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Social Inquisitiveness: A Normative Account of the Social Epistemic Virtue of Good Questioning

Marcelo Cabral 

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and University of Campinas, Campinas – SP, 13083-970, Brazil
Email: marcelobc87@gmail.com

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Abstract

In this paper I offer a characterization of the intellectual virtue of social inquisitiveness, paying attention to its difference from the individual virtue of inquisitiveness. I defend that there is a significant distinction between individual and social epistemic virtues: individual epistemic virtues are attributed to individuals and assessed by the quality of their cognitive powers, while social epistemic virtues are attributed to epistemic communities and are assessed by the quality of the epistemic relations within the communities. I begin presenting Lani Watson's characterization of the (individual) practice of questioning and its related intellectual virtue, inquisitiveness. While she does not employ normative language, I show that her description can be constructed through four norms. Then, based on an account of epistemic communities, I defend that, while epistemic virtues attributable to individuals have norms regulating cognitive powers, epistemic virtues attributable to epistemic communities have norms regulating social epistemic interactions and shared epistemic responsibility. I then present a robust characterization of the epistemic virtue of social inquisitiveness through its social epistemic norms: DISTRIBUTION, ACCESSIBILITY, SOCIAL SINCERITY, SOCIAL CONTEXT, and FREQUENCY. I respond to two possible objections to my account and conclude by offering suggestions to broaden the scope of the epistemology of questioning.

Keywords: Inquiry; intellectual virtue and vice; social epistemology; social virtue epistemology; epistemic community; questions

1. Introduction

Lani Watson has championed the view that epistemologists must pay more attention to the practice of questioning and its associated intellectual virtue, inquisitiveness. She says, “I have argued that questioning is an epistemic practice and, moreover, one of significant social and societal value. If this is right, then questioning should be a topic of interest within contemporary epistemology” (Watson 2022: 436). Taking heed of this call, I investigate the virtue of social inquisitiveness.

Particularly, in this paper I claim that there is a significant distinction between individual and social epistemic virtues: individual epistemic virtues are attributed to

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individuals and determined by the quality of their cognitive powers, while social epistemic virtues are attributed to epistemic communities and determined by the quality of the social epistemic relations within the communities. This distinction implies that, while Watson discusses the *social* practice of questioning and its related *social* virtue, her account seems to focus on an individual practice and an individual virtue – that nonetheless hold important social reverberations. Building upon this claim, in this paper I offer a characterization of the epistemic virtue of social inquisitiveness, highlighting some of its key norms and contrasting it to its individual counterpart. As I will make clear, my approach involves analyzing virtues through the standards or norms that constitute them.

I will proceed as follows. First, I will present Watson's characterization of the (individual) practice of questioning and its corresponding intellectual virtue, inquisitiveness. Initially, she seems to present both the practice and the virtue in terms of individual attributions. Recently, however, she has championed the view that questioning is a social epistemic practice (Watson 2022); I will reconstruct her argument and defend that her employment of the term 'social' can be further developed, having in view the possibility of collective attributions, as her account does not explain what would be the social virtue of inquisitiveness. I will then argue that there is in fact a possible robust notion of social inquisitiveness that is substantially different from individual inquisitiveness, and this distinction can be elucidated through a normative analysis. I will present two possible objections to my account and conclude by highlighting some additional issues that warrant attention regarding social questioning and inquisitiveness.

Before proceeding, it is pertinent to provide a brief explanation of the normative approach employed in this paper. Virtues of any nature are excellences, certain qualities that make their possessor excellent in a certain practice, activity, or broad area of human affairs (cf. MacIntyre 1981; Wood 2018). Epistemic virtues are no exception, and even virtue epistemologists from different branches would agree that epistemic virtues allow their possessors to perform epistemic practices in an excellent manner (Sosa 2007; e.g. Zagzebski 1996).¹ Thus, an epistemic virtue can be aptly described by the standards or norms that must be satisfied for the performance of the virtuous practitioner to be considered excellent.² A similar method of analysis is employed by Boulton *et al.* (2020), who propose the thesis of Normative Charge of Virtues (NCV), according to which "One's actions and states T-ought (morally, epistemically, etc. ought) to manifest T-virtuous (morally, epistemically, etc. virtuous) character traits." They comment that "there is a

¹For instance, to say that one person possesses open-mindedness means that she is competent in transcending her own cognitive standpoint and fairly evaluating different cognitive standpoints (cf. Baehr 2011). The standards or norms in question in this virtue are thus "transcending one's own cognitive standpoint" and "fairly evaluate different cognitive standpoints". In other words, a person who possesses this virtue is able to satisfy these two standards or norms.

²I'm employing the terms 'norms' and 'standards' interchangeably because, while not exactly the same, they perform a similar function, namely that of delineating the parameters which indicate (or constitute) success in a certain practice. "Success" can be framed in different ways, such as "well done", "excellent", and "good enough". In some areas, norms point out simple or binary options: successful or unsuccessful. A belief, for instance, is true (successful) or false (unsuccessful). In other epistemic fields and contexts, there is a gradation in the level of excellence. Good reading, for instance, is not merely a matter of 'successful or unsuccessful'; you can read well, very well, and in between. In both cases, what is crucial is that the norm (or standard) sets a threshold of success. John Greco also employs concept and norm interchangeably (2019: 280, 2021: 40). For profitable discussions on epistemic normativity, see Henderson and Graham (2020); Oliveira (2022); Goldberg (2020); Greco (2021).

type correspondence between virtues and associated norms”, implying that “virtues of a certain type are associated with oughts of the same type” (2020: 45). While they employ a normative approach to distinguish moral from epistemic virtues, I use it to differentiate between individual and social epistemic virtues.

2. The practice of questioning and the virtue of (individual) inquisitiveness

2.1. Overview

While it is possible to ask questions to oneself – as we often do when wondering, reading, or simply thinking³ – questioning is a communal activity that involves at least two individuals: the questioner and the person who is questioned. In this context, questioning entails a dynamic interaction between the two parties, where the questioner seeks to obtain information or some kind of clarification from the other person.

There are, however, many ways by which a question can fail. It can be ill-formulated; it can be asked at the wrong time; it can be directed at the wrong conceptual target. Imagine a person who, while genuinely curious about something, is unable to formulate clear questions about it. Or consider the case of a student who is, in fact, able to formulate concise and clear questions, but who constantly interrupts a teacher by asking too many questions during the class, disrupting the flow of the professor’s thought, and hindering the transmission of knowledge for the overall community. Also, consider a scenario in which an individual possesses the competence to formulate clear questions but frequently delivers them in an excessively ironic or sarcastic manner, that makes the person being questioned feel defensive and unwilling to give a constructive response. These examples highlight the inherent normative nature of questioning and shed light on what sort of trait its corresponding virtue would be.

2.2. Characterization and epistemic norms

To get a more precise depiction, I will follow Watson’s (2015, 2019) portrayal of the virtue of good questioning, or inquisitiveness. She adopts Linda Zagzebski’s model (1996) which posits that intellectual virtues are constituted by two components: a motivation component and a success component. Regarding motivation, Watson stresses that all intellectual virtues share an underlying meta-motivation, which is the drive to improve one’s epistemic standing⁴ (2019: 156). The inquisitive person is motivated to improve her epistemic standing by sincerely engaging in questioning, where ‘sincerely’ indicates a genuine desire to acquire epistemic goods through questions.⁵

³Even our lonely acts of questioning are regulated by the social practice of questioning. There is strong empirical support pointing that our internal mental activities are sufficiently determined by our external interactions, as those working extended cognition (e.g. Gallagher 2013) and situated knowing (e.g. Greeno 1998) have argued. Also, as MacIntyre has emphasized, practices are social not only in the sense that involve multiples persons, but, more fundamentally, because their ends and norms are developed through time by communities in a way that the goods and standards are systematically extended (MacIntyre 1981). Watson comments, “While ostensibly taking place in private, individuals engaging in a practice such as meditation or prayer are still operating under, and are therefore constrained by, the social context in which the practice originally emerged” (Watson 2022: 426).

⁴By which she means simply “an improvement in epistemic standing can be understood intuitively as an improvement in the breadth, depth or accuracy of an individual’s true beliefs, knowledge, understanding, or information” (Watson 2019: 156).

⁵This motivational component phases out questions that aim at other, non-epistemic ends, such as annoying, showing one off, etc.

The success condition, in turn, pertains to a cognitive ability the possession of which makes one reliable in achieving the proper end of the virtue (cf. Baehr 2007, 2016). Watson states that it is not necessary for the inquisitive person to always arrive at the right answer to her questions – because, patently, this outcome does not depend solely on her cognitive abilities – but that the questioning itself must be good, as she says, “it must be questioning that is likely to improve epistemic standing, if the correct answers are forthcoming” (Watson 2019: 160). From these two conditions, she presents the following definition, “the virtuously inquisitive person is *characteristically motivated and able to engage sincerely in good questioning*” (2019: 161 emphasis on the original). These conditions thereby establish the normative demands on the practice of questioning. As she says, “this draws attention to the normative dimension of the skill” (Watson 2020: 440).

From this broad characterization, we can distill two main epistemic norms or standards:

SINCERITY: to be inquisitive, a person must sincerely aim at improving her epistemic standing through her questions.

SKILL: to be inquisitive, a person must ask questions skillfully articulated, i.e., if the person addressed by the questioner is well positioned to answer, the questioner will get the right answer to her question.

The SKILL norm is fairly vague. In another passage, however, Watson provides a more fine-grained analysis. She seems to break down SKILL into three components, which I identify as norms:

TARGET: good questioning requires “targeting worthwhile information”, i.e., it must be able to specify clearly what the questioner wants to know.

CONTEXT: good questioning requires “identifying the appropriate context for one’s questions; one must ask at the right time and place, and identifying the right source of information.”⁶

CLARITY: good questioning requires “the ability to formulate questions well; one’s questions must be well articulated and appropriately communicated” (Watson 2019: 165).

The virtue of good questioning – or inquisitiveness – can, thus, be characterized by these four epistemic norms,⁷ namely SINCERITY, TARGET, CONTEXT, and

⁶Elsewhere Watson says, “A questioner acts competently when she makes appropriate judgements about *who, when, where, and how* to elicit information: the good questioner asks the right questions, of the right information source(s), at the right time and place” (Watson 2018: 358).

⁷An objection could be raised contending that SINCERITY is a moral rather than an epistemic norm, since it is entirely motivational and thus related to the will, not to the cognition. Following Roberts and Wood (2007) and Baehr (2014), I reply that some intellectual virtues are reasonably characterized without reference to a motivation while other intellectual virtues are entirely motivational. Think of love of knowledge, a paradigmatic intellectual virtue, which seems to be an appropriate motivation toward the intellectual goods. Similarly, SINCERITY is a kind of subset of love of knowledge, since it is the motivation to engage in good questioning for the sake of the intellectual goods. As T. Ryan Byerly says, “what makes the character traits that are our focus intellectual is that the motives or values they reveal are intellectual motives or values” (Byerly 2022: 454); relatedly, what makes a norm like SINCERITY an epistemic rather than a moral norm is that it sets a normative criterion for epistemic goods.

CLARITY, that pinpoint the appropriate standards that must be met for questioning to be virtuous, i.e., competently or excellently performed and thus plausibly able to enhance the questioner's epistemic standing. The person who consistently and habitually fulfills these four norms in her questions is virtuously inquisitive.

3. Assessment of Watson's social questioning and social inquisitiveness

Recently, Lani Watson has put forth an account of questioning as a *social* epistemic practice and good questioning (or inquisitiveness) as a *social* epistemic virtue (2022). She offers a rich exploration of the social dimensions that permeate every instance of questioning. To get a grip on this, let us review her approach.

For her, questioning has a pivotal role in epistemic communities, which she defines as "a group of individuals that produces, shares and consumes epistemic goods, such as information, knowledge and understanding" (2022: 427–28). This broad definition allows for virtually any human arrangement to be considered an epistemic community, from families to complex research organizations. The crucial point, for her, is that it is paramount for epistemic agents to find themselves in environments where epistemic goods can be *shared*, as many if not most of our epistemic goods are acquired by transmission from other agents rather than by the exercise of our own individual cognitive powers. Epistemic communities, thus, in order to fulfill their purpose, need to provide sound mechanisms that facilitate the sharing of epistemic goods. A prime mechanism for that, argues Watson, is questioning (2022: 435).

Based on this, Watson states that questioning is a social epistemic practice, a set of social interactions with the purpose of sharing epistemic goods. In a more fine-grained explanation, she defines social epistemic practices as socially established activities that aim at some epistemic end. Drawing from Alasdair MacIntyre (1981), she understands practices to be social when they are developed through time, when they have some meaning attached through social repetition, and when they involve standards of good or excellent performance. Imagine, for instance, the social practice of raising a hand when a student wants to ask a question; "raising a hand" is only intelligible because this activity has through time been associated, by various communities, as a signal of wanting to ask a question. By "aim at some epistemic end" Watson points to the element which differentiates epistemic practices from other kinds of practices, i.e., that they aim at some epistemic good, such as knowledge, justified belief, understanding, or something else. Finally, while it is not explicit in her characterization, practices have a strong normative component, by which the success of the practice in achieving its end may be assessed.⁸

After defending the view that questioning is a social practice Watson proceeds to offer a genealogical discussion of it.⁹ She concludes that the proper goal of questioning

⁸Chris Calvert-Minor puts a similar emphasis on his definition: "Epistemic practices are normative activities that identify what counts as evidence and justification with roughly defined procedures and rules that govern those activities, for which the evidence and justifications are used in the production of knowledge claims" (Calvert-Minor 2011: 355).

⁹Watson appeals to Edward Craig influential *Knowledge and the State of Nature* (1999), in which he offers a genealogical account of knowledge by inquiring into its social primitive function. Similarly, Watson asks, "Imagine a society in which the practice of questioning did not exist, then ask why the practice would emerge in such a society and what purpose it would serve" (2022: 430). The answer she provides is that questioning would be a quasi-essential way to access information we don't possess but others do, i.e., to get access to the knowledge other people within a community have acquired through their own cognitive

is that of eliciting information. She says, “questioning provides an effective and efficient means of accessing the information that we need at the time that we need it, often by reaching out to others who already have the information at their disposal or can more easily acquire it” (2022: 431).

I want to highlight two issues in her account, namely the “social” aspect of the social practice of questioning, and the meaning of this for the correlated virtue of inquisitiveness. Addressing the first issue, as I interpret her, (1) questioning is a key element for epistemic communities to function properly, i.e., to allow a good flux and sharing of epistemic goods, and since communities are social bodies, questioning is therefore a *social* practice; and (2) it necessarily involves multiple people – at least the questioner and the one who is addressed by the questioner, and this social interaction implies that questioning is a *social* practice (Watson 2022: 433).¹⁰

Further, as I’ve sketched in section 2.2, Watson has presented a robust characterization of inquisitiveness, the intellectual virtue of the good questioner, a characterization which I presented through four epistemic norms. A natural conclusion that one could draw from Watson’s argument that questioning is a social epistemic practice is that inquisitiveness is a social epistemic virtue – and indeed, the title of her paper – “The Social Virtue of Questioning” – might be read in this sense. But it is important to get clear on what this means. For Watson, inquisitiveness is a virtue attributed to individual persons, and thus an individual intellectual virtue. The fact that its exercise involves other people beyond its possessor is a characteristic common to several individual intellectual virtues, which also involve, benefit, or require other persons beyond their possessors. Open-mindedness usually involves opening one’s mind to the opinions of *others*. Intellectual humility, at least on two influential views, often involves being able to receive critical feedback from *others* (Roberts and Wood 2003; Whitcomb *et al.* 2017).

In the next sections, however, I want to explore whether inquisitiveness can also be a virtue in an even more robust social sense, namely one that is possessed by epistemic communities rather than individuals. Is there a virtue of *social* inquisitiveness distinct from individual inquisitiveness?

4. Social epistemic virtues: a normative proposal

Virtue epistemology is a burgeoning and diverse field (see, e.g., Baehr 2011; Battaly 2015, 2019; Greco 2010; Pritchard 2012; Sosa 2007, 2015; Zagzebski 1999, 2019). In recent times, there has been a growing interest in the social aspects of intellectual virtues (de Ridder 2022; Kidd 2022; e.g. Lahroodi 2007; McHugh 2017), since the acquisition, exercise, refinement, and development of epistemic virtues inevitably occur within communal contexts and social environments (Tanesini 2022).

powers and can dispose to others (2022: 430). Her argument can be summarized as (1) Craig is right, we need to flag reliable informants (this is as far as Craig goes); (2) but we need more: to be able to access information within our community from the reliable informants; (3) questioning is one widely way to do so.

¹⁰However, Greco defends that some claims trying to establish the social nature of testimony end up being trivial: “at least two people are involved in any testimonial exchange, and so testimonial knowledge is ‘social’ in at least a superficial sense.” He goes on to ask, “But how, if at all, is the social character of testimonial knowledge more substantial than that?” (Greco 2021: 37). From a MacIntyrean perspective, however, virtually any relevant practice that has a history within communities and which is involved in the production of some good counts as social.

One of the issues in this literature is whether there are genuinely social or collective intellectual virtues and, if so, how they can be understood. Following de Ridder, I embrace a pluralist stance on this matter, stating that there are different kinds of social epistemic virtues. For instance, Byerly and Byerly have advanced the distinction between self-regarding and other-regarding virtues, the latter being “social” as they primarily benefit other people, and not the possessor of the virtue. On a different approach, authors such as Fricker (2010) and Lahroodi (2019) have proposed analyses of group or collective intellectual virtues, virtues possessed by groups rather than by individuals. Their approach to group virtues involves finding a model able to explain how groups could possess virtues (or vices) in a non-summative manner, i.e., when their members themselves lack the virtues.

What I am seeking is a model to conceptualize social epistemic virtues in a way that makes the ‘social’ non-trivial. One relevant sense of social epistemic virtues is intellectual virtues attributed to epistemic communities, and not to individuals. Such social virtues must be assessed through distinctive *social* epistemic norms.

Let’s clarify the difference between individual epistemic norms and social epistemic norms first. As stated before, for Watson an epistemic community is “a group of individuals that produces, shares and consumes epistemic goods, such as information, knowledge and understanding” (2022: 427–28). This fairly broad definition does not provide many elements to understand what sort of group an epistemic community is. In the literature various authors have offered their own accounts, connecting the notion of epistemic community to concepts as varied as entitlement (Kusch 2002), epistemic injustice (McHugh 2017), objectivity (Koskinen 2017), epistemic expectations (Goldberg 2021), epistemic norms for acquiring and transmitting knowledge (Greco 2019), practices of accountability (Oliveira 2022), trust (Greco 2021), among others.

Although different in their approaches, two elements stand out. First, epistemic communities perform epistemic practices. One may say, for instance, that Oxford’s cosmic ray department is *researching* such and such topic, or that a group of Brazilian philosophers is *investigating* a certain theme, or that a tutoring class *reads* together a certain paper. As we’ve seen, practices, in turn, possess an intrinsic normative nature, as long as they are governed by certain standards or norms for excellence. Such norms provide a basis for assessing how excellent Oxford’s department research is, how well the group of philosophers investigates, and how well the class reads. The second element is that epistemic communities and their practices include various kinds of epistemic relations. Some practices involve a complex division of cognitive labor (Bird 2014), while simpler tasks are sometimes conducted through joint action (Greco 2021). Either way, epistemic relations are a key feature of any kind of epistemic community, since it is through such relations that practices are performed and intellectual ends pursued.

This brief characterization of epistemic communities makes it clear that social epistemic virtues have social norms that govern social epistemic relations and collective intellectual motivation.¹¹ Such social norms provide a basis for thinking about robustly social intellectual virtues, as distinguished from individual virtues. To develop this

¹¹By delineating the norms that govern the practice of questioning I do not mean that those who pose questions, nor those able to consistently pose good questions, are aware of these norms, or able to answer the question “what are the norms that govern your questions?” Rather, following Henderson and Graham, I think that “Epistemic norms are the normative sensibilities by which folk regulate their epistemic practices. Like the rules of grammar, epistemic rules guide epistemic activity without necessarily being fully articulated in the minds of those who are guided by them” (Henderson and Graham 2020: 426).

approach further, I will explore a characterization of the social virtue of inquisitiveness, as distinct from individual inquisitiveness.

5. Social inquisitiveness and its norms

When can we say that an epistemic community, and not merely its members – or even absent any individual virtues among members – possess the virtue of social inquisitiveness? There are two options. First, one may frame social inquisitiveness as a collective virtue: in this approach, one first must explain how a community would pose questions, and then theorize about how a community could excel at asking questions. While it is not obvious what it would mean for a community to pose a question, one possibility is to think of it in terms of members discussing and consenting to a certain question being asked by one of the community members. Thus, members of an epistemic community would go through a process of cognitive negotiation until, through some mechanism, they find a verdict to state that the community itself has some question.¹²

Another option – the one I will pursue here – is to frame social inquisitiveness as a virtue of an epistemic community in the sense that, while the questions are still posed by individual members of the community, (i) it is the whole community that enhances its epistemic standing through questioning, not only the questioners, (ii) at least in some contexts, members may be able to ask good questions despite an individual lack of inquisitiveness, and (iii) the assessment of the practice of social inquisitiveness is done through the evaluation of social epistemic relations and shared epistemic responsibility, and not through an evaluation of individual cognitive powers.¹³ It is in this sense that I will now characterize social inquisitiveness. First, I will discuss cases in which members of an epistemic community are inquisitive but the community itself is not; second, I will point out cases where members of an epistemic community are not inquisitive but the community itself is inquisitive. Such scenarios will provide the elements necessary to identify the distinct social norms we need to characterize social inquisitiveness.

One caveat. Social relations can be better characterized when we understand the epistemic roles performed within the practice we seek to evaluate. In terms of questioning, we can postulate at least three relevant roles: that of *questioner* – who asks the question – the *questioned* – the one to whom the question is addressed, and the *audience* – other people who are part of the community and who share the same cognitive space and stand to benefit from the question.¹⁴ A paradigmatic example of an epistemic

¹²There are several issues that require further clarification. To whom would a community ask a question? How would the community receive an answer? Which mechanisms would be involved so that a collective question would be reached? These and other issues need to be addressed by those who want to theorize about collective inquisitiveness along these lines.

¹³The notion of shared epistemic responsibility means that the epistemic success of an epistemic community cannot be solely attributed to the individual questioners, but to the whole community, involving the distinct cognitive roles displayed in the practice. Thus, when questioning takes place in a context where there are more people involved than the questioner and the one questioned, it matters that these other people are accounted as epistemic. This notion has received important contribution in the epistemology of testimony and trust. Grasswick, for instance, says, “Our relationships of trust mean that speakers and hearers ultimately share epistemic responsibility for the quality of the particular beliefs that are adopted through trust, with each playing their part” (Grasswick 2020: 179).

¹⁴This is clearly a simplification, since in some cases things might get more complex because of rhetorical effects. One person might ask a question ostensibly to someone else, but in reality, it might be a question to elicit some response for the audience. Or in other cases the question might be directed at one person but answered by another who is not the addressee. (I’m grateful for Jeroen de Ridder for this observation).

community where questions typically play a large role is a class setting, such as a high school or a college class.

5.1. Cases in which members are inquisitive and the community is not

The intellectual profile of individuals influences the epistemic communities they are part of. Inquisitive individuals are a great help to make a community inquisitive. But this is not always the case. To see that, let's retrieve two claims that I've made. First, in appraising social inquisitiveness,

- (i) it is the whole epistemic community that enhances its epistemic standing through questioning,
- (ii) at least in some contexts, members may be able to ask good questions despite an individual lack of inquisitiveness, and
- (iii) the normative assessment of social inquisitiveness is done through the evaluation of social epistemic relations and shared epistemic responsibility.

Second, the norms of individual inquisitiveness are SINCERITY, CONTEXT, TARGET, and CLARITY.

Let's begin with CONTEXT, which is associated with the capacity of practical wisdom (*phronesis*)¹⁵ through which an inquisitive person knows where, when, and to whom it is appropriate to pose questions: "one must ask at the right time and place and identify the right source of information" (Watson 2019: 165). There are, however, ways in which a community can fail in this respect even when members have such practical wisdom. For instance, in a research group where the environment is extremely competitive, or when the supervisor ridicules his students' questions, the questioners may lose the ability to identify appropriate contexts for posing questions. Further, finding the right timing for asking a question is in some occasions a matter of shared epistemic responsibility¹⁶ rather than an issue of mere individual practical wisdom, as the epistemic community has a responsibility to provide cues and hints of when a question is appropriate (cf. iii). For example, in a classroom setting, a professor must frame her exposition in a manner that indicates when questions are appropriate, such as when transitioning between topics or concluding an argument.

Consider now a case where a student is competent to pose clear and well-formulated questions (satisfies CLARITY), capable to identify when is appropriate to ask them (satisfies CONTEXT), able to specify exactly what she wants to know (satisfies TARGET), and sincere in her questions (satisfies SINCERITY). This student is, therefore, individually inquisitive. Now imagine that, in one of her classes, she asks a question without having done the assigned readings for that class. In this case, the professor is forced to spend valuable time explaining things that could have been easily understood from the readings, thus preventing the class from engaging in more interesting and

¹⁵Following Aristotle, some contemporary virtue epistemologists identify *phronesis* or practical wisdom (as it is often translated) as a key and meta-intellectual virtue, i.e., an intellectual virtue the possession of which is a condition for the possession of all other virtues (e.g. Roberts and Wood 2007: 305). My account does not rely on this assumption.

¹⁶This is significant because a flourishing epistemic community will encompass, among other aspects, an environment where questioning flourishes; In order for this to occur, the community as a whole, including the questioner, the questioned, and the audience, must fulfill their epistemic duties and adhere to the proper norms.

intellectually stimulating discussions. While this questioner may learn something new and improve her personal epistemic standing, the epistemic community is hindered in improving its own epistemic standing (cf. i).¹⁷ Also, consider a case where all students excel in asking questions, but the community is filled with prejudice against some social identity from a minority group. When a person from the minority group asks a question, the audience does not pay attention and actively ignores the question. Such a toxic epistemic environment may unleash several epistemic harms: minority inquisitive students may lose their appetite for asking questions, even if they are curious; they can lose their ability to communicate well or to express their thoughts clearly (cf. Medina 2013), thus losing opportunities to improve their epistemic standing. Further, even if they keep asking good questions, the audience may not learn from these questions, since their prejudice results in an unwillingness to learn with them (cf. Alcoff 2020). The audience fails to perform its expected role (Goldberg 2021) and does not fulfill its epistemic responsibility (cf. iii). These two examples serve to highlight that inquisitive individuals do not, necessarily, constitute an inquisitive community. Thus, while norms of individual inquisitiveness are being satisfied, the epistemic community itself is not socially inquisitive – which suggests that some specific *social epistemic norms* are not being satisfied. I will now introduce other cases in order to characterize some of these social epistemic norms, namely SOCIAL SINCERITY, DISTRIBUTION, and FREQUENCY.

First, in terms of SOCIAL SINCERITY, we can see that although individuals can be sincere in the questions they ask (and thus satisfy SINCERITY), various contextual factors may either impede or enhance this motivation. A toxic environment or a community with systematic cases of epistemic exclusion may diminish or impede the sincere motivation for questioning of those suffering exclusion. This introduces an important constraint: for an epistemic community (and not just its individual members) to be sincere in its motivation for questioning, its members (or at least a relevant subset of them) must collectively *share the value* of enhancing epistemic standing through questioning. By this, I mean that they, together as a community, must value questioning as an instrument for improving epistemic standing. As Battaly says, “two or more individuals count as sharing values or goals whenever they in fact have the same evaluative beliefs and commitments – whenever their evaluative beliefs and commitments are in *de facto* agreement” (Battaly 2022: 307). We can thus state the following norm:

SOCIAL SINCERITY: virtuous social inquisitiveness requires members of an epistemic community to sincerely aim at improving the community’s epistemic

¹⁷One could argue that this student is not in fact individually inquisitive, pointing out that she does not satisfy the norm CONTEXT. After all, if she has not done the readings, it would be out of context to raise a question during the class. This touches on the generality problem in virtue theory; it can be argued, nevertheless, that while she fails to fulfill her overall epistemic responsibility, she may be individually inquisitive. She may not have done the readings because she was lazy, but also because she forgot it or because she had many important things to do, more than she could handle. Even so, it is quite possible that, during the class, she had a genuine question, and needed an answer to keep up with the lecture. She can also have detected the appropriate moment in the class to ask the question and have identified the right source of information – and thus, she can satisfy CONTEXT for that specific question. This student, it seems, has failed with her epistemic responsibility at some level, and has frustrated a legitimate normative expectation of her teacher. But she still asked a question from good reasons and did so competently. Her behavior may show a lack of epistemic diligence, but it does not seem to be a lack of individual inquisitiveness. (I thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this issue.)

standing; this requires the questioner, the questioned, and the audience to share the value of good questioning.¹⁸

The difference between SINCERITY and SOCIAL SINCERITY is that, while the former governs individual intellectual motivation, the latter governs group motivation. I will elaborate below that SOCIAL SINCERITY can be satisfied even in cases where individuals lack the capability to satisfy SINCERITY on their own.

To introduce the norm of DISTRIBUTION, let's imagine a community full of inquisitive members, i.e., they all sincerely value good questions and have developed cognitive competencies to pose clear questions, target worthy and precise issues, and have the related phronesis to know the right context. However, because of mutual differences in epistemic power and psychological profile, only one or a few members actually ask questions, while others are sidelined in the role of the audience. In such a case, the community lacks the virtue of inquisitiveness. So with this case in mind, we can formulate the following social norm:

DISTRIBUTION: virtuous social inquisitiveness requires that a relevant subset of members of an epistemic community be encouraged to, and actually, ask good questions.

The importance of DISTRIBUTION is patent for an intellectually flourishing community. At the personal level, if one person in a class asks several questions, that's fine for him and his epistemic improvement. However, if only this person asks questions and no one else does, it may indicate a vice rather than a virtue at the community level, and for a variety of reasons. Some members may have doubts without the opportunity to get answers, thus remaining ignorant about relevant matters and discouraged to engage in the community's epistemic practices – which amounts to a failure in the epistemic relations and shared epistemic responsibility (cf. iii). Furthermore, the community as a whole may miss out on opportunities to hear and learn from questions posed by diverse voices and individuals from different social locations – which constitutes an impediment to the improvement of its epistemic standing (cf. i).

One may object to this norm on the grounds that, in some communities, it does not make sense to require equal sharing in the practice of questioning among all members. For example, why is it a community where everyone asks questions better off than one in which only some members do but the others pay proper attention and learn from the questions? My answer is: yes, contexts vary enormously from one community to another, and the right balance of distribution will vary correspondingly. The proper way of satisfying DISTRIBUTION depends on contextual factors such as the personality and goals of members, their level of instruction and knowledge, their personal epistemic skills, among many others. Nonetheless, for each community DISTRIBUTION holds; what fluctuates is the specificities of its operation.¹⁹

Finally, let's imagine a classroom where students satisfy CONTEXT, since they have the requisite phronesis to recognize where, when, and to whom it is appropriate to ask questions, and they, actually, display this competence in all but one community they are members of. This community has a strong competitive culture where asking questions

¹⁸The questioner be sincerely motivated, the questioned be attentive, and the audience be supportive to the questions.

¹⁹I'm grateful for Jeroen de Ridder for pinpointing this.

results in extra points, which pressures them to ask too many questions, constantly interrupting the flow of the class, and thus frustrating the professor's ability to teach important topics. Here we see a case where, despite individuals being inquisitive, the epistemic community fails to improve its epistemic standing through the members' questions (cf. i). One could object by arguing that these students are not individually inquisitive, insofar as they do not, actually, satisfy CONTEXT and SINCERITY. Since they ask too many questions, it seems that they are not able to find the right moment to ask questions (*contra* CONTEXT), and since they pose the questions to get extra points, they seem to ask them for the wrong reasons (*contra* SINCERITY).²⁰ Let's quickly consider each one of these individual norms. In terms of CONTEXT, imagine that each student in this class asks two questions. If this class has twenty-five students, then they will ask with fifty questions in total! Such a high number of questions could impede the epistemic well-functioning of the class, and thus obstruct the community's enhancement of its epistemic standing. However, from the point of view of each individual student, it seems reasonable to ask two questions. In terms of SINCERITY, having a virtuous motivation does not require that no other motivations are present; in this scenario, it is reasonable that each student has something valuable to learn from their two questions – the questions are really a fruit of their curiosity and eagerness to learn. But the competitive culture adds extra pressure for them to ask the questions (instead of looking for answers outside the class, for example). It seems that, from a purely individual point of view, the students are not violating any epistemic norm, and thus can be considered as individually inquisitive; what is needed are distinct social norms to lay the standards of virtuousness at the social level.

This can be seen in another scenario as well. Imagine another classroom with students who also satisfy CONTEXT, but who are discouraged from asking questions, maybe because the professor humiliates questioners, or because the audience mocks questioners. Here we encounter a case in which the shared epistemic responsibility is not fulfilled either by the questioned or by the audience (cf. iii). From these examples, we can state the following social norm:

FREQUENCY: virtuous social inquisitiveness requires that an appropriate number of good questions are asked, not too many and not too few.

The appropriate number of questions for an epistemic community is highly contextual; nevertheless, this social norm makes explicit an important element for an epistemic community to meet the requirements of social inquisitiveness. In a certain setting where questions are relevant and can help in the sharing of epistemic goods, and, nonetheless, no one in the community poses them, it signals a collective failure; yet, if members pose too many questions, other important epistemic practices may be harmed.

The overall upshot is that in certain communities, despite individual members possessing their own intellectual virtues, the community itself may prevent individuals from manifesting their virtue, so that the community ends up failing to have the social virtue.

5.2. Cases in which members are not inquisitive while the community is

Imagine a college class where most students lack the necessary phronesis to know when it is appropriate to ask questions. They don't satisfy CONTEXT – and not only in this

²⁰I thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing to this possibility.

classroom but in many other epistemic communities they are part of. Their intellectual habits are still being shaped. In this specific class, however, the professor creates a culture where cues, signals, and other indications make it clear when questions are appropriate, such as when she is switching topics or concluding an argument. Here, even though individual members do not possess the required phronesis, the community satisfies what we may call SOCIAL CONTEXT:

SOCIAL CONTEXT: virtuous social inquisitiveness requires identifying the appropriate context and timing for good questions to be posed; questioners must be attuned to when and where to ask questions; the questioned and the audience must provide cues and indications for when and where questions are appropriate.

In this norm, we encounter an explicit shared epistemic responsibility: the task of discerning when it is appropriate to ask questions should not rest solely on the questioner's shoulders. Such sensibility involves an interplay among the agents within the community, where cues and feedback regarding the appropriate timing for questions are provided through various social mechanisms. These may include facial expressions, pauses, or hand gestures among other things, depending on the context and social habits of the community.²¹ This makes this epistemic norm social rather than individual.

Now, let me add another social norm and explain its relevance, especially in a community where members are not inquisitive:

ACCESSIBILITY: virtuous social inquisitiveness requires that questions be formulated in a way that can be easily understood and followed by the other members of the community (the audience).

First, an important caveat: this norm differs from CLARITY because CLARITY governs only an individual agent's capacity to make herself clear when asking questions to the questioned. It is entirely possible for a community to have some members who possess this competence, while others are unable to comprehend the questions and consequently fail to improve their epistemic standing, even when the questions are clear to the questioned. What comes into play with ACCESSIBILITY is a specific intellectual motivation to frame questions in a manner that allows the audience to understand and benefit from them (cf. i and iii).

Furthermore, it is possible for an epistemic community to possess this motive even when the individuals in the community lack the motivation (cf. ii).²² In the literature we have several models postulating cases of non-summative instances of group good motivation. One can get inspiration from Gilbert's plural subject (2004) where members jointly commit to a motivation that they individually lack, or Brady's account of affective conformity and group emotion (2016), or some inspiration from de Ridder's model

²¹The context here is a crucial factor. The mechanisms listed may exclude, for instance, people within ASD spectrum. Each virtuous epistemic community shares the responsibility of providing inclusive mechanisms.

²²As Michael Brady states, "group emotion generates attitudes and behaviours that are 'out of character', in the sense that they are states and actions that the individual wouldn't have and wouldn't perform without the influence of the group" (Brady 2016: 95).

of a group's culture providing a motivation that members lack (2022).²³ I do not intend to commit to any specific model here but simply want to point out that there are reasonable scenarios of epistemic communities where members may not be individually motivated to make sure their questions are understood by all community members but, in a particular community, become motivated to honor ACCESSIBILITY. For example, taking inspiration from Gilbert, we can imagine a classroom filled with students who are not particularly motivated to formulate questions with the aim of promoting class understanding. But they make a social pact – a joint commitment – to make an effort during classes to ask accessible questions so that everyone can learn more. My issue here is not to defend the joint commitment account but to point out that in ACCESSIBILITY we have not only a norm that regulates social interactions but one that can be satisfied at the community level even when individuals by themselves wouldn't satisfy it.

A similar case can be made for the already postulated norm of SOCIAL SINCERITY. While I have explained how, in some cases, individuals who typically conform to SINCERITY may not, in a certain community, be thus motivated, the opposite is also conceivable: individuals who are not sincere in their questions in other settings but who, in a certain community, do satisfy SOCIAL SINCERITY. For instance, taking inspiration from de Ridder's notion of culture, it is possible that when the audience of a certain epistemic community actively listens to and supports the questioner, it creates a collaborative and inclusive environment providing motivation that the questioner would lack otherwise.

These cases of communities that are inquisitive while their members are not have a valuable pedagogical upshot. In many of our ordinary epistemic communities, most members may not be (fully) intellectually virtuous – some might even possess intellectual vices. If a certain epistemic community can, to some extent, display epistemically virtuous behavior despite its members' initial lack of competence or motivation, it may result, in the long term, in an improvement of its members' epistemic character. Participating in a socially inquisitive epistemic community is conducive to the development of individual inquisitiveness.

5.3. Fuller characterization of social inquisitiveness

It is not my aim to provide an exhaustive list of all epistemic norms governing the practice of social questioning and the virtue of social inquisitiveness. Depending on their purposes, methods, intellectual traditions, and contexts, epistemic communities may have a different set of relevant epistemic norms. Instead, I am shedding light on the fact that the virtuousness of a community cannot be understood solely in terms of the virtuousness of its members but must take into account epistemic relations in the community, shared epistemic responsibilities, and the overall improvement of the community's epistemic standing.

With that in mind, I tentatively state that a virtuously inquisitive epistemic community is a community that is conducive to good questioning and thus able to consistently improve its epistemic standing through the questions of its members. Thus,

Social inquisitiveness: An epistemic community is virtuously inquisitive when (i) members share the value both of good questioning [SOCIAL SINCERITY] and

²³He says, "A group's structure and culture (including its system of sanctions) can generate virtuous intellectual performance, regardless of the virtues or vices of individual group members" (de Ridder 2022: 373).

collective understanding [ACCESSIBILITY], (ii) the questioners, questioned, and audience members all contribute to an environment that makes it clear when questions are proper [SOCIAL CONTEXT], and (iii) the pattern of questioning is appropriately distributed across members [DISTRIBUTION] and across time [FREQUENCY].

Moreover, an epistemic community characterized by the social epistemic virtue of inquisitiveness may facilitate the cultivation of the individual virtue of inquisitiveness among its members. Members will learn with each other's questions – learning both the competence to formulate good questions (according to the norms of CLARITY, TARGETING, and CONTEXT) and – through the content of the questions, as questions open up new avenues of inquiry – expand understanding, provoke insights, and uncover connections among different ideas.²⁴ Questioning is a crucial epistemic practice for the flourishing of communities. We must pay as much attention to its individual components as to its social norms and standards.

5.4. Social epistemic phronesis

Two of the five social norms discussed above seem to involve a kind of phronetic disposition of the socially inquisitive epistemic community.²⁵ The norm DISTRIBUTION involves the community figuring out “the right balance” of questions across members, and the norm FREQUENCY involves “an appropriate number” of good questions. There is no single rule that determines the correct distribution and frequency of questions in an epistemic community; they are highly contextual norms, and their meaning may vary from one community to another and even in the same community in different circumstances. How can an epistemic community find such balance and the appropriate number of questions? Epistemically virtuous individuals have phronesis to fine-tune their virtues to the particulars of each situation (cf. Baehr 2016; Roberts and Wood 2007; Zagzebski 1996), where phronesis is a trained personal cognitive disposition. In the individual virtue of inquisitiveness, for instance, the norm CONTEXT requires such phronesis so that the questioner may discern in each particular situation, among other things, the right moment to ask a question. But how can a community have a disposition to judge like that?

This is a very important and complex question, an answer to which is beyond the scope of this paper. But I will offer a few suggestions on how to make sense of a kind of social epistemic phronesis as opposed to individual phronesis. The first thing to point out is that I do not claim that social epistemic virtues are totally independent of the individual intellectual dispositions of the members of the virtuous community. Rather, I have defended that individual dispositions are not sufficient or necessary for social epistemic virtue; individually inquisitive members are neither necessary nor sufficient for a socially inquisitive community. But that does not imply that members'

²⁴ Analogously, the practice of good questioning not only requires certain dispositions, such as the ability to articulate good questions and a motivation to engage in the act of questioning, but also a sound understanding of the topic at hand. Without a sufficient understanding of the subject matter, the act of questioning may fail to achieve its intended end, which is to elicit a thoughtful and informative response. Additionally, a deep understanding of the topic allows the person to anticipate potential answers and to ask follow-up questions that further enrich the discussion.

²⁵ I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out to this social phronetic issue in my account and for suggesting the expression “social epistemic phronesis.”

judgmental capacities are not important to make up the community's judgmental capacity.²⁶

De Ridder, mapping collective intellectual virtues, claims that some communities have a certain culture or ethos that disposes members to behave in virtuous ways even when they, individually, are not so disposed. He says "The *formal structure* of a group and the operative rules and responsibilities can encode intellectually virtuous practices by stimulating or prescribing actions and procedures that constitute virtuous behavior and by making non-virtuous behavior more difficult" (2022: 373). He then exemplifies how the culture of a community can prompt intellectually virtuous behavior, such as if there are opportunities for out-of-the-box thinking, if members give each other credit, and if questions are welcomed (2022: 375). There are two main ways, I argue, by which the culture of an epistemic community can produce something like social epistemic phronesis.

The first is when a certain epistemic community has official, publicized, and enforced protocols or procedures that encode social epistemic phronesis. In a classroom setting, for instance, procedures such as "if you have already asked one question, you should only ask another if no one else has questions" and "let the instructor point out the appropriate moment for questions, and only ask in those moments," if respected and embraced by the class, would help to promote DISTRIBUTION and FREQUENCY.

To achieve social phronesis, however, official protocols are not enough. A more subtle and organic process is vital so that the context-sensitive character of the norms can be accounted for. For that, I suggest a framework in the extended cognition literature that can provide some insight: the notion of *integrated distributed cognitive systems*, which offers a theoretical and empirical explanation for how groups can possess cognitive abilities and skills that go beyond the cognitive capacities of their members (e.g. Barnier *et al.* 2008; Heylighen *et al.* 2004; Theiner *et al.* 2010). In such systems, "the requirement is that the contributing members (...) collaboratively perform a cognitive task by interacting continuously and reciprocally to each other" (Palermos and Tollefsen 2018: 121). Palermos and Tollefsen offer as an example a jazz band, in which each musician regulates the performance of the others by various subtle mechanisms, and the skill of the band to perform a certain piece cannot be explained merely by the individual skill of each musician. Similarly, in an epistemic community, such as a classroom, members are constantly interacting and contributing with each other, as, I have argued, in practices of questioning.²⁷ Further, Palermos and Tollefsen argue that

²⁶I will develop further this issue in the next session.

²⁷It can be argued, however, that the analogy between questioning and a jazz band has at least one relevant limitation, related to the difference between practicing and performing. Arguably, a jazz band routinely trains, with individual musicians grasping each other's playing patterns and collectively developing feedback systems to regulate the band's musical conduct, thereby enhancing performance during actual presentations. On the other hand, in classrooms, it seems that there is no relevant sense of "practicing before actually performing," since every question asked occurs during a class meeting, which itself is an actual performance. I believe this objection raises an interesting potential difference, but I would like to defend the analogy with two comments. First, it is common in jazz performances for additional musicians, aside from the regular band members, to join and play a song. Often, these additional musicians can quickly grasp the flow of the band and its cues almost instantly; this is because cues and feedback systems learned in other bands can be transferred to other bands with local adjustments. The same occurs in the practice of questioning, as students participate in other epistemic communities (such as their families), where the practices of questioning occur regularly. Secondly, classrooms are, *par excellence*, learning environments where actual performances also serve as training practices. Thus, the training process that jazz

the group as a whole is the one responsible for the activity, which resonates with my claim that social norms involve shared epistemic responsibility. In such a community,

The reciprocal and continuous interactivity between the members of the group allows them to keep monitoring each other's performance, such that were there, at any given time, something wrong with the overall process, then it would become noticeable to at least one member of the group, allowing the group to respond appropriately (Palermos and Tollefsen 2018: 123).

Thus, an integrated distributed cognitive system acts as a single epistemic agent, with cognitive capacities that emerge at the group-level, giving rise to epistemically virtuously behavior, in which members constantly monitor each other, thus promoting the group's epistemic goals. Further, individual members are capable of refraining from certain behaviors that are reasonable from the individual point of view but that do not promote the group's ends.²⁸ This picture provides a feasible image of how social epistemic phronesis could work. For the social norms of DISTRIBUTION and FREQUENCY, members in an epistemic community need to constantly monitor each other (who is asking? Is it the time to ask?), offering subtle cues to regulate each other's performance. Some members will need to refrain from asking questions that could be reasonable for the individual but that would not be the best move to advance the epistemic standing of the community; they would instead allow others to ask questions, or simply not ask anything since too many questions were already posed.

My aim in this section was not to provide a robust characterization of social epistemic phronesis, but rather to offer suggestions of how the literature on extended cognition provides useful theoretical solutions helping to explain some of the epistemic community's phronetic properties.

6. Two objections

Now I will discuss and reply to two possible objections to my account. The first objection challenges my claim that the account I offer is essentially social instead of individual; I will call it the social-individual objection. The second objection argues that what I am characterizing as social inquisitiveness is not a single intellectual virtue, but rather a family or cluster of virtues; I will call it the cluster objection.

Social-individual objection: My account is based on the claim that one relevant notion of social epistemic virtues is that they are virtues attributed to epistemic communities, and not to individuals. However, in describing this virtue I refer to various personal dispositions that must be in place and manifested for the community to possess the virtue of social inquisitiveness. The norms of SOCIAL SINCERITY and ACCESSIBILITY, for instance, seem to be an amalgam of the members' particular motivations to be sincere in questioning and to consider other members as worthy epistemic agents. SOCIAL CONTEXT, in turn, seems to be rooted in the individual's practical

players undergo when they are practicing offstage is mirrored by students onstage during classes. (I thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this issue.)

²⁸Palermos and Tollefsen say, "Via the application of positive mutual constraints, which result from, and further guide, the members' coordinated activity, new collective properties (i.e. regular behavior) emerge and the collective achieves a stable configuration that is necessary for its successful operation" (2018: 122). Such "stable configuration" can be a social virtue, that enable the "successful operation" of the community in regulating the amount and distribution of questions in a regular and reliable way.

wisdom and perceptive capabilities. So, the objection goes, this account isn't really an account of a robust social virtue.

In reply, I've shown that these norms can be satisfied even in communities where members lack the individual virtues. In other words, if my account was really an account of an individual virtue, agents by themselves should be virtuous and the community could be virtuous only if its members were. But, as I have argued, this is not the case. Second, I have emphasized that the relevant social norms cannot be understood solely in terms of the cognitive dispositions and powers of individual members. For social norms, things such as social relations (e.g. SOCIAL CONTEXT) and shared epistemic responsibility (e.g. FREQUENCY and DISTRIBUTION) are the relevant normatively regulated factors. As these factors have to do with social interactions, there is a difference between the normative constraints on communities and those on individuals.

By arguing for distinct social epistemic virtues, however, I am not suggesting that these virtues float free of individual agents' dispositions and traits.²⁹ The social norms that I have described can only be satisfied when members cooperate in certain ways, but the norms are not only concerned with individual dispositions.³⁰ A similar point is made by Heather Battaly's account of the virtue of solidarity. In her account, this virtue is imminently social because only social bodies can possess it – one isolated individual cannot be solidary. At the same time, solidarity is made possible by the community members' dispositions to satisfy certain social norms (2022: 304).

Cluster objection: My account of social inquisitiveness may seem to be an account of multiple intellectual virtues. To satisfy the norm of ACCESSIBILITY, for instance, questioners are required to be intellectually generous, as they must be motivated by the epistemic well-being of others; DISTRIBUTION, in turn, requires that some members strive for a kind of epistemic justice by making room for others beyond themselves to ask questions; SOCIAL CONTEXT requires attunement and thoughtfulness, etc.

My reply is that success and excellence in every epistemic practice involve the exercise of many intellectual virtues. When an epistemic subject poses a question, for instance, it involves an act of intellectual humility, as she is acknowledging a lack of knowledge or understanding (cf. Whitcomb *et al.* 2017). It also may involve an act of intellectual courage, as she exposes herself to reproval, mocking, or some other kind of social censure from the audience (Watson 2018). As emphasized by Roberts and Wood, individuating various virtues serves analytical and pedagogical purposes, yet it is unlikely that any virtue exists in isolation within real-life practices (2007: 81).

²⁹While I am sympathetic to non-summativ accounts of groups epistemic states and traits, I do not subscribe kinds radical-non summativism when collective's traits are entirely independent of the personal profiles of the agents that comprise the collective. I am more inclined to an approach inspired by Jennifer Lackey's Group Action Principle: "For every group, G, and act, *a*, G performs *a* only if at least one member of G performs some act or other that causally contributed to *a*" (Lackey 2020: 116). Further, some models of plural subjects (or joint commitment) provide circumstances in which agents can commit to certain ends (such as sincere questioning) even when they are not so individually motivated (Brady 2016; e.g., Gilbert 2004).

³⁰Hence, my notion of social virtue differs from that proposed by Byerly and Byerly, who defend that distinctly collective virtues are those virtues that exist exclusively at the collective level, without an individual counterpart (2016). As evident from the outset, social inquisitiveness is obviously analogous to the individual virtue of inquisitiveness.

7. Broadening the analysis of social questioning and inquisitiveness

I began this paper concurring with Watson's contention that questioning is a practice of great epistemic importance that deserves more attention from epistemologists than it has received so far. In this last section, I want to suggest topics for further research.

The first topic is about the epistemic ends of questioning. Watson argues that the only characteristic end of questioning is eliciting information. She says that other possible ends, such as irritating or mocking the questioner are not epistemic, and thus do not impinge on the *epistemic* practice of questioning (2022). Yet it seems that there are other important epistemic ends beyond eliciting information. A question can be posed to seek clarification, challenge an argument, explore an idea in greater depth, or signal gaps in a lecturer's understanding. If underpinned by a motivation for the epistemic goods, all these ends are proper for good questioning. Watson could reply that all these other ends are but subtypes of eliciting information (cf. Watson 2018: 358). Even if her claim is valid, I think that a more fine-grained description of the kinds of epistemic goods achieved through questioning enriches our understanding of it.

The second topic is an exploration of the different ways of framing a question and its epistemic significance. Questions can be closed-ended, eliciting a straightforward answer (yes or no; blue or red; yesterday of the day before; etc.); or open-ended, inviting deeper reflection and exploration. What kinds of epistemic goods do each of these types of questions produce? Are the abilities required to ask them the same? What kinds of connections do each of them bear to other epistemic practices? These questions seem worth pursuing.

The third topic are the motivations involved in practices of questioning. According to Watson, the motivation involved is that described by the norm SINCERITY. But we can distinguish a range of more fine-grained motives. For instance, a student can pose a question:

1. Because she doesn't currently understand an exposition on a certain topic
 - a. because the exposition is ill-conceived or ill-performed;
 - b. because she lacks the minimum knowledge required to grasp the ideas and concepts of the exposition;
2. Because she perceives new avenues of inquiry that the topic or idea under discussion opens up.
3. Because she wants to connect the topic of the lecture with other themes, authors, and concepts, and by doing so, she perceives inconsistencies or differences in conclusions about the same issue. This realization can prompt the student to pose a question to clarify the matter, deepen understanding, or challenge the existing assumptions and beliefs.³¹
4. Simply to get a token piece of information she's in need of.

Exploring these different kinds of motives that drive people to ask questions can widen our understanding of the cognitive and affective possibilities behind the practice, and can also give us a greater grasp of what kinds of dispositions are at stake.

³¹By associating the topic of the lecture with other areas of knowledge, a person can bring a new perspective to the discussion and contribute to the intellectual progress of the community. Additionally, the act of questioning can encourage others to consider different viewpoints and challenge their own assumptions, leading to a more robust and comprehensive understanding of the topic at hand. Therefore, the ability to connect seemingly disparate topics and identify inconsistencies is a valuable skill in the practice of questioning. By cultivating this ability, individuals can play an important role in promoting intellectual progress and knowledge acquisition within their epistemic community.

Fourth and finally, while questioning may seem to be relevant only when it elicits information from the person to whom the question is addressed, we may conjecture that questioning, in some circumstances and under certain conditions, has intrinsic epistemic value – a value that is gained even when no answer is provided and no information is elicited. Barbara Montero, wondering about the practice of philosophy itself, says, “Indeed, the aim of philosophy – and, here, perhaps, more so than other disciplines – is not so much to find answers to questions but to formulate the questions themselves” (2022: xxi). A good question can reveal something significant, can provide an understanding of what is at stake in a certain field, may expose what that field has not yet been able to answer, may draw attention to something crucial that was previously neglected, and even highlight the limitations of an entire field of inquiry. A good question thus may enhance a whole community’s epistemic standing even when no answer is forthcoming.

8. Conclusion

Questioning is an epistemic practice that is inherently relational and context-dependent, where the quality and effectiveness of the questions are determined by the interplay between the individual questioner and the broader community within which she or he operates. It involves a collective motivation and effort to create an environment that is conducive to the exploration and development of ideas, where all members of the community are committed to fostering a culture of inquiry and learning.

Thus while inquisitiveness, the virtue of good questioning, possesses strong social reverberations, I have argued that there is an important distinction between individual inquisitiveness and social inquisitiveness. Individual inquisitiveness, like other individual intellectual virtues, is an individual excellence and follows norms that regulate individual cognitive habits and motivation. Social inquisitiveness, in turn, is an excellence of an epistemic community and follows norms that regulate epistemic relations and shared epistemic responsibility. I have described social inquisitiveness through five social norms – SOCIAL SINCERITY, ACCESSIBILITY, SOCIAL CONTEXT, DISTRIBUTION, and FREQUENCY – norms that, while they do not exhaust all normative dimensions of this social virtue, provide a broad and consistent picture of some of its main elements. In this sense, a virtuously inquisitive epistemic community is a community that is conducive to good questioning and thus able to consistently improve its epistemic standing through the questions of its members and the community’s interaction with the questions.³²

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Marcelo Cabral is PhD candidate at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and the University of Campinas (UNICAMP). Email: marcelobc87@gmail.com

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