

# CROATIAN JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

## *Symposium on Themes from Work of Ilhan Inan*

Curiosity and Ignorance

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FILIP GRGIĆ

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*Croatian Journal of Philosophy*

1333-1108 (Print)

1847-6139 (Online)

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*Co-published by*

“Kruzak d.o.o.”

Naserov trg 6, 10020 Zagreb, Croatia

fax: + 385 1 65 90 416, e-mail: kruzak@kruzak.hr

www.kruzak.hr

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CROATIAN  
JOURNAL  
OF PHILOSOPHY

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Vol. XVI · No. 48 · 2016

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## *Afterthoughts on Critiques to The Philosophy of Curiosity*

ILHAN INAN

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*In this paper I respond to and elaborate on some of the ideas put forth on my book *The Philosophy of Curiosity* (2012) as well as its follow-up “*Curiosity and Ignorance*” (2016) by Nenad Mišćević, Erhan Demircioğlu, Mirela Fuš, Safiye Yiğit, Danilo Šuster, Irem Günhan Altıparmak, and Aran Arslan.*

**Keywords:** Philosophy of curiosity, ignorance, curiosity, knowledge, reference.

At the time when I published my book, *The Philosophy of Curiosity*, there were only a handful of journal articles and book chapters within the philosophy literature on curiosity.<sup>1</sup> Most of the questions that I addressed and discussed in that book—let alone the answers I proposed—were ones that were hitherto not even raised by any philosopher in the long history of our discipline of more than two millennia. It is a joy to see that in the past four years there has been a rise in interest in at least some of these issues. The extant and scarce literature back then dealt with two questions; one concerning what curiosity is, and the other on whether it is valuable. No doubt these are the two most interesting and perhaps also the most central philosophical questions that may be raised on curiosity. There was however no discussion, for instance, on the question of whether for a being to become curious it is a precondition for them to have the ability to construct a mental representation of something unknown. This issue immediately brings forth various other related questions. Is being curious and intentional mental state? Does mental representation of the unknown always have conceptual content? Can beings who do not possess a language be curious? The list goes on and on. Once you start pondering upon these questions, you find yourself in a rich area of research at the crossroads of philosophy of

<sup>1</sup> For the philosophical literature on curiosity prior to 2012 see the Introduction to Inan (2012).

language, philosophy of mind, epistemology, ethics, value theory, and even philosophical logic. The articles in this issue raise and discuss some of these important issues; some are favorable to my theory of curiosity providing valuable extensions of my views, and others are more critical, raising several fundamental objections; yet all of them I have read with joy. Nenad Mišćević does a wonderful job in arguing that curiosity is “the foundational epistemic virtue”, a view I somewhat merely presupposed in my work, but did not have the resources to argue for. Both Mirela Fuš, and Danilo Šuster address an interesting topic that I had little to say about in my book, namely meta-curiosity, that is curiosity regarding one’s own mental states such as beliefs, or even one’s own curiosity. With her strong practical and theoretical background in the Philosophy for Children movement, Irem Günhan Altıparmak demonstrates why curiosity ought to be a central notion in this discipline, by—to my delight—utilizing some of my ideas. Aran Arslan takes up a rather technical problem concerning whether there are some special epistemic contexts in which the distinction between ostensible and inostensible reference—on which my theory of curiosity is built—has any semantic significance. On the more critical side Mirela Fuš and especially Erhan Demircioğlu propose certain considerations that question my view that not all instances of curiosity have propositional content. Safiye Yiğit convincingly argues against my position that when one has merely inostensible propositional knowledge there must be at least one inostensible term in the sentence that expresses that proposition. Perhaps the most pressing objection comes from Danilo Šuster who takes up certain cases of curiosity which appear to be problematic for my central thesis that curiosity as a mental state always involves the representation of an unknown entity through an inostensible concept.

### *Reply to Demircioğlu*

By appealing to the distinction between objectual and propositional curiosity I have argued that there are also two corresponding forms of ignorance. In his lucid paper Demircioğlu objects:

...the problem is that whatever reason Inan brings forth for doubting “the propositional-bias” in the case of curiosity...could have been easily formulated, with relevant terminological changes being made, as reason for doubting that bias in the case of ignorance, and this shows that the argument *from curiosity* for the distinction between objectual and propositional ignorance is unnecessarily circuitous: assuming that the argument from curiosity establishes the conclusion that there is a distinction between objectual and propositional ignorance, that conclusion could also have been established without going through the roundabout way appealing to the distinction between objectual and propositional curiosity. (Demircioğlu 2016: 307)

Granted that an argument for the distinction between objectual and propositional ignorance can be given without mentioning curiosity at all. Demircioğlu’s objection is that bringing curiosity into the picture

does not add any further support for this conclusion. I think it does. That is because curiosity is typically expressed by the posing of a question, and it is clear that there is a genuine distinction between a wh-question and a whether-question. That a wh-question can never be answered by a simple “yes or “no” is sufficient to show that what is being asked is not whether a certain proposition is true or false, which is what makes the curiosity expressed by such a question objectual. Given that typically curiosity arises out of ignorance, we should then conclude that in such cases the ignorance in question is also objectual. So an argument from curiosity to show that not every instance of ignorance is propositional, I believe, adds support to this conclusion. Let me also note that there is also a personal reason why I think this way; it was through philosophizing on curiosity that I came to realize the significance of the distinction between objectual and propositional ignorance.

I have argued that there are two forms of propositional curiosity corresponding to the two forms of propositional ignorance, fact-ignorance and truth-ignorance. In reply Demircioğlu says:

Inan’s “fact-ignorance” is best understood as “failure to know *the object* that is a constituent of the fact that makes a proposition true” and as such it falls within the rubric of Inan’s *objectual* ignorance. So, the only form of propositional ignorance that we are left with is what Inan calls truth-ignorance. (Demircioğlu 2016: 309)

This appears to be (partly) a terminological issue. What I call “propositional ignorance” (corresponding to propositional curiosity) is one whose content is a proposition. When one does not know whether a proposition is true or false, the content of one’s ignorance is a proposition. Demircioğlu agrees. When one knows that a proposition is true, but is ignorant of the fact that makes it true, the content of one’s ignorance is still a proposition. In both cases the proposition in question is inostensible for the agent. In the former case, it is inostensible because the agent does not know whether it is true or false (and therefore does not know its referent), and in the latter case it is still inostensible given that the agent does not know the fact to which it refers (though he or she knows that it refers to a fact). That a term may be inostensible in these two different ways is easier to see when we consider definite descriptions. The description “the closest planet to Earth on which there is intelligent life” is inostensible (most likely for all us) given that we do not know whether it has a referent, but the description “the cause of dinosaur’s becoming extinct” is also inostensible for anyone who does not know what it refers to even if they know that it must have a referent (given that they know that dinosaurs existed in the past, but no longer do so, and that it has a cause). Something similar takes place when we consider full sentences; one may be ignorant as to whether a sentence refers to a fact (when one does not know whether it expresses a truth or falsity), or one may know that the sentence does refer to a fact (when one knows that it expresses a truth) but is ignorant of the fact to which

it refers. (This is based on a theory of truth and falsity that I am currently working on in a new book project: a sentence is true just in case it refers, and is false just in case it fails to refer.) I agree that that fact-ignorance may be taken as a special instance of objectual ignorance, but still we should not forget that it has propositional content. One reason why I wish to make the distinction this way is because one may have objectual ignorance of a fact even if the content of their ignorance is not propositional. This would be the case for instance if someone were to say “hey, did you hear what happened yesterday” and I have no idea to what fact she is talking about. In these cases reference to a fact is enabled by a definite description rather than a full sentence (i.e. “the fact my friend is talking about”), and therefore is not propositional.

The most pressing objection that Demircioğlu puts forth has to do with the distinction between objectual and propositional ignorance:

Let us call the thesis that for every case of objectual ignorance, there is a case of propositional ignorance with which it can be identified *propositionalism about ignorance* (shortly, *PI*) ... Inan is right that the fact that eliminating propositional ignorance eliminates objectual ignorance does not imply that objectual ignorance is the same as propositional ignorance. However, the question that calls for an answer is what it is that explains *that* fact: why does eliminating propositional ignorance eliminate objectual ignorance? The question receives a straightforward answer if PI is true. Inan’s account, on the other hand, owes us an answer. (Demircioğlu 2016: 311)

I agree that propositional knowledge can eliminate one’s ignorance even if the content of one’s ignorance is not propositional (though in most cases such knowledge has to be ostensible). My emphasis here is on the *content* of ignorance though, or to be more precise, the *content of awareness of ignorance*. It seems wrong to claim that when you are ignorant where your keys are, and your keys are in fact in the bathroom, then the content of your ignorance can be captured by the proposition that your keys are in the bathroom. After all this may not even have occurred to you. If not, then what you were aware of was not your ignorance that your keys were in the bathroom. If what Demircioğlu calls *propositionalism about ignorance* were to be correct, it would follow that being aware of your ignorance where your keys are, would be the same thing as being aware of your ignorance that they are in the bathroom (assuming that it is true). This simply cannot be correct. When you are curious about where something is, (or who someone is, or why something happened etc.) and you have no hypothesis about the correct answer, then you cannot express your curiosity as a whether-question, and consequently you cannot express your ignorance in terms of a proposition whose truth value you seek. Indeed, once you come to know that your keys are in the bathroom your ignorance as to where your keys are will be eliminated, and your curiosity will be sated. This in no way shows that you were curious about whether your keys were in the bathroom. If it never occurred to you that your keys were in the bathroom, not even as an unlikely hypothesis, then you were simply not curious



about whether the keys were there. Of course you were ignorant that your keys were in the bathroom, but you had no awareness of this. It simply follows then that the ignorance of which you are aware that led you to be curious where your keys are, was not your ignorance concerning the proposition that the keys are in the bathroom. To repeat, the fact that objectual ignorance can be eliminated by the acquisition of propositional knowledge does not show that objectual ignorance is also propositional. Demircioğlu seems to agree with this, but he thinks that I owe an explanation. My explanation is that when you have objectual curiosity there is a corresponding inostensible term, and one way of converting that term into an ostensible one is to acquire propositional knowledge. When you find your keys in the bathroom, two things happen simultaneously; one is that by observing the whereabouts of your keys you convert your inostensible term “the location of my keys” into an ostensible one, and the other is that you gain propositional knowledge of the fact that the keys are in the bathroom. It would not be correct to claim that propositional knowledge always has this affect.

### *Reply to Fuš*

Mirela Fuš, in her interesting paper, argues that objectual curiosity has propositional content, which I strictly wish to deny. She claims that when Holmes is curious about who murdered Smith, he believes that someone murdered Smith, which of course has propositional content. For some reason she thinks that this belief statement is a “translation” of the original statement that attributes curiosity to Holmes. I cannot think of any sense of “translation” that would make her claim true. Curiosity-attribution is one thing, belief-attribution is another. It may be said that when Holmes is curious about who murdered Smith, he presupposes that someone is the murderer. But that expresses what he presupposes, it definitely does not express what he is curious about. In fact, by presupposing that someone murdered Smith, Holmes may be curious about things other than who the murderer is. For instance, if Holmes is curious about where the murderer is, he again may presuppose that someone is the murderer. Furthermore, it is not clear to me that in order to be curious about who the murderer is, Holmes must believe that someone is the murderer. If the evidence Holmes gathers at the scene does not rule out the possibility that Smith was assaulted, or perhaps committed suicide, and if Holmes thinks that the evidence slightly favors the murder scenario, but not strong enough for him to come to believe that Smith was in fact murdered, then he may merely presuppose this without believing it. (For a more detailed discussion of this see Inan (2012), Chapter 11-Presuppositions of Curiosity.)

There is an interesting footnote in which Fuš mentions an objection due to Timothy Williamson:

Timothy Williamson (in personal discussions) pointed out that what is going completely astray with Inan’s strategy is that he is focusing all the time

on *belief* when the curiosity has to do with *knowledge*. For example, Williamson strongly disagrees with the above claim that “Curiosity can only take place when we come to realize the fallibility of our beliefs” (Inan 2014: 145). He believes that somebody who has no awareness of their own fallibility can also be curious, let’s say, about what is inside of the box. For if you don’t know what is inside the box, you can still have a desire to know what is inside the box. This is for Williamson a result of his commitment that curiosity acquires a desire to acquire knowledge. However, for the sake of argument, I will proceed with Inan’s notion about one’s realization of one’s fallibility. (Fuš 2016: 317)

This appears to be based on a misunderstanding of my claim “Curiosity can only take place when we come to realize the fallibility of our beliefs” (Inan 2014: 145). Perhaps I should have been a bit more careful in making this statement in the way that I did. I did not mean to suggest that for every instance of curiosity the subject has a belief, which he or she realizes to be fallible. First of all, I made this statement within a context in which I was discussing propositional curiosity, and not objectual curiosity. Coming to realize the fallibility of our beliefs is a precondition only for propositional curiosity. Secondly note that the statement contains the notion of belief in the plural and not in the singular. That is because it expresses a general precondition for propositional curiosity. It can be paraphrased as: only those beings who have the capacity to reflect on the fallibility of their beliefs can enjoy propositional curiosity. Otherwise it would be wrong to claim that in order for one to be curious about whether such-and-such is the case, one must come to realize that their belief that such-and-such is the case is fallible. That is because the curious subject may simply not hold such a belief. In order to be curious about whether there is life on other planets, you need not believe that there is life on other planets, in which case “coming to realize the fallibility of your belief” would not be applicable. In fact, as I have argued in the same paper, one may believe that such-and-such is *not* the case, and still be curious about whether such-and-such is the case. Despite the fact that Williamson’s objection is based on a misreading of what I said, I was nonetheless pleased about it, because it adds support to my contention that not every instance of curiosity is propositional. The example cited by Fuš, that is being curious about what is in the box, is an instance of objectual curiosity. I am in full agreement with Williamson that this not need involve an awareness of the fallibility of any particular belief the subject has. This appears to show that Williamson agrees with me that not all curiosity is propositional.

In her paper Fuš brings up another very interesting issue, which unfortunately I never got a chance to deal with, at least not in print. This has to do with what may be called meta-curiosity, that is curiosity whose object is one’s own mental state. I take it that what Fuš calls “horizontal versus vertical dynamics” addresses this issue. This involves curiosity about one’s own beliefs, desires, knowledge, etc. and

even one's own curiosity. If one does not have privileged access to one's own mental states, in the sense that one's beliefs about their own mental states may at times be fallible, then it should be the case that one may enjoy curiosity with regard to one's own mental states. This is indeed a very interesting issue and I am grateful to Fuš for bringing it up. Questions such as "what do I feel now?", "do I love her?", "do I sincerely believe that this year will be better than the last?", or even "am I really curious about whether there is liquid water on Mars?", in certain contexts, may perhaps legitimately express one's curiosity. There is obviously a lot more to be said about this.

### *Reply to Šuster*

Now another form of meta-curiosity is one that is about, not an object, but a concept. Danilo Šuster addresses this issue in his engaging paper and discusses it in length. In fact, Šuster is not convinced that such instances of meta-curiosity can be handled by my theory of inostensible conceptualization. He appears to be inclined to think that there may be other cases of curiosity as well which do not fit this model. Before we get to these other cases first let us look at what Šuster has to say on meta-curiosity.

Can we also be curious about something we are at the time unable to conceptualize, to describe with an inostensible term? According to Inan (2012: 65), "if we cannot express our curiosity by a definite description, then we really have not expressed a precise question that captures our curiosity." This sounds plausible—the inability to conceptualize one's inquiries is often a sign of confusion and one's search in the dark. But not always. We are able to ascend to higher levels and ask meaningful questions about curiosity itself. We can be curious about the very conditions for the cognitive contact with reality: What representations to use? How to conceptualize a certain problem? What definite descriptions to use? Why should these questions not be allowed as the proper focus of curiosity? (Šuster 2016: 333)

To substantiate his point Šuster provides us with a nice example:

Let me illustrate some of these points with the help of a science fiction novel, *His Master's Voice* (HMV), by Stanislaw Lem (published in 1968, English translation 1984). Its main topic, I would say, is *scientific curiosity*—scientists are trying to decode, translate and understand what *seems* to be a message from extraterrestrials (specifically, a beam of neutrinos with regularities from the *Canis Minor* constellation) ... Two years of intensive curiosity were mostly spent on formulating the proper questions for inquiry—how to conceptualize the strange phenomenon, what kind of inostensible terms to use. The initial question, I suppose, was just—what is *this*? And then the focus shifted to the hypothesis that the observed regularities constitute a message. This was just a provisional, hypothetical conceptualization, typical, I would say, for certain foundational scientific investigations. Inan might say that the main question of curiosity was: "What is the meaning of the signal?" with "the meaning of the signal" as the inostensible term, standing for ... what, exactly? Meanings make for very strange objects, even more so than facts (just consider the eternal search for "the meaning of

life”). In the scenario by Lem, this question comes very close to the question of meta-curiosity: “How to represent the strange phenomenon?” (Šuster 2016: 334)

Such cases of curiosity cannot be subsumed under an inostensible concept according to Šuster:

Object level curiosity about X is based on our ability to conceptualize X, to introduce inostensible terms (“the X?”) and look for their referents. Meta-curiosity is curiosity about these very representations: how to conceptualize the problem? What descriptions to use? What inostensible terms to introduce? Again, one could always introduce inostensible terms, such as “the conceptualization of this problem.” Here, also, the inostensible reference seems to be just a different name for the problem. True, meta-curiosity is on the brink of confusion, but this is sometimes just a different name for a philosophical puzzlement. (Šuster 2016: 339)

First let me note that, under my theory, though meta-curiosity is a special case that involves certain forms of higher-order conceptualization, even instances of ordinary first-order curiosity that can be expressed in language also typically involve meta-cognition. When Holmes is curious about who murdered Smith, we assume that he is aware of his ignorance of what the referent of the term “Smith’s murderer” is. The content of the description is what I take to be a singular concept. Holmes is then aware of his ignorance of the referent of this concept which requires him to attribute a property to it, which I take to be the property of being inostensible. Curiosity that involves awareness of ignorance of the referent of a concept always requires one to attribute a property to that concept, namely the property of its being inostensible. In that sense curiosity expressed by a simple who-question does involve second-order predication. Nonetheless it is not an instance of meta-curiosity given that its object is a person and not a concept. Curiosity expressed by a whether-question on the other hand is more abstract, in the sense that its object is not an object, but a property. Being curious whether *there is life on other planets* requires one to reflect on this thought and to become aware of their ignorance about whether it corresponds to reality. In simple terms what they seek is whether it has the property of *being true*. If we take meta-curiosity to be the kind of curiosity which is directed toward not an object but a concept, we should conclude that curiosity expressed by a simple whether-question is also an instance of meta-curiosity. It is highly important to come to realize that beings that do not have the capacity for such forms of meta-cognition cannot enjoy curiosity as such. Now coming to the sort of meta-curiosity that Šuster mentions. When we experience a phenomenon which we cannot even recognize to be falling under any familiar sortal-concept we may become curious about how to represent the phenomenon in question. If we were to detect a signal that appears to be coming from outer space, we may be totally in the dark as to what it “means”. Granted that a description such as “the meaning of the signal”, in such a case, appears to be too vague or indeterminate to serve as a useful inostensible term.

If we cannot specify any kind of entity as possibly being the referent of such a term, then it is not clear what we are curious about. Now if this is indeed a case in which there is curiosity, but there is no proper inostensible term that represents the object of curiosity as Šuster claims, then it should follow that the question “what are we curious about?” should have no definite answer. If so, then it seems to me that the mental state of the subject who raises the question cannot properly be said to be one of curiosity. It may be mere perplexity, or perhaps some may wish to call it “proto-curiosity”. A more primitive version of such a case could take place when an animal, or even a human in the early stages of evolution, comes across something unusual and unexpected and cannot make any sense of it. One may get a feeling of *wonder* in such a situation, in the sense of being astonished or perplexed, but this does not amount to curiosity. Now putting aside Lem’s novel, it seems to me that when the experts at NASA receive some unusual signal as such, they are not merely perplexed or astonished, but in fact curious. Given their linguistic skills, and their capacity for meta-cognition, they would be in a position to represent the unknown by an inostensible term that is a lot less vague and indeterminate than a phrase such as “the meaning of the signal”. They could be curious about what its cause is, or whether it is being transmitted by some intelligent beings or whether it is caused by, say, an electromagnetic field which they have not been able to detect yet etc. Similarly, when one asks what the meaning of life is, but is unable to explain to us what it is that they seek in asking this question, then I would be inclined to think that they are simply confused. Mere confusion, perplexity, or astonishment does not amount to curiosity. Now in those types of cases that Šuster mentions, one may raise the simple-sounding question “what is it?”. Such an interrogative may acquire different contents depending on the context. It may, for instance, be used to ask what *kind* of phenomenon it is. Here the inostensible term would then be “the kind of phenomenon the signal belongs to”. Such a term need not be vague or indeterminate. Beings that do not possess a language, or those that do not have a meta-concept like *kind*, cannot construct such an inostensible term, and hence cannot be curious about what kind of phenomenon they are experiencing. Perhaps what worries Šuster is that the kind of phenomenon in question may be something that we are totally unfamiliar with. It may very well be the case that we have no prior concept for such a kind. Is there any paradox here? No! If the phenomenon in question is of a novel kind, then simply by constructing the inostensible description “the kind of phenomenon the signal belongs to” we are able to represent the kind in question, though only inostensibly. Later if we are lucky enough to determine the kind in question, we could be in a position to grasp this kind ostensibly.

Šuster’s gives another interesting case:

An example might be a quote from Galileo (*Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems*, cited in Lambie 2014: 46):

... considering that everyone who followed the opinion of Copernicus had at first held the opposite, and was very well informed concerning the arguments of Aristotle and Ptolemy, and that on the other hand none of the followers of Ptolemy and Aristotle had been formerly of the Copernican opinion... I commenced to believe that one who forsakes an opinion which he imbibed with his mother's milk and which is supported by multitudes, to take up another that has few followers ... must of necessity be moved ... by the most effective arguments. This made me very curious to get to the bottom of the matter. (Šuster 2016: 329)

Šuster takes Galileo's curiosity here to be an instance of meta-curiosity:

One way to understand Galileo's "This made me very curious to get to the bottom of the matter" is precisely as a question of meta-curiosity: how to approach a certain problem and what concepts to use? (Šuster 2016: 333)

I am not sure whether Šuster's interpretation of Galileo's curiosity is historically accurate, but assuming that it is, once again I see no problem with it. A meta-representation by the use of an inostensible term such as "the way to approach the problem" or "the concepts to use in dealing with the problem" is perfectly fine; note that once again beings that do not possess the concept of *ways of approaching a problem*, or the concept of a *concept*, will not be in a position to construct such inostensible terms even if they have a language. On the other hand, I am not convinced that Galileo's curiosity was of this kind. It seems more plausible to assume that when Galileo wished to get to "the bottom of the matter", given the context, what he wanted to know were "the facts that settle the dispute between the Ptolemaic and the Copernican theory". If so, then what Galileo was curious about were those very facts, which he must have thought will settle the dispute in favor of the Copernicans. To generalize, when there is a dispute between two rival theories on an important topic, one may be curious as to what the facts are that would reveal which of the two theories is the correct one. Now clearly in such cases the object of curiosity is not very specific, but the fact remains that there is an inostensible term whose referent is being sought. To appreciate the value of this all one needs to consider is to think of people or animals who are unable to conceptualize facts and therefore are unable to construct such an inostensible term and be curious about its referent. Whenever there is dispute concerning an issue which we care to know it is a privilege to possess the capacity to reflect on which view is correct and what facts would settle the issue in favor of it.

Perhaps the most important type of case that Šuster has doubts about how it can be accounted for by my theory concerns why-questions. Here is what he has to say on the matter:

Well, *reasons*, *causes* and *ways* make for strange referents. First of all, what kinds of *entities* are we talking about? Inan says nothing about the referents of terms for reasons and causes. So let me try with a plausible hypothesis... we might try to postulate *facts* as candidate referents for inostensible terms referring to unknown reasons and causes.... Why was it Europeans who

conquered the world rather than the Chinese? It turns out that Europe had an optimal intermediate degree of fragmentation (a too-unified society is a disadvantage, and a too-fragmented society is also a disadvantage). Difficult to pin this down as “the object of the inostensible concept... Of course, there is always an inostensible description available for any “Why X?” question. A simple “the reason for X” or, even more general, “the explanation of X” can be postulated as the unknown referent, whatever that might be. But this is just like saying that the “epistemic file” on X has been opened, but there is nothing in it, or that a file has been created without any descriptive content. (Šuster 2016: 331–332)

Why-questions are notoriously difficult to analyze. Sometimes we ask for a cause, sometimes a reason, and yet at other times we ask for an explanation without committing ourselves to whether that involves a cause or a reason or a combination of the two. Furthermore, the notions of cause, reason and explanation are also highly interest-relative; what counts as a good explanation of why something happened may differ from person to person, and even from context to context for the same person. Curiosity expressed by a why-question is then equally difficult to treat. As Šuster notes I have refrained from going into a detailed analysis of why-curiosity; but this was not due to an oversight on my part. Rather being aware of the difficulties involved, I decided to set it aside so as not to get entangled in technical discussions on the notions of cause reason and explanation in general. The purpose of the book was to give a theory of curiosity in general; it was not to analyze each and every form of curiosity in detail. Of course it would have made the book a lot richer had I been able to allocate a separate section on why-curiosity, but it was simply too difficult a task to undertake. There is after all a large philosophical literature on causes and reasons and ones who specialize on the topic could do a better job on it. In fact, by utilizing the notion of inostensible reference one can write a whole book on why-curiosity with all its different forms. Now having said all this, I still think that Šuster’s criticism is missing a very important point. That is as vague and indeterminate and interest-relative and context-dependent as it may be, still the notions of cause and reason are precious concepts which allow us to raise why-questions, and more importantly they allow us to become curious about why something happened. To appreciate the significance of this all we need to do is to consider those beings that do not possess the concepts of cause and reason, for instance some animals, perhaps all, or small children who have not yet acquired a language. It seems to me to be extremely implausible to hold that such beings can in fact be curious as to why some event took place, or why someone performed the action that they did. Can a dog, for instance, be curious about, say, why you ate treating her badly, or an infant be curious about why her mother’s milk tastes different this time? Granted that animals and infants do show certain emotional responses in such cases when something unexpected happens; they may be surprised, or be perplexed, but none of these emotions can be iden-

tified with curiosity concerning causes and reasons. Aristotle, in the beginning of his *Metaphysics*, proclaims that all philosophy starts with wonder which is what leads us to ask why-questions. Had there been another creature on earth which had the capacity to ask why-questions out of curiosity, they too would have had at least the capacity to do philosophy and science. There appears to be no evidence for this.

Šuster writes:

I do not think that all questions of curiosity can be reduced to the quest for objectual knowledge so masterfully covered in Inan's book. "Why?" of causes, reasons and explanations cannot be (easily) accommodated in this model, even less so our desire for understanding. True, one can always coin inostensible descriptions like: "the explanation of this strange fact." But, in this case, inostensible reference seems to be just the name of the problem and not the proper solution. (Šuster 2016: 333)

I must have to disagree with Šuster here; it seems to me that the ability to construct an inostensible term such as "the explanation of this strange fact" is one that can be possessed only by those kinds of beings who have not only mastered a language, but are also advanced enough to grasp higher-order epistemic concepts such as explanation. It may very well have been the case that in the early stages within the evolutionary process of language our ancestors lacked this ability given that their language had not sufficiently developed to include a term for the notion of explanation. That is perhaps why the emergence of science and philosophy had to wait for many millennia to come even when our ancestors spoke a fully recursive language.

Another problematic issue that Šuster rightly brings up has to do with our curiosity expressed by sentences that contain logical operators and connectives:

There is a familiar conundrum in the area of truthmakers—are there distinct kinds of facts corresponding to logically complex truths, such as negations, disjunctions, generalities? Are there *negative* facts, such as the fact that there is no life on Jupiter's moon—presumably the answer to the question: "Is there any life on Jupiter's moon?" Also, causes and reasons are often disjunctive: why did the accident happen? Because Fred omitted to take precautions. What kind of empirical object (fact) is to be found in the world as the referent for Fred's omission? Omissions are wildly disjunctive. (Šuster 2016: 330–331)

I must admit that in my book on curiosity I have not been able to give a complete account of how each and every instance of curiosity expressible by a term containing a logical operator can be subsumed under an inostensible concept. I think I did a fairly good job in handling curiosity expressed by conditional and disjunctive questions (see Chapter 2 in Inan (2012)), but I was unable to put forth a detailed account of curiosity expressed by terms containing quantifiers, and perhaps more importantly, my treatment of curiosity involving negations was at best scratching the surface of an issue that I now consider to be vital in our efforts to understand what truth is. After the publication of my



book I have been working on exactly this topic which has now turned into a book manuscript. Given the depth of the issue it is by no means possible for me to give a satisfactory answer to Šuster here, but I can at least give you a rough idea how I now treat such cases. By utilizing Frege's notion of a reference-shifting operator I hold that for every sentence that contains a logical operator, the terms within the scope of that operator refer not to their customary referents but to their contents. For instance, the sentence "the earth is not flat", when we give negation wide-scope, does not refer to a negative fact; rather it refers to the thought *that the earth is flat*, and says of it that it does not correspond to reality—which I take to be a special form of failure of reference. Such a sentence, given that it expresses a truth, does refer to reality, but its referent is, not an empirical fact, but rather what I call a "content-state". When one is curious about whether the earth is flat, the object of curiosity is a property of a thought. In such a case the proposition that the earth is flat is inostensible, given that our subject does not know whether it refers to a content-state—in which case it is true—or whether fails to refer—in which case it is false. Disjunctions, conditionals, quantified sentences can also be handled in a similar fashion, though their analyses is more complicated than negation.<sup>2</sup>

### *Reply to Yiğit*

With regard to the distinction I have made between ostensible and inostensible propositional knowledge Safiye Yiğit comes up with a very interesting objection:

For Inan, there are two ways in which a true proposition can be inostensible for a subject, in the first case the subject does not know whether the proposition is true, and in the other case the subject knows that the proposition is true, i.e., it refers to a fact, but the subject does not know the fact which makes the proposition true. This latter case gives rise to "inostensible knowledge", in which the subject merely knows that there is a fact, but does not have sufficient experience of the fact so as to make it ostensible. On the other hand, one's knowledge could be deemed "ostensible knowledge" if all the terms that are contained in the given proposition are ostensible to the speaker; that is, if the speaker knows the referent of the terms in the proposition. On the contrary, in inostensible knowledge cases, for Inan, there is at least one term in the sentence that is inostensible to the subject. He even claims that "the degree of ostensibility of a whole declarative sentence is also a function of the degree of ostensibility of its constituent terms", which comes to mean that if all the terms in a sentence are ostensible to a subject, the sentence is also ostensible. However, I would like to allow for another possible way of having inostensible knowledge, which is perhaps the least noticed one of the inostensible knowledge cases. In this second case, one knows that the proposition expressed by the sentence is true, and one has ostensible knowledge of all the terms in a sentence, but the proposition as a

<sup>2</sup> I discuss these issues in length in my book manuscript (*Truth As Reference and Falsity As Failure*) currently under review for publication.

whole is still inostensible to the subject. In other words, one knows that “a is F”, and both a and F are ostensible to the subject, but the knowledge of the proposition as a whole is still inostensible. (Yiğit 2016: 344)

In defense of her position Yiğit gives the following example:

For instance, one may think that the sentence “war is painful” is ostensible to a subject since both the concepts ‘war’ and ‘painful’ are ostensible for the subject and he knows the proposition to be true. But it might turn out that the fact the proposition as a unity refers to is not actually ostensible to the subject. (Yiğit 2016: 344)

Even if one’s experience of wars and one’s experience of pain, taken separately, can be considered to be sufficient to make the term “war” as well as the term “painful” ostensible in their idiolect, it may, according to Yiğit, be the case that they have little or no experience of a war’s being painful. In such a case though each and every term within a sentence is ostensible for the subject, the whole sentence may still be inostensible even when they come to know that it expresses a truth. This would then be a case in which there is inostensible knowledge of the proposition that war is painful, though the two constituent concepts of the proposition are ostensible for the subject. To put it in ordinary language, one may know what war is, and one may know what it is for something to be painful, but one may nonetheless not know the painfulness of wars. If so, then my thesis that when one knows a proposition, the degree of the ostensibility of the sentence that express that proposition is a function of the degrees of the ostensibility of its constituent terms. Perhaps some may think that one drawback of the example that Yiğit gives is that it appears to be too subjective (i.e. the painfulness of war). This should not be worry though, since if what she says is correct other examples can be given to support her claim that are far less subjective. You could come to know, for instance, that the sun is setting in Perugia, if a friend tells you this on the phone, but you may still wonder about it. You may have experienced sunsets in the past, and you may have seen Perugia and know a lot about it, but you may never have experienced the sunset in Perugia, or even if you have, you may still be curious about the sun setting in Perugia now. It seems that in such a case though both the terms “Perugia” and “sunset” are on the far side of the ostensible end of the scale for you, “the sunset in Perugia now” would still be closer to the inostensible end, as indicated by the fact that you may be curious about it. Once again this would be a case in which you would know that the proposition in question is true, though you would have little acquaintance with the fact that makes the proposition true. This would then be another case of inostensible propositional knowledge. Yiğit’s argument then shows that the degree of ostensibility of a sentence is not *merely* a function of the degrees of ostensibility of its constituent parts. So I stand corrected.

In these cases of what I take to be inostensible propositional knowledge, Yiğit suggests that we may use another epistemic verb in place of *to know*.

Peculiar as it might sound, one suggestion could be to adopt the use of “testify” rather than “know” whenever one merely has inostensible propositional knowledge. In other words, at the entrance of the stairway to knowledge, one should perhaps be aware that one is not entitled to say one “knows” the proposition yet, or else one should at least realize that “to know” is gradable and it is possible to increase the quality of his knowledge. So, the use of “testify” should be seen as an attempt to raise the standard of knowledge rather than a vain effort to change language. Accordingly, if I were lucky enough to have ostensible knowledge of the beauty of love, this would stipulate me to say “I know that love is beautiful”; however, being lucky enough not to have experienced the painfulness of war in my life so far, I should perhaps say that “I testify that war is painful” rather than “I know that war is painful”. (Yiğit 2016: 346–347)

As I understand the reason that Yiğit prefers to appeal to the verb to testify rather than to know is because in such cases the subject does not have direct experience of a fact though he or she knows that the fact exists, and a typical way in which this could happen is when the subject knows that the fact exists by testimony. If there is such a thing as knowledge by testimony, it is usually the type of knowledge that I call inostensible. However not all inostensible knowledge is based on testimony. You may, for instance, know that the shortest spy is a spy, not because you have heard from some reliable source, but simply by inferring it from your background knowledge that there are spies, and no two people are exactly the same height. You may come to know that 98<sup>th</sup> prime number is odd, not by being told that it is so, but by inferring it from your background knowledge that all primes except 2 are odd. If you do not know who the shortest spy is, or what the 98<sup>th</sup> prime number is, then you do not know the facts that make these propositions true, though you know that they are true. In these cases, it would be wrong to say that you know these propositions by testimony. This is one reason why to testify cannot replace to know in all cases of inostensible knowledge. There may in fact be languages that use two separate epistemic verbs for the distinction between ostensible and inostensible knowledge, but it seems that English is not one of them. There are languages such as Turkish that distinguish between the two cases in reporting an event not by appealing to two separate verbs, but by using two separate modes of past tense. If you have witnessed the event in question you use one mode, but if you haven’t, you use another.

### *Reply to Günhan Altıparmak*

The fact that within the somewhat wide literature on the Philosophy for Children (P4C) movement there has been very little discussion on curiosity is another good indicator of the resistance researchers have had, even if it is not at a conscious level, to philosophize on curiosity. Arousing curiosity within a P4C session is so important and central that the success of the session may be measured in terms of it. After all the purpose of a P4C session, as Irem Günhan Altıparmak nicely puts

it, is not to try to *teach* children philosophy, but rather to facilitate discussion that arouses their interest and curiosity. One normally would have expected that within the P4C literature the significance of arousing curiosity in the minds of the child is emphasized and discussed. It seems to me that Günhan Altıparmak's contributions to this effect will be very valuable. What I find most impressive in her approach is her willingness to develop new concepts. In one of our engaging discussions two novel concepts emerged that appear to be vital in laying down the criteria to determine what makes a P4C session successful. One of them is the concept of *curiosity arouser*, which relates to Lipman's notion of attention grabber; this is such a useful notion not just for P4C but for all academic work on curiosity not just within philosophy, but also other related disciplines such as psychology, cognitive science as well as both theoretical and applied educational sciences. The other concept that Günhan Altıparmak makes use of is that of *joint curiosity* which is a special instance of the notion of joint attention, widely used especially in Cognitive Science. This notion is not just an extremely important one for our discussions concerning P4C but it has a wide area of applications. It relates to issues that could be addressed by social psychologists and even sociologists, as well as cognitive scientists; furthermore, it seems to me that it is one that would have a good use in our efforts to understand the origins of human cultures especially the rise of the sciences and philosophy. I hope and expect that with Günhan Altıparmak's efforts these two concepts will become a part of the standard P4C terminology.

### *Reply to Arslan*

Aran Arslan dwells upon an issue that has been bothering me for quite a while. Whether a term is ostensible or inostensible for a subject is an epistemic issue that has to do with the subject's epistemic link to the referent of that term. Prima facie the distinction appears to have no semantic significance, that is whether a term is ostensible or inostensible appears to have no bearing on what proposition is expressed by a sentence which contains that term. It should not make any difference what a definite description such as "the capital of Rwanda" expresses when it appears in a sentence whether we know or don't know its referent. What we understand when we grasp the meaning of the term "the capital of Rwanda" within a sentential context ought to be independent of whether we have spent all our life in Kigali, or whether we know nothing about this city—except perhaps that it is the capital of Rwanda. The content of a term should remain unaffected by the epistemic connection a subject has to its referent. If the ostensible/inostensible distinction had semantic significance, then it would have followed that when a speaker asks "what is the capital of Rwanda?" out of curiosity, the term would mean something different from what it would mean after she finds out the answer. Furthermore, it would

have followed that two people using the same description in discourse could mean different things by their use of that term if the term is ostensible for one and inostensible for the other. Suppose, for instance, a Rwanda native living in Kigali is conversing with an American who is quite ignorant about this country; and the American asks: "what is the capital of Rwanda?" If our Rwandan guy takes the utterance of the interrogative to be sincere, then he can easily deduce that the guy does not know what the capital is, which would imply that the description is inostensible. It would have been extremely weird for our Rwandan guy to even entertain the idea that the term "the capital of Rwanda" means something different for the American given that he does not know its referent. Normally speakers of a language do not have any training in the philosophy of language, nor do they need it to have a normal daily conversation. Quite naturally our Rwandan guy will take the term to mean whatever he means by it when he uses it. For singular terms such as definite descriptions it seems to me to be extremely implausible to hold that the ostensible/inostensible distinction has any semantic significance. When we consider general terms, however, things perhaps are not that clear. For instance, when the term "helium" was first introduced as the chemical element causing a certain bright yellow line in the solar spectrum, very little was known about it, making the term highly inostensible in the idiolects of even the most experienced chemists. After helium was discovered our knowledge of this element got richer and richer, bringing us closer and closer to the ostensible end of the epistemic scale. Did this epistemic progress have any impact on what the term "helium" means? I am inclined to think not, but I am sure that there is more room for disagreement here compared to the case of definite descriptions. It seems to me that the concept of *helium* that we use today is the same concept that was introduced by Edward Frankland and Joseph Lockyer before this element was even discovered. Arguments on the other side may be given. For instance, a Kantian may disagree by claiming that the concept of helium "expanded" (a metaphor used by Kant himself) the more we learned about it. I find such views very problematic, though of course I cannot deal with the matter in more depth here.

As Arslan mentions there appear to be some special contexts in which the distinction may be said to have semantic significance. Years ago in my doctoral dissertation I had very briefly considered such contexts without committing myself to any view on the matter, and in my book I intentionally set these cases aside and did not discuss them in detail. I am grateful to Arslan for bringing this puzzling issue back to my attention. Now the contexts we are talking about here are cases in which a name is introduced by description for an object that the reference-fixer has no experience of. Both the new name as well as its reference-fixing description would then have to be inostensible for the reference-fixer. Taking the worn-out example once again, we assume

that Le Verrier introduced the name “Neptune” by fixing its referent through the description “the planet causing the perturbations in the orbit of Uranus”, which at the time referred to a planet that was unknown to him, making both the description, as well as the name introduced in terms of it, inostensible in his idiolect. Now it is important to acknowledge that, as Arslan notes “[b]efore its empirical discovery, the name ‘Neptune’ was an inostensible term for Leverrier”, though “[a]fter the discovery, he could fix the referent of the name by ostension.” We are of course assuming that the planet that we nowadays call “Neptune” does in fact perturb Uranus, and if so, the name before the discovery referred to the same planet that we later discovered. After the discovery the earlier reference-fixing description lost its special status; that is because we now are in a position to point to Neptune, through its image we receive on a telescope, and re-fix the reference of the name by ostension. Now it would appear that the following sentence would express a truth for Le Verrier when the name was inostensible, but later after the discovery when the term became ostensible the very same sentence expresses a falsity.

“It is certain that if Neptune exists, then it is the planet causing the perturbations in the orbit of Uranus.”<sup>3</sup>

I too was once convinced, just like Arslan, that in these special epistemic contexts the ostensible/inostensible distinction bears a semantic significance. Yet I now find the whole issue quite puzzling, so much so that I refrain from adopting a position.

### *Reply to Mišćević*

In his illuminating piece Nenad Mišćević forcefully argues that “curiosity is the foundational epistemic virtue”, a view to which I am very sympathetic. There is hardly anything he says that I would wish to argue. Perhaps there is only one issue which may be a source of disagreement. Mišćević proclaims that “truth is the primary goal”, a view that he has defended in previous papers as well (see his (2007)). This however, should be taken with some caution, for Mišćević argues in length that “mere true belief is not the fundamental bearer”. That is because, on his view, knowing is more valuable than merely having a true belief. Once again I totally agree. Nonetheless I am reluctant to accept that truth is the primary goal. Now it may be the case that for beings like us who have a language that contains declarative sentences and the concept of truth, reaching truth is important and valuable. In that sense it may be taken to be a goal. However, saying that it is “the primary goal” seems to suggest that it is essential, in the sense that for any epistemic agent with a language reaching truth ought to be the agent’s goal. This I wish to deny. The reason is that I reject the

<sup>3</sup> See Inan (2012) *Chapter 12 Limits of Curiosity and Its Satisfaction* for a more detailed discussion of this and similar examples.

idea that the concept of truth is essential to language. Language may have evolved differently in such a way that its basic syntactic unit to think about reality is not a declarative sentence but rather something different. Such a language would not contain the concept of truth. An example of such a possible language is what I call “Whenglish” which is a language just like English though it contains not sentences but wences which are what we would normally call the nominalizations of our sentences. Whenglish is a full-fledged language; it has compositionality and recursion, and it has all the resources to do whatever we do with English, science, philosophy mythology etc. A Whenglish philosopher would never argue that truth is the primary goal, given that the language does not contain the concept of truth. Rather than saying that the earth is round, Whenglish speakers use its wence equivalent “the earth’s being round”. While we care about our sentence “the earth is round” being true, Whenglish speakers care about their wence “the Earth’s being round” having a referent. In their language the primary epistemic goal would be, not truth, but reference. In more recent work I have argued in length that truth is nothing but a very special form of reference. Given all this I am inclined to think that if anything is the primary epistemic goal, it is reference, and not its subspecies truth. In this sense I believe that truth is overvalued. Same goes for propositional knowledge. If truth is not essential to language, neither is propositional knowledge. Whenglish does not contain propositions, given that it does not have truth-bearers. They too have the notion of knowledge, but only in its objectual mode. While we know that the earth is round, Whenglish speakers know the earth’s being round. This is why I believe that objectual knowledge is far more important than propositional knowledge. Though a significant portion of Mišćević’s essay is dedicated to the discussion of why having propositional knowledge is more valuable than having a merely true belief, he does address the issue in terms of reference and objectual knowledge:

I have been telling the story in terms of propositional knowledge, but it can be retold in terms of objectual curiosity and knowledge, dear to Inan. So, in the story retold, you are interested in who the new president of Croatia is. You have an inostensible description of him/her, namely “the new president”. What you want is a more ostensible information, let say the name. (with all the problems that go with it, listed and brilliantly analyzed by Inan in 2012: 142 ff, in connection with the name “Kigali”). Now, with the practical joke I actually gave you the right information, its Kolinda. Still, you are not satisfied, after you hear about my actual ignorance at the time of giving the info. What is needed is the package deal: *ostensible information with some guarantee of reliability*. I cannot defend the fully isolated true belief (except going the Martin Luther WAY: here i stand and believe, ich kann nicht anders!). (Mišćević 2016: 410–411)

The distinction between mere true belief and propositional knowledge can be applied to one’s epistemic status with regard to the referent of a designator. In Mišćević’s example our subject gets the unreliable

but true information that the new president of Croatia is Kolinda. In such a case the subject may believe that the term “the new president of Croatia” is ostensible in his idiolect, in case he believes that he knows that the new president is Kolinda. Assuming that he is not justified in believing that the new president is Kolinda, this term would then actually be inostensible, making his belief that it is ostensible false. We then have a very special instance of the issue concerning whether knowledge is more valuable than mere true belief. Is having the knowledge what the referent of a term is more valuable than merely having a true belief about it? Pritchard would have to say “no” (see his (2011)), and Mišćević disagrees. I am inclined to side with Mišćević here. In terms of various practical concerns there would indeed be no difference in value between the two cases. If our subject is, for instance, a journalist who is going to write a column in his daily concerning the elections results, it would not matter whether the term “the new president of Croatia” is actually ostensible or not. It would seem that he would produce exactly the same column regardless of whether he has an unjustified true belief that the new president is Kolinda, or whether he actually knows this. But as Mišćević notes, when our subject finds out that his source was unreliable, he would be dissatisfied; in fact, a journalist would be greatly disappointed in such a case: Not only that he would never trust his source again, but he would certainly feel great relief that he was accidentally given true information and did not make a fool of himself. Though it makes no difference whether the term “the new president of Croatia” is ostensible or inostensible in his idiolect at the time he writes his column as long as he gets its referent right, it does make a big difference with regard to his attitudes and emotions after he finds out later that the description was in fact inostensible. The difference can also be put in terms of curiosity. When our journalist finds out that his source was unreliable and comes to realize that he does not know that his belief that the new president is Kolinda is true, he would become curious who the new president is. Having an unjustified true belief is better than having a false belief, but it is still a form of ignorance, and awareness of this ignorance will give rise to curiosity (given that our subject has an interest in the topic.) Now, of course, one may object that if our journalist never finds out that his source was unreliable, it would seem that there would be no difference between him merely having a true belief and him actually knowing that the new president is Kolinda.

### *Acknowledgments*

I owe my foremost gratitude to Nenad Mišćević for bringing out this volume which came out of a week of a series of talks on *The Philosophy of Curiosity* in Maribor which he wonderfully organized. I thank all the authors for their contributions; I found philosophical joy in reading their articles and to reflect on the precious ideas contained in them. It



gives me great pleasure to see that philosophers have finally started paying more attention to philosophical questions concerning curiosity, a trend which I strongly hope and expect to continue to rise in the near future.

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