

**Comments on Jane Friedman, “Inquiry and Belief”
(Arizona Metaphysics Conference 2015)**

“Enquiring minds want to know” – the *National Enquirer* (a tabloid)

1. POTENTIAL PROBLEM FOR JANE’S ACCOUNT OF *INQUIRING*

Jane’s Account: “One is **inquiring into** some question [for time period] just in case one has an interrogative attitude [IA] towards that question [during that time period]” (p. 9)

IAs: “curiosity, wondering, contemplating, deliberating, investigating” (p. 6).

Implies: “[Having] **any** of these attitudes will do [to count as inquiring]” (pp. 6-7)

Also implies that inquiring into a question during a time-period doesn’t require any mental or bodily action during that time-period, except acquiring an interrogative attitude (p. 5).

Problem: Too weak. Departmental meeting, mind wanders. For 3 seconds I’m contemplating (& somewhat curious about, wondering about) the question *how much physical space the Internet takes up* and then I immediately turn my attention back to the meeting. Since contemplating and being curious about are among Jane’s IAs, her account implies that, for these 3 seconds, I’m inquiring into how much physical space the Internet takes up. *But this just seem wrong to me.* [If, later in the day, I *ask* my friend how to go about figuring it out, or *look it up on Google, then* I’d be inquiring. But I wasn’t during those 3 seconds.]

Don’t think Jane has quite given correct account of folk psychological concept of **inquiring**. Contrary to her account, inquiring into a question requires more than just having IA. [Seems to require some good amount of mental or other activity during that time – like asking questions, considering arguments, gathering evidence.]

[BTW: Jane’s official analysandum is **inquiring into**, but she often slips to related (but, I think, *different*) notions, like **having the question whether p on one’s research agenda** (p. 9), or **being involved in an ongoing inquiry** (p. 5), which might be less action-requiring.]

2. WORRY ABOUT JANE’S *DON’T BELIEVE AND INQUIRE* PRINCIPLE, “DBI”

DBI: One ought not to believe an (complete) answer to a question & at the same time inquire into that question – that’d be *irrational*.

Her argument: it explains why something odd is going on if I say, for instance, “The store is closed, but I’m inquiring into whether the store is closed”.

Later in her paper, Jane proposes an interesting idea based on DBI: that what is special about *believing*, by contrast to having a certain (even a high) confidence, is that it rationally rules out inquiring, while merely having a certain confidence doesn’t. That’s the “mark” of believing.

But I think DBI not quite right. Jane notes that, by DBI,

“A subject who believes [some answer] to a question at time t1 may come to have excellent reason to inquire and do so without irrationality at time t2. All DBI says is that this subject should **drop her belief in [this complete answer]** by time t2 for her inquiry into [the question] at that time to count as **completely rational.**” (p. 15)

But this just doesn't fit with our judgments. Suppose a kid, Johnny, says he *believes* there's a god b/c testimony & arguments of adults, etc. But, while *retaining* his belief (and still relying it in ordinary reasoning & going to church, etc.), he inquires into the question (reads philosophers, etc.) because he seeks to *know* or *be more sure*. My intuition: *not irrational at all!* Other examples: if your good friend or child accused of crime or misdeed, say theft, you might *believe* he's innocent, while at the same time inquire into the issue, because you want to *know* (for actual case, cf. NPR podcast *Serial*). Not irrational. (Also: subway case of Ross and Schroeder (2012), lottery case of McGlynn, 2013, *Noûs*).¹

I agree that, in *some cases*, there's something odd about believing an answer to a complete question and still going on to inquire further into that question (e. g. when you come to believe that X is guilty of some crime on the basis of clinching evidence). But I think DBI is not right in all cases, such as the case I just gave. And this is enough to undermine DBI.

Explanation why DBI false: inquiring can have many goals, but typically or ideally, *knowledge*, not mere *belief*. Often one has some justified confidence in & *believes* an (complete) answer to a question (rely on it in everyday reasoning etc.), while *also* recognizing that one's epistemic relation to it is less than ideal (e. g. that one doesn't *know* it, or that one isn't justified in having *super high confidence*). In such cases, *nothing at all* irrational about *believing* an answer, while *at the same time* seeking to achieve further epistemic status of *knowing* the answer (or being justified in having *even higher confidence* than one now has, etc.). Follows from general thought that *there's nothing irrational about having one thing, while at the same time seeking something better*.

3. AN ALTERNATIVE TO JANE'S DBI PRINCIPLE?

DKI: If you already *know* the answer to a question, *then* you shouldn't *inquire* into the question – for then *you've already got* the ideal outcome of inquiry.

[Jane's principle wide-scope: this one narrow.] My suggestion: Jane's DBI false, and this alternative DKI principle is instead true. So can't accept the aforementioned idea of Jane's about how belief ≠ confidence. But I think that this alternative DKI more resistant to counterexamples.

Further, DKI apparently explains just as well as Jane's DBI why something odd is going on if I say "The store is closed, but I'm inquiring into whether the store is closed". Typically, if I say the store is closed, then I already *know the store is closed*, which means, by DKI, that I shouldn't then *inquire* into whether the store is closed.

But even DKI might be open to counterexample. If KK principle (if Kp, then KKp) is false, then you might already have knowledge of the answer to question but not know it, in which case you might, without irrationality, seek the answer. [Compare: on a hike, if you already have some water in your backpack but you don't know it, you might seek water, without being irrational.]

So it may be the best version of the principle isn't DKI but rather DKKI, that is,

DKKI: If you know it is *already* the case *that you know the answer to a question*, then you shouldn't be inquiring into the question, that is, you shouldn't seek to make it the case *that you know the answer to the question*.

¹ One might insist Johnny *is* irrational simply because he believes while taking himself not to know (likewise for other cases). I disagree: we routinely believe (and say we "believe" and act as if) while taking ourselves not to *know* (if we took ourselves to *know*, we wouldn't say we merely "believe"!), without being irrational. (Cf. McGlynn; also Ross&Schroeder.) (The plausible principle in the vicinity is rather: it is irrational to believe, while taking oneself to have no *justification*.) Another objection: maybe in such cases the subject doesn't really *believe*, but merely has high confidence. But in such cases the folk (and the subject himself) describe the subject as "believing", and an error-theory of such belief-talk would be implausible (philosophers shouldn't legislate to the folk on how to use their own terms).

Another attraction of this version is that it is just a substitution-instance of, and is therefore explained by, a *commonplace general platitude*, namely:

Generally, if you know it is *already* the case that p, then you shouldn't seek to make it the case that p.

Now, if KK principle is after all true (Greco, *forthcoming*), then this DKKI principle and the former DKI principle are equivalent, and both follow from this general platitude.