

# THE KNOWLEDGE NORM FOR INQUIRY

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**Abstract:** A growing number of epistemologists have endorsed the Ignorance Norm for Inquiry. Roughly, this norm says that one shouldn't inquire into a question unless one is ignorant of its answer. I argue that, in addition to ignorance, proper inquiry requires a certain kind of knowledge. Roughly, one shouldn't inquire into a question unless one knows it has a true answer. I call this the Knowledge Norm for Inquiry. Proper inquiry walks a fine line, holding knowledge that there's an answer in the left hand and ignorance of the answer in the right.

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Epistemology is about what we should believe. Well, not just *believe* but also, *refrain* from believing, have *confidence* in, *think* to be true, be *certain* of, and so on. These diverse attitudes have something in common: they are all either doxastic attitudes or the omission of a

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doxastic attitude. Norms governing such attitudes concern the attitudes we ought to have toward propositions. It might not be thought a stretch to say that epistemology is, at bottom, about these doxastic attitudes: when we should have them, what they are, when they constitute knowledge or other successes, and so on.

But some epistemologists have thought that this is (at best) only half-right. Epistemology is just as much about *interrogative* attitudes as doxastic ones.<sup>1</sup> It's about the attitudes we should have toward *questions* as much as it is about the attitudes we should have toward *propositions*.

Indeed, a growing minority have been explicitly advancing a “zetetic turn” in epistemology. Friedman argues that epistemology proper should center on zetetic norms,<sup>2</sup> and Kelp argues that epistemology is fundamentally a theory of inquiry.<sup>3</sup> More narrowly, there is a burgeoning debate over whether there are epistemic norms that apply to inquiry. Indeed, several authors have recently defended that there are epistemic norms on *questioning* or *wondering*.<sup>4</sup> One should not ask oneself a question that one knows the (complete) answer to—or perhaps even merely *believes* an answer to.<sup>5</sup> In short: “ignorance is the norm of questioning.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For the term “interrogative attitudes,” see: Jane Friedman, “Why Suspend Judging?” *Noûs*, LI, 2 (2017): 302–26.

<sup>2</sup> Jane Friedman, “The Epistemic and the Zetetic,” *The Philosophical Review*, CXXIX, 4 (2020): 501–36.

<sup>3</sup> Christoph Kelp, *Inquiry Knowledge, and Understanding* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 1–224; Christoph Kelp, “Theory of Inquiry,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, CII (2021): 359–84.

<sup>4</sup> Dennis Whitcomb, “Curiosity Was Framed,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, LXXXI, 3 (2010): 664–87; Dennis Whitcomb “One Kind of Asking,” *The Philosophical Quarterly*, LXVII, 266 (2017): 148–68; Friedman, “Why Suspend Judging?” *op. cit.*; Jane Friedman, “Inquiry and Belief,” *Noûs*, LIII, 2 (2019): 296–315; Jared A. Millson “Seeking Confirmation: A Puzzle for Norms of Inquiry,” *Analysis*, LXXX, 4 (2021): 683–693; Yasha Sapir & Peter van Elswyk, “Hedging and the Ignorance Norm on Inquiry,” *Synthese*, CXCIX, 3-4 (2021): 5837–59; Christopher Willard-Kyle, “Surprising Suspensions: The Epistemic Value of Being Ignorant,” Dissertation, Rutgers University, New Brunswick; Dennis Whitcomb & Jared A. Millson, “Inquiring Attitudes and Erotetic Logic: Norms of Restriction and Expansion,” *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* (forthcoming).

<sup>5</sup> Friedman, “Inquiry and Belief,” *op. cit.*; Christoph Kelp, *Inquiry Knowledge, and Understanding*, *op. cit.*; Millson “Seeking Confirmation,” *op. cit.*

<sup>6</sup> John Hawthorne, *Knowledge and Lotteries*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 1–205, at p. 24.

Although these authors are not without their critics,<sup>7</sup> if they are right, then inquiry is governed by norms with epistemic content. Now, Simion has shown that there is no straightforward inference from a norm's having epistemic content to its being an epistemic norm.<sup>8</sup> For instance, there may be a (socially generated) moral norm to know your partner's birthday. This is a norm with epistemic content, but it is not thereby an epistemic norm. Nevertheless, the inquiry camp have rightly taken such norms as confirming evidence that epistemic normativity encompasses inquiry and not just belief-formation. Tight connections between doxastic states and zetetic success are just what we should expect if inquiry and belief-formation are governed by norms belonging to the same (epistemic) domain.<sup>9</sup>

And indeed, it's intuitive that agents can know too much to properly inquire into a question. Knowing a question's answer threatens to make inquiry into the relevant question *pointless*. But it's also plausible that agents can know too *little* to inquire into a question well. It would be odd for a detective to inquire into who committed the murder if they didn't have sufficient evidence to know that there had even been a murder in the first place.

This paper explores the tension between the ideas that inquirers can't know too much and that they can't know too little. In doing so, I aim to make two contributions to

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<sup>7</sup> Avery Archer, "Wondering about what you know," *Analysis*, LXVIII, 4 (2018): 596–604; Michele Palmira, "Inquiry and the doxastic attitudes," *Synthese* CXCVII, 11 (2020): 4947–73, at p. 4959; Arianna Falbo, "Inquiry and Confirmation," *Analysis*, LXXXI, 4 (2021): 622–31; Arianna Falbo, "Inquiring Minds Want to Improve," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* (2022): DOI: [10.1080/00048402.2021.2024863](https://doi.org/10.1080/00048402.2021.2024863).

<sup>8</sup> Mona Simion, *Shifty Speech and Independent Thought: Epistemic Normativity in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 1–192, at p. 61–64.

<sup>9</sup> The IGNORANCE NORM satisfies "Content Individuation," a principle Simion rightly criticizes as causing conflation between "epistemic norms" and "norms with epistemic content" in: Simion, *Shifty Speech and Independent Thought*, *op. cit.* at p. 61–64. That's because the IGNORANCE NORM affects the required epistemic support (only levels compatible with ignorance!) required for permissibly inquiring or wondering. (*Mutatis mutandis* for the KNOWLEDGE NORM.) But that doesn't mean that proponents (need) think it is an epistemic norm *because* it satisfies Content Individuation (indeed, they shouldn't). It's worth noting that neither the IGNORANCE NORM nor the KNOWLEDGE NORM involve the pattern of *overriding* norms that motivate Simion's critique of the Content Individuation principle. (That said, readers who are convinced that norms on inquiry are not epistemic norms may still be persuaded by this paper that the KNOWLEDGE NORM is a true norm with epistemic content.)

this growing literature, one specific and one general. The specific thesis is this: ignorance of the answer isn't enough to license (epistemically) proper questioning. One also needs a kind of (implicit) knowledge—knowledge that the question has a true answer. I call this the KNOWLEDGE NORM FOR INQUIRY. Proper inquiry walks a fine line, holding knowledge *that* there's an answer in the left hand and ignorance *of* the answer in the right. Second, by further tightening the normative connections between inquiry and knowledge, defending this KNOWLEDGE NORM FOR INQUIRY adds to the cumulative case for the broad view that epistemic normativity encompasses evaluations of inquiry (or wondering) and not just belief-formation.

The KNOWLEDGE NORM FOR INQUIRY is where we're going. Here are the stops we make along the way. In §1, we fill up on terminology. In §2, we speed through three arguments for the KNOWLEDGE NORM FOR INQUIRY. In §3, we take a quick detour to consider some related norms on presupposition. And then in §4, we check the mirror for rival views before arriving at our final destination in §5.

## 1. CONTEXT, CONCEPT, AND CONJECTURE

*1.1. Context.* Philosophers often explicitly set questions aside when discussing epistemic normativity. For instance, Feldman says that the questions one investigates are strictly of moral and prudential—not epistemic—concern:

What topics you ought to investigate depend upon what topics are of interest to you, what investigations can help you to make your own life or the lives of others better, and other such matters. Evidentialism is silent on those moral and prudential issues, and I don't see why it should address them.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Richard Feldman, "The Ethics of Belief," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, LX (2000): 667–95, at p. 690.

Feldman’s view suggests, if perhaps it does not straightforwardly entail,<sup>11</sup> that question asking is *solely* governed by pragmatic and moral considerations rather than epistemic ones. Call this the *no bad questions* view. According to this view, beliefs (and related doxastic states) are subject to epistemic norms but the questions an agent asks themselves are not. Epistemically speaking, there are no bad questions, only bad answers.

Unequivocal endorsements of *no bad questions* are rare. But broadly speaking, there’s a tradition going back (at least) to Chisholm of framing epistemic normativity as something that starts after one has *considered* an hypothesis. Here is Chisholm:

We may assume that every person is subject to a purely intellectual requirement—that of trying his best to bring it about that *for every proposition h that he considers*, he accepts h if and only if h is true.<sup>12</sup>

Chisholm doesn’t mention “inquiry” specifically, but plausibly, taking an interrogative attitude toward a question that has *p* as a candidate answer is a common way that we consider *p*. Wondering about or entertaining the question *whether p* is among the paradigm ways of considering *p*. Chisholm’s view is thus an influential model for approaching epistemic normativity in a way that prompts us to think of raising a question as an activation condition for the normative evaluation of beliefs rather than an object of normative epistemic evaluation in its own right.

But there is growing discontent with the received view. Several epistemologists have recently defended purportedly epistemic norms on inquiring:

IGNORANCE NORM FOR INQUIRY: One ought to: inquire into *Q* at *t* only if one does not know the complete answer to *Q* at *t*.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Strictly, what Feldman says is that *evidentialism* doesn’t address the normativity of questions rather than that *epistemology* does not. But it’s telling that Feldman calls the considerations bearing on question-asking “moral and prudential” while omitting “epistemic.” Thanks to Wes Siscoe for clarifying conversation here.

<sup>12</sup> Roderick Chisholm, *Theory of Knowledge*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall, 1977), pp. 1–144, at p. 14, emphases mine.

<sup>13</sup> For comparison, see the following: Hawthorne, *Knowledge and Lotteries*, *op. cit.*, p. 24; Justin Fitzpatrick, “The Whys and How Comes of Presupposition and NPI Licensing in Questions,” in John Alderete *et al* (ed.)

The “ought” has wide scope: the norm says one shouldn’t inquire into  $Q$  while knowing its answer at the same time. Following Friedman,<sup>14</sup> I assume that the sort of inquiring to which this norm applies is the sort that involves a wondering attitude on the part of the inquirer. In fact, I shall (simplistically) use “inquiring into  $Q$ ” as synonymous with “wondering about  $Q$ ” for the purposes of this paper. “Inquiry” is rich enough to take on significantly more conceptual weight in other contexts: “inquiry” often denotes not just wondering but taking active steps toward figuring something out (by gathering evidence, for instance). And it’s also arguable that inquiry can be underwritten by attitudes other than wondering.<sup>15</sup> But interrogative attitudes (or wonderings) are plausibly of special epistemic interest since they share the content-directed, attitudinal, and (as I shall argue) normatively evaluable profile of doxastic attitudes.

Although the IGNORANCE NORM has experienced a resurgence of interest, it also has historical pedigree. Thus, Plato writes:

[I]t’s not possible for someone to inquire ...into that which he knows... for he wouldn’t inquire into that which he knows (for he knows it, and there’s no need for such a person to inquire).<sup>16</sup>

And Sextus says:

[T]hose who think they know [how objects are in their nature] accurately may not [investigate them]. For... the investigation is already at its end.<sup>17</sup>

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*Proceedings of the 24<sup>th</sup> West Coast Conference on Formal Linguistics* (Somerville, Cascadia Proceedings Project, 2005), pp. 138–145, at p. 143; Whitcomb, “Curiosity Was Framed,” *op. cit.*, at p. 674; Whitcomb, “One Kind of Asking,” *op. cit.*, at p. 152; Friedman, “Why Suspend Judging?” *op. cit.*, at p. 311; Millson, “Seeking Confirmation,” *op. cit.*, at p. 685; Sapir & van Elswyk, “Hedging and the Ignorance Norm for Inquiry,” *op. cit.*; and Willard-Kyle, “Surprising Suspensions,” *op. cit.*, at p. 46–55. The view that questions express that one does not know shows up as early as in Harold Jeffreys, *Theory of Probability*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1948). Jeffreys is followed by John Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1969), pp. 1–203, at p. 66 and also Robert Fiengo, *Asking Questions: Using Meaningful Structures to Imply Ignorance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 2–256.

<sup>14</sup> Friedman, “Why Suspend Judging?” *op. cit.*

<sup>15</sup> On this point, see Falbo, “Inquiry and Confirmation,” *op. cit.*, at p. 627–28.

<sup>16</sup> Translated in Gail Fine, *The Possibility of Inquiry: Meno’s Paradox from Socrates to Sextus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 1–416, at p. 7.

<sup>17</sup> Julia Annas & Jonathan Barnes (eds. & trs.), *Outlines of Scepticism, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 1–286, at p. 69–70 (II.i).

Plato and Sextus may be more interested in the *possibility* of inquiring when one knows than the *permissibility*, but one doesn't have to squint hard to see contemporary epistemologists who endorse the IGNORANCE NORM as carrying on this Platonic tradition.<sup>18</sup>

Apart from the Platonic idea that knowledge is the end of inquiry,<sup>19</sup> the IGNORANCE NORM is supported by conversational data. One reason to think that the norm is true is that sentences of the form, "I know that *p*, but is it the case that *p*?" sound very odd.<sup>20</sup> Another is that we routinely infer that those who ask questions don't know the answer.<sup>21</sup> Saying, "Wait, who are the Beatles?", at least when asked in a certain, inquisitive mode,<sup>22</sup> amounts to a confession that one does not know who the Beatles are. In any case, this paper will grant that there is indeed an ignorance norm on inquiry.

Still, there is *something*, I contend, that the proper inquirer must know. Inquiry demands epistemic accomplishment on our part, not merely epistemic lack. Inquirers must know that there is an answer to the question they are wondering about:

KNOWLEDGE NORM FOR INQUIRY: One ought to: inquire into (an unconditional question)<sup>23</sup> *Q* at *t* only if one knows at *t* that *Q* has a true (complete, and direct) answer.

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<sup>18</sup> It was useful talking to Mike Deigan on this point.

<sup>19</sup> For the related idea that knowledge is inquiry's goal, see Christoph Kelp, "Two for the Knowledge Goal of Inquiry," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, LI (2014): 227–32 and Kelp, *Inquiry, Knowledge, and Understanding*, *op. cit.*

<sup>20</sup> Whitcomb, "Curiosity Was Framed," *op. cit.*, at p. 674 and Friedman, "Why Suspend Judging?" *op. cit.*, at p. 309–10. A related construction is discussed in Ileana Comorovski, *Interrogative Phrases and the Syntax-Semantics Interface* (Dordrecht, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996), pp. 1–195, at p. 26. Kvanvig also notes that "it makes no sense to say, 'I know that it is raining, but I believe further inquiry is warranted.'" See Jon Kvanvig, *The Value of Knowledge and the Pursuit of Understanding* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 1–216, at p. 149.

<sup>21</sup> Whitcomb, "One Kind of Asking," *op. cit.*, at p. 150.

<sup>22</sup> Some kinds of question-asking (rhetorical questions, for instance) don't follow this rule. For more on what distinguishes the inquisitive way of putting forward a question, see Whitcomb, "One Kind of Asking," *op. cit.*

<sup>23</sup> An adequate treatment of conditional questions is beyond the scope of this paper. I tentatively suggest, however, that at least in some cases conditional questions function in (limited) ways like hedges for assertion. But not so much by uniformly modifying the force (if asked), but by removing the otherwise default assumption that the inquirer knows the information embedded in the antecedent of the conditional. For a discussion of a different kind of question hedge, see Steffan Borge, "Questions," in Marina Sbisà & Ken Turner, eds., *Pragmatics of Speech Actions, Vol. II*, (Berlin/Boston, De Gruyter Mouton, 2013), pp. 411–444. On hedges for assertion, see Matthew A. Benton & Peter Van Elswyk, "Hedged Assertions," in

By and by, I'll explain the parentheticals. But for the most part, we'll do just fine to think about the norm as saying that agents ought not inquire into  $Q$  without knowing that  $Q$  has a true answer.<sup>24</sup> Agents who (properly) ask questions don't know too much, but they don't know too little either. Once again, the "ought" has wide scope, and inquiry is taken to involve a wondering attitude on the part of the inquirer.

Unlike the IGNORANCE NORM FOR INQUIRY, the KNOWLEDGE NORM has not been clearly defended in the recent literature. Rescher does call questions "problematic" whose presuppositions are not supplied by the speaker's "purported knowledge"<sup>25</sup> (though he also says such questions can be "proper" in a sense).<sup>26</sup> And there is a healthy literature defending investigative obligations to gather evidence.<sup>27</sup> But apart from Borge,<sup>28</sup> Deigan,<sup>29</sup> and Whitcomb & Millson,<sup>30</sup> one is hard pressed to find in the emerging literature on the zetetic turn *any* positive epistemic requirements for wondering.

That is somewhat surprising, since there is an ancient tradition holding that proper inquiry requires some measure of knowledge. Thus, after articulating a version of the IGNORANCE NORM, Plato continues:

[I]t's not possible for someone to inquire into ...that which he doesn't know (for he doesn't even know what he'll inquire into).<sup>31</sup>

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Sanford Goldberg, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Assertion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 245–263.

<sup>24</sup> Terminologically, questions that have true (complete and direct) answers are sometimes called *sound* questions. For related uses, see Sylvain Bromberger, *On What We Know We Don't Know: Explanation, Theory, Linguistics, and How Questions Shape Them* (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 1–240, and Jane Friedman, "Question-Directed Attitudes," *Philosophical Perspectives*, XXVII, 1 (2013), pp. 145–174.

<sup>25</sup> Nicholas Rescher, *Inquiry Dynamics* (Routledge, 2000), pp. 1–116, at p. 9, 15, 17–18, 50–51.

<sup>26</sup> Rescher, *Inquiry Dynamics*, *op. cit.*, at p. 18. Thanks to Dennis Whitcomb for alerting me to Rescher's (2000) *Inquiry Dynamics*.

<sup>27</sup> Richard J. Hall & Charles R. Johnson, "The Epistemic Duty to Seek More Evidence," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, xxxv, 2 (1998), pp. 129–39; Neil Levy, "Doxastic Responsibility," *Synthese*, clv, 1 (2007), pp. 127–155; and Carolina Flores & Elise Woodard, "Epistemic Norms on Evidence-Gathering," forthcoming in *Philosophical Studies*.

<sup>28</sup> Borge, "Questions," *op. cit.*

<sup>29</sup> Michael Deigan, "Questions Should Have Answers," manuscript.

<sup>30</sup> Whitcomb & Millson, "Inquiring Attitudes and Erotetic Logic," *op. cit.*

<sup>31</sup> Translated in Fine, *The Possibility of Inquiry*, *op. cit.*, at p. 7–8.

Together, Plato's two pronouncements compose the *Meno* paradox. Plato's second injunction requires parsing—when do I count as inquiring into what I do not know? On heavyweight interpretations, Plato's sentence suggests that we need to know the answer to the questions we inquire into. Or perhaps that we need to know the nature of the things that make up the subject of a question. Heavyweight interpretations like these make the *Meno* paradox and the resulting threat of skepticism seem especially pressing.

But these will strike many (perhaps Plato included) as rather *too* heavyweight. On a more lightweight interpretation, Plato suggests that one needs to know enough to have “a target to aim at” or to “be able to specify what it is one wants to discover”.<sup>32</sup> Targeting intuitions like these may underwrite Whitcomb's suggestion that “curiosity requires you to conceive only of everything your questions are about”<sup>33</sup> or Friedman's suggestion that the content of an agent's questions must be “graspable.”<sup>34</sup>

The KNOWLEDGE NORM FOR INQUIRY sits somewhere between these lightweight and heavyweight requirements. It's not enough just to have some kind of (weak) conceptual access to the content of one's question; one must know that the question has a true answer. Together, the KNOWLEDGE NORM and IGNORANCE NORM place positive and negative epistemic requirements on knowledge that define the space of permissible inquiry.

1.2. *Concepts.* The KNOWLEDGE NORM requires that agents know that the unconditional questions that they wonder about have true, complete, and direct answers. Before defending this norm, let's clarify the terminology

Whatever questions are, they are intimately related to answers. Indeed, some have thought that questions just are sets of candidate answers,<sup>35</sup> which are propositions that

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<sup>32</sup> Fine, *The Possibility of Inquiry*, *op. cit.*, at p. 73.

<sup>33</sup> Whitcomb, “Curiosity Was Framed,” *op. cit.*, at p. 671.

<sup>34</sup> Friedman, “Question-Directed Attitudes,” *op. cit.*, at p. 161.

<sup>35</sup> See Charles Leonard Hamblin, “Questions in Montague English,” *Foundations of Language*, x (1973), pp. 41–53.

bear the right relation to the question, e.g., of *settling* the question if true.<sup>36</sup> Perhaps better, questions can be thought of as a partition of possibility space, creating (jointly) exhaustive and incompatible cells which determine which propositions count as answers to the question.<sup>37</sup> When asked, questions direct inquirers to say which cell the actual world is in. For instance, if I ask, “Who among the Stooges (if any) was at the party?” there are eight corresponding answer cells:

None of the Stooges was at the party.	Only Moe was at the party.	Only Larry was at the party.	Only Curly was at the party.
Moe, Larry, and Curly were at the party.	Larry and Curly, but not Moe, were at the party.	Moe and Curly, but not Larry, were at the party.	Moe and Larry, but not Curly, were at the party.

On Groenendijk & Stokhof’s picture, propositions (partially) answer questions just in case they rule out the possibility that the actual world is in (at least) one of the cells. (“Moe was there, but I don’t know about Larry or Curly.”) *Complete* answers rule out all but one of the cells as the home of the actual world. Someone who knows who among the Stooges was at the party knows which unique cell contains the actual world: that cell demarcates the right answer.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> For another account, according to which a question is the set of its true answers, see Lauri Karttunen, “Presuppositions and Linguistic Context,” *Theoretical Linguistics*, 1 (1977), pp. 181–94.

<sup>37</sup> Jeroen Groenendijk & Martin Stokhof, *Studies on the Semantics of Questions and the Pragmatics of Answers*, Dissertation (1984), University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam; Jeroen Groenendijk & Martin Stokhof, “Questions,” in J. van Benthem & A. ter Meulen (eds), *Handbook of Logic and Language*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Cambridge, MIT Press, 2011), pp. 1059–1131.

<sup>38</sup> According to my norm, an agent must know that their question has a *complete* answer. But I’m more open to some deviations from the completeness condition than others. It is well-known that some questions seem to be satisfactorily resolved with less-than-complete answers. For instance, Hintikka introduced “mention-some” question like “Where can I get a cup of coffee?” which is happily answered by “On South Third!” even though this answer is not complete since it does not settle whether I can also get coffee on North Third (Jaakko Hintikka, *The Semantics of questions and the questions of semantics*. (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1976). See also Morgan Moyer & Kristen Syrett, “The Semantics of Questions,” *WIREs Cognitive Science* e1513 (2019): 1–10.) Relatedly, Ginzburg articulates a notion of question *resolution* that explicitly takes the inquirer’s goals in asking the question into account (Jonathan Ginzburg, “Resolving

Notice that none of the cells demarcating the answer choices to “Who among the Stooges was at the party?” contain the proposition expressed by this reply: “There was no party.” According to Greonendijk & Stokhof, this reply is a mere *response* and not an *answer* to the question.<sup>39</sup> But some philosophers carve things up differently. Van Fraassen, for instance, defines responses which deny a presupposition of the question as *corrective* answers.<sup>40</sup> Non-corrective answers van Fraassen calls *direct*. There’s no need to hash things out here. In order to be ecumenical, the KNOWLEDGE NORM that I defend specifies that an agent must know that their question has a true, complete, and *direct* answer to *Q*. But you are welcome to skip over “direct” if you side with Greonendijk & Stokhof.<sup>41</sup>

In defining “direct answer,” we’ve made reference to a question’s “presuppositions.” Van Fraassen defines the “basic presupposition” of a question as “the proposition which is true if and only if some direct answer to *Q* is true.”<sup>42</sup> If that’s right,

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Questions, I,” *Linguistics and Philosophy*, XVIII (1995): 459–527; Jonathan Ginzburg, “Resolving Questions, II,” *Linguistics and Philosophy*, XVIII (1995): 567–609). For Ginzburg, completeness is not a necessary condition on resolvedness but rather a fixed, upper bound (see Ginzburg, “Resolving Questions, I,” *op. cit.*, at p. 460). The lower bound of resolution “floats” in accordance with the question’s contextually situated goal, which may require less than completeness (*ibid.*, at p. 466). For example, knowing that Jill is in Helsinki may be enough to know *where Jill is* in some contexts (when I want to know if her flight has landed) but not in others (if I want to know where, within Helsinki, to meet her). With these cases in mind, one might be moved to modify the norm in (roughly) the following way:

MODIFIED KNOWLEDGE NORM FOR INQUIRY: One ought to: inquire into (an unconditional question) *Q* at *t* only if one knows at *t* that *Q* has a true (and direct) answer that *satisfactorily resolves Q*.

Unfortunately, there is no consensus among semanticists about the best way to think about what it takes for an answer to be thus resolved, in part because there is no agreed upon way to draw the line between what (semantically) settles a question and what (pragmatically) satisfies a questioner’s goals—or indeed, whether this is a distinction that should be drawn. We won’t settle the issue here.

What I insist on—what I will argue for in §2.1—is that the norm cannot be amended by simply deleting “complete,” allowing knowledge of just any incomplete answer to a question to license one’s inquiry into it. The norm must involve *some* notion of an answer’s being conclusive or resolved enough. But I invite the reader to substitute comparable notions of full resolution (e.g., Hintikka’s or Ginzburg’s) at no surcharge, in accordance with their taste in semantics. Indeed, I’ve recently grown more sympathetic to the flexible notion of direct answerhood as it is utilized in Whitcomb & Millson, “Inquiring Attitudes and Erotetic Logic,” *op. cit.*

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Friedman, “Question-Directed Attitudes,” *op. cit.*, at p. 150; (2013: 150); Borge, “Questions,” *op. cit.*, at p. 434.

<sup>40</sup> Bas C. van Fraassen, *The Scientific Image* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 1–235, at p. 140.

<sup>41</sup> Here, I use “direct answer” to indicate that it is non-corrective. But the literature has used the word “direct” in different ways. For instance, in Whitcomb & Millson, “Inquiring Attitudes and Erotetic Logic,” *op. cit.*, they talk about direct answers, roughly, as those that resolve a question. This is a distinct, albeit not wholly unconnected, usage.

<sup>42</sup> Van Fraassen, *The Scientific Image*, *op. cit.*, at p. 140.

then to know that the basic presupposition of a question is true just is to know that it has a true, complete, and direct answer. Or at any rate, to know something that is equivalent to it.

Somewhat more broadly, I will use “presupposition of  $Q$ ” in an epistemic sense to refer to those propositions that an agent must know in order to know that  $Q$  has a true, complete, and direct answer.<sup>43</sup> So, since Holmes must know that *someone* committed the murder to know that there is a (complete, direct) answer to <Who committed the murder?>, that someone committed the murder is a presupposition of the question.<sup>44</sup>

Relatedly, when a question has no true, complete, and direct answer, it is *defective*. Whenever a presupposition of  $Q$  is false, the question is defective. And whenever a question is defective, at least one of  $Q$ 's presuppositions—namely, the “basic” presupposition that  $Q$  *does* have a true, complete, and direct answer—is false. So, a question is defective iff one of its presuppositions is false.

*1.3. Conjecture.* Before diving into the arguments, I want to be upfront about the assumptions and simplifications my argument invokes.

First, I will assume logical bivalence. If a question does not have a true, complete answer, it is because any complete answer it does have is false.<sup>45</sup>

Second, I will assume that just as there are deep parallels between belief and assertion, so there are deep parallels between the questions an agent wonders about and

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<sup>43</sup> Note that, since Holmes does not need to be logically omniscient in order to know that there is an answer to <Who committed the murder?>, not all logical truths are presuppositions (in our sense of “presupposition”) of questions.

<sup>44</sup> Notice, though, that it's not *always* a presupposition of questions of the form <Who  $\varphi$ -ed?> that *someone*  $\varphi$ -ed. Groenendijk & Stokhof explain:

[C]onsider a case such as “Who is coming with me?”. There may be an expectation on the part of the questioner that there is someone coming with her, but it does not seem to be a presupposition. For it seems that “Nobody.” is a perfectly straight (albeit perhaps disappointing) answer, and not a rejection of the question as such (Groenendijk & Stokhof, “Questions,” *op. cit.*, at p. 1126).

In contrast, “nobody committed the murder” *does* seem like a rejection of the question (or, if one prefers, a corrective answer to the question) <Who committed the murder?>, perhaps because there being a murderer is entailed by a murder having happened.

<sup>45</sup> Those who reject bivalence might prefer to replace instances of “true” in the KNOWLEDGE NORM with “not false.” (Thanks to Adam Carter and Dan Friedman for conversation about questions with vague answers and other tricky cases.)

the questions an agent asks aloud inquisitively.<sup>46</sup> We believe things; we assert things too. Both involve a kind of commitment to a proposition. The exact relationship between belief and assertion is contentious, but the idea that there are deep parallels between the two has wide support among epistemologists. Belief (or judgment) is to assertion as interior to exterior,<sup>47</sup> as inner to outer,<sup>48</sup> or as private to public.<sup>49</sup>

We ask things; we wonder about things too. Both are ways of putting forward a question. The relationship between asking and wondering has received comparatively less attention than that of belief and assertion. But plausibly, just as conversations operate with governing questions under discussion (QUDs),<sup>50</sup> so believers typically operate with a governing research agenda.<sup>51</sup> Research agendas are composed of questions that agents ask themselves.<sup>52</sup> And just as postulating a QUD may help explain the research strategies that conversationalists employ in exploring a topic or the assertions that count as conversationally relevant, so postulating a research agenda may help explain the research strategy that a believer employs in exploring a topic, or why they come to believe some propositions (the ones that answer the questions on their research agenda) rather than others that are equally well-supported by their evidence. In any case, I will suppose that, just as QUDs have a special relationship with assertion, so an agent's research agenda has a special relationship with the things they are sure about. "Just as we manifest belief by asserting, we manifest curiosity by asking."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> See Peter Carruthers, "Basic Questions," *Mind & Language*, xxxiii (2018), pp. 130–147, at p. 131.

<sup>47</sup> Michael Dummett, *Frege's Philosophy of Language* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), pp. 1–708, at p. 362.

<sup>48</sup> Timothy Williamson, *Knowledge and its Limits* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 1–340, at p. 255–56.

<sup>49</sup> Ernest Sosa, *Knowing Full Well* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), pp. 1–176, at p. 48.

<sup>50</sup> Craige Roberts, "Information structure in discourse: Toward an integrated formal theory of pragmatics," *Semantics and Pragmatics*, v, 6 (2012), pp. 1–69.

<sup>51</sup> See E.J. Olsson & D. Westlund, "On the Role of the Research Agenda in Epistemic Change," *Erkenntnis*, lxxv, 2 (2006), pp. 165–183; Friedman, "Why Suspend Judging?" *op. cit.*; and Errol Lord & Kurt Sylvan, "Suspension, Higher-Order Evidence, and Defeat," in Mona Simion & Jessica Brown, eds., *Reasons, Justification, and Defeat* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 116–45.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Whitcomb, "One Kind of Asking," *op. cit.* and also Matthew McGrath, "Being neutral: Agnosticism, inquiry, and the suspension of judgment," *Noûs* lvi, 2 (2021), pp. 463–484, especially at p. 477 on "mentally asking."

<sup>53</sup> Whitcomb, "Curiosity Was Framed," *op. cit.*, at p. 672.

Granted, some questions are not genuinely wondered about by the people who ask them aloud. Rhetorical questions, leading questions, and exam questions belong to this category. But I take it for granted that we are pretty competent at distinguishing these sorts of askings from *inquisitive* speech acts, which typically express a wondering attitude on the part of the questioner.<sup>54</sup> Because I assume that there is a close relationship between the questions that one wonders about internally and the questions that one asks inquisitively, I shall sometimes consult our intuitions about the propriety of inquisitively asking a question to draw conclusions about the propriety of wondering about it.

Finally (and relatedly), there's a sense in which the proper conclusion of this paper's argument is a broad family of views of which the KNOWLEDGE NORM is only one member. Here is the broader view:

ROBUST EPISTEMIC ACCOMPLISHMENT NORM FOR INQUIRY (REAN): One ought to inquire into (an unconditional question)  $Q$  at  $t$  only if one  $\varphi$ -s at  $t$  that there is a true (complete, and direct) answer to  $Q$ , where  $\varphi$ -ing that  $p$  represents a robust, epistemic accomplishment with respect to  $p$ .<sup>55</sup>

For instance, instead of *knowledge* one might instead fill out (REAN) by substituting "justifiably believe" or "has reason to believe" for  $\varphi$ , in ways that parallel the norms that have been defended in the literature on assertion.<sup>56</sup>

Given the articulated parallels between the relationship between assertion and belief and wondering and (inquisitively) asking, it's not surprising that there should be the potential for analogous norms. Indeed, one suggestive argument for (REAN) is simply to

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<sup>54</sup> For discussion, see *ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for encouraging me to be explicit about the way the KNOWLEDGE NORM relates to nearby views on analogy with the ways corresponding debates have developed for assertion.

<sup>56</sup> These examples correspond to Kvanvig's view that justified belief is the norm of assertion (Jon L. Kvanvig, "Assertion, Knowledge, and Lotteries," in D. Pritchard and P. Greenough, eds., *Williamson on Knowledge* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 140–160; Jon L. Kvanvig, "Norms of Assertion," in J. Brown and H. Cappelen, eds., *Assertion: New Philosophical Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 223–250.) and Lackey's view that one should only assert what it is reasonable for one to believe (Jennifer Lackey, "Norms of Assertion," *Noûs*, XLI, 4 (2007): 594–626).

note that soundness is to questions as truth is to propositions. *Knowing* (or rationally believing, etc.) that a question is sound—that it has a true, direct, complete answer—is analogous to knowing that a proposition is true. To the extent that there is a robust epistemic norm for assessing the truth of one’s assertions, we should consider that there may be a robust epistemic norm for assessing the soundness of one’s questions.<sup>57</sup>

Of course, several ways of filling out (REAN) are compatible. If, for instance, the KNOWLEDGE NORM is true, then (on the assumption that knowledge entails justified belief) so is the JUSTIFIED BELIEF NORM. But plausibly, one norm among the family of views is special. There may be one way of instantiating (REAN) such that (a) every true way of filling in (REAN) is entailed by it and (b) it is not itself entailed by any stronger, true way of filling in (REAN). In other words, one might be the strongest necessary condition (of the relevant sort) on inquiry.<sup>58</sup>

To put my cards on the table, I think relevant, special way of filling in (REAN) is the KNOWLEDGE NORM.<sup>59</sup> And since it will be easier, dialectically, to focus on a particular instantiation of (REAN) than on the entire family of views, I’ll keep the focus of the paper squarely on the KNOWLEDGE NORM.<sup>60</sup> While I really do think that the arguments in §2 favor a knowledge-centric norm in particular, it’s cutting enough against the grain to argue that we are required to achieve anything substantive epistemically before we ask a question. Any of these theses would be a resounding rejection of *no bad questions*. And so, in order to

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<sup>57</sup> I’m grateful to an anonymous reviewer for drawing further attention to this analogy.

<sup>58</sup> Separately, one might think that one such norm will be (at least partly) *constitutive* of wondering in a way that the other norms or not on analogy with Williamson’s intended interpretation of the K-Norm for assertion (Williamson, *Knowledge and its Limits*, *op. cit.*). I maintain neutrality about whether my norms should be understood as constitutive in Williamson’s sense.

<sup>59</sup> See Christopher Willard-Kyle, “Being in a Position to Know is the Norm of Assertion,” *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* CI, 2 (2020): 328–352 for an indication of how I might shift the norm for asked-aloud questions.

<sup>60</sup> I will also set aside for the present whether the norm for inquiry might shift across contexts. One might think, for instance, that in research contexts, the operative standards shift from knowledge to *endorsement* as theorized in Will Fleisher, “Rational Endorsement,” *Philosophical Studies*, CLXXV, 10 (2018), pp. 2649–75; and Will Fleisher, “Endorsement and Assertion,” *Noûs* LV, 2 (2021), pp. 1–22. Or that the norm weakens in “conditions of epistemically diminished hope” (Sanford C. Goldberg, *Assertion: On the Philosophical Significance of Assertoric Speech* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 1–304, at p. 285). More cautiously, what I aim to defend is there is a *default* knowledge norm for inquiry.

focus on building a positive proposal, I'm happy to count as "on my team" variant views that place similarly robust epistemic requirements on wondering: we share the view that robust, erotetic (or zetetic) normativity is of prime epistemic interest. I will revisit select alternatives in §4.

## 2. THREE ARGUMENTS

So far, I have granted that there is an ignorance norm for inquiry:

IGNORANCE NORM FOR INQUIRY: One ought to: inquire into  $Q$  at  $t$  only if one does not know the complete answer to  $Q$  at  $t$ .

But I have proposed that there is, in addition, a knowledge norm for inquiry:

KNOWLEDGE NORM FOR INQUIRY: One ought to: inquire into (an unconditional question)  $Q$  at  $t$  only if one knows at  $t$  that  $Q$  has a true (complete, and direct) answer.

In this section, I offer three arguments in defense of the KNOWLEDGE NORM FOR INQUIRY. Although the KNOWLEDGE NORM is not the only explanation of *each* of the phenomena to be discussed, it is strong evidence in favor of the norm that it explains *all* the phenomena.

2.1. *The Argument from Defective Questions.* Some questions, it seems, shouldn't be wondered about. Not by any of us, anyway. Consider:

1. Why does the sun set in the east?
2. Was it Abraham Lincoln or Franklin Delano Roosevelt who was the first U.S. president?
3. Why did the slithy toves gyre and gimble in the wabe?
4. Why does  $2+2=5$ ?
5. What is the name of the barber who shaves all and only those who do not shave themselves?

These are *defective* questions. And they are defective (in our sense) because they have no true (complete, and direct) answer. It's false that the sun sets in the east, so there isn't any

reason that it does so. Any answers that involve gyring and gimbling will turn out to be false or, at best, nonsense. There *isn't* a barber who shaves all and only those who do not shave themselves, so there isn't an answer to the question of what their *name* is either. And so on.

There's a simple explanation for why we shouldn't wonder about such questions: they are defective—that is, questions that have no true (complete, direct) answer. These examples suggest, therefore, the following norm:

NO DEFECTIVE QUESTIONS: One ought to: inquire into (an unconditional question)  $Q$  at  $t$  only if  $Q$  has a true (complete, and direct) answer.<sup>61</sup>

This is entailed by (and therefore, to the extent that it is plausible, some evidence for) the KNOWLEDGE NORM FOR INQUIRY, but it doesn't get us all the way there. The KNOWLEDGE NORM requires not only that the question one is inquiring into not be defective but that one *knows* it is not defective. Ultimately, I want to argue that it is reasonable to strengthen the conclusion from NO DEFECTIVE QUESTIONS to the KNOWLEDGE NORM FOR INQUIRY. But first, I will consider objections to the effect that NO DEFECTIVE QUESTIONS is already *too* strong.

I suspect most readers will agree that questions (1)–(5) really would be wrong for any of *us* to mentally ask. But certain readers may object: that isn't merely because (1)–(5) *have* no true answers but because we *know* (or reasonably believe, etc.) that they have no true answers. And so, the objection goes, the same data can be more easily explained by a weaker norm endorsed by Friedman:<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Perhaps Friedman articulates a thought in the ballpark when she says that questions “should be the sorts of things that can be answered” (Friedman, “Question-Directed Attitudes,” *op. cit.*, at p. 166).

<sup>62</sup> When “S realizes that  $Q$  has some false presupposition or is similarly unsound ... further inquiry into  $Q$  would be irrational or otherwise epistemically inappropriate” (Friedman, “Why Suspend Judging?” *op. cit.*, at p. 315–16).

NO KNOWN-TO-BE-DEFECTIVE QUESTIONS: One ought to: inquire into (an unconditional question)  $Q$  at  $t$  only if one doesn't know at  $t$  that  $Q$  has no true (complete, and direct) answer.<sup>63,64</sup>

And, indeed, this weaker principle does explain why you and I cannot ask (1)–(5), since you and I know that (1)–(5) have no true answers.

But while I think this norm is true, I think we should be suspicious of the idea that defective questions only become bad to ask when we achieve a kind of awareness about them. To adapt another line from Friedman, “If there’s nothing wrong with inquiring into  $Q$ ” when  $Q$  is defective, “then why should we be bothered when the subject is aware of being in this state of mind?”<sup>65</sup>

In other words, suppose that NO DEFECTIVE QUESTIONS is false but NO KNOWN-TO-BE-DEFECTIVE QUESTIONS is true. And that an inquirer knows this. Then the inquirer could get into the following weird situation. They are doing something permissible (namely, inquiring into a defective question that they don't know to be defective). And then, in virtue of learning that they are doing something *permissible* (inquiring into a defective question), the permissible action is transformed into something impermissible. Perhaps this isn't straightforwardly incoherent, but it is odd. Why should we be bothered to discover that we are doing something that is epistemically permissible? The best explanation for the truth of NO KNOWN-TO-BE-DEFECTIVE QUESTIONS, therefore, goes through NO DEFECTIVE QUESTIONS. Something has got to be wrong with wondering about

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<sup>63</sup> In addition to explicit endorsement in Friedman (*ibid*), NO KNOWN-TO-BE-DEFECTIVE QUESTIONS is perhaps also derivable from Jared A. Millson, “A Defeasible Calculus for Zetetic Agents,” *Logic and Logical Philosophy* XXX (2021), pp. 3–37, at p. 10.

<sup>64</sup> There are also belief-variants of this norm in the literature. Most explicitly is Braun, who defends a belief-version of this norm as a kind of sincerity condition on asked questions. His norm reads, in part, thus:

Do not ask  $Q$  if you believe that there is no  $P$  such that:  $P$  is true, and  $P$  answers  $Q$ . (David Braun, “Implicating Questions,” *Mind & Language* XXVI, 5 (2011), pp. 574–595, at p. 589.)

Another remark suggestive of the NO BELIEVED-TO-BE-DEFECTIVE QUESTIONS NORM appears in Jeffrey, *Theory of Probability*, *op. cit.*, at p. 378. Jeffrey writes that (at least asked aloud) questions express the belief that the addressee knows the answer (and, *a fortiori*, that there is an answer to be had). Thanks to Peter van Elswyk for pointing out this reference to me.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Friedman, “Why Suspend Judging,” *op. cit.*, at p. 312–13.

defective questions that *makes* it wrong to wonder about questions one *knows* to be defective.

I find this line persuasive, but there are further reasons to think that an even stronger principle is true. Recall the thesis of this paper:

KNOWLEDGE NORM FOR INQUIRY: One ought to: inquire into (an unconditional question)  $Q$  at  $t$  only if one knows at  $t$  that  $Q$  has a true (complete, and direct) answer.

This could be aptly renamed, in our present context, the KNOWN-TO-BE-NON-DEFECTIVE QUESTIONS NORM: Agents must *know* that a question is non-defective in order to properly ask it.

Let's consider a new question. If you're like me, then although you remember that Jupiter is the largest planet in our solar system, you don't remember which of the inner planets (Mercury, Venus, Earth, and Mars) is the biggest. In fact, if you're like me, you have no memory at all concerning the relative sizes of these planets. Given this background, here is a very odd question for either of us to ask:

6. Is it Earth that is the largest of the inner planets or is it Mars that is the largest of the inner planets?

This is a question that you (and I) have no right to ask. We don't have the right epistemic credentials. After all, for all we know, it could be Mercury or Venus that is the largest of the inner planets.

There are only two candidate complete, direct answers to this either-or question: either (a) Earth is the largest of the inner planets or (b) Mars is the largest of the inner planets. This question is like a multiple-choice question with only two answers. But I don't know that the right answer is among the options. And this seems to explain why it's not a question I should ask myself.

Instead of wondering about the question in (6), it would be much better if I asked this question:

7. Is it Mercury, Venus, Earth, or Mars that is the largest of the inner planets?<sup>66</sup>

Given my epistemic position, I *know* that there's a true answer to *that* question.<sup>67</sup>

I wasn't sure whether or not (6) was a defective question. As it turns out, it isn't. Earth *is* the largest of the inner planets, and so (6) had a true, complete, and direct answer all along. Therefore, mentally asking (6) did not violate NO DEFECTIVE QUESTIONS. *A fortiori*, neither did it violate NO KNOWN-TO-BE-DEFECTIVE QUESTIONS. But asking (6) *did* violate THE KNOWLEDGE NORM FOR INQUIRY. I didn't *know* that (6) had a true, complete, and direct answer: that made it an inappropriate question to wonder about. THE KNOWLEDGE NORM FOR INQUIRY alone among its nearby competitors explains why (6) was wrong for me to ask myself.

Reflecting on what's bad about asking (6) also illustrates the importance of knowing that a question's answers are complete (enough)<sup>68</sup> in the relevant sense. In the imagined scenario, (6) is wrong to wonder about because I haven't ruled out that Mercury or Venus could be the largest of the inner planets. So it might be that neither of the complete, direct answers to (6) is true.

But even if I haven't ruled out Mercury and Venus as the largest of the inner planets, I can know that (6) has a true, direct *partial* answer. After all, I know it's not the

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<sup>66</sup> Incurvati & Schlöder (Luca Incurvati & Julian J. Schlöder, "Weak Rejection," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* XCV, 4 (2017), pp. 741–760, at p. 744.), extending an observation by Grice (H. P. Grice, *Studies in the Way of Words* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. 1–394, at p. 82) identify a relevantly similar way to *reject* a question:

Is it the case that X or Y will win the election?

No, X or Y or Z will win

For an argument that we rightly reject such questions, see Jared A. Millson, "Accepting & Rejecting Questions, First Steps toward a Bilateralism for Erotetic Logic," in Moritz Cordes, ed., *Asking and Answering: Rivaling Approaches to Interrogative Methods* (Tübingen, Narr/Francke/Attempo, 2021), pp. 211–232.

<sup>67</sup> Perhaps we have to build in the assumption that the agent knows the planets are not the same size. But this seems like a plausible assumption given how astronomically unlikely it is that each of the planets have exactly the same size. (Thanks to conversation with Chris Kelp here.)

<sup>68</sup> See the discussion about complete vs. resolving answers in note 38.

case that *both* Earth and Mars are the largest of the inner planets. So, I know that one of the following things is true: either (a) Earth is not the largest of the inner planets, or (b) Mars is not the largest of the inner planets. Both (a) and (b) are partial (and direct) answers to (6). That's because both (a) and (b) eliminate one of (6)'s complete answer cells. I know, therefore, that (6) has a true, direct, and *partial* answer even though I don't know it has a *complete* one.

But this doesn't seem to license my asking (6)! That's why I need to know that (6) has a *complete* (enough) answer, not a (merely) partial one.

It seems, then, that we're not entitled to wonder about just any question. First, we find an unresolved question that we can see has an answer: then we are permitted to ask it. Knowing that a question has an answer is a necessary condition on epistemic license to inquire into it.

2.2. *The Argument from Presupposition Denial.* When we ask questions aloud inquisitively, we (typically) express that we are internally wondering about the question that we ask externally. Just as an assertion (at least typically)<sup>69</sup> corresponds to the speaker's genuine belief in the asserted proposition, so inquisitive questions (at least typically) correspond to the speaker's genuine wondering about the asked question.

One suggestive method for determining when a question is epistemically impermissible to inquire into is to look for conversations involving (inquisitive) questions that systematically crash discourse. In this section, I will consider one such pattern. Suppose Jacki asks Dan the following question:

1. Why did you (Dan) eat all of the ice cream in the freezer?

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<sup>69</sup> Arguably, though, assertions can licitly fail to correspond to speaker belief in cases of selfless assertion (Lackey, "Norms of Assertion," *op. cit.* For more on how selfless assertions might be accommodated within a knowledge-centric framework, see Willard-Kyle, "Being in a Position to Know is the Norm of Assertion," *op. cit.*

All answers to (8) will have the form, “Dan ate all the ice cream in the freezer because *p*.”<sup>70</sup>

If the question has a true answer, then it is also true that Dan ate all of the ice cream in the freezer. Now, notice that (8) is a very strange question for Jacki to ask if she doesn’t know that Dan ate all of the ice cream.

2. Jacki: Dan, why did you eat all the ice cream in the freezer?

Dan: Hold on... What makes you think I ate all the ice cream?

Jacki: #I don’t know that/whether you ate all the ice cream. Still, why did you do it?

If Jacki doesn’t know that Dan ate all the ice cream, then she doesn’t know that the question she has asked has a true answer. After all, she can only know an answer of the form <Dan ate all the ice cream because *p*> if she also knows <Dan ate all the ice cream>.

Jacki’s question seems to require *knowing* certain things and not only being *ignorant* of the answer. In this example, Jacki is required to know <Dan ate all the ice cream>. <Dan ate all the ice cream> is a presupposition of Jacki’s question. So, the KNOWLEDGE NORM FOR INQUIRY explains why Jacki’s repeated question is awkward. Jacki shouldn’t ask *why* Dan ate all the ice cream if she doesn’t know even that it’s true.

Similar sentences sound similarly strange:

3. #I don’t know whether you attended the rally, but why did you go?

4. #I don’t know whether there is a party, but when is the party?

5. #I don’t know who won, but how did the Yankees win?

6. #For all I know, Rapinoe might have scored the opening goal, but was it Morgan who scored first or was it Lavelle?

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<sup>70</sup> Or at least *nearly* all the answers have that form. Dan might answer the question this way: “I ate all the ice cream for no reason at all.” See Fitzpatrick, “The Whys and How Comes of Presupposition and NPI Licensing in Questions,” *op. cit.* for critical discussion. In any case, that Dan ate all the ice cream is a presupposition of <Why did Dan eat all the ice cream> even if it is not a presupposition that Dan ate all the ice cream *for a reason*.

Let  $p(Q)$  denote a presupposition of  $Q$ , where such presuppositions are understood to refer to those propositions that must be known in order to know that  $Q$  has a true, complete, and direct answer. We have seen that, in general, sentences that entail something of this form sound awkward:

PRESUPPOSITION DENIAL: #I don't know [wh-complement]  $p(Q)$  is true, but  $Q$ ?

A good explanation for the systematic awkwardness of instantiations of PRESUPPOSITION DENIAL is that there is a norm that requires knowing the presuppositions of the questions one wonders about: of knowing that one's questions have a true answer (albeit, not knowing which one). Just as Whitcomb's and Friedman's arguments<sup>71</sup> appeals to the IGNORANCE NORM to explain the awkwardness of claiming knowledge of a question's answer while asking it, this argument appeals to the KNOWLEDGE NORM to explain the awkwardness of asking a question while denying knowledge of one of its presuppositions.

2.3. *The Argument from Showing Off.* A friend asks out of the blue: "Did you know that female peacocks are called 'peahens'?" A student asks, in a way that is only tangentially related to the present discussion: "Would you say, then, that Aristotle's conception of substantial natures is the very antithesis of the Parmenidean doctrine of monism as described in Guthrie's *A History of Greek Philosophy*?" A self-proclaimed history buff interrupts the tour guide: "When you say, 'during Grover Cleveland's presidency,' do you mean during his first or during his second non-consecutive term?"

All of our protagonists have asked questions: all of them have, thereby, been showing off. And it's not just that they are showing off—they are showing off what (unobvious truth) they know. The friend indicates that *they know* that female peacocks are called "peahens;" the student indicates that *they know* Parmenides believed in monism; the

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<sup>71</sup> Whitcomb, "Curiosity Was Framed," *op. cit.*; Whitcomb, "One Kind of Asking," *op. cit.*; and Friedman, "Why Suspend Judging?" *op. cit.*

history buff communicates that *they know* that Grover Cleveland had two non-consecutive terms. All these are presuppositions of the asked questions.

It's hard to see how the history buff (for example) could be showing off if the only thing that asking their question requires is ignorance. Ignorance isn't the sort of thing one tends to show off! They are able to show off precisely because inquisitively asking the question carries with it the assumption of asker's knowledge: knowledge that the presuppositions of the asked question are true. The KNOWLEDGE NORM FOR INQUIRY neatly explains this, and so our ability to show off by asking questions is further evidence for it.

### 3. JUST A NORM ON PRESUPPOSITION?

I have argued that inquirers must know the things presupposed by the questions they wonder about—where the “presupposition” of a question is intended to pick out those things that an inquirer must know in order to know that  $Q$  has a true, complete, and direct answer. I have presented this as a distinctively erotetic norm. But one might worry: isn't this really just a norm on the speech act of *presupposing*? And if so, is there really anything distinctive to inquiry about it?<sup>72</sup>

Indeed, suppose that the following thesis is true:

KNOWLEDGE NORM FOR PRESUPPOSITION: One ought to: Presuppose that  $p$  only if one knows that  $p$ .

This thesis could indeed explain much of the data in §2. And indeed, I have explicitly appealed to the idea that inquirers ought to know the presuppositions to their asked questions. But such a norm would apply equally to the presuppositions of assertion and imperatives, and so the reader may feel that, even if my conclusion is true, it has been misleading of me to frame my norm as a distinctive norm of *inquiry*.

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<sup>72</sup> I'm grateful to an anonymous referee, Dennis Whitcomb, and Mona Simion for raising versions of this question.

I won't offer any argument here against the KNOWLEDGE NORM FOR PRESUPPOSITION—in fact, I think it may be true! And I see no need to be territorial about whether my norm may be derived from a larger project.<sup>73</sup> But I do want to say why I think it is valuable to think about the KNOWLEDGE NORM FOR INQUIRY from a distinctively erotetic (as opposed to merely presuppositional) perspective.

First, the intuitive judgments in §2 aren't just that certain questions are inappropriate to ask aloud, but that certain questions are inappropriate to *wonder about*. For instance, it seems criticizable for me to wonder <Why does the sun set in the east?> in my own head, even if I don't ask the question aloud. So, *if* the KNOWLEDGE NORM OF PRESUPPOSITION is interpreted narrowly as a norm for *speech acts* that governs the presuppositions of *utterances*, then it won't explain the full data that the KNOWLEDGE NORM FOR INQUIRY does by itself.

But even if the KNOWLEDGE NORM FOR INQUIRY is entailed or otherwise explained by a suitably general version of the KNOWLEDGE NORM FOR PRESUPPOSITION (as I think it may), the KNOWLEDGE NORM FOR INQUIRY can still play a distinctive, erotetic role. Consider again, this question:

6. Is Earth or Mars the largest of the inner planets?

where this question is understood to have (only) the candidate answers <Earth is the largest of the inner planets> and <Mars is the largest of the inner planets>. Some presuppositions of (6) can be read off without appealing to any distinctive facts about questions. For instance, the mere fact that “Earth” is a name might allow us to read off the presupposition that “Earth” has a referent. No need to say anything special about questions to see that <Earth exists> is a presupposition of (6).

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<sup>73</sup> I *did* say that I thought the KNOWLEDGE NORM was the strongest, necessary condition on inquiry among the family of views that instantiate (REAN). But the KNOWLEDGE NORM FOR PRESUPPOSITION isn't an instantiated version of (REAN) since the former covers a broader range of content-types (i.e., propositions and commands as well as questions).

But what about this presupposition: either Earth is the largest of the inner planets or Mars is the largest of the inner planets (and no other planet is)? Why does *that* count as a presupposition of the question?

I think the best answer to this question invokes facts about the normativity of questions. Plausibly, the question presupposes that either Earth or Mars is the largest of the inner planets because (1) questions are the sorts of things that *ought* to have true, complete, and direct answers, and (2) given the question, the answer must be either Earth or Mars. The nature of questions (partially) explains what the presuppositions of questions are. So, even if there's a general norm on knowing presuppositions, it's of distinctive erotetic interest what knowing the presuppositions of *questions* (as opposed to the presuppositions of assertions or imperatives) requires. THE KNOWLEDGE NORM FOR INQUIRY gives an answer: questions presuppose the existence of a true, complete, and direct answer.

#### 4. RIVALS

I've argued agents who inquire into questions ought to know that those questions have an answer. I have been more concerned with constructing a positive case for THE KNOWLEDGE NORM than critiquing its nearby competitors. I have declined, for instance, to argue that the REASONABLE BELIEF NORM doesn't adequately explain all the relevant cases or to argue that the RATIONAL CERTAINTY NORM is too strong, considering them to be allies against the *no bad questions* view. Indeed, broadly speaking, I've taken the thesis of my paper to be this more general principle:

ROBUST EPISTEMIC ACCOMPLISHMENT NORM FOR INQUIRY: One ought to: inquire into (an unconditional question)  $Q$  at  $t$  only if one  $\varphi$ -s at  $t$  that there is a true (complete, and direct) answer to  $Q$ , where  $\varphi$ -ing that  $p$  represents a robust, epistemic accomplishment with respect to  $p$ .

But I do want to say something about two not-quite-so-near competitors to my account, although, keeping within the constructive spirit of the paper, my remarks will remain brief. Both are norms that are entailed by THE KNOWLEDGE NORM. So, they are not competitors in the sense that I think they are *false* but, rather, in the sense that I think it'd be a mistake to suppose that either of these is the *strongest* epistemic accomplishment required for inquiry.<sup>74</sup> Neither is robust enough.

The first alternative is the much weaker (mere) BELIEF NORM FOR INQUIRY:

BELIEF NORM FOR INQUIRY: One ought to: inquire into (an unconditional question)  $Q$  at  $t$  only if one believes at  $t$  that there is a true (complete, and direct) answer to  $Q$ .<sup>75</sup>

The (mere) BELIEF NORM view is not strictly a member of the *no bad questions* camp: *something* is required for proper inquiry after all. But, at least at first glance, it looks pretty easy (epistemically speaking) to be licensed to wonder about  $Q$ . Although one must meet a doxastic requirement to inquire into  $Q$ , there doesn't have to be *anything* good about one's epistemic position with respect to whether  $Q$  has an answer in order to inquire into it.<sup>76</sup>

But the (mere) BELIEF NORM has quite a bit of work to do to explain all the data that the KNOWLEDGE NORM explains as outlined in §2. For instance, it's unclear that the BELIEF NORM can explain why sentences of the form in PRESUPPOSITION DENIAL sound awkward (I don't *know* whether  $\mathcal{P}(Q)$  is true, but  $Q$ ). Nor can the BELIEF NORM explain how, by asking questions, we can show off—there's nothing impressive about merely *believing* an answer to a question. Even a question whose answer is unobvious, or hard to

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<sup>74</sup> Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for emphasizing this distinction.

<sup>75</sup> Van Fraassen considers this norm but ultimately rejects even this as requiring too much. On his view, at least for explanatory questions of the form <why  $p$ ?> in the sciences, one must *accept*  $p$  or believe it to be *empirically adequate*, but van Fraassen takes this to be weaker than believing  $p$  to be *true* (van Fraassen, *The Scientific Image*, *op. cit.*, at p. 151–152).

<sup>76</sup> Of course, on the assumption (which I accept) that knowledge entails belief, the KNOWLEDGE NORM FOR INQUIRY entails the BELIEF NORM; so, the dispute between these two camps is over whether anything *stronger* than mere belief is required for proper inquiry.

figure out. In my view, these are decisive advantages for the KNOWLEDGE NORM over and against the mere BELIEF NORM.

Here is a second norm that is a bit stronger but not yet strong enough—the (mere) TRUE BELIEF NORM:

TRUE BELIEF NORM FOR INQUIRY: One ought to: inquire into (an unconditional question)  $Q$  at  $t$  only if one truly believes at  $t$  that there is a true (complete, and direct) answer to  $Q$ .

A near variant of this norm has been defended by at least as applied to the speech act of asking.<sup>77</sup>

But I don't think the (mere) TRUE BELIEF NORM fares much better than the BELIEF NORM. That is because one could too easily form a true belief that one's question has an answer without any good reason for thinking so. Consider again the impropriety of asking the following question:

6. Is Earth or Mars the largest of the inner planets?

where we are imagining that the wonderer has no idea whether Mercury or Venus might instead be the largest of the inner planets.

Suppose that the inquirer randomly and irrationally forms the belief that either Earth or Mars is the largest of the inner planets. Does *this* completely irrational, but true, belief make it ok for them to wonder whether Earth or Mars is the largest inner planet? No—they still are not in the right epistemic position to so wonder. They haven't earned the right to ask (6), epistemically speaking.

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<sup>77</sup> Borge articulates his principle as a constraint on *askability*, and it reads thus:

There are no and  $S$  believes that there are no presupposition failures that block answers to  $S$ 's question. (Borge, "Questions," *op. cit.*, at p. 435.)

If we apply Borge's norm on askability to inquiry, we get something like the TRUE BELIEF NORM. I say Borge's norm is a *variant* on the TRUE BELIEF NORM because Borge uses "presupposition" more broadly than this paper does—some Borge-presuppositions are such that an agent doesn't have to know them to know that the question has a true answer (*ibid.*, at p. 431, 436).

Relatedly, a mere TRUE BELIEF NORM doesn't explain why it would be wrong to wonder things like "Why did my ticket lose the lottery?" without special information about the result of the draw—even if I *truly believed* that my ticket lost.<sup>78</sup>

Indeed, Borge himself sometimes seems to recognize that something more robust—at least reasonability—is required. At one point, Borge says that a speaker who ask a question that "he *has no reason* to believe ...abuses the procedure of asking questions."<sup>79</sup> For instance, Borge notes, it'd be wrong to ask someone whether they have stopped passing out drunk if you didn't at least have good reason to believe that at one point they had been. This intuition is not well explained by the TRUE BELIEF NORM by itself, but it is well explained by norms that require a more *robust* epistemic accomplishment on the part of the inquirer. Notably, it's well explained by the KNOWLEDGE NORM.

## 5. CONCLUSION

With that, I have concluded my argument for the KNOWLEDGE NORM FOR INQUIRY, or at least the family of views (REAN) to which it belongs. But I suspect that some of my readers still feel some pull toward the *no bad questions* view. At least, I do. After all, inquiry is often the way we uncover false beliefs—it's our path out of ignorance. Thus, Khalifa & Millson write that questions with "false presuppositions ...can be engines of good inquiry ...because they lead to corrective answers that reveal where past inquiries have gone awry."<sup>80</sup> I think they're right about this, and so I'm committed to the view that norm-violating questions can nevertheless be "engines of good inquiry." I think this is the sort of thought we have when we encourage our students to ask questions, no matter how basic

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<sup>78</sup> Compare to (e.g.) Williamson on the impropriety of asserting "my ticket lost" without knowing the result of the draw (Williamson, *Knowledge and its Limits*, *op. cit.*). Thanks to Wes Siscoe for suggesting this parallel.

<sup>79</sup> Borge, "Questions," *op. cit.*, at p. 431.

<sup>80</sup> Kareem Khalifa & Jared Millson, "Perspectives, Questions, and Epistemic Value," in Ana-Maria Crețu & Michela Massisimi, eds., *Knowledge from a Human Point of View*, (Springer) Vol. CDXVI (2020), pp. 87–106, at p. 104.

or silly or confused they might turn out to be. There are no bad questions in the classroom.<sup>81</sup>

But I think we should take this as a point about pedagogy and not normativity. Sometimes, in epistemology as in life, we learn best from our mistakes. Mistakes can be engines of discovery. But we don't *try* to make mistakes—in fact we try not to. Nor do we *try* to (inquisitively) ask questions with false presuppositions—in fact, we try not to. When we discover that we've inquired into a defective question, we stop asking it, revising our question if necessary. Reflective agents are prepared to learn from their failed inquiries as well as their successful ones.

Asking a question requires just the right amount of knowledge. One must know *that there is an answer* but one must not know *what the answer is*. Proper inquiry is properly poised between ignorance and knowledge.

I've only been defending the latter part of this claim—that there is a KNOWLEDGE NORM FOR INQUIRY. Questions carry with them the presumption of an answer. But putting the ignorance-side and knowledge-side considerations together (and omitting the parentheses), we may offer the following norm on inquiry:

INQUIRY NORM: One ought to: inquire into  $Q$  only if (i) one knows that there is a true answer to  $Q$  and (ii) one doesn't know the answer to  $Q$ .

There's a lot of information to look for in the world. We have to decide what information to pursue, and we do this, in part, by asking questions. Questions focus our epistemic attention. But that's not enough to limit the field. We still want to know *which* questions are worth pursuing—*how* to limit our epistemic focus.

Part of the answer to this problem is, no doubt, based on curiosity. Certain topics scratch my curiosity itch and others do not: that's a reason to pursue some questions and

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<sup>81</sup> Several interlocutors, including Matt Jope, Chris Kelp, Max Lewis, and Caroline von Klemperer, suggested versions of this objection,

not others. Part of the answer is, no doubt, pragmatic. Certain questions help me navigate my way through the world while others are idle. Part of the answer to this problem is, no doubt, moral. Certain questions *ought* to be looked into by the conscientious consumer, the thoughtful friend, the socially conscious voter.

But if this paper is right, part of the answer is also epistemic. Epistemology is about question-selection, not just answer-selection. We should only wonderingly inquire into questions of whose answers we are ignorant. That guarantees that there is an epistemic point to our inquiry. And we should only inquire into questions that we know have an answer. That guarantees that, at least in principle, there is an answer to be had. Jointly, the ignorance and knowledge norms suggest a plausible model for advancing inquiry, at least along one dimension. The answers that we learn in resolving one question become the basis on which we learn that further questions are answerable, licensing yet further inquiry.

Good questions drive the pursuit of knowledge. But knowledge also expands the set of questions we can properly ask. If good inquiry enables us to achieve knowledge, it's also true that knowledge enables further inquiry. By meeting the KNOWLEDGE NORM, we enable ourselves to properly advance inquiry, moving stepwise onto further questions that presuppose more and more.<sup>82</sup>

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