

# ZETETIC EPISTEMOLOGY\*

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

I'm walking along the waterfront, looking at the boats. I wonder, "Why does everyone call their boat S.S. something-or-other?". I contemplate the question for a second, but then put it aside; I'm curious, but I'm busy on my walk right now and not going to try to figure it out. The next week though I win a boat in a contest and have to decide what to name it. Before I go with an 'S.S.' prefix, I want to actually figure out what 'S.S.' stands for. I search online and find out that it stands for 'steam screw', which is a kind of steamship. Since my boat is a canoe, I decide against the 'S.S.'

Here are some questions we can ask about this story: Should I have believed that 'S.S.' stands for 'steam screw' when I did? How certain should I have been? Was my evidence sufficient to justify my belief at that time? Does that belief amount to knowledge? Would it have been OK to just take a guess about what 'S.S.' stands for when the question first occurred to me and believe that? These sorts of questions — ones largely about belief and belief formation — are the sorts we regularly ask and answer in contemporary epistemology.

Here are some different questions we can ask about this story though: Was it OK to wonder about what 'S.S.' stands for when I did? Should I have started actively investigating that question right away rather than putting it on hold and continuing my walk? What's the best strategy for figuring out what 'S.S.' stands for? Do I have to deploy this best strategy or is a less good one fine too? These are not the sorts of questions we regularly ask and answer in contemporary epistemology.

Are the questions in this second group even epistemic questions? Is it epistemology's job to answer them? It's certainly plausible that epistemic considerations bear on questions about when to be curious or wonder, or what counts as

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the best way to figure something out. Moreover, the following strikes me as an appealing general thought about epistemology: the rules or norms of epistemology are rules or norms for figuring things out. But if that thought is right, then the questions in the second group look just as epistemic as those in the first.

Even though it's plausible that questions in that second group are questions for epistemology to answer, they are often ignored by the field. In this paper, I want to think about what epistemology would look like if those questions were not ignored — if epistemology spoke to the questions in that second group as well as those in the first. The questions in both groups are about whether I conducted my inquiry well, but the second group focuses on parts of our inquiries that our contemporary epistemic norms don't usually bear on. What if epistemology included norms for the entire process of inquiry, from the initial curiosity or formulation of a question to the settling or resolving of that question? This is the possibility I'm going to explore in this paper: the possibility of expanding epistemology to encompass inquiry in full.

In the next two sections, I'll put together a schematic picture of inquiry and bring out some of the ways in which shifting focus to inquiry as a whole is going to push epistemology to cover more normative ground than it typically does. And in the section after that, I'll argue that once we start taking the sorts of questions in the second group seriously, we might have to go back and re-think some of our traditional answers to the sorts of questions in the first group. A set of norms focused on the question of how we should inquire is not always going to give the answers we're used to to the question of what we should believe.

## 2 THE COURSE OF INQUIRY

At the start of the paper I described a simple (and typical) inquiry: I became curious about some question, then actively tried to figure out the answer, then did figure out the answer. Here is a timeline that reflects this sort of course of events with respect to a question  $Q$ :

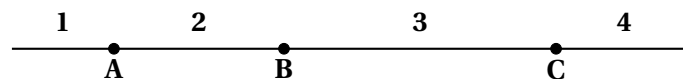


Figure 1: INQUIRY

The letters label key points/moments over the course of the sort of inquiry I've described. At point **A**, a subject *S* starts to think about or wonder about or become curious about  $Q^?$ . This is the time at which the question starts to be an object of thought or investigation for *S*. We can say that at point **A**, *S* 'opens  $Q^?$ ' or 'puts  $Q^?$  on their research agenda'. At point **B**, *S* starts actively investigating  $Q^?$ . Point **B** is the point at which *S* starts genuinely working on resolving  $Q^?$ . At point **C**, *S* resolves  $Q^?$  — they figure out the answer to  $Q^?$  or settle  $Q^?$ . And the numbers above the line label the intervals of time between these key points: the stretch of time before  $Q^?$  is on *S*'s research agenda (**1**), the stretch during which  $Q^?$  is on *S*'s agenda, but *S* isn't actively trying to figure out  $Q^?$  (**2**), the stretch during which *S* is actively trying to figure out  $Q^?$  (**3**), and the stretch during which  $Q^?$  is settled for *S* (**4**).<sup>1</sup>

**INQUIRY** represents one way a subject can relate to a question  $Q^?$ : the sort according to which they put  $Q^?$  on their agenda, then actively investigate  $Q^?$ , and then eventually settle  $Q^?$ .<sup>2</sup> This is a fairly common course of events, but it is far from the only way our relationships to questions can unfold. For instance, there are many questions or issues for which we will never get beyond phase **1** — they will simply never cross our minds. And that a question goes on a research agenda at some time does not tell us how long it will stay there. The way I'm thinking about "opening a questions" or "putting a question on the agenda", becoming curious about a question or starting to wonder about a question is sufficient. But that we become curious about some question at  $t_1$  does not entail or guarantee that we will be curious about that question at  $t_2$ , whether  $t_2$  is one year later, or just one minute. Even if a question does stay on one's agenda, one's future with that question need not follow **INQUIRY**'s path. For instance: that a question goes on a subject's agenda is no guarantee that it will ever become an object of active investigation; even if it does, active inquiries can end due to boredom or interruption or death, they don't need to be settled; there may be little or no temporal gap between putting a question on the agenda and actively trying to figure it out; questions can be resolved without any active investigation (e.g., when an inquirer accidentally gets the answer without having put in any effort);

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<sup>1</sup>The discussion in this paper is going to be entirely focused on inquiries that have a focal question. That said, I don't mean to be committing to the claim that all inquiry is question-directed in this way.

<sup>2</sup>An inquiry can be settled — in the sense at issue in this discussion — without being successfully settled. For instance, an inquirer can settle their question (in the relevant sense) by coming to believe a false answer to that question.

and so on. The course of events **INQUIRY** represents is just one of many ways an inquiry can unfold.

My focus in this paper is on some of the norms that are relevant to this sort of course of events. Let's call the norms of inquiry 'zetetic' norms.<sup>3</sup> Laying **INQUIRY** out helps to bring some questions about zetetic normativity into view. For every labelled point and every labelled interval on **INQUIRY**, we can ask a range of normative questions. Some very general questions: Should S be the way they are with respect to  $Q^?$  during phase **x**? Should S have done the thing they did with respect to  $Q^?$  at point **y**? For any time  $t$  during **INQUIRY**, what should S do or be doing with respect to  $Q^?$ ?<sup>4</sup>

Our familiar, traditional epistemic norms speak to some of what S should do over the course of **INQUIRY**. Though they seem to speak primarily to a small span of **INQUIRY**: the space clustered around **C**. Our traditional epistemic norms have something to say about when S should settle  $Q^?$  — those norms bear on when S's evidence is good enough to believe an answer to  $Q^?$ , whether S knows  $Q^?$ , and so on. Our traditional epistemic norms are, by and large, norms for belief.

I'm going to call this model or way of thinking of epistemic normativity and epistemic norms the 'doxastic paradigm' in normative epistemology. According to the doxastic paradigm, epistemic norms are norms that bear almost exclusively on having, forming, revising, maintaining (etc.) beliefs and other belief-like attitudes, e.g., credences, knowledge. According to the doxastic paradigm, normative epistemology bears primarily on the space around **C**.

While norms for settling inquiries and believing the answers to questions are (of course) extremely important, they are clearly not the only sorts of norms that bear on how to inquire. What I want to explore in this paper is a picture of normative epistemology that includes norms that bear on **INQUIRY** from start to finish, rather than just one small part of **INQUIRY**. If we start doing epistemology by asking what we should believe (or when we know) we've started too late to get the full scope of inquiry in view. So, if the norms of epistemology are going to fully speak to the question of how to inquire, then we'll want more than just norms for belief and believing — we'll want to move beyond the doxastic

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<sup>3</sup>The Greek 'ζητητικός' means 'disposed to inquire'. I'm using 'zetetic' slightly differently, to mean 'related to inquiry'. Thanks to Harvey Lederman for suggesting the term.

<sup>4</sup>For the sake of readability, I'll often just use 'should' in thinking about the various normative questions that we can ask about a course of inquiry and the various zetetic norms themselves. In a more in-depth discussion I would want to be much more careful to distinguish between various relevant normative modalities, e.g., permissions, reasons, justification, and so on.

paradigm.

Let's call the new, more expansive picture of epistemology I want to explore, the 'zetetic paradigm' in normative epistemology. Sometimes I'll just call it 'zetetic epistemology'. Zetetic epistemology gives us norms for the whole of inquiry, from start to finish.<sup>5</sup> Moving from the doxastic paradigm in epistemology to the zetetic paradigm — what I'll call (with apologies) 'taking the zetetic turn' — means moving to thinking of the norms of epistemology as speaking to the entire process of inquiry.<sup>6</sup>

I am taking it as uncontroversial that there are norms that bear on all of the various points and stages of **INQUIRY**: there are norms for when to open questions, how best to proceed in active inquiry, which experiments to perform when, and so on. It is less clear though whether we should be thinking of these norms as epistemic norms. Given the somewhat conditional or experimental program of this paper — I'm exploring what normative epistemology would look like were we to take the zetetic turn — my main aim in this paper is not to fully defend the claim that those zetetic norms are indeed epistemic norms.

That said, part of the reason this experiment is worth running is that the thought that the norms of inquiry and the norms of epistemology are intimately connected — perhaps even so intimately to be one and the same — is very plausible, and in some form or other seems hard to deny. Moreover, beyond this very general thought, it seems to me that many of the ways of characterizing what normative epistemology is or does naturally extend to all kinds of norms of inquiry.

For instance, normative epistemology already tells us what to do when evidence comes in. And sometimes evidence does just happen to come in — a bird flies by, thunder booms, someone tells you the big news, you smell coffee in the morning, and so on. In these sorts of cases there's a sense in which we learn things almost by accident or inadvertently: we simply take in information easily available to us. But epistemic subjects are not mere informational filter-feeders,

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<sup>5</sup>Hookway (2006) also talks about a doxastic paradigm in epistemology, and I think he and I are using the label in mostly the same way. He calls the competing inquiry-focused paradigm, "epistemology as a theory of inquiry". This paper is going to unfold very differently from Hookway's, but I nonetheless think that our general aims are largely in sync.

<sup>6</sup>I want to be a bit more precise about what taking the zetetic turn amounts to. It doesn't require accepting the strong claim that every zetetic norm is epistemic (although at the end of the day that may well be true). It does require accepting the claim that epistemic norms bear on parts of inquiry other than belief formation, and even that norms of inquiry are by and large epistemic.

taking in whatever happens to come our way — we also (and often) make efforts to have certain kinds of evidence or knowledge come in or to learn something new. If I want to know whether Jess is at work today, I'm not going to just sit still and wait for some relevant information to float by. Instead, I'll go downstairs to her office and knock on her door or send her a text. In cases like this I do things to make it the case that I end up with certain kinds of information — effectively, I perform an experiment or ask a question (of the world, perhaps) and put myself in a position to get an answer.<sup>7</sup> When we learn as the result of an experiment that we design and execute (like walking downstairs and knocking on the door), our learning is not accidental but intentional or by design. The doxastic paradigm has had a lot to say about accidental learning, but much less about learning by design.

But it's not at all obvious that accidental and intentional learning are radically different in kind rather than fairly continuous. For some inspiration on this sort of continuity, here is the 19th-century astronomer John Herschel on the close connection between observation and experiment:

But experience may be acquired in two ways: either, first, by noticing facts as they occur, without any attempt to influence the frequency of their occurrence, or to vary the circumstances under which they occur; this is OBSERVATION; or, secondly, by putting in action causes and agents over which we have control, and purposely varying their combinations, and noticing what effects take place; this is EXPERIMENT. To these two sources we must look as the fountains of all natural science. It is not intended, however, by thus distinguishing observation from experiment, to place them in any kind of contrast. Essentially they are much alike, and differ rather in degree than in kind; so that, perhaps, the terms passive and active observation might better express their distinction; but it is, nevertheless, highly important to mark the different states of mind in inquiries carried on by their respective aids, as well as their different effects in promoting the progress of science. In the former, we sit still and listen to a tale, told us, perhaps obscurely, piecemeal, and at long intervals of time, with our attention more or less awake. It is only by after-rumination that we gather its full import; and often, when the opportunity is gone by, we have to regret that our attention was not more particularly directed to some point which, at the time, appeared of little moment, but of which we at length appreciate the impor-

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<sup>7</sup>Jaakko Hintikka — in e.g., Hintikka (1981) — describes his interrogative model of scientific inquiry as one according to which scientific inquiry centrally involves “putting questions to nature”. Hintikka claims to be borrowing the metaphor from Kant, who may have been borrowing it from Francis Bacon.

tance. In the latter, on the other hand, we cross-examine our witness, and by comparing one part of his evidence with the other, while he is yet before us, and reasoning upon it in his presence, are enabled to put pointed and searching questions, the answer to which may at once enable us to make up our minds. (Herschel (1831), pp. 76-7)

Following Herschel, we can think of the distinction between merely happening upon evidence on the one hand, and updating our beliefs in response to investigations and experiments on the other, as a distinction between passive and active updating or passive and active learning. But with this sort of continuity it's hard to make a case that only one kind of learning or one kind of updating falls under the scope of epistemic evaluation, while the other belongs somewhere else entirely.

Moreover, the additional things we do when we learn by design (rather than when we learn merely by accident) appear to be the sorts of things that can be epistemically evaluated. When we learn as the result of an inquiry or experiment, we do things in order to end up with the information we want and need. Those things we do, those acts, whether mental or bodily, are acts aimed at getting knowledge or understanding. Doesn't that put them under the scope of epistemic evaluation? They are acts or processes designed to leave us knowing more and understanding better.

Hopefully this starts to bring out some of the appeal of thinking of norms of inquiry as epistemic norms (and so of taking the zetetic turn). In general, the norms of epistemology are the norms rational subjects in pursuit of knowledge and understanding are going to conform to. But that also describes the norms of inquiry. There is a theoretical unity between the epistemic norms the doxastic paradigm already focuses on and the norms of good inquiry: they are the norms that rational subjects trying to know more and understand better are going to follow.

Given this, it's at least tempting to conceive of the norms of inquiry as epistemic norms. The rest of this paper looks at some aspects of the picture of epistemic normativity that results if we give in to this temptation. What will normative epistemology look like if we take the zetetic turn?

### 3 NEW NORMATIVE QUESTIONS

Inquiring is an activity that a subject engages in over an interval of time. **INQUIRY** represents a version of this sort of interval with canonical moments and sub-intervals picked out. While there are surely other moments or stretches of time over the course of inquiry that are worth reflecting on further, the ones I've chosen to bring to the fore will help us to organize some starting questions about some of the new epistemic norms the zetetic turn will bring. In particular, the three labelled points on **INQUIRY** represent three key occurrences over the course of inquiry: first, when a question is put on an inquirer's research agenda/opened in thought, next when an inquirer begins to actively investigate the question, and then when an inquirer settles the question. These points will help structure the discussion in this section. My main focus will be on the first two as I raise a few of the new normative questions that arise around those points and at least gesture in the direction of some answers to those questions.

#### 3.1 OPENING QUESTIONS

There was a long stretch of my life during which I had never even considered what 'S.S.' stood for (phase **1** of **INQUIRY**). During this time that question was not on my research agenda and had never been. Was that OK? Should I have started thinking about that question sooner? And during phase **2**, I had that question open or on the agenda, but I wasn't doing much of anything to resolve it. Was that OK? Should I have moved to active inquiry more quickly? Should I have even been curious or wondering about boat prefixing in the first place?

To start to answer these normative questions we'll want a better sense of just what happens at point **A**, or just what it takes to have a question on one's research agenda (in the sense at issue). In some of my other work, I've argued for a particular way of answering this question, and that answer can give us part of a framework for answering the normative questions about the early stage of inquiry that we're interested in now. The framework puts suspension of judgment, and so by extension traditional epistemic concerns, front and centre. Let me briefly connect those dots.

So far, in describing the sort of attitude one has towards  $Q^?$  when  $Q^?$  is on one's agenda or open in thought, I've been making reference to familiar folk-psychological attitudes like being curious about  $Q^?$  or wondering about  $Q^?$ . In



Friedman (2017) and Friedman (2019), I explored a broader class of attitudes that includes curiosity and wondering as central members. I called these the ‘interrogative attitudes’. Some key interrogative attitudes are curiosity, wondering, contemplating, deliberation, and pondering (and this list is not exhaustive). To understand what it takes to have a question on our agenda or to open a question in thought, we need look no further than the interrogative attitudes. More specifically, I think we should say that  $Q^?$  is on one’s research agenda at  $t$  iff one has an interrogative attitude towards  $Q^?$  at  $t$ .

It’s worth making clear why these attitudes can play this role. Interrogative attitudes are a kind of ‘question-directed attitude’ — a kind of attitude that has a question as its content or object.<sup>8</sup> But not every question-directed attitude is an interrogative attitude. Compare wondering about  $Q^?$  and being curious about  $Q^?$  (both interrogative attitudes) on the one hand with grasping  $Q^?$  and understanding  $Q^?$  on the other. When I’m wondering about  $Q^?$  or curious about  $Q^?$ , I am questioning or asking  $Q^?$ . When I’m wondering about what the weather tomorrow will be like or curious about what kind of flower that is, I (loosely speaking) want to know the answers to those questions.<sup>9</sup> In contrast, grasping  $Q^?$  and understanding  $Q^?$  — which also seem like attitudes directed at  $Q^?$  itself — don’t need to involve this sort of wanting to know or asking. That I understand the question, ‘What kind of flower is that?’ is entirely compatible with my not at all wanting to know the answer and with my already knowing the answer. Having an interrogative attitude means having a question-directed attitude that additionally involves the relevant sort of wanting to know or asking.<sup>10</sup>

When we come to have interrogative attitudes towards questions, we effectively ask those questions in thought. This is a helpful way of thinking about a

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<sup>8</sup>See Friedman (2013) for an extensive discussion of question-directed attitudes. I am not the only (nor the first) one to argue that some attitudes have questions as their contents or objects. For instance, Whitcomb (2010) argues that curiosity is directed at questions, and Carruthers (2018) argues that questioning attitudes are among the foundations of human and animal minds.

<sup>9</sup>The ‘loosely speaking’ is important. I don’t think we want this sort of “questioning” attitude to literally be a meta-cognitive one, e.g., a desire to be in a certain kind of epistemic state. There’s reason to think that gets the phenomenon we’re after here wrong. See Carruthers (2018) for a good discussion.

<sup>10</sup>In characterizing the interrogative attitudes as “askings”, I mean to be comparing them to the speech act. The central use of uttering an interrogative sentence is to try to get an answer to the question expressed by that interrogative sentence. And typically we ask questions because we want answers. But these characterizations extend to attitudes like wondering and curiosity: these attitudes are expressions of (or just are) our desires to know answers, and sometimes involve our trying to figure something out.

subject's research agenda: a research agenda is a record of all the questions a subject has open in thought, all of the questions they want answers to. So, at point **A** on **INQUIRY**, **S** comes to have an interrogative attitude towards  $Q^?$ .<sup>11</sup>

But, as I argued in Friedman (2017), having an interrogative attitude towards some question necessarily involves suspending judgment about that question. When we're curious about  $Q^?$  or wondering about  $Q^?$  or contemplating  $Q^?$  (etc.), we're suspending judgment about  $Q^?$ . A subject who has an interrogative attitude towards  $Q^?$  at  $t$  is suspending judgment about  $Q^?$  at  $t$ .

Altogether this gets us two claims: First,  $Q^?$  is on one's research agenda at  $t$  iff one has an interrogative attitude towards  $Q^?$  at  $t$ . Second, one has an interrogative attitude towards  $Q^?$  at  $t$  only if one is suspending judgment about  $Q^?$  at  $t$ . Every question on one's research agenda is a question about which one is suspending judgment. And putting a question on one's research agenda necessarily involves suspending judgment about that question.

If all of this is right, then we have two important pieces of insight into what it is to have a question open in thought or on one's research agenda: first via the interrogative attitudes and second, via suspension of judgment. I think both can give us some guidance with respect to norms for opening questions. Many of the interrogative attitudes are entirely familiar and so we have some pre-theoretical insight into when attitudes like that may be appropriate and when they may not be. For instance: If your evidence fully settles the question of whether  $p$  is true, is it OK to wonder about whether  $p$  is true? Should you be curious about a question whose answer you know you will never be able to know? Should you contemplate a question with a false presupposition (e.g., How many people attended Hillary Clinton's presidential inauguration on January 20, 2017?)?

And given that my framework puts suspension of judgment at the core of the sort of inquiry-theoretic question openness at issue now, it makes suspension of judgment central to inquiry's start (and more if we think — as I do — that inquirers have questions open in thought across the whole of inquiry). Suspension of judgment is not a familiar folk-psychological attitude, but it is a doxastic attitude often discussed by epistemologists. And it now looks as though norms for opening questions are — at least in part — norms for suspension of judgment. For

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<sup>11</sup>I've only given a partial list of interrogative attitudes, but hopefully the general characterization makes the contours of the class sufficiently clear for now. Carruthers (2018) talks about a generic "questioning" attitude, which I think is also helpful for thinking about the relevant class here, as well as about the sort of attitude a subject has towards  $Q^?$  when  $Q^?$  is on their agenda.

instance, it now seems right that any case in which S shouldn't suspend judgment about  $Q^?$  is a case in which S shouldn't have  $Q^?$  on their research agenda. Moreover, that suspension of judgment is so central to this early stage of inquiry and question openness in general, makes something else quite clear: epistemic considerations are also going to be central.<sup>12</sup>

Beyond the connections between the interrogative attitudes, suspension of judgment, and the relevant kind of openness, we should expect other familiar sorts of norms to extend to this early part of inquiry. For instance, just as our beliefs are subject to some coherence constraints, so too should our open questions be. First, what one believes and knows should cohere in various ways with the questions one has on one's agenda. In other work I've articulated a couple of coherence constraints of this sort. In Friedman (2017) I argued for an 'Ignorance Norm' for knowledge and the interrogative attitudes: subjects shouldn't both know  $Q^?$  at  $t$  and have an interrogative attitude towards  $Q^?$  at  $t$ . And in Friedman (2019) I argued for an analogous coherence norm for open questions and certain kinds of beliefs. There I argued that one should not have  $Q^?$  open in thought and believe a complete answer to  $Q^?$  at the same time. Of course, these norms just scratch the surface of how the things we know/believe and the things we ask should interact.

Second, we should expect that there will be coherence constraints on our research agendas themselves. For instance, if you're wondering about whether Joe or Ali went to the party, then plausibly you should also be wondering about whether Joe went to the party or wondering about whether Ali went to the party (or wondering about both). More generally, we can find guidance on the shape that some of these constraints might take in the extensive discussions of both the semantics of interrogatives and logics for questions.<sup>13</sup> Both of these literatures tell us something about the logical relations between questions, e.g., about question equivalence and entailment relations. And just as in the case of propositional logic, these logical relations are going to be closely connected to various

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<sup>12</sup>Some discussions in the epistemology literature that speak to what to inquire into (and when and why) can also be brought to bear on what questions to have on our research agendas or ask or be curious about (and when and why). For instance, Grimm (2008) and Treanor (2014) (and the entire discussion around trivial vs. valuable truths/knowledge in epistemology) seems relevant. From a different angle, Olsson and Westlund (2006) and van Rooij (2009) are also germane. And Good (1967) may be relevant here as well (along with some extensions of Good in e.g., Oddie (1997)).

<sup>13</sup>For a couple of nice overviews see Groenendijk and Stokhof (1994) and Harrah (2002).

inference rules and coherence constraints (but for interrogative attitudes now).

This is obviously only a start at figuring out what norms for having questions open will look like. So far though many of these sorts of norms have good claims to being epistemic norms. Might there be norms for opening questions that are sensitive to thoroughly non-epistemic considerations? For instance: Might there be purely pragmatic reasons to question something? Could we ever be morally required to be curious? At first glance this seems plausible, although I suspect that the situation is more complicated than that first glance reveals. That said, the sorts of arguments that encourage us to think that non-epistemic considerations are relevant to what to believe and when might well extend in interesting ways to what to question and when.<sup>14</sup>

### 3.2 ACTIVE INVESTIGATION

When does an inquiry start? Where on **INQUIRY** should we place the start of inquiry? Is it at point **A**, when *S* first becomes curious about a question? Or point **B**, when they start acting in the service of the question they are curious about, when they actually begin trying to resolve that question? Might it come even earlier than **A**, before *S* has even really formulated a question they want to answer and is just poking around somewhat more aimlessly? I'm not sure there's a clear answer. With respect to point **A** versus point **B**: On the one hand, in some sense of 'inquiring' I can be curious about a question but not be inquiring into that question. On the other, that I'm curious about  $Q^?$  seems to make  $Q^?$  an object of inquiry for me in some, at least minimal, sense. What is more clear, I think, is that there can be (typically many) questions on a subject's research agenda at a time that they aren't actively investigating or inquiring into at that time. They may be curious about these questions, or even wondering about them, but they aren't really doing anything to resolve them. One shifts to actively inquiring into a question when one shifts to genuinely trying to figure out the answer to that question.

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<sup>14</sup>Some recent examples: Moss (2018), Basu (2019), and Rinard (2019). It's important to distinguish the question of whether there are non-epistemic reasons to open questions from the question of whether there are non-epistemic reasons to look for evidence on some matter. If my mother really wants me to search for evidence relevant to some question, that may well provide me with a (non-epistemic) reason to search for evidence. It's not clear that it provides me with a reason to (e.g.) be curious about the question. Smith (2014) argues that we sometimes have a moral duty to gather information. This conclusion isn't directly about opening or re-opening questions, although we might find ways to extend it in that direction.

This notion of active inquiry is somewhat vague. What is required of a subject that they count as trying to figure something out? I assume this sort of active inquiry is fairly continuous with the more passive or minimal notion of inquiry I've mentioned. In both cases, subjects want answers to questions and have some sort of epistemic aim or goal. Subjects who are actively inquiring though are doing things — performing mental and bodily actions — in attempts to answer their questions. Even if it's not clear exactly where the line between active and more passive inquiry should go (or if there even is a line), active inquiry is something entirely familiar. When I sift through the papers on my desk to try to find that bill, or try to work out what 34°C is in °F, or ask the waiter whether some dish is vegetarian, or watch a video about how to disassemble my fan, and so on (and so on), I'm actively inquiring in the sense at issue.

If one's having even mild curiosity about  $Q^?$  at  $t$  is sufficient to make it that  $Q^?$  is on one's research agenda at  $t$ , then it looks as though a typical research agenda is fairly populous. Our research agendas are records of all of the things we (even faintly) want or need to know at a time: from our long-term research projects and life's great mysteries, to the hyper-local questions that we need to answer to navigate the physical spaces we're in and our idle curiosities, as well as everything in between.

Whichever way we conceive of active investigation then, I am assuming that we cannot actively investigate (even nearly) all of the questions on our research agendas at the same time. Perhaps we can actively investigate more than one question at a time, but given that active inquiry requires (sometimes significant) attention and effort, there are going to be considerable limits on how much we can actively investigate at a time. This means that there's something of a bottleneck at point **B** on **INQUIRY**. Under what conditions should we take up the task of genuinely trying to figure out the answer to some question on our agenda?

The answer here strikes me as being a function of a complex cluster of considerations. The questions on a research agenda can be ordered in a variety of ways at a given time: by the intensity of the subject's curiosity, by the intensity of a more general need to know, by the value of getting or having answers, by the value of undertaking investigation, by the likelihood of getting an answer, by the ease/difficulty of investigation, and so on. I take it that all of these (and more), as well as the subject's beliefs about all of these, are going to be relevant to norms for which questions should move through the bottleneck and become objects of

active investigation.

Once a question does become an object of active investigation new sorts of norms become relevant.<sup>15</sup> A lot can happen over a period of active inquiry. If I'm investigating why my computer stopped working, that could be an extended project during which I have to gather a lot of information and perform a number of tests. It could take hours or days. Over the course of this inquiry I am likely to perform a range of actions: mental actions like drawing inferences, making judgments, and focusing my attention, as well as regular old bodily actions. To figure out what's going on with my computer I might do some Google searches, talk to people, take my computer to the Apple Store, unscrew and unplug things, and much more.

Clearly, there are norms that bind inquirers as they actively inquire: at any given time over such a stretch there will be some things it would be best (or at least better) to do given what one is trying to figure out, and others it would be completely unreasonable to do, and much in between. If I'm trying to figure out what's wrong with my computer, I can take it to the Apple Store. I can also throw it out my window. Other things equal, one of these actions is far more likely to result in my figuring out what's wrong with my computer, which is highly relevant to which I should do.

In this sense, one key class of zetetic norms are 'strategic' norms: they are norms that speak to which of the various courses of action you should be taking if you want to figure out  $Q$ ?<sup>16</sup> If you're sitting in your living room but you want to know whether the stove off, many strategies present themselves to you. One option is to get up, walk to the kitchen and have a look. Another is to leave the house, drive to the office, from there call your neighbour who has a key to your

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<sup>15</sup>The situation is (at least) a bit more complicated than this. Should the mere fact that a question makes it through the bottleneck mean that the norms of active inquiry kick in with respect to that question? Even if it's not at all a question that should have made it through? And what about the questions that ought to have made it through but didn't? For now, we can leave these sorts of questions aside although they surely need to be addressed eventually.

<sup>16</sup>This way of describing these strategic norms makes it sound as though they will all be instrumental norms. If an instrumental norm is understood to be a norm that binds a subject only insofar as they have certain relevant kinds of ends or goals, then I certainly don't mean to be claiming that all inquiry-theoretic strategic norms are instrumental. Although the discussion to follow does largely focus on cases in which subjects are pursuing epistemic ends they have, and while I do think that some of the relevant sorts of strategic norms will be dependent on inquirers' ends, I don't want to say or imply that there are no "end-independent" inquiry-theoretic strategic norms. And while we're here, it is also worth saying: that a norm  $n$  is instrumental is perfectly compatible with  $n$  also being epistemic.

house, ask the neighbour to look at your stove, and then have them write the answer down in a letter and mail that to you at the office. Another is to work on building some sort of x-ray device that can see through the wall to your kitchen. And this list of strategies for figuring out whether your stove is on can keep going. This list can be (at least partially) ordered along a number of dimensions. The norms of inquiry will speak to those orderings and render verdicts about which of those strategies to adopt.<sup>17</sup>

These sorts of strategic norms are obviously not our typical epistemic norms. Of note: proceeding in inquiry often involves performing bodily actions and so these strategic norms will sometimes tell us which bodily actions we should perform when.<sup>18</sup> But I don't think this aspect of these strategic norms need tell against their counting as epistemic. The actions that we perform over the course of our inquiries are (in the good case, at least) tools for figuring things out. If I'm in the car and I want to know whether the fabric on the ceiling is wet, I might raise my arm and feel the fabric with my hand. This simple action is a kind of experiment — it's an action designed to get me information or evidence. When I want to figure out why my computer stopped working, I might try plugging it into a different outlet. Again, this is a test designed to help me figure something out (Is it the outlet? No). But if actions done in the service of trying to figure something out can be thought of as experiments, then it looks as though they can (and should) be evaluated in ways that seem fairly epistemic: Was the action/experiment well designed? Did it result in knowledge? Was it a reliable method for figuring the relevant thing out? How efficient was it (and is that efficient enough)? Did it yield the right sort of information? And so on.

When it comes to the sorts of actions done in the service of our inquiries, part of the reason epistemic evaluations can seem appropriate is that many of

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<sup>17</sup>What it takes for some strategy, or course of action, or individual action to be better than some other in this context is itself not a straightforward matter. It certainly seems as though efficiency matters (and see Kelly (2004, 2007) for some discussion of 'truth-finding efficiency'), but other features may matter as well, e.g., enjoyableness.

<sup>18</sup>I assume that many readers will be comfortable with the thought that there are epistemic norms for a variety of mental actions — coming to believe, suspending judgment, inferring, and so on. The claim that there are epistemic norms for bodily action is more controversial. Certainly, there's a conservative line of thought in epistemology according to which bodily action is just not the sort of thing that can be epistemically evaluated. Some of the language in Feldman (2000) and Kelly (2003) seems to support this line of thought. I don't subscribe to the conservative view; hopefully this paper brings out some of why. For some recent debate about epistemic norms for bodily action see: Booth (2006, 2009), Rowbottom (2008), Simion (2018), and Singer and Aronowitz (forthcoming).

the “bodily actions” we perform are intimately connected doxastic or epistemic updates. I think this comes out clearly in the case of one of the most central things we do in active inquiry: collect evidence. This is typically what inquirers are trying to do when they perform the sorts of experiments I’ve been describing. There is some discussion in the epistemology literature about the ‘duty to gather evidence’ and in particular whether such a duty (were there one) could be epistemic.<sup>19</sup> Some think not, characterizing evidence collection as extra-epistemic and perhaps a matter of mere bodily action. But the gathering of evidence is not at all a typical bodily action. It’s not a matter of merely picking things up or peering through a magnifying glass. One does not collect evidence without acquiring evidence, and acquiring evidence necessarily involves acquiring information or knowledge or making some sort of changes to one’s doxastic or epistemic state. There is no gathering evidence without coming to know or believe or see or understand (etc.) something new. In effect then, rather than being a matter of mere bodily action, evidence gathering is something of a hybrid of mental and bodily action, one that essentially involves doxastic update. It shouldn’t be surprising then that these sorts of actions are epistemically evaluable.

So far I’ve said a bit about points **A** and **B** and phases **1 - 3** along **INQUIRY**. I’ve sketched out a few of the sorts of norms that are going to be relevant to these parts of inquiry and said something in defence of thinking of those norms as epistemic norms. Taking the zetetic turn will mean including the sorts of norms I’ve been discussing in the domain of epistemic normativity.

### 3.3 CLOSING QUESTIONS

Inquiries can end in a variety of ways. I can fall out of love with some question or find pursuing it too taxing. I can also end my inquiry if I (take myself to) have answered my focal question. In this latter sort of case, I settle or close my question. In Friedman (2019), I argued that believing a complete answer to  $Q^?$  is a way of settling  $Q^?$ . If that’s right, then (at least some of the) norms for settling are already epistemologists’ bread and butter. Whether S should settle or close  $Q^?$  can be a function of things like: whether S is in a position to know the answer to  $Q^?$ , whether S’s evidence is sufficiently good to justify believing an answer to  $Q^?$ , and so on. These are our traditional epistemic questions and concerns.

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<sup>19</sup>For some of this discussion see, e.g., Kornblith (1983), Hall and Johnson (1998), Feldman (2000), Buchak (2010), and McGrath (2016).



Since epistemologists have already had so much to say about when we should believe and what we're in a position to know, I'm not going to spend more time thinking about this stage of inquiry here. This is not to say that there's not more to say, nor that thinking about our traditional epistemic concerns through a zetetic lens, won't help shed new light on them. It's just to say that for now I'm going to leave these issues aside.

At this point, it might look as though taking the zetetic turn is a fairly straightforward expansion project. Recipe: take our familiar epistemic norms for belief and belief revision, add some norms for other sorts of acts and states that are also central to our inquiries, and we're done. I don't think the zetetic turn is quite this straightforward though.

Here is my worry. There is fairly widespread agreement among those working within the doxastic paradigm about what some of the central norms for belief and belief revision look like, e.g., basing a belief in good evidence will leave that belief justified. But the new norms we're thinking about adding to epistemology needn't harmonize all that well with these central norms for belief and belief revision. As I said earlier, focusing on the question of how to inquire may force us to rethink some of our traditional answers to the question of what to believe.

#### 4 OLD NORMATIVE ANSWERS?

Once we start thinking about expanding epistemology in the ways I've suggested, we might wonder how well the new epistemic norms fit with our old ones. The structure of the discussion in the last section might give the impression that the new norms aren't going to interact all that much with our older ones: the new norms appear to be norms for different parts of inquiry than our old norms were.

While I think that's to some extent accurate (and does reflect the structure of the last section), it doesn't quite capture the reach of our traditional epistemic norms. We can go back to **INQUIRY** to see this. **INQUIRY** represents an interval of time. While some canonical moments were highlighted on **INQUIRY**, that hardly tells us everything that happened to/with S over that interval. For instance, if **INQUIRY** represents my boat prefixing inquiry, the stretch of time between point **A** and point **C** might be a few days. Over that stretch of days a great deal of information and evidence was available to me. I wasn't in a sensory deprivation tank

during those days but was out in the world where knowledge was everywhere to be had. So, all sorts of information — information not at all relevant to my boat prefixing inquiry, e.g., all of the information in front of my eyes while I was on my walk, and back at home, when I went to work and the gym, and so on — was available to me at most times throughout those few days between **A** and **C**; any time at which I was awake, we can assume. But norms for belief and belief revision are relevant whenever information or knowledge is available. And that means that there's a sense in which our old epistemic norms have normative relevance across much of **INQUIRY** (and inquiry).

This makes the risk of disharmony between our new epistemic norms and the old ones greater. Could there be tension at various points, with our old epistemic norms telling inquirers one thing and our new epistemic norms telling them another? In fact, I think tension between our old and new epistemic norms is going to emerge at several spots over the course of inquiry. In this section I want to briefly sketch just one of the sorts of tension I have in mind.<sup>20</sup> My focus will be on phase **3** (active inquiry) and the strategic norms inquirers should conform to there.

To start, an observation: if we take a typical inquirer (S) at a typical time during active inquiry ( $t$ ), there will be many different things that S can do or is in a position to do at  $t$ . Some of those things may be means to S's resolving their focal question ( $Q^?$ ), but others will not be. And among the available means to resolving  $Q^?$ , some may be better than others. In general, there is a lot S can do at  $t$ .

Moreover, this 'do' doesn't only range over bodily actions, like talking to people or looking under the rug or typing something into a computer. It also ranges over mental actions like drawing inferences, making judgments/forming beliefs, coming to know, searching memory, and so on. Let's say that  $\mathcal{A}$  is the set of all the things S is in a position to do at  $t$ . The strategic norms for active inquiry are going to render a verdict about which acts in  $\mathcal{A}$  S is allowed to do and which they are not allowed to do.<sup>21</sup> There is room for discussion about what this "permissibility partition" of  $\mathcal{A}$  will look like: there might be only one optimal permissible act or many permissible acts. Even without settling these matters though, if we

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<sup>20</sup>For a much more detailed discussion of the sort of tension I'm going to draw out in the rest of this section see Friedman (forthcoming).

<sup>21</sup>By 'acts' here I just mean that these are things we do. I don't mean to take a stand on whether the act of forming a belief is an intentionally or metaphysically robust action.

assume that at a minimum S should take some means to their end of figuring out  $Q^?$  at  $t$  (rather than doing something that's not a means at all), then I think we should say that there can be many acts in  $\mathcal{A}$  that S is not permitted to do at  $t$  from the perspective of these strategic norms. This is simply because many of the things S can do at a typical time are not going to be means to their figuring out  $Q^?$ .

My concern now is that some of the acts that are going to be on the impermissible side of this bipartition or split of  $\mathcal{A}$  are going to be acts of belief formation that, from the perspective of our old traditional epistemic norms, are beyond reproach: they are rational, based in the evidence, result in knowledge, and so on. This will mean that forming these beliefs will be impermissible from the perspective of our new epistemic norms, but perfectly permissible from the perspective of our old epistemic norms. And that means that were we to simply add the sorts of norms discussed in the last section to our current crop of epistemic norms, then epistemic normativity would end up incoherent, telling inquirers all at once that they are permitted and not permitted to form some beliefs.

And worse, I think the sort of incoherence I'm describing is going to be pervasive on the purely expansive version of zetetic epistemology we are considering now. To see this we can stay focused on a typical inquirer (S), inquiring into any old  $Q^?$  at a typical time ( $t$ ) during active inquiry. If S is awake and alert at  $t$  (which we can assume), then there will be a huge number of beliefs they will be able to form at  $t$  (sometimes I'll call the act of forming a belief 'judging'). Let's focus on some that will be, on most any traditional account of epistemic normativity, perfectly permissible: those that result in knowledge. So, what I mean to be focusing in on now is the set of everything S is in a position to come to know at  $t$ . If this is a typical situation, then that set of available knowledge will be fairly robust as well. That said, I take it that much of that available knowledge will have nothing at all to do with  $Q^?$  or resolving  $Q^?$ . It's the normative relevance of this available knowledge that concerns me now. That is, the normative significance of the fact that at  $t$  there is a range of judgments that S is in a position to make that are such that the making of those judgments will result in S coming to know something entirely ' $Q^?$ -irrelevant'. Let's call this set of available judgments for S at  $t$ ,  $\mathcal{K}_{\bar{q}}$ . Were S to make any judgment in  $\mathcal{K}_{\bar{q}}$ , that judgment would result in S's acquiring new knowledge, but that new knowledge wouldn't be relevant to  $Q^?$  or

S's resolving  $Q^?$ .

It's important to be clear about just how sizeable a typical  $\mathcal{K}_{\bar{q}}$  will be. First, inquiries typically take place out in the world where all sorts of perceptual information is being presented to inquirers. And second, typical inquirers begin their inquiries with vast bodies of knowledge already in place — the knowledge they've acquired over their lifetimes — and those bodies of knowledge can typically be extended inferentially as well. So a great deal of knowledge is available to S at  $t$ . But very little of that knowledge needs to be relevant to S's inquiry into  $Q^?$ . And so a typical  $\mathcal{K}_{\bar{q}}$  will be quite populous.

For example, say I call you to find out what 'S.S.' stands for, and you tell me the answer. Over the course of that phone call, there is a huge amount I can come to know perceptually and inferentially that has absolutely nothing to do with boats, prefixes, my inquiry, and so on. Whether I'm calling from the park or my house or my office (or wherever) there will be plenty of perceptual information available that is not at all relevant to my inquiry; and the same is true for the overwhelming majority of the ways in which I can inferentially extend my knowledge at that time.

We can assume that for most any judgment in  $\mathcal{K}_{\bar{q}}$ , S's making that judgment at  $t$  will not itself count as S's taking a means to resolving  $Q^?$  at  $t$ . It's not just that S's making these judgments won't amount to S's taking the best means they can to resolving  $Q^?$  at  $t$ , but that S's making those judgments at  $t$  will not count as their taking any sort of means at all to their resolving  $Q^?$ . This isn't because it is in principle impossible that our coming to know some  $p$  is a means to our inquiry-theoretic ends. Coming to know surely can and often will be among the very best means to resolving our inquiries, e.g., when the answer to a question is just an inference away. The problem here is that coming to know these  $Q^?$ -irrelevant propositions is not at all a means to resolving  $Q^?$ . Given this, if S makes judgments in  $\mathcal{K}_{\bar{q}}$  rather than doing whatever they are meant to be doing from the perspective of the relevant strategic norms, it looks as though they will have behaved epistemically impermissibly from the perspective of those norms. But the epistemically impermissible thing they've done is come to know things they were in a position to know. And that's the sort of thing that is always perfectly epistemically permissible from the perspective of our traditional epistemic norms.

Going back to me and my boat, let's say I'm sitting in the park and I call you to find out what 'S.S.' stands for. You utter the answer. But say that instead of

listening to you I am busy studying the pigeon on the bench next to me and learning various details about its appearance and behaviour. I don't hear what you said, and so I failed to do what the strategic norms of inquiry were telling me to do, and did something else instead. From the perspective of those strategic norms I've behaved impermissibly.<sup>22</sup> But that behaviour looks epistemically impeccable from the perspective of our traditional epistemic norms. Where did I go wrong? I acquired some knowledge I was in a position to easily acquire. And this is just one small example of a way I could have extended my knowledge at the relevant time by coming to know something that was not at all relevant to my figuring out what 'S.S.' stands for and not at all a means to my resolving that question.

I take it that the sort of phenomenon being described in this specific case generalizes. If our new strategic norms demand that S  $\phi$  at  $t$ , and rather than  $\phi$ -ing S makes some of the judgments in  $\mathcal{K}_{\bar{q}}$  at  $t$ , thereby getting some new knowledge at  $t$ , then S can easily have done something epistemically impermissible from the perspective of those strategic norms. So, if we go back to  $\mathcal{A}$  (the set of all of the things S is in a position to do at  $t$ ), we can now see that our old epistemic norms will not induce the same permissibility split on  $\mathcal{A}$  that our new strategic norms will. In fact, at any given time those splits may be poles apart. In particular, the small discussion in this section brings out that some of the acts that are going to be on the impermissible side of the split of  $\mathcal{A}$  induced by our new strategic epistemic norms are going to be acts of coming to know. But that is going to place those acts squarely on the permissible side of the split of  $\mathcal{A}$  induced by our traditional epistemic norms. Coming to know any  $p$  whatsoever is always epistemically permissible from the perspective of our traditional epistemic norms. So, is it epistemically permissible or not epistemically permissible for S to make those judgments and come to know at  $t$ ?

And so, a zetetic epistemology that simply expands the scope of doxastic epistemology looks somewhat incoherent. And its incoherence is not merely at the fringes, when inquirers are in some strange situations. The sort of incoherence I've drawn out can and will occur throughout most any typical in-

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<sup>22</sup>This assumes that I haven't legitimately switched to some pigeon inquiry at the relevant time. And that is what we should assume in this case. That's not to say that there isn't another, similar case in which I do switch inquiries, nor that the norms of inquiry won't have plenty to say about such switches. But it is not the case that every time we drop the ball with respect to one question it's because we are picking it up with respect to another. Sometimes we just drop the ball.

quiry. The sort of merely expansive zetetic epistemology we are considering now will regularly give inquirers conflicting epistemic advice, telling them all at once that making some judgments at some time is epistemically permissible and that making those judgments at that time is not epistemically permissible.

Of course, there is a great deal more to say about what basically amounts to a sketch of an argument for one kind of disconnect or discord between our old epistemic norms and the new epistemic norms we'll get if we take the zetetic turn. To move beyond this mere sketch we'd need to hear more about means and ends, what counts as relevance to  $Q^?$ , what information is available to an inquirer at a time, rational constraints on temporally extended activities, and much more. Obviously that sort of discussion is beyond the scope of this paper. I hope the contours are clear, at least. In effect, our new strategic epistemic norms are going to tell us what we should do at a given time in active inquiry by comparing the various things we are in a position to do at that time according to the extent to which those things are means to our inquiry-theoretic ends. But one kind of thing we can do at most times during active inquiry is make all sorts of judgments. Many of those judgments will be both epistemically impeccable — in our old sense (e.g., result in our knowing something) — and not at all means to our inquiry-theoretic ends, which unfortunately means that they need not be epistemically impeccable in our new sense.

## 5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Where does this leave us? The task of this paper was to explore a more inquiry-focused epistemology. And while that exploration was somewhat experimental, we have good reason to want epistemology to speak to all of inquiry — to tell us not just what to believe but how to inquire more generally. Even this cursory glance at where the zetetic turn will take us makes clear that it will expand the purview of the epistemic in a variety of ways. That said, shifting from our more traditional doxastic paradigm in epistemology to a new zetetic paradigm might not be a straightforward expansion project. Some answers we'll want to give to some of the new questions that arise about how to inquire don't harmonize perfectly well with some of the old answers we've been giving to questions about what to believe and when.

That there is this discord makes it harder to decide whether we should take

the zetetic turn. And beyond the mere fact of discord, some of the verdicts issued by the new sorts of epistemic norms we're considering now might themselves be hard to stomach. Part of the reason the strategic epistemic norms are in tension with our traditional epistemic norms is that the strategic norms sometimes declare epistemically impermissible the making of certain traditionally epistemically impeccable judgments. According to those new epistemic norms, it can easily be the case that our coming to know or our forming some belief in response to excellent evidence is not permitted. And that 'not permitted' is thoroughly epistemic once we take the zetetic turn. But could it really turn out epistemically impermissible to come to know  $p$ ? Or epistemically impermissible to judge  $p$  based on excellent evidence for  $p$ ? So, beyond the fact that these sorts of epistemic verdicts are in conflict with our more traditional ones, they are somewhat troubling on their own terms.

Does all of this mean that we should abandon the zetetic paradigm? My view: not yet. We have good reason to take the zetetic turn, and the fact that it seems to bump up against some old epistemic intuitions doesn't yet make it that we need to jump ship rather than more carefully investigate and explore the interaction between the epistemic and the zetetic, potentially making revisions to each. Besides, it's not clear how much of a reprieve we'd actually get by deciding against the zetetic turn. Here's a way to see this. Rather than asking whether our new zetetic norms are epistemic, we can ask whether our traditional epistemic norms are norms of inquiry. But either answer to this question leaves something to be desired. If they are zetetic norms, then we'll have to say that the norms of inquiry fail to harmonize (for the same reasons discussed in the previous section). And if our traditional epistemic norms are not norms of inquiry? Well, then it becomes hard to see what epistemology is or what it's for. If our traditional epistemic norms are not the sorts of norms we ought to conform to in order to successfully figure things out, then why should we conform to them at all? ‡

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