

CREATIVITY FOR THE EPISTEMIC CONSERVATIVE

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Master of Arts

In

Philosophy

by

Natalia Cathryn Nealon

San Francisco, California

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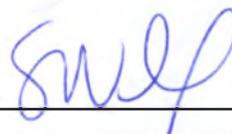
CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

I certify that I have read Creativity for the Epistemic Conservative by Natalia Cathryn Nealon, and that in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree Master of Arts in Philosophy at San Francisco State University.



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Carlos Montemayor, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor



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Shelley Wilcox, Ph.D.  
Professor



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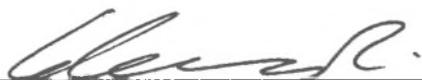
Abrol Fairweather, Ph.D.  
Lecturer

# CREATIVITY FOR THE EPISTEMIC CONSERVATIVE

Natalia Cathryn Nealon  
San Francisco, California  
2019

Curiosity is a central trait that initiates our epistemic pursuits. How one engages with it, both reliably and responsibly, will be highly entwined with virtuous insensitivity: that which constrains our curiosity in such a way that removes our attention from any unnecessary and irrelevant material, thus, leaving us able to successfully open and close inquiry. The problem I seek to explore here is that, despite its epistemic value, virtuous insensitivity should hinder our epistemic endeavors by creating a hyper-discriminatory, vicious epistemic conservatism that bars us from accessing abstract content and non-traditional narratives; however, this is not the case. Epistemic agents considered both reliably and responsibly curious are still able to engage with these concepts. I argue that this is made possible by creativity, since it allows for unique inquiries and epistemic risk taking.

I certify that the Abstract is a correct representation of the content of this thesis.

  
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Chair, Thesis Committee

03/21/2019  
Date

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I dedicate this thesis to the three women that raised me: mom, auntie Alva, and noni. It is because of your constant support, guidance, and love that I have been able to achieve this.

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Eyes focused on his target, Ernest Sosa's archer aims and releases his bow, his shot evaluable in three respects: accuracy, adroitness, and aptness. It is in this way, Sosa argues, that we may also assess belief. A belief's accuracy is determined by its truth, just as its adroitness may be measured by its manifestation of epistemic virtue or competence. Most importantly though, a belief may be measured by its aptness, its being true because of the credibility of the archer—that is, the epistemic agent.<sup>1</sup> Virtue reliabilist accounts of epistemology emphasize the importance of both cognitive capacity and ability for the successful acquisition of truth. For the virtue reliabilist, the epistemic value of a belief is derived from the epistemic value of the faculties that produced it. These epistemic faculties help determine the credibility and reliability (i.e. the aptness) of the epistemic agent that possesses them. One such faculty is selective attention. *Attention* is responsible for selectively directing our mental lives in such a way that effects our epistemic movements. Having proper mechanisms in place for guiding our attentional processes will, therefore, be essential in determining not only the epistemic value of an agent's belief, but also whether or not the epistemic agent in question is a reliable one. One such mechanism, and the focus of this paper, is curiosity.

Curiosity is fundamental to our being active epistemic agents. It entails a desire for knowledge that motivates agents to open and close inquiries, as well as process information. How we engage with curiosity, both responsibly and reliably, is going to be determined by the mechanisms that guide it. One such guidance mechanism, as discussed

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<sup>1</sup> Sosa, Ernest. *A Virtue Epistemology: Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge*. Vol. 1. 2 vols. Oxford University Press, 2007. Pg 22

by Abrol Fairweather and Carlos Montemayor, is virtuous insensitivity.<sup>2</sup> Virtuous insensitivity operates as an information filtration system for handling the large amount of informational input agents come into contact with on a daily basis. If informational input meets the conditions set forth by virtuous insensitivity, then virtuous insensitivity will direct an agent's curiosity to open inquiry about said input. Thus, virtuous insensitivity has the capacity to prevent agents from opening the *wrong* kinds of inquiries, as well as opening too many inquiries. Most importantly though, in guiding our curiosity, virtuous insensitivity is what allows the epistemic agent to open and close inquiries *at all*. Hence, virtuous insensitivity is a fundamental guidance mechanism that offers an indispensable quality to our epistemic lives.

The problem I explore here involves the ability to access certain content when curiosity operates within the bounds of virtuous insensitivity. Virtuous insensitivity entails a set of constraints (or conditions) that provide a means for filtering information. These constraints include the epistemic motivations of the agent in question and the relevance of the information being processed. These constraints should subject epistemic agents to an epistemic conservatism<sup>3</sup> pervasive enough to prevent them from accessing

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<sup>2</sup> Fairweather, Abrol, and Carlos Montemayor. *Knowledge, Dexterity, and Attention: A Theory of Epistemic Agency*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. Pg 148-151

<sup>3</sup> An epistemically conservative agent is an agent who limits their attention in accordance with their virtuous insensitivity. In other words, to be an epistemic conservative is to operate with restraints on one's attention.

certain content, opening and closing abstract inquiry, and even understanding narratives when they fall outside of the traditional paradigm.<sup>4</sup>

The problem I present here will operate on two fronts: epistemic and social. On the epistemic front, I argue that virtuous insensitivity, despite its indispensable epistemic value, should have the capacity to initiate and maintain an epistemic conservatism pervasive enough to prevent access to abstract forms of inquiry, or inquiry that falls outside of one's world-view. On the social front, I present a similar argument, but in regards to the social consequences of this vicious epistemic conservatism. Here I focus on non-traditional narratives, and the work of Diana Tietjen Meyers and Susanna Siegel. Both Meyers and Siegel suggest that prior outlook has the capacity to prevent agents from accessing testimonies existing outside of their world-view. This outlook feeds virtuous insensitivity, and, as a result, the epistemic agent should be blocked from accessing non-traditional testimonies. The problem lies in the fact that agents are not epistemically incapable of accessing abstract concepts and non-traditional testimony. Epistemic agents can engage in abstract thought and inquiry, as well as with non-traditional narratives, despite the fact that virtuous insensitivity should prevent them from doing so. It is why epistemic agents are culpable when they lose track of these concepts or commit epistemic injustices by downgrading the epistemic status of those presenting non-traditional narratives. Thus, we need a theory that explains our ability to access these contents without sacrificing the epistemic value of virtuous insensitivity.

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<sup>4</sup> I use the terms "traditional paradigm" and "traditional narrative" to describe conventional ways of understanding the structure and content of testimony.

I argue that the possession of creativity is what ultimately will allow us to avoid the problem of epistemic conservatism that should otherwise arise with the application of virtuous insensitivity. Having the ability to think creatively provides agents with a certain level of epistemic inventiveness; epistemic inventiveness, in turn, allows them to pursue new lines of thought and inquiry, as well as engage with unfamiliar testimony. I will begin my paper by elaborating on the problem of epistemic conservatism, and how it arises within the virtue reliabilist framework. I will focus on both the epistemic and social consequences of the problem. I will then conclude my paper by breaking down the dynamics of creativity and how it can serve, not only as a solution to the problem of epistemic conservatism, but also as an explanation for our ability to engage in abstract inquiry and grasp the testimony of others.

Virtuous insensitivity is indispensable for the reliable functioning of curiosity. However, despite its epistemic value, without any supplementation, virtuous insensitivity should have the potential to become a hindrance on our epistemic lives. As stated above, informational input must meet certain conditions before we can begin inquiring about it. If informational input does not *meet the criteria* of our virtuous insensitivity, then we will not fixate our curiosity on it; however, these conditions can become excessively constraining.

As mentioned above, in order to process information through our virtuous insensitivity, informational input must fit within an agent's epistemic motivations and it must be relevant. In regards to epistemic motivation, Fairweather and Montemayor's

approach is similar to that of Imogen Dickie's account. Motivational states can be understood in terms of intentions. Behavior, selected by intention, is a means of reliable, non-lucky fulfillment. In Fairweather and Montemayor's words, "intentions constitute a form of knowledge when there is an appropriate luck eliminating relation between intending to perform an action and successfully performing the action. Without meeting this reliability requirement, the intention is only weakly justified."<sup>5</sup> A reliable agent operating with good epistemic motivations, therefore, should in theory stray away from epistemic risk taking; however, the formation of abstract or non-traditional inquiry (which I will elaborate on later in this paper) will require some degree of risk taking that will force agents to step outside of their epistemic comfort zones. This means that epistemic motivation, alone, is already a highly constraining condition for virtuous insensitivity. In addition, relevance also has the potential to be overly constraining. Determining the relevance of content becomes complicated when we start considering access. If an epistemic agent lacks prior access to certain content they may become barred from accessing new information, particularly information that operates outside of their prior worldview. This means that it's highly likely that abstract or unconventional content, regardless of actual relevance, may become barred by virtuous insensitivity on the basis of an agent lacking prior access to it.

In theory, virtuous insensitivity, as we currently understand it, should then cause us to fall into a vicious epistemic conservatism. The problem of epistemic conservatism is

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<sup>5</sup> Fairweather, Abrol, and Carlos Montemayor. *Knowledge, Dexterity, and Attention: A Theory of Epistemic Agency*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. Pg 58

the result of a heavy filtration of information in which we become hyper-discriminatory in the way we direct our attention, open and close inquiry, and process information. Epistemic conservatism can either be virtuous or vicious. It is virtuous in so far as being epistemically conservative means that we are able to remove our attention from irrelevant pieces of information. However, epistemic conservatism becomes vicious when we start to deem useful information as useless because it failed to meet the criteria of our virtuous insensitivity. While it is clear that finding a solution to this problem is vital, the beneficial effects of *virtuous* epistemic conservatism necessitate the presence of safeguards to supplement virtuous insensitivity so as to not compromise its epistemic value. That is to say, an effective solution should not jeopardize virtuous insensitivity, but complement it in such a way that it becomes more reliable.

Virtuous insensitivity is indispensable because of the pervasive role curiosity plays in our epistemic pursuits and social interactions. Curiosity's pivotal role is largely due to the relationship it shares with attention. In being responsible for selectively directing our mental lives, attention is essential for the acquisition of knowledge because anchoring one's attention triggers guidance mechanisms that further direct this attention and aid in the formation of new beliefs. Fairweather and Montemayor specifically advocate for a world-directed view of attention, as opposed to self-directed attention. This view describes a motivational state in which acquaintance with another being or object anchors one's attention towards that being or object, as opposed to the self. This

allows epistemic agents to attend to reality, as opposed to only self-reflecting.<sup>6</sup> One guidance mechanism for anchoring attention towards another object or being is curiosity. Curiosity is a central trait that initiates our epistemic pursuits. In “The Epistemic Value of Curiosity,” Frederick F. Schmitt and Reza Lahroodi describe it as “uncontroversially valuable”<sup>7</sup> for the achievement of knowledge, composed of both attention and a desire for knowledge.

All curiosity will entail this desire for knowledge; it is the very essence of what curiosity is. Ilhan Inan’s *The Philosophy of Curiosity*, builds on this even further by distinguishing between two forms of the desire for knowledge: propositional and objectual. Propositional curiosity concerns “whether” questions regarding the truth or falsity of a statement (i.e. the truth values of propositions). Objectual curiosity concerns “who, what, when, where, and why” questions. These are not simply answered with finding the appropriate truth-value of a proposition, but in identifying the referent of the question itself.

Desire to answer these questions will also be directly correlated with interest. According to Inan, curiosity is positively correlated with interest, but negatively correlated with certainty. As our interests rise, so does our curiosity, whereas the more certainty we have regarding a given subject, the less curious we are about it. These correlations are of particular importance here because they indicate that “any curious

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<sup>6</sup> Fairweather, Abrol, and Carlos Montemayor. *Knowledge, Dexterity, and Attention: A Theory of Epistemic Agency*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. Pg 54-57

<sup>7</sup> Schmitt, Frederick F., and Reza Lahroodi. "The Epistemic Value of Curiosity." *Educational Theory* 58, no. 2 (2008). Pg 125

agent must have a complex attentional ability to form and track subjective probability assessments during an ongoing inquiry, and to psychologically integrate this information with interest-directed forms of attention.”<sup>8</sup> How we then open and close inquiry will be highly dependent on this cognitive apparatus of interest-directed attentional abilities.

These interest-directed attentional abilities, such as curiosity, are inescapable aspects of our mental lives. They are the mechanisms that allow for the opening and closing of inquiry; therefore having safeguards in place so that they may operate both reliably and responsibly is crucial. This is because epistemic agents are constantly being bombarded with new information and need epistemic tools in place that will limit the scope of their interests. These tools will allow them to successfully open and close inquiry, as well as properly process informational input. The reliability and responsibility of the curious agent is, therefore, going to be rooted in the sating of their curiosity. We can explain this in terms of *halting thresholds*: when a curious agent can close inquiry and establish a belief in answering a question. When an agent can reliably halt their curiosity, it is because they have answered a question or dropped their interests; therefore, having this ability to sate a curiosity is going to be virtuous because, not only does it terminate inquiries, but it also prevents the agent in question from opening too many. It does so through a form of reliably successful selective attention. More specifically, it does this through virtuous insensitivity.

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<sup>8</sup> Fairweather, Abrol, and Carlos Montemayor. *Knowledge, Dexterity, and Attention: A Theory of Epistemic Agency*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. Pg 142

Virtuous insensitivity constrains our curiosity by removing our focus from any unnecessary or irrelevant material. In doing so, virtuous insensitivity anchors our curiosity in favor of the most relevant information, given a specific epistemic motivation. By anchoring our curiosity, virtuous insensitivity prevents us from becoming overwhelmed by the enormous amount of information we come into contact with on a daily basis. It creates a virtuous type of epistemic conservatism that allows the agent to fixate their curiosity on that which is of interest.

For an example, imagine a philosophy student named “Steve.” Steve has a midterm approaching within the next week, and has a desire to know what the structure of the test is going to be like. In other words, Steve is experiencing an objectual curiosity about the test’s structure. While Steve is sitting in class, he is coming into contact with a lot of informational input beyond just that regarding his midterm—the florescent lighting, the tone of his professor’s voice, the person sitting in front of him, a picture on the wall. Steve’s virtuous insensitivity allows him to filter through all of this other information so that he only attends to what is relevant to his epistemic needs: the test material. Were it not for his virtuous insensitivity, Steve would become overwhelmed by all of the informational input that surrounds him, and any effort he makes to seek relevant information about his midterm will be in vain.

This extreme information overload would have the potential to prevent him from opening and closing inquiry, or even processing information at all. Virtuous insensitivity allows Steve to anchor his attention on the basis of relevance (an essential variable

provided by curiosity since it always involves interest) and his own epistemic motivations. In this way, the application of virtuous insensitivity for constraining curiosity is invaluable to our epistemic lives. Without virtuous insensitivity, it would be impossible to ever satisfy our curiosity.

Virtuous insensitivity also benefits us in our social interactions. Virtuous insensitivity allows us to distinguish between nonsensical testimonies and more relevant ones. For an example, imagine that you're watching the news and see two stories: the first is about victims, forced into internment camps, now being released; the second is about someone claiming they met George Washington. My virtuous insensitivity (if it is reliable) is going to initiate an epistemic conservatism that allows me to fixate my curiosity on the former. This is because the first story, not only meets the proper conditions, but it also fits well within the traditional paradigm of what a narrative *should* be.

Virtuous insensitivity benefits epistemic agents in many ways. Without virtuous insensitivity, an agent's epistemic function would be grossly limited. This, again, is because a lack of virtuous insensitivity would result in an abundance of informational input, and no interest-directed attentional guidance mechanisms. With virtuous insensitivity, we are able to sort through and prioritize information so that the information does not overwhelm us. By limiting and ordering the information to which we attend, virtuous insensitivity may help us to raise the *right* kinds of inquiries. Recall Steve. His epistemic conservatism remains virtuous because his attention is being guided in such a

way that forces his curiosity to focus on relevant information that satisfies his current epistemic needs, as opposed to permitting an overabundance of distractions that will prevent any successful opening and closing of inquiry. Thus, epistemic conservatism has aided Steve in his epistemic pursuits.

Again, the problem arises when the conditions for our insensitivity become too constraining. The more severe these constraints, the more vicious our epistemic conservatism becomes. This, again, is because the epistemic conservative should be completely blocked from certain concepts that do not fit within the criteria of our virtuous insensitivity. For example, Steve's current web of beliefs may trigger a type of insensitivity that closes him off to useful information because it falls outside of his belief system. Steve, for instance, might believe that his professor is the only person capable of conveying useful information about the midterm, so Steve will then withdraw his attention from the teaching assistant's lectures. In this case, Steve's epistemic conservatism is no longer serving him in a virtuous and efficient way, and he's prevented from opening or closing inquiry about the advantageous information in question, or even processing it at all. For the remainder of this paper, any reference to the problem of epistemic conservatism will assume a vicious kind of epistemic conservatism.

The problem of epistemic conservatism becomes even more concerning when we consider abstract concepts. In constantly constraining our attention to that which we deem as relevant and of interest, we should become blocked from acquiring certain content at all. This would leave us with a missing epistemology. For example, we should

not be able to engage with abstract concepts or inquiry when they fall outside of our world-directed focus, as they are not physically present to us. This means that they lack the interest and relevance that should give us access to them. Concepts such as quantum mechanics, brains in vats, or even complex approaches to reasoning such as critical thinking or the transposition of mathematics, therefore, shouldn't even be components of our epistemologies. Our access to these concepts should be blocked, and we should solely be bound to the world-directed web of accepted belief.

This problem arises in the social realm as well. The *social* problem of epistemic conservatism is largely inspired by Diana Tietjens Meyers's book *Victims' Stories and the Advancement of Human Rights*. Often times, victims' stories of human rights abuse go unheard, unrecognized and unaddressed. In response, Meyers examines this tendency to overlook victims' stories, arguing that this tendency can be explained, in part, by traditional conceptions of what a narrative is supposed to look like. She specifically cites the work of Anthony Amsterdam and Jerome Bruner, who present an Aristotelian conception of the traditional narrative. Some conditions that Amsterdam and Bruner claim an *acceptable* narrative must meet include the possession of a beginning, middle and end; they must also portray an initial state "grounded in the legitimate ordinariness of things"<sup>9</sup> that is disrupted by human intervention, and this must evoke a desire or effort to transform the situation.

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<sup>9</sup> Meyers, Diana T. *Victims stories and the advancement of human rights*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. Pg 68

Meyers challenges this view as being too structurally constrained. Amsterdam and Bruner's account of a narrative assumes specific norms and culturally dependent conventions. As a result, many victims' stories fail to be categorized as such, and go overlooked. Other conceptions of the so-called "traditional narrative" that Meyers cites contain similar problems. Some go so far as to make assumptions about who can be injured and who can make legitimate claims regarding injury. She then argues that this practice establishes a traditional paradigm that "endorses a set of resolutions that may overlook the needs and life trajectories of unrecognized victims—those whose speech is preempted."<sup>10</sup> Victims are then excluded from participating in the social realm because their narratives fail to fall within the traditional paradigm. This commonly happens when victims' stories fail to match the generally-accepted web of belief, or when victims lack the tools which would allow them to express their experiences under structures such as the one presented by Amsterdam and Bruner.

Vicious epistemic conservatism comes in when we examine the structure of virtuous insensitivity. Before the reliable, curious, epistemic agent can open inquiry, their virtuous insensitivity must filter input in such a way that only allows for the processing of information that is relevant and fits within their epistemic motivations. If they are bound by the traditional narrative, as Meyers suggests, then their virtuous insensitivity should, in theory, leave them untouched by the experiences of those whose narratives fall outside of the traditional paradigm. Again, in some cases, this can be an epistemic good because

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<sup>10</sup> IBID. Pg 72

we are prevented from being bombarded with irrelevant information. Recall the two news stories. The epistemic agent focused their curiosity on the people being released from internment camps, as opposed to the person claiming they met George Washington. Their epistemic conservatism was operating in a virtuous manner because they were able to focus their attention on the more relevant story. Epistemic conservatism becomes vicious when we begin to blatantly ignore legitimate cases of victimization because the information given not only failed to meet the conditions of our insensitivity, but also fell outside of what we consider the structure of the traditional narrative.

In *The Rationality of Perception*, Susanna Siegel also briefly examines this problem. She claims that our understanding of victim's stories is going to be shaped by our own outlook on the world. This outlook is influenced by the interface between our own mind and the cultural milieu, making our attitudes towards these stories socially normal responses. As a result, we may become absorbed in this experience and then lack the curiosity that could potentially lead us to know about life beyond our current social experience.<sup>11</sup> If we insert virtuous insensitivity into this view, we see the effects of society on how we determine relevance and establish our own motivations. As a result our insensitivity may dispose of information garnered through these narratives and direct our curiosity elsewhere, leaving us stuck within our current outlook.

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<sup>11</sup> Siegel, Susanna. *The Rationality of Perception*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2017. Pg 181-190

In clinging to our current outlook, we begin to engage in a type of epistemic injustice. Miranda Fricker describes this particular type of injustice as “testimonial injustice”: when a hearer deflates a speaker’s level of credibility based on prejudice.<sup>12</sup> Vicious epistemic conservatism has the capacity to produce this effect. In theory, our virtuous insensitivity should bind our curiosity to the traditional narrative. This means that any speaker who has an experience that does not fit within the traditional narrative is at risk of being downgraded as a knower and having their testimony completely disregarded. This can be explained further with an example used by Fricker regarding sexual harassment. In Fricker’s example, women that experienced sexual harassment in the workplace found it difficult to communicate their experience to others, especially in regards to conveying an understanding of their own experiences and the discomfort they felt. Because the proper tools were not present to place these testimonies within the traditional narrative, virtuous insensitivity should direct our attention away from them, leading us to completely disregard their testimony.

Obviously, it is not the case that we are prevented from accessing these concepts, engaging in inquiries of an abstract nature, or taking in the testimony of an individual whose narrative falls outside the traditional paradigm. In the case of abstract concepts and inquiry, human beings are not only capable of concrete thought regarding the physical world, but they are also capable of abstract thought regarding objects, principles and ideas that exist beyond just that which is physically apparent to them. In addition, humans

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<sup>12</sup> Fricker, Miranda. *Epistemic injustice: power and the ethics of knowing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. Pg 9-29

are capable of symbolic thinking and substitution, as well as complex reasoning. These types of thought processes are applied on an everyday basis through various behaviors. It was Jean Piaget's theory that this capacity for abstract thought is developed later on in childhood, around the age of 11 and continues to develop through adulthood. This is known as Piaget's last stage of childhood development: the formal operational stage. The development of these types of epistemic behaviors that we witness in human beings is clearly indicative of the human capacity to engage with complex ideas that go beyond that which is immediately apparent to us, and we need to be able to account for this capacity.

Agents, not only can engage in these types of thought processes, but they can also do so both reliably and responsibly. Epistemic agents can be curious under the guide of virtuous insensitivity and still able to direct their curiosity towards these abstract concepts, such as quantum mechanics, brains in vats, and mathematical transposition, despite the fact that virtuous insensitivity should prevent them from having this capacity to do so at all. The fact that they can have access to these concepts should be a mark in favor of their reliability, since they possess the capacity to surpass the problems that arise with the epistemic conservatism virtuous insensitivity seems to promote. I propose that this capacity is made possible through our possession of creativity, since it allows us to make unique inquiries. Epistemic creativity provides agents with the means to take epistemic risks, while remaining properly constrained by epistemic halting thresholds.

To be creative is the ability to see beyond the traditional, world-directed realm of belief, and form new ideas, beliefs and principles. In “The Virtue of Insightfulness,” J. Adam Carter argues that this ability allows for deep, non-trivial, and original ideas that extend beyond that which is physically apparent to us. Creativity allows us to recognize relevant information at a deeper level, as well as recognize relational modes that can be used to form beliefs and principles that may have otherwise eluded us. The curious agent may direct their focus to that which seems relevant and of interest, but it is creativity that will ultimately permit that agent to drive their inquiry beyond the information that is readily available and onto more unique forms of thought.

Creativity has the capacity to provide access to abstract concepts and inquiries that should otherwise be inaccessible under the guide of virtuous insensitivity. Creativity then can be applied as a supplemental ability that is used to counter-balance any vicious epistemic conservatism. In doing so, creativity will then provide a salience for concepts that we should not have access to; therefore, there is an added epistemic value that comes with the possession of creativity. Creativity is that which saves virtuous insensitivity and provides an account of this missing epistemology. It is then essential that the epistemic agent must not only exercise curiosity (guided by virtuous insensitivity), but also operate from within a creative mindset so as to safeguard against an epistemic conservatism that could potentially become detrimental to our epistemic lives. The epistemic agent, therefore, ought to engage with their curiosity in this way in order to remain both epistemically reliable and responsible agents.

Creativity establishes a functional relationship between our virtuous insensitivity and curiosity in a way that can prevent epistemic conservatism from becoming vicious. While this makes creativity an essential ability for the reliable and responsible epistemic agent, it is also essential to being an epistemically just agent. Creativity is what allows for the possibility of agent culpability in the case of epistemic injustice. It is possible due to the fact that these agents, in spite of virtuous insensitivity, are still capable of absorbing testimony operating outside of the traditional narrative. This is because creativity, in virtue of being the ability to look beyond the traditional, world-directed, realm of belief has the capacity to allow us to take risks and engage in unique inquiries. This ability can then let us look at information that spans beyond the traditional narrative. Supplementing our virtuous insensitivity with creativity sheds new light on testimony that otherwise would fall within the epistemic gap. This then prevents hearers from committing an epistemic injustice against those whose narratives do not fit within the traditional paradigm, as well as those who lack the tools needed to express their experiences. Thus, possessing creativity is, not only an epistemic good, but also a social good. The ability to process information creatively thus permits the possibility of a just epistemic agent in addition to a responsible and reliable one.

I have argued that how we engage in our curiosity, both reliably and responsibly, will be highly dependent on how our virtuous insensitivity constrains our curiosity in such a way that removes our focus from any unnecessary or irrelevant material. Epistemic curiosity is a central trait that initiates our epistemic pursuits. It is a

fundamental faculty for making us active epistemic agents, and it entails a desire for knowledge that motivates us to open and close inquiries, as well as process information. It is guided by virtuous insensitivity so that we are not overwhelmed by the enormous amount of information we come into contact with on a daily basis, making virtuous insensitivity highly valuable to our epistemic lives; however, despite its epistemic value, virtuous insensitivity, on its own, threatens an epistemic conservatism that should block us from acquiring certain content at all. This potentially blocked content is not solely epistemic in nature, but extends onto the social realm and affects our interactions with one another.

Virtuous insensitivity should, in theory, keep us tied to the general body of accepted belief and prevent any abstract or unique inquiry that surpasses that standard. Obviously this is not the case. Epistemic agents, considered both reliably and responsibly curious, will still be able to engage in abstract ways of thinking. I have argued here that this capacity is made possible through our possession of creativity, in virtue of the fact that creativity allows us to take epistemic risks and open unique inquiries. Creativity constructs a salience we otherwise wouldn't have with virtuous insensitivity alone. Thus, in counter-balancing the (otherwise vicious) epistemic conservatism we supposedly should have, possessing creativity provides an indispensable quality to our epistemic lives.

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