THE INTERROGATIVE STRUCTURE OF INQUIRY

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This paper is about the action of inquiry — about what we do as we inquire. After all, inquiring is not just a state of mind or process of thought, it's a thing we do in the fullest sense of 'do'. If the detective wants to crack the case, if I want to find my keys, if we're going to figure out whether there is intelligent extraterrestrial life, we're going to have to act. Inquiries like these (and many others we perform) require complex combinations of mental and bodily action. What sorts of things do we do over the course of an inquiry? The inquiries named a few sentences ago seem to involve quite different actions, unfolding in quite different settings, using different tools and techniques. My plan here is to try to offer the start of a unified picture of the action of inquiry.

Inquiry starts with attitudes towards questions — curiosity, wondering, and the like. One of the primary things we do as we inquire, I'll argue, is best conceived of as asking those questions. All inquirers aim to ask questions, and successful inquirers get their answers in response to asking questions. For this to be plausible though, we'll need a notion of question asking that goes beyond mere illocutionary asking. I'll begin to develop this account here. To get there, I'll think more about the structure of inquiry, and in particular, its different parts or stages. That will bring out a distinction between the core of the activity and its more peripheral bits. At that core is the asking of a question.

1 THE STRUCTURE OF INQUIRY: CORE AND PERIPHERY

I want to start by focusing on a single run-of-the-mill inquiry. Much of what I say here is meant to be easily generalizable.

> **Library.** I'm curious about whether a book I need for work is in the library. My internet is down, so I decide to walk over to the library and look for myself. Since it's freezing out, I put on my winter clothes, put my library card in my bag, and go to the library. Once I'm there, I check the catalogue for the usual location of the book and head up to the stacks. I find the right aisle, and I go slowly through the numbers looking for my book. I find it.

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This is a story about my inquiry into B (Is the book in the library?). The actions described in this story are done in the service of my inquiry into B; I do them as part of my effort to figure out B. In this sense, we can think of these actions as part of my inquiry into B. I don't mean to use 'part' here in a metaphysically loaded sense. Rather, it's meant to simply distinguish actions that are done in the service of this particular zetetic task from those that are not. If the dentist calls to reschedule my appointment while I'm getting dressed to go the library, and I spend a few minutes rescheduling, those actions are not part of my inquiry into B in the sense at issue.

But even if all the actions described in **Library** are part of my inquiry into B in this broad sense, I think **Library** makes a kind of hierarchy of zetetic parts visible. While putting on my hat, taking my library card, and walking to the library may well be parts of my inquiry into B in a broad sense, they seem to play critically different roles in that inquiry as compared to what happens once I get to the library and search for the book. My searching at the library feels more *thoroughly inquisitive* as well as more *central* to that inquiry than do my putting on my hat, tying my shoes, and walking to the library. I'll say more about each of these.

THE 'BY'-TEST AND METHODS OF INQUIRY

To bring out the distinction between the parts of my inquiry I'm trying to get at, I want to introduce what I'll call the *'by'-test*. For each thing I do in **Library**, we can ask whether I inquire into B *by* doing that thing. Do I inquire into B by putting on my gloves? Do I investigate B by putting my library card in my bag? To my ear, no. I don't investigate whether my book is in the library by putting on my gloves. On the other hand: do I inquire into/investigate B by searching the library shelves for my book? Yes, I do. I think this marks an important distinction between these various parts of my inquiry.[1]

There has been much discussion in the philosophy of action about the "by' locution'. The sorts of 'by'-sentences that interest us here are ones that

[1] I am using a range of zetetic vocabulary interchangeably here: inquiring, investigating, looking into, and more. These descriptions of the activity of inquiring are neutral with respect to whether the relevant inquirers arrive at their answers (and indeed, to what extent they have any acquisitive aims at all). When an inquiry is successful in this telic sense, we can apply the 'by'-test to a range of (success-entailing) zetetic terms as well, e.g. Did I figure out/work out whether my book was in the library by putting on my gloves? (No.) Did I figure out/work out whether my book was in the library by searching the shelves? (Yes.) Additionally, the test can be done on the sort of vocabulary that encodes acquisitive attempts (whether or not they are successful), e.g. 'try to figure out' or 'try to work out'. I'm sticking with the most neutral language here, but feel free to substitute my terms for these others.

combine a sentence (⌜S ψ-ed⌝) with a 'by'-gerund (⌜by φ-ing⌝), e.g. Don alerted the prowler by turning on the light, Liz poisoned the inhabitants by replenishing the water supply, and so on. Although the sort of 'by'-test I have begun to describe has not been discussed, the existing literature can help us to understand what my by-test is picking up on. Here is Schnieder (2008) on these kinds of 'by'-sentences,

> [I]n order to understand the import of 'by'-statements, one should focus on the sort of question that they can be used to answer. Any correct 'by'-sentence must provide an answer to a putative question of the form 'How does he/she/it do it?' (663)

The idea here is that the relevant sorts of 'by'-sentences offer how-explanations — they provide explanations of how some ends were achieved. When we report that Don alerted the prowler by turning on the light, we give an explanation of how Don alerted the prowler; in saying that Liz poisoned the inhabitants by replenishing the water supply, we are explaining how Liz managed to poison the inhabitants. Since our concern now is acts of inquiry, we can stay focused on sentences that describe those. Following Schnieder then, we can say that a sentence like ⌜S investigated Q by φ-ing⌝ should provide an answer to a corresponding how-question, viz. How did S investigate Q? These answers explain how S investigated Q.

How-questions can be answered in a few different ways. If I ask you how S investigated Q, you can answer, 'carefully' or 'in secret'. These sorts of answers speak to the 'manner' in which S inquired. By contrast, answers that state the 'method' by which S inquired are the sorts of 'by'-statements that we're interested in here.[2] When it's true that S inquired into Q by φ-ing, we can say that φ-ing was the (or at least a) *method* by which S inquired into Q. These methods are the ways in which S investigated Q.

I want to bring out a few points now. On the assumption that the actions described in **Library** are part of my inquiry into B, we can see that not all of the things I do as part of my inquiry are going to count as my methods of inquiry according to the 'by'-test. Checking over the shelves in the library is a way of inquiring into whether the book is in the library, but putting on my winter hat, packing my library card, tying my boots, and so on are not. Those may be parts of my inquiry into B, but they aren't themselves ways of inquiring into B. This is one important sense in which my searching the library is more *thoroughly zetetic* as compared to my putting on my hat and gloves.

[2]For more on the manner-method distinction (and other related distinctions) with respect to how-questions, see Jaworski (2009) and Sæbø (2016).

As I said, I also think that my searching the library shelves is *more central* to my inquiry into B than the other actions I perform in **Library**. I think there are two related ways in which this is true. First, while I've said that the method of inquiry in **Library** is my search, the 'by'-test in fact gives us a number of different and overlapping methods of inquiry into B. If true answers to the relevant sort of zetetic how-questions — How did I investigate B? How did I inquire into B? How did I look into B? — are all my methods of inquiry into B, then there are many such methods. These sorts of how-questions can have many different true answers at different levels of detail. If I'm asked, 'How did you investigate whether the book was in the library?', there are a number of true answers I can give. I can list all the parts of my inquiry in **Library** from first to last; I can just say: by checking the library or by checking the stacks; I can say: by heading over to the library and seeing if it was on the shelves; and so on. Each true answer is different in detail or fineness of grain.

If every true answer to a zetetic how-question gives us a method of inquiry, then each of these describes the method used at a different level of detail. But notice: every true answer to this question will have to make reference to — either explicitly or implicitly — what I do once I get to the library, viz. my searching the shelves for my book. Here is another way to say this: every true answer to the relevant zetetic how-question denotes a set of actions, and every such set includes my shelf search. The other actions in **Library** can appear in some method sets, but not others. So, my shelf search is the action at the intersection of all of my methods of inquiry. In this sense, the shelf search is my *core method* of inquiry into B.

This gives us a sense in which the part of my inquiry that's my searching the library shelves is more central than the other parts of my inquiry. But there's another related sort of centrality worth bringing out. Take the same story described in **Library** but modify the end so that once I get to the library, I just sit in the lobby and relax. I don't go up to the stacks to look for the book. Maybe I get distracted or just decide I'm not that interested anymore; I had intended to search the shelves, but didn't in the end. Did I investigate B in this case? I think the answer here is somewhat subtle. On the one hand, I made a (good, workable) plan to figure something out and, in some sense, started my investigation — I took substantial steps to find out what I wanted to find out. On the other hand though, this inquiry into B seems not just unfinished but in some sense hollow. In this version it's not just that I don't figure out B, but my inquiry seems defective in some more fundamental way as well. In a way, I failed to get to the main event; I put

up all the scaffolding to do the work, but then didn't do it.

In this way, I think inquiry is like other complex, temporally extended activities. Many such activities have a diversity of parts, with some of those parts being more central to the activity than others. For instance, say you want to repaint your living room. It seems right to think of some of your preparation and planning as part of this activity, e.g. readying the paint, putting up the tape and the tarp, planning how you'll proceed. But if you did all that and then failed to actually put any paint on the walls, something will have gone wrong; the activity will have been defective or empty in a crucial way.

In this sense, the relevant planning and preparation work is like scaffolding for the core of the activity, and without that core, the activity is hollow. Say your day proceeds as follows: you move the furniture out of the living room, put down some tarp, get the paints from the garage, put up that blue tape, etc., and then finally paint the living room. Say this last part — the putting paint on the wall part — takes a couple of hours, but the whole activity, with the preparation, takes all day. If I ask you how your day went, you can truly say, 'Long day! I spend all day painting the living room'. In this sense, the preparatory steps are part of the activity of painting the living room. But, if instead the prep work takes longer than you anticipated and you get to the end of the day without having put any paint on the wall, it would be somewhat disingenuous to respond to my query with, 'Long day! I spend all day painting the living room'. Perhaps this is true in a very thin sense, but just that.

Looking at **Library**, we can see that that inquiry has this same sort of core-periphery structure. The core of the activity — my searching the shelves — is one of the many things I do during that inquiry, but it seems to have a special status. My inquiry in **Library** minus that core activity might still count as an inquiry into B in some thin sense, but it's a hollow inquiry.

2 ASKING THE WORLD

My searching the library shelves has a particular pride of place in **Library**. How can we better characterize this stage of my inquiry into B? To help us along, let's imagine a slightly different case.

In this case — call it **Library′** — I do the same things described in **Library**, but rather than searching the shelves for my book, once I get to the library, I head to the front desk and ask the librarian B. Now we can ask the following about **Library′**: How did I investigate B? How did I look into B? Again, I did not inquire into B by putting on my gloves, but I did

inquire into B — this time — by asking the librarian B. And again, there are a number of other true answers to the relevant how-question — true 'by'-answers that describe the method of inquiry, some more detailed, some less. But again, there is a core action that all of these 'by'-answers describe. In this case that core action is my asking the librarian B. So in this case, I investigated B/looked into/inquired into B by asking B (of the librarian).

In **Library′**, my asking the librarian is playing the analogous central role that my searching the shelves is playing in **Library**. What I want to suggest now is that these two actions — my searching the shelves for the book and my asking the librarian — are actions of a single type. In particular, both are ways of asking B. And even more generally: at the core of all methods of inquiry is the asking of questions. How does S investigate Q? Always, at least in part, by asking Q (or related questions). I'll say more about this very general claim later; for now, back to the library.

Library and **Library′** largely diverge once I get to the library. Let's label my action of searching the shelves β and my action of asking the librarian B, β′. Part of what I am claiming now is that both β and β′ are question askings (and in particular the asking of B).

Two questions now: (i) Why think β and β′ are actions of a single type? And (ii) Why think that type is a question asking? First on (i). β and β′ play largely the same functional role in the two inquiries. Both are motivated and guided by my curiosity about B, both are intentionally designed and performed to resolve that curiosity, and both count as expressions or enactments of that curiosity. Further, both β and β′ are the parts of my inquiry at which I make contact with a source of information and act so that the source presents a particular piece of information to me (an answer to B). Both β and β′, in this sense, are designed to bring the answer to B to my attention. Of course, each is an interaction with a different source of information, and so my strategy for bringing the answer to my attention is different in each case: In β′, I utter some sentences and direct them at a particular person with the intention of having that other person understand and respond with the answer. In β, I move to a particular location and perform a visual search in order to bring the answer to my attention. In both cases I achieve the intended result: the presentation of the answer to B.

In addition (and now on both (i) and (ii)), the sort of language we use to describe β is distinctively interrogative. What do I do once I'm up in the stacks? There are a number of ways we might describe my activities there. I search for my book and inspect the shelves; I modulate my focus and attention in predictable ways given my target. But there are other levels of description that bring out just how interrogative my activity is. When

I head up to the stacks, I try to 'see if' or 'see whether' my book is there; 'determine whether' or 'discern if' my book is on the shelf; and so on. These ways of describing β align well with the idea that part of what I'm doing is asking a question.

We can see these sorts of interrogative action descriptions in all sorts of inquiries. I can try to see whether my book is on the shelf. And I can also try to see what kind of tree is in my yard, see who has arrived at the party so far, see how many fish are left in the pond, and so on. Although 'see if' and 'see wh' locutions use the language of vision, we don't use them just to describe visual searches or processes that are aimed at visual uncovering. I can call the office to see if my workmate is in yet, or reach my hand in the narrow space next to the driver's seat to see whether my phone fell down there.[3]

Finally (and now more focused on (ii)), β is a search. I've described it as my searching for the book, but it can also be understood as a more question-focused operation, e.g. I'm searching for an answer to B. Question-focused searches are sometimes called 'queries'. And of course my action in β′ is also naturally described as a query, just of a slightly different kind. These are both question-guided search operations directed at particular sources of information. In one case, I perform the query on the world, and in the other, it's directed at another person. I'm calling these both 'askings' or 'question askings', but 'queries' is a fine label as well.

The asking of a question is traditionally thought of as a speech act and thinking of β as an asking requires some stretching of our central notion. But it is worth making clear that it is part of our ordinary conception of question asking that asking needn't be a communicative speech act. First, ordinary question asking is not always a speech act, strictly so-called. For instance, we can ask questions with movements and gestures. If we go to search the library for my book together, and you find a book that you think is the right one, you can ask me, 'This one?' just by pointing at the book.[4] And second, it's not always communicative: we ask ourselves questions, and these are presumably not acts of communicating with ourselves. And of course we query databases of information and ask Google and ChatGPT for answers.

Moreover, illocutionary asking is itself not a monolith. My proposal here is that there are kinds of asking that are not at all speech acts, but it is

[3]The idea that an activity like visual search is closely tied to questioning should feel natural. And the connection has been drawn out in one particular direction in some detail by Philipp Koralus. Over a series of papers — especially Koralus (2014a,b) — Koralus has argued that attentional focus is best understood in relation to the questions we have an interest in answering in perception. Koralus calls this the 'erotetic theory of attention'.

[4]See De Leon (2023) for more on gestural communication.

worth bringing out just how varied our practices of illocutionary asking are.

In what is treated as the canonical case of illocutionary asking, the speech act of asking a question is a communicative act performed by a speaker S directed at a hearer H. In this typical case, S doesn't know Q, but wants to know Q and thinks that H does know Q. And so S utters an interrogative sentence that expresses Q so that H can hear and understand it and understand that S wants H to do a particular kind of speech act in response (make an assertion that expresses the true answer to the question) thereby enabling S to resolve their ignorance about Q. But nearly every property of this canonical case is unnecessary. A simple case of question asking that succeeds in throwing many of these into doubt at once are 'quiz questions'. If I'm helping you study for a test, I can quiz you. In doing so, I ask you a series of questions. I might already know the answers to these questions, but if not, there is no reason to think I want to know them, and I don't assume that you know them.

Further, we often use declarative sentences to ask questions, especially polar questions ('You ate the whole thing?').[5] And even further, sometimes we ask questions not really wanting the presentation of an answer at all from the hearer, e.g. when we ask rhetorical questions ('Is the Pope a Catholic?'), tell jokes ('Why did the chicken cross the road?'), or announce some news ('You know who I saw today?').[6] Illocutionary asking is a fairly diverse phenomenon. Intuitively, these all count as askings in some sense, but as far as I can tell, there is no positive theory of question asking that explains the range. A common tack is to theorize the properties of the canonical askings and then theorize the rest in terms of the absence of one or more of those properties.[7]

All of this is to say that while I am proposing something of an expansion of our notion of question asking, even the central sort of asking, illocutionary asking, the kind we are all familiar with, is a quite diverse set of practices with diverse aims and motivations. So I am proposing we stretch the notion of question asking somewhat further, but I hope it's clear that a positive theory that was able to account for the entirety of this nuanced illocutionary practice would have to break some traditional borders already. From some angles, my library search looks more like a canonical question asking than

[5] Stivers (2010) finds that in spontaneous (American English) conversation, declarative utterances are the dominant polar question type. And Dryer (2013) provides data on polar questions across 842 languages, finding 138 of those do not use any form of interrogative morphosyntax to index polar questions. For more discussion, see Levinson (2012) and Borge (2013).

[6] For some interesting discussion about how to think about the asking of rhetorical questions, see Caponigro and Sprouse (2007) and Biezma and Rawlins (2017).

[7] For some discussion, see Dayal (2016) and Farkas (2022).

rhetorical question asking does.

The suggestion that we can ask questions of sources other than other agents, and in particular of 'the world', is not new. Over a series of papers and books, Jaakko Hintikka claimed that all scientific inquiry was a matter of 'putting questions to nature'.[8] Hintikka didn't say exactly what he thought 'asking nature' amounted to, but that wasn't his project. So while my claim here is certainly in a Hintikkan spirit, I am saying both more and less than Hintikka. More, in that I think that there is a range of actions we perform, not just illocutionary, that deserve to be called question askings. But also less, in that I don't think all inquiry or even all scientific inquiry is a matter of asking just nature/the world. There are other sources we put questions to as well (like other scientists), and other things we have to do over the course of an inquiry, as we've just seen.

Hintikkan worldly asking is an interaction between an agent and a source of answers. Unlike the typical case of illocutionary asking, that source of answers is not another agent. I think there are familiar sorts of single-agent askings, including ones involving a non-agential 'responder'. When we ask ourselves questions, although we ask an agent a question, we don't ask some other agent. And when we query databases or ask search engines or AIs questions, these questions are not being put to an agent at all.

But even in the canonical type of illocutionary asking, there is an important sense in which the other-directed communicative project is secondary to a self-directed knowledge-acquisition project. In the canonical case, I interact with another agent. But in that sort of case the reason I'm interacting with this agent is that I want a piece of information that I take them to have. I am ignorant about Q and I direct my query at someone I take to know Q in order to communicate my desire that they present the answer to me so that I can come to know it.

But this means that the central, canonical case of question asking is always two tasks in one, and one of those tasks is done in the service of the other. While it may be true that this sort of canonical illocutionary asker is interacting with another agent, this other-directed project is only a means to their primary, self-directed project of having some information presented to them.[9]

[8] See, e.g. Hintikka (1999). And Hintikka claims to be taking inspiration from Kant and Bacon (see Hintikka (2007), p.19). It's been claimed that Bacon talked about experimentation as 'putting nature on the rack' for interrogation, although there is some debate about whether Bacon actually used the rack metaphor or whether Leibniz did in discussing Bacon (see Pesic (1997, 1999) for some discussion). Either way, both Kant and Bacon seem committed to the interrogation part, if not the torture part.

[9] Searle (in, e.g. Searle (1975, 1976)) claimed that question askings were a kind of directive: a sort of illocutionary act in which a speaker requests (demands, suggests) that

β and β′ are both projects of this latter sort: they are actions done, in part, in order to get back the presentation of the answer to B from some source of answers. In β′ that source is another person (the librarian), and in β it's the world. In both cases my action is a kind of informational lasso meant to pull a specific piece of information to me.

3 QUESTION ASKING, IN GENERAL

We — as philosophers, and also just as people who communicate with other people — have a pretty good idea of what illocutionary asking is. As we've seen, perhaps we don't have a complete theory with necessary and sufficient conditions, but we have a good, if imperfect, sense. But, my claim in this paper has been that the act of asking a question is an act more general than the illocutionary one; communicative asking is just one kind of question asking. What more can we say about question asking, in general? I'm not going to be able to give a complete account, but hopefully some of the following remarks will help.

We can start here. When a subject S asks a source of information σ a question Q, and σ returns the answer to Q, we can think of S's action as an act of extraction or elicitation — S extracts or elicits a particular piece of information (the answer to Q) from σ by asking them Q. To say that information p is 'extracted' by S from σ, is to say something about the route by which p gets to S. Extraction — whether it's petroleum, DNA, teeth, or promises — is a kind of pulling. When we extract petroleum, we pull it out from underground; it doesn't just fall out or emerge some other way. The key here is that in extracting or eliciting something, we (help) make the thing come to us. In this context, what's being extracted or elicited is information. I've described this sort of act of informational extraction (or attempted informational extraction) as a search or query, and I think this is the right way to think about it. An asking of Q is a kind of search — a search for an answer to Q.

One way to get a better grip on the more general notion of question asking at issue now is by doing some classificatory work. So far I've been focused on two main types of question asking: illocutionary asking and worldly asking (though a third has also been mentioned — more on this in a moment). Notice that these two types are each characterized along a different axis.

a hearer do something, viz. perform a speech act. This sort of account of question asking centrally involves an agential responder. But of course, the directive being issued is not to perform any old speech act in any old setting — it's to assert an answer to the question asked and to direct that speech act right back to the asker. So while I wouldn't want to endorse the Searlean approach to question asking, even in this agent-centric account, there is a more fundamental self-centred project to which the other agent is a mere means.

'Illocutionary' describes the procedure by which a question is asked. Doing an interrogative speech act with content Q is a way of asking Q. But 'worldly' picks out the target of a query. In this case the world is the source of information that the asker puts their question to. Each of these kinds of asking might also be picked out along the other axis. Speech act asking also has a (typical) target: another person (/agent). So we can think of illocutionary asking as a kind of interpersonal asking.

And worldly asking has a canonical procedure: we ask the world largely via perceptual search. I will look for, listen for, feel for (and so on) answers to my questions, e.g. What colour was the car that just passed by? Is it hot outside? Are the clothes on the rack still wet? Who is in the living room? What's that in the corner of the cupboard? Which of these bags is heavier? And so on. These two axes can help us get a better picture of the various kinds of askings and so a fuller picture of question asking in general. Every question is asked of some target and by way of some procedure.

Staying focused on the targets of our question askings, I have also mentioned another: ourselves. The activity of putting questions to ourselves is not just commonplace but productive and fruitful. Self-asking can take different forms. For instance, we can ask introspective questions (Am I in the mood for pasta?), and straightforward memory questions (What's that actor's name?). But self-asking can also involve reasoning, sometimes complex. A lot of our 'armchair' inquiries involve self-asking in this way.[10] There are many questions whose answers I don't already know, but about which I do have plenty of relevant information, e.g. Should I sell my car now? Why is the cat so sleepy today? What evidence does the BIV have? Is this enough cash to buy all of these candies? And so on. While self-asking involves putting questions to an agent, the procedures for doing this are varied, and, crucially, quite different from those we use in standard cases of illocutionary asking.

One preliminary way of carving up the interrogative terrain then is target-wise: we can put questions to other agents (interpersonal), to ourselves (intrapersonal), and then to other, non-agential targets, like the world (extrapersonal). In each case, we use some querying procedure, suited to that type of target, to elicit (question-relevant) information. There is obviously much more to say here but hopefully this is a somewhat illuminating start.

[10] See Rosa (2024) for a fairly extensive discussion of armchair inquiry and how it compares to empirical inquiry.

4 ASKING AND INQUIRING

In Section 2 I argued that at the core of my library inquiries was the asking of a question. We also saw that question asking and inquiring are not identical — in the course of my library inquiries, I do more than just ask my question. The other things I do are, looked at in one way, the necessary preparatory steps: I do those actions to put myself in the position to ask my question (of some source). From this perspective my library inquiry involves at least two types of zetetic 'moves': those done in order to put myself in a position to ask a question, and the asking of a question.

This thought can be generalized. Over the course of a typical inquiry we can do a number of things: try to come up with new questions, reason about our evidence, strategize, and more. But part of what I mean to be bringing out here is that much of what we do is in the service of asking questions. Inquirers have questions in mind and work to put those questions to sources of information.[11]

Conceiving of inquiry as focused question asking might seem to leave out the crucial bit: question answering. And of course this is typically exactly why we are asking questions in inquiry. But I think keeping the focus on asking rather than answering is preferable. We tend to theorize inquiry through a highly 'acquisitive' frame. Some of the most commonly made claims about the activity of inquiring are claims about its 'constitutive aim', where this aim is always the acquisition of some epistemic good like knowledge, true belief, or understanding (or more than one of these). But the picture of inquiry as a thoroughly acquisitive process has been challenged — most forcefully in Dover (2024). This challenge seems to me both important and especially pressing for someone who thinks inquiry has a constitutive acquisitive aim. Intuitively, it certainly seems as though we can have inquirers interested in a more exploratory and less acquisition-focused practice. It's hard to see how this isn't ruled out on a picture in which (say) knowledge is the constitutive aim of inquiry.

But when central zetetic act — indeed inquiry's central 'aim' in some sense — is question asking, we have a picture of the structure of inquiry that holds no matter how acquisitive an inquirer's aims are. Here is one way to put this. Not all inquirers have clear acquisitive ambitions, but they all have interrogative ambitions. While inquirers often or even typically aim to come to know or get some true beliefs, all inquirers aim to ask some

[11] My library inquiries are very simple in that they involve the asking of a single question. Many inquiries are not like that. Even if the relevant inquirers aim at answering a single question, their strategies for answering that focal question often involve asking and answering other, 'smaller' or otherwise evidentially relevant questions on the way to answering their focal question.

questions. Sometimes this asking is clearly in the service of the acquisition of new beliefs and new knowledge, but it needn't be.

But I don't think that the focus on asking rather than answering helps to illuminate just this sort of less acquisitive inquiry; it helps with the canonical acquisitive type of inquiry as well. Any account of acquisitive inquiry that ignores the process of answer acquisition is not going to be able to give us an adequate account of successful inquiry. When inquirers are trying to come to know Q, we know something important about what success in that endeavour amounts to: at least in part, coming to know Q. But that can't be the whole story.

To see this, imagine I'm curious about who is coming for dinner later (D). I briefly contemplate D, but then get lazy and only sort of try to figure it out. But then, by fluke, you announce the guests, or a benevolent Cartesian demon grants me the knowledge, or I slip on a piece of paper on the ground and when I pick it up, I see it's the guest list, or I decide to cancel the party altogether because I'm not feeling well (thereby coming to know that no one is coming). In any of these cases, was my inquiry into D a success? Of course, I succeeded in acquiring a piece of information I wanted to acquire, but was the inquiry that I performed a successful inquiry? I don't think so.[12]

What's missing in these cases? Why isn't my inquiry a success? Well, in the first instance it doesn't even look as though my knowledge acquisition is the product of my inquiry. I inquire, and I get the knowledge I was after, but not as the upshot of my inquiry — it came some other way. What needs to happen then such that some knowledge acquisition is the product of some inquiry? The view I've proposed here gives us a tidy and plausible answer. What was missing in my inquiry into D? I got my answer but I did not even try to extract or elicit that answer from any source; it came to me some other way.

My claim now is that an inquiry into Q in which a subject is clearly trying to come to know (etc.) Q, will only count as a successful inquiry if the subject acquires their knowledge in response to having asked Q (or some closely related questions). Success in acquisitive inquiry requires the asking of questions and requires that answers come in via this sort of interrogative mechanism. In this sense, question asking isn't just a central feature of successful acquisitive inquiry, but the route by which those inquiries succeed.[13]

[12] Compare. Say I make a lemonade stand to earn fifty dollars. I try to sell lemonade for an hour, but no one is buying any, so I pack up the stand. On the way home, I find fifty dollars on the ground. Was my lemonade stand a success? Obviously not. I succeeded in my aim of getting fifty dollars, but my activity of selling lemonade for money was not a success.

[13] One of the main things we do in many inquiries is 'collect evidence'. In order to collect evidence, one needs to receive evidence, but I take it that the reverse is not true — we

SUCCESS WITHOUT QUESTION ASKING?

Asking a question is a kind of extractive activity. In asking Q, we do something to pull information that answers Q to us — we work to rearrange our informational or attentional environments so that they speak to Q. And when all goes well, we learn Q in response to this active effort to recruit information. But is all that really needed for successful (acquisitive) inquiry? One might think we can get by with much less.

For instance, we often put questions we've been contemplating aside and work on other tasks only to have the answers pop into our minds seemingly unbidden (call this, following Siegel (forthcoming), a case of *low inquiry*). And sometimes we know that answers will eventually come to us, even if we don't do much of anything, so we just wait for them (call this a case of *passive inquiry*). Can't these count as successful inquiries? Let me say something about each sort of case.

First on low inquiry. Imagine the detective who has all the pieces to crack the case, but hasn't yet managed to put two and two together. He puts the question aside for a bit and works on something else. But a few mornings later, he wakes up and has that familiar sort of aha-moment when the answer is suddenly clear. Was his inquiry a success? Plausibly. Do we have the sort of extraction or elicitation I'm claiming is necessary for success in this case? It might seem as though we don't, but I think it's compatible with this sort of case that we do.

While in a case like this the answer doesn't seem to come in via conscious or deliberate question asking, there is good evidence that what happens when answers come to us on a walk or in the shower or after sleeping on it is very much like what happens when we deliberate more deliberately. The first thing to note is that we often decide to turn away from explicit focus on particular inquiries exactly because we think it will be helpful for the task. And we're right, it often is.[14] It is fairly well-established that the off-task mind — the mind not consciously focused on a particular task — does a lot of cognitive work ('thinking' in some general sense), and moreover that in this 'default mode' the mind works towards its goals.[15] And this, of course, includes our epistemic and zetetic goals.

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can receive evidence that we didn't 'collect' or 'gather'; it just arrived through no fault of our own. What more does evidence collection/gathering require? We collect or gather evidence when we set out to learn particular things (presumably that we've deemed or at least are hoping will be relevant to some epistemic endeavour of ours). In other words, in evidence gathering we try to extract or elicit particular pieces of information. In still other words, we ask questions.

[14] See Irving et al. (2022) for more on the 'shower effect'.

[15] For some relevant discussion see, Christoff et al. (2009, 2011), Andrews-Hanna (2012), Klinger (2013), and Klinger et al. (2018).

So in the familiar sort of case in which answers come to us 'unbidden', they are not truly unbidden. These zetetic advances are the product of goal-directed thought processes. Moreover, these processes are very much like the ones we recruit in more conscious or explicit zetetic processes.[16] So far then we have good reason to think that these sorts of spontaneous zetetic advances are crucially like their more deliberate cousins.[17]

Second, on passive inquiry. We don't always need to opt for the most active and focused version of inquiry, and this might seem to make trouble for my claim about asking's role in successful inquiry. For instance, say I'm sitting on a park bench waiting for you. To pass the time, I decide to see how many orange cars will drive by before you get here (0). I watch all the cars pass and count two. You arrive, and we head off. In this sort of case there's a sense in which I let the answer to 0 come to me rather than soliciting it, but it seems like a successful inquiry nonetheless.

But of course, I am not just sitting passively receiving information in this case. In order to get the answer to 0, I modulate my focus and attention guided by the question at issue — I look for the answer to 0, and I get that answer as a result. While I'm on my bench, there are a huge number of ways that my time can unfold, perceptually speaking. In order to make it that the flow of visual information I'm receiving speaks to my particular question, I have to continuously search my environment for the information I'm after (or perhaps perform a series of searches); I have to look for orange cars and try to see what colour each car is.

5 CONCLUSION

There is obviously plenty more to say about all of this — about the structure of inquiry I've presented, about the account of generalized question asking I've argued for, and about the general picture of inquiry that emerges from all of it.

Inquiring is an activity. Sometimes it's short and involves little more than drawing a quick inference. But it can also involve much more. And in particular, it can involve complex chains of mental and bodily action.

[16] See Christoff et al. (2004) for a summary of the evidence (behavioural and neuroimaging) that these two types of cognitive processes share 'common cognitive and neural mechanisms'.

[17] Is it possible for an answer to a question one is curious about but not actively investigating to emerge in conscious awareness in a genuinely arbitrary way, not as the result of any of the relevant zetetic-like processes? And were that to happen, would we want to think of that learning as the culmination of a successful inquiry? The first question seems like an empirical one. But even if such a thing does or could happen, I don't think that it would be a clear case of successful inquiry.

Understanding inquiry then requires a better understanding of the action of inquiry — of what we do as we inquire. Like other complex and temporally extended activities, this is not straightforward.

My suggestion here is that when we look at the structure of inquiry we find a particular act-type at its centre. We inquire because we are curious about or wondering about questions. Those sorts of question-directed attitudes motivate and guide us as we inquire. What do they motivate and guide us to do? Well, the canonical question-involving act: asking. When we are curious about some question Q, an inquiry into Q is a process designed to successfully ask Q of some source. In this sense, thought and action align in inquiry. When we have questions in mind, we can put them into action by having (or at least trying to have) particular kinds of encounters with particular sources of information.

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