

CURIOSITY AS AN INTELLECTUAL AND ETHICAL VIRTUE

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Thesis Abstract

Safiye Yiğit, “Curiosity as an Intellectual and Ethical Virtue”

In this study, I claim that curiosity is an ethical and intellectual virtue that is necessary for any well-lived life. I distinguish curiosity from other types of desiring to know that could emerge from pragmatic reasons, necessity, or an idle urge to know, and any other reason except the ones that comes from within the individual and that will not leave one until it is satisfied. Restricted as it might sound, I define curiosity as an “intrinsic desire to know in order to understand” and claim that a flourishing life is not possible without it. Such a curiosity has two distinguishing marks: in any case of curiosity there must be (a) an intrinsic interest to know and (b) a genuine aim of understanding. Since curiosity is taken to be the gateway to the ultimate epistemic end, understanding, I briefly explore the distinctions between knowledge and understanding and propose understanding as the human telos/ergon. Another claim I make is that curiosity is *intrinsically* valuable regardless of the final attainment of knowledge and it is also pointed out that non-pragmatic knowledge would lose any significance and value if we were not curious beings. Probably the most original claim of the thesis will appear in the part where I argue that knowledge and curiosity form “an organic unity” and neither is correctly assessable without the other. I will then draw attention to the fact that curiosity is perhaps the ground of the possibility of theoretical knowledge and it should be valued as much as or even more than we value knowledge.

Then, I explore intellectual virtues in the sense the term has recently gained in Virtue Epistemology and after I succinctly survey the newly flourishing field, the claim that curiosity is an intellectual virtue will take place. This claim will be made based on the fact that curiosity is necessary to be able to question and make sense of any corresponding knowledge. Even if one had every other intellectual virtue such as open-mindedness, perseverance, and the like, if one lacks curiosity, the epistemic endeavor would end even before it starts. In addition to being an intellectual virtue, the other central claim I have is that curiosity is an ethical virtue. Controversial as this claim may be, I attempt to show that there is ample reason for considering curiosity as a virtue that makes our lives “eudaimon”.

As side issues, I also deal with the conditions under which curiosity is totally satisfiable and whether or not such satisfaction is desirable. Here, the “utopia paradox” that awaits human beings provided that all curiosity is eliminated from our world is sketched out and this will give support to my thesis that curiosity is necessary for a good life. Lastly, I address the problem of deviant curiosity and give an account of why curiosity could still be considered as an ethical virtue despite the possible negative consequences.

Tez Özeti

Safiye Yiğit, “Entelektüel ve Etik Bir Erdem Olarak Merak”

Bu çalışmada merakın, iyi geçen her yaşam için gerekli olan etik ve entelektüel bir erdem olduğunu savunacağım. Merakı, faydacı nedenlerle, gereklilikten veya boş bir bilme güdüsünden gelen veya bireyin içinden gelenler ve doyuma ulaşana kadar onu rahat bırakmayacak olanlar haricindeki tüm diğer nedenlerle olan bilme arzularından ayırmaktayım. Kulağa kısıtlanmış gelse de, merakı “anlama amaçlı bilmeye yönelik içsel istek” olarak tanımlıyorum ve güzel bir hayatın onsuz mümkün olamayacağını savunuyorum. Bu tip bir merakın ayırt edici iki işareti vardır: herhangi bir merak durumunda, (a) bilmeye yönelik içsel bir ilgi ve (b) anlamaya yönelik hakiki bir amaç olmalıdır. Merak nihai epistemik sona, anlamaya açılan bir giriş kapısı olduğu için, bilgi ve anlama arasındaki farkları kısaca ortaya çıkaracağım ve anlamamanın bir insan telosu/ergonu olduğunu ileri süreceğim. Diğer bir iddiam da merakın, edinilen son bilgiye bakılmaksızın *doğası itibarıyla* değerli olduğudur ve eğer meraklı varlıklar olmasaydı bilginin önemini ve değerini yitireceği de vurgulanacaktır. Muhtemelen tezin en özgün iddiası, bilginin ve merakın “organik bir birlik” oluşturduğunu ve her ikisine de diğeri olmadan değer biçilemeyeceğini belirttiğim bölüm olacaktır. Daha sonra merakın belki de bilginin olanaklılığının temeli olduğunu ve bilgiye biçtiğimiz değer kadar, hatta daha fazlasını ona vermemiz gerektiği gerçeğine dikkat çekeceğim.

Daha sonra, entelektüel erdemleri, terimin yakın geçmişte Erdem Epistemolojisinde kazandığı içerik kapsamında, ortaya çıkaracağım ve yeni serpilten bir alandan ve merakın entellektüel bir erdem olduğu iddiasından kısaca bahsedeceğim. Bu iddia, merakın sorgulamak ve karşılık düşen herhangi bir bilginin anlamını kavramak için gerekli olduğu olgusuna dayanacaktır. Açık fikirlilik, azim ve benzeri diğer entellektüel erdemlere sahip olunsu bile, eğer merak eksik olursa, epistemik çaba daha başlamadan bitecektir. Entelektüel bir erdem olmasının yanı sıra, merak konusundaki merkezi diğer iddiam, merakın etik bir erdem olduğudur. Bu iddiam tartışmalı olabilir ama merakın bir erdem olarak hayatlarımızı daha “eudaimon” kıldığını düşünmek için yeterli sebebimiz olduğunu göstermeye çalışacağım.

İkincil meseleler olarak da merakın tamamen doyurulabilir olduğu koşulları ve böyle bir doyumun istenebilir olup olmadığını ele alacağım. Burada bütün merakın ortadan kaldırıldığı, insanları bekleyen bir “ütopya paradoksu”, kabataslak anlatılacaktır ve bu merakın iyi bir yaşam için gerekli olduğu tezime destek olacaktır. Son olarak, alışılmışın dışında sapkın merak sorununa değineceğim ve muhtemel olumsuz sonuçlarına rağmen, merakın neden etik bir erdem olarak düşünülebileceğini açıklamaya çalışacağım.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Curiosity is one of the passions of the soul¹ that has created quite a lot controversy over its nature and its value for human life. Some thinkers such as Augustine and Aquinas found curiosity less than an appealing state for human beings and even demoted it to the level of a vice. On the other hand, thinkers like Socrates and Aristotle as well as Cicero held curiosity as a valuable asset that made philosophy possible. One cannot help but wonder how should one determine one's stance towards curiosity? Is it a virtue or a vice? This study will mainly focus on this question and it will also explore peripheral questions that are related to this issue. In order to give an accurate account of the value of curiosity in our lives, it is necessary to delve into the nature of curiosity, its role in human life, its ramifications and what life would be like without this desire for understanding. The answers for these questions will reveal curiosity as quite significant for our lives both in ethical and epistemic terms. Yet, could it be called a virtue just like benevolence, justice, and the like? To respond to this question one also needs to address the nature of virtue and what makes a character trait virtuous to have. I think curiosity is, among other virtues, necessary to make our lives meaningful and it helps us flourish as human beings.

In addition to being an ethical virtue, curiosity is also an intellectual virtue we should possess just like open-mindedness, intellectual courage, perseverance, and humility. In order to be good questioners and to reach epistemic success, curiosity is a necessary trait we should have. In fact, curiosity is essential to a good life as well as to good epistemology. Virtue epistemology, as a field, deals with the character

¹ Rene Descartes, *Passions of the Soul*, trans. Stephen H. Voss, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1989).

traits of the knowers and explores intellectual virtues that will pave the way for knowledge. Among those virtues, I think curiosity holds a pivotal place because, without this desire for knowledge, epistemic endeavor would often fail to start and there would be little value attributed to knowledge. Curiosity is perhaps one of the reasons we value knowledge because, due to our curious nature, we have an inherent desire to seek knowledge.

This desire for knowledge and understanding is an indispensable part of being human and I doubt that one could lead a good life without this trait. Yet, I believe having curiosity is not something that certain people enjoy and some others lack, it can stay latent in some people but such a desire could definitely be cultivated in individuals. In fact, my main goal in dealing with this topic is that perhaps with a greater awareness of the role of curiosity for making our lives better, curiosity will be esteemed more and studied more so as to make it a part of our lives. It is also significant to point out the astonishing fact that there is little research done on curiosity within the field of philosophy despite its seeming centrality in any philosophical inquiry. This might be due to the ambivalence towards its value for human life, and once curiosity is seen as a virtue which is indispensable for a well-lived life, it will possibly gain its proper place within the philosophical field.

A human being is more than a species which possesses a definite number of deoxyribonucleic acids and looks in a certain way. Rather, a human being is distinguished by its doubting, questioning, and comprehending nature; a human being targets at understanding and he/she is not satisfied until he can give an account of the reality as a whole in one way or another. I think curiosity is an excellence of human beings and one of the essential characteristics that makes us human. Hence, I believe, it deserves further attention and scrutiny.

CHAPTER II: NATURE OF CURIOSITY

Its Significance and Neglect

“I was a Treasure unknown then I desired to be known so I created a creation to which I wanted to make Myself known; then they knew Me.”²

The quotation above is attributed to the deity of monotheism; whether it really belongs to God, or to a wise man called David, a desire to be known is offered as the ultimate reason for being; accordingly, a ‘desire to know’ is the accurate human response to the divine calling. Besides this supposed divine calling for curiosity, quite different sources throughout the history have drawn attention to the significance of a desire to know as an integral part of human flourishing. An old Yiddish proverb goes “A man should go on living, if only to satisfy his curiosity” and Aristotle is known for claiming that “it was through the feeling of wonder that men now and at first began to philosophize.” A 19th century noble prize-winner French author, Antole France, has humbly claimed that “the greatest virtue of men is perhaps curiosity.”

Looking at these references, it seems as though curiosity is commonly regarded as a significant component of a good life. Yet, despite the common agreement that curiosity is central to human life, when it comes to the exploration of curiosity theoretically we are able to find almost nothing despite the philosophical

² Tradition says that it is the divine response to the Prophet David’s query when he asked about the purpose of creation

salience of the subject. Besides, there is almost no one who considers curiosity as a necessary constituent of a good life³.

In fact, if we define curiosity simply as a “desire to know”, we can find its trace in philosophy even from the earliest times; Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* begins “all human beings by nature desire to know” and that view is not challenged, since there is an inherent desire, a force, which urges us on towards knowledge. During our childhood, one of the first questions we learn to ask is “why” and probably it is the question we yearn to ask even before we are able to utter the words for it. Inquiry is a fundamental part of what we call a ‘human being’. I suspect we would consider someone who has never asked questions not fully human; we would probably think this person as severely deficient in rational human capacities.

Despite drawing attention to the *presence* of curiosity in human nature as an inherent drive, the *value* of curiosity has been neglected in the philosophical arena. One of the reasons behind this neglect could be due to the emphasis put on knowledge and understanding in the philosophical studies and this one-sided emphasis has overshadowed the value of curiosity, which is usually seen as a useful drive for attaining knowledge. In the meanwhile, epistemology has emerged as a separate branch and several theories and definitions have been proposed for knowledge; however, it has never occurred to the philosophers that there would be minimal value attached to knowledge if we were not curious beings. We would not attach the same value to the word “knowledge”, if recipients of knowledge did not exist – living creatures able to question, understand, and make sense. Without curiosity, we could seek out knowledge that had pragmatic significance but unless

³ See Elias Baumgarten’s “Curiosity as a Moral Virtue” *International Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 15(2) (2001).

we possessed this genuine desire to know, we would have no real passion to chase after knowledge for its own sake. Both trivial as well as quite significant pieces of information float around the universe, yet neither the planets nor the rivers care about it. No other entity but humans are concerned about understanding and making sense; the grand puzzle intrigues only the human mind. As a result of this desire to understand, knowledge gains value and each piece of puzzle becomes precious for the puzzle player. As Jonathan Lear aptly notes:

It is a remarkable fact about us that we cannot simply observe phenomena: we want to know *why* they occur. We can imagine beings who simply watched the sun set and the moon rise in the heavens: they might come to expect regular transitions, but they would lack curiosity as to *why* the changes occur. We are not like that. The heavenly motions cry out (*to us*) for explanation.⁴

Nonetheless, not everything cries for explanation in the same extent; this inherent desire to understand is not uniformly distributed to everything we observe in the world. Some pieces of knowledge emerge as more important for human beings compared to others and there is almost a common agreement among people regarding this gradation of significance. I think the criterion to attribute value to knowledge has to do mainly with its relation to ‘understanding’; in other words, a piece of information is valued based on its relevance in making us closer to understanding. To illustrate, the number of words starting with an ‘a’ in a pamphlet is not considered valuable unless there is a special context to make this information worthy of knowledge. Yet, the number of words starting with an ‘a’ in a dictionary might be quite a valuable piece of knowledge as it shows the richness of the vocabulary of this specific language. It is possible to find many examples- that could be even more convincing than mine- which will prove that we do not attribute the

⁴ Jonathan Lear, *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.3.

same amount of epistemic value to every piece of true knowledge that corresponds to a given question. One cannot help but wonder what is it that inspires our inquiries? Why do we wonder at certain things and why do we find some inquiries more meaningful than others? How do we choose to be intellectually curious about one thing rather than the other? I believe the reason why we become curious about certain things and leave others out has to do with our inherent desire to understand and make sense.⁵

In this very first chapter of the thesis, I will mainly focus on the nature of curiosity and try to give a definition of curiosity which distinguishes it from a mere desire to know; sparing the word curiosity for the type of desiring to know that is understanding-oriented and which emerges from an intrinsic desire to understand how and why, rather than other possible types of desiring to know which could stem from extrinsic sources. To give a more complete picture, I will be elaborating on the accounts of curiosity given by prominent philosophers and point out to the neglect concerning an in-depth analysis of ‘curiosity’ in the philosophical literature.⁶ While touching upon the historical accounts of curiosity in the philosophical literature in order to lay down the distinguishing marks of my preferred usage of curiosity, I will first need to address the definitions offered for curiosity so far in the philosophical arena and point out to the nuances between the states of wonder and curiosity which have been often used interchangeably in the history of philosophy. I will emphasize the distinctive characteristics of curiosity that makes it more than a wondrous state.

⁵ There are a few studies in the psychology literature which support this point. See G. Loewenstein, ‘The Psychology of Curiosity: A Review and Reinterpretation’, *Psychological Bulletin*, 116(1), 75-98, 1994. Also, J. Kagan, ‘Motives and Development’, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 22, 51-66, 1972.

⁶ This neglect and the possible reasons as to why it has been the case are mentioned in more detail by Inan in his forthcoming book *Curiosity and Reference to the Unknown*.

To sketch briefly, wonder will be seen as the preliminary step⁷ that paves the way for curiosity. It emerges as the first kindling of the mind, and in the words of Martin Heidegger, it is when “the usual becomes the unusual”⁸. Yet, if wonder stays at the level of suspicion and perplexity and unless it is gradually transformed to the state of curiosity, it has little possibility of being satisfied. Wonder in the Cartesian sense of the word “admiration”⁹, is a state that we find ourselves in and it is usually defined as a state of astonishment and puzzlement. On the other hand, curiosity is a mental state that arises in an individual as a result of awareness of ignorance and it propels questioning.

After curiosity is compared to the states of wonder and awe, it will be claimed that curiosity is a more valuable state that leads to “understanding” rather than staying at the level of perplexity. Seeing how it all fits together and ultimately grasping why everything is the way it is makes up the ultimate concern of human beings and the answer to these questions are only possible through curiosity. Then, the chapter will continue with clarifications regarding the definition of curiosity and the best definition for curiosity will be pursued. My central claim in this introductory section will be that the commonly agreed upon definition of curiosity as “a desire to know” cannot capture the significance of the term because this definition would include the cases in which desiring to know is present without necessarily involving curiosity. Knowledge could be desired for pragmatic reasons; you could start the

⁷ Nenad Miscevic, ‘Virtue -Based Epistemology and the Centrality of Truth (Towards a Strong Virtue-Epistemology)’, *Acta anal.*, 22:239–266, 2007, p.247. Here, Miscevic talks about primitive alertness as the first step in becoming curious. He believes whereas curiosity could be habituated, alertness is biologically based. Hence, he calls alertness as proto-curiosity and proto-virtue, that makes us open to the world and sensitive to it.

⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p.144.

⁹ Descartes uses the French word “admiration” in his book *Passions of the Soul* and allocates a long chapter to this notion, which is translated into English by Stephen Voss as “wonder”.

inquiry not because you yearn to know but because you need to know or just for the sake of accumulation of knowledge without a genuine desire to understand, and such cases are not good examples for the state of curiosity.¹⁰ Hence, curiosity will be defined as a state that leads to an intrinsic desire to know *in order to understand and make sense*.¹¹ It will be claimed that curiosity is better defined in this way rather than merely as a “desire to know”, and the reasons as to why will be elaborated on.

Accounts of Curiosity in the Philosophical Literature

Quite neglected as it might seem, there have been philosophers who defined curiosity in different ways, some praising it as the highest human activity, some demoting it to a state that should be avoided. Although it is difficult to find explicit discussions of curiosity’s definition, it is evident that a common understanding of curiosity remained remarkably uniform across thinkers and over many centuries. It is basically defined as an intrinsically motivated desire for knowledge. As mentioned before, Aristotle starts his *Metaphysics* with the statement “all human beings by nature desire to know” and he adds that it was out of curiosity (thauma) that man study science and “not for any utilitarian end”¹². Later, Cicero also puts forward similar reasons for the state of curiosity; he says curiosity (curiositas) emerges through an “innate love of learning and of knowledge... without the lure of any profit”.¹³ He also emphasizes that curiosity is a human characteristic and it can be

¹⁰ Dr. Inan points out to the problems in traditional definitions of curiosity and suggests that while curiosity and a desire to know occur together, curiosity is a peculiar state that cannot always be defined as a desire to know. (*Curiosity: A Philosophical Dialogue*, unpublished manuscript, 2006).

¹¹ A similar approach is also taken by A. Subasi in “Cognitive Dynamics of Scientific Curiosity.” MA Thesis in Cognitive Science, Bogazici University.

¹² Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, Book 1, Sec.2.

¹³ G. Loewenstein, ‘The Psychology of Curiosity: A Review and Reinterpretation.’ *Psychological Bulletin*, 116 (1) (1994): 75-98, p.78

inferred that he considers curiosity as a necessary constituent of a happy life. In his own words:

Above all, the search after truth and its eager pursuit are peculiar to man. And so, when we have leisure from the demands of business cares, we are eager to see, to hear, to learn something new, and we esteem a desire to know the secrets or wonders of creation as indispensable to a happy life.¹⁴

Apparently, these early thinkers drew a sharp distinction between an extrinsically motivated desire to know and curiosity. Even though we colloquially use “I am curious” for almost any type of desiring to know, whether or not it is geared towards an inherent desire to make sense, I am also inclined to think that the word ‘curiosity’ should be spared for instances of genuine desire for knowledge and understanding. Objectionable as it might be, for the purposes of this thesis I will consider curiosity not as any desire for knowledge, but as an intrinsically motivated state which aims at understanding and limit my discussions to those cases of curiosity which are understanding-oriented.

Although curiosity has been praised by many, not all the thinkers were in good terms with every instance of curiosity. For instance, St Augustine describes curiosity as a certain “vain and curious longing for knowledge”¹⁵ that he refers to as “ocular lust” to emphasize its frequent although not exclusive connection to visual perception. He attaches negative connotations to curiosity mainly because it involves getting in touch with more knowledge than God bestows upon one as a human being. This could be inferred from his *Confessions*, where he writes that one should keep oneself from being curious about what God was doing before he created humankind or about God’s essence. Yet, he seems to agree with my other claim that human

¹⁴ Cicero, Book One, section 13 of the *De Officiis*

¹⁵ St. Augustine, “*The Confessions of St. Augustine*” (New York: Liveright, 1943), p.54.

beings' ultimate concern is to *understand and make sense*. He is famously quoted for "I believe so that I may understand" and he apparently prefers faith over curiosity in order to understand and make sense, in other words, it could be claimed that he *subjectively satisfied* his curiosity by accepting a grand answer which he found sufficiently plausible and this has sated his curiosity about fundamental questions. In a way, he thinks there are questions one might appropriately become curious about whereas there are other questions that should not be subject to curiosity, questions with which belief can better cope. Yet, this, by no means, undermines the value he gives to understanding for a well-lived human life.

Another prominent thinker, Rene Descartes, writes in *Passions of the Soul* that there are six primitive passions of human beings and he says one of them is "wonder" –the other five being love, hatred, joy, grief, and desire. His depiction of wonder is more like a state that leaves one in perplexity, and he believes the excess of this state, which he calls astonishment, "can never be anything but bad"¹⁶. On the other hand, he finds it good to be born with some inclination to this passion because it disposes us to engage in sciences. Wonder is good as long as it aids us in accomplishing this goal; yet, we had better get rid of this passion if it leads us to what he calls "the sickness of the blindly curious"- which he exemplifies by people who "investigate rarities only to wonder at them and not to *understand* them"¹⁷. It is clear that Descartes values the passion of wonder as long as it is useful in human progress, and if it does not lead one to understanding, it views it as a sickness of soul. Interestingly, he does not say anything about curiosity in the section about Wonder; however, he mentions curiosity briefly in the section on Desires and while talking

¹⁶ Descartes, p.58.

¹⁷ Ibid, p.61.

about the species of desires, he defines curiosity as “nothing but a desire to understand”. Apart from this quick definition, he says nothing on the value of curiosity or the distinctions, if any, between curiosity and wonder.

In his famous *Leviathan*, Hobbes defines curiosity as “a desire to know how and why” and he praises it as a distinguishing mark of being human. He believes that human beings, unlike animals, have a lust for knowledge and that it is unrelenting. For him, this search for the questions ‘how’ and ‘why’ should be a part of human life so that it could be distinguished from other animals. It is apparent that Hobbes values curiosity as he sees it as essential to the definition of being human. To quote him word by word:

Desire to know why, and how, curiosity; such as is in no living creature but man: so that man is distinguished, not only by his reason, but also by this singular passion from other animals; in whom the appetite of food, and other pleasures of sense, by predominance, take away the care of knowing causes; which is a lust of the mind, that by a perseverance of delight in the continual and indefatigable generation of knowledge, exceedeth the short vehemence of any carnal pleasure.¹⁸

In Book II of the *Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume talks about the passions¹⁹ and presents a somewhat ambivalent attitude toward curiosity. Not disregarding that there is “a certain curiosity implanted in human nature”²⁰, he subdivides it into two distinct motives: a *good* variety, the “love of truth”²¹, which he thinks to be the first source of all our inquiries, and a *bad* type, which he saw as a passion derived from a quite different principle which he exemplifies by an insatiable desire for knowing the actions and circumstances of one’s neighbors. Leaving aside the latter kind of

¹⁸ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. E. Curley, with selected variants from the Latin edition of 1668, (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1994) , p.124.

¹⁹ David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, (UK: Penguin Classics, 1986), Sect. X (pp.495-500).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.499.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.453.

curiosity, Hume primarily deals with the good curiosity and thinks that it is worthy as a process rather than primarily focusing on the final attainment. He also has some interesting ideas on curiosity; he believes what is easy and obvious is never valued and if we learn something without difficulty we do not regard it highly. Apart from being difficult to reach, he also thinks that the truth needs to be of some “utility and importance to be valued”. He likens the search for truth to game-playing or hunting. He draws a parallel between the two enterprises and he not only argues that the more difficult it is to get a specific knowledge the more valuable it becomes, but also claims that the “exertion of our wits” as well as “attention fixing” during curiosity contribute to the value of curiosity. With respect to the analogy of hunting and philosophical inquiry, he argues that both involve motion, attention, difficulty, and uncertainty as components contributing to the overall value of both enterprises. I agree with Hume that curiosity, just like hunting, involves attention-fixing, difficulty, uncertainty, and also motion as it causes a variation in the thought and transports us suddenly from one idea to another. After he argues for the necessity of some amount of difficulty in order to value the truth about an issue, he then says that it cannot be the only property that renders truth valuable. He draws attention to the importance and utility of this piece of information in helping us get better understanding regarding the issue at hand. I draw this conclusion based on the examples he gives in explaining the differing value of the diverse pieces of knowledge. For instance, he argues that “Tis easy to multiply algebraical problems to infinity, nor is there any end in the discovery of the proportions of conic sections; tho few mathematicians take any pleasure in these researches, but turn their thoughts to what is more useful and important.” He notes that our interest in the first sort of truth is clearly not an interest in the truth as such -- these truths are not desired merely as truths. Simple

arithmetical discoveries -- like the product of the numbers 3437821 and 89786234 -- don't strike us as particularly pleasant. "Which is an evident proof," Hume says, "that the satisfaction, which we sometimes receive from the discovery of truth, proceeds not from it, merely as such, but only as endow'd with certain qualities"²²

The obvious question that follows from this would be what could be these qualities that render truth significant for us. Even though curiosity is defined as “a love of truth” by Hume, not every truth deserves our love and not every truth contributes to satisfaction of our curiosity. After talking about the role of the employment of our wits in making the truth so agreeable to us, Hume claims that this is not the only factor that makes a piece of knowledge valuable. For instance, arithmetic problems need the employment of our wit and genius but they may be treated as uninteresting and not worthy of our curiosity. In fact, they are in some sense easy and obvious because anyone who is guided through it can reach the correct solution and its difficulty is not sufficient to make it interesting. While Hume believes that what we want are things that work our minds, fix our attentions, and exert our genius; he suspects that these conditions are alone sufficient for explaining much about our enjoyment of truth. For Hume, the significance of truth also has something to do with its usefulness and importance of it in leading us to beneficial consequences as it is apparent from his emphasizing the fact that the truth needs to be of some “utility and importance to be valued”.²³

In a somewhat similar vein, it is my contention that the criterion for determining the value of knowledge depends on the role it plays in helping us make sense and understand. To go with the analogy Hume draws between hunting and

²² Hume, Book II, Part III, Section X.

²³ Ibid.

philosophical inquiry, I think while the pursuit of understanding is like *hunting for nourishment*, going after knowledge that is trivial in aiding us make sense resembles *hunting for recreation*. If the hunter is chasing the prey just for fun, he leaves the game animal once he manages to shoot it. In a similar fashion, trivial but subjectively valuable information is discarded once it is reached; and more importantly it does not matter whether the knowledge I have gained is true or not. To quote an example Boylu (2010) makes use of in her article, “imagine someone who is bored at a piano concert counting how many times the note E will be repeated throughout the performance. It is hard to see why she would be going through a valuable epistemic change by changing her false belief that there were 142 repetitions of E to the true one that there were 143 of them”.²⁴ This is an interesting but convincing point about the value of knowledge or the lack thereof. Not all truths share the same amount of value just because they correspond to a true state of affairs. They vary in their salience for us depending on how much role they play in helping us make sense. It might sound as if there is a grand puzzle and we need to find the pieces to complete it but actually it does not have to be one grand puzzle. For the human mind, everything that is capable of attracting our interest is a question worthy of inquiry.

Going back to the analogy, hunting this or that animal could be subjectively valuable for the hunter because it is a challenge he sets for himself, but it does not show that it is objectively valuable. Similarly, the number of times the note E appears throughout the performance does not contribute to the overall understanding we have of the world. It is hard to see for instance why knowing that this number is 143 instead of 142 should have any epistemic value whatsoever. Surely, this piece of knowledge might gain some epistemic value if it is related to some important

²⁴ Ayca Boylu, “The Value of Knowledge”, *The Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 40 (4) (2010): 591-610, p.593

epistemic or practical goal. But then its value is extrinsic, not intrinsic. If we are told that the person possessing this piece of knowledge is getting paid to find out the exact number of notes, then we can bring into view the extrinsic value of this instance of knowledge. But in the absence of some such story, the person in question cannot be credited with a piece of intrinsically valuable knowledge. Along the same lines, Talbot Brewer emphasizes that a person who keeps memorizing phone numbers out of a phone book cannot really be in the business of accumulating intrinsic value.²⁵ There is no loss, let alone loss of intrinsic value if the number memorizer remembers only a few of the numbers the next day. In fact, it is perfectly acceptable to grade knowledge as less or more valuable and actually Roberts and Wood's diagnosis of someone who loves to assent to true propositions without any discrimination is that this person is showing a kind of "intellectual pathology not an intellectual virtue".²⁶

I prefer to call such instances of knowledge that lack in epistemic value but that are sought after by the individual as subjectively-valued trivial knowledge. On the other hand, there is another type of knowledge that is similar to 'hunting for nourishment' and I prefer referring to this type of knowledge as objectively valued, understanding-oriented pursuit of knowledge. In the latter case, for the hunter, the prey is the ultimate concern. Regardless of the pleasure he derives from tracing the game animal, he values the outcome since he needs it to survive. Once he captures the prey, he would never leave it behind because it has objective value rather than subjective. Therefore, I believe Hume is mistaken in thinking that the piece of knowledge is valuable as long as it is difficult to reach. It could seem like it is

²⁵ Talbot Brewer, *The Retrieval of Ethics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), Ch. 8.

²⁶ R. C. Roberts and W. J. Wood, *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.156.

valuable but this is not an indicator of objective value. My choice of the analogy of hunting for fun and hunting for food might be interpreted as promoting the kind of knowledge that is pragmatically useful over the one that is of little use, but, it is not my intention. What I want to emphasize has more to do with the role knowledge plays in granting us further understanding. Just like missing puzzle pieces are important for completing the picture, a piece of knowledge would be valuable as long as it plays an important role in understanding. In other words, the more important role it plays in understanding/making sense the more valuable the knowledge is. Provided that understanding is acknowledged as the ultimate goal we want to attain as a result of our inquiries, value would be directly proportionate with its role in making us understand. On the other hand, if the piece of knowledge answers a question that is irrelevant to enhancing our understanding, then it is of little value objectively, regardless of its subjective value for an individual.

After Hume, another considerable attempt to reinstate the value of curiosity has been taken up by Martin Heidegger, who discusses the issue at length; yet, his discussions mainly center on the Greek term *thauma*, which is usually translated as wonder instead of curiosity. Since his insights are quite supportive of my perspective, I will continue this discussion in the next section where I will elaborate more on the ancient usage of *thauma* as well as Heidegger's insights on this notion. I will then sketch out the similarity *thauma* shares with understanding-oriented curiosity.

Thauma (Θαυμά) versus Curiosity

There has been no significant attempt to differentiate curiosity from wonder and the two terms have been mostly used interchangeably in translations. *Thauma*, which is

found in the works of Aristotle, is translated into English as wonder, so is Descartes's admiration in French. In fact it is possible to find more mention of wonder in the philosophical texts but curiosity is quite ignored. For the purposes of this thesis, I will distinguish curiosity from wonder because while wonder stays at the level of astonishment and perplexity, curiosity lets us flourish as human beings through the inquiries it generates.

One of the first instances we find the use of *thauma* is in Plato's *Theatetus* where he writes "this is the great passion of the philosopher: wonder (*thauma*). There is no other beginning of philosophy than this."²⁷ Then the notion is revisited by Aristotle in his *Metaphysics*. Beginning from the first book, he mentions wonder as the reason why "men both now begin and at first began to philosophize" and he differentiates this state from a desire to know that comes out as a result of utilitarian ends. He thinks *thauma* makes us seek knowledge for the sake of knowledge and it is evident from the fact that philosophy and first sciences have flourished when the basic needs of humankind are met, not the other way around. Even though it is perfectly possible to seek out knowledge for pragmatic ends, it is not true that we always seek out knowledge for the sake of any other advantage. We could desire to know just because we are curious, and that could be the only explanation.

After Aristotle, Martin Heidegger revisits the notion "thauma" and places it at the center of philosophy. Yet he thinks that the term has been misunderstood and it is a pitiful fact that philosophy is thought to have emerged from a simple and ordinary sense of curiosity. In contrast, he mystifies the notion and believes that it is not an easily comprehensible state. According to Heidegger, philosophy cannot be

²⁷ Plato, *Theatetus*, *Platonis Opera*, ed. J. Burnet, vol. I, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1900), 155D2ff.

separated from thauma and he says that “to say philosophy originates in wonder means that philosophy is wondrous in its essence and becomes more wondrous the more it becomes what it really is”²⁸. For him, philosophy should stay at this marvelous state, should be preserved in its inexplicability and be saved from trivialization. Thauma is what “transports us into the beginning of genuine thinking”. He distinguishes the state of thauma from all types and levels of amazement, admiration, and astonishment. Whereas all these latter types of marveling focus on the unusual and bypass what is usual, such a turning away from the usual is not the case in the state of thauma. Heidegger claims that “in wonder what is most usual itself becomes the most unusual” and that is a unique characteristic of thauma. Quite mystified and hard to understand, it seems that Heidegger actually tries to situate thauma in a special place and he is annoyed by the fact that it is underestimated in philosophical endeavors. He then links the notion of thauma to aletheia –which he thinks we translate much too emptily as truth- and claims that thauma gives us the opportunity to experience unconcealedness (aletheia).

Despite the fact that it is hard to grasp the term aletheia by a few words, to sketch briefly, Heidegger seems to believe that aletheia is distinct from conceptions of truth understood as statements which accurately describe a state of affairs as in the case of correspondence, or statements which fit properly into a system taken as a whole as in the case of coherence. In aletheia, the focus is on the clarification of how an ontological world is disclosed or opened up, in which things are made intelligible for human beings in the first place, as part of a holistically structured background of meaning. In that sense, the search for aletheia is quite similar to the pursuit of understanding that I want to emphasize as the ultimate aim of

²⁸ Heidegger, p.141.

curiosity. Aletheia is defined as unconcealedness and disclosure, the literal meaning of the word ἀλήθεια is, "the state of not being hidden, the state of being evident", and similarly, in understanding, the puzzle pieces come together and the whole picture becomes evident. The blurriness that belongs to the case of non-understanding disappears as understanding takes place. Knowledge pieces come together and straighten up the mind, so that we can see through the vagueness. Considered as such, aletheia is close to the state one can attain once understanding is achieved.

Going back to Heidegger's earlier account, he suggests that thauma gives us the *opportunity* to experience aletheia. Yet, this opportunity does not guarantee a gateway to aletheia unless this sense of thauma is transformed to curiosity, a desire to know in order to understand. Thauma could be considered as a general sense of wonder that is not particularly directed at certain inquiries; on the other hand, curiosity targets specific knowledge and help us stop the excessive desire to be enchanted by the objects or by the flow of novel knowledge. As mentioned in the earlier sections, Descartes also points out to this fact that wonder without inquiry is not useful and may even become dangerous in the sense that one may become always wishful for the novel and the unusual, without becoming deeply interested about the true nature of things. On the contrary, a curious person shows the courage to be disenchanted by the new knowledge, as the aim and interest here is truth, not a desire to be fascinated and captivated by bewildering objects. The curious person, beyond enchantment, has the awareness that he lacks knowledge and this will encourage the person to go deeper in his inquiries compared to the person who just finds phenomena wondrous. Thus, one may become more modest in the sense that he

needs to inquire into things beyond himself, suspending his judgements, in order to reach truth.

Another distinction that could be drawn between the state of wonder and curiosity is that curiosity is *intentional*. I use intentional referring to both meanings of the word, one being directedness and the other being done by intention. As for the first meaning of the term, I want to appeal to the distinction Inan makes between weak and strong intentionality and claim that what I propose for understanding oriented curiosity is closer to a weak form of intentionality.²⁹ The object of curiosity, since curiosity aims at understanding, is always directed at a piece of knowledge as well as at the big picture which remains unconcealed at the background. Metaphorically, even though our attention and interest might be directed at just a puzzle piece at one time, the object of curiosity is also the grand puzzle that we aspire to grasp as a whole. Hence, whenever there is a specific instantiation of curiosity there is always at the same time a greater object that our curiosity is directed at. Vague as it might sound, this puzzle of life is the object of curiosity that lies in the background and perhaps it is the ground of all the other curiosities we have. In that sense of intentionality, I think this is a property that distinguishes curiosity from wonder since a person in a wondrous state can be at a loss about what his definite object of wonder is. This state could be observable in babies who are mesmerized by observing the world with wonderous eyes but who do not necessarily have a direct object they want to understand.

²⁹ İlhan Inan, *Curiosity and Reference to the Unknown*, forthcoming, p.206. Perhaps being the only person arguing for the intentionality of curiosity, Inan distinguishes a weak and a strong sense of intentionality and he holds the view that, taken in a “strong” sense an intentional mental state directed towards an object requires for that object to exist, but taken in a “weaker” sense it doesn’t. Accordingly, since he believes that the object of curiosity needs only be “conceptualizable” rather than actually referring to an existent object, he opts for the weak sense of intentionality for the case of curiosity.

For the second meaning of intentionality, it could be said that whereas wonder is more akin to a state that emerges without the will of the person, curiosity has to do with the exertion of intellectual capacities one possess for the purpose of capturing truth. To put in other words, it may not be possible to make ourselves more wondrous; yet, curiosity could be cultivated through habituation³⁰. I tend to believe that wonder could be a springboard for initiating curiosity, and it is helpful in inspiring diverse inquiries. It is a facilitator in the road to aletheia, but without curiosity we would lack guidance and could get lost in the search after truth. Hence, it is essential to develop curiosity, which is an intentional state, to successfully shape our intellectual pursuits. I suppose it would not be totally wrong to consider wonder as a shapeless and comparatively aimless form of pre-curiosity that needs to be molded into a pattern so that it will help us walk out of the obscurities and approach the unconcealed truth about things. Yet, this does not mean that wonder cannot be directed at things; we could wonder at an object, we could be astonished by an object, but it is curiosity that is needed for further inquiry in a more comprehensive way.

Definition of Curiosity

In light of the foregoing discussion, curiosity could be defined as a tenacious mental state, motivation of which is the desire to know in order to understand. However, before making this hasty conclusion, it would be better to analyze the concept in more detail and see whether or not this definition could be offered as a good candidate. Following the sketch of the general defining elements of curiosity, I will focus on the distinct characteristics of curiosity, which will be the center of inquiry in this thesis. Mainly, the distinguishing marks of curiosity could be listed as follows:

³⁰ This aspect of curiosity will be expanded upon in Chapter 4, Curiosity as an Ethical Virtue.

(a) it should involve an awareness of ignorance, (b) emerge as a result of an intrinsic desire to know and (c) should aim at understanding.

A brief visit to the etymological origins of the term reveals that the word “curiosity” comes from Latin “curare”³¹ which shares etymological roots with “care”; in addition, the “curator” derived from the same root refers to a person who cares for a museum or a gallery. While a peculiar care for episteme ignites curiosity, it could also be expanded to include an awareness that much of reality is outside of our possible knowledge and experience and there is much outside of ourselves that is worth caring about. In that sense, curiosity gives birth to a peculiar kind of compassion which could be roughly defined as the care or concern for people or things other than ourselves. In its most general terms, curiosity is used to refer to a desire to know for the purposes of interest, attention, utility, necessity, or any other motivation that could propel such a desire for knowing. In compatibility with this diverse definition, we colloquially use curiosity for any instance of desiring to know without paying attention to its genuine source. Yet, what I will propose to be an ethical virtue in this study would be spared for the curiosity which arises out of a genuine interest and is understanding-oriented.

In the philosophical and psychological investigations, curiosity has generally been considered in terms of the two broad categories –epistemic curiosity and perceptual curiosity (Berlyne,1960). Ahmet Subaşı (2009) makes use of this distinction and he agrees with the common view that while perceptual curiosity is shared by humans and animals, epistemic curiosity is peculiar to human beings. Yet, I aim to make a further distinction and claim that while epistemic curiosity is geared

³¹ Ernest Weekly, *An Etymological Dictionary of Modern English*, (Dover publication, 1967), vol.1.

towards knowledge and can only be carried out by humans; I prefer using the term “curiosity” only for genuine instances of desiring to know and one which may not be experienced in every instance of desiring to know. For me, this understanding-oriented desire to know, which I will call curiosity, is a virtue that needs to be cultivated and my homage will especially be directed to this conception of curiosity. When I say “I am curious”, this will refer to a state of desiring to know without any pragmatic need or obligation. This, however, does not mean that there cannot be pragmatic consequences of a particular curiosity one feels towards something; what I try to emphasize is that this pragmatic reason should not be the main purpose or cause of the inquiry. Curiosity contains questions asked for oneself, and the answers we get from others are not adequate to satisfy this curiosity. We need the answers to get understanding for ourselves and every piece of information that we seek and find as a result of such a curiosity is as valuable to the inquirer as gold is to a miner.

To give an account of the reason why we have this kind of desire to know, it will be useful to turn to Loewenstein (1994), who carries out experiments about curiosity in the psychological arena. He notes that “the remaining question – the cause of curiosity – is inherently unanswerable” but, nevertheless, expresses his belief that “the need for sense making discussed by Kagan and others provides a plausible account of the underlying cause of curiosity”³². Accordingly, I prefer to define curiosity as *an intrinsic desire to know in order to understand and make sense*. Hence, this understanding-based sense-making will show itself as the ultimate motivation for curiosity and the fundamental force that determines its direction.

³² G. Loewenstein, “The Psychology of Curiosity: A Review and Reinterpretation.” *Psychological Bulletin*, 116(1), p.87.

I will give this understanding-oriented curiosity (or what I will simply refer to as curiosity hereafter) a special place among other kinds of desiring to know and limit my scope of interest to this kind of curiosity for the purposes of this thesis. While defining what I will call curiosity, it will be necessary to point out to the distinctions between knowledge and understanding and I will mainly rely on the valuable literature that has been created by virtue epistemologists in the last decade regarding the distinctions between the two epistemologically salient concepts.³³

³³ In the last few decades, numerous articles and books have been published on understanding and they have drawn attention to the fact that it has been an epistemologically neglected notion. See especially Kvanvig, 2003; Pritchard, 2007, 2009; Zagzebski, 1996; Grimm, 2001, 2006.

CHAPTER III: EPISTEMIC VALUE OF CURIOSITY

Understanding as the Ultimate Epistemic End

Understanding Transcends Knowledge

Although it has been “knowledge” that attracted most of the attention in the epistemological field, recently there have been scholars who have drawn attention to the notion of “understanding” as the ultimate epistemic end. The reason why knowledge attracted the most attention and the reason for the neglect of “understanding” could be because of the fact that the ancient notion of “episteme” which lies at the origin of the field of epistemology is translated into English as knowledge. Some even suggested that the ancient usage of *episteme* by Plato and Aristotle should be translated as *understanding*³⁴ and they prefer translating the beginning of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* as “all human beings by nature desire understanding”. These thinkers believe that understanding better captures the deep nature of episteme, rather than reducing it to the justified true beliefs about things. For, it is only *understanding*, but not knowledge, that requires explanation and interrelated accounts, and knowledge, not understanding, that allows one to know propositions only individually, not collectively. In Zagzebski’s words, “one *understands p* as part of one’s understanding of the pattern of a whole chunk of reality”³⁵, and she claims understanding is an epistemic value qualitatively different from the piling up of beliefs that have the property of justification, warrant, or certainty.

³⁴ Nelson Goodman (1978), Gail Fine (1990), Burnyeat and Barnes (1980).

³⁵ Linda Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge*. (Cambridge, 1996), p.50.

Inquirers often seek goals other than true knowledge, say *coherence* and *insight into how things are*, that will aid them in understanding and explanation. In a similar fashion, Kvanvig (2003) has been among the pioneers of drawing the epistemologists' attention to the concept of understanding and he put forward a radical proposal of replacing the talk about value of knowledge with the one about value of understanding. In *The Value of Knowledge and the Pursuit of Understanding*, he allocates a chapter to the distinction between understanding and knowledge and talks about what makes understanding superior to knowledge. First of all, he makes it clear that understanding is not a species of knowledge, and that there are two kinds of understanding, *propositional* understanding and *objectual* understanding. In both cases, understanding requires that one successfully grasp how one's beliefs in the relevant propositions cohere with other propositions one believes.³⁶ This requirement entails that understanding is indirectly factive in the case of objectual understanding, as only *propositions* can be true or false in a straightforward manner. In addition to this distinction between propositional understanding and objectual understanding, another difference is that objectual understanding allows for gradation and that is a type of knowing that is more layered than propositional understanding. Given these distinctions, it seems that this classification is not very different from the distinction between propositional and objectual knowledge. In the face of such a criticism, Kvanvig points out to the fact that there is a more fundamental difference between knowledge and understanding and it lies in the *focus* of the two. Whereas knowledge mainly focuses on justification of beliefs and facticity, understanding has its focus on grasping the ways in which

³⁶ Jonathan Kvanvig, *The Value of Knowledge and the Pursuit of Understanding*, (Cambridge University Press, 2003) p.192, 197-8.

pieces of information are connected with each other. Kvanvig aptly states the difference in focus as such:

When the question is whether one knows, the issues that are foremost in our minds are issues about evidence, reliability, reasons for belief, and, perhaps most importantly, non-accidentality regarding the connection between our grounds for belief and the truth of the belief. When the question is whether one has understanding, the issues that are foremost in our minds are issues about the extent of our grasp of the structural relationships (e.g., logical, probabilistic, and explanatory relationships) between the central items of information regarding with the question of understanding arises.³⁷

In addition, he thinks that understanding has a “special and unique value that exceeds the value of its subparts”³⁸ because besides the truth value it confers upon the understanding agent, there is a grasping of internal, structural relationships between pieces of information and it results in a an internal grasping or appreciation of how the various elements in a body of information are related to each.

Thus, even though the object of propositional knowledge and propositional understanding and the object of objectual knowledge and objectual understanding could be the same, the way we relate to them and the way we make sense of the resulting information differs. According to Kvanvig, the distinctive characteristic of understanding is sketched out as the following:

[It] is in the neighborhood of what internalist coherence theories say about justification. Understanding requires the grasping of explanatory and other coherence-making relationships in a large and comprehensive body of information. One can know many unrelated pieces of information, but understanding is achieved only when informational items are pieced together by the subject in question.³⁹

These significant distinguishing marks constitute his answer to the question “what does understanding add that knowledge can lack?” He even proposes a more radical

³⁷ Jonathan Kvanvig, “The Value of Understanding” in *Epistemic Value* (New York: Oxford UP, 2009) by Adrian Haddock, Allan Millar, Duncan Pritchard, p.95

³⁸ Kvanvig, 2003, p. 192.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 194

thesis which suggests that “a change occurs metaphysically when understanding is achieved”. This metaphysical change is perhaps what is responsible for the transcendence of understanding to knowledge because even though it is difficult to account for the difference between having knowledge and having understanding, the person who reaches understanding goes through a metaphysical change and he/she is not the same person anymore. Whenever one has understanding, one possesses more than a number of single propositions; he grasps a chunk of reality together with the relationships among each other. In that way, understanding is a human potentiality that is not available to other living beings; hence it makes sense to say that a cat knows its master but it would be awkward to say that the cat understands its master or understands what its master has gone through after he lost his wife. If one succumbs to the view that knowing is perceiving, and that we do not need higher capacities to know something, then my suggestion would be that humanly-knowing something is always more than perception. “Humans are no more and no less *perceivers* than pigs, baboons, or tadpoles; but they are different in their powers of judgment about perceptions”.⁴⁰ Human beings cannot help but do more than perceiving; it is an inevitable human characteristic that our perceptions are understanding-oriented.

Yet, if the relational ties are that pivotal for understanding, could not it be possible to explain away understanding only by piling up of know-that p propositions that also include ones which state there are relations between the propositions? In other words, suppose one is given a list of all the true propositions about a matter as well as propositions about the relations between them, could it be said that this person has understanding? I doubt that such a list of knowledge would be *sufficient*

⁴⁰ Timothy Chappell, "Plato on Knowledge in the *Theaetetus*", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

for understanding and we cannot claim that every time these propositions are offered to someone that person necessarily has understanding. But what about the question whether or not knowledge is *necessary* for understanding? This is a question that is hard to answer because we can think of a mystic or a sage that might possess understanding even without propositional knowledge. It could be possible to gain an understanding into the nature of things through insight and acumen. This relationship between knowledge and understanding is a quite interesting subject, but unfortunately, I will have to leave this discussion aside for the purposes of this thesis since it is a whole new issue to be explored.

Another difference between knowledge and understanding is claimed to be the relativity of understanding. For Kvanvig, understanding can be a matter of degree whereas it is awkward to speak of degrees of knowledge. In Kvanvig's words, some people have a better understanding of a subject matter than others, and others have a greater degree of understanding.⁴¹ To illustrate, he appeals to such an example:

When we say that a person understands Special Relativity Theory, there is no single proposition of which we ascribe understanding. Rather, there is a larger body of information, composed perhaps of propositions, regarding which we ascribe understanding...What is distinctive about understanding has to do with the way in which an individual combines pieces of information into a unified body. This point is not meant to imply that truth is not important for understanding, for we have noted already the factive character of both knowledge and understanding. But once we move past its facticity, the grasping of relations between items of information is central to the nature of understanding. By contrast, when we move past the facticity of knowledge, the central features involve nonaccidental connections between mind and world.⁴²

Lastly, he concludes that for understanding, there is need for 'truth' and for 'explanatory' and other 'coherence relations' to obtain between the various beliefs involved. However, the mere existence of such connections is not sufficient, for there

⁴¹ Kvanvig, p.196.

⁴² Ibid., pp.195-197.

is also a ‘psychological requirement’ concerning the coherence relations involved in understanding, and it is required that the subject is able to grasp them. In order for understanding to take place, besides truth, there needs to be grasped coherence relations, as well as subjective justification. With reference to such characteristics of understanding, Kvanvig claims that understanding is valuable not only because it “organizes and systematizes our thinking on a subject matter in a way beyond the mere addition of more justified true beliefs” but also because it “allows us to reason from one bit of information to other related information that is useful as a basis for action, where unorganized thinking provides no such basis for inference”.⁴³

All along the discussion on the value of understanding, Kvanvig rightfully admits that much of ordinary parlance treats ‘understanding’ and ‘knowledge’ as interchangeable. It is true that his proposed distinctions between knowledge and understanding are not *reflected* in ordinary language. He takes his guard against possible critics who will disagree with the distinction he makes regarding the concepts of knowledge and understanding basing their arguments on the colloquial usage of the terms. Yet, he makes it clear that “what interests [him] is understanding itself, not the way we talk” and he believes it is the responsibility of philosophers to develop and revise ordinary language “instead of merely reporting it”⁴⁴. He suggests that we use understanding in the philosophical jargon to refer to a state that offers more to the knower than knowledge does. Understanding harbors an array of meanings besides knowing, such as admitting, and making sense of a piece of information. When one says that she understands something, it means she does more than knowing that thing and while it is not contradictory to say that I know a fact but

⁴³ Ibid., p.202.

⁴⁴ Kvanvig, 2009, p.98.

I don't understand, it would be meaningless to say that I understand something but I do not know it. Simply put, we do more than "knowing" when we claim that we understand something.

In a similar fashion, Wayne Riggs points out that the insight that accompanies understanding often takes "the form of a holistic 'revelation', where one piece fitting the puzzle might suddenly reveal its significance, shed a new light on it, and the like"⁴⁵. He also points out that it is not the piece itself, nor its truth, that ultimately counts, but the understanding of the whole.

Ernest Sosa also thinks that not all knowing are identical; and he distinguishes two different sorts of knowledge: reflective knowledge and animal knowledge. Sosa argues that these two states transcend the value of true belief in different ways. His basic ideas here are that when one has animal knowledge, we might say, one has reliably formed a true belief and when one has reflective knowledge, one has an internally justified true belief. Whereas the former kind of knowledge can be shared by animals and humans alike, the latter kind is available only to beings who are capable of intellectual reflection.⁴⁶ To quote Sosa, animal knowledge without reflective knowledge is "like lucking into some benefit in the dark"⁴⁷. He also argues that "For any person, proposition, and time, it is epistemically better that the person *reflectively knows* that proposition at that time, than that person *animal-knows* that proposition at that time". According to Sosa, one has reflective knowledge only when "one's judgement or belief manifests not only

⁴⁵ In Miscevic, Nenad. "Virtue -Based Epistemology and the Centrality of Truth (Towards a Strong Virtue-Epistemology)", *Acta anal.* 22 (2007), p. 250

⁴⁶ The distinction between animal knowledge and reflective knowledge figures prominently in the works of Ernest Sosa. See Sosa 1991, 1997, and Sosa's contributions to *BonJour* and Sosa 2003.

⁴⁷ Ernest Sosa, *Knowledge in Perspective: Selected Essays in Epistemology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p.142.

such direct response to the fact known but also understanding of its place in a wider whole.”⁴⁸ Sosa makes it clear that such reflective knowledge is superior in value to mere animal knowledge. Here, he draws attention to the type of knowledge that is superior to the other in terms of epistemic goodness. What this goodness consists of is not clear-cut, yet, we can simply think that this type of knowledge contains relational ties between pieces of information and gives the knower episteme rather than mostly unconnected true beliefs.

This sketch Sosa puts forward for reflective knowledge is often taken to be very similar to understanding. Various theorists claim that understanding is itself an epistemic good, usually while also arguing that its status as such has been unjustly neglected in recent epistemology.⁴⁹ These theorists argue that understanding occupies a paramount position among the epistemic goods and has a special kind of value that other epistemic states such as knowledge do not, and this fact threatens the justification for the focus on knowledge that the history of epistemology displays. They choose to focus on understanding rather than knowledge and draw attention to the lack of discussion on the former compared to that on the latter.

Another notion about which epistemologists have written a lot, certainty, also overshadows the worth of understanding. While in Plato’s and Aristotle’s concept of episteme understanding is immanent⁵⁰, throughout most of the modern age, certainty

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 240.

⁴⁹ Goldman (1986), Elgin (1996), Zagzebski (2001), Riggs(2003), Kvanvig(2003), Grimm (2005).

⁵⁰ The notable historian of Greek philosophy, Julius Moravcsik (1979) tells us that the central epistemological aim of the Greek thinkers was to give an account of what it means to understand something (p.53), and that mere knowledge of truths is of no interest to Plato (p.60).

has been given more attention than understanding.⁵¹ Compared to certain knowledge, Pritchard argues, understanding has a higher epistemic standing, “for while one can have understanding while lacking knowledge, it should be clear that understanding requires an intellectual sophistication that is not necessarily demanded by knowledge. One can imagine, for example, an agent knowing a great deal while having very little understanding of anything, but it is hard to imagine the converse.”⁵² Yet, certainty and justified true belief is directed toward a single propositional object and cannot offer a holistic understanding. No one would be convinced by the argument that the person who is greatest in knowledge is the one who amassed in his mind the highest number of true propositions that are certain. We would not consider the pages full of phone numbers all of which are certainly true in a phone directory as containing epistemically valuable knowledge. We intuitively believe that some propositions are worth knowing more than others; however, when the reason is asked, we fall short of being able to provide accurate explanations. I believe the reason why we value some pieces of knowledge more than others is due to the fact that they give us *understanding* and that they emerge from *a desire to know in order to understand*, in other words, from *curiosity*.

It should not be deduced that I am overintellectualizing the notion of curiosity. I emphasize the goal of curiosity as being understanding rather than knowledge because that is the point where the closure of questioning takes place and where satisfaction comes into scene. This understanding could be at a degree that is

⁵¹ Some modern philosophers such as Spinoza and Locke emphasized the central importance of understanding. In Prop. XXVI, Spinoza writes “whatsoever we endeavor in obedience to reason is nothing further than to understand; neither does the mind, in so far as it makes use of reason, judge anything to be useful to it, save such things as are conducive to understanding” (Ethics, trans. Elwes). Locke mentions understanding as the “most elevated faculty of the soul,... employed with a greater and more constant delight than any other” (“Epistle to the Reader” opening of the *Essay*).

⁵² Duncan Pritchard, “Knowledge, Understanding, and Epistemic Value” in *Epistemology*, (ed.) A. O’Hear, (Cambridge UP, 2008).

not very high, and it definitely allows for degrees, yet what I try to establish here could be analysed in terms of the intention of curiosity and why we are urged into this state in the very first place. I argue that it is the lack of understanding and the lack of a grasp of relationships between phenomena that ignites our curiosity. Just knowing a fact is not truly satisfying for the human mind, we are mainly interested in making sense and locating this knowledge in a coherent whole.

One can also get the impression that I am a coherentist and a strong internalist about knowledge, and I do not deny that I have emphasized the importance of the internalization of knowledge for the knower and the necessity of the presence of coherent relational ties. However, this should not be taken as an anti-realist approach towards knowledge. The emphasis is needed for clarifying the distinguishing points of understanding in comparison to knowledge and it could be said that understanding is a notion that requires more than being aware of an external reality; it should be followed by an internal conviction. The basic idea of internalism is that justification is solely determined by factors that are *internal* to a person. Externalists deny this, asserting that justification depends on additional factors that are *external* to a person. In that sense, I am inclined to think that what I have been proposing so far calls for an externalist approach because I assume that there is a big picture, a puzzle, which corresponds to reality and we try to make sense of it through getting the pieces together. This idea presupposes that there is an external reality that imposes itself upon us and we cannot just create a coherent puzzle in our minds and claim that we have reached understanding— unless, perhaps, we are schizophrenic. The data we gather from the world would not fit into the puzzle if the only justification we had is internal. There must be an external component to our

justification; this external justification, however, should be internalized for each and every knower in order for them to reach *understanding*.

Catherine Elgin, in “Is Understanding Factive?” writes about the nature of understanding and she claims that when Kvanvig equates knowledge with understanding in terms of facticity, it might erroneously come to mean that understanding always involves true propositions. She wants to oppose to this idea and claims that a second-grader’s understanding of evolution might include some true and false propositions but she thinks this state of understanding should also be epistemologically relevant because it paves the way for better understanding. She also makes an attempt to define understanding and lays out the crucial characteristics as such: first she makes it clear that there should be a recognition that “understanding is some sort of a cognitive success term”⁵³. Then, she rejects the factive analysis and to characterize this cognitive success that comes with understanding, she offers this rough definition:

I suggest that understanding is a grasp of a comprehensive general body of information that is grounded in fact, is duly responsive to evidence, and enables non-trivial inference, argument, and perhaps action regarding that subject the information pertains to.⁵⁴

Through this definition she admits that understanding is grounded in fact but it is not and does not have to be strictly factive. The focus of understanding is not on facticity but this does not mean that there could be false understanding, since understanding is some sort of a cognitive success term. When it comes to my preference of using understanding rather than knowledge as the final goal of curiosity; it will be helpful to allude to a few points. It is possible that one might object to my insistence of

⁵³ Catherine Elgin, “Is Understanding Factive?” in *Epistemic Value* by Haddock, Millar, Pritchard. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009, p.327

⁵⁴ Ibid.

emphasizing understanding rather than knowledge for the cases in which curiosity is involved. For such criticisms, I once again want to remind that I do not take any desiring to know as a case of curiosity; one might desire to know what kind of fabric is used for the shirt one wants to buy in a store or the number of cars in front of him that wait to get in the ferry, yet these are not intrinsic desires for knowledge that one cannot help but ask, they are asked for other reasons rather than an intrinsic desire to know. On the other hand, questions out of curiosity are asked with a desire to know in order to understand and make sense of a piece of information to be able to place it in a coherent reality. Taken as such, my emphasis on the notion of understanding as the final goal of inquiries out of curiosity has hopefully been more reasonable after the distinction between knowledge and understanding is emphasized. I am not disregarding the possibility of other cases of desiring to know out of practical reasons or out of necessity or out of an uncontrollable control freakiness, but I just want to and prefer to spare the cases of desiring to know out of sheer curiosity and focus on these cases that are peculiar to human mind. In the end, these cases of genuine curiosity will be put forward as the essential components of a good life as this type of curiosity undoubtedly has an intricate relationship with human *arête*.⁵⁵

Yet still one might object to my restriction of curiosity to understanding-oriented desire to know and give an example of a person who is curious about what his neighbour is wearing to work that Monday. Is this not a case of curiosity? Is curiosity only restricted to cases in which one is curious about great questions of the universe or the enigmas of life? I think this is by no means the right approach to understand curiosity. Someone who is curious about the attire of his neighbour while he is going to work is after understanding; he is trying to locate this information in

⁵⁵ This aspect of curiosity and its relation to a good life will be expanded on in Chapter 4.

the coherent whole he calls reality. This is not just a perceptual curiosity just as in the case where a cat might be willing to see the people walking by the street. The cat is not after making this knowledge just another piece that makes up a coherent whole. To illustrate why I claim that is the case, let us assume that his neighbor on this Monday shows up in the costume of a clown. As soon as the he sees this, he will try to *understand* why and try to locate it in the coherent whole he calls reality. Is he not going to work? Is it acceptable to go to work in a costume? Is it Halloween and has he forgotten it? Yet, the circumstances do not have to be that dramatic. He might be wearing a nicely tailored black suit and shiny black shoes and that would also count as a piece of information that will help him understand and make sense. It is not possible for a human being just to glare at him and not *think* anything just as the cat does. Immediately, he would come up with ideas: they could be possible explanations (he likes shiny shoes), further inquiries (how he would look like in a white suit), generalizations (men prefer wearing black suits to work), inferences (he should be quite rich) and so on that all play a significant role in helping one understand. Hence, I am not excluding the cases in which we could become curious about more trivial facts or occurrences around us. I merely want to point out that any case of genuine curiosity is understanding-oriented and we should not consider any desire to know as curiosity. One might want to know a fact for practical reasons or need to know something out of obligation or desire to know a piece of information to show off his diverse knowledge of things or desire to know just to look curious or even desire to know because he thinks it is the appropriate thing to do under the circumstances (such as in the case one asks a friend how his school is going just out of courtesy without an inherent desire to know).

My intention is to dig out the cases in which an intrinsic desire to know is present and call only such cases as instances of curiosity. I believe this distinction is important because the sentence “I am curious” is used in parlance for the cases in which there is no intrinsic desire to know, and I want to leave them out while talking about curiosity as an essential component of a well-lived life.

Is Understanding Valuable Because We Are Curious?

Recently, the value of knowledge and its relation to curiosity has been reassessed by epistemologists concerned about epistemic value.⁵⁶ Basing epistemic value to presence of curiosity on the part of the inquirer sounds quite plausible and even tautological, but it can at the same time be problematic. One might oppose to this idea by saying that it is not only about my curiosity that confers epistemic value to a piece of knowledge; it could be valuable even without anyone’s being curious about it. In order to counter such an argument we could appeal to the work of Alvin Goldman, who is one of such theorists who give epistemic significance to curiosity. Goldman argues that there are three kinds of curiosity: *occurrent* (where one is attending to a question), *dispositional* (where one would be occurrently curious were one to attend to a question), and *extended* (where there are facts such that, if one were to learn them, one would be dispositionally curious about a question), and a proposition is significant, if and only if it answers a question one is curious about in any of these ways.⁵⁷ This classification of curiosity proves helpful in explaining why some knowledge could be valuable even without a here-and-now present curiosity on the part of the inquirer.

⁵⁶ See Alston (2005), David (2005), Goldman (1986; 1999), Foley (1987), Hempel (1965), Kvanvig (2003; 2009), Lynch (2004), Sosa (2003).

⁵⁷ Alvin Goldman, *Knowledge in a Social World*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.95, 350.

Another insightful thought about the value of knowledge comes from Linda Zagzebski. She prefers to explain all of epistemic value in terms of “what we care about”. For her, all epistemic value is care-rooted, she writes “there is no epistemic value that is unhinged from what we care about... Epistemic values always arise from something we care about”⁵⁸ This approach is more helpful in dealing with the cases that involve tenacious believers. There are people who withhold themselves from questioning about a particular subject and they willingly switch off any curiosity regarding that matter. Whitcomb illustrates this with an example about a religious person who firmly believes in God and would never be curious whether or not God exists. However, even though this person will not be *curious* about God’s existence, he/she surely *cares* whether God exists, and this makes this piece of knowledge epistemically salient. In that sense, the epistemic value of a given piece of knowledge is highly correlated with the degree of “care” we have for the matter.

One of the theorists that explicitly argue for this reciprocal and necessary relationship between knowledge and desire to know is Nenad Miscevic⁵⁹. Similar to the point I want to make, he says “the very truth-goal owes its value and attractiveness to human inquisitiveness” and he even argues that inquisitiveness is “essential for understanding the role of truth, the point of wanting to have knowledge, and of having the concept ‘knowledge’”.⁶⁰

Anne Baril also wants to give an account of the value of knowledge depending on what is it that knowledge bestows upon us. She thinks it is straightforward to account for the value of epistemic knowledge such as the place

⁵⁸ Linda Zagzebski, “Epistemic Value and the Primacy of What We Care About” *Philosophical Papers* 33, no.3, (November 2004), pp. 353 – 377. (2004, p. 368).

⁵⁹ Miscevic’s take on the issue will be explained more broadly in the section on Intellectual Virtues.

⁶⁰ Miscevic, p.244.

where I have put my keys. It has *pragmatic* value; but when it comes to theoretical knowledge, the same explanation falls short of being explanatory. Because even though theoretical knowledge might also have pragmatic value as a side benefit, it is valuable even when it lacks pragmatic value; for her, the significance of theoretical knowledge is in the sense of being somehow “deep and important”. She adds that “scientific theories are the sorts of things we think are important for a person to know, even when that knowledge doesn’t help a person achieve her practical aims”, and she thinks this kind of knowledge is valuable because it makes a “contribution to a comprehensive picture of the natural world”⁶¹. This explanation of hers is quite compatible with what I suggest understanding plays a role in our lives. But the essential point is that what makes a piece of knowledge –excluding the pragmatically valuable knowledge- significant and valuable is the possibility of emergence of curiosity and a desire to understand pertaining to that subject. To draw an analogy, an artwork is valuable if there are viewers who think that such an artwork is valuable or would think so if they were to see it. A grandiose sculpture might be worthless in a world in which there were no one to appreciate art and beauty. Similarly, our curiosity or the possibility of curiosity, in other words the *being* of curiosity is the ground for the value and significance of theoretical knowledge. I deliberately choose not to talk about the value of any kind of knowledge because there are pieces of knowledge that are significant just because they have pragmatic value. For instance, for a hungry man the knowledge that there is food in the next room would be highly

⁶¹ Anne Baril, “A Eudaimonist Approach to the Problem of Significance”, *Acta Anal* 25 (2010), p.219.

valuable.⁶² On the other hand, for the value of theoretical knowledge that is not pursued primarily for pragmatic ends, curiosity is a necessary condition.

Just like the epistemic value of knowledge varies based on the care and interest we have for that specific knowledge, the value of a certain “desire to know” is also gradable. Apart from practical reasons that compel us to desire certain knowledge, such as when I need to learn what is wrong with my tooth which gives me pain or the phone number of a good dentist, there are situations in which we become curious just out of pure intellectual reasons, and that type of curiosity is the most valuable because it deals with the epistemically most valuable knowledge. To put it in other words, an understanding oriented-curiosity, since it targets understanding rather than mere knowledge, is the most valuable curiosity.

It could be argued that knowledge is valuable depending on how much it helps us get closer to understanding. When the knowledge of a trivial event in the ordinary life is compared to the knowledge of a philosophical answer to an important question, it is not difficult to see the different levels of value we confer upon them. Simply put, this gradation could possibly be explained in terms of the degree to which a given knowledge ascends one to the state of understanding. Likewise, curiosity aimed at questions that will increase our understanding is also more valuable. I do not think many people would object to me when I argue that curiosity about the number of tiles in the first floor of a shopping mall (provided that there is no context that will make such an information valuable) versus curiosity about what kind of life I should live so that it will be deemed a “well-lived” life?

⁶² I owe this example to Dr. Lucas Thorpe and I would like to thank him for drawing my attention to this fact.

Why Do We Become Curious?

It has been remarked before that, as a psychologist, Loewenstein notes “the remaining question – the cause of curiosity – is inherently unanswerable” but, nevertheless, expresses his belief that “the need for *sense making* discussed by Kagan and others provides a plausible account of the underlying cause of curiosity”⁶³. In a similar fashion, I want to argue that we are curious simply because we seek understanding. We seem to have a distinctively intellectual desire to make sense of the world, a desire rooted in :

... our sheer intellectual curiosity, in [our] deep and persistent desire to know and to understand [ourselves] and [our] world. So strong, indeed, is this urge that in the absence of more reliable knowledge, myths are often invoked to fill the gap.⁶⁴

In a similar fashion, Larry Laudan even argues that man’s sense of curiosity about the world is every bit as compelling as his need for clothing and food. He writes:

If a sound justification for most scientific activity is going to be found, it will eventually come perhaps from a recognition that man’s sense of curiosity about the world is every bit as compelling as his need for clothing and food. Everything we know about cultural anthropology points to this ubiquity, even among ‘primitive’ cultures barely surviving at subsistence levels, of elaborate doctrines about how and why the universe works.”⁶⁵

I am inclined to think that, our inherent seeking of understanding and trying to make sense of things ignites curiosity, and reciprocally, it is due to our curiosity that we desire understanding. In a similar fashion, Roger White succinctly expresses his perspective by saying “in asking a why question, we are seeking to satisfy a peculiar kind of curiosity, we are seeking *understanding* and trying to *make sense* of

⁶³ Loewenstein, p.87.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Grimm, Stephen R., “Explanatory Inquiry and the Need for Explanation”, *British Society for the Philosophy of Science*,(2008) pp. 481-497.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p.483

things”⁶⁶. However, not everything arouses curiosity, and some situations seem to elicit our curiosity more than others. This problem is addressed by Stephen Grimm in his article “Explanatory Inquiry and the Need for Explanation”, and he finds it useful to differentiate between *practical* need of explanation and *epistemic* need of explanation. The former is quite easy to account for, to borrow his example, my leaky roof stands in need of explanation for me and the answer to this question is valuable for me. Yet, this need for explanation does not emerge from a genuine sense of curiosity. On the other hand, *epistemic* need of explanation emerges as a result of an inherent concern for understanding. To illustrate, it could involve a desire to know whether or not there is some form of life after death. This distinction of practical versus epistemic needs for inquiry is quite similar to what I have been arguing so far about the probable motives that ignite one’s curiosity. And the corresponding value for these inquiries varies according to the concern we have for them; some might belong to our ultimate concern in life, and some might belong to temporary needs we have in life. A sheer intellectual curiosity certainly arises out of the ultimate concern of human beings and hence I argue that it must be a necessary constituent of any good life.

To sum up, I claim that ‘understanding’ is valuable and the kinds of knowledge and curiosity that gets us closer to understanding are more valuable than the ones aimed at trivial truths. Value is attributed to knowledge according to its relevance, significance, and salience in bringing us toward understanding.

⁶⁶ Roger White, “Explanation as a Guide to Induction”, *Philosopher’s Imprint* 5 (2) (2005), p.2.

Intrinsic Value of Curiosity: Curiosity and Knowledge Forming an “Organic Unity”

In this part, I will be proposing that curiosity is an intrinsic good admirable in its own right even without the final attainment of the knowledge sought after. It is commonly agreed upon that episteme is intrinsically valuable; yet claiming that curiosity has intrinsic value is harder to support. To clarify this claim, it is necessary to define intrinsic values and present its distinguishing marks from other kinds of values. Korsgaard points out to a common fallacy in which theorists find themselves while talking about values. She argues that the problem lies in the fact that intrinsic values are equated with final goods and extrinsic values are thought to be instrumental goods. In simple terms, she thinks we should judge particular things to be good absolutely just because “here and now the world is a better place because of this thing”⁶⁷, rather than questioning if it is a means to another end. Since it is illuminating and helpful in understanding the proposed intrinsic value of curiosity, I prefer quoting Korsgaard’s convincing argument in length:

Objects, activities, or whatever, have an instrumental value if they are valued for the sake of something else—tools, money, and chores would be standard examples. A common explanation of the supposedly contrasting kind, intrinsic goodness, is to say that a thing is intrinsically good if it is valued for its own sake, that being the obvious alternative to a thing’s being valued for the sake of something else. This is not, however, what the words ‘intrinsic value’ mean. To say that something is intrinsically good is not by definition to say that it is valued for its own sake: it is to say that it has goodness in itself. It refers one might say, to the location or source of the goodness rather than the way we value the thing. The contrast between instrumental and intrinsic value is therefore misleading, a false contrast. The natural contrast to intrinsic goodness—the value a thing has in itself—is *extrinsic* goodness—the value a thing gets from some other source.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Christine M. Korsgaard, “Two Distinctions in Goodness” *Philosophical Review* 9 (2) (2010), pp.169-195, p. 169.

⁶⁸ Korsgaard, p.170.

She, then, points out to the “two distinctions in goodness”: (a) the distinction between things valued for the sake of something else—between *ends* and *means*, or *final* and *instrumental* goods, and (b) the distinction between things which have their value in themselves and things which derive their value from some other source: *intrinsically* good things versus *extrinsically* good things. By making this distinction, she safeguards against the fallacy of thinking of a value as not intrinsic just because it is a means to another good. According to this faulty theory, final goods (things valuable as ends) would be the same as intrinsic goods, whereas instrumental goods (things valuable as means) would be the same as extrinsic goods.

Korsgaard adds that the consequence of such an equation is serious. “Since intrinsically good things are thought to have their value *in* themselves, they are thought to have their goodness in any and all circumstances—to carry it with them, so to speak.” On the other hand, she points out to another faulty reasoning that haunts us: If one finds that “a certain kind of thing is not good in any and all circumstances, that it is good in some cases and not others, its goodness is extrinsic—it is derived from or dependent upon the circumstances.”⁶⁹

At this point Korsgaard appeals to the insightful distinction Kant makes regarding the conditioned and unconditioned goods. In fact, *The Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* opens with this very claim: “Nothing in the world—indeed nothing even beyond the world—can possibly be conceived which could be called good without qualification except a *good will*.”⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Ibid, p.171.

⁷⁰ Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, , trans. Lewis White Beck, (Library of Liberal Arts, 1956), 9/382-393.

It is apparent that Kant does not talk about means/ends distinction while talking about unconditioned/conditioned good, since happiness, without doubt, is desired as an end. According to Kant, the means/ends distinction is different from the distinction between the conditional and unconditional values because the latter is a distinction not in *the way we value things* but in the conditions in which they are *objectively good*. Accordingly, it is not surprising that under some circumstances, curiosity seems to be in contradiction to the attainment of a good life, for instance, if one is curious about the best method of torturing someone in order to inflict the greatest amount of pain on the subject, this cannot be argued that this type of curiosity is necessary for a good life. However, such a problem applies to each and every virtue. Being too courageous to rob a bank or being too merciful and letting a criminal get away with his crime could be examples that turn virtues into vices. Kant is right in arguing that it is only the good will that is unconditionally good. This does not, however, show that virtues could not be intrinsically good in themselves.⁷¹

Having argued that curiosity is an intrinsic value, I will move on to proposing that curiosity, as an endless quest for making sense, is an admirable enterprise in its own right even without the final satisfaction of curiosity sought after. Because even if we are unable to reach the exact piece of knowledge, the ‘understanding’ we possess would be increased. Curiosity helps us expand our horizons, and sometimes even a question itself might assist us in looking at the world in a different perspective compared to the outlook we had before the inquiry. It is not always the answer that expands our understanding; sometimes the questioning also works quite marvelously in adding more to who we are and help make our lives complete.

⁷¹ This line of thought will be expanded more in the last chapter “Is Curiosity Always Good?”

Bold as it could be, I will attempt to show that curiosity (a desire to know in order to understand) is an intrinsic value that makes life worth living for a human being and the cessation of curiosity would make any attainment of knowledge meaningless. Knowledge would lose its significance for human beings without curiosity and provided that there is no desire to make sense and understand on the part of human beings, we would respond to knowledge as animals do, that is, there would be no recognition of the value of knowledge. Miscevic also points out to this fact and invites us to a thought experiment to try out our intuitions:

So imagine an uninhibited world, or a family of uninhibited world: no minds around, not even God's. Add a swarm of propositions, some of them true, say, "Stones are solid", some false, say "Stones are liquid"...Abstract away from your act of imagining, and just consider the world(s), together with attendant propositions. Is there any value to the true ones, not shared by false ones? There is nobody around, nobody cares, nor could care: why would "Stones are solid" have more value *there* than "Stones are liquid"? If at this juncture, you are tempted to answer, "Yes, but the true proposition could be believed by someone in our world, and it is more valuable than the false one", I suggest that you yield to temptation.⁷²

Hence, he seems to strongly support the claim that the value of truth derives from the inherent drive of curiosity people possess. Tautological as it is, if there were no one to appreciate and desire knowledge, then knowledge would lack any value. Likewise, Sosa also ties the value of truth to the antecedent interest that is present in the subject. He suggests that we desire to know both for pragmatic and purely intellectual interests,⁷³ and he adds that without such an interest the knowledge gained would be unworthy. As a result, Sosa doubts that knowledge by itself is valuable; he says:

At the beach on a lazy summer afternoon, we might scoop up a handful of sand and carefully count the grains. This would give us an otherwise

⁷² Miscevic, p.259.

⁷³ Although desiring to know could stem from any motive such as pragmatic needs, obligation, obsession, etc. I prefer using the word "curiosity" for intellectual interest to know.

unmarked truth, something that on the view before us is at least a positive good, other things equal. This view I hardly understand. The number of grains would not interest most of us in the slightest. Absent any such antecedent interest, moreover, it is hard to see any sort of *value* in one's having that truth.⁷⁴

On the other hand, Kvanvig finds this link between the presence of curiosity in human beings and the value of knowledge as less than convincing. He writes: "So in appealing to the phenomenon of curiosity in defense of the value of knowledge, the defender of the value of knowledge is tilting at windmills"⁷⁵. He seems to hold the view that our desire to know cannot be the source of the value attributed to knowledge. Since Plato, it is established that something is not to be deemed valuable just because we desire it. We might desire to scratch our back but this does not make an itch intrinsically valuable. I understand his motivation in rejecting the view that knowledge is valuable because we desire it. My position is immune to this criticism though, and I think I am not tilting at windmills because I do not base the value of knowledge to the feeling of curiosity we possess. What I want to emphasize is that there is a reciprocal relationship between curiosity and knowledge and neither would be valued without the other. However, this should not be understood as demoting the value of knowledge; indeed, both have value but they would be lacking in value if one of them were missing while the other remained.

In order to elaborate on this idea of reciprocal relationship, I want to appeal to "the theory of organic unities", an insightful view that G.E. Moore had proposed in order to account for intrinsic goodness. In *Principia Ethica*, he claims that there are intrinsic goods that should be regarded as a whole and the value of this whole is not equal to the sum of the individual worth of the pieces. To quote word by word: "The

⁷⁴ Ernest Sosa, "The Place of Truth in Epistemology", in *Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology*, Michael DePaul and Linda Zagzebski, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p.156.

⁷⁵ Kvanvig, p.150.

value of a whole must not be assumed to be the same as the sum of the values of its parts”⁷⁶.

According to the theory of organic unities, the whole transcends the parts when they come together and the two pieces that make up the unity possesses *intrinsic value*. However, this does not show that the parts lack any value whatsoever. In Moore’s words, “the good in question cannot conceivably exist, unless the part exist also... what is asserted to have intrinsic value is the existence of the whole; and the existence of the whole includes the existence of its part.” To understand the application of the organic principle to questions of value, it is perhaps best to consider Moore’s primary example, that of a consciousness experiencing a beautiful object. To see how the principle works, a thinker engages in “reflective isolation”, the act of thinking of a given concept in isolation and determining its intrinsic value. In the example above, we can easily see that taken solitarily, beautiful objects and consciousnesses are not really assessable. They might have some value, but when we consider the total value of a consciousness experiencing a beautiful object, the value of this organic unity immensely transcends those of its parts. Moore says “it seems to be true that to be conscious of a beautiful object is a thing of great intrinsic value; whereas the same object, if no one to be conscious of it, has certainly comparatively little value, and is commonly held to have none at all. But the consciousness of a beautiful object is certainly a whole of some sort in which we can distinguish as parts the object on the one hand and the being conscious on the other”. The organic metaphor is thus very appropriate; biological organisms seem to have emergent properties which cannot be found anywhere in their individual parts. For example, a human brain seems to exhibit a capacity for thought when none of its

⁷⁶ G.E.Moore, *Principia Ethica*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1903), p.28.

neurons exhibit any such capacity. In the same way, an organic unity can have a value far greater than the sum of its component parts, and it is impossible to evaluate the worth of a part without thinking of the reciprocal relationship they are engaged in.

Similarly, in order to give an account of the reciprocal relationship between curiosity and knowledge, G.E. Moore's theory of organic unities can be applied to knowledge and curiosity.⁷⁷ I will argue that (a) curiosity and knowledge form an "organic unity" and that (b) intrinsic value belongs to this organic unity whose value immensely transcends the value of each taken independently. Just as a piece of artwork cannot be deemed valuable unless there is appreciation of beauty, I will suggest that neither the value of curiosity nor that of knowledge could be successfully evaluated separately. In other words, although curiosity is still admirable even without the possession of knowledge, just as the appreciation of beauty is admirable without the presence of the piece of art, the two form an organic unity and when we consider the 'whole', the organic unity becomes incomparably valuable. In the same fashion, Moore argues that the mere existence of what is beautiful has some intrinsic value, but so little as to be negligible, compared to the consciousness of beauty. Similarly, I propose that knowledge has some intrinsic value, but almost negligible, compared to a desire to understand.

It should not be assumed that Moore strips the parts of the organic unity off any sort of value. He just wants to direct our attention to the fact that "a good thing may exist in such a relation to another good thing that the value of the whole thus

⁷⁷ As being never articulated in the literature before, this will be a novel and striking argument that will probably need further development.

formed is immensely greater than the sum of the values of the two good things”⁷⁸. Hence, it is not contradictory to the theory of organic unities that the parts also have intrinsic goodness. Just like the consciousness of beauty has intrinsic value, I think a deep desire to understand is valuable even without the final attainment of truth sought after. Considering that both curiosity and knowledge has goodness in themselves, the organic unity formed by the two qualifies for the class of “unmixed goods” which comprises of two parts that are good in themselves and characterized by Moore as consisting in the love of beautiful things or of good persons. For Moore, “these goods are undoubtedly good, even where the things or persons loved are imaginary”⁷⁹. Accordingly, even a skeptic who believes in the impossibility of knowledge can appreciate the organic unity and accept its goodness when Moore’s insights are taken into consideration.

It could be confusing to some because I seem to use knowledge and understanding interchangeably even though I have already given an attempt to distinguish the two. In applying the organic unity to the case of curiosity, I deliberately place knowledge -rather than understanding- vis-à-vis curiosity. It is because, analogically, the artwork is akin to knowledge in its barest form while understanding always involves a subject that receives the knowledge. In a way, understanding can be thought as knowledge plus the recognition of knowledge by the individual. What I want here is to refer to the passive state of knowledge on the one hand, and the curious person (who appreciates knowledge due to a desire to understand) on the other. If I used understanding rather than knowledge for the organic unity metaphor, it would not be accurate analogically. Understanding is possibly more similar to “viewing/enjoying an artwork” rather than the artwork

⁷⁸ Moore, p.27-28.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p.224.

itself. Since the reciprocal relationship that Moore wants to emphasize is between the consciousness and the beautiful object, I prefer matching up the beautiful object with knowledge and consciousness with curiosity. Then, does this analogy say anything about the value of understanding? Surely it does. Just like when consciousness meets the beautiful object there is enjoyment and admiration of beauty which is intrinsically valuable; whenever a curious intellect meets knowledge the end result is understanding. In other words, the organic unity becomes intrinsically valuable as a whole because it produces the desired –and valuable– state of understanding. Likewise, the organic unity of aesthetic appreciation and beautiful object becomes valuable as a whole because it produces the desired –and valuable– state of admiration/enjoyment of beauty.

Having established that the value of the organic unity of knowledge and curiosity surpasses the value of its parts; when it comes to the value of curiosity that is not objectively satisfied by the corresponding knowledge, still much worth can be found in the curious state. In support of this claim, let us imagine a world in which there are “curious” people who “desire to understand”, but unluckily, can only reach the false propositions about the world due to an Evil Demon. Let there also be a world in which people possess all the true propositions but lack curiosity. If asked which one is a better world, acknowledging that it is not easy to give a straightforward answer; my personal propensity would be towards the former one. Despite the seeming attractiveness of the latter possible world, knowledge (non-pragmatic knowledge) in that world by itself would have little or no value due to the lack of curiosity on the part of the subjects. Therefore, even though we yield to temptation and value believing what is true from the perspective we *already have* as curious beings and opt for the world in which there are true propositions, in that

possible world the true propositions that lack immediate pragmatic value would actually be worthless.

Satisfaction of Curiosity: Endless is the Search for Understanding

Defined as a desire to understand and make sense, the true satisfier of curiosity would be a state of ‘being able to make sense’. However, the ultimate satisfaction of curiosity is not possible because contrary to true belief or knowledge⁸⁰, total understanding is not attainable. Hence, it is possible to claim that “there is always a minimal understanding required by knowledge but one can always *understand better* what one already knows”⁸¹. Understanding allows for gradation and it is a subjective state that differs from person to person, based on the nature of the object of curiosity, and according to the degree of interest⁸² one takes in the object of curiosity. Granting that the satisfaction of curiosity is to some extent relative to personal characteristics, degree of interest, and the nature of the object of curiosity, I will take curiosity as a never ending state since there is no end to understanding and making sense. Instead of talking about satisfaction of curiosity, Kvanvig prefers to call this state as “finality” or “closure” and believes that it is the end we are seeking in any inquiry. He says “For such closure and finality is precisely what we seek when we are curious and when we engage in inquiry. Kvanvig also thinks that this closure is a subjective state and cannot be captured in objective terms. He writes:

How is this element of finality or closure achieved on the account of curiosity that characterizes it in terms of finding the truth? The answer is in terms of some level of subjective justification that achieves such finality or closure for

⁸⁰ I limit this claim to propositional knowledge rather than objectual knowledge, since objectual knowledge could be gradable and it is much more similar to the notion of understanding.

⁸¹ Boylu, p.607.

⁸² The pivotal role of “interest” in arousing curiosity and setting the conditions for satisfaction are discussed in detail by Inan in his forthcoming book *Curiosity and Reference to the Unknown*.

each cognitive being. In seeking the truth, an individual acquires subjective justification for a claim, and when that level of subjective justification reaches a suitably high level, closure is experienced. We do not need to claim that the individual has a theoretical viewpoint about how high the level must be for closure or finality, for the level may itself be part of the hardware of the mechanism rather than a feature of its software.⁸³

Does this closure take place exactly when we acquire the knowledge that we seek in our inquiry? Can one be subjectively satisfied without attaining the desired knowledge? My claim would be that since the aim of curiosity is *understanding* rather than having the knowledge, one could become subjectively satisfied even if he/she cannot reach the knowledge sought after. It is possible that even when we cannot reach the desired knowledge or even if the object of our curiosity does not exist, I believe there is some understanding as to why I cannot reach the knowledge or why I came to be curious in the first place. In other words, I believe that a person who experiences curiosity becomes richer in understanding and making sense of the world *after* being curious about this thing, whether or not he is able to reach an exact answer.

The satisfaction conditions of curiosity differ depending on a number of variables. One of them is the *personal characteristics* of the person involved; if one does not have an inquisitive mind, his curiosity is easily satisfied; on the other hand, if one is skeptically inclined and not easily convinced, nothing but complete certainty will satisfy his curiosity. This is perhaps only achievable with respect to certain kinds of objects and not all questions can be answered by certainty. This actually points to another variable, which is the *object* of curiosity; if one is curious about a straightforward fact, let's say, the number of students registered to a high school, it is easier to be satisfied once s/he reaches the corresponding piece of knowledge. On the other hand, if one is curious about the nature of human beings, or the purpose of life,

⁸³ Kvanvig, p.149.

then this curiosity has different satisfaction conditions. In addition, the *degree of interest* one takes in the subject is also important in determining the satisfaction conditions. Drawing attention to the variation in the amount of interest people have towards different subjects, Loewenstein states that “a comprehensive theory of curiosity would need to explain why certain people become interested in certain topics and why certain topics (e.g., anything having to do with the self) are almost universally “interesting” and adds that “however, the goal of constructing such a theory is extremely ambitious”.⁸⁴ It is an undeniable fact that human beings are interested in topics to varying degrees and the satisfaction of a given curiosity is directly related to how much interest we have regarding that subject matter. Whereas the buck stops quite fast and easily when the question is about coming to know a stranger, the buck almost never stops if the person to be known is ourselves. I believe this could be explained by the human need to understand, and understanding the world is perhaps never possible without having an understanding of who we are; hence the topics related to the self are “almost universally interesting” as Loewenstein points out. I suppose I am not alone in thinking that understanding the world goes through understanding oneself. This idea finding its epitome in the saying “Know thyself” belongs to the long-established wisdom and Plato employs this maxim extensively by having the character of Socrates use it to motivate his dialogues. Drawing attention to the original inscription of the saying on the front door of Temple of Apollo at Delphi, Plato refers to it in six different places throughout his dialogues.⁸⁵ In *Phaedrus*, for instance, Socrates uses the maxim 'know thyself' as his explanation to Phaedrus for why he has no time for mythology or other

⁸⁴ Loewenstein, p.93.

⁸⁵ *Charmides* (164D), *Protagoras* (343B), *Phaedrus* (229E), *Philebus* (48C), *Laws* (II.923A), *Alcibiades* (124A, 129A, 132C) The Dialogues of Plato translated into English with Analyses and Introductions by Benjamin Jowett in Five Volumes, Oxford University Press, 1892.

far flung topics. Socrates says, "But I have no leisure for them at all; and the reason, my friend, is this: I am not yet able, as the Delphic inscription has it, to know myself; so it seems to me ridiculous, when I do not yet know that, to investigate irrelevant things"⁸⁶. Since it will not be possible for me to expand upon the value Plato gives to understanding oneself as first and foremost necessity to flourish as a human being, I will suffice by the quick references and leave room to the reader for further thinking about the possible links between knowing oneself and the ultimate epistemic end of “understanding” as a whole.

Apart from such variables, there is another aspect that makes satisfaction of curiosity problematic. How to decide when and under what conditions my curiosity is satisfied? Is it whenever I feel that I am satisfied and I am no longer curious about the question I had, or is it when I have objectively and truly satisfied my curiosity? This question is addressed by Inan in his forthcoming book, in which he refers to two different views, Kvanvig’s and Whitcomb’s, who takes satisfaction of curiosity to be a purely internal state and an external state, respectively. Kvanvig has no problem with an individual feeling satisfied even when that individual cannot reach an objectively true knowledge; yet, Whitcomb opposes Kvanvig’s position. The example he illustrates in objection to Kvanvig’s idea involves a case in which a person takes a pill to sate his hunger and feels not hungry, but who is physically (and he claims objectively) still hungry. He then asks if we could say that he is not hungry anymore. Inan seems to hold a midway stance between the two positions and he finds it useful to differentiate between a “subjective satisfaction” and an “actual satisfaction”⁸⁷. On the other hand, I am inclined to think that we cannot talk about an

⁸⁶ Plato, *Phaedrus*, 229e.

⁸⁷ Inan, p.224.

“actual satisfaction” of curiosity, because it is an internal state that only the inquirer has access to. No one except myself can claim, on behalf of me, that I am satisfied or not satisfied, since it is all about the state *I feel* and there is no physical complement that will objectively reveal my satisfaction. I think Whitcomb commits a kind of reasoning fallacy here, because hunger is a feeling that also has a physical basis, so even if we suppress the feeling of hunger it still lingers. When we come back to the problem of the satisfaction of curiosity, I think we could think in a similar fashion. Curiosity is an internal state that arises within the inquisitive mind and it could vanish either by a false or a true piece of knowledge. This could be an epistemic disaster, but we cannot claim that this specific curiosity is not satisfied just because it is filled up by false belief. One might oppose my view by saying that satisfaction connotes a positive meaning and when I claim something is satisfied I imply that it is truly and actually satisfied. Nonetheless, if satisfaction of curiosity is defined as a vanishing of curiosity or being no longer curious about a certain question due to feelings of satisfaction, then there is no way to claim that one is not actually satisfied. In that sense, I think satisfaction is a state just like happiness, and it would not be quite right to claim that one is not happy while he/she feels and states that he/she is happy.

This actually reminds one of the discussions on happiness and eudaimonia, and I want to shortly dwell upon this distinction just to draw a helpful analogy. While some philosophers are in favor of the view that happiness is only a mental state and it is subjective; others such as Platonists believe that one could claim that he is eudaimon but it is possible that he is not. The common analogy is that eudaimonia is like the health of a person. In his article, Creed writes “it is perfectly logical for a Greek to assert that he is eudaimon, and for an outside observer to say

‘Oh, no! You are not’ just, too, as in English it makes sense for a doctor after examining me to contradict and refute my claim that I am healthy.”⁸⁸ He also gives another example to clarify the different connotations of the two words, namely happiness and eudaimonia, and says that if my house is burnt down while I am away, my happiness is affected when I receive the news, but my eudaimonia is affected at the time of the misfortune. Hence, eudaimonia is a term which describes a man’s state or condition, not his feelings. It is an objective state about one’s well-being; it depends on all the things that would make us happy if we knew of their existence, but it is independent of one’s knowledge of them. However, I think the analogy between health and happiness is not a good one because in the case of health there is a physical indicator as well as a mental feeling that makes up health. But, happiness is a state we feel and nothing more just like the state we call curiosity.

Nonetheless, it is still possible to take a more realist approach and claim that the curiosity is not satisfied by the disappearance of curiosity for the person. This disappearance might be called the “closure of curiosity” but it is something else to claim that the curiosity is satisfied. Inan prefers taking such a stance and that’s the reason why he coins the term “actual satisfaction”. This way of thinking is quite reasonable considering the insight that is possible to be gained through the famous thought experiment of Nozick, the experience machine. He wants us to imagine a machine that could give us whatever desirable or pleasurable experiences we could want. He says that "superduper neuropsychologists" have figured out a way to stimulate a person's brain to induce pleasurable experiences that the subject could not distinguish from those she'd have apart from the machine. He then asks, given the choice, whether or not we would prefer to live tied to the machine rather than

⁸⁸ J. L. Creed. “Is It Wrong to Call Plato a Utilitarian?” *The Classical Quarterly* 28 (2) (1978), p.325.

choosing the real life? In order to make the experience flawless, he also adds that we would not know that it is the machine that produces the pleasure and we will get the feeling of being in love or writing a bestseller or giving a wonderful concert. Yet, how many of us would be willing to get tied to this experience machine and give up our contact with reality? According to Nozick, our choice would be contrary and he concludes, “Perhaps what we desire is to live ourselves, in contact with reality”⁸⁹. Here, the pleasures of the individual who is tied to the machine is *subjectively satisfied*, but there is something missing that leaves us unsatisfied and that has to do with the *actual satisfaction* of curiosity. Looking from such a perspective, Inan’s distinction between subjective and actual satisfaction proves to be significant. To borrow his example, Sue could be said to be subjectively satisfied when she wrongfully believes that the capital of Rwanda is Butare, but she is actually satisfied only when she learns that the capital of Rwanda is Kigali. In the first scenario, her curiosity might vanish thinking that she has reached the accurate piece of information but this is not an actual satisfaction in the strong sense of the word. It might perhaps be called the “closure of curiosity” since that would have less positive connotations than the word “satisfaction”.

At this point, it will be useful to refer to the term “buck-stopper”⁹⁰ and explain the pivotal role it could play in giving an account of satisfaction of curiosity. Buck-stopper is the piece of knowledge that stops questioning on the issue at hand. Suppose I am curious about the highest mountain in the world and I google the question and reach the answer Mount Everest. Whether or not this answer is accurate, I could feel satisfied by this answer and this becomes the end of my

⁸⁹ Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, (New York: Basic Books, 1974), p.614.

⁹⁰ Inan, p.219.

curiosity regarding this specific question. Here, Mount Everest is where the buck stops and my curiosity is satisfied. It could have been the case that the website I have learned the answer was an unreliable one and it said the highest mountain is Mount Erciyes. And imagine that my laptop is out of battery and I cannot check other sites to test the accuracy of this information and let's assume that I am not a skeptical person. Being unaware of the falsity of this answer, I could believe this information and feel satisfied. Now, it would not be right to tell me 'No, you are not satisfied' because I *am*.

On the other hand, I am inclined to think that while *instances of curiosity* are satisfiable, *curiosity as a whole* cannot be satisfied. This would be undoubtedly true for the understanding-oriented curiosity as understanding is a never ending journey. It is possible to think of understanding as a ladder that goes up to infinity; we ascend to better understanding with every step but there is no end to understanding. In other words, one cannot claim that s/he completely understood X and s/he cannot understand it better.

Although I am not in favor of resembling the state of curiosity to hunger, it might be useful in appealing to this analogy once again just to make sense of how curiosity can never be totally satisfied. One might successfully satisfy his/her hunger by eating a whole meal but after some time, his hunger reappears. Similarly, instances of curiosity may be satisfied but, due to the impossibility of total understanding, curiosity will reemerge. Curiosity could be totally satisfied if and only if there is complete understanding. However, this is not possible. On the other hand, this partial satisfaction is good and necessary because if all curiosities were left unsatisfied, we would get the feeling of helplessness and despair, which would terminate our hope to find an answer to our questions.

Although it definitely admits of degrees, simply put, there are four conditions one might find oneself with respect to the knowledge that is offered as an explanation for the question that ignites curiosity. In the first scenario, one could be subjectively satisfied while the knowledge he gets is false, in that case this curiosity will probably reappear in the future due to facts, but he might fail to get curious if the person is dogmatic. In the second scenario, one could lack subjective satisfaction while the knowledge he already has is true. For instance, one might be informed about the theory of evolution but he might be ambivalent about its truth and keep his curiosity on the matter, even though the story of evolution might offer the actual explanation. In this second case, the person will probably be convinced and satisfied after time and experience, s/he might figure out that s/he is mistaken, though it sometimes takes a whole lifetime. On the third scenario, one could be neither subjectively nor objectively satisfied and this situation calls for curiosity. The last scenario would depict the case of a person who is both objectively and subjectively satisfied and this is a very appealing state to be in. Yet, since attaining a complete understanding is impossible and understanding is a life-long endeavor, this fourth scenario will not entirely quench one's curiosity. This would give a temporary satisfaction regarding an instance of curiosity, but will not be the end of a desire to know for the person.

Intuitively, the first scenario looks like the worst scenario to be in because we inherently value true beliefs. Just as taking a pill might suppress the feeling of hunger, delusions might result in a subjective satisfaction of curiosity. Is this state of subjective satisfaction contrary to good life? If it leads to a deficiency of curiosity, then it undermines the possibility of a well-lived life, since a life without curiosity will fall short of actualizing the human potential.

The Utopia Paradox: Life without Curiosity

Even if it could be established that total satisfaction of curiosity is impossible, there still remains a question: would total satisfaction of curiosity be desirable? Inan also raises this question and argues that this situation creates a utopia paradox.⁹¹ This paradox will refer to the dilemma in which we find ourselves wishing to attain a state which loses its appeal when it is attained. The utopia I have in mind is a world in which all desire to understand is satisfied. If curiosity is defined as a desire to understand, then it implies that it is directed at a final attainment, since desires usually indicate a lack and a missing property that is sought after. So, if we are curious beings, it should be the case that we should seek after the final satisfaction of curiosity. Yet, this does not seem to be the case. Inan's portrayal of such a world is quoted below:

... in utopia there is no ignorance, nothing to wonder about, no puzzles to solve, no surprises, and no curiosity. Now when put as such it gives me the feeling that utopia would not be a very attractive place to live in. Not only would we know all the laws of nature, but also everything about the future, including our own. There would be no motivation to change or to seek what is novel, and no need for deliberation. Everything we do we would know in advance. I would not only know what I will have for breakfast tomorrow, but also what I would feel as I take my first bite.⁹²

Now I ask if this could be an ideal life. Such a world in which we have knowledge of everything will leave no room for curiosity and mystery, and this would subtract value from our lives. Although understanding is desired, the attainment of complete understanding cannot be desired, since in such a case, there will be no curiosity left to make our lives meaningful. And curiosity is so intrinsic to being *human* that life

⁹¹ Ilhan Inan, *Curiosity: A Philosophical Dialogue*, 2006, unpublished manuscript.

⁹² Inan, p.6.

without curiosity would be a less-than perfect life. I will argue that, intuitively we would not want to live a life devoid of any desire to understand. Imagining a possible world where curiosity is excluded will make it clear that knowledge and understanding will also lose their central role for human beings and knowledge would be demoted to the level of bits of insignificant information.

It is true that curiosity has an aim of reaching knowledge but this does not show that curiosity is just instrumentally valuable and is negligible in this process. To illustrate, suppose I want to see the Metropolitan Museum of Art because I believe I will greatly enjoy seeing the paintings of Monet. Hence, I tell my friend that I desire to see the paintings of Monet. There is a hidden premise here, even hidden to myself, which secretly admits of my appreciation of beauty and that is the reason why I desire to see the artwork. If the part of my brain that deals with aesthetic appreciation were damaged, I would not care about going to the museum, because then I would not be desiring to see the painting in the first place. This reciprocal relationship is also observable between curiosity and knowledge. That is to say, merely attaining knowledge cannot be the final goal without the inherent desire to know.

Similar to this, being curious about something and desiring to understand something is not about merely attaining the knowledge sought after. Curiosity makes up a significant part of this process and without curiosity the understanding we have reached would not be meaningful. Total satisfaction of curiosity is not only unattainable but also undesirable, because if one's whole sense of curiosity is satisfied and curiosity is eradicated from one's life, this would make life less worthy. A possible world in which all curiosities are satisfied and all questions are answered would lose its appeal for the inhabitants of that world. This utopia would give birth

to a dystopia, since everything being the same; a life that contains curiosity is more valuable than a life that lacks curiosity. This argument is hard to object when the relationship between curiosity and value of knowledge is considered.

On the other hand, I suggest that curiosity is not only good and desirable for its epistemic ends, but it is intrinsically valuable. This is because we can imagine possible worlds, such as Descartes' demon world, where the beliefs of curious people are almost entirely false. Alternatively, we can imagine worlds where the intellectually lazy and careless have mostly true beliefs. Suppose we were to somehow discover that ours was such a world. Would we then revise our opinions about which traits count as intellectual virtues and which as vices?⁹³ Curiosity is a virtue even if we are unfortunate enough to be the victims of a Cartesian deceiver, and traits like laziness and carelessness are vices even if they turn out to be truth-conducive. Then, truth-conduciveness cannot be a distinctive mark of the epistemic virtues. I claim that curiosity is such an epistemic virtue that would be valuable in itself even without the epistemic goods it produces.

The reason why I use the phrase utopia paradox here has to do with the fact that the utopia –which we erroneously think as eliminating curiosity through reaching the answers of all our questions–, becomes meaningless and unattractive when it is realized. Hence, a desire to understand is valuable and it should be included in a good life. Curiosity is actually one of the characteristics that is integral

⁹³ Montmarquet makes a similar claim about having intellectual virtues but he does not mention curiosity. His argument compares a world containing people who are intellectually virtuous having false beliefs, in contrast to a world in which there are no intellectually virtuous people but who possess true beliefs. *Epistemic Virtue and Doxastic Responsibility*, (Lanham, Md:Rowman&Littlefield,1993).

to the definition of being human⁹⁴. And a life devoid of curiosity would demote people to the level of animals that could not evolve to the level of human beings.

In support of the utopia paradox thesis, I would like to appeal to Socrates who also points out to the value of staying as curious beings. In the *Meno* (81de) he says that even if we have no rational grounds for preferring the religious story of 81ad to the eristic story of 80d, we are better off believing the former since it makes us energetic seekers, whereas the eristic story makes us lazy. Socrates prefers the former explanation that encourages questioning not because it gives a better account but because it results in a lasting curiosity.

⁹⁴ This argument will be further developed in the forth Chapter, where it will be claimed that curiosity is one of the components that makes up the human form (eidos).

CHAPTER IV: CURIOSITY AS AN INTELLECTUAL VIRTUE

What is an Intellectual Virtue?

Intellectual virtues were first mentioned by Aristotle as necessary traits for a flourishing life. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, he classifies virtues into intellectual and moral virtues and this classification has not been radically challenged since his time. Among Aristotle's virtues are *sophia*, *episteme*, *nous*, *phronesis* and *techne*; and he claims that a good life is not complete without such intellectual virtues. However, the intellectual virtues have remained quite underdeveloped because while virtue ethicists preferred to focus on moral virtues rather than intellectual virtues, epistemologists almost altogether ignored them. Generally the only intellectual virtue that has gotten any attention was *phronesis*, or practical wisdom, but that is examined by virtue ethicists merely because of Aristotle's connection of *phronesis* with the distinctively moral virtues.⁹⁵

It wasn't until the 1980s that epistemologists became interested in and once again researched into intellectual virtues. Propelled by a deadlock in epistemological debates going on between internalists and externalists, and between coherentists and foundationalists, Ernest Sosa has written "The Raft and the Pyramid" (1980) in which he proposed that epistemologists focus on intellectual virtues to resolve the debates in epistemology. Rather than properties of belief states, he suggested emphasizing on the properties of persons. He pointed out to our "stable dispositions for truth acquisition" as the objects of "primary justification"⁹⁶. These dispositions he

⁹⁵ Zagzebski points out to this fact in *Virtues of the Mind*, p. 9.

⁹⁶ Ernest Sosa, "The Raft and the Pyramid: Coherence versus Foundations in the Theory of Knowledge" in *Studies in Epistemology*. Midwest Studies in Philosophy, vol.5, University of Notre Dame Press. (1980), p.189.

emphasized are justified by their *reliability* at reaching the truth, and hence Sosa identified his view as “reliabilism”. However, his proposed intellectual virtues were quite dissimilar to those of Aristotle. Sosa and his followers (later called reliabilists) tended to focus on intellectual faculty-virtues such as eyesight, memory, hearing, deduction, and inferential reason etc. that helped “maximize one’s surplus of truth over error”.⁹⁷ There have been numerous theorists such as Plantinga, Greco, and Goldman who embraced such a definition of intellectual virtues and they were the pioneers of the field that came to be known as virtue epistemology. In fact, virtue epistemology first became to be known as another name for reliabilism, until the responsibilists drew attention to intellectual character-virtues in an attempt to “deepen and humanize” epistemology⁹⁸. Whereas the reliabilists focused only on the reliability of the process that produces the belief in question, responsibilist virtue theorists emphasized the characteristic motivations that make up an agent’s character traits, and also investigated into how those character traits have been developed.

The responsibilist move has narrowed the gap between Aristotle’s notion of intellectual virtues and those proposed by reliabilists. The virtues that responsibilists stress are in line with Aristotelian notion of virtue⁹⁹ and they interact with moral virtues. It seems plausible that in order to develop intellectual virtues one will need the moral virtues; since intellectual honesty requires the moral virtue of honesty and intellectual courage makes it necessary that the agent is courageous. Furthermore, the responsibilist account has become a good candidate for solving the existing problems

⁹⁷ Ernest Sosa, “Knowledge and Intellectual Virtue” *Monist* 68, no. 2 (Apr. 1985), p.227.

⁹⁸ Roberts and Wood, p.7

⁹⁹ Aristotle’s notion of virtue (arête) will be explained in more detail in Chapter 4.

in epistemology¹⁰⁰. With the advent of responsibilism, virtue epistemology, unlike the traditional epistemology, has stopped directing its focus on justified belief and knowledge. Rather than asking “What makes a belief a good belief?” virtue epistemology begins with the question, “What makes a believer a good believer?” starting with this question will lead us to begin our epistemic inquiry with an analysis of the character traits of the believers. Then, the identified character traits that a good believer should have will determine what the epistemic virtues are. Hence, the direction of analysis in virtue epistemology will lead us from the epistemic virtues to the definition and conditions of true belief and knowledge. To put in other words, justification and knowledge will be defined in terms of intellectual virtues, and the intellectual virtues will be defined in terms of their role in making a good life possible for human beings.

The Value Turn in Epistemology: The Reliabilist versus the Responsibilist Account

As a result of the influence of virtue ethics on contemporary epistemologists who have argued that normative epistemology should be reexamined and intellectual virtues should be included in the study of the theory of knowledge, responsibilist intellectual virtues are introduced into the literature. These philosophers understandably concentrate on the ways the idea of virtue can help in epistemological problems and they emphasize on responsibilist intellectual virtues, also known as trait-virtues, such as open-mindedness, fairness, intellectual courage and perseverance, in the evaluation of knowledge (e.g. Code, Montmarquet, Zagzebski, Roberts & Wood, Baehr, etc.) rather than focusing on the reliabilist faculty-virtues such as good vision, memory, and perception (e.g. Sosa, Greco,

¹⁰⁰ Sarah Wright (2009) focuses on this aspect of virtue epistemology and explains how it could be useful in solving the problems of epistemology.

Plantinga). The latter camp has been known to be reliabilists whereas the adherents of the former camp responsibilists¹⁰¹. Unlike reliabilists, responsibilists emphasized the active nature of knowers in the act of knowing and drew attention to the human responsibility in the acquisition of knowledge. In distinguishing a human act of knowing from that of an inanimate being, Code states “one speaks of a *reliable* computer, not a *responsible* one”¹⁰² in order to account for the active human involvement in the act of knowing. Another influential theorist, Montmarquet, also helped shape the responsibilist account of virtue epistemology. Recently, contrary to the spirit of the beginnings of virtue epistemology, virtue epistemologists mainly fall under the responsibilist camp and they emphasize the character virtues more than faculty-virtues. The roots of this tendency could be fathomed by looking into the shortcomings of the reliabilist account and the triumph of responsibilism through better accounting for the weaknesses. One of the criticism that is targeted at reliabilists is that they aim at very low-grade knowledge.¹⁰³ Reliabilists argue that one does not need any act of intellectual courage, humility, attentiveness, or perseverance in order to reach knowledge. A reliabilist theorist offers such an example: suppose one notices that the lights has gone off all of a sudden, what do we need to correctly account for what happened? A reliabilist would claim we only need good eyesight and reliable brain functions to get this knowledge. In this case, it might be true; yet, this is just a simple case of attaining knowledge about the world. Reliabilists are criticized for focusing on low-grade knowledge such as the lights-out case, while not being able to cover cases that involve high-grade knowledge such as

¹⁰¹ It was Loraine Code who introduced the term in her book *Epistemic Responsibility* (1987) and who called for a move to a more responsibilist epistemology in contradistinction to a reliabilist epistemology.

¹⁰² Zagzebski, pp. 50-51.

¹⁰³ Roberts and Wood, p. 10.

understanding the sources of normativity, or understanding the workings of a new scientific discovery. On the other hand, responsibilists can better accommodate cases that are aiming at higher-grade knowledge.

In giving a defense of character-virtues as necessary in getting at truth, Baehr¹⁰⁴ gives some solid examples that contain particular virtues such as perseverance, intellectual courage and fairness, patience and honesty without which knowledge would be impossible to acquire. Even though any of his examples could be cited for the support of my thesis, it will suffice to cite one of them. In his article, he illustrates the case of a field biologist who discovers why an engendered bird species changed its migratory pattern, through overcoming various obstacles and distractions such as conflicting evidence, bureaucratic road blocks, inclement weather conditions, and boredom. As a result of his determination and careful inquiry, he is able to discover the true piece of knowledge. Baehr thinks that in this scenario, reaching the truth is not simply a matter of good eyesight or a good memory, or making valid logical inferences. Rather, the biologist reaches the truth because he manifests certain inner attitudes and character traits.

Yet, he surprisingly neglects any mention of curiosity, which is one of the fundamental virtues that drives him in the first place. Without a desire to know the truth about the case, none of these good inner qualities would perhaps be enough to propel such a discovery. In this study I will propose that curiosity is an intellectual virtue that plays a paramount role in any human knowledge. It should not be supposed that I disregard other possible motivations to know, such as political or pragmatic motives that could also make one seek knowledge; yet, curiosity often

¹⁰⁴ Jason Baehr, "Character, Reliability, and Virtue Epistemology", *The Philosophical Quarterly* 56, no. 223 (2006), pp. 193-212.

accompanies such motives and even if it does not, we cannot stay indifferent to knowledge newly gained. We care about knowledge although it may not be the dominant motivation for one to seek out knowledge. In that sense, curiosity is often part of the inquiry process and most of the time it is the reason why we desire to know.

Understanding-oriented curiosity, which is my focus in this thesis, is an intellectual virtue that would be classified under responsibilist virtue epistemology. The following section will sketch out what has been – or has not been- said about curiosity as an intellectual virtue in the literature so far and propose curiosity as an intellectual virtue.

Curiosity as an Intellectual Virtue

Even though virtue epistemologists proposed an array of different intellectual character-virtues including firmness, humility, courage, autonomy, generosity, little has been said about curiosity as an intellectual virtue. Yet, almost all have wandered around it and pointed out to the significance of curiosity. Montmarquet acknowledges that desire for truth is essential in making any inquiry possible but he puts emphasis on “epistemic conscientiousness” rather than curiosity. Roberts and Wood list all the intellectual virtues in their book and one of them is spared for “love of knowledge”. This intellectual virtue is quite similar to curiosity but it overlooks a very fundamental point which could be summarized as such: Love of knowledge is an intellectual virtue that is made possible by the sense of curiosity we have. In other words, curiosity is a precondition for the possession of love of knowledge by an inquirer. Interestingly, they choose to quote the very beginning of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* but they fail to recognize “desire to know” as an intellectual virtue.

Instead, they emphasize love of knowledge, and in an attempt to differentiate this virtue of “love of knowledge” from *any pursuit* of knowledge, they claim that one has the virtue of “love of knowledge” provided that he/she desires knowledge according to the “significance, relevance, and worthiness”¹⁰⁵. But why would knowledge be worthy if we are not curious beings? Would it be pragmatically worthy? In that case, this love of knowledge would be restricted to kinds of knowledge that are pragmatically significant and we would value knowledge that has such tangible utility. Indeed, what I want to draw attention by proposing curiosity as an intellectual virtue is quite similar to what Roberts and Wood want to emphasize by proposing “love of knowledge” as one of the intellectual virtues. It is also possible that what they mean by love of knowledge and what I mean by curiosity actually coincide and there is no real distinction between the two. However, I just want to draw attention to the fact that curiosity should be temporally prior to love of knowledge, and I think the virtue we should cultivate and focus on should be curiosity, because once one’s curiosity is aroused, love of knowledge will naturally follow. Conversely, without the possession of curiosity, even though one can still pursue knowledge for its pragmatic outcomes, it will not be possible to love knowledge for its own sake because we would not have motivation to do so.

A similar case is observable in Zagzebski’s book that is monumental in virtue epistemology literature. She appreciates the centrality of curiosity for the attainment of any knowledge but she does not name curiosity as one of the intellectual virtues. She even writes “the motivation to know is the most basic constituent of every intellectual virtue”, but she neglects mentioning curiosity as one of such virtues.

¹⁰⁵ Roberts and Wood, p.155.

Zagzebski treats the motivation for knowledge as a basis from which all intellectual virtues are derived but she does not consider it as a separate virtue.

Nenad Miscevic is probably the only one who clearly suggests curiosity as an intellectual virtue and the following will be an examination of his perspective. In his article, he argues that the reliabilist theories of virtue epistemology are all “virtue-focused” but not “virtue-based” and he proposes a strong virtue-based theory which is truth-oriented. He thinks the reliabilists misunderstand the notion of virtue since it should refer to excellences of agents rather than capacities such as eyesight, memory, etc. In fact, such a criticism had been made by Aquinas targeting the intellectual virtues of Aristotle. Miscevic draws attention to this, and he claims unlike the moral virtues, most of the intellectual virtues of Aristotle and all of the reliabilist list of intellectual virtues fail to be motivating character traits. On the contrary, they are just capacities. To overcome this problem, Miscevic gives central importance to the intellectual virtue of *inquisitiveness and curiosity*¹⁰⁶ and believes that it is a “motivating and truth-seeking virtue, a choice-related feature of the mind, of the sort similar to generosity and courage” rather than a capacity. Naming inquisitiveness-curiosity the ‘core motivating epistemic virtue’, he also draws attention to the necessity of curiosity in order to account for any possibility of knowledge. This is related to the claim I have made in the second chapter about the impossibility of conferring value to truth without the virtue of curiosity. Miscevic argues “it is this motivating component of inquisitiveness that is capable of bestowing value” and he claims that the value of truth derives from the virtue of curiosity. He sketches out his idea by a simple illustration where he says:

¹⁰⁶ He makes it explicit that he prefers “inquisitiveness” instead of or together with curiosity due to the negative overtones of the latter.

Suppose little Linda just wants to know the number of trees on her block. Not in order to do something with them; she is just curious. How should we describe the value of true belief in this case? A natural way to go is to say that the particular truth has value for her because she is curious about how many trees there are on her block. Generalizing, we obtain the view that it is worth knowing that or whether p because a normal (or idealized normal) cognizer would be curious whether p .¹⁰⁷

His way of approaching the matter is very similar to what I have been arguing so far, especially regarding the bestowing of value upon knowledge and truth by considering the reciprocal relationship between curiosity and knowledge.

With reference to all that has been said, it could be claimed that we can find some traces of the thought of including curiosity among the intellectual virtues; however it is still not established as one of the intellectual virtues. For instance, curiosity does not appear in the works that are most influential in the field.¹⁰⁸ Curiosity, of course, is seen as necessary to acquire any kind of knowledge, yet; apparently its ubiquity might be the cause of its neglect. That might be one of the reasons why no one¹⁰⁹ seems to propose curiosity as one of intellectual virtues. Yet, it would not be totally wrong to claim that without this intellectual virtue, we would not only lack the means to render truth meaningful to us, we would also be unable to fathom even the possibility of acquiring knowledge just for the sake of knowing. Without curiosity, there would still remain motivations for knowledge, but they would emerge from practical and pragmatic needs rather than out of a real desire to understand. To bring this section to an end, it would perhaps not be an overstatement to claim that no genuine intellectual pursuit would be possible if we lacked curiosity. Even if one has all the other intellectual virtues to their fullest, if the inquirer is not

¹⁰⁷ Miscevic, p.259.

¹⁰⁸ I especially refer to *Intellectual Virtues* by Roberts and Wood, *Virtues of the Mind* by Zagzebski, and *Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology* by DePaul and Zagzebski.

¹⁰⁹ It would be unjust not to mention Nenad Miscevic here as the only theorist who puts emphasis on inquisitiveness-curiosity.

curious, the inquiry would not even start. For instance, even if Charles Darwin were intellectually courageous, hard-working, open-minded, and even if he had good eyesight, hearing capacity and so on, if he had not been curious, he would not start inquiring about the beaks of the birds on the Galapagos Island.

One might object to this and claim that there could be other reasons that could start an inquiry; a lawyer may desire to know the details of a lawsuit due to his commitment to justice or a missionary worker could be interested in learning a specific tribal culture and language to be able to spread the message of Jesus. We cannot claim that these people are “curious” to know the piece of information they are after. On the contrary, they are motivated to know not because they are curious but because they have their own legitimate reasons to seek out knowledge. Then, how is it possible to suggest curiosity as a necessary intellectual virtue? I think the claim that curiosity is an intellectual virtue that is necessary for intellectual pursuits is immune from such a criticism because the abovementioned quests for knowledge do not really have pure intellectual ends. It is also possible to say that intellectual virtues such as open-mindedness, love of knowledge, or intellectual courage are not necessary for the lawyer or the missionary. If the lawyer is committed to justice and the missionary is committed enough to his religion, then they would not need any intellectual virtues to embark on the inquiry at hand. When talking about intellectual virtues, the knowledge I have in mind is more about the intellectually rewarding knowledge that is sought after for purely intellectual reasons. For these kinds of genuine intellectual pursuits, curiosity should be a necessary intellectual virtue.

CHAPTER V: CURIOSITY AS AN ETHICAL VIRTUE

What Is an Ethical Virtue?

What sort of distinction can be drawn between moral and intellectual virtues? This question can be answered only after the scope of the moral is determined. If we interpret morality in broad terms and include in morality all virtues that contribute to a good life, then it would be plausible to include intellectual virtues under the domain of morality. There are different views according to virtue epistemologists regarding the distinctions between intellectual and moral virtues. Intellectual virtues could be viewed as a subclass of moral virtues, as suggested by Linda Zagzebski, or they could be viewed as a separate class of virtues. As another alternative, intellectual virtues could be thought to be reducible to moral virtues¹¹⁰. This discussion on the position of intellectual virtues vis-à-vis moral virtues could probably be resolved by defining the scope of the moral and this has been a significant problem handled by virtue ethicists especially since Anscombe's monumental essay "Modern Moral Philosophy" in which she stresses that the moral as we understand it today has been very limited compared to the ancient usage. She writes:

Anyone who has read Aristotle's Ethics and has also read modern moral philosophy must have been struck by the great contrasts between them. The concepts which are prominent among the moderns seem to be lacking, or at any rate buried or far in the background, in Aristotle. Most noticeably, the term "moral" itself, which we have by direct inheritance Aristotle, just doesn't seem to fit, in its modern sense, into an account of Aristotelian ethics.¹¹¹

In a sense, during modernity, ethics has become an ethics of principles rather than an ethics of ideals. Yet, there is evidence in recent moral philosophy of a desire for a

¹¹⁰ Jason Baehr discusses these possibilities in his blog on virtue epistemology. www.janusblog.com

¹¹¹ G.E.M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy", The Journal of the Royal Institute of Philosophy 33 (124) (1958), p.1.

broader understanding of the moral through emphasizing virtues and duties to oneself. Anscombe, as one of the pioneers of this ethical turn, believed that a return to an Aristotelian view of ethics, which is founded on a conception of human flourishing with virtue at its center, was very much needed. In fact, in an attempt to expand the scope of moral philosophy, some philosophers have distinguished ethics from morality and ethics came to encompass many emotions and human traits that could as well be rejected by morality as irrelevant.¹¹² I am also convinced that such a distinction between moral and ethical virtues could be helpful and I intend to propose curiosity as an ethical virtue.

Making this claim will necessitate a discussion on why I choose to pose curiosity as an ethical virtue rather than a moral virtue. Baumgarten (2001) is the only philosopher who explicitly claims that curiosity should be considered among the moral virtues. Contradictory as it might sound to what I have been arguing, he claims that curiosity is a ‘moral’ virtue since it generates moral emotions and states such as attentiveness, care, openness, self-reflection, reverence, etc., which altogether help us attain a good life. He prefers using the term ‘moral’ but it is my contention that the status of curiosity in human life could be better captured by appealing to the ethical realm rather than the moral, considering the distinctions I will be making in the following paragraphs.

Distinguishing between moral and ethical realms turns out to be quite fruitful since the question “How should I live?” necessitates the exploration of several emotions and traits that do not directly correspond to the realm of morality. In order to have a well-lived life, do I need to be good-humored; do I have to appreciate art; do I need to be curious? Or can I be thought to have a good life if I have never taken

¹¹² This thought is especially held by Bernard Williams.

a genuine interest in any topic so as to kindle my curiosity? These could be questions that seem over-the-edge; but who decides on what makes a life worthy of living? If we forget about rightness or blameworthiness for a moment, and think about what virtues would make life more praiseworthy; one cannot help but wonder what kind of list we would come up with. When pondered deeply, it will be evident that the list will contain diverse virtues that cannot be reasonably classified under one category. For example, it would be strange to classify being honest and being creative under one class even though both virtues are constitutive of a good life. Mothers do not scold their children for being not as creative as they should be but we intuitively think that they certainly have the right to scold them for being not as honest as they should be. If we list virtues such as creativeness, curiosity, having a good sense of humor under the title of moral virtues, there seems to be a misclassification. Even though the distinction might seem trivial, there *is* a distinction; and I just want to draw attention to this small detail which might prove to be important for the depiction of what a good life is.

It is a hard task to draw strict boundaries for the moral and ethical; yet this slight difference might be traced back to the roots of the two concepts. As Bernard Williams (1985) points out, overlooked as it might be, originally there was a linguistic difference between the terms ‘ethics’ and ‘morality’. It is known that the term ‘moralis’ is introduced by Cicero as a Latin translation for the Greek word ‘ethos’, which was used for the part of philosophy that is concerned with character. Williams also states that the Latin *moralis* emphasizes the sense of social expectation, while the Greek *ethos* is mainly concerned about that of individual character. The morality of the ancients is generally thought to be rooted in the desire of every individual for the good and motivated by an attraction to the good, whereas

the morality of the moderns is characterized as “interpersonal, rooted in reason, and restrictive rather than attractive”¹¹³

In the light of the abovementioned facts, even though there is not an established distinction between the two terms, it becomes understandable why I am inclined to use the two words with an emphasis on their distinctive meanings. Such a differentiation allows me to suggest curiosity be considered as an ethical virtue that makes our lives more worthy of living through enriching our life experience and making human fulfillment possible. In an attempt to clarify my claim that curiosity is an ethical virtue, after demarcating moral virtues from ethical virtues, I also argue that intellectual virtues are better classified as a subclass of *ethical* (rather than moral) virtues¹¹⁴. Indeed, intellectual virtues will simply be taken as ethical virtues that have an epistemic end. The classification I propose here can doubtlessly be reshaped depending on the nature and scope of the moral which is a controversial issue that I cannot possibly settle here. Therefore, my aim merely will be to consider some familiar and fairly intuitive ways of thinking about the nature and scope of the ethical and to examine the implications of these ways for the classification of virtues as moral, ethical, and intellectual. The following will give a brief sketch of what I have in mind regarding the classification of virtues. In order to call a characteristic a virtue, I will be looking for two conditions (a) it should be a cultivated character trait rather than a natural talent or natural capacity and (b) it should play a significant role in human flourishing. Accordingly, whereas a natural born athlete would not be considered as virtuous, someone who became a wonderful chef through diligence, discipline, perseverance, and patience, in other words, who cultivated this talent of

¹¹³ Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 7th ed. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1981), p.105.

¹¹⁴ Linda Zagzebski also claims that intellectual virtues are a subclass of moral virtues while making a distinction between intellectual and moral virtues in *Virtues of the Mind*.

his/hers, would be deemed a virtuous person. To name a few, under the class of moral virtues it would be possible to mention trustworthiness, fairness, mercifulness, respectfulness; whereas for ethical virtues we might list characteristics like curiosity, attentiveness, diligence, punctuality, and even having cultivated a good sense of humor. Still further, I am inclined to think that virtues such as curiosity, open-mindedness, intellectual courage, and firmness are intellectual virtues since these are intimately related with the ethical realm that are operative in an intellectual domain.

One might ask why I am attempting to make such a distinction between moral and ethical realms and could see this as an insignificant. However, my motivation behind not placing ethical and intellectual virtues in the class of moral virtues is partly due to the reasoning Susan Wolf draws our attention in her article “Moral Saints”. In that article, she talks about “non-moral virtues” and claims that it would be ridiculous to say that one is not moral because he is not creative, curious, or lacks sense of humor, although we greatly esteem such characteristics in people. That’s why there need to be another class of virtue that covers such admirable traits and they are slightly different from the class of moral virtues. On the other hand, it is possible to imagine a person who is a careful and diligent scientist committed to research, well-known as a great academician; yet, who is morally rotten. Despite possessing some ethical and intellectual virtues, he might be, let’s say, an abusive husband at home. Therefore, possession of such admirable characteristics does not necessarily make someone a morally good person. That’s why, there needs to be a demarcation between moral and ethical virtues and once such a distinction is made, it will be more appropriate to locate intellectual virtues under the class of ethical virtues.

Coming back to Baumgarten's claim, other than the seeming terminological difference, I believe his perspective on curiosity is in parallel with what is being argued in this paper. My reason for this claim is twofold: first, he makes it clear that curiosity should be considered within the scope of ethics that focuses on self-perfection, rather than on the welfare of others. He regards curiosity as belonging to the "character traits that enhance or impede our ability to flourish as human beings, even apart from their social benefits"¹¹⁵. Through such categorizations, he implicitly locates curiosity under the domain of ethics rather than morality. Secondly, he argues that "being curious is something analogous to an imperfect duty"¹¹⁶. It is noteworthy that he chooses to characterize curiosity as an imperfect duty rather than a perfect duty. In Kant's ethics, perfect duties are the duties that could be enforced by external legislation while imperfect duties could not; imperfect duties are above moral rules and obligations. In Kant's words, "Imperfect duties are, accordingly, only duties of virtue. Fulfillment of them is merit ... but failure to fulfill them is not in itself culpability ... but rather mere deficiency in moral worth"¹¹⁷. However, we have imperfect duties towards ourselves such as cultivating our talents or towards others such as being benevolent; in Kantian ethics, one has to fulfill these imperfect duties to lead a moral life but they are called imperfect because there is no strict guideline to perform them. I could choose one talent rather than another one throughout my lifetime or I could choose to be benevolent to people only on the weekends when I have time. In the light of this definition of imperfect duty, it follows that curiosity is more akin to what I prefer to call an 'ethical' virtue whose

¹¹⁵ Baumgarten, p.1.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p.9.

¹¹⁷ Kant, p.161.

foremost role is to help increase the worth of our lives without necessarily being accompanied by some sort of culpability.

With reference to all these, it is apparent that my objectives in placing curiosity under the domain of ethical virtues are very much in parallel with what Baumgarten puts forth as the reasons why curiosity should be seen as a moral virtue. On the other hand, my argument to some extent diverges from his, on the grounds that rather than taking on the stronger claim that curiosity is necessary for a well-lived life, Baumgarten prefers to limit himself to a “more moderate claim”¹¹⁸ that it is “conducive to a well-lived life”¹¹⁹. My claim that curiosity is essential for a good life is quite strong compared to his; yet, this does not point to a discrepancy about the value we give to curiosity; it perhaps depends on what we choose to include as necessary virtues for a good life. I acknowledge that mine is a bold claim; yet, curiosity is so central to being human that I cannot help but add curiosity to the list of necessary virtues for a flourishing human life.

How Could Curiosity Be an Ethical Virtue?

Since ethics should be an enterprise that also encompasses the realization of human ideal rather than merely being concerned about drawing the boundary of moral principles, I think the investigation of the ethical realm is significant, and hopefully, mine will be a small contribution to this strand of ethics. Related with such a perspective, curiosity will be examined as an ethical virtue, that is, a human excellence that plays pivotal role in attaining the fulfillment of human potential. To

¹¹⁸ This has been based on my personal correspondence with Dr. Baumgarten.

¹¹⁹ Baumgarten, p.3.

shed light on this claim, it will be necessary to clarify the concept of virtue; so, I will trace back to the Aristotelian origins of the concept and try to make sense of virtues in a retrospective manner. One could as well give a more convincing explanation for the claim that curiosity is a virtue, and one by no means has to commit oneself to the Aristotelian teleological view of the world to accept the following claims made regarding the relationship between virtues and curiosity. Nevertheless, I prefer to limit my discussion to the Aristotelian view as I believe it gives a good account of virtues in general and his perspective supports my thesis.

To make my claim comprehensible, I will briefly mention the Aristotelian terms of *arête* (virtue), *ergon* (function), *telos* (end) and *eudaimonia* (human flourishing), and I will arrive at the claim that curious person exhibits human *arête* (excellence), fulfills his function well (understanding/making sense) and flourishes as a human being. To state briefly, just as for Aristotle sight is the function of the eye and eye's virtue is a trait that enables the eye to see well, grasping the truth is a function of the intellect; hence, the virtue of the human being would be those traits whereby his intellect is enabled to grasp the truth well¹²⁰. As human beings, to seek knowledge well, in other words, to function well, yet in other words, to exhibit *arête*, we need curiosity. Although it seems to be a hasty conclusion now, the argument will be gradually built upon the definition of *arête*.

In simple terms, something's *arête* (virtue) is that which enables it to perform its specific function well. Accordingly, while claiming that curiosity is a virtue, I suppose that curiosity enables human beings to perform its specific function well, which will be claimed to be "understanding" (understanding is taken as the *specific*

¹²⁰ Zagzebski, L.T., *Virtues of the Mind: An inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge*. Cambridge, 1996, p. 9.

human function among many others because only human beings are able to understand and make sense). Consequently, I will try to reach at the conclusion that curiosity is the *arête* of human beings and a good life is impossible without this virtue. To flourish as human beings, and to accomplish the human ideal, curiosity will be proposed as a necessary feature of any well-lived life.

The two criteria to be deemed virtuous for a character trait was that (a) it should be a cultivated character trait rather than a natural talent or natural capacity and (b) it should play a significant role in human flourishing. Certainly, curiosity is a disposition in rational human beings that needs to be cultivated properly in order to attain human flourishing. Aristotle also points out to the indispensability of the need for cultivation when referring to virtues. He believes that virtues are in a manner “expressions of our will” and he continues “at any rate, there is an element of will in their formation”¹²¹. He also warns the reader for not confusing feelings or natural capacities as virtues as we would not be praised or blamed for them. Later, he mentions the *natural virtues* that come by nature versus the *true virtues* that are cultivated by the agent.¹²² Still further, he stresses the “voluntariness of dispositions” and argues that “their beginning is somewhere we can control, but as they develop step by step the stages of their development elude our observation –it is like the progress of a disease. They are however voluntary in the sense that it was originally in our power to exercise them for good or for evil”¹²³.

At this point one might wonder what he means by exercising them for good; and luckily he does not leave us in suspense. He believes that one performs his

¹²¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. by J. A. K. Thomson, in *The Ethics of Aristotle*, (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1955). Ch. V.

¹²² Ibid., Ch. XIII, p.190.

¹²³ Ibid., p.93.

function well when he avoids the extremes and chooses the mean in actions and feelings. He also makes it clear that the mean should not be understood in a mathematical sense; rather it is relative to persons and circumstances. He summarizes the mean as being at the right time, on the right occasion, towards the right people, for the right motive, and in the right way.¹²⁴

Aristotelian Perspective: *Arête*, *Ergon*, *Telos*, *Eudaimonia*

In this section of the thesis, in order to justify why I believe curiosity should be considered as an ethical virtue, I will elaborate on the concept of virtue, human function and purpose, and a good, flourishing human life. I will try to expand upon the common usage of the term through exploring the origins of these notions that have been inspirational for me in securing the place of curiosity among the ethical virtues. For this purpose, the terms “*arête*”, “*ergon*”, “*telos*”, and “*eudaimonia*” will be examined for a better understanding of their relationship with the state of curiosity. However, this will merely be a humble attempt to give a brief survey of the Aristotelian terms and I will not be able to provide detailed descriptions of them. I will suffice by stressing the centrality of these notions for the depiction of a good life and attempt to support my claim about curiosity.

Aristotle’s short definition of virtue (*arête*) could be stated as follows: a disposition that enables the good man perform his function (*ergon*) well. Although *arête* had been used among ancient Greek thinkers before Aristotle, the term has gained its peculiar meaning by the specifications put forward by him. In ancient Greek, the term was used to indicate that something is a good instance of its kind and

¹²⁴ This aspect of curiosity will be explored in more detail in the last chapter which will be centered around the question “Is curiosity always good?”

it was by no means confined to morality.¹²⁵ In short, whenever something performed its function well, it was said to exhibit *arête*. Alexander Nehamas suggests that we might try to understand *arête* as the quality that makes something outstanding in its group, as the feature that accounts for its justified notability.¹²⁶ Quite straightforwardly, Aristotle defines *arête* as the state in which a being realizes his *ergon* in an excellent manner. Hence, while the *arête* of the eye is to see well, the *arête* of a horse is to run well and the *arête* of a human being is to perform his *ergon* well or in other words, to realize its Good (*agathon*).

Then, what is this “*ergon*” and what is its relation to human good and *telos*? Simply put, something’s *ergon* indicates not only the function of a being, but also the characteristic activity (to *idion*) of a being. The human *telos* is reached by realizing this characteristic function of man. Aristotle thinks that the human good and *telos* resides in the human *ergon*: “For just as for a flute-player, a sculptor, or any artist, and in general, for all things that have a function or activity, the good and the “well” is thought to reside in the function, so would it seem to be for man, if he has a function”.¹²⁷ The good for any type of thing consists in the proper fulfillment of that thing’s *ergon*. Accordingly, the human *ergon* and *agathon* comprise the *telos* of a human. For Aristotle, the *telos* of a being determines its nature and form (*eidos*). For instance, the *ergon* of the eye is to see well and besides being its *ergon*, it also makes

¹²⁵ It is known that the Greek word is used by Homer while speaking of horses, by Herodotus to praise the *arête* of Indian cotton, and by Thucydides to speak of the *arête* of fertile soil.

¹²⁶ Alexander Nehamas, *Virtues of Authenticity: Essays on Plato and Socrates*, (New Jersey: Princeton, 1999), p.319.

¹²⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean*, 1097b25.

up its telos and agathon.¹²⁸ In other words, telos is the realization of human potential in an excellent manner, and Aristotle has a name for such a state: eudaimonia.

As stated before, the way to discover the ergon of a being lies in the depiction of that being's eidos (form). Kathleen Wilkes states that seeing is the eidos of the eye and also its ergon; cutting is the eidos of an axe and also its ergon.¹²⁹ She, then, tries to give an account of why Aristotle focuses on the rational activity of man rather than his other capacities that are possible candidates of being his ergon. We can define man in many ways; such as a moving, growing, sensing animal, but none of them gives the characteristic peculiar to human beings. What is the human ergon then? Could it be the life of nutrition and growth? Aristotle asks what the *ergon* of a human being is, and he excludes the functions that humans share with other beings like plants and animals and looks for a function that is peculiar to man. Here, it will be useful to appeal to Kraut's distinction of *koinon* and *idion*. Whereas *koinon* are the properties something has in common with other things, *idion* refers to the properties that differentiate that thing from others. Kraut argues that Aristotle draws attention to the *idion* of beings while talking about ergon. Eating, drinking, growing, sensing are the common *koinon* properties that human beings share with plants and animals. None of these properties, according to Kraut, expresses the *idion* of human being. The *idion* of human being should distinguish it from other things; hence, it should be related with its rationality. In the end, he settles on the view that human ergon consists in activity of the rational part of the soul in accordance with virtue.¹³⁰ Since human beings are the only species that has not only lower capacities they share with

¹²⁸ G.R. Lear, *Happy Lives and the Highest Good: An Essay on Aristotle's Nichomachean Ethics*, (Princeton University Press, 2004), p.22

¹²⁹ Kathleen V. Wilkes, "The Good Man and the Good for Man in Aristotle's Ethics". *Mind* 87 (1978):553- 571, p.557.

¹³⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean*, 1097b22-1098a20.

other animals but a rational soul as well, to be a good example of its kind, one needs to exhibit the properties that set humanity off from other species, and that is our capacity to guide ourselves by using reason. If we use reason well, we live well as human beings; or, to be more precise, using reason well over the course of a full life is what eudaimonia consists in.

After this brief introduction, I want to make my claim regarding the place of curiosity in a well-lived life. Since another possible translation for *arête* is “the act of living up to one’s full potential”, in that sense, the virtue of a human being has quite high standards. Whereas a horse is virtuous when it is a good runner and a well-behaved animal, a human being is responsible for flourishing many faculties since he has immense potential that waits blossoming. Human virtue or excellence definitely depends on the fact whether one is close to living a life up to one’s full potential. Translated as such, *arête* is necessary for the realization of eudaimonia, which could be defined as “the state of living up to one’s full potential”. Doubting, questioning, and employing one’s rational part is definitely among the *arête* of human beings and it is impossible to be able to live up to human potential without such characteristics.

A thing performs its function well by means of its own virtue. In other words, something’s virtue or excellence is that which enables it to perform its specific function well. Given as such, human being’s ultimate excellence could be thought as a desire to understand; since without this excellence we cannot start any genuine theoretical inquiry and would lack the desire to make sense of things. Theoretical knowledge finds its meaning through this desire we have. Otherwise, there would be no one who could question *being*, appreciate *being* and even be aware of *being*. Entities without curiosity would respond to knowledge not as human beings do, but perhaps as animals do.

Given that a human life is severely incomplete without curiosity and questioning and understanding are necessary for a good life, it could be claimed that curiosity is one of the most essential functions (ergon) of human beings. To define humanity we certainly refer to its having knowledge and understanding of things, hence, it is impossible to give the Form (eidos) of human beings without these characteristics that are peculiar to man. Since the eidos of a thing makes up its telos, then, understanding becomes the human telos.

With reference to the abovementioned ideas on what a good life consists in, I think it is crucial to add curiosity among the virtues in order to live up to human potential. In the preceding sections, we have seen that understanding or even knowledge is not possible without curiosity, and that is quite sufficient to argue that we need curiosity in order to lead a good life, since understanding is vital to make our lives worthy. Actually, curiosity is an essential part of a good life rather than an instrumental good that leads to a good life. This is parallel to what Gerard Hughes claims about the notion of eudaimonia: “eudaimonia is not the product of the actions of a good person. Fulfillment in life is not something over and above someone’s actions which those actions produce”¹³¹. Here, he points out to the fact that eudaimonia is not what good actions produce and the point of the good life is just the living of it.

Another aspect to which Aristotle draws attention has to do with the fact that eudaimonia is not a gift from Gods or a natural capacity, but it is actively realized by the performance of human ergon. Related with this, Aristotle gives such an example: in the Olympic Games, it is not the ones who have the capacity to win the competition that are crowned but those who compete and win the competition.

¹³¹ Gerard J. Hughes, *Aristotle on Ethics*, (London: Routledge, 2001), p.89.

Likewise, a virtuous life is nothing but a life in which human ergon is exercised through *arête*. Given that curiosity is so central to a good human life, we need to explore how it is that people become curious. Aristotle thinks that just like one becomes a shoemaker by making shoes and one becomes a sculptor by making sculptures first, any other human *arête* is also cultivated through practice. Being virtuous is possible by actualizing the potentialities within ourselves. We are not virtuous because we are born curious but because we cultivate it through instantiating curiosity in our lives.

Along these lines, it would be quite understandable to place curiosity at the center of humanly virtues because without curiosity it is not possible “to be good at humanness”. However, one might object to this claim by saying that one could lead a perfectly meaningful and moral life without having any curiosity whatsoever. As a counterargument, I would claim that it is perfectly normal and acceptable that people have curiosity directed at different topics and they could target deep as well as trivial knowledge; however, a life devoid of curiosity whatsoever would demote human life to the level animals, or, less assertively, it would be a life that is quite different from what we mean by human life even if it possessed some rational capacities. It could perhaps allow for pragmatic knowledge –knowledge of survival- similar to the corpus of knowledge animals have, but it would not be *knowing* in a humanly way. For a fulfilling life, and in order to be able to realize the human potential, curiosity is necessary. It is possible that there could be “good” lives that lack curiosity, just as it could be a “good” use to utilize a microwave oven as a breadbox in the kitchen. This would not be a very bad use but if it is a properly working microwave oven and I just use it for bread storage, then I am wasting it! The microwave oven cannot fulfill its own function and practically it becomes *less than* a microwave oven. Likewise, if the

human end (telos) is fulfilling the human form, and human being is a rational (questioning, doubting, understanding) being by definition; then, curiosity would be an essential part of any good human life and a life without curiosity would be *less than* a human life.

In fact, I want to go one step further and claim that curiosity is the *idion* of human beings, it is the characteristic that distinguishes human beings from others. It is claimed by Aristotle that the highest human good is *theoria*¹³²; yet, in the Aristotelian cosmos, human beings share this activity of the soul with God. Actually human *theoria* is an imitation of the perfect *theoria* that only God is capable of. Hence, *theoria* is not a solely human telos, it is shared both by humans and the God. On the other hand, curiosity is not a virtue that God possesses and it is perhaps the only virtue that is peculiar to human beings. Only through this virtue, human beings as a species, does become questioning, doubting, and understanding beings and this characteristic makes up its *idion*.

Eudaimonia and Curiosity: Dominant versus Inclusivist Interpretation

With reference to the abovementioned arguments, it is quite plausible to cite curiosity among the virtues that are essential for the realization of eudaimonia. In this section, eudaimonia will be explained in detail and the two interpretations on how to understand this Aristotelian term will be scrutinized so as to find out whether curiosity would be appropriately listed as one of the components of it.

Aristotle links human eudaimonia to the performance of human *arête* in life. Even though translated into English as ‘happiness’, the meaning of eudaimonia

¹³² This notion will be handled in more detail in the next section while outlining the intellectualist reading of eudaimonia in Aristotle.

cannot be wholly captured by this term. Hard as it might be to come up with a single term, ‘human flourishing’, ‘blessedness’, or ‘prosperity’ could be more appropriate translations for the term. The latter translations are usually preferred because they convey the meaning of eudaimonia as an objective state unlike the inherent subjectivity of happiness. Also, in contrast to the English word ‘happiness’, it suggests an ongoing process or activity, rather than a particular state of mind or emotion. Eudaimonia is seen as the highest human good to be achieved and rather than being a subjective feeling, it refers to an objectively desirable life. Unfortunate events may not alter one’s experience of happiness but it affects one’s eudaimonia. To make an analogy, eudaimonia is like the health of a person. In his article, Creed writes “it is perfectly logical for a Greek to assert that he is eudaimon, and for an outside observer to say ‘Oh, no! You are not.’ Just, too, as in English it makes sense for a doctor after examining me to contradict and refute my claim that I am healthy.”¹³³ He also gives another example to clarify the different connotations of the two words, namely happiness and eudaimonia, and says that if my house is burnt down while I am away, my happiness is affected when I receive the news, but my eudaimonia is affected at the time of the misfortune. Hence, eudaimonia is a term which describes a man’s objective state or condition, not his feelings. It is a supraperspectival idea about one’s well-being; it depends on all the things that would make us happy if we knew of their existence and if we knew how they affect –or will affect- our happiness, but it is independent of one’s knowledge of them. It overrides our perceptions; it is more about the reality of our well-being. Aristotle’s one of the most significant thesis is that *arête* has an intricate relationship with eudaimonia. If we are seeking for the best life, we should let each part of us to perform their roles as

¹³³ Creed, p. 325.

best as they can and make sure that we perform our ergon as a human being. To put in other words, the route to the most eudaimon life rests on fulfilling human functions well.

In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle presents two different notions of eudaimonia, or at least opens up the way for two different interpretations: the inclusivist interpretation says that eudaimonia is a complex of virtues and external goods, and the dominant (or intellectualist) interpretation claims that eudaimonia should be identified exclusively with contemplation. There is still debate over which notion Aristotle endorses, and whether and how these two notions can be reconciled. In this part, I will try to elaborate on the two views and see if curiosity could be considered as a human arête from the standpoint of the two interpretations. My claim will be that that, in a way, curiosity is immune from this debate and both interpretations allow for inclusion of curiosity among the virtues that make up the eudaimonia. Oversimplified as it might seem, we could briefly sketch out the dispute as trying to figure out whether we should understand happiness to consist in one kind of activity, for whose sake we ultimately do everything else (the intellectualist reading) or, whether happiness consists in a package of activities (the inclusivist reading) .

The picture through much of *Nicomachean Ethics* is that happiness consists in a range of goods or activities - a life guided by practical wisdom. This encourages the inclusivist view which is supported by J. L. Ackrill. According to him, Aristotle actually thinks that “eudaimonia must consist in a package of worthwhile activities and things, each of which is desired for its own sake”¹³⁴ and he adds that we value each of them as part of the all-inclusive package. On the other hand, In NE X 7 we

¹³⁴ Hughes, p.28.

are told that happiness is to be identified with just one good: it consists in a single rational activity, that of philosophical contemplation. Nagel and Kraut are proponents of such a view and they claim that eudaimonia consists in the highest activity humans can engage in, which is *theoria*. This unsettled dispute seems to linger on since Aristotle cannot be asked for a clarification of his original thesis. Yet, my claim that curiosity is a human *arête* remains unchallenged no matter what perspective is the right view Aristotle has actually endorsed.

Curiosity for the Inclusivist Reading

For the inclusivists, eudaimonia consists of a package of good things that includes everything desirable in itself. It is true that one might consider bacon as the best of three breakfast foods to pick from, but the combination of bacon, eggs and tomatoes could be the best breakfast for that person. Also, according to the inclusivist reading, good life is not to be found in some specific part of that life but it is all-pervasive. Gerard Hughes offers an analogy to make this point clear, if you are going to have an anniversary celebration, a nice dress, good meal, good wine, and a good restaurant are all parts of it and all of them make up *the* celebration. There is nothing beyond these little details that we can call the anniversary, and all are part of what is called an anniversary. Similarly, all the intrinsic goods that make up a eudaimon life are intricately tied to eudaimonia. There is nothing over and beyond this package of intrinsic goods. Given this brief description, it is possible to argue that curiosity is one of the intrinsic goods that make up a well-lived life. The inclusivist reading easily accommodates curiosity among the human goods and now we move on to the intellectualist interpretation to see what it will say on curiosity.

Curiosity for the Intellectualist Reading

While inclusivists are open to accept different intrinsic goods into the definition of a eudaimon life, intellectualists (or the dominant reading) claim that Aristotle actually equates flourishing to intellectual activity. For Kraut, Aristotle thinks that “in order to live our lives well, we need more than a list of intrinsic goods: we must determine which one is the most worthwhile, and how much each should be pursued. His way of imposing this kind of order on the diversity of human goals is to arrange our ends in a hierarchy and to place virtuous activity at the top. Happiness is the end for the sake of which all others are desired; it consists solely in activity, and is not a composite of all intrinsic goods”¹³⁵, having said that, Kraut then claims “perfect happiness consists in contemplation alone” and he considers ethical activity as the secondary form of happiness. This is mostly due to the intrinsic value attributed to the objects of theoria; they transcend the intrinsic value of the objects of consideration in the ethical domain. Kraut resembles the intrinsic values to a pyramid and places theoria at the top and gives value to the other activities as long as they reinforce this primary activity. According to the intellectualist view, human ergon is to engage in theoria, which is defined as the “active consideration of the ultimate explanation of everything that there is, seeing how it all fits together, and ultimately grasping why the cosmos is the way it is”¹³⁶ (Hughes p.46). As it is evident from the definition of theoria, curiosity and theoria have an intricate relationship. In fact, curiosity is the ground for the possibility of theoria, the highest human capacity, or telos. Therefore, it is evident that the proponents of an intellectualist reading of Aristotle would readily support my claim that curiosity is a human *arête*.

¹³⁵ Richard Kraut, *Aristotle on the Human Good*, (Princeton University Press, 1989), p.9.

¹³⁶ Aristotle says that theoria is not the seeking of such an understanding, but the active consideration of the understanding that one has achieved (*NE* 1177a27).

In fact, curiosity is the necessary characteristic human beings should possess from an intellectualist reading. It is because even though some primitive kinds of pragmatic and technical knowledge may be acquired without the sense of curiosity, theoria is not possible for human beings without curiosity. Actually, the demarcating point of humans and gods could be that the latter engages in theoria without curiosity while the former can only reach the state of theoria through curiosity. Evident from this fact, from an Aristotelian perspective, in order to *be human*, that is, in order to actualize the human form and fulfill the human ergon, and in order to engage in theoria, curiosity is needed. Since theoria is seen as the only real function of man for the intellectualist view, it is apparent that curiosity is a human *arête* and essential for eudaimonia according to this interpretation.

CHAPTER VI: IS CURIOSITY ALWAYS GOOD?

Dark Side of Curiosity: Idle, Morbid, and Evil Curiosity

So far, it has been ardently claimed that curiosity is an essential part of a well-lived life and it is a virtue in both the epistemic and ethical sense. However, one cannot help but wonder whether or not curiosity could also be bad or even vicious. Is not there a dark side to curiosity? This problem is also addressed by Baumgarten and in his article, besides the insightful argument that postulate curiosity as a moral virtue since it helps one to live well and flourish as a human being, he also claims that curiosity could fail to be a virtue if it is experienced at inappropriate times or in inappropriate ways¹³⁷. He claims that just as there are times when we have a duty to be curious, there may also be occasions when we have a duty not to be curious, in other words, curiosity becomes a vice when it is directed at inappropriate objects at inappropriate times. He also makes it explicit that he believes we have some control over the curiosity we experience, and we should abstain from what he calls “morbid” or “idle” curiosity. He explains morbid curiosity as the curiosity that is debasing, such as the investigation of bodies after an accident or curiosity about someone else’s private life. And for idle curiosity, he has in mind unusual and trivial curiosities such as a person’s being curious about the exact number of cement blocks on a sidewalk. What he calls morbid or idle curiosity will be referred as ‘deviant’ curiosity henceforth. Concisely, deviant curiosity will be used to refer to the type of curiosity that deviates from norms about what kind of knowledge is acceptable to pursue. Besides idle and morbid curiosity that could be classified as deviant types, at the most extreme side of the spectrum there is evil curiosity that could be exemplified by someone, say, who desires to know how it would feel like to rape someone or who is

¹³⁷ Baumgarten, p.11.

curious to see how it would be like to torture someone. What would our reaction be if someone told us that he had such curiosities? Without doubt, we would not think they are being virtuous. How, then, can this be explained?

Curiosity Is No Virtue without Phronesis and Good Will

In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle defines phronesis (commonly translated as practical wisdom) as the “knowledge of how to secure the ends of human life” and he adds that the mark of a man of practical wisdom is “to deliberate well about what is good and expedient for himself, not in some particular respect, e.g. about what sorts of thing conduce to health or to strength, but about what sorts of thing conduce to the good life in general”.¹³⁸ Aristotle makes it clear that phronesis should accompany the virtues, otherwise, they cease to be virtues. In fact, Aristotle remarks early in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that ethics is not a precise science and that we ought not to expect more precision out of a science than it is capable of giving.¹³⁹ Although virtue is defined as a mean between extremes, this determination is insufficient as a guide to virtuous action because the mean is relative to the person and to the exact situation in which the person finds him/herself.

The need for phronesis is also acknowledged by virtue epistemologists, just as phronesis is essential for ethical virtues, it is also necessary to have phronesis for intellectual virtues; otherwise, in Zagzebski’s words, it is impossible to “make sense of both morally right action and justified belief in virtue theory”. For, by definition, ethical virtues are what the person of practical wisdom would see to be right. Accordingly, there is an intricate relationship between what we call ethical virtues

¹³⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean*, 1140a 30-32.

¹³⁹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean*, I.3.1094b11-14.

and practical wisdom. Without this ability, we would be lacking any possibility of a eudaimon life as the knowledge of virtues is not enough in making one flourish. We also need phronesis to be able to live a eudaimon life because as human beings we find ourselves in circumstances that calls for rational and “phronimos” decisions. Along the same line, Wilkes aptly remarks: “we cannot forgo phronesis because we are no gods”.¹⁴⁰

Thinking that curiosity is not a virtue just because it could be directed at inappropriate objects would not be a right way of thinking, because the same problem also applies to other virtues. Suppose someone is courageous but uses his courage to kill an innocent person or suppose one is very generous that he gives money for drugs to his addicted friend who is in rehab. These are the instances that turn virtues into vices; nevertheless we do not consider these traits like courage or generosity as non-virtuous or question their candidateship for being ethical virtues. Yet, interestingly, when it comes to determining whether or not curiosity is a virtue, the inappropriate cases of being curious draws our attention and presses us to question the virtuousness of a curious person.

As remarked above, phronesis is essential for any virtue to be deemed one. Aristotle actually claims that no one can have the moral virtues without phronesis and anyone with phronesis has the moral virtues: “it is plain, then, after what has been said, that it is not possible without practical wisdom to be really good morally, nor without moral excellence to be practically wise”.¹⁴¹ From this utterance of Aristotle it becomes apparent that virtues are empty without phronesis, and it cannot be claimed that something fails to be a virtue just because it could deviate from the

¹⁴⁰ Wilkes, p.565.

¹⁴¹ Aristotle, *NE*, VI.13.1144b30-1.

phronimos sphere of actions. Having said that, the need for phronesis shows itself as essential for the person who experiences curiosity, and just like in the case of any other virtue, phronesis is required to filter the cases of deviant curiosity, which could bring notoriety to curiosity and make people feel ambivalent towards people experiencing curiosity.

Although this might seem to be contradictory to what has been claimed about the intrinsic value of curiosity, namely that curiosity is an “intrinsic good”, actually there is no discrepancy. When pondered deeply, it is possible to see that intrinsic goods, perhaps except a *good will* as Kant ingeniously remarked, are always conditionally good. I rely on Kant’s insights for this explanation about the conditionality of intrinsic values, a conditionality that plagues even the values such as health, riches, and happiness that are not at all controversial compared to the state of curiosity. Kant says that fortune can be misused, what we thought would induce benefit might actually bring harm, and happiness might be undeserved. It is only a “good will” that is unconditionally good and the goodness of the remaining goods are always contingent. Kant also believes that virtues cannot be virtues if they are not accompanied by a good will. Even virtues such as moderation, self-control, and calm reflection can be extremely evil if not used by a good will, as when “the coolness of a scoundrel not only makes him far more dangerous but also immediately more abominable in our eyes”¹⁴². The good will is the indispensable condition for the value of other kinds of goods. Hence, it is not peculiar to curiosity that it is an intrinsic yet conditional good; and this should not take away anything from its value as a virtue that is necessary for a eudaimon life.

¹⁴² Kant, 4:394.

Another possible explanation regarding the non-viciousness of curiosity is suggested by Inan and it is that there is always a dilemma and a conflict of virtues whenever we find ourselves pressed to choose one over the other. Curiosity is always good but when it is directed at a deviant piece of information, say how it would feel to rape someone, it contradicts with other moral values and this makes the situation unacceptable morally. Yet, this does not have to mean that curiosity has a dark side; it perhaps shows that people have a dark side and they might as well employ their capacity to be curious for evil causes. In such situations, since the moral values should always override other values –such as the value of acquiring a piece of knowledge one is curious about-, it is not a dilemma anymore and one should give up on those kinds of curiosities for the sake of morality.

With reference to all that have been argued so far, it would be reasonable to claim that curiosity is just like any other virtue and without phronesis and good will, it would fail to be a virtue. Also, in most cases, there is a conflict of morality versus a specific curiosity, and in such circumstances morality should prevail.

How Curious is Curious Enough? Aristotle's Doctrine of the Mean

As stated in the above section, phronesis is an essential part of a eudaimon life since it is the tool to be used in determining the proper application of virtues in a good life. Yet, this is not an adequate explanation for action guidance. How generous should I be? To what extent should I stretch my curiosity? How much of my life should I allocate for charity? These are the questions we face in everyday life and it is hard – and perhaps undesirable— for ethics to offer a strict guideline in choosing the right

actions and feelings¹⁴³. Aristotle's approach in the face of this ambiguity in ethics lies in the proposal that came to be known as the doctrine of the mean, which is a method offered towards achieving eudaimonia. According to Aristotle, every ethical virtue is a condition intermediate between two erroneous states, one involving excess, and the other deficiency (1106a26-b28). To give his own example, the courageous person lies between the coward—who escapes from every danger, avoids every risk, and experiences excessive fear—and the rash person,—who is fearless even at the face of severe danger—. The person who lies in the mean, the *courageous* person, on the other hand, judges that some dangers are worth facing and others not, and experiences fear to a degree that is appropriate to his circumstances. Aristotle holds that a similar structure applies to every ethical virtue; yet, he is careful to add that the mean is to be determined in a way that takes into account the particular circumstances of the individual (1106a36-b7). In fact, he proposes a list of variables that should be taken into account when deciding on any moral action; a moral act should be performed at the right time, on the right occasion, towards the right people, for the right motive, in the right way, and to the right extent.¹⁴⁴

Even though he makes great effort to lay out the contextual nature of ethical actions and allocates some of his ethical writings to remind the reader that ethics by nature is not a precise science and that we ought not to expect more precision out of a science than it is capable of giving¹⁴⁵; he is often criticized for not providing a helpful guide for particular actions. For the reasons peculiar to the nature of ethics, he suffices to point out to the fact that virtue is a mean between extremes, yet, he by

¹⁴³ For Aristotle, due to the nature of ethics, there could be no rigid guideline for human action, whereas some sciences allow for precision, some do not; and ethics is one of the latter kind.

¹⁴⁴ Aristotle, *NE*, II.9.1109a26

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, I. 3. 1094b11-14

no means overlooks the contextual variables and contingencies while making this point. For Aristotle, determining what is an excess and what is a deficiency in a given situation for the location of the mean is “as a man of phronesis would determine it”¹⁴⁶. Now that we have left the determination of the mean to the man of phronesis, it looks like the argument has become circular and of no practical use. Nonetheless, as it has been remarked above, Aristotle is aware of the fact that it is not possible to give a straightforward and simple way to sketch out the list of right ethical behavior and even though people would be willing to hear such a remedy for ethical action, for Aristotle, that would not be possible in the domain of ethics. The reality hurts, but in reality it is not possible to hit the mean just by following rules or following a guide for right action. Aristotle, in fact, acknowledges that hitting the target in ethics is not an easy task, “wherefore goodness is both rare and laudable and noble” he says. It is easy to find the arithmetic mean of, say, 2 and 6, and it does not change according to what I am counting or on what occasion I am counting. Nevertheless, when it comes to deciding the mean in an ethical circumstance, it is relative; it has to be done at the right time, on the right occasion, towards the right people, for the right motive, in the right way, and to the right extent. The only common advice Aristotle offers is that the mean for a man is farther away from what he is naturally inclined; “for some of us tend to one thing, some to another; and this will be recognizable from the pleasure and the pain we feel. We must drag ourselves away to the contrary extreme; for we shall get into the intermediate state by drawing well away from error, as people do in straightening sticks that are bent”¹⁴⁷. One inference from this common advice is that if we are prone to being excessively

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., II.6.1107a1-2

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., II.9.1109a30

curious about inappropriate things, we should try to balance this out by working on this excess and try to hit the mean point.

With reference to all that has been said, since virtue is a mean, and since virtue is the gateway to a eudaimon life, determining the mean through *phronesis* seems to be indispensable to lead a good life. Yet, the virtues under discussion could also be epistemic virtues and just like good judgment is required in all areas of human activity, it is also required in the cognitive domain. In Zagzebski's words, "it takes *phronesis* to know *how persevering* one should be to be persevering, *how careful* one should be to be careful, *how self-sufficient* one should be to be autonomous, and so on"¹⁴⁸. When it comes to curiosity, it takes *phronesis* to know *how curious* one should be to be *curious* in a *phronimos* way. If we locate the extreme as spying into the private lives of people or as collecting any information¹⁴⁹ regardless of its value, and if we locate the deficiency as lacking any desire to understand, the *phronimos* person would lie in the mean relative to the circumstances. Only then would he be careful to be curious at the right time, on the right occasion, towards the right object, for the right motive, in the right way, and to the right extent. Persons with *phronesis* learn how much and when to become curious; and as Zagzebski suggests "the difficult part is to train the inclinations themselves to reliably produce the desired end"¹⁵⁰. Yet, in such an endeavor, and in fact in the case of every virtue, we need the guidance of *phronesis*, which is thought

¹⁴⁸ Zagzebski, p.221.

¹⁴⁹ Melanie Klein, a British psychoanalyst, coined the term "epistemophilia" to refer to such cases, and she considers this as a pathology.

¹⁵⁰ Zagzebski, p.226.

by Zagzebski as “a higher order virtue that governs the entire range of moral and intellectual virtues”¹⁵¹.

To recapitulate, virtue is a disposition that enables the good man to perform his ergon well, and he performs it well when he avoids the extremes and chooses the mean in actions and feelings. Given that ‘understanding’ is established as a key human ergon, in order to perform this ergon well, one needs ‘curiosity’ governed by phronesis. That seems to be the reason why it is suggested by Zagzebski that phronesis should be as important for epistemologists as for the moral philosophers.¹⁵² Related with this, Pierce also draws attention to the connection between ethics and reasoning and claims that: “we can perceive that good reasoning and good morals are closely allied; and I suspect that with the further development of ethics this relation will be found to be even more intimate than we can, as yet, prove it to be.”¹⁵³ As it is clear from the quotation, intellectual and ethical virtues are intertwined and both in moral and intellectual life, phronesis is necessary to lead a eudaimon life.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p.229.

¹⁵² Zagzebski writes about this problem in more detail in the section “The Importance of Phronesis” in *Virtues of the Mind*, starting from p. 211.

¹⁵³ C.S. Pierce, “Minute Logic” in the preface of *Intellectual Virtues* (2007), by Roberts and Wood.

CHAPTER VII: CONCLUSION

What I have set out to do and where I am standing right now make me think that I have hit upon a valuable but hidden treasure that awaits more exploration. This treasure I have found would not be possible if Dr. İnanc have not introduced me to the world of curiosity and Dr. Baumgarten did not help me draw my attention to the ethical dimension of the subject. I had the sense that curiosity would turn out to be an almost necessary component of a good life but I have come to see that it is actually one of the essential characteristics that make us human. Neither intellectual questioning nor non-pragmatic knowledge would be possible without this inherent passion that we call curiosity. In this thesis, I have attempted to give a more refined definition of curiosity and claimed that not every desiring to know would necessarily involve curiosity and the curiosity that I am talking about could only be satisfied by understanding. I have also delved into the current virtue epistemology discussions on the intellectual virtues and proposed that curiosity should find its place among the primary intellectual virtues.

Trivial as it might seem, I believe this new approach to curiosity would be important in elevating its status as one of the virtues that should be cultivated throughout our lives. One strand of this could stretch to the area of philosophy of education¹⁵⁴ and another could go into the area of virtue ethics in an attempt to broaden the scope of morality to include intellectual and ethical virtues that will make a flourishing life possible. This thesis should be considered merely as an

¹⁵⁴There have been a few studies about the importance of curiosity in philosophy of education . See especially Opdal, P. M., Curiosity, Wonder and Education seen as Perspective Development. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, (2001): 331-344. Also see Schmitt, F. F., & Lahroodi, R. The Epistemic Value of Curiosity. *Educational Theory*, 58(2) (2008): 125-149.

introduction to the study of curiosity in the ethical realm and I hope this has been a small yet valuable contribution to the human endeavor of understanding. I must confess that it has been a very rewarding experience for me to work on this thesis and I will consider this study has fulfilled its purpose if it adds a little bit more understanding into the lives of others.

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