to be, at least to a large extent, insensitive to practical considerations. This idea has both a normative and a descriptive, psychological dimension. Let us start with the normative point. Arguably, the appropriate conclusion of

[7] I am not claiming that all instrumental norms derived from the aims of inquirers are distinctively zetetic. Some of these norms may be common to other goal-directed endeavours (e.g. norms about being properly fed).

doxastic deliberations is determined exclusively by epistemic considerations. In doxastic deliberations, non-epistemic considerations cannot properly weigh in as normative reasons to be balanced against epistemic considerations.[8] That is, we cannot correctly form a belief by engaging in a good deliberative process (in particular, a good piece of reasoning) that takes as its premises non-epistemic considerations (see Way 2016).

So, one's doxastic deliberation is not appropriately concluded by adopting a belief just because of a reward to do so. Indeed, it can be argued that this way of deliberating is not only inappropriate, but psychologically implausible. At least in typical cases, we cannot (easily) believe for practical reasons.[9] If we want to believe against our evidence because we are rewarded to do so, we will have to engage in indirect processes of self-manipulation (e.g. undergoing hypnosis). By contrast, as we have seen, economical rewards can weigh in directly in our deliberations about how to proceed in our inquiries. If practical considerations play a role in doxastic deliberation, it is not as direct and straightforward as that played in deliberations about how to act when inquiring. This is not to say that we do not engage in motivated reasoning, or that our deliberations are not influenced by biases. However, agents cannot typically treat considerations that they recognize as non-evidential as their reasons for believing. These observations about the impact of practical considerations in doxastic deliberation are attractively accounted for by a view of epistemic norms as constitutive correctness standards for doxastic attitudes. In the next section I present this view.

5. Epistemic norms as standards of correctness

[8] The view that non-evidential considerations cannot be normative reasons for belief is defended, among others, by Kelly (2002), Moran (1988), Parfit (2011), Shah (2006) and Way (2016). Those who argue that practical considerations can constitute normative reasons for belief include Foley (1987); Howard (2020); Leary (2017), McCormick (2015); Reisner (2009) and Rinard (2017, 2019). I can remain neutral about whether there are practical reasons for belief. For my purposes here, I just need the idea that practical considerations do not intervene in doxastic deliberations in the same way as in practical deliberations.

[9] Classic presentations of this idea can be found in Alston (1989), Bennett (1990) and Williams (1973).

The rules of games are paradigmatic examples of constitutive correctness standards. Think of the rules determining what moves are allowed in a game of chess. Part of what makes an activity a game of chess is that its moves are governed by these rules (although, as we will see shortly, this is not all there is to it). Standards of correctness introduce a form of assessment that is insensitive to consideration not relevant for such standards. So, whether a given move is allowed in chess depends exclusively on the rules of chess, and not on further considerations concerning other positive or negative aspects of making the move (for instance, whether the move is aesthetically pleasing, or whether we have been paid to make it).

The idea that I want to explore here is that epistemic norms are analogous to the rules of games, insofar as both are constitutive standards of correctness. As it is constitutive of chess that its moves are subject to certain rules, it is constitutive of doxastic attitudes to be governed by certain correctness standards – more specifically, by standards whose conditions of satisfaction are exclusively epistemic. In this way, doxastic attitudes are constitutively associated with a form of assessment that is not sensitive to non-epistemic considerations.

More precisely, my proposal is that epistemic norms derive from the correctness standards of doxastic attitudes. Consider the popular view that truth is the correctness standard for belief (Boghossian 2003; Shah and Velleman 2005; Wedgwood 2013; Whiting 2013). This could be seen as a basic epistemic norm, from which other norms derive. For instance, Wedgwood (2013) argues that epistemic rationality norms assess the expected degree of correctness of attitudes. Other epistemic normative evaluations may target whether the agent manifests a good disposition to form correct attitudes (see Lasonen-Aarnio 2020). Moreover, there have been alternative correctness standards proposed in the literature. For example, Way (2021) argues that the correctness standard for belief is being in a position to know. This standard would directly give rise to knowledge norms for belief.

Now, in many cases it is perfectly possible to break deliberately rules constitutive of an activity one is engaged in (Steglich-Petersen 2006: 506-407). For instance, in a basketball match one can decide to kick the ball, against the constitutive rules of the game. These transgressions may be incorrect according to the constitutive rules of the practice, but are no doubt easy to carry out, and one may have decisive reasons to commit them.

The question then is why it is not easy to violate deliberately the correctness standards for belief. I think that a promising answer lies in the role that these standards play in doxastic deliberation. Let us focus on what I will call deliberative beliefs, that is beliefs that are subject to deliberative control, and therefore can be adopted in response to considerations treated as reasons in deliberations. My suggestion is that it is constitutive to this type of belief that the deliberative processes in which it is formed, revised or maintained are governed by the relevant standards of correctness. More specifically, these doxastic deliberative processes are subject to such standards by virtue of being regulated in accordance with them.

In what sense is doxastic deliberation regulated by correctness standards? The idea is that some process is an instance of doxastic deliberation only if it is suitably sensitive to the correctness standards for belief (see Shah and Velleman 2005). Doxastic deliberation amounts to deliberating about whether *p*. I will take it to be constitutive of this form of deliberation that it is regulated by a disposition to be settled only on the basis of considerations that bear on the deliberative question whether *p*. These are considerations about the evidence concerning *p*, but not, for instance, practical considerations about the usefulness of believing *p*.

Doxastic attitudes can be evaluated in relation to many different norms, epistemic and otherwise. My claim is that some of these norms count as the constitutive correctness standards of such attitudes by virtue of playing a special regulatory role in doxastic deliberation. On the view I am presenting, our deliberative control over doxastic attitudes is partly constituted by regulatory dispositions to adopt beliefs only on the basis of considerations relevant for settling the deliberative question whether *p*. It is by virtue of being regulated by these dispositions that doxastic deliberations, and the attitudes they involve, can be said to be constitutively subject to certain epistemic correctness standards. So, doxastic attitudes are governed by epistemic norms in the sense that our deliberative control over those attitudes constitutively involves regulatory dispositions that are sensitive to the correctness standards from which these epistemic norms derive. Other norms, even if they may be relevant for certain evaluations of beliefs, do not regulate doxastic deliberation in this way. This is what happens, for instance, with norms regarding the relevance of beliefs for the agent's zetetic pursuits. It may be (zetetically) advisable to follow norms of this type, but doxastic deliberation does not seem to be constitutively regulated by them. A deliberative process can count as a non-defective instance of

doxastic deliberation despite being insensitive to issues of zetetic relevance. Therefore, norms of zetetic relevance are not part of the correctness standards of beliefs, as I am understanding them.[10]

My proposal, in sum, is to think of traditional epistemic norms as underpinned by the correctness standards constitutive of our deliberative control over doxastic attitudes. This proposal offers an appealing account of the intuitive idea that epistemic norms are largely insulated from non-evidential considerations. Certainly, non-evidential considerations can influence causally the outcomes of our deliberations, for instance via biases and prejudices (Shah 2006). Yet one does not count as engaging in doxastic deliberation if these types of considerations, while being recognized as non-evidential, are taken as reasons to give a conclusive answer to one's deliberative process (Shah and Velleman 2005: 531, n. 16). Insofar as this deliberative process is not sensitive to the epistemic correctness standards constitutively regulating doxastic deliberations, it will not be an instance of this kind of deliberation.

The comparison with games is helpful here. If the agent is participating in a basketball competition, the rest of the competitors, and the referees, will assess and sanction her behavior in accordance with the rules of basketball. This is what makes her count as subject to those rules. By contrast, in an individual card game like solitaire (also known as klondike), whether the agent counts as subject to the relevant rules is a matter of her disposition to regulate her own behavior in accordance with them. It is by virtue of these regulative dispositions that the subject counts as subject to the rules in question. Thus, if the agent decides to break the rules knowingly, she will simply not be playing that game. That is why strategic infractions are hard to come by in games like solitaire. Doxastic deliberation, in the picture I am presenting, is in this respect like solitaire.

It should be stressed that, even if I rely on an analogy with games to illustrate the notion of constitutive standards of correctness, I am not claiming that games and epistemic practices are alike in all respects. There are certainly relevant dissimilarities, some of them discussed by Friedman (2024).For instance, while the rules of games are intentionally designed, epistemic correctness standards derive from the regulative dispositions constitutive of doxastic deliberation. Relatedly, the rules of games are arbitrary and conventional. In principle, we can design a game with any set of rules with

[10] I thank a reviewer for pressing me on this point.

fancy. It is far from clear that this is so with the mental attitudes involved in epistemic practices, which seems to be a less artificial activity (McHugh 2023; Falbo 2023a: 2985; Friedman 2024). However, these dissimilarities do not affect the central analogy I am interested in: both activities are essentially subject to standards of correctness, insofar as they are both essentially regulated in accordance with such standards. Moreover, even if the correctness standards of attitudes are not arbitrary, there is a diversity of mental attitudes, subject to different standards (for instance, the standards governing belief are different from those of assuming or accepting). So, while the correctness standards of mental attitudes may not be arbitrary, they are plural. We can adopt different attitudes with different standards, in the same way that we can play different games with different rules.

6. The aims of games

I have appealed to the rules of games as a model for doxastic standards of correctness. However, rule-governed games are not fully characterized by their rules. We also need to specify the internal aims of the game (Dummett 1959; Maitra 2011; Nguyen 2020). A full characterization of a game includes what counts as winning and losing in the game, what outcomes are valuable within the game. For example, the internal aim of chess is to checkmate one's opponent. Only if we know the aims of the game can we figure out what is an advisable strategy, what moves make one a good player of the game.

From the aims of games we can derive instrumental, often defeasible, norms for the achievement of such aims (Maitra 2011). I will call them norms for good play. At the most general level, we have norms recommending actions that promote success, and discouraging moves that go against the aims of the game. Here we will find norms analogous to ZIP, exhorting players to take the necessary means to achieve the aims of the game. At less general levels, there will be a great variety of norms for good play in each game. For instance, in basketball it is not advisable to leave a rival unmarked under one's basket. There are many other norms like this underlying what it is to play basketball well.

I am taking norms for good play to have an instrumental, teleological nature. So, players have reasons to follow them insofar as they have reasons to pursue the aims of the game (to win). The internal aims of games can be balanced against other goals and

concerns of players. For instance, a player may aim to win the game, but also to impress their audience, to exercise or to practice certain moves. Therefore, the player's reasons to win the game can be weighed against other reasons to play in less than optimal ways. A basketball player may attempt a complicated dribble, just to show off and catch the attention of the audience, despite the availability of an easier, more efficient pass. This player is still playing basketball, with the aim of winning: it is just that other goals and considerations weigh in their decision-making during the game.

We saw above that zetetic norms can be seen as teleological norms derived from the aims of inquirers.[11] Zetetic norms, thus, are norms for good inquiry –norms for good play in inquiry games. They do not determine what moves are correct in inquiry games (that is the job of epistemic correctness standards, the rules of the game), but rather what moves are good means to achieve the aims of players in those games.

I will examine now how correctness rules interact with norms for good play. We will see that the types of cases discussed by Friedman appear as unproblematic when considered through the lenses of the analogy with games.

7. Bad play

Complying with the rules of a game, its standards for correct play, only guarantees that the player's performances are allowed or legal in the game, but not that they are intelligent or advisable with respect to the aims of that game. Not all moves allowed in a game are good, as moves of that game. One can play extremely badly despite respecting all the rules of the game. That is, correct moves may go against the attainment of the aims of the game.

An example is a basketball player who has an easy shot available but instead makes a clumsy pass that can be easily blocked by an opponent. Or consider a chess player sacrificing their queen with no gain in sight. These moves are allowed in those

[11] I am not assuming that zetetic aims are constitutive of inquiry, but just that inquirers typically have certain aims, characteristic of normal inquiry (see Friedman 2024 for discussion).

games, but they are lousy plays. They clearly detract from the achievement of the internal aims of such games.

What we find, therefore, is that the norms for good play forbid or discourage many moves that are perfectly legal, that is moves that comply with the rules saying what is allowed in the game. However, this does not mean that the constitutive rules of, say, chess are in conflict with the internal aims of that game. There is no conflict between the rules and aims of chess (or many other games), at least not any problematic conflict that calls for revision of those rules and aims. The normative structure of games is not made incoherent just by admitting bad legal moves. In particular, these are not cases in which the norms for good play demand breaking the rules of the game. In general, it is perfectly compatible with the rules of a game to refrain from making permissible moves that are bad with respect to the aims of that game. Precisely, part of what makes playing games interesting and fun is that there is more to it than just following the rules.

These are rather trivial observations, but I think that they go a long way towards dissipating the apparent normative tensions identified by Friedman (2020). Remember that I am conceiving of epistemic practices as including both correctness rules and internal aims. More specifically, zetetic norms derive from the aims of inquiry, whereas (narrow) epistemic norms would be correctness standards for doxastic attitudes. The idea, then, is that respecting those standards does not imply that one's epistemic performance is good, in the sense of contributing towards the achievement of one's aims as an inquirer. The adoption of some doxastic attitude can be detrimental to one's zetetic aims even if it complies with all epistemic standards of correctness. Correct doxastic attitudes can therefore be unadvisable given one's aims as an inquirer.

In this way, Elsa, the character in TRIVIALITY who gets distracted from important inquiries by following trivial implications of her evidence, is a poor player of zetetic games: her behavior is discouraged by the instrumental norms derived from her zetetic aims. While the relevant distracted beliefs may be epistemically correct (say, they may be supported by the evidence), their adoption detracts from the achievement of Elsa's valuable aims as an inquirer.

One may wonder whether Elsa would do something epistemically incorrect if she avoids being distracted by the number of tiles in the room, thereby withholding beliefs that are supported by the evidence available. Imagine that Elsa considers briefly the

question of the number of tiles, but then remembers her main zetetic goals and drops that distracting matter, suspending judgment about it. Is Elsa's brief deliberation appropriately closed? I want to argue that it is, and that her suspension can be epistemically correct.

Remember that I am taking the correctness standards from which epistemic norms derive to be introduced by the regulatory dispositions constitutive of doxastic deliberation. However, doxastic deliberations are not constitutively regulated by dispositions to avoid suspending judgment before all the evidence available has been reviewed. As Elsa's example shows, for matters of minor interest it is perfectly possible to stop deliberating before one has finished going through all the evidence: one can just suspend judgment, drop the issue and move on. Deliberations that are closed in this way are not necessarily defective. Thus, the regulatory dispositions constitutive of doxastic deliberation do not introduce correctness standards that makes this type of suspension epistemically incorrect. By withholding belief about the number of tiles, therefore, Elsa can be doing something that is both epistemically correct and recommended by her zetetic goals. In contrast, pursuing the distracting question about the number of tiles would be discouraged in light of Elsa's zetetic goals, even if it may lead to epistemically correct attitudes.

To be clear, I am not saying that moves deemed correct by epistemic norms can be made epistemically incorrect by zetetic norms. Whether a given doxastic attitude is epistemically correct is determined entirely by the epistemic norms derived from its constitutive correctness standards. Zetetic norms just indicate whether the adoption of that attitude is conducive, or detrimental to the fulfillment of the agent's aims as an inquirer– and therefore whether it is a good or advisable move with respect to the achievement of those aims. So, if epistemic and zetetic norms give divergent verdicts about the permissibility of some move, it is only in different senses of being (im)permissible. Epistemic norms concern the correctness of the move according to the standards constitutively governing doxastic deliberations. Zetetic norms assess the convenience of the move as a means to the ends of inquiry. There is no incoherence in some move being permissible in one of these senses and impermissible in the other.

As the example of games shows, the possibility of bad, albeit correct epistemic moves is not in itself problematic. This possibility does not mean that epistemic norms are in conflict with the aims of inquiry, in ways that call for revision of our account of the normative structure of the practice. In general, coherent normative systems can include

both correctness standards that allow a certain move and aims that make that move inadvisable. Games illustrate how practices with this normative structure can work perfectly fine. Thus, we do not need to reject epistemic norms to have coherent inquiry practices – it is enough if we see these norms as constitutive correctness standards for attitudes, and distinguish them from instrumental norms for good inquiry.

8. Remaining conflicts

So far, I have discussed situations in which zetetic norms discourage epistemically correct moves (that is, moves that comply with epistemic norms). I have argued these situations do not generate problematic tensions in zetetic practices. But what about cases in which zetetic norms recommend violating epistemic standards of correctness?

This type of case was already discussed by Firth (1981), and can be connected to structurally analogous debates about practical incentives to break epistemic norms.[12] What I am interested in here are situations in which the relevant incentives come from the aims of inquiry. In principle, manipulating oneself to have some false belief now could predictably lead to significant epistemic improvement further down the line (say, important knowledge or understanding). For instance, the false belief that I am an extraordinary researcher may boost my confidence, making it more likely that I achieve the aims of my investigation.

Do cases like this give rise to problematic tensions between zetetic and epistemic norms? One first thing to say is that it is typically difficult to form doxastic attitudes that one takes to violate epistemic standards of correctness – for instance, beliefs that go against one's evidence. In general, we cannot adopt such attitudes directly in our deliberations, but we have to resort to indirect methods of self-manipulation (say, brainwashing or hypnosis). So, the motivational role of incentives to break epistemic norms will be at best significantly limited. Still, it can be argued that the normative conflict between those incentives and epistemic standards remains, even if its motivational impact is reduced.

[12] For this debate, see among others Clifford (1877), Foley (1987), Howard (2020), James (1897/1979), Kelly (2002), Leary (2017), McCormick (2015), Reisner (2009), Rinard (2017, 2019), Shah (2006), Way (2016)

I will grant that at least sometimes zetetic norms can recommend violating epistemic standards of correctness. However, this does not need to make the normative structure of epistemic practices incoherent in any problematic way. Again, the example of games reveals that there are perfectly functional practices in which these conflicts are rife.

Many rule-governed games leave room for the possibility of intentional strategic infractions, that is violations of the rules of the game that foster the goal of winning. While these violations count as illegal moves, and may be sanctioned accordingly, they can prove ultimately advantageous with respect to the achievement of the aims of the game. Think of strategic fouls in games like basketball or football (soccer). For instance, football players sometimes foul a rival intentionally in order to stop a counterattack. This move is an infraction of the rules of football, but it can help to win the game by preventing the rival team from scoring an easy goal.,

Similar examples can be found in many other sports and games. More specifically, cases like these will arise in games in which transgressions of the rules can still count as moves within the game. For instance, football includes rules regarding how to sanction infractions such as fouling opponents, and how to proceed after their committed. These infractions prevent immediate success, but are compatible with ultimately winning the game. For example, in football you cannot score a legal goal by hitting the ball with the hand. But it is possible to win despite having touched the ball with the hand at certain points during the match. In other games, by contrast, infractions are excluded from the game. For instance, when one breaks the rules of solitaire one stops playing that game. A move that violates the rules of solitaire is not a move within the game. Infractions, therefore, cannot have a direct influence in the evolution of games like solitaire. In this type of game, winning requires following the rules in every move of the game. This is why strategic infractions are not present in solitaire and similar games.

We find, therefore, that many, but not all, games have aims that occasionally incentivize breaking the rules. Yet this does not make such games incoherent. Perhaps here we can talk of a genuine conflict between the rules and aims of games. But it is not a conflict that renders the normative structure of those games defective or dysfunctional.

My suggestion is that something analogous happens with cases in which the aims of inquiry provide incentives to break epistemic standards of correctness. Incorrect moves

in inquiry, for instance false beliefs, are like infractions in football or basketball in that they still count as moves within the practice. And making such incorrect moves is compatible with the satisfaction of the agent's ultimate zetetic aims. Having an incorrect belief that *p* is compatible with succeeding in one's inquiry into whether *q* – it can even increase the chances of final success (e.g. by boosting one's self-confidence as an inquirer). Thus, one's zetetic aims can generate instrumental reasons to try to violate epistemic standards of correctness. This possibility, however, should not be considered problematic. Again, it is a common feature of many rule-governed, aim-directed practices, such as football, which are nonetheless perfectly functional.

As we will see, the crucial point both in games and epistemic practices is that their aims can only be attained by moves that respect the relevant rules (even if violations of those rules can perhaps happen at other times during the game). So, scoring in basketball constitutively requires following certain rules, and likewise one cannot satisfy the aims of inquiry (e.g. acquiring relevant knowledge) without heeding certain correctness standards (e.g. without responding to the evidence). It is in this way that these practices are not only aim-directed, but also governed by constitutive rules of correctness. In the next section I further examine how the rules of (epistemic) games constrain the pursuit of the goals of those games.

9. How is inquiry constrained by epistemic correctness?

I have just discussed cases in which the (valuable) aims of inquiry provide reasons to break epistemic standards of correctness. I want to consider now what type of normative pressures, if any, epistemic correctness standards exercise in our practices of inquiry. In what sense are these practices governed by such standards, and not merely by the aims of inquiry (and the norms derived from them)? My conclusion will be that epistemic correctness standards play a significant role in the normative structure of inquiry games even in a consequentialist framework in which all normative authority is ultimately teleological (in particular, a framework in which normative authority in inquiry derives entirely from the aims of agents when inquiring).

Following Maguire and Woods (2020), I take as my starting point the idea that standards of correctness, on their own, do not always have normative authority or

weight.[13] A standard of correctness has normative authority if and only if there are weighty normative reasons to respect it – where authoritative reasons are those that determine what one ought to do (Maguire and Woods 2020). For the purposes of this paper, I will consider that there are weighty normative reasons to *F* only if *F-ing* contributes to, or serves something actually valuable.

That *F-ing* is incorrect according to some standard does not necessarily mean that we have authoritative, weighty normative reasons not to *F*. Think of the instructions of a bad cooking recipe, unjust etiquette rules, or boring games. Why should I take heed of a bad recipe? If the recipe forbids doing something that will actually improve the dish, it seems that there are no reasons not to ignore that recipe (see Lord and Sylvan 2020). Likewise, one may have no reason whatsoever to follow standards of etiquette that are somehow unfair or undesirable. And, clearly, we lack reasons to comply with the rules of many games that do not really interest us. This is so even if such standards are constitutive of the dish, social practice or game in question. That some activity is constitutively governed by some standards does not mean that one has reasons to engage in that activity, or respect those standards.

I will assume, therefore, that standards of correctness have normative weight only insofar agents have reasons to respect them. Absent such reasons, it may be perfectly fine, or even required, to break the standards in question. And I will make the further assumption that we lack reasons to respect epistemic standards concerning many doxastic attitudes[14] – even if perhaps it is difficult to violate these standards deliberately. I think this is a natural assumption on the type of consequentialist, teleological approach to epistemic normativity pursued by Friedman (2019, 2020). On that approach epistemic practices have certain aims, the aims of inquiry, giving rise to the (teleological) norms that govern those practices. And the conflicts discussed by Friedman show that sometimes respecting epistemic correctness standards does not contribute to furthering these aims of

[13] Different versions of this idea are defended by Boghossian (2003), Broome (2014), Côté-Bouchard and Littlejohn (2018), Glüer and Wikforss (2009), Hattiangadi (2006), Lord and Sylvan (2020), Miller (2010).

[14] The view that epistemic standards do not always have normative authority is defended by Côté-Bouchard and Littlejohn (2018), Mantel (2019) and Maguire and Woods (2020). Kiesewetter (2022) argues against this view.

inquiry. In other words, what is valuable in inquiry does not give us reasons to respect epistemic standards of correctness in every case. Indeed, as we have seen, many epistemically correct moves are detrimental to the aims of inquiry.

The worry now is that epistemic standards of correctness seem to become normatively ineffective – they do not impose any substantial constraint on epistemic practices. Why should inquirers care about whether such standards are met, rather than just about pursuing the aims of their inquiry? True, respecting epistemic standards is often conducive to achieving the aims of inquiry (following your evidence is in general a good way of figuring out some question). In these cases, zetetic norms will recommend complying with such standards. But when this instrumental relation does not obtain, epistemic correctness standards may seem to become idle. Is this conclusion not as revisionary as just saying that there are no epistemic norms (other than those derived from the aims of inquiry)?

It is useful at this point to go back to the analogy with games. As we have seen, not all moves that respect the rules of a game are good means to achieve its aims. Yet rule-based games are characterized by a further, non-instrumental relation between rules and aims. Achieving the aims of these games requires constitutively respecting their rules: the aims of the game cannot count as fulfilled if the rules have not been followed in relevant ways. This is clear in Suit's (1978) account of games (see Nguyen 2020). On this account, the internal aim of games (its lusory goal) is to obtain a certain outcome (the prelusory goal) by following certain rules – in Suit's words, by overcoming unnecessary restrictions and obstacles. For instance, the aim of basketball is to score more points than the opponent. And scoring points in basketball amounts to getting the ball through the hoop, while being subject to certain constraints: among other things, the ball cannot be kicked, players cannot run more than two steps with the ball without bouncing it, and the ball cannot go out of bounds. For our purposes, the important thing is that being subject to the rules of the game, and respecting them, is a constitutive part of achieving its internal aim. Fulfilling the aim of the game amounts to doing something (getting the ball through the hoop) by complying with the relevant rules (e.g. not kicking the ball).

As discussed above, in games like basketball winning is compatible with breaking the rules at some point during the game (say, by kicking the ball or fouling an opponent). However, the aim of the game can only be achieved by a play that respects the rules: scoring in basketball can only be achieved by means of moves that comply with the rules

of the game. If I get the ball through the hoop by kicking it, then I am not (legally) scoring. Following the rules, therefore, is necessary for players to be able to fulfill the internal aim of the game.

My suggestion is that something analogous happens in epistemic practices. The internal aims of those practices can only be achieved by moves that are subject to, and respect certain relevant epistemic standards of correctness. It is not just that complying with those standards tends to be an efficient means to achieve the relevant aims. Rather, as Steglich-Peterson (2021) notes, the satisfaction of those aims constitutively involves respecting the epistemic standards in question. Take the zetetic aim of figuring out a given question. Clearly, respecting certain epistemic standards is part of what constitutes achieving this aim – in particular, figuring out whether *p* constitutively requires forming epistemically correct beliefs about *p*.

The idea, therefore, is that attaining the aims of inquiry constitutively involves adopting attitudes that follow certain epistemic norms, understood as standards of correctness. This is why agents pursuing these aims subject themselves to such standards, and care about respecting them. In this way, epistemic correctness standards constrain epistemic practices of inquiry, even if they derive their normative weight from the (valuable) aims of these practices.

In the previous section I discussed Firth cases, in which zetetic norms recommend breaking epistemic norms in relation to a certain attitude (because this promotes the agent's zetetic aims). In this type of case, respecting the correctness standards of that particular attitude is not constitutively required to fulfill the agent's aims as an inquirer. Therefore, as far as that inquiry is concerned, the agent may have no reason to respect the correctness standards of the attitude in question.[15] However, fulfilling the agent's zetetic

[15] Note, however, that the correctness standards for this attitude remain operative in the sense that deliberations involving the attitude will be regulated by dispositions sensitive to such standards.

A further question is whether transgressions of epistemic norms can be rational or justified. To a large extent this is a terminological issue. We can stipulate a notion of epistemic rationality according to which incorrect doxastic attitudes are always epistemically irrational. Alternatively, we can think of rationality in terms of support by (weighty, authoritative) normative reasons. On this view, inquirers can be rational in

aims will depend constitutively on adopting some other attitudes correctly. The correctness standards that constrain the agent's inquiry are the ones of those other attitudes, insofar as respecting such standards will be constitutively required to achieve the agent's zetetic aims. Imagine for instance, that the agent aims at figuring out whether *q*, and that this investigation will be aided by having an epistemically incorrect attitude regarding *p*. In this case, the agent may have zetetic incentives to form that incorrect doxastic attitude regarding *p*, but their inquiry will be constitutively constrained by the correctness standards governing beliefs about *q* (because succeeding in that inquiry constitutively requires respecting the correctness standards for beliefs about *q*).

The constitutive relation between the aims and the correctness standards of epistemic practices vindicates the comparison with games, which exhibit an analogous connection between their aims and their rules. By aiming to score in a basketball match one becomes subject to the rules of that game. Likewise, engaging in some aim-directed inquiry binds one to certain epistemic standards of correctness. So, far from being an arbitrary analogy, comparing rule-based games and inquiry is justified by deep parallels in the normative structure of both types of practices.

Are all inquiries constrained by the correctness standards of belief? I want to allow for a variety of possible aims for inquiry. On this pluralist view there can be inquiries that do not aim at (exact) truths, knowledge or understanding, but rather have other goals such as making good predictions or having useful practical applications. Perhaps these alternative aims can be achieved by attitudes that are not subject to the correctness standards of belief, for instance hypotheses (Palmira 2020), endorsements (Fleisher 2018), or acceptances (Cohen 1995). When undertaking inquiries with these aims, agents are not constrained by the correctness standards constitutive of belief, in the sense that they can achieve these aims by adopting different attitudes with other standards. For example, acceptance and belief are subject to different standards: while it is epistemically incorrect to believe something known to be false, it may be correct to accept it (say, as a good approximation).

Note that I am not saying that in inquiries with alternative goals it can become epistemically appropriate to violate the constitutive standards of correctness of beliefs.

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trying to violate epistemic norms (e.g. in cases of strategic infractions). Only this latter notion of rationality, but not the former, would carry normative force.

These standards keep determining what counts as a correct belief. What happens is rather that in these practices we can achieve the relevant aims without needing to form correct beliefs, but by means of other attitudes like acceptance. Similarly, it is not that when playing football kicking the ball becomes a legal basketball move. Rather, making legal basketball moves is not required to achieve the aims of football. In this way, football is not constrained by the rules of basketball. So, inquiries with alternative aims are like different games with different rules. Respecting the correctness standards of belief is not a constitutive part of the satisfaction of some of these aims.

The plurality of zetetic aims should not obscure, however, the importance of epistemic norms for belief. Central aims of inquiry, such as acquiring knowledge about relevant issues, constitutively require the adoption of doxastic attitudes that are subject to, and respect the correctness standards of belief. This explains why many of the most prominent epistemic norms concern belief and its correctness standards.[16]

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[16] Thanks to audiences at the 2020 SLMFCE conference (Salamanca), the 2021 Inquiry and its Norms workshop (Madrid), the 2022 European Epistemology Conference (Glasgow), and the 2022 SEFA conference (Santiago de Compostela). Special thanks to Michele Palmira for his invaluable help with this article and beyond. This work has been supported by the project PID-2021-123938NB-100, funded by MCIN/AEI/10.13039/501100011033/FEDER, UE.

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