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ARTICLE

Inquiry, Questions, and Actions

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Abstract

This article aims to contribute to the elucidation of the nature of inquiry. I start with some common desiderata for any theory of inquiry. I then categorize inquiry as a structured process. By focusing on its essential components, I advance a new characterization of inquiry as a combination of questioning attitudes guiding actions. Finally, I turn to the recent objection that questioning attitudes are not necessary for inquiry. I argue that inquiry is a structured process essentially constituted by questioning attitudes having two precise functional roles, initiating and guiding the deployment of cognitive capacities towards an epistemic goal.

Résumé

Cet article vise à élucider la nature de l'enquête. Je présente tout d'abord les desiderata communs à toute théorie de l'enquête. Je catégorise ensuite l'enquête comme un processus structuré en me concentrant sur ses composantes essentielles : des attitudes de questionnement guidant des actions. Enfin, je me penche sur l'objection récente selon laquelle les attitudes de questionnement ne sont pas nécessaires à l'enquête. Je défends la thèse selon laquelle l'enquête est un processus structuré essentiellement constitué d'attitudes de questionnement ayant deux rôles fonctionnels précis, soit d'initier et de guider le déploiement de capacités cognitives en vue d'un but épistémique.

Keywords: inquiry; questioning attitudes; process; Jane Friedman; epistemology; zetetic actions

1. Introduction

The contemporary shift in epistemology, known as the "zetetic turn," which emphasizes the central role of inquiry, calls for a thorough understanding of its nature. It has recently been argued that we are witnessing a "zetetic turn" in normative epistemology. This transformation entails a shift in focus from the question of what we should believe to how to inquire. One of the notable proponents spearheading this shift is Jane Friedman (2019a, 2020, Forthcoming (a), Forthcoming (b)), who advocates for a departure from the doxastic orientation in favour of a zetetic perspective. According to Friedman (Forthcoming (b)), the subject of examination ought to be directed towards establishing the "norms for the entire process of inquiry, from the initial curiosity or formulation of a question to the settling or resolving of that

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question," i.e., norms that bear on the process from start to finish (Falbo, Forthcoming; Haziza, 2023; Thorstad, 2022). However, the literature often assumes, without discussion, that inquiry is a process. Contemporary epistemology prioritizes the starting and ending stages of inquiry, leaving much of the intermediate stages unexplored: "The Doxastic Paradigm fixates upon the end point of a much more robust and temporally extended process" (Falbo, 2023, p. 2978).

In epistemology, thinking about inquiry has a long tradition. This indicates that the recent tendency represented by the "zetetic turn" is not as radical a departure as it may seem.[1] It is indeed good news that epistemologists are rediscovering the importance of inquiry after a prolonged focus on the analysis of knowledge and the justification of belief. In this article, I will argue for a precise and systematic examination of what we mean when we characterize inquiry as a process rather than a state, an event, or a disposition. Inquiry is generally characterized by its essential aim of answering questions or by being in a certain state of mind. However, the process-based view defended in this article will show that neither of these approaches alone is sufficient to account for the complexity of inquiry. It proposes a coherent integration of the strengths and insights from these views to fully characterize inquiry's ontological, psychological, and teleological dimensions. Understanding its components is crucial for a comprehensive grasp of inquiry. Categorizing inquiry as a process, rather than an event or a state, invites a detailed examination of its internal structure.

The process-based view, for which I will argue, holds that inquiry is a structured process consisting of (1) questioning attitudes guiding (2) actions and (3) aiming at an epistemic goal.

The purpose of this article is twofold. First, it argues for a view that aligns with our common-sense understanding of inquiry. Second, by building on and expanding prior philosophical insights, it articulates a more coherent and natural account of inquiry. I will also shed light on some historical underpinnings of contemporary views. The process-based view of inquiry is of significance for, at least, three reasons: (i) it upholds our common-sense intuitions about inquiry's dynamic nature, (ii) it maintains the well-accepted idea that inquiry is an epistemic goal-directed activity, and (iii) it presents a coherent metaphysical framework that combines teleological and psychological elements.

This article will be structured as follows. I will first identify some common desiderata for any theory of inquiry (Section 2). I will then provide considerations for capturing inquiry in terms of process (Section 3) before laying down an account of the fundamental components of inquiry (Section 4). After that, I will combine the results of my previous insights to show which theoretical benefits are provided, and how my

[1] The emphasis on inquiry within the realm of epistemology is not an entirely new idea. For instance, Jaakko Hintikka has consistently contended that it forms the core of both Platonic Socratic and Aristotelian epistemologies, advocating for "a genuine epistemology of knowledge-seeking over and above the epistemology of knowledge-justification, which is what current epistemology almost entirely is" (Hintikka, 2007, p. 80). Christopher Hookway (2008, 2009), aligning with the spirit of pragmatist tradition (notably C. S. Peirce and John Dewey), alongside philosophers such as Isaac Levi (2012), has also played a prominent role in advocating for this conception of epistemology as a theory of inquiry. See Falbo (Forthcoming) for parallel historical considerations.

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view fares with two main current approaches of inquiry (Section 5). Finally, before concluding, I will answer a threatening objection to the process-based view (Section 6).

2. Desiderata

Several intuitively plausible desiderata must be satisfied in order to provide a comprehensive account of inquiry. First, a theory of inquiry should identify the components that structure inquiry and how they relate to each other. Providing a theory of a particular phenomenon, whether a natural one like digestion or an artifactual one like the game of cricket, implies that one can describe in a minute fashion its main components. Similarly, "when analyzing the structure of inquiry, what is wanted is insight into the components of inquiry, and how those components are related so as to constitute a certain kind of process" (Bengson et al., 2022, p. 15). Second, a theory of inquiry should account for the fact that questioning attitudes are constitutive of any inquiry. It is part of the definition of an inquiry that it implies "the action of asking or questioning" (*Oxford English Dictionary*). It would indeed be absurd to describe a subject as inquiring into a matter while that person manifests absolutely no questioning attitude towards the matter. It means that you cannot inquire, e.g., about Caesar's last words without, at least, asking yourself what his last words were. You need to have some kind of specific attitude directed towards some content in order to count as an inquirer. Third, a theory of inquiry is supposed to respect the natural idea that inquiry is an activity. Imagine a police detective who, instead of inquiring into some current issue pertaining to his job, is just lying all day long on his sofa binge watching soap operas. Now, suppose his partner calls him and narrates the latest developments about the case he's supposed to be working on. We wouldn't want to qualify this detective as being engaged in any inquiring activity. It follows that we should not characterize inquiry as a mere mechanical gathering of information. Friedman is crystal clear on this point when she writes that "inquiring is something we do, it's not something that happens to us, it's not a reflex or a tic or 'mere behaviour'. On the whole, inquiring is a piece of intentional action — by and large it's an intentional activity" (Friedman, Forthcoming (a)). Its character as an activity is a commonly well-recognized feature. Inquiring is something that we do about a variety of objects, in different ways, e.g., superficially, methodically, with or without success, etc. It is something we can decide to do or refuse to do and can be blamed for if we do not do. There are certainly different forms of inquiring activities or attitudes, but the general idea is that inquiry is not a passive acquisition of information. It should be part of the definition of inquiry that it includes the deployment of capacities and not mere behaviours.[2] Fourth, a theory of inquiry should clarify how inquiry is, like other activities, goal-directed. An inquiry can have or not have a result, such as a discovery or resolution of the initial question or problem. Christopher Hookway aptly illustrates this in noting that

[2] Christoph Kelp observes that opting for a "local brainwashing service" to instill a certain belief does not constitute genuine inquiry into the corresponding question. This aligns with my use of the term "deployment of capacities," as I count gathering and evaluating of evidence as the main inquiring capacities (see Section 4.2 below). It is also consistent with an evidentialist framework, as Kelp further notes, stating, "Evidentialists, for instance, might say that inquiry essentially involves gathering evidence (and that's why using the brainwashing service in the case below doesn't qualify as inquiring)" (Kelp, 2021, p. 52).

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> [t]he most natural view is that an inquiry is an attempt to solve some problem concerning what is the case or, perhaps, to find the answer to a question. […] If I inquire into the causes of global warming, I seek an answer to the question "Why does global warming occur?". […] [I]nquiry is always an attempt to find the correct answer to some question. (Hookway, 2007, p. 355)

The aim-directedness or teleological structure of inquiry is a vastly discussed topic. However, Friedman notes that the fact that "inquiry is a goal-directed activity can make reference to a number of different aspects or features of inquiry — its structure, its norms, the mental lives of its participants" (Friedman, Forthcoming (a)). To avoid the risk of ambiguity, I will try to be clear about which aspects are targeted by the view I am advancing. But, from now on, I will start arguing for the process-based view of inquiry.

3. Inquiry as a Process

In this section, I will explore how the ontology of processes offers insights into inquiry's characteristics. Initially, it's crucial to note the long-standing notion in literature, predating the "zetetic turn," that inquiry fundamentally is a process. Here is small a sample:

> Inquiry is a process of asking questions and looking for the answers to them. (Wiśniewski, 1995, p. 3)

> Inquiry is a dynamical and ultimately incompletable process so that the agenda of questions and the inventory of our answers to them are not something stable but rather manifest an ever-continuing flux. (Rescher, 2000, p. 10)

> Considering inquiry as a question-answer sequence enables us to theorize about entire processes of inquiry, including strategies and tactics of questioning, not only about what to do in some one given situation. (Hintikka, 2007, p. 7)

> Human inquiry is a dynamic process that takes place in space and time. (Skorupski, 2010, p. 45)

There are several general features of inquiry as a process. First, inquiry is a localized process, much like walking to the office or the occurrence of rainfall in a particular region. Second, inquiry is a generic process that can occur and reoccur in different places and times, such as swimming or roller skating. Third, inquiry involves a part-whole relationship, where the parts of inquiry are not inquiries in themselves but contribute to the overall process. Fourth, and perhaps most significantly, in contrast to most natural processes, inquiry is *intentional*. We actively engage in inquiry as a daily process, in contrast to our passive relationship with processes like rain, digestion, or respiration.

It is crucial to note that inquiry is not a series of individual events, but rather a structurally configured process with specific elements that possess causal powers.

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Despite variations between the starting point and endpoint of an inquiry, the fundamental nature of the inquiry process remains the same. As Helen Steward states, processes are

> types of unfoldings in the world which are structured in such a way that a certain termination point, product, or ongoing production cycle is the norm. As long as such a process continues, we suppose that the very same token process is going on — each new stage or addition makes not a new process but a mere continuation of the same one. (Steward, 2013, p. 807)

Fred Dretske similarly characterizes a process as

> the bringing about, the causing, the production, of a terminal condition, state, or object — […] its product. The product is a *part* of the process, and therefore the process isn't complete until that product is produced. (Dretske, 1988, p. 35)

Both authors provide an effective framework for understanding the key elements of the inquiry process: its different phases and the bringing about of a product. In this sense, inquiry has a specific endpoint that is targeted from the outset. The process of inquiry itself results from a goal that one has already fixed, i.e., wanting to know when is the last train to London, how decaf is made, or whether the Zodiac Killer is one individual or different ones. The role of initiating inquiry is always devoted to the questioning activity, and the phases of inquiry are constituted by various cognitive and physical activities.

I assume here, for the sake of argument, that activities are not events at all. Rather, they are ongoing processes that unfold through time and may change as they are going on. The temporal shape of inquiry is thus the following: an inquiry is an activity taking place across some interval of time, $[t_0, t_n]$. The inquiry starts at t_0, proceeds across that interval, and then ends at some later time t_n (Friedman, 2019a). Of course, an inquiry may not have a terminal temporal boundary and can remain unsettled.

In the next section, I will examine the defining essential components of inquiry as a process: (a) the attitude of questioning with which it begins, and (b) the zetetic actions of exploring and exploiting the evidence in one's possession to answer the focal question of the inquiry.

4. Questions and Actions in Inquiry

I will now spell out in more detail the process-based view of inquiry: necessarily, an inquiry is a structured process consisting of (1) questioning attitudes guiding (2) zetetic actions, which are (3) aiming at an epistemic goal.

4.1. Questions in Inquiry

Questioning attitudes have different functional roles. In this section I will argue for the following two claims:

> **INITIATING INQUIRY:** Questioning attitudes' primary functional role is to initiate inquiry.

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GUIDING ACTIONS: Questioning attitudes guide the actions and capacities deployed in inquiry.

Inquirers do not only make decisions and take actions when engaged in inquiries; they necessarily have what is referred to interchangeably as "inquiring attitudes" or "interrogative attitudes." According to Friedman (2019a, p. 300), having some interrogative attitude at *t* is necessary to count as an inquirer at *t*.[3] The family of attitudes constitutive of the activity of inquiry — the attitudes that one is disposed to have in the course of inquiry — includes wondering, being curious, considering a question, examining or exploring it, deliberating, and presuming.[4] Following Friedman (2013) and Peter Carruthers (2018), I view questioning attitudes as first-order, world-directed attitudes. This last term means that, when inquiring about a question Q, an inquirer is, according to Friedman, "not merely reflecting on her own mind or desiring that she improve her epistemic standing" (Friedman, 2013, p. 156) with respect to Q; her thoughts are not mind-directed. In the same vein, Carruthers argues that the interrogative behaviour of inquirers (whether infants and toddlers, or non-human animals) is "manifesting first-order questioning attitudes, rather than metacognitive awareness of their own states" (Carruthers, 2020, p. 9). Carruthers defends the idea that "questioning attitudes are not only basic and widespread, but are fundamental to our understanding of cognition generally" (Carruthers, 2018, p. 141). In contrast to Friedman concerning their nature, Carruthers argues that they constitute *sui generis* forms of affective states. These attitudes have questions, rather than propositions, as their content (see Friedman, 2013) and it "can be as simple as *what that is* or *where the toy is*" (Carruthers, 2020, p. 24). Carruthers also notes that "the content of a questioning attitude is the set of propositions or possible states of affairs […] that would satisfy the attitude (normally removing it)" (Carruthers, 2018, p. 135). Plunging further into the metaphysical nature of our various questioning attitudes will not be necessary. However, what needs to be emphasized is that questioning attitudes have different functional roles. It is generally assumed that the primary role is INITIATING INQUIRY (see Friedman, Forthcoming (a), Forthcoming (b)).

[3] According to Friedman (2017, 2019b), if S is inquiring about whether p, then S is suspending judgement about whether p. Moreover, Friedman further claims that suspension is the most central interrogative attitude, but see Michal Masny (2020) for convincing objections. The question of the localization of suspension in inquiry is a difficult one and a lot will hang upon how one cashes out the nature of suspension (see Wagner, 2022). Contrary to Friedman, I do not count suspension of judgement among the class of interrogative attitudes, and thus, I believe that it is not essential to inquiry. Numerous cases show that suspension does not sufficiently motivate inquiry (i.e., efforts to eliminate this state and reach a settled position) and therefore lack the INITIATING ROLE of questioning attitudes. Additionally, it is intuitively possible to inquire without having any suspensive attitude from beginning to end. On the view defended here, suspension can be either an outcome of inquiry or a state entertained during the process of inquiry, but it is merely a contingent fact that one has this attitude during inquiry. This still holds when adopting Julia Staffel's (2019) view that suspension can be a "transitional" or "terminal attitude" in complex deliberation. Thanks to an anonymous referee for encouraging me to clarify how suspension is related to inquiry.

[4] On presumption, see Pascal Engel (2021) and Nicholas Rescher (2006, Chapter 5); on wondering, see Daniel Drucker (2022) and Richard Teague (Forthcoming); and on curiosity, see Daniela Dover (Forthcoming).

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Interestingly, INITIATING INQUIRY was already noticed by John Cook Wilson in his account of the relation of knowing to thinking:

> In an inquiry, first comes this questioning activity when we set a problem to ourselves. This implies that we know something of a given subject but are ignorant of some aspects of it which interests us. We put to ourselves questions: our attitude is obviously not that of knowing, nor even of having an opinion, but an attitude in which we wonder what the truth is. We may find the answer by experience or some other direct apprehension: or else we may see that the facts known to us at the start necessitate certain other facts and thus reach the goal by reasoning, a form of thinking which is knowing. If we arrive in either way at the knowledge which we seek, our undecided and interrogative attitude ceases. If our data are not enough we may either remain undecided, or we may form an opinion. (Cook Wilson, 1926, p. 36)

Cook Wilson is thus addressing the question "What needs to happen for an inquiry to start?" aligning with contemporary views that consider wondering central to genuine inquiry. Adolf Reinach concurs, viewing the questioning attitude (or interrogative stance) as *sui generis* ("something of which definition is not only impossible, but would also be pointless"), and as "the founding phenomenon" of inquiry. According to Reinach, the first stage's sole function is to make possible the last stage of deliberation. He notes that the last stage "towards which the reflection is aimed is always a position-taking by the subject" (Reinach, 1989, p. 280). Reinach interestingly observes that "should [inquiry] end with the lack of or with the *abstention from taking any position*, with an absolute 'I don't know,' then it has failed in its immanent purpose; then the process has failed" (Reinach, 1989, p. 280). It means that, according to Reinach, ending inquiry in suspended judgement — which is traditionally conceived as a kind of doxastic abstention — is a mark of the failure of inquiry.

Accepting INITIATING INQUIRY, it is crucial to understand the additional functional roles of questioning attitudes beyond this primary one. An often overlooked role is GUIDING ACTIONS. Friedman correctly points out that "Qua inquirers we are motivated by question-directed attitudes and we act on those attitudes in ways that can be conceived of as question-askings" (Friedman, Forthcoming (a)). However, if we emphasize the centrality of question-directed attitudes in inquiry, it's essential to clarify the term "question-askings," as it can be ambiguous. Wolfgang Künne distinguishes:

> Question$_1$ *mental acts of asking oneself a question*
> Question$_2$ *illocutionary acts of asking a question*
> Question$_3$ *interrogative sentences*
> Question$_4$ *askables*
> (Künne, 2003, p. 158)

Sense-1-questions correspond to the interrogative attitude of wondering or having a question in thought (i.e., possible content corresponding to sense-4-question). These questions can be voiced and directed towards others. Sense-1-questions are prior to

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sense-2-questions (illocutionary asking). Sense-3-questions serve as linguistic vehicles for both the illocutionary acts and mental acts of asking a question (e.g., "Charlie asks whether Sylvia Ageloff was part of the plot to kill Trotsky"). Importantly, sense-2-questions are a subtype of a more general action-type (asking in general). Friedman views this action-type as central to inquiry: "In asking questions we try to remake our informational environments in particular ways: ways that align with our questions" (Friedman, Forthcoming (a)). Thus, the questioning activity is a necessary condition for any inquiry to occur. The process-based view concurs that we do act on these questioning attitudes by asking questions (in sense-1 or sense-2). However, contrary to Friedman, I argue that it's also necessary for questioning attitudes to guide other types of mental and physical actions (see Section 4.2 below). To expand on this idea, here is an analogy: *questioning attitudes are to inquiry what intentions are to actions*. By this, I mean that *questioning attitudes guide inquiry like intentions guide actions*. Inquiry has guiding states: the questioning attitudes. If they are not manifested (as mental or verbal question-askings) or if they cease to exist during inquiry, the process will stop. One is no longer inquiring as long as one's questioning attitude disappears. Similarly, as long as one entertains questioning attitudes guiding one's actions, one is still inquiring. The questioning attitudes are, so to speak, the *forms* or the internal structure of inquiry, guiding the actions — the external structure — deployed by the inquirer to reach a terminal point.

Let me elaborate further on this analogy that questioning attitudes are to inquiry what intentions are to actions. According to Elisabeth Pacherie:

> Intentions have […] been assigned a guiding function in the production of an action. The cognitive component of an intention to A incorporates a plan for A-ing, a representation or set of representations specifying the goal of the action and how it is to be arrived at. It is this component of the intention that is relevant to its *guiding function*. (Pacherie, 2006, p. 146)

What is an equivalent to intentions in inquiry? In general, an intention is executed, or not executed. What happens in inquiry? In inquiring, a subject S aims at determining the truth about a question Q. In inquiring, S has a questioning attitude towards Q. Like intentions having a guiding function in the production of action, the representational content of S' questioning attitude has a guiding function in the process of inquiry.[5] But, which are the actions guided by the questioning attitudes? That will be the topic of the following section.

4.2. Actions in Inquiry

Inquiry involves more than simply asking questions to oneself or to others. What is required, for inquiry to obtain, is the deployment of actions, which compose the exploration and exploitation phases, i.e., what is roughly characterized in the

[5] Thanks to Miloud Belkoniene for discussing this point.

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epistemological literature as gathering and evaluating evidence. Let's call these actions "zetetic actions" and "zetetic tasks."[6]

What are zetetic actions? Zetetic actions refer to actions that aim to seek, improve, or transform information, without necessarily having an immediate practical goal (see Clark, Forthcoming; Proust, 2014). For instance, searching online for the address of a nearby grocery store is an example of a zetetic action. These actions can be carried out externally, by gathering evidence in the environment, or internally, by recalling information from one's memory. Zetetic actions can be broadly categorized as physical or mental actions, with the latter including memory retrieval, directed imagining, considering alternative views, and performing directed reasoning (e.g., checking the soundness of an argument). Other activities deployed in inquiry include conducting experiments, consulting books, and making observations, all of which involve managing attention and considering how to understand what is being attended to in a particular context (see Hookway, 2009). These actions reflect the aim-directedness of inquiry and are essential for successful inquiry. Which token actions will be deployed, or which attitudes will be adopted during inquiry, is indeed a contingent matter depending on the specific inquiry in which one is engaged.[7] We can be, you and I, working independently on the same inquiry (for example, "What was

[6] In the literature on epistemic agency, we often come across the term "epistemic actions." However, the term "zetetic actions" and its cognate "zetetic acts," as far as I am aware, originate from Friedman (Forthcoming (a), Forthcoming (b)). She identifies question-asking as the quintessential zetetic act. Verena Wagner also uses this term to include "*all* activities (mental or otherwise) that are performed [by the inquiring subjects] with the aim of making progress with respect to the target question" (Wagner, 2023, p. 153).

[7] Will Fleisher (2018) and Michele Palmira (2020) argue that the attitude of endorsement and hypothesis respectively play significant roles in inquiry. Palmira contends that one can genuinely inquire into a question even if one no longer suspends judgement towards the question. Palmira's target is mainly Friedman's suspended-judgement view of inquiry (and other accounts of suspension in terms of epistemic neutrality). As noted in footnote 3, I do not consider suspension of judgement to be within the class of questioning attitudes. There is indeed no conflict between Palmira's view and the process-based view. They are compatible in the sense that one can have a cognitive inclination (e.g., a hypothesis) at different stages of inquiry and still be guided by one's main question. The *hide-and-seek game* example (below) illustrates this point: in inquiring, a subject maintains a questioning attitude in considering alternatives and eliminating hypotheses. It is not implied that questioning attitudes are epistemically neutral or incompatible with some inclinations towards a possible answer. One can entertain a hypothesis H regarding a question Q at some stage of inquiry and still engage in wondering, being curious, deliberating, or contemplating what the answer to Q is. The point is that the process-based view agrees with Palmira as it is not assuming that "suspended judgement is the *only* type of doxastic attitude that one tokens when one is inquiring into a question" (Palmira, 2020, p. 4952). Furthermore, I do not assume that "the attitude of cognitive inclination one has at the second stage of inquiry" entails (or can be reduced to) suspended judgement (Palmira, 2020, p. 4952). The process-based view implies that, during inquiry, one can hold very different attitudes and perform various mental actions, such as "considering alternative views," which is identified as a potential zetetic action. Thus, the process-based view is flexible, accommodating the idea that attitudes like hypotheses (which Palmira specifies as a second stage in a three-stage inquiry process) and endorsements can be adopted during inquiry, alongside other attitudes such as imagining or recalling that p. Fleisher also emphasizes that "endorsement is distinctively epistemic and provisional" (Fleisher, 2018, p. 2652), supporting the view that such acceptance-like attitudes are appropriate during inquiry. Here, I take for granted that, like hypothesis or endorsement, imagination and memory are integral yet contingent components of the questioning process, which constitutes inquiry. When an inquirer activates their memory, they can tap into their knowledge base and glean hints for resolving their question. Similarly, by activating their

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the role of Ageloff in Trotsky's assassination?") while engaging in very different zetetic actions. The important thing is that they participate as a type of action essential to inquiry, viz., with an epistemic purpose, and are guided by (in this case, by the same) questioning attitudes.[8] Let's take another example:

> *Hide-and-seek game*
> Your little brother manages to hide somewhere in the house. Now you are asking yourself where he could be hiding. You mentally try to visualize the different locations he might have chosen. You go from one to the next possible location without yet finding him. You consider alternatives and eliminate your hypothesis by acquiring evidence of his absences in the parental bedroom, or in the kitchen. You are progressing in your quest in making some simple inferences, and with a bit of luck, you finally find him in a closet on the first floor.

Hide-and-seek is a game mostly done for fun. Its goal is not purely epistemic, but nonetheless, discovering and thus knowing your brother's precise situation is arguably an epistemic enterprise. The *hide-and-seek game* example, simple as it is, provides all of the elements constitutive of inquiry. It is processual, it has a questioning attitude as its initiating point and manifested throughout the search, and is realized via zetetic actions and capacities that are deployed in aiming at a stopping point. This example illustrates how inquiry involves zetetic tasks manifested by the deployment of specific capacities of exploration and exploitation. Of course, some of these capacities can be intentionally or non-intentionally deployed during the inquiry process. They are mainly realized through sub-tasks, for example, such as direct or indirect inferences produced from one's stock of information. But the main task of inquiry remains intentional.[9]

In contrast, the deficit in the deployment of capacities, and the inability to evaluate one's evidence correctly would result in failure to discover the truth. Take as an example some famous fictional detectives like Inspector Clouseau or Thomson and Thompson. If they are not totally failing in the exploration phase, they are absolutely failing when it comes to the exploitation phase of inquiry. The results are most of the time delivered through jumping to erroneous conclusions, misunderstandings, and flawed reasoning, despite, from time to time, some well-motivated efforts. But this leads us to the normative territory that will need to be scrutinized another time.

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imagination, an inquirer is inclined to envisage a range of scenarios, either proceeding through elimination or further exploring one of the potential answers they are considering.

[8] An inquiry into a specific question can naturally involve multiple, smaller-scale inquiries as integral phases. For instance, to elucidate "What was the role of Ageloff in Trotsky's assassination?," one might need to explore Ageloff's biography, her involvement in the Trotsky movement, the layout of Trotsky's house in Mexico, and even the identities of his visitors at that time. These different sub-inquiries will contribute to answering the main target question. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pressing me to clarify this point.

[9] "Inquiring is necessarily intentional and […] every inquirer is acting with some aim or engaging in a kind of goal-directed activity" (Friedman, Forthcoming (a)).

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4.3. Inquiry and Its Aim(s)

Recent literature on inquiry primarily focuses on the epistemic states and attitudes that result from inquiry. It explores questions about the epistemic standings constitutively aimed at in inquiry, such as reasonable belief, confidence, knowledge, certainty, understanding, etc., indicating that "the goal of mental state acquisition" is "an essential feature of the activity of inquiry" (Friedman, Forthcoming (a)). It is part of the process-based view that inquiry is a structured process that aims at an epistemic goal. I have assumed that the goal of inquiry is always to adopt some positive epistemic standing on a given question Q. However, I believe that the process-based view can remain neutral regarding inquiry's specific aim. It is as compatible with a knowledge-centred approach (Friedman, 2017; Kelp 2021; Williamson, 2000) as with pluralist approaches that include weaker, or stronger, epistemic states. As H. H. Price points out, knowledge is *ideally* what we aim at in inquiry but often we cannot get it and thus "belief is a second best. It is not what we wanted, but it is better than nothing" (Price, 1969, p. 72). It is crucial to recognize that until an inquiry about a question Q is closed, the representational content for any inquirer remains <not known> (see Carruthers, Forthcoming). This contrasts with episodic acts like asking a question or wondering whether p, as well as other mental processes that are transient phases of inquiry. The representational content <not known> persists from the beginning to the end of the inquiry, assuming there is a definitive endpoint. However, recent objections (Falbo, 2021; Woodard, Forthcoming) challenge the necessity of questioning attitudes (and thus the representational content <not known>) for inquiry. Their view consists in arguing that one can know p and still inquire into whether p. I will discuss this point at length in Section 6. From the descriptive angle adopted in this article, the termination of inquiry is not necessarily conceived of in terms of knowledge. Instead, other epistemic outcomes like understanding, certainty, uncertainty, or credence are also potential products. More often than not, this is a context-dependent matter, and it is an obvious claim that different inquiries aim to solve different problems and, in this sense, have different objectives. What is important here is to respect the desideratum that a theory of inquiry explains its aim-directedness feature.

The package-deal conception of inquiry comprising questioning attitudes and zetetic actions effectively elucidates its teleological aspects. Echoing Reinach's observation, the first stage's sole function (corresponding to INITIATING INQUIRY) is to make possible the last stage of deliberation, while the actions guided by the questioning attitudes (corresponding to GUIDING ACTIONS) are naturally goal-oriented. The process-based view supports Friedman's claim that an "interrogative attitude is part of what motivates and guides inquiry, encoding the inquirer's zetetic goals" (Friedman, Forthcoming (a)). Regardless of whether one favours a knowledge-centred or pluralist approach, the common thread is the pursuit of a correct, reasonable, or provisional answer to the inquirer's questions. As noted earlier, identifying a specific constitutive aim of inquiry is not essential for the present descriptive project. In agreement with Friedman, I propose that a deeper understanding of the components and characteristics of inquiry might emerge from shifting focus away from the aim of inquiry and instead examining its other aspects.

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5. Some Clarifications and Consequences

There are indeed two plausible and general views that I take on board, as they offer important insights relevant to the nature of inquiry. They are what I call the "state-of-mind view" and the "aim-directed view."[10] According to these respective views:

- Inquiry is just being in a specific state of mind.
- Inquiry is just an activity of answering questions.

These approaches are valuable in that they shed light on what exactly should be considered as a part of an inquiring activity. However, they both provide a somewhat reductionist characterization of inquiry by focusing, first and foremost, on its teleological or psychological dimension, respectively. Embracing these aspects of these views, while rejecting their reductionist tendency in understanding what inquiry is, is a consequence of the common-sense view of inquiry that I advocate.

To establish the limitations of these views, consider the following. Regarding the state-of-mind view, it does not offer much insight into how inquirers' inquisitive mental states guide their investigative activity. For instance, if I ask myself how decaf is made, according to the state-of-mind view, asking myself the question is a clear indication of inquiry. However, it is possible that I merely contemplate the question without exhibiting any behaviour aimed at seeking information. In this case, I am not genuinely inquiring into the question. I might simply wonder about how decaf is made without any real intention of seeking an answer. My questioning attitude of wondering simply does not guide some actions in such a case. Moreover, I could procrastinate eternally without aiming for an answer to this question, or even forget about it altogether.

Similarly, concerning the aim-directed view, it is insufficient in capturing the essence of the activity of inquiry. For example, if I am participating in a quiz game, according to the aim-directed view, I am engaged in an inquiry because I aim to find an answer to a question. However, let's consider a situation where I am asked about the capital of Honduras and I am ignorant of the correct answer. In such a case, I might merely guess the answer without engaging in genuine inquiry. In both the decaf and quiz scenarios, I am doing what the two views suggest — I am in a particular mental state, and I am answering a question. However, in neither case am I truly inquiring.[11] These mental events of questioning and answering can be

[10] These views can be attributed respectively, and with some qualifications, to Friedman (2017, 2019a) and Nicholas Smith (2020).

[11] Kelp is another proponent of the aim-directed view of inquiry. He contends that "the aim of settling questions is not only the aim of inquiry but also its *constitutive* aim. Any activity that does not have this aim is *ipso facto* not the activity of inquiry" (Kelp, 2021, p. 52). Paradoxically, Kelp also maintains "that cases of automatic belief formation are cases of inquiry," yet this clashes with the principle that inquiry is more than passive information gathering, our third desideratum. For instance, while we continuously form spontaneous beliefs about our environments — such as the location of a book or recognizing a melody — these instances do not equate to engaging in inquiry. It does not seem that the formation of these spontaneous beliefs aims at settling questions. On the contrary, inquiry implies settling questions that are the content of questioning attitudes, like wondering about the whereabouts of my book or actively determining whether a melody is by Mozart or Vivaldi. Kelp attempts to mitigate this discrepancy by introducing what he calls a "lightweight" view of inquiry, categorizing "finding things out" as "a broader genus of activity" with a

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phases within an inquiry, but they do not fully constitute the essence of inquiry. Genuine inquiry involves a combination of questioning and actions. In essence, inquiry necessitates both questioning and actions — no inquiry without questions, and no inquiry without actions.

The process-based view offers two notable advantages over the state-of-mind and aim-directed views of inquiry. First, it satisfies all the desiderata of a comprehensive theory of inquiry. As previously mentioned, my proposal is essentially a common-sense view of inquiry with philosophical elaboration. However, it is not merely ornamental but serves a substantive purpose. In fact, I argue that the process-based view captures the full spectrum of inquiry's nature by highlighting the interdependence of inquiry's various aspects in a systematic, coherent, and natural manner. Second, it integrates the theoretical strengths of both the aim-directed and state-of-mind views. While the aim-directed view underscores the teleological nature of inquiry as an activity directed towards answering questions (Smith 2020), the state-of-mind view concurs but recognizes this central aspect as insufficient. In this regard, the state-of-mind view emphasizes the psychological component of inquiry, particularly the role of questioning attitudes and their centrality in characterizing inquiry (Friedman, 2017, 2019a, Forthcoming (a), Forthcoming (b)). It's important to clarify that while both views make priority claims about the nature of inquiry, such claims need not be mutually exclusive. The process-based view doesn't prioritize one aspect over another; instead, it sees them as interconnected. By advocating for a common-sense view, I contend that it is insufficient to define inquiry solely in terms either of activity, attitudes, or aims. It is necessary to articulate these different aspects to achieve a more informative and comprehensive understanding of this familiar phenomenon, which extends beyond a mere sequence of actions aimed at answering questions. Therefore, my project can be seen as an endeavour to descriptively capture, in a unified manner, at least three key dimensions of inquiry: ontological, psychological, and teleological.

6. What if Questioning Attitudes Are Not Necessary for Inquiry?

Recently, some authors have argued that inquiring into p while knowing that p is not inherently problematic (see Falbo, 2021; Woodard, Forthcoming). They support this view with examples where a "subject is seeking further epistemic goods beyond knowledge" (Woodard, Forthcoming). Common illustrations include situations like double-checking or cases derived from linguistic data. Woodard, for instance,

shared aim, thus aligning it with the aim-directed activity of inquiry (Kelp, 2021, p. 57). However, this characterization in terms of "finding things out" is overly vague and fails to capture the essence of inquiry. Moreover, "finding things out" refers to achievement concepts like discovering, getting to know, solving, or noticing things — outcomes that occur to us, rather than activities in which we engage. See also Friedman: "Achievements [verbs], e.g. notice, reach the top, win, win the match, are happenings, but they seem to mark just the very end of some process — in this sense, they are entirely endpoint" (Friedman, Forthcoming (a)). As Alan R. White aptly notes "When we notice something, we are struck by it, it makes an impression or dawns on us," underscoring that, while inquiry can lead to "finding things out," the latter is not equivalent to the activity of inquiry itself (White, 1963, p. 117). See also Friedman (Forthcoming (a)). Inquiry is a processual activity and not merely the process of acquisition of information, nor is it identical with its possible outcomes.

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contends that these scenarios suggest "that inquiry does not require interrogative attitudes, such as wondering" (Woodard, Forthcoming). This challenges the process-based view, which posits questioning attitudes as central and indispensable to any inquiry. If there really are cases in which a subject inquires into Q without having a questioning attitude on Q, such as wondering or deliberating about Q, this could potentially undermine the process-based view. In order to alleviate this problem, I will examine two types of double-checking cases and provide two responses to the potential objection that questioning attitudes are not necessary for inquiry.

First, let's consider a case based on one of Woodard's examples featuring an apparently non-paradoxical assertion:

> (3) I know that I bought the tickets, but I'm double-checking that I did, just to be sure. (Woodard, Forthcoming)

Woodard suggests that this subject "is represented as both knowing that something is the case and inquiring further into it," and adds that "we often claim to double-check that p or corroborate that p" (Woodard, Forthcoming). While I concur with her observation about frequent double-checking or corroboration, I disagree with the idea that, in the present case, the subject is further inquiring into the *same* question. Rather, the subject inquires into her epistemic standing on this matter (e.g., "Do I (really) know that p?"). More generally, I would argue that when a subject knows that p, that subject cannot inquire into the truth-value of p, but can inquire into the epistemic standing (or other properties) of one's doxastic state on whether p, as it is not clear, for instance, that if I know that p, I am aware that I know that p. Considering the tickets example, let's assume that I genuinely know that p (<I bought tickets>) rather than merely think that I know that p. When double-checking, I'm inquiring about whether I know that I did indeed buy them. It is not the case that my knowledge has somehow been destroyed. My inquiry is about whether my doxastic state on this issue amounts to knowledge, which may require having conclusive evidence that I bought the tickets. This double-check is more a way to reassure myself than to inquire into Q. If I double-check while uttering that I know that p, I am mostly seeking some irritation-relief. We could reformulate this as follows: S is not genuinely seeking a better epistemic good (e.g., than knowledge) in double-checking, but S is instead seeking "irritation-relief," so checking again is a form of reassurance-seeking and not strictly a zetetic/epistemic affair. It means that the subject aims at being in a certain psychological state rather than aiming at a further epistemic good. In inquiring into Q* (<Do I (really) know that p?>), a questioning attitude is in place: wondering whether I know that I bought tickets. Thus, I have a questioning attitude into a question in the vicinity of the original question.[12] INITIATING INQUIRY and GUIDING ACTIONS are playing their roles (see above Section 4.1). I can begin an inquiry about that question, warning others not to bank on what I say when I assert <I know I bought tickets>. As Douglas Arner observes,

[12] This is close to Smith, who argues in favour of a looser requirement for double-checking: "one return to a question 'in the neighborhood' of or 'appropriately related to' one's original question" (Smith, 2023, p. 1930).

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"'Know' closes questions, stops debates. Allowing that someone knows or knew something is incompatible with continued inquiry and caution" (Arner, 1959, p. 89). The idea here is that if I know that I bought tickets, I authorize others to consider the issue resolved, and thus I "assume a special responsibility for the consequences of error" (Arner, 1959, p. 89). This brings us to the second case in which, according to some, questioning attitudes are dispensable for inquiring. My response will be that in that kind of case, subjects are simply *not* inquiring.

Our second case is as follows. Suppose you're trying bungee jumping for the first time. The jump operator, a safety expert, assures you that the equipment is functional and that your harness is secure. He and a second operator independently double-check everything as a routine procedure. According to Arianna Falbo, in such scenarios "if one already knows that p, it seems rationally permissible […] for one to lack an attitude of curiosity or wonder concerning the answer to the question" (Falbo, 2021, p. 627). This suggests that questioning attitudes are not essential for inquiry. However, according to my "code-of-conduct solution," in high-stakes situations like these, subjects are not truly inquiring into what they already know; they are following a prescribed code of conduct. They are not genuinely inquiring when double-checking whether p in such cases. Consider an analogy without practical stakes. Suppose I know that p (<Jack Ruby shot Lee Harvey Oswald>), and a friend asks me whether I am sure that p. Does my effort to explain my reasoning and assure my friend that I'm right count as inquiring further into p, which I already know? The answer, I would argue, is no. In this scenario, I'm not engaging in further inquiry about a known fact; instead, I am merely applying a procedure of demonstration — exposing the method by which I arrived at my knowledge of p to my friend. In such a case, INITIATING INQUIRY and GUIDING ACTIONS are not involved.

The upshot is that type-1 cases of double-checking involve a questioning attitude about Q*, e.g., one is questioning one's epistemic position regarding p by aiming for a psychological state of reassurance rather than an epistemic good beyond knowledge. Here, one is not inquiring into the original question Q, as one already possesses (or believes one already possesses) the answer. Conversely, in type-2 cases, there's no questioning attitude because it simply is not about inquiring into known information; it's about adhering to and applying a standard procedure.[13]

7. Conclusion

The process-based view of inquiry brings attention to the structured nature of inquiry and highlights the interconnectedness of its essential elements. According to this view, inquiry is not limited to having a state of mind characterized by curiosity but instead involves intentional and deliberate mental episodes and attitudes of questioning that guide the deployment of cognitive capacities towards an epistemic goal. This view provides us with a realistic, albeit idealized, picture of inquiry. Other views may prioritize the aim-directed characterization of inquiry over its processual nature, or they may regard the process as a mere means to an end. However, the process-based

[13] Thanks to an anonymous referee for encouraging me to address the objections discussed in this section. For other critical approaches of double-checking as either a way of inquiring or as a way of gaining other epistemic goods than knowledge, see Smith (2023) and Eliran Haziza (Ms).

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view recognizes the importance of both the inquiry process and its outcome, considering them intimately intertwined. Additionally, the process-based view paves the way for the peaceful coexistence of zetetic epistemology, which focuses on the question of how to inquire, and traditional epistemology which deals with categories like knowledge and justification. On the one hand, the actions performed during the inquiry process, such as gathering evidence and testing hypotheses, are guided by diachronic and instrumental norms. On the other hand, the formation of doxastic attitudes, which are the outcomes of mental actions and processes like evaluation and reasoning from the evidence, is governed by synchronic evidential norms.

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