# WHAT IS INQUISITIVENESS

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The virtue epistemology movement, as it was first conceived in the mid-1980s, offers a novel approach to addressing the traditional problems of analytic epistemology. By focusing on the role of the intellectual virtues and modelling itself on the domain of virtue ethics, virtue epistemology has uncovered fertile ground for the fresh analysis of key epistemic states such as justification and knowledge. More recently, however, there has been a move to establish virtue epistemology as an independent or autonomous area of epistemological inquiry (e.g. Roberts and Wood 2007; Baehr 2011). With this orientation the movement can be viewed as a departure from traditional epistemology and as such, a new epistemological project has emerged consisting in the characterisation of the individual intellectual virtues. This paper will contribute to that project by offering a characterisation of the intellectual virtue of *inquisitiveness*.

Before embarking on an examination of inquisitiveness, it is worth noting a relevant distinction in the virtue epistemology literature, first made explicit by Lorraine Code (1984) and now familiar amongst virtue epistemologists. This is between virtue reliabilism and virtue responsibilism. These approaches differ primarily with respect to the nature and scope of the intellectual virtues. Epistemologists in the former camp, including contributors such as Ernest Sosa (2007) and John Greco (2010), take the intellectual virtues to consist of cognitive faculties such as good memory, acute reasoning and keen eyesight. These have been broadly classified as *faculty-based virtues* (see Greco and Turri 2011; Baehr 2011). In contrast, virtue responsibilists, including contributors such as

Linda Zagzebski (1996), Christopher Hookway (2007) and Jason Baehr (2011), take the features of an individual's cognitive character to comprise the intellectual virtues. These include traits such as intellectual humility, rigor and open-mindedness and have been classified as *trait* or *character-based virtues* (see Greco and Turri 2011; Baehr 2011). In light of this distinction, the intellectual virtue of inquisitiveness should be viewed as a character-based virtue.

Despite some recent extensive work on the characterisation of the character-based virtues (e.g. Roberts and Wood, 2007; Baehr 2011) no detailed treatment of the intellectual virtue of inquisitiveness has yet been forthcoming[i]. Inquisitiveness, however, is often cited as an example of intellectual virtue in the contemporary literature (e.g. Baehr 2011; Zagzebski 1996). An in-depth examination of the virtue of inquisitiveness is therefore apt in the context of this emerging discourse. Part I of this paper will review three approaches to characterising the intellectual virtues taken by Zagzebski (1996), Roberts and Wood (2007) and Baehr (2011) and subsequently develop a characterisation of inquisitiveness. Part II will extend this examination by investigating the unique role that inquisitiveness plays in the intellectually virtuous life thus highlighting its place at the heart of the autonomous virtue epistemological framework.

## PART I: CHARACTERISING INQUISITIVENESS

### 1.1 Characterising the virtues

In her seminal work, *Virtues of the Mind* (1996), Zagzebski presents a compelling case for the adoption of a virtue-theoretic approach to epistemology focusing on the character-based intellectual virtues. She argues that the virtues should be understood as "acquired excellences" (p. 116), distinguishing these from natural capacities and skills and maintains that they are comprised of both a motivational and success component. The motivational component, according to Zagzebski, is action-guiding, providing us with "a set of orientations toward the world" (p. 136). She defines a motivation "in terms of the end at which it aims and the emotion that underlies it" (p. 136). This characterisation of motivations is aligned with the success component of the virtues hence Zagzebski asserts that, "[A] person does not have a virtue unless she is reliable at *bringing about the end* that is the aim of the motivational component of the virtue" (p. 136, emphasis added). This demand for reliable success in realising the ends of one's virtuous motivations places a relatively strong requirement on the virtuous agent meaning that they must not only possess virtuous motivations but

also *act virtuously* under the appropriate circumstances. This is required of all the moral and intellectual virtues on Zagzebski's account.

Roberts and Wood's *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology* (2007) advances the case, not presented by Zagzebski, for autonomous virtue epistemology. The authors offer seven detailed characterisations of character-based intellectual virtues listed as love of knowledge, firmness, courage and caution, humility, autonomy, generosity and practical wisdom. Roberts and Wood call their distinct approach regulative epistemology, contrasting this with analytic epistemology, and aim to promote a form of reflection on the intellectual virtues that will provide guidance for epistemic agents. This aspiration is explicitly divergent from the objectives of traditional epistemology and this departure is notable in the authors' approach to characterising the virtues. They describe their method as providing conceptual maps of the intellectual virtues stating explicitly that they do not "aspire to specify the logically necessary and sufficient conditions" (p. 26). This marks a move against the more rigid formulations commonly found in the analytic epistemological tradition.

Most recently, in an effort to further advance the autonomous virtue epistemological project Baehr, in his book *The Inquiring Mind* (2011), endorses the approach taken by Roberts and Wood towards the formation of an independent branch of epistemological inquiry focusing on the character-based virtues. In line with this he offers two detailed analyses of the virtues of open-mindedness (Chapter 8) and intellectual courage (Chapter 9). Baehr regards these as paradigm examples of the character-based virtues and attempts to uncover their "essential or defining character" (p. 141). In each case, Baehr orients his treatment of the virtue around "that which is *distinctive* of this virtue as compared with other intellectual virtues" (p. 141, emphasis original) and goes on to explicate the virtues in terms of their characteristic function. He concludes these analyses with a discussion of when it is appropriate to exhibit the virtue in question. This approach, incorporating both the function and appropriateness of the virtues marks, once again, a subtle move beyond analyses exclusively in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions revealing in addition a concern with the application of the virtues.

Important progress has thus been made with respect to characterising several of the character-based intellectual virtues. The following characterisation of inquisitiveness will draw on the contributions discussed above in several ways. Drawing on Zagzebski (1996), the characterisation will identify

both a motivational and success component of the virtue of inquisitiveness. Drawing on Roberts and Wood (2007) the characterisation will endeavour to advance the project of autonomous virtue epistemology. Drawing on Baehr (2011) the characterisation will be structured by identifying the distinctive features of inquisitiveness as compared with the other intellectual virtues and then examining cases of virtuous and non-virtuous inquisitiveness. Before embarking on this however, it is necessary to consider a broader feature of the intellectual virtues in general, namely their common goal.

## 1.2 The goal of the intellectual virtues

### 1.2a A preliminary distinction

The notion of a goal for the intellectual virtues has been discussed primarily in the context of distinguishing the intellectual virtues from their moral counterparts (e.g. Baehr, 2011, Appendix). In order to examine this goal it will be useful to begin by drawing a distinction regarding the structure of the virtues derived from Zagzebski's account outlined above[ii]. Zagzebski posits both a motivational and a success component. However, as recently observed by Baehr (2013, p. 100) among others, these two components can themselves be divided. Baehr characterises this additional distinction in terms of the *ultimate* and *immediate* aims of the virtues. The ultimate aim of the virtues is that element of the motivational component that is *common* to all the virtues. This will be referred to henceforth as the *common goal*. The immediate aim of a virtue is that element of the motivational component that is *distinctive* to that virtue. This will be referred to as the *distinctive goal*. This distinction differentiates between the common goal, which serves as an underlying motivation for all the intellectual virtues and the distinctive goals which serve as characteristic motivations of the individual virtues. In addition the success component of the virtues can also be understood in terms of this distinction encompassing both success in achieving the common goal and success in achieving the distinctive goal. This distinction differentiates between two aspects of success in the case of the intellectual virtues and this will be constructive when characterising the virtue of inquisitiveness in due course.

A table outlining the distinction may therefore be useful for reference:

| Structure of Intellectual Virtues | |
|---|---|
| Motivational component | Success component |
| Common goal | Achieving common goal |
| Distinctive goal | Achieving distinctive goal |

### 1.2b The common goal

The common goal of the intellectual virtues is shared by all the intellectual virtues and thus importantly distinguishes the intellectual from the moral virtues. Hence, the intellectual virtues are often thought to be distinct from their moral counterparts on the basis that they arise out of a concern with distinctively intellectual or epistemic goods such as knowledge, truth and understanding. Zagzebski (1996) for example, comments that the intellectual virtues "are all forms of the motivation to have *cognitive* contact with reality" (p. 167, emphasis added). This broad classification marks a deliberate reluctance to identify a single epistemic good or set thereof as the common goal of the intellectual virtues. Instead, the intellectual virtues are demarcated by a more general concern with cognitive or epistemic matters. The notions of cognitive, intellectual and epistemic moreover are often employed synonymously within virtue epistemological discourse indicating an intuitive use of these terms. Baehr (2011) for example, comments that "[W]hile more could be said to demarcate epistemic ends from other kinds of ends, the basic distinction should be intuitive enough" (p. 209). This indicates a deliberately broad and intuitive treatment of the notion of the epistemic.

Adopting this intuitive approach to the epistemic, the common goal of the intellectual virtues will be characterised here as the goal of *improving epistemic standing*. An individual's epistemic standing is broadly taken to encompass all of her true beliefs, knowledge and understanding[iii]. By aiming at an improvement in epistemic standing, the intellectual virtues are seen to aim at cognitive contact with reality. In addition, incorporating the notion of *improvement* ties the virtues to succeeding in that aim and is thereby sensitive to the success component specified in Zagzebski's account. Finally, the improvement may occur in one's own epistemic standing or that of another's[iv]. A concern with improving epistemic standing then gives rise to the intellectual virtues; it can thus be thought of as a *pre-requisite* for intellectual virtue.[v]

### 1.3 The intellectual virtue of inquisitiveness

Having established that the intellectual virtues arise out of a concern with improving epistemic standing it is now possible to identify the distinctive way in which the virtue of inquisitiveness manifests this concern. This will identify the *distinctive* goal of inquisitiveness. To begin with an intuitively plausible characterisation of inquisitiveness can be adopted, thus, inquisitiveness is a *tendency to question*. This simple characterisation of inquisitiveness identifies *questioning* as the distinctive and defining feature of the virtue. In support of this intuition, imagine a philosophy student who, despite sitting through numerous tutorials and lectures and having access to a range of philosophical resources, fails to ask a single question relating to philosophy or read a single book on the subject. It seems clear that such a student could not be described as inquisitive. Moreover, it is her *failure to ask questions* in the absence of any barriers to doing so that exposes this lack of inquisitiveness[vi]. Thus, the inquisitive person asks questions; without doing so she cannot be attributed the virtue of inquisitiveness.

### 1.3a Motivational component

As noted above, Zagzebski (1996) emphasises a motivational component in her account of the virtues and this seems like a highly plausible demand. It is difficult to imagine what the virtues would look like if they lacked this motivational component. Take for example the notion of a just person void of the motivation for a just world. Or the notion of a rigorous researcher void of the motivation for an accurate representation of the truth. In these cases it seems that the attribution of a *virtue* is simply misplaced. Zagzebski defines motivation as "a persistent tendency to be moved by a motive of a certain kind" (p. 132). Here the notion of *tendency* is employed within the definition. It is therefore worth reformulating the intuitive characterisation of our target virtue in order to identify the characteristic motivation associated with the virtue of inquisitiveness; its distinctive goal. Thus, the inquisitive person is *characteristically motivated to ask questions.*[vii] Here as above, questioning is identified as the distinctive and defining feature of inquisitiveness.

A closer examination of this motivation will enable further refinement of the characterisation of inquisitiveness. Specifically, not only should the inquisitive person be characteristically motivated to ask questions but their questioning should be directed towards the common goal of the intellectual virtues; improving epistemic standing. To see this, imagine a second philosophy student who regularly asks relevant questions during lectures. However, unbeknownst to his lecturers he has been

promised €100 by a group of rich and lazy classmates for every relevant question asked. The student has no genuine interest in finding out the answers to his questions and is motivated purely by the prospect of financial gain. In this case it again seems misplaced to attribute the virtue of inquisitiveness to the student. Although he exhibits a characteristic motivation to ask questions he is not motivated to do so in order to know or understand the answers given. It is the nature of his motivation then that results in a reluctance to attribute to him the virtue of inquisitiveness.

This feature of inquisitiveness can be captured by incorporating the notion of *sincerity*. A sincere question is one in which the questioner genuinely wants to improve epistemic standing with respect to the subject matter in question. In other words, a sincere question is one in which the questioner genuinely wants to know or understand the answer.[viii] With the notion of sincerity in mind the characterisation of inquisitiveness can be further refined. Thus, an inquisitive person is *characteristically motivated to engage sincerely in questioning.[ix]*

### 1.3b Success component

It is now possible to turn to the second component of Zagzebski's (1996) account of the virtues, namely, reliable success in bringing about the ends of the motivational component. This condition is arguably the more contentious of the two. In the case of inquisitiveness it may strike one as simply too demanding to require that the inquisitive agent is reliably successful at improving epistemic standing. To see this potential concern, take the example of a third philosophy student who finds himself under the instruction of an epistemically unfriendly lecturer. This lecturer is committed to lying in response to any question she is asked. Despite the student's characteristic motivation to ask sincere questions in order to improve his epistemic standing he is bound not to achieve this end given his epistemically unfriendly circumstances. In this case attributing the virtue of inquisitiveness to the student may still be appropriate despite the fact that he fails to improve his epistemic standing. This might be seen to bring into question the requirement of reliable success.[x]

In order to appreciate the significance of the success component however and to further examine its constituent feature in relation to inquisitiveness, the example can be adapted to highlight the essential role that success plays. Imagine that our student, no longer at the mercy of an epistemically unfriendly lecturer, is genuinely fascinated by the Gettier problem and eager to learn more. As a result he regularly asks questions during lectures on the topic. However, despite their sincerity, the

questions are invariably incomprehensible or irrelevant to the Gettier problem and he appears to be deriving them from an introductory metaphysics book. As with the previous case, the student is characteristically motivated to ask sincere questions and yet fails to improve his epistemic standing. However, unlike the first case this student's failure is due to a faulty question-asking strategy; he is asking the *wrong questions*. This is significantly different from the first case in which the student was prevented from improving his epistemic standing due to epistemically unfriendly circumstances. Our Gettier student's failure to improve his epistemic standing does not result from a defect in his epistemic environment but from the student himself. It is on this basis that he fails to exhibit the virtue of inquisitiveness.

This second case highlights the need for a further refinement of the characterisation of inquisitiveness. In addition to the requirement of sincerity there is also the need for *good questioning*. This represents the success component of the virtue of inquisitiveness. In order to be virtuously inquisitive a person must not only exhibit a characteristic motivation to engage *sincerely* in questioning, they must also be *good* at asking questions. Whether or not they are successful in improving epistemic standing as a result of good questioning is then determined by whether or not they are in an epistemically conducive environment. Actually improving epistemic standing is not a requirement of the intellectual virtue of inquisitiveness; *good questioning* that aims at doing so is.

This result can be helpfully elucidated by returning to the distinction outlined above regarding the goals of the intellectual virtues (section 1.2) and by focusing on the distinction as it manifests itself in the success component. As was observed, success in achieving the common goal is differentiated from success in achieving the distinctive goal for any given virtue. In the case of inquisitiveness, success in improving epistemic standing (the common goal) is thus importantly distinct from successfully engaging in good questioning (the distinctive goal). Looking at the cases once again, the student in the epistemically unfriendly lecturer case is prevented from improving his epistemic standing and so prevented from achieving the common goal of the virtues. He is however a good questioner thus achieving the distinctive goal characteristic of inquisitiveness and is thereby attributed the virtue. Our Gettier student achieves *neither* the common goal nor the distinctive goal of the virtue and so is not deemed to be virtuously inquisitive. Hence, actually improving epistemic standing, as the common goal of inquisitiveness, is *not* required for the virtue. Good questioning that aims at such an improvement, as the distinctive goal of inquisitiveness, is required.

Undoubtedly, the notion of good questioning is a rich and complex one deserving of significantly more attention than can be afforded in the present paper. Any attempt to offer an account of it in this context will therefore be insufficient. In light of this it will be useful to rely in general on an intuitive understanding of this notion to ground the claim that a person must be a good questioner in order to exhibit the virtue of inquisitiveness. However, in order to provide some limited theoretical grounding for this intuitive understanding we may look again at the case of the Gettier student. Here we saw our student employing a faulty question-asking strategy in which his questions were either incomprehensible or irrelevant. Focusing on these features of the student's bad questioning it is possible to identify several key attributes of good questioning required for the virtue of inquisitiveness.

Firstly, good questioning will pick out and target that information which is required in order to improve epistemic standing in the *relevant* manner. Our Gettier student notably fails in this regard due to the fact that he is deriving his questions from an introductory metaphysics book. As such, while the question for example, of whether Gettier believed in absolute time may lead to *some* improvement in the student's epistemic standing it is unlikely to do so with respect to the Gettier problem itself, about which he is keen to learn. The student has failed to target the relevant information and is consequently asking the wrong question. Good questioning requires targeting information *relevant* to improving epistemic standing on the subject matter under investigation. Secondly, let us imagine that not only is our student deriving his questions from an introductory metaphysics book but that he is raising them in the middle of a lecture on ethical theory. Here our student is employing a faulty question-asking strategy by failing to identify a *context* conducive to improving his epistemic standing with respect to the Gettier problem. Our ethics lecturer while probably quite capable is still unlikely to provide him with the information he is looking for given the context in which the question is asked. Good questioning requires identifying an appropriate context conducive to improving epistemic standing regarding the subject matter under investigation. Finally, it was noted that the student's questions are incomprehensible. In particular we may imagine that he often embarks on meandering tangents which are almost impossible to follow. As such, his questions are poorly formulated and confusing making it unlikely that the lecturer will be able, even if willing, to provide an answer in order to improve his epistemic standing with respect to the Gettier problem. Good questioning requires the ability to formulate a question effectively in order to

improve epistemic standing regarding the subject matter under investigation. We have seen then, that good questioning requires, at a minimum, the asking of relevant, context-sensitive and competent questions in order to meet the conditions of good questioning required for virtuous inquisitiveness.[xi]

It is now possible to offer a final characterisation of the intellectual virtue of inquisitiveness. The inquisitive person is *characteristically motivated to engage sincerely in good questioning.*

## 1.4 Distinguishing virtuous and non-virtuous inquisitiveness

With this characterisation in place, the question of *when* it is intellectually virtuous to be inquisitive can be addressed. This provides an opportunity to distinguish between cases of virtuous and non-virtuous inquisitiveness and to thus further define the contours of inquisitiveness *qua intellectual virtue.* With this in mind it is important to set the concept of inquisitiveness as a virtue apart from the ordinary language concept. The former can be understood as a thick concept, in the sense first employed by Bernard Williams (1985), implying both a *descriptive* and an *evaluative* element. Attributing the *virtue* of inquisitiveness to a person entails that one is not only describing what they are doing but identifying it as a *good* thing to do. By contrast, the ordinary language concept of inquisitive is purely descriptive. Describing a person as inquisitive in ordinary language simply identifies them as someone who asks a lot of questions. This says nothing about the normative goodness or rightness of their actions. The concept of inquisitiveness as an intellectual virtue is thus rooted in the ordinary language concept but carries with it an evaluative dimension that the ordinary language concept lacks. Examining cases in which a person may be described as inquisitive despite seemingly non-virtuous inquisitive behaviour will allow for a clear demarcation between the virtue concept and the ordinary language concept.

Take the following three cases of non-virtuous inquisitiveness. Firstly, imagine a student who arrives at each of her tutorials armed with an endless list of questions concerning her tutor's personal life. She is incessantly eager to know who the tutor spends his weekends with, where he goes on holiday, the colour of his kitchen walls etc. This student is evidently motivated to ask questions in order to improve her epistemic standing and is asking all the right questions. Intuitively, however, her questioning does not appear to be intellectually virtuous. Now imagine a second avid question-

asking student who can once again be relied upon to ask questions throughout tutorials. He is, however, exclusively concerned with the content of the exam at the end of the semester and all his questions are aimed at finding out what this will be. Once again, despite the fact that the student is motivated to ask good questions in order to improve his epistemic standing the attribution of intellectually virtuous inquisitiveness appears misplaced. Finally, imagine a student who spends her three-year undergraduate philosophy degree reading and asking questions exclusively concerning the entry under modus ponens in the Oxford Companion to Philosophy. As with the first two cases, although the characteristic motivation is in place and the right questions are asked, describing the student's behaviour as intellectually virtuous seems misplaced. In all these cases, the student in question may be *described* as inquisitive on the basis that they exhibit a characteristic and sincere motivation to engage in good questioning. However, in each case there is something distinctively *non-virtuous* about the student's behaviour. The description of these students as inquisitive therefore lacks the positive evaluative dimension required for the attribution of an intellectual virtue. Thus, the ordinary language concept of inquisitiveness can be appropriately employed but the *intellectual virtue* of inquisitiveness is not present thereby distinguishing the former concept from the latter.

### 1.4a A potential concern

At this stage it is worth examining briefly the relationship between the intellectual and moral virtues in order to address a potential concern regarding the distinction illustrated above. One could argue that whilst there is a sense in which the students in the cases described are acting non-virtuously, it is not *intellectual* virtue that is lacking. Rather the students exhibit elements of *moral* vice and it is this that lends the cases an intuitively non-virtuous character. Take the example of the student who asks good questions directed towards improving her epistemic standing on the subject of her tutor's personal life. All the components of the intellectual virtue of inquisitiveness are ostensibly in place. It is her choice of subject matter that introduces a non-virtuous element and this choice is at least plausibly the result of a defect in her moral, not intellectual, character.

In response to this concern it should first be noted that the plausibility of a strict demarcation between the intellectual and moral virtues is the subject of some debate within the wider literature. Section 1.2 examined the notion that the intellectual virtues are broadly demarcated in terms of their concern with cognitive or epistemic goods. However, this does not preclude the possibility of a close relationship between the intellectual and moral virtues. Zagzebski (1996), for example, argues

that "we have not yet seen any reason for dividing moral and intellectual virtues into distinct kinds" (p. 158). Similarly, Roberts and Wood (2007) maintain that "no strict dividing line can be drawn between moral and intellectual virtues" (p. 180) and Baehr (2011, Appendix) rejects, as a minimum, the claim that they should be regarded as mutually exclusive. If the intellectual and moral virtues cannot be rigidly demarcated then it is also less clear that the examples under discussion can be characterised in terms of intellectual virtue and moral vice.

Furthermore, even when one restricts consideration of the cases to more clearly defined epistemic or intellectual territory it is not obvious that the students exhibit intellectual virtue. Take the example of the student concerned with her tutor's personal life once again. It seems clear that this kind of prying behaviour is in some way morally deficient but it can also be seen as intellectually deficient. After all, by focusing on the details of the tutor's personal life the student is foregoing an opportunity to ask questions that might further her philosophical education. At least arguably, the common goal of the intellectual virtues, improving epistemic standing, would be better served if the student were to shift the focus of her questions away from the trivial details of her tutor's life towards the richer content of the philosophy he is trying to teach. A similar analysis can be offered in the second and third cases as well. The student asking questions in order to uncover details about the end of semester exam may, if successful, improve his grades but will not *significantly* improve his epistemic standing if his questions come at the expense of others about the philosophical subject matter of the course. Likewise, the student obsessed with the entry under modus ponens in the Oxford Companion to Philosophy would plausibly improve her epistemic standing *to a greater degree* were she to examine a variety of philosophical topics.

Naturally, the intuitive force of these analyses will depend in part upon what it means to improve epistemic standing. In line with Roberts and Wood's characterisation of the virtue they call love of knowledge (2007, Chapter 6) one can incorporate the *significance, worthiness* and *relevance* of the knowledge a person gains into an assessment of the degree to which they have improved their epistemic standing. Thus, the trivial or irrelevant nature of the knowledge acquired in the cases above indicates the presence of intellectual vice despite the fact that *some* knowledge has been gained. In all these cases, intellectual vice is thus manifested in the failure of the students to improve their epistemic standings in a significant or non-trivial manner. This response provides some motivation for understanding the cases in terms of *intellectual* as opposed to moral vices and this

should help to further define the concept of inquisitiveness as an intellectual virtue thus distinguishing it from the ordinary language concept.

## PART II: INQUISITIVENESS AND THE INTELLECTUALLY VIRTUOUS LIFE

The inquisitive person is characteristically motivated to engage sincerely in good questioning. In addition, attributing the virtue of inquisitiveness to a person implies that they are doing something normatively right. With the characterisation of inquisitiveness thus fully developed, the distinctive place of inquisitiveness among the intellectual virtues can be explored.

### 2.1 Inquisitiveness among the virtues

Section 1.2 identified a common goal shared by all the intellectual virtues; that of improving epistemic standing. Different intellectual virtues however contribute to this common goal in distinct ways. In *The Inquiring Mind* (2011) Baehr divides the intellectual virtues into six groupings demarcated in terms of their relationship to inquiry (Chapter 2). According to this the intellectual virtues may be concerned with motivating inquiry, focusing inquiry, consistent inquiry, inquiring with integrity, flexible inquiry or endurance in inquiry. Each of these can be thought of as distinct ways of improving epistemic standing. Thus, each of the character-based intellectual virtues contributes to the common goal of improving epistemic standing in a distinctive manner. In order to determine where inquisitiveness stands among the virtues it will be useful to identify the distinctive manner in which it contributes to this common goal.

#### 2.1a A motivating intellectual virtue

In his categorization of the intellectual virtues Baehr (2011) begins by noting that "one...demand [of successful inquiry] is fundamentally *motivational*, for inquiry must be initiated or undertaken" (p. 19). The virtue of inquisitiveness is then listed under the heading of initial motivation. Miscevic (2007), another commentator who has drawn attention to the virtue of inquisitiveness similarly contends that inquisitiveness is a "*clearly motivating* epistemic virtue" (p. 264, emphasis added). He regards this as a defining feature of inquisitiveness commenting that "[I]nquisitiveness... is a *motivating*, truth-seeking virtue" (p. 244). What Miscevic and Baehr are both highlighting is the key role that inquisitiveness plays in the *initiation* of inquiry. Intuitively it seems right to classify inquisitiveness as a *motivating* intellectual virtue in this respect. When we compare it to other intellectual virtues such as

open-mindedness, intellectual courage, autonomy and rigor it seems reasonable to posit that inquisitiveness sets itself apart from these on the basis that it is distinctively concerned with getting inquiry off the ground. Inquisitiveness is thus a motivating intellectual virtue. This distinguishes it from many of the other intellectual virtues and determines to a significant extent its place among them.

### 2.1b The question-asking virtue

There are, however, a number of closely aligned intellectual virtues that also play a motivating role in the process of inquiry. Alongside inquisitiveness, reflectiveness, contemplativeness, curiosity and wonder are all listed under the initial motivation category in Baehr's taxonomy. All four of these are naturally associated with the impetus to inquire and so with the initiation of inquiry. In order to determine the particular place of inquisitiveness among the virtues then, it is necessary to identify how it distinguishes itself from its close relatives within the category of motivating intellectual virtues.

Here it will be useful to return to the defining feature of inquisitiveness identified in section 1.3, questioning. Recall our first philosophy student; it was precisely her failure to ask questions that prevented the attribution of virtuous inquisitiveness. Inquisitiveness is thus defined by its relationship to questioning; the inquisitive person *must* ask questions. Arguably at least, the same cannot be said of the other motivating intellectual virtues listed above. One can reflect, contemplate or wonder without actually asking questions. One can also, at least arguably, be curious without asking questions. This latter claim may at first appear contentious given that one might regard inquisitiveness and curiosity as one and the same. Miscevic (2007), for example, employs the terms interchangeably. It can be argued, however, that they are not one and the same for the reason just stated. One can be curious *without* asking (either articulated or non-articulated) questions. This is because curiosity is, at least plausibly, more akin to wonder than to the virtue of inquisitiveness. It involves a certain reflective or thoughtful form of wondering which may constitute an inclination to engage in questioning but does not require questioning itself in order to be realised.[xii] Virtuous inquisitiveness by contrast requires not only a characteristic motivation to engage in questioning but questioning itself. Of course, curiosity does in fact frequently involve a process of questioning but crucially this is not a *defining* feature of the virtue.[xiii] As such, the virtue of inquisitiveness sets itself

apart from the other intellectual virtues, including those that are its close relatives, by being the only intellectual virtue for which questioning constitutes a *defining* feature.

To appreciate more closely what it means for questioning to constitute a defining feature of inquisitiveness in this sense it will be useful to consider again the distinction between the common and distinctive goals of the virtues. In section 1.3b we identified *good questioning* as the distinctive goal of the virtue of inquisitiveness. Our student in the epistemically unfriendly lecturer case was attributed the virtue of inquisitiveness on the basis that he engaged successfully in good questioning despite the fact that he failed to improve his epistemic standing. Our confused Gettier student, by contrast, was not attributed the virtue precisely because he failed to ask good questions. Compare this to another of the intellectual virtues, say open-mindedness. While good questioning will often play an important role in the virtue of open-mindedness, it does not serve as the distinctive goal of this virtue. Thus, a person may still be attributed the virtue despite failing to engage in good questioning. Once again, the same can be said for the closely related virtues. Reflectiveness for example, may manifest itself in good questioning but good questioning is not the distinctive goal of reflectiveness. A person who does not engage in good questioning (or questioning of any form) can therefore still be described as virtuously reflective. Likewise, on the grounds laid out above, for curiosity. This is not the case for inquisitiveness. Good questioning is the distinctive goal of inquisitiveness and failing to achieve the distinctive goal of a virtue amounts to not being attributed that virtue. Good questioning is thus not simply a manifestation of the virtue of inquisitiveness but its *defining* feature; inquisitiveness is the question-asking virtue. On this basis, the place of inquisitiveness among the virtues can be distinctively identified; inquisitiveness is a *motivating* intellectual virtue uniquely defined by its relationship to *questioning*.

## 2.2 The role of inquisitiveness

Having determined the place of inquisitiveness among the virtues it is now possible to examine the distinctive *role* that it plays in the intellectually virtuous life. As noted above, the intellectual virtues are all in some way tied to the process of inquiry. As Baehr observes moreover, "inquiry *must* be initiated" (2011, p. 19, emphasis added). Inquisitiveness plays precisely this key role as a motivating intellectual virtue; it *initiates* inquiry. Crucially moreover, its defining relationship to questioning marks inquisitiveness out as significant in this respect. It is the role that inquisitiveness plays as the

question-asking virtue that sets it apart from the other intellectual virtues and determines its distinctive role in the intellectually virtuous life.

In order to further elucidate this distinctive role however, two significant concerns regarding the claim that inquisitiveness initiates inquiry should be considered. Firstly, not *all* inquiry is initiated by inquisitiveness. Secondly, inquisitiveness does not *always* lead to inquiry. A discussion of these concerns will allow for further refinement of the role that inquisitiveness plays in the intellectually virtuous life.

### 2.2a First concern

Inquisitiveness is distinctive among the virtues due to its motivating role in initiating inquiry. However, not all inquiry is initiated by inquisitiveness. To illustrate this imagine another philosophy student. This time our student suffers from a distinct lack of philosophical imagination and as a result, when faced with the task of setting a question for his dissertation, is unable to do so. Fortunately, his lecturer, being familiar with this problem, has provided a set of standard questions to choose from. The unimaginative student simply picks one of these at random having no special interest in its subject matter. He then diligently goes to work on the chosen question and produces a rigorous, sensitive and philosophically sophisticated dissertation. Given the characterisation of inquisitiveness that was developed in Part I, the student cannot be said to exhibit virtuous inquisitiveness; he did not actually ask the question under investigation, it was asked for him by the lecturer. Despite this, he has engaged substantially in a process of inquiry and moreover, exhibited several of the intellectual virtues as demonstrated by his excellent dissertation. This case suggests that not *all* inquiry begins with inquisitiveness and thus demands a more precise account of the role that inquisitiveness plays in the initiation of inquiry.

The claim that inquisitiveness initiates *all* inquiry is indeed too strong. In addition to the case described above, there are a number of familiar contexts that involve inquiry which do not result from an initial inquisitive drive. Inquiry by a doctor into a medical condition or by the jury in a legal proceeding serve as two supplementary examples. In response to this concern then, a clearer conception of the role that inquisitiveness plays in the initiation of inquiry must be laid out. Crucially, the claim that inquisitiveness initiates inquiry does not entail that inquisitiveness is *necessary* for inquiry. Nevertheless, the claim that the virtue of inquisitiveness *does* (at least sometimes) initiate

intellectually virtuous inquiry remains uncontentious. A characteristic motivation to engage sincerely in good questioning is bound to lead in some instances to intellectually virtuous inquiry. One may argue in fact, that it will *often* do so. It is this that emerges as significant when discussing the role of inquisitiveness among the intellectual virtues. Inquisitiveness often initiates intellectually virtuous inquiry and is importantly distinguished by this fact. The significance of this can be underlined by turning now to the second concern noted above.

### 2.2b Second concern

It is not hard to imagine a wide range of examples in support of the claim that inquisitiveness often initiates intellectually virtuous inquiry. Take the child who embarks on a thorough examination of butterfly species after questioning how they come to have such a variety of patterns and colours. Similarly, take the amateur historian who conducts an open-minded investigation into the rise and fall of the Roman Empire after questioning how it was able to dominate such a significant portion of Europe and the Middle East. Finally, take the brilliant scientist who performs a series of novel experiments on the nature of gravity after questioning why apples fall from trees in the direction of the earth. These examples demonstrate the broad spectrum of inquiries that can and do result from virtuous inquisitiveness.

It is, however, just as easy to imagine a wide range of cases in which inquisitiveness is thwarted from the outset. The fascinated child is told not to play with insects. The amateur historian is diverted by a family commitment. The brilliant scientist is forced to abandon scientific experimentation after being labelled a heretic. In all of these cases, intellectually virtuous inquiry does not ensue despite virtuous inquisitiveness on the part of the inquirer. Hence our second concern; inquisitiveness does not *always* lead to inquiry.

Interestingly though, these cases in fact serve to highlight the unique relationship that inquisitiveness bears to the initiation of inquiry. Note that each time our inquisitive inquirer is thwarted it is something *extrinsic* to the conditions of their inquisitiveness that prevents inquiry from taking place. Our inquirers are diverted by the external influences of people and circumstance. In the absence of such extrinsic factors however, any inquiry brought about by an initial inquisitive drive will *necessarily* take place. Uninhibited inquisitiveness will *always* lead to inquiry. This is due to the unique relationship that the virtue of inquisitiveness bears to the initiation of inquiry in its role as the

*question-asking virtue*. In order to be virtuously inquisitive a person *must* ask questions. One can, moreover, imagine any number of inquiry-worthy claims or occurrences and yet inquiry into them is not underway until an initial *question* has been asked. Inquiry is thus initiated through questioning. As the question-asking virtue inquisitiveness thereby bears a unique relationship to the initiation of inquiry. It is, one might say, in the nature of inquisitiveness that it initiates inquiry.

This unique relationship highlights the special significance of inquisitiveness in the intellectually virtuous life. No others of the intellectual virtues are defined by their relationship to questioning and so neither do they exhibit this distinctive relationship to inquiry. Inquisitiveness not only often leads to intellectually virtuous inquiry but is *defined* by its role in the initiation of such inquiry. Thus we have identified the distinctive role that inquisitiveness plays in the intellectually virtuous life. Without the virtue of inquisitiveness, inquiry itself would be a vastly more limited and one might imagine intellectually poorer pursuit. A characteristic motivation to engage sincerely in good questioning is therefore integral to the fulfilment of an intellectually virtuous life. This places inquisitiveness at the heart of the autonomous virtue epistemological framework and thereby concludes our in-depth examination of the virtue.

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**Notes**

[i] Perhaps the most explicit discussion of inquisitiveness within the literature can be found in Nenad Miscevic's (2007) paper in which he argues for the central role of *inquisitiveness or curiosity* in the virtue-theoretic framework. Miscevic does not, however, offer an explicit characterisation of this trait (or traits) as an intellectual virtue. A number of other commentators, notably Jonathan Kvanvig (2003, 2012) and Dennis Whitcomb (2010), have also discussed *curiosity* in some depth. In addition, Roberts and Wood (2007) offer a detailed characterisation of the intellectual virtue they call love of knowledge (chapter 6). This virtue shares several features in common with curiosity, as it is construed by both Kvanvig and Whitcomb and to a lesser degree the intellectual virtue of inquisitiveness that is the focus of this paper.

[ii] Thanks to Jason Baehr for this suggestion and for a useful discussion of the distinction.

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<sup>iii</sup> The notion of epistemic standing however, should be flexible enough to allow for any set of cognitive or epistemic states without forcing a firm commitment to a given one.

<sup>iv</sup> Incorporating the epistemic standing of *others* as a feature of the common goal of the intellectual virtues distinguishes the account offered here from an exclusively self-oriented or individualistic account. This highlights the collective or social nature of the common goal thus falling in line with a broadly social, rather than individualistic, epistemology. For a more significant treatment of this move from individual to social epistemology within the virtue epistemology literature see, for example, Fricker (2007), Goldberg (2010), Baehr (2011).

<sup>v</sup> The notion of having a goal to improve epistemic standing bears some resemblance to the virtue characterised by Roberts and Wood (2007) as love of knowledge. Significantly, Roberts and Wood treat this as an intellectual virtue in its own right whereas here it is understood as a pre-requisite for *all* the intellectual virtues. One challenge to this conception of the common goal as a pre-requisite for intellectual virtue is to imagine an epistemically perfect being incapable of improving her epistemic standing. If the goal to improve epistemic standing is required for intellectual virtue then such a being's capacity for intellectual virtue may be brought into question. However, this case once again draws attention to the significance of incorporating the epistemic standing of others in our conception of the common goal. The epistemically perfect being would be well positioned to improve the epistemic standings of others and in so doing she could also manifest the intellectual virtues. Thanks to an anonymous referee for highlighting this.

<sup>vi</sup> A broad characterisation of questioning is being employed here incorporating both articulated and non-articulated questioning. The failure to read philosophy books for example is viewed as a failure to ask a range of non-articulated questions.

<sup>vii</sup> The notion of a *characteristic* motivation is employed here in line with Zagzebski's (1996) account. This ensures that the virtue of inquisitiveness cannot be attributed on the basis of a single instance of the motivation in question but that this motivation represents a stable feature of the inquisitive person's character.

viii This account of sincerity is somewhat over-simplified due to the restricted scope of the discussion. One significant complication to note is the case of questioning that seeks to improve *others'* epistemic standing. Take for example the questions set by a teacher in an exam. Here it seems false to claim that the teacher wants to understand the answers to the questions herself and yet it would also be improper to accuse her of insincere questioning. Arguably however in this case the teacher, by setting the exam, is aiming to improve the epistemic standing of her students as part of a wider pedagogical strategy, one in which exam questions are taken to improve epistemic standing. In this broader sense her sincerity to improve epistemic standing is thus preserved. Nevertheless, this issue highlights the complex nature of the notion of sincerity. The simplified account offered here should however suffice for the purposes of the characterisation of inquisitiveness. Thanks to an anonymous referee for highlighting this.

ix Thanks to Allan Hazlett for useful comments on the notion of sincerity.

x One may be inclined to contend here that the student's general habit of questioning in this case is sufficient for the attribution of virtuous inquisitiveness without casting doubt on the success component of the virtues. This is because he is exhibiting a broader strategy of questioning that will reliably, albeit not in this case, lead to an improvement in his epistemic standing. Reliable success does not require success on every occasion and is all that is required to satisfy Zagzebski's (1996) success component. If this is the case then the concern raised here will not trouble the reader in the first instance and it remains only to examine what reliable success amounts to in the case of inquisitiveness. This is the primary aim of the following stage in the discussion. Thanks to an anonymous referee for highlighting this.

xi As noted, significantly further explication will ultimately be required in order to examine the role of good questioning more fully as a central feature of the virtue of inquisitiveness. It is hoped however that the brief discussion here will offer some parameters to guide one's intuition in this regard for the remainder of the discussion.

xii To illustrate this form of wondering imagine that one is enjoying a pot of tea in a café. At the sound of someone entering the café one absentmindedly glances towards the door. In this instance however I contend that one is not yet asking any questions. Although this form of wondering may quite plausibly lead to

questioning, one can wonder even in cases such as this where no questioning (be it articulated or non-articulated) in fact arises.

xiii The interpretation of these terms may naturally vary among readers. It should thus be noted that the characterisation of inquisitiveness offered here is ultimately unaffected if one does regard curiosity and inquisitiveness as synonymous.

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