

# Questioning and Addressee Knowledge

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**Abstract.** There are norms for asking questions. Inquirers should not ask questions to which they know the answer. The literature on the norms of asking has focused on such speaker-centered norms. But, as I argue, there are addressee-centered norms as well: inquirers should not ask addressees who fall short of a certain epistemic status. That epistemic status, I argue here, is knowledge.

## 1 Introduction

Suppose I am looking for Ann, and I have no reason to suspect you know where she is. It would be odd for me to ask you:

(1) Where is Ann?

By contrast, it would be perfectly fine for me to ask you either of the following:

(2) Do you know where Ann is?

(3) Have you seen Ann?

The reason for this contrast, I will argue, is that there is a norm on inquiry that requires asking a question only of addressees who know the answer. The first question violates this norm, while the latter two do not. I will defend the following norm:

**Addressee-Knowledge Norm (AKN)** Ask addressee *A* the question *Q* only if *A* knows *Q*.

I take AKN to be a norm of questioning alongside a speaker-ignorance norm:

**Speaker-Ignorance Norm (SIN)** Ask  $Q$  only if you do not know  $Q$ .<sup>1</sup>

Discussions of the norms of questioning have focused only on speaker-centered norms like SIN. However, as I aim to show in this paper, there is also an addressee-centered norm: only addressees with a certain epistemic status should be asked. A range of different norms is compatible with this general claim. Here I will defend AKN in particular, and argue that the required epistemic status is knowledge.

Questioning is a species of the more general activity of inquiring. We can inquire by thinking, by looking, by doing experiments, and we often inquire by asking people. So I take AKN to be part of the norms of inquiry that have received increasing attention in recent years.<sup>2</sup> It will not be surprising if AKN interacts with other norms of inquiry. I will argue, in particular, that AKN supports the view that inquirers should aim to acquire knowledge.

In the following section, I clarify AKN and the kind of questioning it is about. Then, in §3, I give several arguments for AKN. In §4 I consider some objections. Finally, in §5, I explore some implications of the resulting view of questioning for inquiry in general.

## 2 Preliminaries

### 2.1 Questions

There are three senses of ‘question’ that need to be distinguished: a type of sentence, semantic content, and speech act. These distinctions parallel the more familiar ones between declarative sentences, propositions, and assertions. The sentence ‘Where is Ann?’ is an *interrogative sentence*. Whereas the semantic content of a declarative sentence is a proposition, the semantic content of an interrogative sentence is a *semantic question*. Semantic questions are commonly modeled as a set of propositions, each of which is an answer to the question. Speakers can use an interrogative sentence to ask a question. The question asked, too, is a semantic question: it is the content of what is asked, just like a proposition is the content of what is asserted.<sup>3</sup> Asking a question is a speech act that I

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<sup>1</sup>See Whitcomb (2017) for defense of a speaker-ignorance norm for questioning. Hawthorne (2004, p. 24) also endorses such a norm. As a norm of inquiry more generally, the ignorance norm is defended by Friedman (2017) and van Elswyk and Sapir (2021). See Archer (2018) for critical discussion.

<sup>2</sup>Recent work on the norms of inquiry includes: Whitcomb (2017); Friedman (2019b,a, 2020); Millson (2020); Falbo (2021); Thorstad (2021); McGrath (2021); van Elswyk and Sapir (2021); Woodard (2022).

<sup>3</sup>Though sometimes ‘question’ in ‘ask a question’ refers to a speech act and not to a semantic content, as in ‘ask a rhetorical question’. Rhetorical questions are a kind of speech act, not a kind of semantic content.

will call *questioning*.<sup>4</sup>

## 2.2 Questioning

There are different kinds of questioning. If I quiz you, I will typically know the answer to my question, and you might not. If I rhetorically ask you a question, often both of us will know the answer, and we will know that a reply is not expected. These are two kinds of questioning, and they are different from my asking “Where is Ann?” when I am looking for her.<sup>5</sup>

Linguists and philosophers often focus on the latter kind of questioning. Searle (1969, ch. 3), for instance, calls such acts ‘real questions’, and analyzes them as requests for information. They are also the focus of Åqvist (1975), who analyzes them as commands to make the questioner know. Whitcomb (2017) calls this kind of questioning ‘inquiring’, which he takes to be constitutively governed by a speaker-ignorance norm. They are also often called, especially in linguistics, ‘information-seeking questions’.<sup>6</sup> Others do not distinguish this kind of questioning from questioning more generally. On the accounts of Bell (1975); Bach and Harnish (1979); Braun (2011), for instance, both quizzing and information-seeking questioning are just acts of questioning, and what further motivations the questioner has, such as wanting to know the answer, wanting to see if the addressee knows, etc., is irrelevant to the type of speech act being performed.<sup>7</sup>

It is controversial how to individuate speech acts,<sup>8</sup> and we likely need to answer that before we can say how different types of questioning are to be individuated. In this paper, however, I sidestep these debates. I wish to talk about a particular type of act, performed in specific contexts, regardless of whether this type of act is its own type of speech act or not. The kind of questioning I discuss here has a special relationship to inquiry, which is why I take it to be of interest.

Questioning is a linguistic activity, but inquiring is more general. Instances of inquiry include: thinking where Ann could be, calculating whether 119 is prime, looking for my keys, checking the train schedule, investigating a house robbery. Following Friedman

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<sup>4</sup>Groenendijk and Stokhof (2011); Braun (2011) make similar distinctions. I won’t be very meticulous in making these terminological distinctions in what follows, with the hope that it will be clear from context what sense of ‘question’ I’m using.

<sup>5</sup>Some theorists, e.g. Sadock (1971), take rhetorical questions to be instances of assertion. (See e.g. Caponigro and Sprouse (2007) for criticism.) But my argument in this section doesn’t depend on whether they are questions or assertions. Thanks to an anonymous referee for raising this issue.

<sup>6</sup>See e.g. Caponigro and Sprouse (2007); Biezma and Rawlins (2017).

<sup>7</sup>Though see Levinson (1979) and Wilson and Sperber (2012, ch .10) for arguments against such general accounts of questioning.

<sup>8</sup>See Fogal et al. (2018, ch. 1) for a helpful overview of the debate.

(2013, 2019a,b, 2020), I take inquiring to necessarily involve an inquiring attitude: cognitive attitudes such as wondering and being curious. Unlike other cognitive attitudes such as beliefs and desires, inquiring attitudes are relations not to propositions but to questions.<sup>9</sup> I can be curious about where Ann is, and wonder whether 119 is prime. Inquiring thus always involves a question. The question one aims to figure out in one's inquiry is the same question one's inquiring attitude (wondering, curiosity, etc.) is about: one inquires into *Q* only if one has an inquiring attitude towards *Q*.

The kind of questioning I am interested in here is the kind one performs when one is inquiring. I call it *inquiry questioning*, which I characterize as follows:

**Inquiry Questioning** A speaker's asking *Q* is an inquiry questioning if and only if the speaker is inquiring into *Q* and is trying to settle *Q* by asking it.

If I am looking for Ann, for instance, I am inquiring. The question of my inquiry is "Where is Ann?", and I have a corresponding inquiring attitude: I am wondering where Ann is. When I ask someone "Where is Ann?", in the hope of getting a definitive answer, I am asking an inquiry question. I take inquiry questioning to be the type of questioning that [Whitcomb \(2017\)](#) discusses in his account of the norms of questioning, and to which the speaker-ignorance norm is meant to apply.

To get a better sense of inquiry questioning, let us consider some of the ways in which inquiring and questioning can come apart. First, I can ask or pose a question without inquiring at all. This is what often happens with rhetorical questions. If I say "Is the Pope Catholic?", intending to imply a positive answer in response to some question, I may not be inquiring into anything. Likewise, at the beginning of class, a teacher might say "How did humans evolve?" in order to bring up a topic, and without having any inquiring attitude. Consider guess questions: a parent might ask their child "Which hand is the candy in?" in order to get the child to guess and find the candy. Or I might ask someone a question just to get them to speak or to hear their voice. More generally, one might ask a question not in order to find an answer to anything, but in order to accomplish some other goal.

Second, I may ask one question but be inquiring into another. For instance, you ask me if I want a beer, and I choose to reply "Is the Pope Catholic?", rather than simply "Yes", because I am curious how you will respond. In this case, I am inquiring, but what I am inquiring into is how you will respond, and not whether the Pope is Catholic. Quiz

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<sup>9</sup>Although it is widely accepted that inquiring attitudes like wondering and curiosity are relations to questions, it is controversial whether these relations are irreducible or ultimately reducible to propositional attitudes in some way. See [Friedman \(2013\)](#); [Haziza \(forthcoming\)](#) for discussion. I need not take a stance on this issue here.

questions often fall into this category. When a teacher asks a student, for example, “How did the Cold War end?”, the teacher is typically not inquiring into this question but rather into a question like “How much does this student know?”. For another example, consider opinion questions: I may ask you “Who will win the election?”, not trying to find out who will win, but trying to find out what you think. Although these acts of questioning are done as a way of inquiring, the speakers are not asking  $Q$  as a way of inquiring into  $Q$ , but rather are asking  $Q_1$  as a way of inquiring into some other  $Q_2$ .

A related way in which questioning and inquiring may come apart is more subtle, and is important to note. Suppose a detective is trying to find out who stole the cake from the department’s kitchen. There are several suspects, and the detective’s method is to ask each one of them “Who stole the cake?”, to see how they respond. Even though the detective is asking the same question as the one into which she is inquiring, her questions are not of the inquiry questioning kind. The detective is not trying to settle who stole the cake each time she asks a suspect “Who stole the cake?”. Rather, she is trying to settle something like “What does this suspect have to say about the matter?”, in order to get some useful evidence. So one can ask  $Q$  as part of an inquiry into  $Q$  without one’s asking being an inquiry questioning, when it is not an attempt to settle  $Q$ .

One might worry that inquiry questioning, the way I have defined it, is too narrow to be of much interest. But I do not think so. On the contrary, I take it to be a central and common kind of questioning. Very often, we ask a question because we are interested in finding out its answer, and asking the question is typically an attempt to find out the answer. I want to find out what time it is, so I ask someone with a watch “What time is it?”. I am wondering who won the game last night, so I ask a person who watched it “Who won the game last night?”. I am curious if 119 is prime, so I ask a knowledgeable friend “Is 119 prime?”. We ask inquiry questions all the time. In fact, it is the other kinds of questions that I take to be less ordinary, where we ask  $Q$  *not* in order to settle  $Q$ , but for some other reason.

### 2.3 Clarifying the norm

Since, in what follows, I will only be interested in inquiry questioning, I will simply refer to it as ‘questioning’. Here is AKN again:

**AKN** Ask addressee  $A$  the question  $Q$  only if  $A$  knows  $Q$ .

Sometimes, norms of this sort are formulated differently, with terms like ‘may’, ‘ought’, ‘must’, and ‘should’, which can yield different, non-equivalent formulations.<sup>10</sup> AKN is

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<sup>10</sup>See e.g. Schlöder (2018) for some of the logical issues.

formulated here as a directive as a way of avoiding such issues.<sup>11</sup>

The phrase ‘know  $Q$ ’ is meant to represent question-embedding knowledge ascriptions, like the following:

- (4) Ann knows who won the game.
- (5) Bob knows why dogs bark.

I use ‘know  $Q$ ’ rather than ‘know the answer to  $Q$ ’, for the following reason. Consider the question “Where can I buy an Italian newspaper?”. This is naturally interpreted as a mention-some question. That is, one does not need to list all the places in the world that sell an Italian newspaper to answer the question; a few, or even one, will do. By contrast, some questions are mention-all, and require exhaustive answers; for instance, “Who came to the party?”, under one reading, requires stating for each person whether or not they came to the party. For mention-some questions, there is no ‘the answer’. Why not use ‘know *an* answer to  $Q$ ’ then? Because one can know an answer to  $Q$  without knowing  $Q$ . Mention-some questions display false-belief sensitivity.<sup>12</sup> Suppose Ann knows that she can buy an Italian newspaper at store A and falsely believe she can buy one at stores B and C. It seems wrong to say in this case that Ann knows where she can buy an Italian newspaper. AKN requires for such a question asking only those who know where to buy an Italian newspaper, and not merely one who knows *an* answer to the question, while perhaps also believing many false ones. I formulate the speaker-ignorance norm SIN with ‘know  $Q$ ’ for the same reason.

I have described AKN as an addressee-centered norm, but AKN is still a norm that applies only to the speaker: it is the speaker, not the addressee, who complies with or violates the norm. AKN tells you which addressees to ask given a question. But it can also tell you which questions to ask given an addressee. Suppose you want to find out when the meeting starts. Only Ann is around, and you are not sure if she knows when the meeting starts. Instead of asking “When does the meeting start?” you could ask something like “Do you know when the meeting starts?”. By doing so, you are adapting your question to the epistemic status of the addressee, since Ann knows whether she knows when the meeting starts. So, even though AKN might seem particularly demanding, it is not, since it is always possible to adjust one’s question in this way.

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<sup>11</sup>One might still wonder how AKN would compare to other norms in the literature. I am open to interpreting AKN in a number of different ways, but one I view as plausible is formulated in terms of permission: One may ask addressee  $A$  the question  $Q$  only if  $A$  knows  $Q$ , where ‘may’ denotes an epistemic permission, and takes scope only over the antecedent. SIN would then be interpreted in a similar way: One may ask  $Q$  only if one does not know  $Q$ . This is similar to how the knowledge norm of assertion is often formulated: One may assert  $p$  only if one knows  $p$ . Thanks to an anonymous referee for asking me to clarify this.

<sup>12</sup>George (2013); Phillips and George (2018).

Consider the speaker-ignorance norm:

**SIN** Ask  $Q$  only if you do not know  $Q$ .

Whitcomb (2017), who argues for SIN as a norm of questioning, takes it to be constitutive of questioning. In this way, he takes SIN to parallel the knowledge norm that has been argued by Williamson (2000) to be constitutive of assertion. As I argue in this paper, there are phenomena of questioning that SIN alone cannot explain, and which require an addressee norm like AKN. So, if questioning has constitutive norms at all, it has at least SIN and AKN as its constitutive norms. However, my thesis in this paper is only that AKN is a norm of questioning, and I make no claims about whether it is a constitutive norm (alongside SIN), or whether questioning has constitutive norms at all.<sup>13</sup>

## 2.4 Alternative norms

Part of my task in this paper will be to rule out alternatives to AKN. A natural alternative is the following:

**AKN-B** Ask addressee  $A$  the question  $Q$  only if you (justifiably, rationally) believe  $A$  knows  $Q$ .<sup>14</sup>

Consider the example we began with: it would be odd for me to ask you “Where is Ann?” when I have no reason to think you know where Ann is, but it would be fine to ask “Do you know where Ann is?”. AKN-B explains this just as well as AKN does, and perhaps even better. Why not argue for AKN-B instead?

I take what one believes about the addressee’s knowledge to be part of trying to follow the norm, rather than part of the norm’s content. Consider the norm: Serve alcohol to  $A$  only if  $A$  is 21 or older. Guided by this norm, you will act according to what you believe about a person’s age: you might serve alcohol to someone if you believe them to be 21 or older, and you will not serve alcohol to them if you believe them to be under 21. But the norm is not: Serve alcohol to  $A$  only if you (justifiably, rationally) believe  $A$  is 21 or older. The same is true for AKN: in being guided by it, you will act according to what you believe addressees know. If you believe you are complying with the norm but end

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<sup>13</sup>See Maitra (2011); Marsili (2019); Kelp and Simion (2020) for a discussion of the issue of constitutivity and some reasons for skepticism.

<sup>14</sup>This suggestion can be traced back to Jeffreys (1939), who claims that in asking, e.g., “Where is Ann?”, the speaker expresses, among other propositions, that she believes that the addressee knows where Ann is. As a claim about the semantics of questions, this was wrong (see e.g. Hamblin (1958)), but as a claim about the pragmatics of questioning, it is captured by AKN-B.

up violating it (you thought the addressee knew, but they did not), your behavior will in some sense be reasonable or excusable. Some have captured this idea by distinguishing primary and secondary propriety.<sup>15</sup> An act has primary propriety when it is done in accordance with its norms, and it has secondary propriety when the acting subject believes with good reason that she is acting in accordance with the norms. So, in the secondary propriety sense, even according to AKN a speaker should ask only if she believes that the addressee knows. But the content of AKN does not include the belief condition. For these reasons, I take AKN to be preferable to AKN-B, or any other such ‘second-order’ addressee-knowledge norm, as long as both can explain the same data.

For the same reasons, I will often speak in terms of what the questioner expects the addressee to know, or has reason to believe the addressee knows, and so on. But this is only so as to take the questioner’s perspective, and not to suggest a norm like AKN-B.

Other alternatives to AKN concern the kind of epistemic status addressees should have. AKN requires asking addressees who know, but a norm could require asking those who believe, have reasons to believe, are justified in believing, have sufficient evidence, and so on. For instance:

**ABK** Ask addressee *A* the question *Q* only if *A* believes an answer to *Q*.

**AEK** Ask addressee *A* the question *Q* only if *A* has evidence pertaining to *Q*.

As I will argue, however, the data supports specifically a knowledge norm like AKN, rather than belief, evidence, or similar addressee norms.<sup>16</sup>

### 3 Data

In this section, I present several arguments for AKN as a norm of questioning. No single argument is meant to be decisive, but collectively I take them to present a strong case for AKN.

#### 3.1 Indirect questions

The first argument centers around the following phenomenon: when it is uncertain whether an addressee knows the answer to a question, inquirers resort to asking an indirect question instead, to which the addressee can be expected to know the answer.

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<sup>15</sup>See Williamson (2000); DeRose (2002); Weiner (2005) on this distinction.

<sup>16</sup>Second-order variants of ABK and AEK, like AKN-B, are also possible. But they will be ruled out for similar reasons.



Consider first a case where it is uncertain whether the addressee knows the answer to a question. Suppose that Ann is at work and she cannot find her keys. Moreover, she has no reason to think that anyone else knows where her keys are. She turns to her co-worker, Bob, and says the following:

(6) Where are my keys?

Ann's question seems awkward or less than fully felicitous. Contrast this with the following:

(7) Have you seen my keys?

(8) Do you know where my keys are?

Call these *indirect questions*, since they begin with 'do you know' or 'have you seen', instead of asking where the keys are outright. These questions seem perfectly felicitous. One important difference between the direct question (6) and the indirect questions (7) and (8) is that, while it is unreasonable to expect Bob to know where Ann's keys are, it is reasonable to expect him to know whether he has seen or knows where they are.

Ann's direct question can be implicitly criticized with the following reply:

(9) Ann: Where are my keys?

Bob: Why would I know where they are?

Bob's reply in this example implies that he should not be asked this question and that the reason has to do with his not knowing the answer. In contrast, such a reply is not appropriate to an indirect question:

(10) Ann: Have you seen my keys?

a. ?? Why would I know where they are?

b. ?? Why would I know if I have seen them?<sup>17</sup>

Why is Ann's direct question criticizable in a way that her indirect question is not? The thesis that a question is appropriate only if the addressee knows the answer can make sense of this.

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<sup>17</sup>It may be observed that "Why would I know where they are?" could be an appropriate reply to the indirect "Do you know where my keys are?". But such a reply is only be appropriate as criticism of the speaker as asking something whose answer should already be known. In general, if a speaker asks "Is *p*?", one may reply "Why would it be the case that *p*?" to criticize the speaker in this way. All this is compatible with the present argument.

We have noted that the indirect questions in this case satisfy the addressee-knowledge requirement, but that is only one part of why they are appropriate. By asking them, the inquirer can come to know whether the addressee-knowledge requirement for the direct question holds. Consider:

- (11) Ann: Have you seen my keys?  
Bob: Yes, I have.  
Ann: Where are they?

Of course, typically, the addressee is expected to say where the keys are in response to the first question in such a situation. But if Bob does answer in this way, then Ann's direct question becomes perfectly appropriate. What has changed is that Ann now knows, or at least reasonably believes, that Bob knows where the keys are. These phenomena are difficult to make sense of without some addressee-centered requirement on questioning.

Consider cases where it is certain that the addressee does not know the answer to a question. Suppose Ann has a lottery ticket. The draw has been held, but she does not know the result. Bob does not know the result either, and Ann is aware of this. As in the previous case, the following direct question by Ann seems not fully appropriate:

- (12) Did my ticket win?

The question can be criticized, for example, as follows:

- (13) Ann: Did my ticket win?  
Bob: Why are you asking me? I don't know if it won, and you know that.

In this case, questions such as "Do you know if my ticket won?" or "Have you heard if my ticket won?" would also not be appropriate, as they would violate the speaker-ignorance condition. However, the following is fine:

- (14) Ann: Do you think my ticket won?  
Bob: I think it probably didn't.

While Ann's direct question whether her ticket won was criticizable, this question is not. Why is this? One salient difference between the two questions is that Bob knows the answer to the second, but not to the first question: he knows what he thinks about the ticket's winning, even though he does not know whether the ticket won.

### 3.2 Known ignorance

The second argument is as follows. Questioning is infelicitous when addressee ignorance is entailed by the common ground. This can be explained by a norm requiring not to question an addressee who lacks knowledge. Consider:

- (15) Ann: Do you know when the meeting starts?  
Bob: No.  
Ann: # When does it start?

Ann's follow-up question is infelicitous. This is in contrast to the following far more natural exchange:

- (16) Ann: Do you know when the meeting starts?  
Bob: Yes.  
Ann: When does it start?

Bob's negative reply in the first case makes it common ground that he does not know when the meeting starts, while his positive reply in the second case makes it common ground that he does know it. Asking a question when it is common ground that the addressee does not know the answer results in infelicity.

The same happens even when the addressee's ignorance is not explicit. To see this, consider three cases of following up on a question:

- (17) Ann: Is the meeting today?  
Bob: I don't know.  
Ann: # So when is it?

- (18) Ann: Is the meeting today?  
Bob: Yes.  
Ann: # So when is it?

- (19) Ann: Is the meeting today?  
Bob: No.  
Ann: So when is it?

In (17), Bob makes it common ground that he does not know whether the meeting is today, which entails that he does not know when the meeting is—otherwise he would have known whether it is today. Ann's follow-up question is infelicitous, and that is because

the common ground now entails that Bob does not know the answer to this question, even though this was never explicitly stated. This can be explained by AKN. (18) is analogous, but with speaker knowledge: since Bob's reply makes it common ground that the meeting is today, it is also common ground that Ann knows when the meeting is. Here the speaker-ignorance norm SIN gives an analogous explanation. (19), in contrast to the first two cases, seems fine. Given Bob's reply, he knows that the meeting is not today, which means that he is likely to know when it actually is.

It is important to note that, unlike the cases in §3.1, the questions in cases (15), (17), and (18) seem absurd, or defective, rather than simply inappropriate or criticizable. That is because these questions do not merely violate a norm but do so overtly: in §3.1, it was not common ground that the addressee does not know the answer to the question. In the present cases, however, it is, which means that both speaker and addressee know that the addressee does not know the answer to the question, and each knows that the other knows it. Similar violations of communicative norms result in a similar absurdity. Compare:

(20) Ann: Do you know when the meeting starts?

Bob: No.

Ann: Oh, OK.

Bob: # But it starts at 4.

Here, Bob's assertion seems absurd given that it is common ground that he does not know when the meeting starts. Bob's ignorance being common ground is crucial: if Ann does not know that Bob does not know when the meeting starts, or if she knows but Bob does not know that she knows, then Bob's assertion may be bad, in the sense of violating a norm, but it would not be absurd.

Just as a knowledge norm of assertion explains the absurdity of the assertion in (20), and SIN explains the absurdity of the question in (18), AKN can explain the absurdity of the questions in (15) and (17).

It may be objected that this only supports the following norm, rather than AKN:

**AKN-CG** Ask addressee *A* the question *Q* only if it is not common ground that *A* does not know the answer to *Q*.

I agree that this common ground version of AKN can explain the data presented here. AKN, however, can explain not only the same data but more, since it is unclear how AKN-CG would explain the data of §3.1. So AKN is preferable.

### 3.3 Moorean questions

A related argument appeals to Moorean phenomena. In particular, it sounds incoherent to attribute to an addressee ignorance about a question and at the same time ask them that question. Consider:

(21) # You don't know whether Ann is coming to the party, but is she coming to the party?

Admittedly, it would be ordinarily odd to attribute ignorance to an addressee anyway. Still, one can make such attributions in conjunction with asking a question, and the result sounds acceptable:

(22) You don't know whether Ann is coming to the party, but is Bob coming to the party?

It also sounds acceptable to attribute ignorance to an addressee while asking for their opinion on the same question:

(23) You don't know whether Ann is coming to the party, but do you think she is coming to the party?

In these two cases, we do not get the kind of incoherence that we get in (21). So the incoherence of (21) is not due to the oddness of attributing ignorance to an addressee. The felt incoherence of (21), in contrast to the latter examples, calls for an explanation.

To this end, let us consider an analogous phenomenon. Attributing knowledge of the answer to a question to oneself while asking that question likewise sounds incoherent:

(24) # I know whether Ann is coming to the party, but is she coming to the party?

By contrast, both of the following are fine:

(25) I know whether Ann is coming to the party, but is Bob coming to the party?

(26) I *think* Ann is coming to the party, but is she coming to the party?

Those who accept a speaker-ignorance norm of questioning explain why (24) is defective, in contrast to the latter cases, as follows: by asking a question *Q*, the speaker implies that she does not know the answer to *Q*, and so by attributing to herself knowledge of the answer to *Q* she contradicts what is implied by her question.<sup>18</sup> No such contradiction is

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<sup>18</sup>See e.g. Whitcomb (2017) for a similar explanation.

present in (25) and (26). The speaker-ignorance norm explains why by asking a question the speaker implies that she is ignorant of the answer. I think this explanation is correct, and I propose an analogous explanation for (21): by asking an addressee *A* a question *Q*, the speaker implies that *A* knows the answer to *Q*, and so by attributing to *A* ignorance of the answer to *Q* the speaker contradicts what is implied by her question. No such contradiction is present in (22) and (23). The addressee-knowledge norm explains why by asking a question the speaker implies that her addressee knows the answer.

It might seem that there are some cases where it is nevertheless fine to ask such Moorean questions. For example, the speaker might say that the addressee does not know the answer to a question, and then ask them that question, to see what they are going to say. Consider:

(27) Ann: I know who won the game.

Bob: No, you don't. But let's hear it, who won?

Here Bob's utterance does not seem incoherent in the way that (21) was, and that is despite his asserting that Ann does not know the answer to the question he is asking. Thus, it may be objected, Moorean questions of the form "you don't know *Q*, but *Q*?" are not always bad, and, moreover, a speaker may ask a question even if he is certain that the addressee does not know the answer.

However, Bob's act is not an inquiry question. He is not asking the question in order to find out who won; he is asking the question in order to find out what Ann believes, or to see what her response is going to be. AKN is not meant to apply to such questions.

Finally, it might be objected that Moorean questions such as (21) can also be explained by the alternative, less strict, norm which says: do not ask if *you know* that the addressee does not know, rather than AKN which says: do not ask if the addressee does not know. I agree: Moorean data alone does not favor AKN over this alternative. However, given considerations of secondary propriety discussed in §2.4, and given the other data in favor of AKN, I take AKN to be preferable to this alternative norm.

### 3.4 Parenthetical clauses

An additional argument is based on parenthetical clauses in questions. An inquirer can qualify or hedge their question by asking for something less than knowledge. But a question cannot be hedged by asking for knowledge.

The following are instances of parenthetical clauses in questions. In particular, they use "do you think", and "as far as you know" in a parenthetical position:<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>I take "as far as I know, *p*" not to entail "I know *p*", which I don't think is controversial.

- (28) Is it, do you think, raining?
- (29) Where, do you think, did Bob go?
- (30) Is it, as far as you know, raining?
- (31) Where, as far as you know, did Bob go?

Parenthetical clauses may occur in the middle of the sentence as in these examples, and they may also occur at the end:

- (32) Is it raining, do you think?
- (33) Where did Bob go, do you think?
- (34) Is it raining, as far as you know?
- (35) Where did Bob go, as far as you know?

The present argument relies on an analogy with assertion. Assertions can also have parenthetical clauses. For example:

- (36) It is, I think, raining.
- (37) Bob went to the library, I think.
- (38) As far as I know, it is raining.
- (39) Bob, as far as I know, went to the library.

While phrases such as “I think” and “as far as I know” can be used parenthetically, “I know” cannot.<sup>20</sup> Consider:

- (40) # It is, I know, raining.
- (41) # It is raining, I know.

This phenomenon can be explained as follows. Proper assertion requires knowledge, and thus an assertion of *p* expresses or implies that the speaker knows that *p*. When a speaker uses a phrase such as “I think” or “as far as I know” parenthetically, the speaker blocks this implication, and thus hedges her assertion.<sup>21</sup> Thus speakers can use such

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<sup>20</sup>See Benton (2011); van Elswyk (2021); van Elswyk and Sapir (2021).

<sup>21</sup>See Benton (2011), and Benton and van Elswyk (2020).

parentheticals to express something like belief, rather than knowledge. But one cannot use “I know” for this purpose, given that an outright assertion already serves to express knowledge.

A similar phenomenon occurs in questions. While phrases such as “do you think” and “as far as you know” can be used parenthetically in questions, “do you know” cannot. For instance:

(42) # Is it, do you know, raining?

(43) # Where, do you know, did Bob go?

(44) # Is it raining, do you know?

(45) # Where did Bob go, do you know?

It is important not to confuse (44) and (45) with the following, which are felicitous:

(46) Is it raining? Do you know?

(47) Where did Bob go? Do you know?

In these latter two cases, “do you know” is not parenthetical as in (44) and (45) but is used to express an additional question, perhaps in order to reiterate or replace the first, and can be expanded accordingly: “Is it raining? Do you know (if it’s raining)?”.

Why can questions be hedged with “do you think” and “as far as you know” but not with “do you know”? I offer an explanation analogous to the one for the case of assertion. Proper questioning requires addressee knowledge, and thus asking a question *Q* implies that the addressee knows the answer to *Q*. Parenthetical uses of phrases such as “you think” or “as far as you know” block this implication and thus hedge the question. Thus speakers can use such parentheticals to ask what the speaker believes, rather than knows. But one cannot use “do you know” for this purpose, given that an unqualified question already serves to ask for what the speaker knows.

Unlike the other data presented so far, the data from parentheticals is not easily explained by the rivals to AKN.

## 4 Objections

At this point, one might accept that AKN is well supported by the data but still worry about potential counterexamples. Aren’t there cases where it is perfectly fine to ask someone a question even if they do not know the answer? I consider such cases in this section.



## 4.1 Asking those in a position to know

A simple and commonplace kind of question might seem to preset trouble for AKN. Suppose Ann wants to know the time, and her phone battery is dead. She sees that Bob has his phone and can quickly check the time. She then asks:

(48) Ann: What time is it?

Bob: (*checks phone*) It's 4:15.

At the time of asking, Bob does not know the answer to Ann's question. Moreover, we may suppose that Ann knows that Bob does not know what time it is at that moment. Yet, Ann's question seems perfectly fine. Doesn't this show that questioning requires not that the addressee know the answer, but rather that they be in a position to know, or otherwise capable of finding out the answer?

This is a tempting option, but I think it is incorrect. To begin, it is not clear how such a norm can explain all the data above. For instance, why would it sound incoherent to assert that the addressee does not know the answer to a question in conjunction with asking them that question? If all that is required as far as the addressee goes is that they be in a position to know, or be capable of finding out the answer, such assertions of ignorance should not be in conflict with what is implied by asking the question. Second, there is a sense in which the addressee does know the answer and in this sense this is not, after all, a violation of AKN. To see this, consider first this variation of the exchange:

(49) Ann: I don't know what time it is. Do you?

Bob: Yes, (*checks phone*) it's 4:15.

By replying 'yes' in this case, Bob says that he knows what time it is. This is before checking the time on his phone. What he says is strictly speaking false: he does not know what time it is at that point, but only after he checks his phone. Is Bob lying? I think not. Rather, there is pretense at play: Bob pretends to know, because in a moment he is going to know anyway. Likewise, I suggest, Ann treats Bob as a knower in (48), even though she knows he will only be one a few moments after her question.

To further support this idea, consider that Moorean questions in this context are still defective:

(50) Ann: # You don't know what time it is, but what time is it?

Even though both Ann and Bob know that, strictly speaking, Bob does not know what time it is before he checks his phone, and even though the question by itself is fine in the

same context, it seems incoherent to combine the ascription of ignorance and the asking of the question. I suggest that this is because Bob is treated as a knower here in order to ask him the question, and it is reasonable to treat him as a knower because he will be a knower in a matter of seconds. But why would asking the question require treating the addressee as a knower? AKN can make sense of this: asking requires addressee knowledge.

## 4.2 Asking those who know more

It often seems perfectly acceptable to ask those who know more than us about a subject matter, even if we do not expect them to know the answer to our specific question. Suppose that Ann goes to a car repair shop. She sees several people around in uniforms, and she does not know exactly who among them are technicians. Still, she is confident that no matter who she asks they are bound to know more about cars than her, even if they do not know the answer to her specific question. She turns to one of the employees and says: “Excuse me, why isn’t my radiator heating up?” The employee says, “Oh sorry, I’m actually just an apprentice, let me get the boss.” Ann’s question, the worry goes, seems perfectly fine, and it would not be appropriate for the employee to criticize her for it. If Ann’s question is appropriate, this could be troublesome for AKN.<sup>22</sup>

I think that Ann’s question in this case is not fully appropriate as an inquiry question. Consider first an explanation for why it may seem appropriate. Ann knows that no matter which employee she asks, they will be such that they either know the answer, or know someone who does, and in that case will refer her to that person. So Ann’s question would be instrumentally rational, in that it would be a rational means of attaining her goal of finding out what is wrong with her radiator. So the intuition that the question is acceptable may be an intuition about what is instrumentally rational, and not about what is appropriate from the point of view of the norms of questioning. I say more about the relation between questioning norms and instrumental rationality in §4.4 and §4.5. Moreover, Ann’s question may not even be an inquiry question in that case: her question is not an attempt to settle her inquiry just by asking the question, but an attempt to either settle her inquiry or to get to someone whom she can ask an inquiry question. An attempt to  $\phi$  or  $\psi$  is not an attempt to  $\phi$ .

If, on the other hand, Ann asks an inquiry question, then it is not clear that Ann’s question is fully appropriate. If Ann truly does not expect her addressee to know the answer to her question, the indirect “Do you know why my radiator isn’t heating up?” seems much preferable to the direct “Why isn’t my radiator heating up?”. Moreover,

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<sup>22</sup>I’m grateful to an anonymous referee for raising this worry and providing the example.

suppose that Ann is open about not expecting the employee to know the answer:

(51) Ann: I don't expect you to know the answer to this, but why isn't my radiator heating up?

Employee: Uh, then what are you asking me for?

The employee's criticism of Ann's question does not seem out of place in this version of the exchange. This suggests that the reason why it would be odd for the employee to criticize the question in the original example is that Ann is best interpreted by the addressee as someone who does expect them to know the answer.

Consider the alternative to AKN that might be suggested by such cases. According to this alternative norm, the required epistemic status of the addressee is not knowledge, but something like being sufficiently informed or knowing more than the questioner about the issue at hand. But this norm would not be able to explain much of the data presented in §3. Moreover, this does not seem the right epistemic status required for the addressee. Suppose that Ann learns that the employee does not know the answer to her question, even though the employee remains far more knowledgeable about radiators and cars than Ann is. It would then be inappropriate for Ann to ask the question. To illustrate, consider:

(52) Ann: Excuse me, why isn't my radiator heating up?

Employee: Sorry, I don't know. I'm just an apprentice.

Ann: # Ok, but why isn't my radiator heating up?

Ann's follow-up question is clearly infelicitous. But this infelicity cannot be explained by the alternative norm under consideration, since the fact that the employee knows far more about radiators and cars than Ann does has not changed, and we may assume that Ann remains confident about this fact. What has changed is that Ann has learned that the employee does not know the answer to her question, and one should not ask those who do not know the answer.

### **4.3 Asking those who might know**

It might seem that it is often appropriate to ask those who we merely suspect to know or have moderate credence in their knowing the answer, even though we do not fully believe them to know. If this is right, then AKN might have trouble explaining this. Recall that AKN can explain why it is appropriate to ask those who we believe to know but do not in fact know: that is because we are guided by AKN, and so we seek those addressees

who we believe satisfy its requirements. In other words, in such cases we satisfy the norms of secondary propriety (§2.3). However, by asking when we merely suspect or have moderate credence in someone's knowing we do not even satisfy secondary norms. How can AKN explain this?<sup>23</sup>

I grant that we often ask those who we merely suspect to know. But it seems far more appropriate to do so by indirect, rather than by direct, questioning. Consider an example similar to those in §3.1. If Ann is looking for her keys, and she does not expect Bob to know anything about her keys, it seems that asking him outright "Where are my keys?" would be inappropriate. By contrast, asking something like "Have you seen my keys by any chance?" would be perfectly fine. Now, suppose that Ann comes to rationally suspect that Bob has seen her keys, though she remains unsure. It seems that the outright "Where are my keys?" would still be inappropriate in this case, and an indirect question like "Do you know where my keys are?" perfectly acceptable. The direct question seems inappropriate because Ann falls short of actually believing that Bob knows the answer. Suppose, by contrast, that Ann is told by a reliable friend that Bob knows where the keys are. In that case, the direct "Where are my keys?" would be acceptable.

Consider another example. Suppose Ann has three close friends who have applied for a job at the same company. Ann knows that only two of the three received a job offer, but she has no idea who. For each friend, Ann has rational  $2/3$  credence that this friend received an offer. If Ann meets one of them, Bob, it would be quite odd of her to ask a question such as "What's the salary like?" without first finding out whether he was one of those who got an offer. This is so despite Ann's rational  $2/3$  credence that he did and knows the answer. If Bob says that he got an offer, Ann's question immediately becomes appropriate, and that seems to be because Ann comes to rationally believe (outright) that Bob knows the answer. This suggests that a doxastic state that falls short of belief that the addressee knows the answer is insufficient for appropriate (direct) questioning.

#### 4.4 Useful questions

Another type of case might seem problematic for AKN. Suppose that Ann wants to find out who won the lottery. She learns from a third party that Bob has a true but irrational belief about the identity of the winner, but she is not told who the winner is. It seems perfectly reasonable for Ann to ask Bob who the winner is, since she will be able to learn the truth from him, even though Bob's belief about the matter does not constitute knowledge. Thus the following exchange may take place:

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<sup>23</sup>I'm grateful to an anonymous referee for raising this worry.

(53) Ann: Who won the lottery?

Bob: Carl did.

So here is another case where the question seems proper even though the addressee lacks knowledge and, moreover, the questioner knows that the addressee lacks knowledge. Doesn't this show that true belief is all that an addressee-centered norm of questioning should require?

Two points in reply. First, as in the previous case, here too the addressee is treated as a knower despite not being one. As before, the following would sound defective:

(54) Ann: # You don't know who won, but who won?

Consider what might be a legitimate reply to this Moorean question:

(55) Ann: # You don't know who won, but who won?

Bob: If I don't know, then why are you asking me?

Here Bob's reply is critical of Ann's question. The criticism seems legitimate once the pretense that Bob is a knower is no longer present. These considerations suggest that proper questioning has something to do with addressee knowledge.

Second, we should note that a question may be rational, e.g., instrumentally, even when it is improper as a matter of the norms of questioning. The same holds for other speech acts. It may be instrumentally rational to assert what I know to be false, if asserting it will lead to some rationally desirable result, even if it violates the norms of assertion. Thus, the intuition that Ann's question is acceptable in this case may track intuitions about the instrumental rationality of asking the question, rather than its appropriateness from the perspective of questioning norms.

There are good reasons to think that Ann's question is instrumentally rational. Typically, questioners want to know the answers to their questions, and some ways of acting might be instrumentally rational in pursuing this goal. Ann's asking Bob as she does is instrumentally rational insofar as it is an efficient way for her to achieve her goal, which might not be attainable otherwise. Similar questions might be instrumentally rational in cases where it is clearer that the question violates a questioning norm. Suppose that Bob knows who won the lottery, but he lies whenever asked about it. If Ann knows that Bob will provide a false answer, she can exploit this in order to find out the true answer to her inquiry. She might ask "Did Carl win the lottery?", and when Bob answers "No", she will know that Carl won. Her question is instrumentally rational, as it is a good way of attaining her goal of knowing who won. But it seems to violate at least some norm of

questioning, since she asked the question knowing full well that the addressee is going to provide an answer that he doesn't know, doesn't believe, doesn't have evidence for, and is false. So, the objection, if successful, would show that there are no norms of questioning that center on the epistemic status of the addressee, but there are good reasons to think that is at least *some* such norm. So it is more plausible that the intuitions about these cases come from intuitions about instrumental rationality.

## 4.5 Instrumental rationality

A related concern is that the various phenomena presented in this paper can all be explained by a norm of instrumental rationality, rather than a newly posited norm such as AKN. After all, inquiry questioning is a goal-directed act, where the goal is settling the inquiry, and it is instrumentally irrational to try to achieve a goal by means that are not believed conducive to achieving it. This might seem to explain much of why inquiry questioning seems to require a knowing addressee.<sup>24</sup>

As a goal-directed activity, questioning is surely subject to the norms of instrumental rationality.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, the requirements of AKN and instrumental rationality often coincide. But AKN is still required to explain the data.

Consider, for instance, the data from parenthetical clauses (§3.4). It is felicitous to insert clauses like 'do you think' or 'as far as you know' to qualify what is asked by a question, but it is infelicitous to insert a 'do you know' clause. As I have argued, AKN provides a good explanation of this. In contrast, I do not think a norm of instrumental rationality can give an adequate explanation. There is no reason why the insertion of such a clause would hinder the inquirer's chances of attaining her goal, and so should not be instrumentally irrational, at least not to a degree that would make the resulting question infelicitous.

Moreover, norms of instrumental rationality cannot explain the preference of indirect to direct questions (e.g., "Do you know where Ann is?" vs "Where is Ann?") in cases where addressee knowledge is uncertain (§3.1). Indeed, from the perspective of pure instrumental rationality, direct questions should be preferable in every case. After all, if the addressee does not know the answer, they can just say "I don't know", and if they do, so much the better. Indirect questions seem unnecessarily longer, and they potentially introduce an extra conversational step. Still, there is clear preference for indirect questions

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<sup>24</sup>I'm grateful to an anonymous referee for raising this worry.

<sup>25</sup>It should be added that, although I agree that settling an inquiry requires knowing its answer (see §5), this is not an assumption I have made in arguing for AKN, and it needs to be assumed if instrumental rationality is to explain the relevant data.

in cases of uncertain addressee knowledge. This preference, as I have argued, is best explained by the desire to comply with AKN.

## 5 Inquiry

The view of questioning that emerges from the present argument is that it has the following two-part norm:

**Questioning Norm** Ask addressee *A* the question *Q* only if:

- (i) You do not know *Q*
- (ii) *A* knows *Q*

In this final section, I draw out some of the implications of this account for the nature and norms of inquiry more generally.

A natural question to ask is: Why does questioning have this particular norm? Recall that by questioning one is trying to resolve one's inquiry. The explanation for why questioning has this particular norm, I propose, has to do with inquiry in the more general sense.

The speaker-ignorance part of Questioning Norm can be explained by the following norm of inquiring:

**Ignorance Norm of Inquiry (INI)** Do not inquire into *Q* when you know *Q*.

Here inquiry encompasses more than just questioning. According to INI, for instance, one is not to go looking for Ann when one knows where Ann is, calculate whether 119 is prime when one knows whether 119 is prime, wonder when dinner will be served when one knows when dinner will be served, and so on. INI can itself be explained in terms of a norm of coherence in one's mental states: one should not have an inquiring attitude (be curious, wonder, etc.) about *Q* when one knows *Q*.

The speaker-ignorance norm of questioning, then, can be derived from INI. Since questioning is a kind of inquiring, and inquiring requires ignorance, then so does questioning. One may object to INI, or to its inquiring attitude counterpart, by arguing that it is not possible to inquire into *Q* while knowing *Q*: inquiring into *Q* just entails ignorance of *Q*.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps. But in that case, it is not possible to ask an inquiry question while knowing its answer, since to ask an inquiry question *Q* is to inquire into *Q*. If so, Questioning Norm will reduce to AKN.

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<sup>26</sup>See e.g. Stanley (2011, p. 42), and see Archer (2018) for relevant discussion. A related, though not identical, view is defended in Lee (forthcoming).

What about the addressee-knowledge part? I suggest that it can be explained by the following norm of inquiry:

**Knowledge Aim of Inquiry (KAI)** When trying to resolve an inquiry into  $Q$ , aim to acquire knowledge  $Q$ .<sup>27</sup>

Here, too, inquiry encompasses more than just questioning. According to KAI, for instance, I should aim to know where Ann is if I am looking for her, aim to know whether 119 is prime when calculating whether 119 is prime, aim to know who stole the cake when investigating who stole the cake, and so on. Like INI, KAI can be explained in terms of norms on inquiring attitudes: one should not have an inquiring attitude about  $Q$  without aiming or wanting to know  $Q$ .

Deriving the addressee-knowledge norm of questioning from KAI is slightly less obvious than in the case of the speaker-ignorance norm and INI. Suppose that one can acquire knowledge that  $p$  from a speaker's answer that  $p$  only if that speaker knows that  $p$ .<sup>28</sup> That is, if a speaker only believes that  $p$ , but does not know whether  $p$ , then you cannot acquire knowledge that  $p$  through this speaker's assertion that  $p$ . Suppose, moreover, that by asking  $Q$  the questioner is aiming to get the addressee to answer that  $p$ , for some  $p$  that is a complete answer to  $Q$ . So, for instance, if I ask "Where is Ann?" as an inquiry question, and the addressee replies with an incomplete answer such as "Either at the library or at her office", then, even though the reply is helpful, I did not get what I aimed for, since the answer does not settle my inquiry. So, if one can come to know  $Q$  through an addressee's answer only if the addressee knows  $Q$ , and one aims to get a complete answer to  $Q$  by asking  $Q$ , then KAI can explain why questioning has an addressee-knowledge norm: in asking an inquiry question  $Q$ , one is aiming to come to know  $Q$ .

In supporting the ignorance norm of inquiry and the knowledge aim of inquiry, the evidence for Questioning Norm is also evidence—though not decisive evidence—against their rivals. A rival to INI, for instance, is:

**Don't Believe and Inquire (DBI)** Do not inquire into  $Q$  when you believe a complete answer to  $Q$ .<sup>29</sup>

DBI and INI are compatible under one interpretation. If one does not believe an answer to  $Q$ , one does not know one, either. Another interpretation of INI is that it forbids knowing,

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<sup>27</sup>See e.g. Whitcomb (2010); Kelp (2014, 2021); van Elswyk and Sapir (2021) for defense. The claim that knowledge is the aim of inquiry is sometimes given in different formulations.

<sup>28</sup>This claim is challenged by Lackey (2007, 2008), appealing to cases of what she calls selfless assertion. I have no space to discuss the issue here, but see Montminy (2013); Turri (2014, 2015); Milić (2017) for criticism of Lackey's argument.

<sup>29</sup>See Friedman (2019b) for a defense of DBI. It is endorsed by others, e.g. Millson (2020).



but permits anything that falls short of knowing, while inquiring.<sup>30</sup> On this interpretation, DBI and INI are not compatible. Since Questioning Norm supports not just INI but also KAI, the claim that inquiry aims at knowledge, it supports the latter interpretation of INI and so it supports it over DBI.

KAI has its rivals too. For instance:

**Belief Aim of Inquiry** When trying to resolve an inquiry into  $Q$ , aim to acquire a (true/justified/etc) belief in an answer to  $Q$ .<sup>31</sup>

**Improvement Aim of Inquiry** When trying to resolve an inquiry into  $Q$ , aim to improve your epistemic position w.r.t  $Q$ .<sup>32</sup>

Since KAI is the only one that explains why there is an addressee-knowledge norm for questioning, it is favored over the belief and improvement aims by the present account of questioning. One may wonder, however, whether a norm like the ignorance norm of inquiry or the speaker-ignorance norm of questioning already suffices to support KAI over the alternatives. Not necessarily. The fact that one should not inquire into  $Q$  while knowing  $Q$  does not, by itself, entail that one should aim to know  $Q$  by inquiring into  $Q$ . It is compatible with the ignorance requirement on inquiring, for instance, that one should aim to improve one's epistemic position in inquiring, if it is either not possible or not required to improve one's epistemic position beyond knowledge. The knowledge-addressee norm, however, rules out this option.

One might question whether KAI is really the only norm about the aim of inquiry that can explain AKN. Consider, for example, the improvement aim. It might be argued that one typically seeks to ask  $Q$  only of addressees who know  $Q$  because acquiring knowledge is a common, though not the only, way of improving one's epistemic position with respect to  $Q$ .<sup>33</sup> I find this thought plausible, though I still think that AKN favors a knowledge aim over an improvement aim of inquiry. For one thing, the knowledge aim gives us a simpler explanation of the addressee norm of questioning. For another, given an improvement aim of inquiry one would expect a corresponding norm of questioning, where it would be permissible to ask those who are in a better epistemic position, even if they lack knowledge. Such a norm, however, is not supported by the data. To be clear, I do not think these considerations rule out an improvement aim of inquiry. My argument in this section is an abductive one. A knowledge account of the aim of inquiry gives the best

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<sup>30</sup>See van Elswyk and Sapir (2021) for a defense of the latter interpretation.

<sup>31</sup>See e.g. Kvanvig (2003); Lynch (2005).

<sup>32</sup>See Archer (2021); Woodard (2022); Falbo (forthcoming).

<sup>33</sup>Thanks to an anonymous referee for pressing this point.

overall explanation of the data about the norms of questioning, so it is better supported by this data.<sup>34</sup>

## 6 Conclusion

I hope I have convinced you that questioning has *some* addressee-centered epistemic norm. I have argued that this norm is one that requires addressee knowledge: you should ask only those who know the answer to your question. This norm sounds demanding at first, perhaps too demanding to be plausible. How are you to know who knows the answer to your question? But it should be clear by now that there is no problem being guided by this norm. For one thing, as with all norms, you act according to what you believe will satisfy it. For another, you can always resort to asking the indirect “Do you know ...?”, to which the addressee is surely going to know the answer, and which we typically prefer in cases of uncertainty. Still, there may be more to say about who we should ask, and I welcome further discussion on this.

I have also argued that this account of questioning has implications for issues such as the aim of inquiry. The view that inquirers should aim at knowledge, I have argued, gives the best, though perhaps not the only, explanation for why only those who know should be asked. More generally, I think that the activity of inquiring and the speech act of questioning are intimately connected, and that a better understanding of questioning can provide a better understanding of the nature and the norms of inquiry. My hope is that we can gain further insights into the latter by looking into the relation between questioners and their addressees.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Relatedly, one may wonder what the present account of questioning has to say about the cases that motivate an improvement account of the aim of inquiry. One case is offered by Archer (2021), where an economist (call her Ann) conducts an inquiry into whether a policy would yield certain results, even though she knows the available information is insufficient for knowing the answer. Ann nevertheless examines the evidence and arrives at an informed opinion, and thus a better epistemic position, on the matter. (See Falbo (forthcoming) for a related case.) I believe that thinking about what questioning would look like in such a case can shed some light on it. Suppose Ann has a twin, Beth, also an economist. Beth has the exact same information as Ann, and has already conducted the same inquiry. If Ann could ask Beth a question, instead of conducting her own inquiry, what should she ask? In my view, she shouldn't ask “Will the policy yield these results?”, to which she knows Beth doesn't know the answer, but rather something like “How likely is the policy to yield these results?”, to which Beth does know the answer. If so, then it is more plausible that the latter is really the question Ann is inquiring into, and to which she is aiming to know the answer. Thanks to an anonymous referee for calling my attention to such cases.

<sup>35</sup>Thanks to David Barnett, Nate Charlow, Benj Hellie, Jennifer Nagel, and two anonymous referees for helpful comments and discussion.

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