

# THE EPISTEMIC AND THE ZETETIC\*

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

We are inquirers. Not just qua philosophers but qua humans and even qua animals. We are subjects in pursuit of information, from the mundane to the extraordinary and everything in between. We want to know where our keys are, who will win the next election, how life began, and more. How should we conduct ourselves in inquiry? Which norms should we conform to as we inquire? Let's call norms of inquiry *zetetic* norms.<sup>1</sup> How are zetetic norms related to epistemic norms? Here is a plausible thought: they are closely related. Aren't epistemic norms norms of inquiry, norms that bind us qua inquirers?

I think so. But it turns out that, like many close relationships, the relationship between the epistemic and the zetetic is somewhat fraught. In this paper, I'm going to argue that some of our familiar contemporary epistemic norms are in tension with and even conflict with central zetetic norms. I'll also explore the relationship between the epistemic and the zetetic more generally. The upshot of this paper is not that there is no way of thinking about epistemology that keeps it in close harmony with a theory of inquiry; in fact, I think there are many such ways. What I do want to say though is that epistemology as we know it, as it is currently done, doesn't seem to be leaving as much room as we might like for the sorts of norms that are central to the practice of inquiry. At the heart of this paper then is a puzzle: a puzzle for a picture of epistemic normativity that doesn't accommodate the norms of inquiry, and a puzzle about how to conduct ourselves in our efforts to get more information, acquire knowledge, and understand better.

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<sup>1</sup>The Greek verb 'ζητέω' means "seek for" or "inquire after". The adjective 'ζητητικός' is formed from the verb and means "devoted to inquiry" or "disposed to inquire". The word is used in this paper in a slightly different way, to mean "related to inquiry". Thanks to Harvey Lederman for suggesting the term.

## 2 THE EPISTEMIC AND THE ZETETIC: SOME NORMATIVE TENSION

I want to start by getting a feel for a key sort of tension I'm going to explore in this paper. Think about any typical inquiry — I want or need to figure something out. Say, for instance, that I want to know how many windows the Chrysler Building in Manhattan has (say I'm in the window business). I decide that the best way to figure this out is to head down there myself and do a count. To do my counting, I set up outside of Grand Central Station. Say it takes me an hour of focused work to get the count done and figure out how many windows that building has.

Now think about the hour during which I'm doing my counting. During that hour there are many other ways I could make epistemic gains. For instance, I'm standing outside Grand Central Station and so there is obviously a huge amount I can come to know (most of which is completely unrelated to my counting task or windows or the Chrysler Building). More specifically, during that hour I can extend my knowledge in two sorts of ways. First, I'm a typical epistemic subject and so I arrive at Grand Central with an extensive store of evidence: the body of total evidence, relevant to all sorts of topics and subject matters, that I've acquired over my lifetime. Second, I'm standing outside Grand Central Station for that hour and so the amount of perceptual information available to me is absolutely vast. This is all to say that there is a lot of new knowledge that I can acquire and a lot of evidence I can follow during my hour outside of Grand Central.

However, during my hour examining the Chrysler Building I barely do any of that. I need to get my count right, and to do that I really have to stay focused on the task. Given this, during that hour I don't extend my current stores of knowledge by drawing inferences that aren't relevant to my counting task, and I do my best to ignore everything else going on around me. And this seems to be exactly what I should be doing during that hour if I want to actually succeed in the inquiry I'm engaged in. If that's right though, then what I should be doing during that hour includes ignoring available evidence and information. I succeed at my inquiry then by behaving in something of an epistemically dubious way. There is an important sense in which I succeed in inquiry by failing to respect my evidence for some stretch of time. It's not that my success in this case comes by believing things my evidence doesn't support, but it does come by ignoring a lot of my evidence and failing to come to know a great deal of what I'm in a position to know. So it looks as though there's a kind of incongruence here:

my success as an inquirer requires somewhat epistemically suspect behaviour.

What we have here, I think, is a mismatch between the demands of inquiry and some widely accepted epistemic norms. Since I'm trying to figure something out, there is zetetic pressure to take the means to that end — to do the things required to get to an answer to my Chrysler Building question. That's to say, there is some sort of zetetic instrumental norm I should conform to — a norm that says that I should take the means to my inquiry-theoretic ends. My end in this case is figuring out the answer to some question: How many windows does the Chrysler Building have? We can generalize this thought to get a zetetic instrumental principle (call it *ZIP*):

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

*ZIP* is just an instance of a familiar sort of norm — a norm of instrumental rationality that enjoins us to take the means to our ends. In this case, the end is figuring out the answer to some question,  $Q^?$  (What kind of tree is that? Why is my friend behaving this way? Is justified true belief knowledge? Etc.). But as we just saw, conforming to *ZIP* can sometimes require us to stay focused on some particular inquiry for some stretch of time. And staying focused on a particular task often means avoiding certain kinds of distraction. And sometimes, following the evidence we already have and that's easily available to us down some “inquiry-irrelevant” path can be just such a distraction. If all of this is right, then according to *ZIP*, we should sometimes not follow our evidence and we should sometimes not come to know things we are in a position to know.

This sits uneasily with some of our traditional epistemic norms. Consider, for instance, the following two epistemic norms:

**EP<sub>a</sub>** If one has excellent evidence for  $p$  at  $t$ , then one is permitted to judge  $p$  at  $t$ .

**KP<sub>a</sub>** If one is in a position to come to know  $p$  at  $t$ , then one is permitted to come to know  $p$  at  $t$ .

The ‘*a*’ subscript on these norms stands for ‘act’, indicating that these are norms for forming beliefs (which I'm just calling *judging* here) and coming to know. These sorts of act or process norms can be contrasted with more state-oriented epistemic norms, which tell us which states to be in (rather than which

states to get into).<sup>2</sup> I'll discuss epistemic norms for states a bit later in the paper.  $EP_a$  is a fairly standard (weak) evidentialist norm, and  $KP_a$  is a kind of generalization of that sort of evidentialist norm. These norms say that it's always epistemically permissible to form beliefs in response to the right kinds of evidence and always epistemically permissible to come to know something. Both norms get at fairly core commitments of normative epistemology as it's currently conceived of. In fact, on our current way of thinking of epistemic normativity, it's difficult to know quite what to make of the claim that coming to know some  $p$  was epistemically impermissible — you came to know after all and so you seem to have done great epistemically.

So, it looks as though according to  $KP_a$  and  $EP_a$ , it was perfectly permissible for me to come to know anything at all that was available for me to know while I was outside Grand Central, and perfectly permissible for me to follow any excellent evidence I had during that time. But to succeed at my count, I needed to stay focused and do my best to ignore much of what was going on around me, as well as much of the other evidence I came with — evidence that was not relevant to this task. So according to ZIP, it wasn't permissible for me to come to know all sorts of things I was in a position to come to know over the stretch of time during which I was inquiring (and I had all sorts of excellent evidence that I had to ignore). ZIP declared it impermissible for me to do things epistemology never declares impermissible.

There was nothing special about my Chrysler Building inquiry. It was fairly typical: I wanted or even needed to figure something out, I came up with a strategy for figuring that thing out, and deployed that strategy carefully. But typical inquiries don't proceed in informational vacuums. They proceed out in the world. Given this, there will typically be plenty inquirers can come to know via perception (visual, auditory, etc.) throughout the intervals of time during which they're inquiring. This isn't a special feature of inquiring throughout those intervals, but merely a feature of moving through the world as a typical subject does over a typical interval of time. Moreover, at any given time during a typical inquiry interval, inquirers will have fairly extensive bodies of total evidence: they will have plenty of information and knowledge already stored. And typical inquirers have not drawn out all of the implications — deductive, induc-

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<sup>2</sup>Just to be clear: in the discussion to follow I am thinking of judging as nothing more (or less) than the act of forming a belief. Some use 'judging' to mean something more robust than just coming to believe, but I am using the term in only that very thin sense. And while I'm calling judging an act, I also don't mean anything metaphysically or ethically robust by 'act', and 'process' would work just as well for our purposes.

tive, etc. — of those bodies of total evidence, which means that over the course of any run-of-the-mill inquiry, there is a lot of different evidence inquirers can follow and a lot they can come to know. Again, this is not a special feature of being an inquirer during some stretch of time, but just a feature of being a typical human during that stretch of time.

To succeed in my inquiry, I had to stay focused on the task and not get too distracted. And I did that: the inquiry required some of my attention and I gave it. But being a diligent inquirer meant I was not allowed to do what core epistemic norms always allow me to do.

This is not to say that in being a diligent inquirer I had to violate  $KP_a$  or  $EP_a$ . From the perspective of just those norms, I was permitted to (e.g.) come to know anything and everything about the scene outside Grand Central, but not required. Conforming to ZIP didn't force me to violate those epistemic norms (I'll say more in the next section about whether I had to violate some other epistemic norms). But the problem I'm highlighting right now isn't a problem of violation, it's a problem of normative coherence.

Even though ZIP is a “zetetic” norm in the first instance, that doesn't seem to fully capture its normative force or perhaps the source of the demand it imposes on us as inquirers. ZIP strikes me as a distinctively epistemic norm: it's the sort of norm the conforming to which makes for good inquiry; it's a norm that rational subjects in pursuit of knowledge and understanding are going to conform to; it's a norm that we'll follow if we want to successfully move ourselves from ignorance to knowledge or from confusion to comprehension; it's a norm of inquiry.

And this, I think, is where the rubber meets the road. If ZIP,  $KP_a$ , and  $EP_a$  are all epistemic norms, then epistemic normativity seems problematically inconsistent or incoherent since it will turn out that it can be both epistemically permissible and epistemically impermissible to form some beliefs or to acquire some knowledge over the course of inquiry. And it looks as though this sort of normative incoherence/inconsistency is going to be pervasive in inquiry so that inquirers will regularly be confronted with incoherent epistemic advice. Are inquirers allowed or not allowed to come to know whatever they are in a position to come to know over the courses of their inquiries?<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Although I said the problem here wasn't a problem of violation, there is a nearby problem of violation lurking now: there is knowledge available to us over the courses of our inquiries that we cannot acquire without violating the norms of inquiry. So, we could violate a norm of inquiry by coming to know something. This does not seem like a good result either.

The rest of this paper fleshes out, defends, and extends this concern. In the next section (3), I'll say more about the ZIP and zetetic normativity. In section 4, I'll say more about contemporary epistemic norms, more carefully bring out the tension described in this section, and then bring out a series of closely related tensions that emerge with other familiar epistemic norms, including more state-oriented epistemic norms. And in section 5, I'll explore the different paths forward and the difficulties we face along each, signalling which path looks best to me.

This paper raises a puzzle for our current picture of epistemic normativity. The puzzle comes via thinking about the norms of inquiry and their place in epistemology. I find the puzzle worrying, and I hope that by the end of the paper the reader will be similarly concerned. Beyond the puzzle though, part of the aim of this paper is to make space for zetetic normativity, which has been woefully under-explored. I take it that engaging in the project of exploring the norms of inquiry requires no special justification, but I hope that the sort of reflection on the interaction between the epistemic and the zetetic to come will bring out some of the intricacies involved in figuring out just how inquiry should proceed.

### 3 ZIP

Recall our zetetic instrumental principle:

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

ZIP is a familiar kind of norm in a less familiar context. It's an instrumental norm: a norm that rational subjects conform to in pursuing their goals. In this case though, it's a specifically zetetic instrumental norm.

A norm like ZIP follows fairly naturally from the thought that central to inquiry is an aim of epistemic improvement. We inquire in order to figure something out, or get more information or knowledge, or understand something better. Where we find goal- or aim-directed activities, we find instrumental norms. That said, while that may mean that some ZIP-like norm will be central to inquiry, we haven't got all the way to ZIP yet. In this section, I want to say more about instrumental norms in general and about ZIP in particular. I will also say more about the "kind" of norm ZIP is, and especially whether we should be thinking of it as an epistemic norm (as I suggested in the last section).

In general, an instrumental principle tells us to take the means to our ends. The literature on instrumental rationality is largely in agreement that a norm like this governs goal-directed activities, but exactly how to formulate it is a matter on which opinions diverge.<sup>4</sup> I want to try to stay as neutral as I can on these matters, but let me at least flag some of the axes of debate that are relevant for the discussion to come.

First, there are questions about the “strength” of an instrumental principle. In general, an instrumental norm tells us to take the means to our ends. But if there is more than one means available (say there are ten possible routes I can take to work), then ‘the means’ might not refer. We might say instead that the principle tells us to take any available means to our ends, or at least any that are necessary for our getting to our ends. But this can seem too weak: if some means are obviously better than others — more efficient, more enjoyable, more reliable, and so on — shouldn’t we be taking those rather than the obviously worse ones? At the other extreme, instrumental principles are sometimes formulated as maximizing or optimizing principles, i.e., ones that demand we take the best means to our ends. But this can seem too strong: do we really have to do the absolute very best all the time? Perhaps an instrumental principle should demand we satisfice with respect to our means at least?<sup>5</sup>

Beyond these sorts of strength questions, there are also some “scope” questions. In particular, there is a fairly voluminous debate about whether we should say that the ‘ought’ in an instrumental principle takes wide or narrow scope with respect to the conditional. A wide-scope instrumental principle will say (roughly) that we should either take the means to our ends or not have those ends.<sup>6</sup> A narrow-scope instrumental principle will say that if we have an end, then we ought to take the means to that end. The distinction is important since in only the narrow-scope case does the mere fact that one has an end imply that one ought to take the means to that end.<sup>7</sup>

And beyond these scope questions, there are (related) questions about the

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<sup>4</sup>For a helpful overview of some of the issues being contended, see Way (2012).

<sup>5</sup>For some of this debate see Byron (1998), Schmitz (2004), Henden (2007), and Tenenbaum (2015).

<sup>6</sup>I am not going to be making very fine-grained deontic distinctions in this paper. Talk of what we ought to do is going to be interchangeable with talk of what we should do, what we’re required to do, what we’re obligated to do, and so on. And the same goes (*mutatis mutandis*) for ‘permit’ and its relatives.

<sup>7</sup>See Way (2010) for a nice overview of this debate in the case of practical reason. John Broome (in e.g., Broome (1999)) is often associated with the wide-scope view, with Niko Kolodny (in, e.g., Kolodny (2005)) and Mark Schroeder (in, e.g., Schroeder (2004)) pushing in the other direction.

very nature of an instrumental requirement and in particular what kind of force it could have. If an instrumental requirement can be generated just because we happen to have some end or desire, what kind of requirement could it be? If our ends are boring or evil, could we really be required to take means to them? That said, it does seem as though having an end or goal or aim has some implications for how we should act.<sup>8</sup>

While on the question of strength I am partial to a maximizing norm, we only need a weaker principle for the arguments to come, so I've formulated ZIP as a demand to take the necessary means to our epistemic ends. On the question of scope, I've put the 'ought' in ZIP in front of just the consequent, rather than in front of the entire conditional. And for now I'm going to assume that that's where it should be, i.e., I'm going to assume that ZIP is a narrow-scope instrumental principle. This is largely for expository ease, and I'll revisit the question of scope in section 5.

As to the nature/force of the requirement in ZIP, on the one hand the answer comes easily — it's a zetetic requirement. On the other, this doesn't do much to address concerns about the normative power of an instrumental requirement. Does the mere fact that one wants or needs to figure something out trigger a genuine (zetetic) requirement to try to figure it out? I'm not too worried about answering "yes" here for now. For those more worried than me though, let me say the following. In the case of practical rationality, some have suggested that instrumental requirements are triggered only when we have good reason to pursue our ends (or at least are allowed to).<sup>9</sup> In light of this, it's worth making clear that all of the cases I discuss in this paper can easily be thought of as ones in which inquirers are allowed to and have excellent reason to pursue the epistemic ends or goals they are pursuing.

These issues dovetail with another complicated one relevant to the discussion to come. Goal pursuit — epistemic or otherwise — is a temporally extended activity. When I'm counting windows, or looking for my keys, or learning karate, or trying to solve a crime, or trying to figure out if the mind and body are identical, I'm doing these things over (sometimes quite long) intervals of time. An instrumental principle tells me to take the means to these ends. But when do I have to do this? Right away? Can I delay a bit? A lot?

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<sup>8</sup>See Setiya (2007), Schroeder (2009), and Finlay (2010) for some different ways of thinking about an instrumental requirement.

<sup>9</sup>For instance, see Raz (2005) for a defence of the thought that one has reason to take a necessary means to one's end only if one has reason to pursue the end.

Although a complete theory of rational goal pursuit will have to speak to these sorts of difficult questions, I'm going to do my best to sidestep them here. To do that I'm going to focus on *temporally urgent* inquiries: inquiries in which the goal is to figure out  $Q^?$  by  $t$ , where  $t$  is a time in the very near future. I take it that many of our inquiries are temporally urgent in this sense. If I want to know whether my neighbours are home so I can borrow a flashlight to fix my fuse box, I want to know whether they are home now. And when I'm looking for my keys, I need to find them right away so I can leave the house. And when I'm tasked with counting windows outside Grand Central for work, that project has a deadline. All of these inquiries — and many that we perform every day — are temporally urgent in the sense I intend: they have to be completed fairly quickly. Perhaps I can delay figuring out whether my neighbours are home for a bit, but if I want to check the fuse box and get the power back on before my guests arrive, there is a limit to how long I can put my investigation off.

An inquiry may be temporally urgent because we need some information in order to act (Is the restaurant north or south of here?), or we need the information in order to help resolve some other temporally urgent inquiry (What did these witnesses see?), or perhaps even because we're just deeply curious about some question (What's the difference between a domain of life and a kingdom of life?). Some of our inquiries may well have little or even no temporal urgency, but most have some, and many have a great deal. For the purposes of this discussion at least, I'm going to focus on inquiries with sufficient temporal urgency to make it plausible that inquirers need to deploy their zetetic strategies with little delay.<sup>10</sup> So it's not simply that I want to figure out how many windows the Chrysler Building has, but that I want to figure that out in the next hour, or by the end of the day, or as soon as possible.

Beyond these general issues about instrumental norms and normativity and their application to ZIP, I want to make a few more ZIP-specific comments.

First, ZIP is formulated as a norm about wanting and trying to figure out the answers to questions. I am assuming that it is often the case that we inquire in order to answer questions: Who robbed the bank? Where did I leave that book? Is this soil acidic enough for a cactus to grow? Is the good prior to the right? And so on. There may well be parts of inquiry during which we don't quite have

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<sup>10</sup>This isn't to say that ZIP isn't relevant or in force when there is less temporal urgency, it's just to say that the issues in those cases are decidedly more complex. See Tenenbaum (2010, 2016) for some interesting discussion about rational action in the context of temporally extended activities.

a clear question before our minds, but my focus for now is on determinately question-directed inquiry.

I've also described the relevant inquiry-theoretic goal as the goal of figuring out  $Q^?$  (where ' $Q^?$ ' is to be replaced with an indirect interrogative sentence). "Figuring out" is a sort of generic placeholder for our epistemic aims in inquiry. I'll often talk about wanting to know the answer to questions and wanting to resolve questions. I find these the most natural ways of speaking, but I mean to stay largely neutral on how to think about our (question-directed) epistemic aims in inquiry.<sup>11</sup>

Further, as formulated, ZIP is somewhat oversimplified. Presumably, subjects can (and often do) want to figure out many different things at a time: there are any number of questions we're curious about and want answers at a given time. And it's certainly possible that taking the necessary means to answering one of those questions can mean that we won't be able to take the necessary means to answering another. There are a number of ways ZIP could be modified to handle this additional complexity, e.g., adding a *ceteris paribus* or *pro tanto* rider. Rather than get too off track working through those though, I'm going to leave ZIP unmodified. The reader can assume that in all the cases I discuss there are no competing zetetic ends or other such complications.<sup>12</sup>

Beyond these matters of formulation, there are looming questions about what kind or flavour of norm ZIP is. Again, there's an easy answer and a more involved one. The easy answer is that it's a zetetic norm. But is it also an epistemic norm? Is it a practical norm? Is zetetic normativity *sui generis*? This set of issues is going to come up a number of times in this paper, and it's an important thread in the discussion to come. As I've already said, I think that ZIP has a good claim to being an epistemic norm. Let me say more in defence of this thought.

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<sup>11</sup>There is some disagreement as to the aim(s) of inquiry. It's widely agreed that inquirers are trying or aiming to get to the truth, but there are questions about whether something weaker than knowing the truth might do, as well as whether something stronger than or just different from knowing (e.g., understanding) might be required. For some helpful discussion see Misak (1987), Sartwell (1992), Hookway (2007), Whitcomb (2010), Millar (2011), Kvanvig (2011), Grimm (2012), and Kelp (2014, forthcoming).

<sup>12</sup>In general, the zetetic requirements and permissions I'll be discussing are "all zetetic things considered" requirements and permissions. That said, it's worth making clear that this does not make them the final word on what subjects should or may do at some time once all of the non-zetetic things are also considered. The norms of inquiry might tell me that I ought to do my count, but if someone from the window factory calls and says there's been a welding accident, then perhaps all things considered I should leave my counting station and not do what I zetetically ought to do.

ZIP is a norm that speaks to how we should inquire. Whether or not we conform to ZIP is highly relevant to whether or not we come to know what we want to know and whether or not we succeed in understanding what we want to understand, and not merely in some superficial sense. ZIP tells us how to proceed when we want to come to know or understand something. This counts in favour of thinking of ZIP as epistemic. ZIP is a norm that a rational subject trying to know more and understand better will conform to.

Why might someone think ZIP is not an epistemic norm? Well, it isn't one of our more familiar ones. Of course, on its own this thought doesn't amount to much, but perhaps it can be fleshed out in ways that leave us with a conception of the epistemic that is sufficiently narrow to shut out norms like ZIP.<sup>13</sup> One thought might be that we can form beliefs in violation of ZIP and still end up with knowledge. Relatedly, ZIP is not a standard evidentialist norm telling us no more than when/how to respect our evidence. I don't know that either of these is much evidence that ZIP isn't epistemic though. I can end up with knowledge despite being e.g., uncharitable, closed-minded, or incurious. But norms that tell us to avoid these sorts of intellectual vices are typically thought to be epistemic norms. Moreover, if those sorts of virtue-theoretic norms are epistemic norms, then the purely evidentialist conception of the epistemic also does not seem to be in good standing. And there are other (presumably epistemic) norms widely discussed in mainstream epistemology that are not obviously evidentialist norms, e.g., coherence norms, norms for responding to peer disagreement, and anti-akrasia requirements.

I suspect some will take the fact that ZIP is an instrumental norm to be evidence that it's a practical norm rather than an epistemic one. But I don't think ZIP's status as instrumental is evidence that it's a practical norm, at least not in any sense of 'practical' that renders it non-epistemic.

In support of this: there is a serious debate in epistemology about whether epistemic normativity is a form of instrumental normativity. For instance, we think that epistemic subjects should follow their evidence. But why should they? An instrumentalist answer is that it's because epistemic subjects are trying to (say) know more, and following their evidence is a means to that end. On this sort of account, all epistemic norms are, in some sense, instrumen-

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<sup>13</sup>This sort of narrow conception of the epistemic has proved difficult to pin down. I will only be raising doubts about the plausibility of two attempts, but I think others will face similar hurdles. Relatedly, Cohen (2016b) argues against a series of proposals for when a belief's justification counts as epistemic. Cohen thinks that 'epistemic' is ill defined, but I think his arguments make room for some more expansive accounts of the epistemic as well.

tal norms. But it is not part of this sort of account that those norms are no longer epistemic, or that they are practical in some sense that's incompatible with their being epistemic. In the debate over whether epistemic rationality is a species of instrumental rationality, the instrumentalists are not arguing that epistemic rationality is something other than epistemic rationality.<sup>14</sup> That ZIP is a norm for subjects in pursuit of goals, is not on its own a reason to think that it's not an epistemic norm or that it's a practical norm in any sense that tells against its (also) being epistemic.<sup>15</sup>

I will come back to these issues again in section 5, but until then will continue to treat ZIP as an epistemic norm.

#### 4 TENSIONS, IN DETAIL

In section 2, I described a kind of normative incoherence generated in the interaction between some of our contemporary epistemic norms on the one hand and a central norm of inquiry on the other. The culprits, I argued, were ZIP and some permissive epistemic norms. But those permissive epistemic norms are not the only norms at the centre of our current picture of normative epistemology. In this section, I'll say more about ZIP's interaction with those permissive norms as well as about its interaction with other familiar epistemic norms. In each case we'll find similar sorts of normative discord. Altogether, this should make clear that the tension I'm pointing to in this paper is not merely a superficial tussle, but a more serious mismatch between zetetic normativity and our current picture of normative epistemology.

Let's say that Z is the set of all the true and genuine zetetic norms, and E the set of all the true and genuine epistemic norms. Z and E are, in a sense, objects of inquiry for us as philosophers. In fact, we might characterize one of the main aims of normative epistemology as a whole as that of figuring out what is (and is not) in E. Before thinking about the relationship between Z and E in general,

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<sup>14</sup>Instrumentalism about epistemic norms is not a fringe position either. For some defences, see Foley (1987), Stich (1990), Kornblith (1993), Leite (2007), Grimm (2008), Street (2009), Steglich-Petersen (2011), Cowie (2014), and Sharadin (2018). Relatedly, a largely instrumentalist account — where the relevant goal is accuracy — of the norms of probabilistic coherence has become popular lately. See Joyce (1998) for a key source of inspiration here.

<sup>15</sup>Although there is a (putative) sense of 'practical' in the epistemology literature that is meant to be thoroughly non-epistemic, it's also quite tricky to pin down. There is a weak sense of 'practical' according to which a norm is practical iff it tells us what to do (rather than how to be). But this sort of practicality is not incompatible with a norm being epistemic. Nor is the sort of practicality involved in instrumentality. What is this thoroughly non-epistemic sense of 'practical' then?

I want to focus on the relationship between Z and a different set of norms: CE.

CE is the set of all of our familiar contemporary epistemic norms. CE is not an object of investigation for philosophers (perhaps one day it will be for historians), rather it is more of a record of contemporary epistemology's efforts to figure out what's in E. It's a bit of a hodgepodge since it includes many norms that we no longer think genuine as well as obvious inconsistencies (e.g., see the internalism/externalism debate).

This section focuses on some of the points of friction between Z and CE. Since CE is fairly unruly on its own, I'll stay focused on its most promising corners. That is, the norms in CE I'll discuss here are those that strike me as among the most central and widely accepted.<sup>16</sup>

Some of what's already been said gives us some starting insights into the relationship between CE and Z. I am assuming that ZIP is an element of Z. It doesn't seem to be a member of CE though. This means that Z and CE are not identical, and Z is not a subset of CE.

The claim that some norm of inquiry hasn't found a place in the contemporary epistemic landscape so far should not be confused with the more general claim that some norm of inquiry is not epistemic. On the assumption that CE and E are not identical, the claim that at least some elements of Z are not elements of CE does not imply that Z and E are not identical. I am taking the claim that Z and E are identical to be equivalent to the claim that all zetetic norms — all norms of inquiry — are epistemic, and all epistemic norms are norms of inquiry. I'll say more about whether  $Z = E$  in the next section.

Before getting to the main arguments, it's worth saying: the discussion in this paper does not nearly do justice to the full shape and character of Z. My discussion is largely focused on ZIP, but ZIP is far from the only interesting norm in Z, nor is it the only norm in Z that might come into conflict with our familiar epistemic norms. Z will contain norms for starting inquiry, changing strategies or switching inquiries, settling questions, giving up inquiries, and much more. I don't want the focus on ZIP here to obscure other parts of Z, even if we won't be able to turn our attention to them in this paper.

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<sup>16</sup>How should we be thinking about the relationship between CE and E? Well, let's hope they intersect at least.

#### 4.1 INCONSISTENT/INCOHERENT PERMISSIONS

I want to go into a bit more detail about the sort of tension I articulated in section 2. Recall  $EP_a$  and  $KP_a$ :

**$EP_a$**  If one has excellent evidence for  $p$  at  $t$ , then one is permitted to judge  $p$  at  $t$ .

**$KP_a$**  If one is in a position to come to know  $p$  at  $t$ , then one is permitted to come to know  $p$  at  $t$ .

I'll call these the  $P_a$ -norms. I said that the  $P_a$ -norms are central to normative epistemology as it's currently done. I hope that strikes the reader as fairly obvious (of course, "excellent" needs filling in, but most any plausible way will do for our discussion).<sup>17</sup> Not only do I not know of any epistemologists who explicitly deny these sorts of permissibility norms, but I don't know of any who might want to given their other commitments. These norms say that if you have no opinion about whether  $p$  is true but have excellent evidence for  $p$ , then you're epistemically permitted to come to believe  $p$ , and that if you have no opinion about whether  $p$  is true but are in a position to come to know  $p$ , then you're epistemically permitted to come to know  $p$ . I find it hard to think about normative epistemology as we know it without norms like the  $P_a$ -norms.<sup>18</sup>

To make the tension between ZIP and the  $P_a$ -norms precise, we should assume that 'ought' and 'permit' are duals, i.e., that one ought to  $\phi$  at  $t$  just in case one is not permitted to not- $\phi$  at  $t$ .<sup>19</sup> Let's also say that if a subject cannot

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<sup>17</sup> $EP_a$  and the other evidentialist norms officially need some kind "basing" clause as well, but since nothing in what follows hangs on any particular articulation of the basing relation, I'm just going to leave it unarticulated.

<sup>18</sup>Here is a way to get at the centrality of a norm like  $EP_a$  in the literature. Claim 1: If one has excellent evidence for  $p$  at  $t$ , then one is justified in judging  $p$  at  $t$ . Claim 2: If one is justified in  $\phi$ -ing at  $t$ , then one is permitted to  $\phi$  at  $t$ . Claim 1 has its roots in Feldman and Conee (1985) and remains widely accepted. And Claim 2 is a general claim about the relationship between justification and permissibility. These two claims can get us to  $EP_a$ . And while  $KP_a$  is somewhat less familiar than  $EP_a$ , it's at least as plausible and widely accepted (if less explicitly discussed in this form). Knowledge has its epistemic goodness baked right in. If you judge  $p$  and in so doing succeed in coming to know  $p$ , then you've done something epistemically right or good or reasonable or justifiable (or all of these). But again, these seem to entail that what you did was epistemically permissible.

<sup>19</sup>This assumption is widely made. Intuitively, it certainly feels as though part of what I'm saying when I tell you that you are required to go to class tomorrow, is that you're not allowed to miss class tomorrow. That said, I don't think we absolutely need the assumption. I could have cast our zetetic instrumental principle as a prohibition against failing to take necessary means, which, although more cumbersome than ZIP, does not strike me as any less plausible. For ease of exposition, I'll sometimes say things like, "Z/ZIP prohibits  $\phi$ -ing". Strictly speaking, it's Z/ZIP plus this duality assumption getting us to the relevant prohibitions.

both  $\phi$  and  $\psi$  at  $t$ , then  $\phi$ -ing and  $\psi$ -ing are *incompatible* for that subject at  $t$ . And finally, if  $\phi$ -ing and  $\psi$ -ing are incompatible at  $t$ , then we can say that  $\phi$ -ing at  $t$  is a way of not- $\psi$ -ing at  $t$ , and  $\psi$ -ing at  $t$  is a way of not- $\phi$ -ing at  $t$ . Altogether then, we can say that if you're required to  $\phi$  at  $t$ , and  $\psi$ -ing at  $t$  is incompatible with  $\phi$ -ing at  $t$ , then you're not permitted to  $\psi$  at  $t$ .

Now we can go back to the case in which I have to figure out how many windows the Chrysler Building has ( $W^?$ ) by the end of the day. Take some time after which I really do have to get going and focus or I will not get the job done. If I spend this time just people watching outside Grand Central, I will fail to complete my task. If I start counting but get distracted, the count will be unreliable and I won't figure out  $W^?$ .

So according to ZIP, I should start counting and stay focused for some interval of time,  $T$ . I assume that taking in some of the sights and sounds around me is compatible with my doing as I zetetically ought. But there's also a limit: at some point those sights and sounds will be a distraction and so I'll have to tune them out. And an analogous claim is true of my standing, pre-existing evidence. There is a lot I can learn if I spend  $T$  drawing out the consequences of what I already know (e.g., whether I have jogged more than ten thousand miles in my life so far, or what the time is in Shanghai now).<sup>20</sup> While I may be able to learn some of these things while reliably counting, again there is a limit: at some point, extending my knowledge in those ways will be incompatible with figuring out  $W^?$ . And so, from the perspective of ZIP, I'm not permitted to come to know some of what I'm in a position to come to know during  $T$ , and I'm not permitted to follow some of my evidence during  $T$ . But the  $P_a$ -norms do permit me to do those things during  $T$ .<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Or more simply even: say on my way to Grand Central I see someone walking a cute dog. I could easily spend  $T$  coming to know the following sorts of things: that person was not walking a peacock, that person was not walking a polar bear, that person was not walking an earthworm, that person was not walking a glass of orange juice, and so on.

<sup>21</sup>There are good questions to ask about exactly what perceptual evidence I have while I'm doing my count. And answers to those questions might vary (perhaps widely) depending on one's accounts of evidence, perception, experience, attention, and more. Perhaps some combination of views on these matters make it that while focused on one task I have no perceptual evidence about anything not relevant to that task. I don't find that thought (nor the views one would have to take on the various central notions) very plausible. Unfortunately, I can't say much about all of this without getting too far off track. Let me make two quick points though. First, the argument I'm making here doesn't, strictly speaking, need subjects to have inquiry-irrelevant perceptual evidence while inquiring. So long as they have any other evidence they can follow, my argument here will work. Second, I assume that even someone who thought (e.g.) that I had no extraneous perceptual evidence while focused on my counting task, thinks that I could very easily acquire a great deal of perceptual evidence by shifting my gaze, attention, or focus. But if ZIP is telling me

This sort of case is very easily multiplied. For instance, imagine you're at a busy restaurant, and the dinner bill arrives. In order to figure out what you owe, you have to do some mental math. Maybe it's possible to acquire some of the perceptual knowledge available to you in the restaurant while doing the math or to learn from your pre-existing evidence while adding and dividing, but at some point doing those calculations is going to require you to focus on that task. At that point, ZIP is going to place some restrictions on which evidence you are allowed to follow and what you are allowed to come to know. So again, if you ought to do your bill calculations now, then you're not permitted to come to know all about (e.g.) the conversation at the next table now.

Or say you need to talk to a witness and write down what they say in order to resolve some inquiry of yours. Again, this will require you to attend to some of your available evidence but also ignore some of it: you can't follow what the witness is saying and write it down while also taking in all of the mundane information available to you. If you ought to pay attention to the witness and write down what they say, then you're not permitted to spend that time (e.g.) memorizing the colours of all the cars passing by, or figuring out how much it's going to cost to fill up your own car given the recent change in gas prices.

In all of these cases we have ZIP declaring the making of some judgments impermissible, and, at the same time, the  $P_a$ -norms declaring the making of those same judgments permissible. We'll be able to find tension like this in most any inquiry that requires our attention for any stretch of time (which I assume is most any inquiry). In those sorts of cases, there will typically be some traditionally epistemically impeccable judgments that it won't be permissible to make. These judgments are then both permissible and impermissible.

As I've said, the force of this tension is amplified if we maintain that ZIP and the  $P_a$ -norms are all of the same kind or type or part of the same domain of normativity. This domain of normativity is giving flatly inconsistent advice to inquirers, telling them all at once that making some judgments is permissible and that making those judgments is impermissible.<sup>22</sup> I've already argued that

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to stick to my counting, then I shouldn't shift my attention or focus to acquire that evidence. And if I do acquire that evidence, ZIP is also going to tell me not to do anything with it since it's telling me to do my counting. So again, although I think questions about just what information and evidence is available to us moment to moment in these cases is both important and interesting, I don't think we need to answer them just yet.

<sup>22</sup>Is this so bad? Couldn't the  $P_a$ -norms issue in fairly weak or mere prima facie permissions that can then easily be outweighed by the requirements ZIP issues? Or might there not be some higher-order epistemic norms that resolve permissibility conflicts like this? Perhaps. But this would have the result that there are many cases in which we are not, at the end of the day, epis-

ZIP should be thought of as an epistemic norm, which means that part of the result here seems to be that epistemic normativity is incoherent. And this is not the only problematic aspect of the relationship between ZIP and CE.

## 4.2 CONFLICTING REQUIREMENTS

So far I've been focused on the interaction between ZIP and some fairly weak epistemic norms — norms that issue in epistemic permissions. But many epistemologists think that epistemic norms demand more of us, and in particular that they require us to believe what our evidence supports. For instance, at least some will want to insist that norms like the following are also in E (and we can assume that they are in CE):

**EO<sub>a</sub>** If one has excellent evidence for  $p$  at  $t$ , then one ought to judge  $p$  at  $t$ .

**KO<sub>a</sub>** If one is in a position to come to know  $p$  at  $t$ , then one ought to come to know  $p$  at  $t$ .

These norms (call them the  $O_a$ -norms) are a bit more controversial than the  $P_a$ -norms but are still fairly central to our current conception of epistemic normativity. It's easy to feel the force of the claim that rational epistemic subjects don't simply turn their backs on the evidence. If one has excellent evidence for  $p$ , it seems right that judging  $p$  is permitted. But is it also permissible to fail to judge  $p$ ? Is it never the case that epistemic norms demand that we follow our evidence (rather than merely allow it but also allow us to remain agnostic)? The thought that, yes, sometimes we really must make certain judgments given our evidence is fairly intuitive.<sup>23</sup>

But I hope that at this point it's easy to see how tension between ZIP and the  $O_a$ -norms is going to emerge. ZIP will demand I focus on my window counting and the  $O_a$ -norms will demand I come to know all I can about what's going on

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temically permitted to judge  $p$  based on our excellent evidence for  $p$  or epistemically permitted to come to know  $p$ . This would mark a significant shift away from our current picture of epistemic normativity. The picture that would result is not very different from one according to which we outright reject the  $P_a$ -norms. I'll say more about that sort of picture in section 5.

<sup>23</sup>Support for the existence of a requirement to believe what the evidence supports can be found in a number of spots in the literature, e.g., BonJour (1980), Feldman and Conee (1985), Feldman (2000), Kelly (2007), and more. We find a slightly different thought in a slightly different context as well: for Bayesians, if you learn some proposition  $p$ , you don't then have the option of conditionalizing on  $p$  or not — you are required to conditionalize on that new evidence. And for more intuitive support, open most any epistemology textbook and you will find the claim that a central question epistemologists are trying to answer is: What ought we to believe?

outside Grand Central (and everything else I'm in a position to as well). But I can't do all of these things. And ZIP will demand we do some mental math to figure out what we each owe, or listen to the witnesses and write down what they say, or watch carefully so we measure the liquid's volume properly, or try to think through the start of a proof, while the  $O_a$ -norms will demand that we come to know anything we're in a position to during those intervals of time. Again, we cannot do all the things we ought to do when we ought to do them — we can't focus on our inquiries and come to know everything else our evidence supports while focusing.

This tension is slightly different from the last one. Here we have something closer to a dilemmatic structure, with inquirers facing conflicting requirements. In these cases, the  $O_a$ -norms demand that inquirers  $\phi$  at  $t$ , while ZIP demands that they  $\psi$  at  $t$ , and they cannot both  $\phi$  and  $\psi$  at  $t$ . Inquirers in predicaments like these are going to have to violate the norms of inquiry or traditional epistemic norms (or both).

### 4.3 DIVERGENT IDEALS

The  $O_a$ -norms demand a lot of us. And some have suggested that they demand too much (Are we really epistemically required to believe absolutely everything our evidence supports at a time?).<sup>24</sup> But even if the  $O_a$ -norms strike us as too demanding, we might still want to say that those norms somehow state ideals. While we may not fault subjects like us for failing to live up to the demands of the  $O_a$ -norms, perhaps we do think of them as setting some sort of epistemic standard that it would be better to live up to (all else equal, at least). Doesn't the ideal epistemic subject come to know all they can, believe whatever their evidence supports, and have a set of beliefs that is closed under all of the relevant logical operations?

If norms like  $EO_a$  and  $KO_a$  set or express ideals, then we should be able to think about how close or far subjects are from those ideals. And plausibly, the more one approximates the ideal the better. While we don't want to have to count propositions, when it comes to ideals that emerge from the  $O_a$ -norms, we'll want to say something like: the more of what S is in a position to come to

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<sup>24</sup>For instance, Nelson (2010) relies on demandingness considerations (or something close) to argue that we do not have an epistemic duty to believe what our evidence supports. Nelson instead endorses (what he calls) a "permissivist epistemology", according to which there are epistemic permissions to believe, but no epistemic requirements to believe. Cohen (2016a) and Dogramaci (2018) are also in this sort of permissivist camp.

know at  $t$ , S in fact comes to know at  $t$ , the closer S gets to this epistemic ideal at  $t$  and the better S does epistemically at  $t$ . But if this is the epistemic ideal, then I think it's going to be fairly different from the zetetic ideal.

Again, think about Grand Central, or the busy restaurant, or any other inquiry that takes place out in the world where information is everywhere available while we inquire. Say I go to get my window count done, but instead of figuring out how many windows the Chrysler Building has during  $T$  (the interval of time during which I'm meant to be inquiring into that question), I take in as much information as I can about the activity around Grand Central. I learn a ton, way more than I would have had I actually focused on counting windows. From the perspective of the sorts of ideals we get from the  $O_a$ -norms, I've done very well during  $T$ , maybe even as well as I could have. But from the perspective of my goal of figuring out how many windows the Chrysler Building has, I seem to have failed fairly dramatically: I failed to (even try to) figure out the one thing I was meant to figure out.

The inverse sort of case is telling as well. Say I do my count over the course of  $T$ , staying focused so I can do it well, not doing any distracting learning over the course of  $T$ . I do not extend my knowledge in any of the other ways I easily could have during that time. In this case, I will have been a complete zetetic success (at least from the perspective of  $W^?$ ), but far from epistemically ideal in the sense at issue now. This is all to say that if we think of  $EO_a$  and  $KO_a$  as setting epistemic ideals, then an extremely successful epistemic subject (from the perspective of those norms) can be an utter failure zetetically, and a completely successful inquirer can end up quite far from epistemically ideal. This makes for a significant gulf between an epistemic ideal we can read off of the  $O_a$ -norms and the zetetic ideal.

#### 4.4 ZIP AND TRADITIONAL STATE-FOCUSED EPISTEMIC NORMS

So far I've been investigating the interaction between ZIP and some traditional epistemic norms — ones that range over certain kinds of doxastic or epistemic acts. But what about ZIP and our familiar state-focused epistemic norms, e.g., epistemic norms that range over belief states (rather than acts of belief formation)? Certainly, a good deal of normative epistemology has focused on norms that tell us how to be (rather than what to do), doxastically speaking. Given this, the following norms are also in CE and are good candidates for being in E:

**EP<sub>s</sub>** If one has excellent evidence for  $p$  at  $t$ , then one is permitted to have a

$p$ -belief at  $t$ .

**EO<sub>s</sub>** If one has excellent evidence for  $p$  at  $t$ , then one ought to have a  $p$ -belief at  $t$ .

**KP<sub>s</sub>** If one is in a position to know  $p$  at  $t$ , then one is permitted to know  $p$  at  $t$ .

**KO<sub>s</sub>** If one is in a position to know  $p$  at  $t$ , then one ought to know  $p$  at  $t$ .

These norms are the state-focused twins of the epistemic norms I've been discussing, and so I'm going to assume that the claim that they play a starring role in contemporary epistemology needs no further defence. However, we don't seem to have the same sort of conflict between ZIP and these state-focused epistemic norms (call these the *s-norms*), at least not in the first instance. The *s-norms* make claims about the permissibility and obligatoriness of having beliefs and of having knowledge, but they are silent (at least in the first instance) about the permissibility and obligatoriness of judging and coming to know. ZIP bars us from acquiring certain kinds of "irrelevant" knowledge over the course of inquiry since doing that can distract us and interfere with our success in inquiry. But this argument doesn't obviously extend to merely having the relevant knowledge. That coming to know  $p$  at  $t$  will distract you from some other task doesn't mean that knowing  $p$  at  $t$  — just having that knowledge at that time — will. Perhaps, then, ZIP doesn't interact in the same sorts of worrying ways with the epistemic *s-norms*?

I'm not sure there is much of a reprieve here though. We do, after all, have conflict between ZIP and other of our central epistemic norms. And worse, even if the tension between ZIP and the *s-norms* isn't right on the surface, it doesn't take much digging to get there.

First, we should expect that the *s-norms* and their act-focused twins (call these the *a-norms*) won't be entirely independent of one another. For instance, isn't the best explanation of one's having a requirement to form a belief, that one has a requirement to have that belief? If that's right then it should turn out that requirements to form beliefs and requirements to have beliefs don't come apart all that often: we should expect these two sorts of requirements to move largely in lockstep. And the same goes for the various permissions. But if we can move fairly quickly from requirements and permissions to be in some doxastic or epistemic states to requirements and permissions to get into those states, then while we don't have immediate tension between ZIP and the

*s*-norms, we are only a bridge principle away. While I think there is a great deal to say about these sorts of bridge principles, I don't want to get too far off track. Especially since I think there's trouble for the *s*-norms even if one wanted to insist on radical independence between *a*-norms and *s*-norms.<sup>25</sup>

Part of what's meant to be worrying about the conflicts I've brought out so far is that they dash our hopes that our traditional epistemic normative verdicts would largely align with central zetetic normative verdicts. But the normative verdicts issued by ZIP on the one hand and the *s*-norms on the other are also fairly incongruous.

Thinking back to our toy inquiries again, it looks as though it will regularly be the case that having some belief at *t* is perfectly permissible from the perspective of the *s*-norms, but making the judgment one would need to make to get into that belief state at *t* is impermissible from the perspective of Z. For instance, according to the *s*-norms, it's epistemically permissible for me to have all of those beliefs about the goings-on outside of Grand Central while I'm figuring out *W*<sup>?</sup>, but according to ZIP, I'm not permitted to form those beliefs during that stretch of time. So according to the *s*-norms, I'm allowed to have beliefs that according to ZIP, I'm not allowed to come to have. While there may be no act that's both permissible and not now, this is an uncomfortable set of normative verdicts. And as before, these sorts of conflicts are going to be entirely commonplace.

And if we think that norms like  $EO_s$  and  $KO_s$  are genuine epistemic norms, then it will regularly be the case that inquirers are required to have some beliefs at *t* according to the *s*-norms, but the norms of inquiry bar them from forming those beliefs at *t*. In these sorts of cases, traditional epistemology will demand we be in states that our inquiries don't permit us to get into. Given this, conforming to ZIP can mean violating even *s*-norms like  $EO_s$  and  $KO_s$ .

Overall then, while the relationship between the *s*-norms and Z might not be quite as fraught as the relationship between the *a*-norms and Z, these sets of norms are not operating harmoniously either.

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<sup>25</sup>The rest of this section will also speak to the sort of reader who is thinking about suggesting that E contains only state-oriented norms and so none of the *a*-norms from the last section are in E. According to this vision of E, epistemic norms are completely indifferent or blind to the judgments we make, ranging only over our doxastic states. I certainly don't think this is a plausible account of E, but I also don't think adopting it saves E from friction with ZIP.

#### 4.5 SUMMING UP

So far I've articulated a series of related tensions between ZIP and different norms in CE. At the core of these is tension between the kinds of focused intellectual or theoretical norms that govern good inquiry and the sorts of very general and diffuse intellectual or theoretical norms that are central to our current conception of normative epistemology.

Among other things, these tensions make clear that we really cannot read the norms of inquiry off of our familiar contemporary epistemic norms. That it's permissible or obligatory to form or have some belief at a time according to our familiar epistemic norms, tells us very little about whether making the judgment that would result in having that belief at that time is permissible or obligatory from the perspective of the norms of inquiry. Epistemic permissibility as characterized by the norms in CE we've been focused on so far is not a guide to zetetic permissibility. And epistemic obligatoriness as characterized by the norms in CE we've been focused on so far is not a guide to zetetic obligatoriness.

I've claimed that at some point in fairly typical inquiries inquirers will need to avoid distraction. I have not claimed that once an inquiry into a question starts it must proceed free of any distractions, nor that inquirers cannot drop their inquiries or switch to inquiring into some other question or matter part-way through. I assume that typical subjects have all sorts of things they want to know about at any given time, and that a more in-depth account of the norms of inquiry will speak to how to manage these different epistemic goals (as well as how they should interact with our non-epistemic goals). The only claim I need for now is that sometimes inquirers will have to bear down on a question if they want to answer it.

When inquirers have to focus on answering some particular question(s), they will also (at least typically) have to ignore some other available information and not come to know other things that their evidence supports. This isn't because it's impossible in principle to calculate, or count, or listen carefully, or explicitly reason, while also taking in everything going on around you and drawing inferences from your body of total evidence. Perhaps some creature with recording and processing power well beyond ours could do this, but we cannot. (Think about how often you ask someone to stop talking so you can think.) And this means that the norms of inquiry and the norms of epistemology are regularly giving creatures like us conflicting and even inconsistent ad-

vice.

I am not the first to use claims about some limitations of ours in an argument questioning some of epistemology's normative commitments — demandingness complaints about strong epistemic requirement norms and Harmanian clutter avoidance arguments are two other examples that easily come to mind.<sup>26</sup> The arguments in this paper certainly have some points of contact with those arguments, but my arguments are not demandingness or clutter avoidance arguments. On the former, I've been mostly focused on the tension between zetetic norms and entirely undemanding epistemic norms. On the latter, while it's true that the norms of inquiry might insist on our ignoring certain kinds of "irrelevant" information for certain stretches of time, that zetetically irrelevant information need not be clutter for us (Harman also called this cluttering information "trivial"). That some information is irrelevant to my figuring out  $W^?$ , is perfectly compatible with my also wanting and needing that  $W^?$ -irrelevant information. That information might be important, valuable, meaningful, interesting, and generally zetetically relevant for me (even if not zetetically relevant to  $W^?$  specifically). Unfortunately, I simply cannot do everything at once, and so even knowledge I do and should want and need might have to fall by the wayside if I'm going to succeed in some other specific inquiry. This is true even if I'm the kind of creature for whom no information is trivial or cluttering.

## 5 GOING FORWARD

This leaves us with a cluster of related tensions between the epistemic (at least as we currently conceive of it) and the zetetic. That we have this sort of mismatch between the norms of inquiry and a number of different contemporary epistemic norms should lead us to suspect that the friction between the epistemic and the zetetic that I'm pointing to will need more than a superficial fix. This section confirms that suspicion.

My plan now is to think about some of the ways one might proceed in light of these epistemic-zetetic tensions. Part of the goal of this section is to make clear the costs of taking those various routes forward. I think in each case they are substantial. I will indicate which path strikes me as the least painful, but the

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<sup>26</sup>For Harman on clutter avoidance see Harman (1986), especially chapter 2, but also chapters 4 and 6. And see Friedman (2018) for discussion of Harman's arguments and just how much of an impact they stand to have on normative epistemology as we know it.

spirit of this section is largely ecumenical. Other people may well find other paths more palatable than I do. How one responds to these tensions will depend on one's answers to other big questions about norms and normativity, questions I won't be able to fully speak to here. By bringing out the dangers along each path forward, I hope to at least make clear that we'll have some difficult decisions to make.

I've explored two different sorts of norms in CE that sit uncomfortably with a demand to take the necessary means to our ends in inquiry — epistemic requirement norms (*O-norms*) and epistemic permissibility norms (*P-norms*). Some of the tensions I've explored can be avoided by jettisoning the O-norms. But clearly not all. If ZIP and the P-norms are part of the same normative domain — whether epistemic or zetetic (or both) — then that domain regularly issues inconsistent and incoherent advice to inquirers.

This makes two paths forward salient. The first involves making peace with this sort of normative incoherence, and the second involves keeping ZIP and the P-norms sequestered from one another. Neither of these paths seems good to me.

I don't have very much to say about the sanguine approach to the sort of normative incoherence at issue now. Perhaps someone with a different sort of meta-epistemic or meta-normative picture than mine has the stomach for this vision of normative epistemology and domains of normativity in general, but I do not. If ZIP and the P-norms are all in E, then E regularly gives inquirers contradictory advice. Is it epistemically permissible or not epistemically permissible to form those beliefs? Given that E is the set of true and genuine epistemic norms, the set of norms that characterizes (or just is) epistemic normativity in general, I find it hard to see how this incoherent (putative) version of E could be the real E. In general, can a set of norms that regularly issues inconsistent normative advice represent (or be) a genuine domain of normativity?<sup>27</sup>

I suspect that the second path forward — the path that involves separating the epistemic from the zetetic — will strike readers as a more tempting path. If ZIP were not an epistemic norm and the P-norms were not zetetic norms, then

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<sup>27</sup>I take it that genuine normative domains (e.g., morality) are typically thought more unified and coherent than any set of norms that has both ZIP and the P-norms as members. Just how incoherent can normative domains get? Even if we say that they can fall short of full normative coherence, so that they sometimes deliver contradictory normative verdicts (e.g., that some subject is both permitted to  $\phi$  at  $t$  and not permitted to  $\phi$  at  $t$ ), I take it that the fact that some set of norms, S, falls far short of being fully coherent is evidence that S doesn't express or represent a genuine normative domain.

some of the sting of inconsistency might be lessened.<sup>28,29</sup>

But this path also strikes me as too costly. I've already said a fair bit in defence of the claim that ZIP is an epistemic norm in section 2: I've defused some of the temptation to classify ZIP as non-epistemic, indicated some of the difficulties that come with trying to restrict epistemic norms to only evidentialist norms (and the like), and made a positive case for thinking that a norm as central to our epistemic pursuits as ZIP should count as epistemic. This defence still stands. Rather than revisiting it here, I want to add to it from a slightly different direction — by thinking more generally about the relationship between the epistemic and the zetetic.

The claim that the epistemic and the zetetic are just a single normative domain is equivalent to the claim that Z and E are identical: it's the claim that all epistemic norms are norms of inquiry, and all norms of inquiry are epistemic. Call this claim *the unity of the epistemic and the zetetic*. I want to make a case here for the unity of the epistemic and the zetetic on general theoretical grounds.

One way to defend the unity of the epistemic and the zetetic is to precisely delineate the borders of each domain and show them to be the same. I don't know how to do that. Figuring out exactly where the epistemic starts and ends has proved difficult.<sup>30</sup> And what counts as a zetetic norm is not a matter of discussion at all. My plan then is to aim for something more modest. I want to give some reason to think that in general, (a) all epistemic norms are norms of inquiry, and (b) all norms of inquiry are epistemic.

First, on (a). I take it that at first glance we are inclined to say that epistemic norms are norms of inquiry. Perhaps once we reflect on our current way of conceiving of epistemology we begin to think twice, but that first glance is telling: conceiving of epistemic normativity as tied to inquiry comes naturally. The alternative is to say that epistemic norms aren't norms that bind us qua inquirers, that they aren't the norms that tell us how we ought to go about properly acquir-

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<sup>28</sup>To be clear: Someone who wants to keep the epistemic largely consistent will want to deny that ZIP is epistemic. That won't save the zetetic from widespread incoherence though. For that, one will also need to deny that our familiar epistemic norms are norms of inquiry.

<sup>29</sup>It's worth pointing out that even the person who wants to insist that ZIP is a practical norm, in some sense that renders it non-epistemic, may have to adjust some of their picture of the norms of belief. If ZIP is a non-epistemic practical norm, then my arguments here show that we are regularly not permitted to do what epistemic norms say is perfectly permissible because non-epistemic practical norms don't let us. This would give non-epistemic practical norms a significant amount of normative influence over what we should/shouldn't believe and when.

<sup>30</sup>For some recent debate see Cohen (2016b) and responses.

ing and managing information. But isn't that exactly what epistemic norms are? This is not so much an argument for (a) as it is a challenge to those who want to put the relevant sort of daylight between the epistemic and the zetetic. How should we think of the normative force of epistemic considerations if they aren't closely tied to the ideals of inquiry?

Second, on (b). Some of what I've already said in defence of ZIP's status as epistemic can be generalized to all zetetic norms. We inquire in order to reach our epistemic ends — knowledge, better understanding, some sort of epistemic improvement. The norms of inquiry tell us how to properly engage in the activity so that we end up in the sort of epistemic state we want or need to end up in — they tell us how to come to have knowledge and understanding. Even without a precise statement of what makes a norm epistemic, it seems to me clear enough that there is some important sense in which the norms that guide and constrain us in our efforts to acquire knowledge and understanding are epistemic.

Moreover, once we reflect on that sort of general feature of the norms of inquiry, a more restrictive conception of the epistemic, e.g., one that limits epistemic norms to only those that tell us how to proportion our beliefs to the evidence, can begin to feel awkward and unprincipled. Contemporary epistemology is already engaged in the project of telling us how to end up with knowledge when we form our beliefs. When the norms of inquiry are epistemic, this project simply extends its purview backwards in time so that it doesn't only focus on the moment of belief formation, but the entire length of our knowledge-acquisition efforts. There's a kind of temporal parochialism to normative epistemology as it's currently done that is not obviously well motivated. What's so special about the moment of belief formation?

In fact, an exclusive focus on norms that tell us how to fit our beliefs to the evidence strikes me as doubly parochial. Those sorts of norms tell us what to do with new information when it happens to come our way. But epistemic subjects don't just want to know what to do when they happen to be hit in the eye with new information, they also want to know how to get and manage the information they want and need. Evidentialist norms are silent on much of this — they are silent on what new information should come in, whether that's the sort of information subjects need, how subjects should get the sort of information they're after, and more. Why should epistemology care about what to do with the information we happen to get but not about our getting the information we actually want and need?

I take it that the feeling that epistemology should be able to tell us how to come to know what we want to know — from start to finish — is not misplaced. Zetetic norms are part of that sort of project and so thinking of them as epistemic is not misplaced either. Zetetic norms are norms that guide and regulate our pursuit of knowledge and other epistemic goods.<sup>31</sup>

These considerations move us towards a somewhat expansive picture of the epistemic. Although it may well be more expansive than some might like, it's not more expansive than many accounts of the epistemic explicitly or implicitly defended in the literature. For instance, two hugely popular contemporary debates have been over the character of epistemic norms for assertion and action. Those sorts of epistemic norms are not narrowly focused on whether some beliefs are knowledge or fit the evidence: they are epistemic norms for saying and doing.<sup>32</sup> And while some epistemologists have wanted to insist that any norm for action — inquiry-related action and action in general — must be non-epistemic, others have argued that norms for action in and outside of inquiry can be epistemic.<sup>33</sup> Finally, one popular strand of virtue epistemology focuses discussion on epistemically or intellectually virtuous actions like hypothesis generation, considering objections, and searching for evidence.<sup>34</sup> The unity of the epistemic and the zetetic demands a somewhat expansive vision of the epistemic, but it's one that fits nicely with many existing treatments.

Even if one were not fully on board with the identity of Z and E, the arguments in the last few paragraphs hopefully make clear that those two sets of norms are quite closely connected. But if the path of normative sequestering is going to dissolve the sorts of tensions I've been drawing out in this paper, then the epistemic and the zetetic will have to be pulled fairly far apart. At this point, that sort of move looks unprincipled. Much worse though is that it leaves both normative epistemology and the norms of inquiry on unstable ground. How could epistemic normativity be entirely independent of the normative force of inquiry-theoretic considerations? And how could the normative force of those

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<sup>31</sup>My sense is that this more expansive way of thinking of the epistemic/epistemology is consonant with much of the history of philosophy. I take it that a number of philosophers through the ages — from Aristotle to Bacon to Peirce — were thinking about epistemology as (also) concerned with more obviously inquiry-theoretic questions. Hookway (2006) is a contemporary example of this sort of inquiry-influenced expanded vision for epistemology.

<sup>32</sup>See Benton (2014) for a nice overview of these two (vast) debates.

<sup>33</sup>In the no-epistemic-norms-for-action camp see (e.g.) Kelly (2003), Cohen (2016b), McGrath (2016), and Simion (2018). And in the opposing camp see (e.g.) Kornblith (1983), Hall and Johnson (1998), Booth (2006, 2009), Field (2009), and Singer and Aronowitz (forthcoming).

<sup>34</sup>For some discussion see, e.g., Battaly (2008).

inquiry-theoretic norms be entirely detached from the normative force of epistemic norms — the norms that already tell us how to come to know? I don't think this sort of sequestering leaves us with pictures of either epistemic normativity or zetetic normativity that are sustainable.

So, if we do want to keep the epistemic and the zetetic closely connected and we don't want to tolerate the sort of normative incoherence I've described, then what options do we have left? It looks as though we'll have to reject ZIP or reject the P-norms (or both).

Can we reject ZIP? I assume that "rejecting" ZIP involves insisting that it is not a genuine norm of inquiry. Given that inquirers are subjects pursuing epistemic ends, I don't see how to deny that a norm like ZIP is a central zetetic norm. That said, ZIP is my specific articulation of an inquiry-theoretic instrumental principle, and so perhaps there's some wiggle room there?

One potentially controversial decision I made early on was to treat ZIP as a narrow-scope norm rather than a wide-scope norm. Can one insist that the 'ought' in ZIP takes wider scope and thereby relieve some of the tension I've been highlighting here? If we were to think of ZIP as a wide-scope norm, we could think of it as issuing in a disjunctive demand: either take the necessary means to figuring out what you want or need to figure out or don't want or need to figure it out. When we read ZIP this way, it's not in tension in quite the same sorts of ways with our familiar epistemic norms, since it doesn't say straightforwardly that you should take the necessary means to figuring things out. That said, in the end I don't think that there is much relief along this path.

If ZIP were a wide-scope norm, then there would be cases in which, according to the P-norms, making some judgment  $j$  was permissible, but according to ZIP, it was impermissible to make  $j$  while wanting to figure out the answers to some questions. I take it that this is still a bad or at least strange result for the relationship between the epistemic and the zetetic, even if it's not quite the same conflict we get with a narrow-scope ZIP. In these cases, from the perspective of a wide-scope ZIP, it is not permissible to both want to figure out  $Q^?$  and make some other (traditionally) epistemically impeccable judgments. But from the perspective of the P-norms, this combination looks perfectly fine.

Moreover, what should the wide-scoper say about cases in which subjects have excellent reason to inquire or genuinely need to figure something out? Plausibly, in those sorts of cases, the requirement in a wide-scope ZIP "detaches" — these subjects ought (full stop) to take the necessary means to their epistemic ends. And that brings us back to a more direct sort of tension. While

there are many interesting questions about the shape a zetetic instrumental principle should take, I don't think insisting that the principle's 'ought' operator scopes over the whole conditional rather than just that conditional's consequent will have a significant impact on the conclusions I've drawn in this paper.

"Subjectivizing" ZIP won't help either. If ZIP were modified to say that inquirers should take what they (e.g.) think are necessary means to their epistemic ends, we'd have the same issues. A subjectivized ZIP would still leave the making of some traditionally epistemically impeccable judgments impermissible, although exactly which might be different now. In this case, inquirers' thoughts about means and ends might play a more significant role in determining what they are required to do and prohibited from doing over the course of their inquiries.

I don't see much other wiggle room with respect to ZIP. And given this, I don't see how to proceed down a path that denies ZIP's place as a key norm of inquiry. So, we are left with the option of sending off the P-norms along with their O-norm counterparts, i.e., denying that the P-norms are genuine epistemic norms. And this, in the end, is what I think we should do, although as we'll see, this path forward is fairly bumpy as well.

To be clear, rejecting the P-norms means denying that we are always and everywhere epistemically permitted to judge  $p$  when the evidence clearly supports  $p$ , and that we are always and everywhere epistemically permitted to come to know. Denying these things doesn't mean saying that we're never epistemically permitted to believe in accordance with our evidence, or never epistemically permitted to come to know. It does mean denying that there are blanket epistemic permissions to follow our evidence and blanket epistemic permissions to come to know. This leaves it open that there are cases in which believing in accordance with the evidence and/or coming to know are not epistemically permissible.

Those sorts of blanket permissions are central to normative epistemology as we know it though, and so rejecting them should force a fairly significant rethink of our current understanding of epistemic normativity. If we insist that the P-norms are not in E, then we will have to say that there may well be cases in which following our excellent evidence and coming to know will have been a mistake — a thoroughly epistemic mistake. It's hard to know quite how to think about epistemically problematic knowledge or knowledge acquisition on our current understanding of normative epistemology.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>This might be a bit too strong. Although I don't know of any epistemologists who want to

Moreover, there are some pressing questions on this path about some of our other beloved epistemic-normative modalities, ones that I have not much discussed in this paper. For instance, do we want to maintain that there are (blanket) epistemic constraints against, say, judging  $p$  when one's evidence for  $p$  is not excellent? If so, we'll need to be careful: in order to avoid inconsistency, the absence of this sort of epistemic constraint at a time cannot entail an epistemic permission. This means that we could easily be left with cases in which there is no epistemic constraint against coming to know  $p$  at  $t$ , but in which it's also not epistemically permissible to come to know  $p$  at  $t$ . This is obviously not an entirely comfortable set of normative commitments.<sup>36</sup>

Even more pressing seems to me to be what to say about epistemic justification. The following are both fairly plausible justification-theoretic principles:

**J-to-P** If S judges  $p$  at  $t$ , and the resulting  $p$ -belief is epistemically justified at  $t$ , then judging  $p$  at  $t$  was epistemically permissible for S.<sup>37</sup>

**K-to-J** If S knows  $p$  at  $t$ , then S's  $p$ -belief is epistemically justified at  $t$ .

But it's hard to see how to maintain both of these without the P-norms. With the P-norms gone there can be cases in which S's coming to know some proposition is not epistemically permissible. On the assumption that ZIP is also epistemic, we already know what some of those possible cases look like, viz., cases in which ZIP demands certain kinds of zetetic focus. Take a case like that. Say, for instance, that instead of calculating your portion of the dinner bill, you eavesdrop on the table next to you and hear that the person at the next table had twenty-eight people over for Thanksgiving. You come to know this, but this is a case in which coming to believe and know it were not permissible. Is your new belief that the neighbouring diners had twenty-eight people over for Thanksgiving epistemically justified? Given K-to-J it is. And then given

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say that there are cases in which it is not epistemically permissible to come to know  $p$ , some discussions might open up the possibility. One nice example of this comes in the account of "unreasonable knowledge" in Lasonen-Aarnio (2010).

<sup>36</sup>If there are cases in which there is no epistemic constraint against judging  $p$  but in which it is also not epistemically permissible to judge  $p$ , then we should say that normative epistemology is "gappy". See von Wright (1991) for some discussion of these sorts of normative gaps.

<sup>37</sup>There is a slightly tricky temporal issue that I am glossing over here. Judging is a process that takes place over an (often very brief) interval of time. Given this, if one starts judging at  $t$ , one ends up in the resulting belief state at a time slightly later than  $t$ . For our purposes, it's fine to just think of  $t$  in J-to-P as the end of the  $p$ -judging interval and the first moment at which S has the resulting  $p$ -belief.

J-to-P we should also say that your judging that they had twenty-eight Thanksgiving guests was an epistemically permissible judgment for you to make at the time. But it wasn't. Given all this, it looks as though at least one of K-to-J or J-to-P will have to be rejected along with the P-norms. And I suspect we'll have some similar difficulties with other familiar epistemic-normative modalities like epistemic warrant and epistemic reasons. In the end then, rejecting the P-norms doesn't make for smooth sailing either. It strikes me as the best of the options so far, though.

Here is a way to think of that space of options. First, are the epistemic and the zetetic closely connected? If yes, then can widespread normative inconsistency be tolerated? If no, then one should either say that ZIP is not a genuine norm of inquiry or that the P-norms (and the O-norms) are not genuine epistemic norms (or both). Of course, one might feel the best landing spot is one where we say "no" to (at least) one of those first two questions, i.e., where we tolerate normative incoherence or pull apart the epistemic and the zetetic. As I've said, my main goal in this section has been to lay out the terrain and show the difficulties in navigating it. I assume different readers will have different views about the size and scope of the costs and benefits along the different paths given their other normative and meta-normative commitments.

My own leanings are towards epistemic revision, i.e., the path on which we rethink even the P-norms. While there are clearly details to be worked out on this path, and some difficult decisions to be made, the revisions it forces are theoretically well motivated and help to ground epistemic normativity in a satisfying way. One way to think of at least part of what's been revealed in this paper is that the norms in CE we've been investigating — O- and P- alike — really aren't zetetic norms. That is, they aren't the sorts of norms that a rational inquirer will conform to. But what grounds these norms then? Why should epistemic subjects conform to them at all? If we let go of any putative epistemic norms that can't be zetetically grounded, then while we'll certainly have to do some revising, the picture of epistemic normativity we'll be left with will be both tidy and theoretically robust.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>To be clear, this "zetetically grounded" vision for E is one according to which ZIP is in E and the P-norms are not. Of course, claiming that the P-norms are not in E is compatible with also claiming that ZIP is not in E. But in this discussion, the motivation for rejecting the P-norms is coming largely from the thought that ZIP is a central norm of inquiry as well as an epistemic norm. A zetetically grounded E will presumably include permissions to believe what the evidence supports and permissions to come to know in cases in which doing that serves one's inquiries in the right sorts of ways. Of course, this barely makes the contours of this picture of epistemic normativity clear, and unfortunately getting even there will have to wait.

## 6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The thought that the project we're engaged in when theorizing about normative epistemology is the project of formulating or articulating a picture of rational inquiry is *prima facie* plausible. Isn't theoretical rationality the rationality one displays in inquiring well? Part of the upshot of this paper is that the interaction between the epistemic as we currently conceive of it and the zetetic is far from harmonious. While there is good reason to think that the epistemic and the zetetic are intimately connected, thinking more about the norms of inquiry brings out some of the ways in which our familiar epistemic norms are also in tension with some central zetetic norms. That some judgment or belief is, by our current measures, in impeccable epistemic standing is not a good guide to whether it's an acceptable judgment to make in inquiry.

I've explored different ways we might try dealing with this normative discord and brought out some significant costs each faces. There is obviously much more to say about all of this. To my mind, a few things are already clear though: the epistemic and the zetetic are very closely connected and inquiry is a goal-directed activity. I think following just those thoughts through calls for a revision to our standard epistemic norms, and perhaps even a significant one. The only alternative seems to me to involve insisting on a fairly radical separation of epistemology and a theory of inquiry. But if epistemic norms are not norms of inquiry, then what are they, and why should we conform to them?<sup>39</sup>

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