THE AIM OF INQUIRY?*

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1 INTRODUCTION

It is said that inquiry has an aim. And there is some debate over just what that aim is. Candidates are typically mental states like knowledge, true belief, reasonable belief, understanding, and so on.[1] Let's call this question — What is the aim of inquiry? — the *Specific Question* with respect to the aim of inquiry. There is a different sort of debate to be had over the aim of inquiry as well, this time over what we can call the *General Question* with respect to the aim of inquiry: What does it mean to say that inquiry has an aim?

In discussing the claim that belief has an aim, Ralph Wedgwood says the following,

> It is often claimed that beliefs aim at the truth. Indeed, this claim has often been thought to express an essential or constitutive feature of belief. But this claim is obviously not literally true. Beliefs are not little archers armed with little bows and arrows: they do not literally "aim" at anything. (Wedgwood (2002), p.267)

And in a similar (albeit terser) spirit, John MacFarlane calls for a sort of quietism about the claim that assertion aims at truth, remarking on the claim, "This idea is pretty obscure anyway." (MacFarlane (2005), p.227)

Wedgwood and MacFarlane are not talking about the aim of inquiry in these passages. But both are expressing puzzlement about a particular 'aim of x' claim that is the subject of some discussion: Wedgwood about the claim

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[1]Some recent discussions of the specific aim of inquiry: Kelp (2014, 2018, 2021), Hookway (2007), Lynch (2009), Whitcomb (2010), Millar (2011), Kvanvig (2011), Treanor (2014), Ahlstrom-Vij and Grimm (2013).

that belief aims at truth and MacFarlane about the claim that assertion aims at truth. Neither passage expresses an objection to the claim that belief/assertion aims at truth in particular (rather than, say, knowledge), but rather expresses some puzzlement about what it means to say that the relevant practice-type has an aim in the first place. This puzzlement is puzzlement about how to answer General Questions with respect to aims for these practice-types.

My main focus in this paper is the General Question with respect to the aim of inquiry (in what follows 'General Question' can be read as 'General Question with respect to the aim of inquiry'). I want to do more than express puzzlement about how to answer the General Question, I want to try to show that some of the main answers on offer are not right. And I want to follow MacFarlane in calling for a sort of quietism about 'the aim of inquiry'.

While my focus in this paper is on a few different options for understanding the General Question, I'll also say some about the Specific Question in light of those options. Most of the (small, but growing) literature about the aim of inquiry is focused on the Specific Question, but there is some discussion of the General Question as well. Also, as we've just seen, there are other, somewhat similar 'aim of x' debates: belief, assertion, action, science, and more (I'm going to call these all 'practices'). I will draw on these when appropriate.

Broadly speaking, there are two ways that 'aim of x' claims are interpreted, normative and non-normative. For instance, in the paper cited above, Wedgwood argues that the claim that belief aims at truth should be read as a normative claim about the correctness conditions for belief: it says (roughly) that a belief is correct, if and only if, the proposition believed is true. On this tack, the claim that belief has an aim just is a normative claim about the correctness conditions for belief. Virtually everyone involved in an 'aim of x' debate thinks that the claim that some practice-type π aims at α is going to be closely connected to some norms for π.[2] But a 'normative reductionist' about the 'aim of x' (like Wedgwood with respect to the aim of belief) holds that the claim that some practice-type π aims at α is nothing more than a normative claim about π. An alternative is a wholly non-normative treatment of the aim of x, with the normative implications to be worked out separately. This paper focuses on these sorts of non-normative treatments.

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[2]For instance, see Côté-Bouchard (2016) for a good discussion of the prospects for grounding epistemic normativity in belief's (putative) aim.

I will discuss two types of non-normative answers to the General Question, the first *structural* and the second *personal*. Structural answers to the General Question take the claim that inquiry has an aim to be a claim about inquiry itself. Roughly, the thought is that inquiry — the practice — has a teleological structure. Personal answers to the General Question take the claim that inquiry has an aim to be a claim about the aims or goals of inquirers qua inquirers. A structural account of the aim of inquiry can say that any token inquiry has some aim α, whatever the goals of the inquirers conducting that inquiry, i.e., whether or not those inquirers themselves are trying to achieve α. Personal accounts make inquirers' goals, what it is that inquirers qua inquirers are trying to achieve, central.

My plan in what follows is to start by looking at two structural answers to the General Question and argue that neither is satisfactory. A personal answer to the General Question fares somewhat better but doesn't align very well with the standing debate over answers to the Specific Question. All of these answers to the General Question make for interesting discussion and are clearly not entirely off-base. That said, in the end it is hard not to feel as though one is chasing down a metaphor. Perhaps a more quietistic attitude towards 'the aim of inquiry' is appropriate? Perhaps we can theorize directly about the structure of inquiry, the norms of inquiry, and the goals of individual inquirers without speaking to the General or Specific Questions (at least initially)? Of course, one hopes and expects that in doing this, some of the relevant teleological features of inquiry will emerge. In the final section I suggest a framework that I hope can do all this.

2   THE GENERAL QUESTION: STRUCTURAL ANSWERS

In this section I want to think about two structural answers to the General Question — one that's discussed by almost everyone in any 'aim of x' discussion, and another that's barely mentioned. Both are interesting and informative. They give us insight into some ways that we might conceive of practices themselves having a teleological structure, as themselves as having ends or aims or teloi. I don't think either accurately describes the structure of inquiry though, and so neither treatment gets us a handle on what we might mean when we say inquiry is goal-directed or has an aim or end.

2.1   CONSTITUTIVE AIMS & THE GAMES ANALOGY

In discussions of the aim of inquiry — and the aims of the other practices mentioned: belief, assertion, and action generally — it is extremely common

to find two central thoughts. First, that the aim of inquiry (or the others) is a constitutive aim. And second, that we can understand some of what it means to say that inquiry (belief, action, assertion) has a constitutive aim by way of an analogy with games and game playing.

With respect to inquiry in particular, there aren't as many in-depth discussions of its aim as there are discussions of the aims of belief or action. But the claim that the aim of inquiry is a 'constitutive aim' runs through the existing discussions. For instance, on the first page of Kelp (2021) we find the following claim, 'One interesting property of inquiry is that it is a type of activity with an aim, and indeed, a constitutive aim'. And, as Kelp develops his view in that paper, he draws on some of the familiar arguments and concepts from the literature on constitutive aims.

Talk of constitutive aims has figured prominently in arguments for (and against) 'constitutivism' about practical and/or moral norms and in debates about the aim of belief and the aim of assertion.[3] The crucial claim in these discussions is not just that some practice has an aim, but that this property of the practice — its having this or that telos — is constitutive of the practice. To say that some aim is constitutive of some practice is at least to say that the practice or activity has that aim in every possible case — it's a necessary feature of the practice. It may also be to say more than that — to say something about the essence of or constitution of the practice that goes beyond mere necessity, or even to say that having that telos is unique to that practice so that it's a sufficient condition for identifying the practice.[4] I'm going take the claim that some practice has an aim constitutively to be equivalent to the claim that it has that aim necessarily or in every case, and leave aside the stronger interpretations mentioned. That said, the modal interpretation still makes for a strong claim. If some practice-type π has a constitutive aim α, even in the bare modal sense at issue now, then every instance of π aims at α, and any practice that didn't aim at α, would not be an instance of π.

The claim that inquiry has its aim constitutively obviously gives us only limited guidance with respect to our General Question. If we want to know

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[3]On the constitutive aim of action: By far the most well-known constitutivists are Christine Korsgaard (in e.g., Korsgaard (2009)) and David Velleman (in e.g., Velleman (2000)). See Katsafanas (2018) for a good overview. Re: the constitutive aim of belief. The aim of belief literature is quite substantial at this point. See Chan (2013) for a nice introduction to the main issues. On the constitutive aim of assertion: Here, the bulk of the debate is about the closely related issue of the constitutive *norm* of assertion. This debate, also quite substantial by now, starts in many ways in response to the discussion in Williamson (2000), chapter 11.

[4]See Reiland (2020) on constitutive rules for some discussion here.

what it means to say that some practice has an aim, we're not getting much closer to an answer if we're told that it has that aim in every case. But discussions of constitutive aims typically lead to potentially more illuminating discussions of how to think of the relevant sort of teleologically-structured practice. I'm not going to try to say everything that gets said in the various 'aim of x' debates, but there are a few points and themes that come up over and over, and I do want to address those.

In particular, there is an analogy that comes up in almost every discussion of constitutive aims: the analogy with games and game-playing (mostly with chess and chess-playing, in practice). There seem to be at least two ways in which an analogy with games is meant to help us to understand the aim of inquiry (or belief or action). The first is via the structural properties of the game itself, and the second is via the (putative) necessary conditions on being a player of a game.

Let's start with the first. If we decide to play the card game War, but you don't know how to play, I can explain it to you this way: we each get half the deck, and then, at the same time, we turn the top card in our respective piles face up. Whoever's card is higher wins and takes both cards into their pile. Then I'll explain what happens in the case in which our cards match and we go to war. And that's it, we're ready to play. After I tell you this you might still have a question left over: What's the point of this game? I can say: to get all the cards.

This 'point' of the game is plausibly essential to the game and can be thought of as the aim of War.[5] In fact, for any competitive game, this sort of aim is identical to the conditions under which the game is won. In this sense of 'aim', the aim of a competitive game is to win. Even if all of this is true, I don't know how helpful this analogy will be for understanding the structure of inquiry.

Crucially, games are human artifacts: intentionally constructed and designed practices. This part of why the claim that some games have aims (whether constitutive or not) is fairly straightforward — we invented the games and decided on their aims.[6] But inquiring is not an artifactual process or activity. How should the fact that artifactual processes like game playing have aims give us insight into the structure of a natural practice like inquiring? Williamson (2000)'s discussion of constitutive rules of assertion as analogues to constitutive rules of games is helpful here. Williamson

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[5]Although it's plausible that this sort of aim is essential, I have some reservations. If we decide that the winner in our game will be the first to get three out of four aces, it's not obvious to me that we are no longer playing War.

[6]Nguyen (2020) dubs games, 'artifactual vessels'.

points out that the analogy might not be very helpful if assertion turned out to be 'more like a natural phenomenon than it seems' (p.239). Inquiring is a natural phenomenon. All sorts of creatures, simple and complex, inquire.[7] Inquiring is not a human construction or invention. Even if some games have rules or aims constitutively, that they have them (constitutively) is a matter of human design and convention. It's not clear how to extend this model to aims (or rules) of inquiry.

That said, when the games analogy is drawn out, there is sometimes a subtle but important shift in thinking about how we're meant to understand that analogy. And this is the second way the analogy might be thought to help us to understand the structure of inquiry. Here is Paul Katsafanas on the aim of action,

> Certain kinds of action are distinguished by the fact that participants in these activities necessarily have certain aims. Games, such as chess, provide clear examples. Insofar as you play chess, you must aim at checkmating your opponent (or at least at attaining a draw). If you lack this aim—if you are simply moving pieces about on the board in accordance with the rules of chess, but are not aiming to checkmate your opponent—then you are not playing chess. It follows that the aim of checkmate is present in all episodes of chess-playing. If you do not have this aim, you are not playing chess. (Katsafanas (2018), p.368)

If Katsafanas is trying to flesh out the claim that some activity has an aim by analogy to games, he's doing it in a way different from the way I've just described. Katsafanas' claim is that participants in a game g with constitutive aim α necessarily adopt α as their own personal aim, where this is a matter of their being in some sort of mental state, of their having a goal. I'm sympathetic to the thought that in thinking about the 'aim of inquiry' we should look to the personal goals of inquirers. But I don't think the analogy with games is helpful here either.

First, this way of trying to draw an analogy between games and inquiry still relies on being able to make good on the analogy between the structure of the game and the structure of inquiry that I just questioned. If we still don't know quite how to think about the aim of the practice of inquiry then we're also not going to know quite how to think about the claim that inquiry

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[7]See Carruthers (2018, forthcoming) for some fascinating discussion of animal (rats, bees) inquiry.

is like a game because just as in game playing, inquirers need to adopt the aim of inquiry as their own personal goal.

But even putting that aside, is it true that a player of g with aim α, must adopt α as their own personal aim or goal? Part of Katsafanas' claim is that if g has α, then any player who doesn't adopt α as their aim cannot be genuinely playing g. This claim strikes me as quite implausible. If all competitive games have winning as a constitutive aim in the sense at issue, then playing those games non-competitively is impossible or conceptually incoherent. This does not seem right. It certainly doesn't seem to comport with our ordinary ways of thinking and talking about games. If I went out to play tennis with you but we end up just hitting around without playing any points, there is nothing at all wrong with reporting my activity as having played tennis. If I try to throw a game of Candy Land because my nephew hates losing so much, there's nothing at all wrong with describing what I'm/we're doing as playing Candy Land. Moreover, many games have fairly specific conditions that the winner must meet, and it's difficult to see how the failure of a player to try to achieve exactly those specific conditions leaves them doing something else entirely.[8] I am not alone in concern or dissent here. The claim that one can only count as playing some game if one adopts the point of that game as one's own personal aim is not without controversy.[9] Defenders typically dig in with claims that even when a player is trying to lose the game, there is still some sense in which they are trying to win, or perhaps that they are, in cases like that, playing a subtly different game (e.g., Shwar rather than War). Neither response strikes me as very plausible.

If I'm right, then it's difficult to see what insight is to be gleaned about the teleological structure of inquiry by looking to games and game playing. Inquiring is not similar to playing a game in the ways that would make the fact that games have a conventionally agreed-upon point/constitutive aim relevant — inquiring is not a artifactual practice in the way that playing a game of Candy Land or War is. Further, the claim that some game g's having a constitutive aim α implies that anyone playing g adopts α as their personal aim, looks false. And so the analogy with games is unhelpful either

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[8]Imagine someone confused about the victory conditions of some game (they think the point of the game is α^* rather than α). It seems to me that with a bit of luck this sort of person can still end up winning the game despite not having adopted the aim of the game as their own personal aim. But they can't have won if they weren't playing.

[9]A few dissenters: Williamson (2000), McHugh and Way (2018), Kelp and Simion (2020), Kelp (2021), and Nguyen (2019). The latter also includes a nice, in-depth account of the complex aims of game players.

way. Of course, this doesn't mean that inquirers don't have personal aims in every case. It only means that an argument that they do that goes by way of an analogy with games does not get us to that conclusion.

2.2 LANGUAGE: ASPECT AND TELICITY

Although not much discussed in the context of 'aim of x' debates, there is, I think, some insight into the sorts of practice-theoretic structural features at issue now in some influential discussions of the aspectual properties of verbal predicates. These discussions are about specific semantic properties of verbs and VPs and they work to classify them according to (at least roughly) the metaphysical properties of the events/activities/practices that they pick out. As we'll see in a moment, one of those properties (telicity) has to do with the endpoints of the relevant events and activities. If a verb/VP is telic then, the thought is, it is part of the meaning of that verb/VP that the activity it picks out has an endpoint. My thought then is that these discussions have the potential to bring out a way in which some activities are essentially teleologically structured: the aims or ends of some activities can be read off of our descriptions of them.

To start, here is Rothstein (2004) introducing the notion of (lexical) aspect that interests us here:

> Aspect traditionally concerns itself with what Comrie (1976) calls "different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation" (pp. 3, 5). The intuition behind this definition is that while tense relates the temporal location of a situation or "eventuality" to some other temporal reference point such as the time of utterance, aspect is concerned with the structural properties of the event itself. (p.1)

So we can use aspectual distinctions to categorize verbal predicates according to something like the metaphysical properties of the events (or 'eventualities', a more general ontological category) picked out by those verbal predicates. Much of the current discussion of lexical aspect starts from Zeno Vendler's work on the topic. Vendler (1957) proposes that we distinguish between four different types of verbal predicates: state verbs/VPs, activity verbs/VPs, accomplishment verbs/VPs, and achievements verbs/VPs.[10] This classification scheme has been widely discussed, and although various modifications have been proposed over the years, much of the scheme has

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[10]Ryle (1949) is an important precursor here.

remained hugely influential and useful in getting at the relevant aspectual distinctions.[11] A few examples of verbs and VPs in the different categories are as follows. State: 'know', 'believe', 'love'. Activity: 'run', 'push a cart', 'celebrate'. Accomplishment: 'run a mile', 'paint a picture', 'pick two oranges'. And finally, achievement: 'win', 'reach the top', 'recognize'.

Corresponding to each of the Vendlerian verb/VP-types is an eventuality-type — states, activities, accomplishments and achievements. Although the four Vendlerian eventuality-types have familiar names, and those certainly give us some guidance about how to think of those types, it's better to think of these labels as technical rather than bits of ordinary language. To indicate this, I'll use a 'v' subscript when using the terms in the Vendlerian sense. And otherwise, words like, 'activity' and 'accomplishment' should be taken in their ordinary senses. That said, as expected, there is an important intuitive distinction between states$_v$ and the other Vendlerian eventualities. States$_v$ are ways we are, while the other eventuality-types are more active processes or things we do. I'm assuming that inquiring goes on the active side. And so given that inquiring is our main focus here, I am going to largely put states$_v$ aside in much of what follows.

How should we be thinking of the other three categories? Here are the intuitive glosses. Activities$_v$ — e.g., running, walking, driving, driving a car, painting,. . . — are open-ended processes, doings, or happenings that unfold over some period of time with no obvious endpoint. This makes for a contrast with accomplishments$_v$ like, running a mile, eating two sandwiches, painting a wall, fixing the computer. . . . These are also activities in the ordinary sense of the word, but they do seem to have endpoints built in. Running a mile is an activity that ends when the mile is up. If you keep running after you've hit the mile mark, you are no longer engaged in that running of a mile (although you are still running). And if you paint a second wall, then while you're still painting a wall, the completion of the first wall seems to make it that a new eventuality is underway. Achievements$_v$, 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. Noticing happens in an instant, as does winning and reaching the top. Many achievements$_v$ require plenty of activity in the lead-up, in order to achieve the thing achieved, but achievements$_v$ are just the achieved part, which Vendler thought of as occurring at a single moment and largely over as soon as they begin.

Given the (quasi)-instantaneous nature of achievements$_v$, I think the rel-

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[11] Some well-known variants: Kenny (1963), Mourelatos (1978), Dowty (1979).

evant question for us is whether the practice picked out by 'inquire' (and cognates) is an activity$_v$ or an accomplishment$_v$. And I hope the relevance of this question for our discussion is clear: accomplishments$_v$ have pre-defined or built-in endpoints. And so it's not a stretch to think of Vendlerian accomplishments as a type of activity with an essential aim or goal or telos. But is the practice picked out by 'inquire' (and the like) an accomplishment$_v$? If we left the discussion here, we might have assumed that it was: the idea that inquiry has an aim is very closely connected to the idea that it has some sort of special stopping point, the point at which the activity comes to its (successful) conclusion. But this natural thought is not confirmed by the linguistic data. Rather, 'inquire' (and related verbal predicates) seems to pick out an (open-ended) activity$_v$ and not a (telos-having) accomplishment$_v$.

We can see this since Vendler offered a variety of linguistic tests that distinguish verbal predicates and sort them accordingly. These tests are still widely deployed, and have been expanded on in a number of ways. Vendler showed that there are two important properties that are especially relevant to dividing up verbal predicates: 'telicity' and (what I'll call) 'progressivity'. Roughly, a verb is telic if it picks out an eventuality that has a natural point of culmination or stopping point, and atelic otherwise; and a verb is progressive if it picks out an eventuality that progresses or has stages and non-progressive otherwise.

Verbal predicates that describe or pick out either accomplishments$_v$ or activities$_v$ tend to be progressive. They can be used to describe events in progress or underway, and, crucially, they can appear in the progressive (e.g., pushing a cart, painting a picture). State$_v$ and achievement$_v$ verbs/ VPs don't naturally appear in the progressive.[12],[13]

1. (a) I am running
   (b) I am running a mile
   (c) # I am believing that it is raining
   (d) # I am noticing that it is raining

(1a) describes an activity$_v$, (1b) an accomplishment$_v$, (1c) a state$_v$, and (1d) an achievement$_v$. 'Inquire' does appear in the progressive (e.g., 'I am inquiring'), as it should since inquiry is the sort of thing that can be ongoing

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[12]Although, of course, there are exceptions. See Filip (2012).

[13]This is as expected: states$_v$ aren't events in progress (even though they may last for extended periods of time), and if achievements$_v$ are conceived of as having only momentary existence, they are also not best thought of as things in progress.

or in progress. This further confirms what we already know, which is that the eventuality or practice picked out by 'inquire' is either an activity$_v$ or accomplishment$_v$. Here — as we've already started to see — telicity matters. Accomplishments$_v$ have already been intuitively classified as eventualities that have teloi, while activities$_v$ are eventualities that do not. It should come as no surprise then that activity$_v$ verbs/VPs are by and large atelic, while accomplishment$_v$ verbs/VPs are by and large telic. Two well-known tests have become almost definitional with respect to telicity. But those tests put 'inquire' (and related verbs/VPs) firmly on the atelic side.

The first test for telicity is known as the 'temporal modification' test. Telic verbs freely combine with 'in'-adverbials but not 'for'-adverbials, and the reverse is true of atelic verbs.

2. (a) I ran for 30 minutes/(*) in 30 minutes

    (b) I ran a mile in 10 minutes/(*) for 10 minutes

The second, is what we can call the 'progressive inference test' (this is sometimes called the 'imperfective paradox'). Atelic verbs licence an inference from the past progressive ('S was ϕ-ing') to the simple past ('S (has) ϕ-ed') but telic verbs do not.

3. (a) I was running $\rightarrow$ I ran

    (b) I was running a mile $\nrightarrow$ I ran a mile

If I was in the process of carrying a suitcase then the bits of that activity that had already passed will be ones in which I carried a suitcase. But if I was in the process of carrying a suitcase to my brother's house, but hadn't got to his house yet, then the bits of the activity that already passed are not going to be aptly described as ones in which I carried a suitcase to my brother's. 'I carried a suitcase to my brother's' seems only to be true after I've successfully made it to his house.

Both of these tests indicate that 'inquire' is atelic.

4. (a) I inquired for 30 minutes/(*) in 30 minutes

    (b) I inquired into x for 10 minutes/(*) in 10 minutes

5. (a) I was inquiring $\rightarrow$ I inquired

    (b) I was inquiring into x $\rightarrow$ I inquired into x

Moreover, other inquiry-related verbs, seem to pattern in the same ways. For instance,

6. (a) I investigated the matter for 30 minutes/(*) in 30 minutes

   (b) I deliberated for 20 minutes/(*) in 20 minutes

   (c) They probed the issue for an hour/(*) in an hour

7. (a) I was investigating the matter → I investigated the matter

   (b) I was deliberating → I deliberated

   (c) They were probing the issue → They probed the issue

It is fairly clear that 'inquire' is atelic. And these other verbs and VPs that describe inquiring (or closely related activities) seem to be too. Other verbal predicates that are closely related to 'inquire' seem to pattern in the same ways, e.g., 'look into', 'explore', 'examine', 'scrutinize', 'seek', 'delve', 'wonder', and more. Moreover, we've already seen that 'inquire' is also progressive (in the sense specified earlier). And these other inquiry-describing verbs and VPs seem to be as well. This puts the activities/practices/eventualities picked out by these verbs/VPs firmly in the activity$_v$ category and not in the accomplishment$_v$ category.

Of course that 'inquire' is atelic in the sense at issue is not to say that inquiring doesn't have a telos in some other sense. All it means for now is that another route to making sense of the claim that inquiry is essentially teleologically structured is somewhat thwarted. Some verbs and verb phrases describe activities in ways that make their endpoints clear, and some do not. 'Inquire' does not.[14]

It's interesting (and I think instructive) that our main zetetic vocabulary is not accomplishment$_v$ vocabulary. An accomplishment$_v$ verb/VP describes a unit of an activity by providing a time after which that unit of activity cannot — by definition (and metaphysics) — continue. If I'm running a mile, then once I hit the mile mark, I've finished running a mile. I might not know I've hit the mile mark, I might think I surely have not, I might keep running. No matter. The activity (accomplishment$_v$) of running a mile that I had been engaged in is over (even if the activity of running that I had also been engaged in is still going). My activity of running a mile has a terminus that's out of my hands in a particular way: once I've reached that terminus it is not possible for me to continue doing the thing I was doing. I can keep running, but I can't keep running that mile.

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[14]This is not to say that there are no ways of describing inquiring that come out telic according to these tests, e.g., 'figure out'? What is clear enough though is that our zetetic vocabulary is not a robustly telic vocabulary.

This does seem to be one way in which an event or activity or practice can be teleologically structured. But, intuitively, if inquiry has a teleological structure, it's not this kind of teleological structure.[15] Even if inquiries have a telos and have a sort of directionality towards a terminus, reaching that terminus does not guarantee — as a matter of definition or metaphysics — the end of an inquiry. When I keep running after I've hit the mile mark (say I don't know I've hit it), I'm still running, but I'm not running that mile; perhaps I'm running a new mile. But that first unit of activity has, of necessity, ended. But now assume that knowledge is inquiry's terminus in the sense at issue. Now say I'm investigating why my computer won't charge. And say the reason it won't charge is that there's a software bug that is preventing charging and that I know about this software bug and what it does. But imagine I don't know or realize that I know this, or that I think absolute certainty is the relevant terminus (rather than knowledge). So, I keep investigating. If inquiring were like running a mile, then my knowing about the software bug would make continued investigation into why my computer won't charge impossible. It would mean that the moment I come to know about the software bug, my inquiry into why my computer won't charge ends. Starting at that very moment, my continued inquiring would have to amount to my inquiring into something else, or not be continued inquiring at all. But this does not seem right. Perhaps I should have stopped inquiring into the cause of the charging issue once I came to know about the software bug, but that coming to know didn't itself bring an end to my investigation; I kept at it. Whatever the intuition that makes post-terminus running-a-mile crash, it is not at work here. Whatever it means to say that inquiry has an end or goal, it's not that it has a sort of terminus that once reached makes continuing that very inquiry impossible. This seems to be the sort of terminus that telicity tracks, and so it's not a surprise that 'inquire' is atelic.

3 PERSONAL AIMS & THE SPECIFIC QUESTION

'Inquire' isn't a telic verb (in the Vendlerian sense). And while inquiry may well be game-like in some ways, I don't see turning to games or game playing as offering much insight into inquiry's teleological character per se. There are certainly other ways we might try to flesh out a structural, non-normative aim of inquiry, e.g., look to discussions of biological functions and

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[15]It's interesting to think about the teleological structure of games in this context as well. 'Play War' looks atelic, but 'play a game of War' looks telic?

teleology.[16] Rather than trying further structural roads, I want to think about a 'personal' aim of inquiry. While it may be difficult to make sense of what it might mean to say that inquiry itself — the activity — has an aim, it is not nearly so difficult to make sense of the claim that inquirers have aims.

Discussions of the aim of inquiry often move between talk of the aim of the practice and talk of the aims of the participants of the practice — sometimes acknowledging the shift, sometimes not. Other 'aim of x' discussions also confront questions about whether the aim of the relevant practice should be thought of as a personal aim of the participants in the practice. Turning to the personal aims or goals of participants isn't a radical suggestion then. Do inquirers — all inquirers, qua inquirers — have particular kinds of aims or goals?

Notice how general this question is. Are there any goals or aims or ends that all inquirers (qua inquirers) share? At this level of generality, a yes answer to this question strikes me as fairly plausible. First, inquiry seems to be a largely 'person-level' phenomenon — whole persons are inquirers, subjects. Even though various sub-personal processes contribute to our inquiries, we are the inquirers. Moreover, inquiring is something we do, it's not something that happens to us, it's not a reflex or a tic or 'mere behaviour'. Inquiries can involve a complex interaction of mental and bodily action.[17] And while some processes or sub-processes that are part of this larger process or activity will happen automatically or not be entirely in the control or under the guidance of the agent, on the whole inquiring is a piece of intentional action — by and large it's an intentional activity.[18]

The following describe some of the ways we commonly distinguish intentional action from (say) mere behaviour: where intentional action is pur-

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[16]This isn't to suggest that there's a straightforward route via biological function either. Aside from the standard concerns these sorts of teleological explanations (see Neander (1991) for a classic discussion), inquiring is not a state or trait or biological process, but a thing we do. It's not obvious how to tell a story about the design of mother nature in this sort of case.

[17]For instance, think about the different sorts of things (mental and bodily) inquirers will need to do to be successful in the following sorts of inquiries: criminal investigations, doctors and epidemiologists trying to figure out the cause of a new illness, safety inspections for bridges and buildings, investigating a workplace accident, trying to prove a new theorem, trying to figure out the cause of demographic trends, trying to understand why a marriage ended, almost any kind of academic research, figuring out why your printer won't work or trying to decide on a new car, or. . . .

[18]Although it doesn't feel quite right, just as a matter of ordinary language, to call inquiring an action, I don't think there is much we should make of that. See Hornsby (2012, 2013) for some discussion of the close connections between action and activity.

posive, mere behaviour is not; intentional actions are done for reasons/are in the 'space of reasons', not so for mere behaviour; intentional actions can be thought of as 'tryings' and are subject to certain kinds of rationalizing explanations (e.g., there is good sense to be made of asking a subject why they did what they did), while neither of these apply to mere behaviour.[19] But having reasons, a purpose, trying to do something or get something, there being a reasonable explanation for why a subject did a thing are all fairly teleological notions. In a very broad sense, all intentional action is teleological or goal-directed or is done with some aim.

But given all this, it can start to look fairly easy to get to the thought that all inquirers have some aim(s) in inquiring. All inquirers are trying to do something.[20] What are they trying to do? At this point we can't say much in detail. Perhaps though we can at least give the very general answer that they are trying to inquire.[21] Either way, my point here isn't to provide a personal answer to the General Question but just to briefly indicate that the general thought that all inquirers have some aims or ends or goals (qua inquirers) seems prima facie plausible. Let's say it's true that all inquirers qua inquirers have some sort of aim or goal or telos. What I want to think about now is how debates over the Specific Question sit with this sort of answer to the General Question.

The Specific Question asks, What is the aim of inquiry? And these are the sorts of answers typically given: knowledge, understanding, truth/true belief, certainty, epistemic improvement, settled opinion, etc. Given that we're considering a personal aim now, the Specific Question changes shape a little bit. Now we should think of it as asking: What goals do all inquirers qua inquirers have? Or: What is it that all inquirers qua inquirers are trying to do? One thing worth drawing out right away is that strictly speaking the

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[19] O'Brien (2014), ch.2 has a nice discussion of the family of concepts we use in discussion of intentional action.

[20] On the close connection between trying to φ and intentionally φ-ing: O'Shaughnessy (1973), McCann (1975), Pietroski (1998), Ruben (2015), Grünbaum (2008).

[21] This answer may be general, but it isn't trivial. In fact, to get to even that general answer we will have to do a bit more work. When Davidson alerted the prowler by turning on the light, his action was intentional under one description ('turning on the light') and unintentional under another ('alerting the prowler'). He meant to do one of those things but not the other; he did one of those things on purpose, the other by accident. Are there cases of accidental inquiry like this? Cases in which S φs and that φ-ing counts as S's inquiring, but it only counts as such accidentally? If so then there may well be cases of accidental or unintentional inquiry, inquiring without meaning to. And if that's right then perhaps there are cases in which S inquires without trying to inquire. I find it hard to flesh out a clear case of accidental inquiry like this. But since it's not crucial to settle the matter here, I'll leave further discussion for another occasion.

typical answers to the original Specific Question do not answer our new, 'personalized' Specific Question. 'Knowledge' and 'true belief' (etc.) are not answers to the question, 'What are inquirers trying to do?'.

There is an easy enough fix for this, of course. What are inquirers trying to do? Acquire knowledge, get true belief, and so on. There are two things worth noticing about these sorts of answers though. First, they all assume or presuppose that inquirers' aims are *acquisitive*, and second that what inquirers are trying to acquire are mental states or attitudes. These sorts of acquisitive mental state answers are only a subset of the possible (and plausible) answers to the question of what inquirers are trying to do. In this way, the current debate over the Specific Question might better be thought of as a debate over an even more specific question, e.g., Which mental states are all inquirers qua inquirers trying to acquire?

But not all aims are acquisitive aims. Much of the discussion so far has been about non-acquisitive aims or ends. Competitive games don't (or at least needn't) have acquisitive ends or goals — the aim of those games is winning. The Vendlerian accomplishments we discussed, e.g., running a mile, carrying a suitcase to my brother's, pushing the cart up a hill, and so on, were largely practices with non-acquisitive teloi. For a certain kind of Kantian, it's constitutive of action that agents aim at (or perhaps are committed to) being governed by the Categorical Imperative. In general, not all goals are acquisitive. Are inquirers' goals necessarily acquisitive? I don't think the answer here is straightforward. Of course, typical inquiries involve efforts to learn more about the world. On the other hand, as we'll see, once we shift focus to the sort of personalized Specific Question I'm interested in now, the debate over acquisitive aims starts to look a bit too narrow.[22]

Now that we've shifted to thinking about the aim of inquiry as a personal aim of inquirers, the Specific Aim Question is a question about the aims of actual and possible people (and other sorts of inquisitive creatures perhaps). The debate over the specific aim of inquiry has proceeded largely as a debate over different forms of 'monism' about the aim of inquiry. For now, let's focus in on that sort of debate. Are all inquirers always trying to get σ, where σ is one of the relevant mental states, e.g., knowledge, true belief, justified belief, settled opinion, understanding, certainty, etc.?

I don't think we have reason to expect even all actual inquirers (never mind the possible ones) to share any one of the acquisitive aims the various

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[22]And as I said, the debate is not merely narrowed to a focus on acquisition only but to mental state or attitude acquisition only.

monists argue for. Has everyone who has so far inquired (which I take to be more or less everyone who has existed) been trying to get knowledge? True belief? Understanding? Certainty? What about skeptics or eliminativists about those attitudes? More generally, have you always aimed for just one of those every time you've inquired? And once we move to thinking about all possible inquirers the prospects for monism become dimmer still. There is nothing conceptually incoherent about an inquirer who is trying to be certain (Descartes?), nor one who is trying to settle their opinion (Peirce?), nor one who is trying to achieve tranquility (Sextus?) nor one trying to get to the truth or come to know, and so on. Any of these personal aims seem broadly compatible with being an inquirer. And for any of those, we can imagine subjects who genuinely don't have the other aims, because they don't think there are such states, or merely because they simply aren't the ones they are after in some inquiry or another.

To bring this point out even more, it's worth thinking about a case. Say I'm convinced that inquirers are always trying to get knowledge. You don't think that's right. To prove it to me you decide to call up James Watson and ask him what sort of mental states he and Francis Crick were trying to get into when they investigated the structure of DNA. He says that they just wanted to understand the structure of that incredible molecule, and he insists that he and Crick were both skeptics about knowledge. You hang up and tell me the news.[23]

Before I say something about the sorts of responses that might be appropriate in this case, I want to ask a different question. Was calling Watson a good strategy for getting information about our debate over the aim of inquiry? If the 'aim of inquiry' is an aim of inquirers, it's hard to see why not. If you want to know whether I'm trying to get a dog or a cat, you're going to want to know the specific things I'm doing, saying, and thinking. Analogously, if we want to know whether someone is trying to get (say) knowledge or just settled opinion, isn't it appropriate to ask or observe them? Of course these sorts of self-reports and observations aren't decisive, but they do seem relevant. This is an important methodological shift though. The Specific Aim debate has been largely an armchair debate. Answering a personalized version of the Specific Question though seems to require or at least be amenable to empirical investigation.

Back to the story. Is the news about Crick and Watson's pursuit of

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[23]This is obviously a fictional tale, but Watson wrote an autobiographical account of his and Crick's work and journey (Watson (1968)). In it he gives his account of what he and Crick were doing, trying to do, wanted, and more. A wide range of epistemic and zetetic vocabulary is used.

understanding rather than knowledge evidence against my view that knowledge is the aim of inquiry? It seems so, although it does feel like a serious failure of imagination on my part for it to have taken a call to James Watson for me to get there. Of course, I could try to explain Watson's testimony away by (say) trying to impugn his powers of introspection or recollection, but his testimony does seem to give us information that is relevant to our debate.

That said, imagine you give me the news that Watson and Crick were pursuing understanding and not knowledge, and I say, in astonishment: 'I can't believe it! It turns out Watson and Crick never even investigated the structure of DNA!'. This is not a good response; it's absurd even. But it's not entirely clear why. After all, if my theory says that every A has property ψ and then I come upon something that lacks ψ, it's not absurd to conclude that it's therefore not an A. This isn't to say I should always modus tollens in a case like this, but just that it's not absurd. Why does it seem so bad in this case then?

Notice, it's not that there isn't any evidence Watson could have given me that would make it reasonable to conclude they never investigated. For instance, if Watson had decided to confess that he and Crick didn't do any work on DNA and didn't care about it at all, but some mystery scientists who wanted to forever remain anonymous handed them all their research, then it would be entirely reasonable for me to conclude that Watson and Crick didn't inquire into the structure of DNA. The problem with Watson's news is not that he couldn't have given me evidence that he and Crick never inquired into the structure of DNA, rather it's that his telling me they were trying to understand rather than know doesn't look like evidence for that conclusion.

There is nothing special about the replacement for σ that I chose in this story (knowledge). I could have used any of the other candidate attitudes, and the tale would play out in much the same way, and we should have the same reactions. In fact, it's not clear that Watson could give me a reason to give up my belief that he and Crick investigated the structure of DNA by asserting that they were trying to get attitude σ^* and not σ, for any attitude-types σ^* and σ.

And other sorts of responses on Watson's part about what he and Crick were and weren't trying to do also seem to me perfectly compatible with their having genuinely inquired. For instance, imagine that Watson responds to our query entirely puzzled. He says he and Crick were thinking about DNA, not knowledge or belief or understanding; they were investigating the structure of a molecule, not trying to get themselves to think things.

This strikes me as a coherent (and even fair) response on Watson's part. The activity Watson and Crick were engaged in was world-directed in an important sense, and the conception of it as at bottom about moving one's mind feels off. Further, I think it's not hard to imagine Watson insisting that he and Crick weren't trying to acquire anything at all — that they were just engaging in an activity. In general, couldn't we have inquirers only truly interested in the journey and not the destination, or ones who want to avoid ever getting to the destination for other reasons?[24],[25] It simply isn't clear that it matters one way or another to Watson's status as an inquirer whether he was trying to get knowledge, understanding, true beliefs, or not trying to acquire any new attitudes at all.

Some of the argument in this section relied heavily on the (fictional) self-reports of inquirers. While I don't think these sorts of self-reports should be decisive in determining what the relevant inquirers are trying to do or get, they should count as some evidence. Part of the appeal of personalizing the aim of inquiry is that aims and goals of agents like us are relatively well understood and metaphysically unproblematic (unlike the aims and goals of an event itself). But those sorts of aims and goals are the sorts of things that we have decent access to and insight into; they are the sort of things that self-reports can tell us about. Moreover, the thought experiments have force beyond the hypothetical self-reports — it's not just that we can imagine the relevant inquirers insisting that they are trying to get σ^* and not σ, but that we can imagine them in fact trying to get one rather than the other by, e.g., being sensitive to or satisfied/unsatisfied with particular kinds of information and not other kinds.

Where does all of this leave us? All inquirers may well have some aims qua inquirers, but it doesn't look as though they all have, of necessity, one of the acquisitive aims that are the focus of the Specific Aim debate. And

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[24] For a process-focused view like this, see Dover (2022) on interpersonal curiosity and inquiry.

[25] This evokes some other, perhaps more familiar, sorts of concerns about whether inquirers necessarily have the relevant sorts of acquisitive goals (and so whether they are constitutive of inquiring). For instance, typically there is information that subjects actively do not want, e.g., various forms of bad news. Nonetheless, it doesn't seem impossible to inquire when the upshot could be the discovery of bad news — betrayal, illness, failure, and so on. And there are familiar metacognitive concerns lurking as well. If an inquirer needs to have the various relevant epistemic concepts — knowledge, understanding, truth, belief — in order to aim to acquire those things, then we have the result that creatures that lack those concepts cannot inquire. But this isn't right: conceptually unsophisticated humans as well as a wide range of non-human creatures inquire. See Carruthers (2018, 2020, forthcoming) for some excellent recent discussion.

it's not clear that every inquirer needs to have any sort of acquisitive aim at all. So, while it's fruitful to think about our aims qua inquirers, I don't think it leads us in the expected direction.

4   BEYOND THE AIM OF INQUIRY

Discussion of the aim of inquiry accounts for a good deal of the discussion of inquiry in general. There are surely many reasons for this, and it's not my intention to speculate about the motivations of other authors, but I can report some of my own. The idea that inquiry is a 'goal-directed activity' feels like some sort of first principle about inquiry. One way to capture this thought is with an 'aim claim': a claim of the form, 'inquiry aims at α'. Part of what I've tried to do in this paper is offer up some interpretations of this sort of zetetic aim claim. I've not found any satisfying. We could certainly try others. There are other structural options, a number of personal options are still on the table, and I haven't said anything about relevant forms of normative reductionism. But it is not clear that the best approach to understanding inquiry — even its teleological aspects — is to stay focused on this aim claim. At some point it starts to feel as though one is chasing down a metaphor. Part of what's emerged in this discussion is that the idea 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. These are all aspects and features of inquiry that I care about and want to understand better. My suggestion though is that we might have a better chance of understanding these aspects and features if we stop worrying about 'the aim of inquiry' (/goal-directness).

While not everyone will be satisfied with the sort of quietism I am suggesting here, I think even those committed to one of the forms of acquisitive monism discussed can get on board at least with some of the spirit of my quietistic suggestion. For instance, assume it's a necessary condition on counting as an inquirer that one is trying to get knowledge. It obviously doesn't follow from that that the activity of inquiring is identical to the activity of trying to get knowledge. Moreover, this sort of identification would not be plausible. Inquiring is not just a matter of trying to get knowledge. There are many things we do that are designed to get us knowledge that are not going to amount to our inquiring. Going to college is an activity I may decide to do to get more knowledge, so too taking the SATs to get into college, as well as taking the train to my classes, and so on. These aren't activities we want to describe as inquiries, I take it. Perhaps we can get knowledge by hypnosis or head injury or brain surgery or taking a magic

knowledge pill, but doing those things to myself in efforts to come to know also needn't count as inquiring. What is it about inquiring that makes it different from these sorts of knowledge-aimed activities? Whatever it is, it will not be found by staying focused on the fact that the inquirers are trying to get knowledge. We'll need to look to other features of inquiry and inquirers if we're going to locate the relevant difference makers.

So I think everyone interested in inquiry should want to move beyond the aim of inquiry to some extent. And I think we're well placed to do that. Go back to the case in which we call up James Watson to ask whether he and Francis Crick were trying to get knowledge. Part of the reason why his answer feels evidentially irrelevant to the question of whether he and Crick inquired is that we already know a great deal about what Watson and Crick did, e.g., studied Chargaff's work on the chemistry of nucleic acids, pored over Franklin's x-ray diffraction images, shifted cardboard cutouts of molecules around to see the different possible configurations, and so on. These actions and activities comprised their inquiry. Given that we already know what they did (more or less) and where it ended up (more or less), which particular mental state they were trying to get into at the very end of all of that (if any) doesn't seem all that important.

I want to close by very briefly sketching out the start of a different angle of approach. Rather than beginning at the very end of inquiry and focusing on how that endpoint casts its shadow back over the activity, this approach tries to focus on the activity and its participants directly — on the aiming (as it were) rather than what is aimed at (as it were). My version of this more direct approach starts by taking seriously inquiry's close relationship to questions and questioning. While the approach involves a sort of quietism about the aim of inquiry strictly so-called, it does not require abandoning all things teleological in one's theory of inquiry. It is a desideratum of any such theory that it tells us some of the ways in which inquiry is 'goal-directed'. My hope is that my questioning-focused framework will, in the end, help make these various teleological dimensions of inquiry clear, even if that's not its main purpose.

Why look to questions and questioning? As a start, here is a list, obviously incomplete, of ways we describe the activity of inquiring: inquiring, investigating, examining, probing, querying, interrogating, looking into. Here are some others focused on what inquirers are trying to do: trying to figure out, trying to sort out, trying to suss out, trying to determine, trying to establish, trying to see.[26] Many of those work without the 'trying to' as

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[26]Notice: while those in the first group don't come with built-in teloi (as we've already

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well: figuring out, sorting out (and perhaps the others as well). Every description mentioned here (and anywhere else in this paper) involves a verb or verb phrase that takes an interrogative complement. What we investigate or inquire into or try to figure out, or any of the others seems to be, at least in the first instance, a question. Our zetetic vocabulary may not be robustly telic, but it is robustly interrogative.

Moreover, in other work I've drawn out one sort of connection between inquiry and questions. I've argued that inquirers have particular kinds of 'question-directed attitudes' — attitudes like curiosity or wondering.[27] This tells us something important about the activity of inquiring, but obviously only a small part. What do inquirers do with the questions they have in mind? In which ways do these attitudes show themselves in inquiry?

Here is a suggestion. What is the canonical question-involving act or activity? What is it that we typically do with questions? We ask them. In ordinary English, 'asking' describes an act of speech. But in a series of papers Jaakko Hintikka fleshed out the thought that scientific inquiry, and perhaps science itself, should be conceived of as a series of 'questions put to nature'.[28] Putting a question to nature is a matter of asking the world that question. How do we 'ask' the world a question? We might try the speech act, but that won't be very productive. I can approach a tree and utter, 'Tree, how tall are you?', but I will not get an answer back. So if we are going to take Hintikka's suggestion seriously, we will need a notion of question asking that goes beyond the illocutionary.[29]

Can we meaningfully conceive of illocutionary asking as a subtype of a more general action-type (asking in general)? If so, is that an action-type we'll find at the centre of inquiry? I think the answer to both of these questions is 'yes'. In asking questions we try to remake our informational environments in particular ways: ways that align with our questions. In illocutionary asking we do that by communicating our intentions and re-

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seen), the others may. But those teloi aren't, in the first instance at least, any of the familiar ones that are part of the Specific Aim debate. If you managed to figure something out that does seem to have some implications about an epistemic telos you've reached (unlike in the case in which you've managed to inquire), but it's not clear exactly what that epistemic telos is (other than having figured something out).

[27] For an argument in defence of the existence of question-directed attitudes — attitudes that have questions rather than propositions (or something else) as their contents or objects — see Friedman (2013). And for more on the central role of some of these in inquiry see Friedman (2017, 2019).

[28] E.g., Hintikka (1981, 1988), Hintikka and Harris (1988).

[29] Hintikka himself didn't say much more about exactly what sort of action asking nature might be, but that wasn't his main concern.

questing that someone else update our informational space by making a particular kind of utterance with a particular content. But communication, utterance, other agents — none of these are essential. There are many ways to rearrange our informational environments so that they present or display answers to the questions we have. We can ask someone else to make the answers available to us, but we can also change our locations, modulate our focus and attention, manipulate our surroundings and more. These sorts of actions and activities can move us from informational environments that do not speak to our questions to ones that do, and as such resemble illocutionary asking in important ways.

This is both quite vague and quite speculative at this point. But hopefully promising as well. Illocutionary asking has been extensively theorized, and many of the features that have emerged from those discussions stand to illuminate inquiry in interesting ways, including some of its teleological features. Questions are intimately related to answers, and asking a question is plausibly a way of trying to have an answer to that question presented to you. In this way the activity of question asking has a particular kind of directionality and shape (loop? boomerang?). It fits into a larger conversational structure in specific and interesting ways. Question asking requires particular kinds of intentions (broadly construed). And so on. To what extent question asking will help shed more light on the structure of inquiry and the aims of inquirers remains to be seen. But my hope is that it can give us a fruitful way of theorizing about those things in a somewhat more direct way: by looking at the activity of inquiry and its participants head-on rather than via a shadow cast backwards from inquiry's very last moment.

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