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THE PHILOSOPHY OF CURIOSITY

Ilhan Inan

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Dedicated to *all those whom I love*, a term which is happily ostensible for me...

Preface

When I was a young boy my father had a wide collection of science fiction novels. One day as I was skimming through the side covers of his books that stood on the shelves, one of the titles caught my attention. It was called *A Guide to Science*, in two volumes, written by Isaac Asimov. My father was an Asimov fan, so there were many more of his books on the shelves. I already had read a couple of Asimov's short stories and knew that he was a famous science fiction writer, but the title of this two volume work suggested that it was not fiction. Since I had a vague interest in the sciences the title appeared attractive. So I pulled out the first volume from the shelves and looked at the cover. It said *A Guide to Science, Volume I, Physical Sciences*. I then opened up the first Chapter which was entitled "What is Science?". I was even more interested. How do you go about answering such a question? So I went on to read the first sentence, which has been stuck in my mind ever since. It said: "Almost in the beginning was curiosity." I was perplexed and even more interested, so I started reading the first chapter. It was written in a lucid, clear and yet literary style, and most importantly, I understood it. It started off with the Ancient Greeks; Asimov explained how the Greeks were able to calculate the circumference of the earth and the moon, and the distance between them with great precision. I learned that they had little technology, no telescopes, or any measurement devices that we have these days, but they did have a powerful tool, Euclid's geometry. I knew a bit about that, but there was something else Asimov mentioned that I had never heard of before; it was called the Parallax System. Just in a few sentences Asimov explained how this system works. It was fascinating. He gave instructions

as to how one may create the effect of parallax by simply using one's own eyes and fingers. I immediately tried it myself. And then I went on to read how this method was used to calculate the distance from the earth to the sun. There was something fascinating about all this. I didn't know what it was at the time. Perhaps one thing that struck me was the power of reason. I had a love for mathematics and geometry at that very young age, but surely there was more in Asimov's book that had attracted my attention. Why had the Greeks spent so much time and effort to create ingenious methods to calculate the distance to the moon? Was there going to be any use of it, if they found the right answer? Or was it "sheer curiosity" as Asimov put it? I then thought that, I too, like most children do, wondered at things and asked many questions, mostly to myself, without even thinking what I would do with their answers if I were to find them. It was perhaps the first time in my life that I realized the power and the beauty of curiosity. I was especially fascinated by the fact that in my private mental life I could think about so many things that were totally unknown to me at the time. As most people do I too asked some "big" questions about the meaning of life and the limits of the universe and things of that nature, but it was the underlying ability to think of the unknown that struck me the most, even when it was not directed towards those "big" questions. For instance as a young teenager I distinctly remember thinking about whom I would marry when I grew up, what she would look like, whether she would be interested in logical puzzles, and things like that. And then I asked myself: when I meet the love of my life and marry her, can I go up to her and say "I thought about you at the age of 14, years before we met"? Would that have been a crazy thing to tell her? Wasn't there a sense in which I had thought about her? How would I have ever known that the question that I was so puzzled about at the

time was a philosophical one that related to the conditions for one to refer to something unknown which would become my dissertation topic many decades later.

Years went by, and my vague interest in curiosity and reference to the unknown gradually became overshadowed by other things as I grew up. It had to wait for another 30 years for me to attend to it seriously. Before starting my graduate studies I had developed an interest in epistemology, logic, and language. Not surprisingly I developed an interest in how we become aware of our ignorance and how we were able to refer to things we did not know, which later became my dissertation topic. It still had not occurred to me that the topic I was working on was closely related to curiosity, but upon reflecting on it now, I see that most likely it was my tacit interest in curiosity that had led me to write a dissertation on what I then called “inostensible reference”, or reference to the unknown. After finishing the main text, I came across a beautiful line from a poem and added it to the start of my dissertation: “In mystery our soul abides”. It still had not occurred to me that this was due to my tacit interest in curiosity. I then started teaching. Mostly I taught classes in philosophy of language and issues in the theory of reference, always with an emphasis on epistemology. I then developed an interest on questions, read the basic literature on the logic of questions and answers, and gave a graduate seminar on the topic. It was then that I seriously started considering certain philosophical problems about curiosity. After all the primary function of asking a question is to express our curiosity. So, finally I decided to give a graduate seminar on curiosity, but to my surprise, I found out there was little the literature in philosophy had to offer on the topic. It was not even easy to put a syllabus together. The more I looked into the literature the more shocking it seemed to me that philosophers had simply not

taken curiosity as a topic that was worthy of philosophical investigation. I have been giving seminars on the topic ever since, and each time I collected a bit more literature, but mostly they were at best indirectly related to the issues on curiosity that I discussed in those seminars. This is how I first decided to write a book on the topic.

There are various philosophical questions on curiosity that I believe are philosophically interesting. Some involve ethics, some involve metaphysics, some involve epistemology, some involve philosophy of mind, some involve philosophy of language, and some involve different combinations of these areas. It is a highly inter-disciplinary topic even within philosophy. Obviously it is not my intention to deal with all the interesting questions on curiosity in this book. I will have little to say on whether curiosity is a virtue, and if so, whether it is a moral one, or an ethical one, or merely an epistemic or an intellectual one. The fact that I have written a whole book on the topic, (when no philosopher has done so) is no doubt a good indicator that I take curiosity as a value of some sort, but I will leave it to the reader to make their judgments on this rather than trying to convince them by argument. I will also not deal with certain technical issues in philosophical logic concerning the semantics of questions and answers, nor will I engage in a detailed discussion in philosophy of mind on what kind of a mental state curiosity is. I will limit myself to certain questions on curiosity that relate to our use of language and our ability to become aware of our ignorance. So in what follows there will be a lot on reference to the unknown, or inostensible reference, as I like to call it, and how our aptitude for this kind of reference enables us to become aware of our ignorance and be curious. Most of the discussion will be in an area in which philosophy of language and epistemology overlap. Of course a lot of

what I say and argue for will be controversial, and I do not expect my readers to agree with me on everything I say. I do hope however that I will be able to convince some of my readers that the questions I raise in this book, most of which have never been explicitly stated, let alone discussed in the philosophical literature, are good philosophical questions that require attention which have the potential to motivate fruitful discussions that relate to various philosophical problems which most philosophers care for. All in all, if I can at least convince the reader that the issue of how curiosity relates to our use of language is a philosophical topic that is worthy of discussion, then I would think that the book will have achieved its goal.

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First I would like to thank all my students who have taken my seminars on curiosity and related topics I discuss in this book. I have especially benefitted from discussions with my students in my seminars on *Curiosity* I gave in 2006, and then in 2010 at Bogazici University, as well as my seminars on *Curiosity, Certainty, and Dogmatism*, which I gave at Bogazici University in 2007, and at Virginia University in 2009, and on *Wonder and Language* I gave at Bogazici University in 2010. I wrote the first version of Chapter 2 during my graduate seminar on *The Semantics and Epistemics of Questions* I gave at Bogazici University in 2005. In the first of those seminars I wrote a text entitled *A Philosophical Dialogue on Curiosity* to stimulate discussion among my students. Many read the dialogue and gave me precious feedback, since it is a long list, I cannot name them separately here. I should mention that I also got valuable comments from an outsider, Ayla Kursunlu, who is neither an academic nor a philosopher, and she happens to be my mother. I am especially indebted to my dissertation students at Bogazici University, Ahmet Subasi and Safiye Yigit, who have both written their dissertations on curiosity with me, as well as Cem Siskolar, Melis Erdur, Nazif Muhtaroglu, Ayca Boylu, and Pelin Ataman for stimulating discussions on some of the topics I cover in the book.

I developed the central notion I use in this book, namely *reference to the unknown*, or *inostensible reference*, in my PhD dissertation. Nathan Salmon was my advisor. Despite the fact that it was not a topic of any interest to anyone at the time, he encouraged me to write a dissertation on it and gave me his full support. Chapters 3, 4, 5, and a portion of Chapter 12 are extended and revised versions of parts of my dissertation which owes a lot to Nathan Salmon. I

would also like to thank my two other committee members, Anthony Brueckner, and Anthony Anderson who was also the host of the Santa Barbarians discussion group which I regularly attended as a graduate student in which we discussed some of the issues I dealt with then, especially the de re/de dicto distinction.

I gave a number of talks on certain topics that I discuss in the book, whose audiences I would like to thank: “What Makes Questions Possible?”, (European Congress for Analytic Philosophy-4, Sweden, 2002); "The Map and the Treasure: Reflections on Meno's Paradox", (Bilkent University, 2004); “Curiosity and Relativism” (3rd Greek-Turkish Philosophy Congress, 2006); “How to be Open-minded without Being a Skeptic”, (American Philosophical Association, Pacific Division Meetings, San Francisco, 2007); “Inostensible Reference and Conceptual Curiosity” (LOGOS Seminar, University of Barcelona, 2009); “Unanswerable Questions for Millians”, (Bilkent University, 2010); “Ignorance by Description: A Criticism of Russell’s Theory of Descriptions”, (Bilkent University, 2010); “Creativity, Curiosity, and Language”, (International Conference on Cognition, Experience and Creativity, IIT, Gandhinagar, India 2010); “Truth Is Reference”, (University of Virginia, 2011).

My sister Alev Cinar, who is a well established Political Scientist, and someone a lot more experienced about book publishing than myself, has been a continuous guide for me in the submission process of the book. I would also like to thank my close friend and former guitar teacher, Levent Gonul, who is now the chief editor of a university press, for all his help. I got the first impetus to work on reference to the unknown and curiosity at a very young age from a well established lawyer and academic who had a “sheer” curiosity in science, mathematics and logic.

His name is Nurkut Inan, and he happens to be my father. Another academic in the family is my uncle, Kemal Inan, who played the devil's advocate in all our philosophical discussions since my early childhood, with all his charm and charisma, always pushing me to my limits. I also had very stimulating discussions on curiosity with two other family members, Mehmet Inan and Deniz Inan. I got the deepest emotional and intellectual support from my wife Irem Rona Inan. It was also a happy coincidence to discover that her current research on innovation and creativity partially overlapped with my own research on curiosity which at times led to fruitful discussions. More importantly though it was our true love that was the best motivator for me.

I am indebted to Routledge Publishing for enthusiastically deciding to publish this book whose topic is by no means included within the mainstream philosophy literature; in particular I owe my gratitude to my first editor Erica Wetter who decided to consider my proposal, and especially to Felisa Salvago-Keyes for her professional, supportive, punctual, open-minded and extremely efficient approach throughout the submission and evaluation process. I would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their extremely valuable comments and suggestions as well as for their enthusiastic support of an earlier draft of the book. There are many philosophers whom I benefitted from in our discussions of certain parts of the book; I am indebted to Roslyn Weiss who gave me precious feedback on my chapter on Meno's Paradox, and to Harold Langsam, Trenton Merricks, and Sam Nicholson who gave me very useful comments on my paper "Truth Is Reference" a portion of which I used in the book. I owe my gratitude to Stephen Voss, Gurol Irzik, Murat Bac, and especially to Lucas Thorpe who have not just encouraged me with their stimulating discussions on various issues I deal with in this book, but more importantly they

have been a great support by enthusiastically sharing my excitement in working on the topic of curiosity.

This work has benefitted from the academic and financial support of various institutions. Most importantly I would like to thank my home institution Bogazici University not only for granting me a sabbatical leave to write my book, and for all their financial support, but more importantly for the excellent academic environment it has provided me with that has given me all the encouragement I needed to do my research and to teach my own designed seminars. I would also like to thank University of Barcelona, TUBITAK (the Turkish Scientific and Technical Research Institute), University of Virginia, and Bilkent University for all their support. This work has been partially funded by research grants given by Bogazici University (Research Project # 07 B 201) and the Turkish Scientific and Technical Research Institute, TUBITAK (Research Grant # 2219).

Introduction

For more than two millennia philosophers have been engaged in discussions concerning the notion of knowledge. Much has been said on issues such as what knowledge is, how it is possible, what kinds of knowledge there are, and a host of related issues. Various theories of knowledge have emerged that attempt to answer these questions, and the debate is still as alive as when it first started. One good reason for this is that knowledge is important for us. Some believe that knowledge of certain things has intrinsic value, but even ones who think otherwise, still think the study of knowledge is of utmost importance for philosophy. Epistemology has significantly flourished after the twentieth century leading to more detailed and rigorous discussions concerning certain epistemic notions that relate to knowledge. There is now an abundant literature especially on justification, belief, and truth, the three parts of knowledge in its so-called classical analysis. A lot has been said about the notion of inquiry as it is considered to be a fundamental driving force in our quest for knowledge. But oddly enough epistemologists have paid little attention to the more basic motivation that has led us to start inquiring into the unknown. That is curiosity. It is a fascinating fact about the evolution of our species that led us to come to know things that were unimaginable just a few millennia ago, but it is even more

fascinating that we have developed the skills to become aware of our own ignorance about matters which enabled us to enjoy the mental state of curiosity. Some are much better at it, but it appears to be one of the defining characteristics of being an adult human who speaks a language. Even the most uneducated or the least open minded has the capacity to use language to think about things unknown to him and to become aware of his ignorance. When such an awareness of ignorance is coupled with an interest in the topic it motivates curiosity. Curiosity, one of the basic drives that led us to develop the sciences, philosophy, technology and perhaps even the arts. It is difficult even to imagine how our intellectual achievements would have been possible without the basic motivation of curiosity. Hume called it "...that love of truth that was the source of all our inquiries"¹ and Hobbes took Curiosity as a Passion "...such as is in no living creature but *Man*; so that Man is distinguished, not only by his Reason; but also by this singular Passion from other *Animals*."² What made it possible for us to reach this stage in which we enjoy the mental state of curiosity? How did we come to develop our languages to this extent that allows us to formulate what we do not know and to express our curiosity in the form of a question? Understanding human curiosity and its expression in language surely must be of vital importance for philosophy. The history of philosophy has produced an enormous amount of literature on questions

¹ David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, Penguin Classics, 1986.

² R. Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul*, translated and annotated by Stephen Voss, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis/Cambridge, 1989.

concerning how the human mind relates to reality, and surely one such important link is curiosity. Yet little has been said about curiosity in the philosophy literature. This, I take to be a very odd historical fact. The Ancient Greeks had the idea, verbalized by Plato and Aristotle, that all philosophy starts with θαύμα (*thauma*), an old Greek notion that has traditionally been translated into English as “wonder”, for the lack of a better term. *Thauma*, for these great figures, could not have been simply the state of mind one is in when he comes across something unexpected or novel which gives him a feeling of surprise or perplexity. Nor could it have meant merely having a feeling of approval, respect, or awe. It was not simple amazement, astonishment, or admiration, though it may have included an element of each in some form. For it to serve as a motivation to start doing philosophy and science, the old Greek notion of *thauma* must have contained more than that; it must have had a motivating force that gave one the first impetus to inquire into things not immediately present to the senses. Astonishment, amazement, admiration, or awe taken separately or all together is not sufficient to motivate us to inquire into things unknown. *Thauma* must have contained in it some other element that involves an awareness of our ignorance, something Socrates emphasized the significance of over and over again in Plato’s dialogues. It must have involved a desire to know, which Aristotle thought to be an essential part of our nature. *Thauma* was not simple amazement, or admiration, it had to include a kind of inquisitiveness, a way of questioning things unknown, it had to involve a form of curiosity to serve as the driving force for philosophy. Why is it then that neither Plato nor Aristotle ever engaged themselves in a philosophical discussion of what curiosity is, how it is possible, how it motivates learning, and other questions as such? Though Plato never said anything about curiosity, he did address, in his *Meno*, what I take to be a very interesting problem that indirectly

relates to the issue of how curiosity is at all possible. This short passage, commonly referred to as “Meno’s Paradox”, contains a very simple argument that inquiring into something unknown is impossible. Oddly enough, it has not attracted the attention of philosophers other than Plato scholars, and to my knowledge no one has taken Meno’s Paradox as to be addressing any important philosophical problem about how inquiry and discovery are possible, let alone addressing anything significant on curiosity and its satisfaction. Aristotle starts off his *Metaphysics* with the famous line: “All men by nature desire to know.”³ After reading this opening statement, one would expect the *Metaphysics* to contain a philosophical discussion of curiosity, but it doesn’t. After all curiosity has been traditionally defined as “desire to know”, a view which I believe requires some questioning. But Aristotle, after making a few remarks on the matter in the first two sections of Book 1, never comes back to it. Why is that? As a word of speculation we may suggest that Aristotle was not interested in the desire to know *per se*, but only in the final product of the satisfaction of such a desire, that is knowledge itself. He had a lot to say about knowledge, but nothing on curiosity. For Aristotle, the state of knowing appears to be a more valuable state than the state of wonder or desiring to know. Towards the end of Part 2 of Book 1, here is what he says:

Yet the acquisition of it must in a sense end in something which is the opposite of our original inquiries. For all men begin, as we said, by wondering that things are as they are...for it seems wonderful to all who have not yet seen the reason...But we must end in the contrary and, according to the proverb, the better state, as is the case in these instances

³ Aristotle, *A New Aristotle Reader*, ed. J. L. Ackrill, (Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 255.

too when men learn the cause....⁴

Now what that proverb which Aristotle mentions was, I do not know, but it must have contained the idea that *knowing is a better state than the state of wondering*. It appears that Aristotle himself endorsed it as well. This is no surprise. Today perhaps all epistemologists would strongly hold that, for things we care about, it is better to know rather than be ignorant of them, or be in a state of wonder, or be in state of curiosity. It may be suggested that this is one good reason why the epistemology literature that is more than two millennia old produced so many theories and so much discussion on knowledge, but close to nothing on curiosity. But that is hardly an explanation that could satisfy us. If curiosity is the starting point, if it is the most primitive motivation of all our intellectual endeavors, if all science and philosophy, and even perhaps the arts emerged as a result of curiosity, then one would expect it to be an issue of philosophical significance. That would be true even if knowing is the better state, it would be true even if for every particular topic we care about it is better to know it rather than be curious about it. One only needs to observe the huge literature on the notion epistemic justification especially in contemporary epistemology to see this. Is being justified of the truth of a proposition more valuable than knowing it? Surely most, if not all epistemologists would deny that. Given fallibilism, an epistemic theory that has dominated the recent literature, justification does not

⁴ Ibid., p. 259.

entail truth, and therefore does not entail knowledge. Almost every epistemologist of our times admits that one could be justified in believing a proposition without knowing it. Nonetheless all these epistemologists presumably believe that knowing is the better state, than merely being justified. But that has not prevented these philosophers from engaging in detailed discussions on epistemic justification. Why not in the case of curiosity? Even if knowing is better than being curious, why has curiosity not attracted the attention of philosophers as much as the notion of justification did? One may perhaps say that one reason for this is that justification is a necessary condition for knowing, but being curious is not. So despite the fact that neither being justified, nor being curious, may be taken to be valuable in themselves, some may wish to say that the former deserves more attention. Granted that not all knowledge is acquired through curiosity, but does that make the notion of curiosity philosophically uninteresting? I doubt it.

The common view that knowing is more valuable than being curious, even if true, does not provide a satisfactory explanation of the fact that so little attention has been paid to the former, and so much work has been done on the latter. After all not everything that philosophers have concentrated has intrinsic, or even instrumental value. Just the wide literature on evil is sufficient to see this. Furthermore the common view that knowing is better than being curious does not appear to me to be expressing a truism, and may plausibly be challenged. Most of us fear death, and at times we are tempted to believe that it would better if it did not exist. But few of us take the time to think about what life would have been like if we were immortal. It is not obvious at all that an immortal life is better than a mortal one. Even if it is true in general that we rather be alive than be dead at any moment in time in which we think of the matter, it does not

follow that if we all had immortal lives the world would have been a better place. Perhaps, it is the same with curiosity. For every instance in which we are curious, even if it may be true that we are better off knowing the thing we are curious about, it does not follow that a world in which there is no curiosity would have been a better place. In fact I shall also argue that there are cases in which we are better off by not satisfying our curiosity.

One other reason why curiosity has been neglected by philosophers, at least until the Linguistic Turn, may have been due to the fact that philosophy of language had not developed sufficiently to deal with it. As I shall argue in detail later a comprehensive account of how we have developed the aptitude for being curious requires us to engage in a discussion on how curiosity relates to the use of language. In particular the linguistic act of reference to the unknown is what I take to be a requirement for being curious. This is true at least for the kind of curiosity that we enjoy that finds its expression in language in the form of a question. It was only in the latter part of the twentieth century that philosophers have finally concentrated on what a question is, how it relates to its possible answers and related issues. More of this will be discussed in detail in the following chapters. Again if the idea that curiosity has been neglected by philosophers for the reason that philosophy of language had not developed to a sufficient level, we still cannot account for the fact that not much has been done on curiosity even after the Linguistic Turn which has given rise to a huge literature in the philosophy of language. It also does not provide an explanation of why authors who have worked on the logic of questions and answers have said close to nothing on curiosity either. So I take it to be an interesting historical question that is open as to why curiosity has not been paid the attention which I believe it deserves.

Let us go back to the Middle Ages briefly. It is perhaps no great surprise that we find little on curiosity in this period. But some prominent philosophers of those days, especially Augustine, had things to say about *admiratio*, a Latin word which again has been translated into English as “wonder”. Augustine in his *Confessions* deals with this notion to some extent, and for the most part what he says about wonder is negative, especially if wonder is directed towards natural phenomena.⁵ Such wonder, on Augustine’s view, distracts one’s attention from God, and results in a desire to know things that gives the individual some kind of pride. An attempt to know such things is to try to put oneself in the place of God, and needless to say such pride in gaining knowledge is sinful on Augustine’s view. Again we may assume that the Latin notion of *admiratio* included an element of curiosity in it. It does not follow however that for Augustine all acts of wonder and curiosity were sinful. After all he was very curious about certain moral questions, how to lead a good life, how to get closer to God, and various other issues. So contrary to some of his interpreters, I do not take Augustine to have committed himself to the sweeping claiming that all curiosity is sinful.

It was only in the Modern Era that we find some explicit praise for curiosity by a few prominent philosophers. This is also the period in which the concept of *curiosity* entered the philosophical jargon and was distinguished from *wonder*. For instance, Descartes, in his interesting work *The Passions of the Soul*, claims that there are six primitive passions: Wonder, Love, Hatred, Joy, Grief, and Desire. This time we have the old French notion of *admiration*

⁵ For a discussion of this see Daston, L., and Park, K., *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750*, (The MIT Press, 2001).

being again translated into English as “wonder”. Here is what Descartes says on it in Article 53 entitled Wonder:

When the first encounter with some object surprises us, and we judge it to be new, or very different from what we knew in the past or what we supposed it was going to be, this makes us wonder and be astonished at it. And since this can happen before we know in the least whether this object is suitable to us or not, it seems to me that Wonder is the first of all passions.⁶

Despite the fact that Descartes allocated a long section on Wonder, and talked in depth about when and how it is valuable, how it differs from all the other five primitive passions, how it should be disposed of after it does its job etc, we find very little on curiosity. In fact the few sentences he allocates to it is to be found in the section on Desire, another primitive passion, in which curiosity is only cited as an example of a kind of desire:

It would be more correct to distinguish Desire into as many different species as there are different objects sought after. For Curiosity, for example, which is nothing but a Desire to understand, differs greatly from Desire for glory, and this from Desire for vengeance, and so on.⁷

⁶ Descartes, R., *The Passions of the Soul*, translated and annotated by Stephen Voss, (Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis/Cambridge, 1989).

⁷ Descartes, R., *The Passions of the Soul*, translated and annotated by Stephen Voss, (Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis/Cambridge, 1989), p.67.

Wondering was valuable on Descartes' view, only as far as it "disposes us to the acquisition of sciences", though "we should still try afterwards to emancipate ourselves from it as much as possible"⁸. On the value of curiosity Descartes says nothing. But merely wondering at something which is unusual and unexpected, the mind is in a passive state of being stunned; Wonder by itself does not contain a desire to understand, or to come to know, or to learn anything. So Descartes should have at least acknowledged the fact that it was only when wonder was coupled with curiosity that we started doing philosophy and developed the sciences.

Perhaps the first explicit real praise for curiosity is to be found in Hobbes' *Leviathan*. One of the two things that distinguish men from animals is curiosity, says Hobbes, and the other being reason. Interestingly despite having said this, Hobbes does not care to philosophize on curiosity much, but at least he gives an explicit definition:

*Desire, to know why, and how, CURIOSITY; such as is in no living creature but Man; so that Man is distinguished, not only by his Reason; but also by this singular Passion from other Animals; in whom the appetite of food, and other pleasures of Sense, by prædominance, take away the care of knowing causes; which is a Lust of the mind, that by a perseverance of delight in the continuall and indefatigable generation of Knowledge, exceedeth the short vehemence of and carnall Pleasure.*⁹

⁸ Ibid., p.60.

⁹ T. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, E. Curley (ed), with selected variants from the Latin edition of 1668, (Hackett Publishing Company, Cambridge, 1994), p.124.

This is very much in the spirit of Aristotle; curiosity is the desire to come to know the inner causes of things, the first principles and causes of Being that allows us to learn how and why things are as they are.

Hume, too, places curiosity at a very prestigious location within our passions. Here is what he says in his *Treatise* in the last section of the Passions, entitled “Curiosity or the Love of Truth”:

But methinks we have been not a little inattentive to run over so many different parts of the human mind, and examine so many passions, without taking once into the consideration that love of truth, which was the source of all our enquires. ‘Twill therefore be proper, before we leave this subject, to bestow a few reflections on that passion, and shew its origin in human nature. ‘Tis an affection of so peculiar a kind, that ’twould have been impossible to have treated of it under any of those heads, which we have examin’d, without danger of obscurity and confusion.¹⁰

Though this introduction is followed by an interesting discussion of when and how curiosity is intellectually valuable, Hume does not fulfill his promise in showing the origins of curiosity in human nature. This would have required Hume to have at least given an account of what makes it possible for us to enjoy the passion of curiosity, but unfortunately he doesn’t.

¹⁰ David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, (Penguin Classics, 1986), Book II, Part III, Section X.

One would have expected Kant who has written on almost every topic in philosophy to say something on curiosity, but he doesn't. However some of his metaphysical claims, especially his famous distinction between the phenomenal and the noumenal world, indirectly relate to certain issues concerning the limits of our curiosity and its satisfaction. If there are things which we can talk about using language which are essentially unknowable, which appears to be Kant's position, then we may be curious about such things, ask questions about them, without ever being able to satisfy our curiosity. (This will be dealt with in more detail in the last chapter.) In 20th century philosophy Heidegger stands out as perhaps the only figure to have explicitly discussed the philosophical significance of wonder in depth. In his *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, by making a sharp distinction between wonder (*θαυμάζειν*) on the one hand, and astonishment, amazement and admiration on the other, he claims that the object of wonder (in contrast with the latter three notions) is not something unusual; rather what is usual becomes the unusual when we wonder at it. This is how we should interpret the old Greek idea that all philosophy starts with wonder, on Heidegger's account. But wonder is not mere curiosity:

It has been long been known that the Greeks recognized *θαυμάζειν* as the "beginning" of philosophy. But it is just as certain that we have taken this *θαυμάζειν* to be obvious and ordinary, something that can be accomplished without difficulty and can even be clarified without further reflection. For the most part, the usual presentations of the origin of philosophy out of *θαυμάζειν* result in the opinion that philosophy arises from curiosity. This is a weak and pitiful determination of origin, possible only where there has never been any reflection on what is supposed to be determined here in its origin. Indeed we

consider ourselves relieved of such reflection, precisely because we think that the derivation of philosophy out of curiosity also determines its essence. Thus we fail to realize how decisively the reference to *θαυμάζειν* as the origin of philosophy indicates precisely the inexplicability of philosophy, inexplicability in the sense that here in general to explain and the will to explain are mistakes.¹¹

Though Heidegger sees it as “pitiful” to interpret wonder as a form of curiosity, afterwards he proclaims that it is a form of “questioning”, making it difficult to understand how then it does not involve curiosity :

The basic disposition of *θαυμάζειν* compels us to a pure acknowledgement of the unusualness of the usual. The purest acknowledgement of what is most unusual is fulfilled, however, in the questioning that asks what the most usual itself might be, such that it can reveal itself as what is most unusual.

But is this questioning not precisely intrusiveness and curiosity, hence that which most eludes all pure acknowledgment? To be sure it is, but only if we understand this questioning as a part of our everyday comportment and dealings and as a part of the rage to make explanation the measuring rod for the determination of the essence of thoughtful questioning. But thoughtful questioning is not the intrusive and rash curiosity of the

¹¹ Heidegger, M., *Basic Questions of Philosophy: Selected “Problems” of “Logic”*, tr.

Rojcewicz, R., Schuwer, A, (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1994). p.135.

search for explanations; it is the tolerating and sustaining of the unexplainable as such, despite being overwhelmed by the pressure of what reveals itself. ..¹²

In the latter half of the 20th century some philosophers have developed an interest in what a question is and how it logically relates to its possible answers, which has given rise to various theories, mostly semantic in nature, and has been called “the logic of question and answers”, or “erotetic logic”. Oddly enough there is close to nothing on curiosity in this literature. It should be obvious that it was our curiosity from which the linguistic formation of interrogative sentences emerged by which we were able to pose questions. The fact that even this literature does not address any philosophical issue concerning curiosity, is one other indicator that there has been great resistance in dealing with this notion at a philosophical level. Why is that? Another interesting open question that requires attention.

Despite the fact that there has been so little literature on curiosity, certain texts of contemporary philosophy address issues that indirectly relate to it. One is Collingwood’s *An Essay on Metaphysics*. In that book Collingwood argues that there are “absolute presuppositions” which are not the answers to any question, but make questioning possible.¹³ If there are such presuppositions, as Collingwood suggests, then it should follow that they cannot be objects of curiosity (though Collingwood never mentions this.) Similarly Wittgenstein in his famous

¹² Ibid, p.148.

¹³ Collingwood, R.G., *An Essay on Metaphysics*, ed. Martin, R., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940).

Philosophical Investigations appears to claim that for every language game there are sentences that serve such a foundational purpose that they “cannot be said” within that language game.¹⁴

We may then infer that if they cannot be said, then they cannot be called into question either, and therefore cannot be the objects of curiosity. Again Carnap, in his classic piece, “Empiricism, Ontology, and Semantics”, introduces his notion of a *linguistic framework*, and distinguishes between an “internal” and an “external” question (for a particular framework), and argues that theoretical external questions cannot be raised within that framework.¹⁵ This appears to have the implication that external questions cannot be used to express genuine curiosity. All of this will be discussed in more detail in what follows.

Though philosophers neglected to work on curiosity, psychologists didn't. Various theories have emerged in psychology that deal with what curiosity is, what different forms it may take, how it is satisfied, how it can be measured, how it leads to inquiry and learning, what function it had within the evolutionary process of our species etc. But this is psychology and not philosophy. Just like the fact that psychologists' way of dealing with the notion of *knowledge*, the kinds of questions they raise and discuss about it significantly differ from the way in which philosophers approach the very same notion, one would expect the same for the notion of

¹⁴ See especially Paragraph 50 of his *Philosophical Investigations*, translated by G. Anscombe. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).

¹⁵ Carnap, R., “Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology” in *Meaning and Necessity*, (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1956), pp. 205-21.

curiosity. In fact some of the basic questions concerning curiosity that will be dealt with in this book have not even been raised by psychologists, or for the ones that have been raised, we find little in-depth discussions of them. For instance, though there has been some discussion in this literature on how curiosity relates to awareness of ignorance (for instance in Lowenstein [1994]), no one to my knowledge has talked about how curiosity relates to our aptitude for referring to things unknown to us, and how this motivates the asking of a question. Having said this, there is some useful research in psychology that will be relevant to some of the questions to be discussed here, especially concerning what curiosity is, whether it is a desire, if so, what its object is, how it relates to novelty seeking, sensation seeking or exploratory behavior etc.¹⁶ One would have expected there to be more discussion on curiosity in Cognitive Science, an inter-disciplinary area that deals with the mind which emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century. A thorough study of curiosity cannot be achieved only within philosophy of course; it should require the collaboration of many disciplines, not just cognitive and evolutionary psychology, but neuroscience, linguistics, artificial intelligence, and biology as well. These are the typical areas that Cognitive Science brings together, and it is where we should expect such an inter-disciplinary study on curiosity to take place.¹⁷

¹⁶ Some of the literature in psychology that I have used in my seminars is included in the bibliography for the interested reader.

¹⁷ See my former student Ahmet Subasi's Master's Thesis, *Dynamics of Scientific Curiosity*, Master's Thesis in Cognitive Science, Bogazici University, 2009. So far I have not come across any other thesis or dissertation on the topic in cognitive science.

In the last two decades or so there has been, what we may call, an ethical turn in epistemology which has given rise to an area that is usually referred to as “virtue epistemology”. It is an area in which philosophers are engaged in a quest for the so-called epistemic values. Is knowledge valuable? Is all knowledge valuable or only some kinds of it? Does knowledge ever have intrinsic value? How does the value of knowledge relate to the value of truth, or the value of epistemic justification? Is understanding more valuable than knowledge? These are the kinds of questions that virtue epistemologists have taken up. Within this literature, more recently, there has been some increase of interest on curiosity, though not much.¹⁸ Some authors who have

¹⁸ See especially, Kvanvig, J., *The Value Of Knowledge And The Pursuit Of Understanding*, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 143-156; Kvanvig, J. ”Curiosity and a Response-Dependent Account of the Value of Understanding”, *Epistemic Virtues*, Timothy Henning & David Schweikard, eds., 2012; Miscevic, N., “Virtue -based Epistemology and the Centrality of Truth: Towards a Strong Virtue-epistemology”, *Acta Analytica*, 22 (3), 2007; Schmitt , F.F., Lahroodi, R., “The Epistemic Value of Curiosity”, *Educational Theory*, 58, 2008, pp. 125-148; Brady, M., “Curiosity and the Value of Truth”, *Epistemic Value*, A Haddock, A. Millar, and D. Pritchard, eds., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 265-183. Whitcomb, D., “Curiosity Was Framed”, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 81:3, pp. 664–687, 2010; Baumgarten, E., “Curiosity as a Moral Virtue”, *International Journal of Applied Philosophy*, Fall 2001; Grimm R. S., “Epistemic Goals and Epistemic Values”, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 77:3, 2008, pp. 725–744. Finally I should note that the enormous impact of Timothy Williamson’s book *Knowledge and its Limits* (Oxford: Oxford University

written on the topic have praised the value of curiosity in different ways. For instance

Baumgarten writes:

Recent philosophical interest in a more classical view of morality has led beyond an exclusive focus on actions to an exploration of virtues, vices, character traits, and the “moral emotions.” Most attention has been paid to those virtues and vices that bear on our willingness to respond to the needs of others or to the impact of their actions on us; e.g., compassion, forgiveness, and greed. But if virtue theory is right that ethics should focus not just on the welfare of others but on “self-perfection,” we should find useful an exploration of any emotions or character traits that enhance or impede our ability to flourish as human beings, even apart from their social benefits. Though it has been largely overlooked, curiosity about the world shares many of the features of character traits more commonly recognized to be virtues and deserves, I think, the same kind of serious attention.¹⁹

Press, 2000) is also another indicator of the need for a philosophy of curiosity, as it was pointed out to me by a reviewer: “One of the most striking claims of that book [*Knowledge and its Limits*] concerned the priority of knowledge to evidence. That places the nature of ignorance at the centre of epistemology and in the current manuscript curiosity is the intellectual response to ignorance.”

¹⁹ Baumgarten, E., “Curiosity as a Moral Virtue”, *International Journal of Applied Philosophy*, Fall 2001.

Miscevic argues that curiosity derives its value from its motivating force:

A human being devoid of curiosity would have no motivation to arrive to true belief and knowledge...therefore inquisitiveness-curiosity is the virtue that motivates us to gain true belief and knowledge, So, we have a truth-focused motivating virtue: inquisitiveness or curiosity having as its general goal reliable arriving at truth.²⁰

And more recently Kvanvig attaches the value of curiosity to (objectual) understanding, rather than knowledge:

Understanding, of a special sort, has a special value...that distinguishes it from the value of knowledge and related epistemic states... The argument for this claim arises from a careful treatment of the nature of human curiosity...²¹

In another recent paper, Schmitt and Lahroodi, are perhaps to first ones to bite the bullet and claim that curiosity at times has intrinsic value, though this only appears in a footnote:

Curiosity seems to have not only instrumental value for knowledge but intrinsic value as well. People seek out situations in which their curiosity is elicited. We pursue and enjoy puzzles — riddles, crossword puzzles, Rubic cubes, logical perplexities such as the liar

²⁰ Miscevic, N., “Virtue -based Epistemology and the Centrality of Truth: Towards a Strong Virtue-epistemology”, *Acta Analytica*, 22 (3), 2007

²¹ ”Curiosity and a Response-Dependent Account of the Value of Understanding”, *Epistemic Virtues*, Timothy Henning & David Schweikard, eds., 2012

paradox, and so on. Certainly we do not pursue and enjoy these merely for the knowledge we gain by solving them, which often seems less important than the activity of solving them. We enjoy being curious in a way that we do not enjoy being hungry or thirsty, and we enjoy it even if we do not satisfy our curiosity. One might propose that all that is valuable here, apart from the knowledge gained, is the activity of attempting to solve the puzzle. But curiosity seems to have value over and above both the activity of inquiry and the knowledge gained. But we will make little here of curiosity's intrinsic value.²²

It appears that the general tendency is to take curiosity as being an essential tool in achieving something that has intrinsic value, whether that is knowledge or understanding, in the propositional or objectual sense. Let us take the simplest of such an approach, namely one that takes the acquisition of knowledge as being intrinsically valuable, whose origins go back to at least Aristotle. We may then wish to say that curiosity derives its value from the fact that it is what motivates us to learn and acquire knowledge. That by itself does not make curiosity essential though for the acquisition of knowledge, for it seems to me quite clear that one come to know something without any prior curiosity. The paradigm case for this is ordinary sense perception. Assuming that perception gives us knowledge about the world, it would seem that most of the time the perceiver has no prior curiosity at all. If I see a tree as I am walking and

²² Schmitt , F.F., Lahroodi, R., "The Epistemic Value of Curiosity", *Educational Theory*, 58, 2008, p.125.

thereby come to know that there is a tree nearby, most likely I wasn't curious about that tree, or whether there are trees on that street, or anything that indirectly relates to the fact that there is a tree. I was simply a passive observer. Perceptual knowledge need not be motivated by any prior curiosity. Knowledge by testimony is another case. There are a lot of things we learn as we read or listen to others, and it would seem that that does not necessitate having any prior curiosity either. A disinterested student may be reading Plato's Republic to pass an exam, and might learn many things as he does so, but none of that learning would be curiosity based. So if the value of curiosity can only be derived from the fact that it sometimes leads us to acquire knowledge, then this would not be an essential value, unless we can demonstrate that there are certain kinds of truths that can be known by a subject only by the motivation of his prior curiosity. I am not sure that there are such special kinds of truths. For every true proposition we may think of a possible scenario in which a subject comes to know it, not as a result of his curiosity, but accidentally coming across it in some way or another. But for the progress of human knowledge in general things stand differently. There are many truths which we would claim to know that are not based on immediate sense experience that have emerged from the sciences and mathematics and perhaps even from philosophy; such knowledge would not have been possible if we humans were not curious beings in the first place. Such knowledge cannot have emerged merely from our mammal instincts and drives that motivated us to explore our environment; it required the emergence of our languages that enabled us to describe things unknown to us. It required curiosity that had conceptual content.

If something is in fact valuable but people in general do not come to realize this, the best kind of argument to make them do so is to think of a possible situation in which we lack it and ask people if they would want to be in that kind of situation. Nozick's famous Experience Machine argument is a wonderful example of this. Now we may apply the same kind of argument to reveal our intuitions about the value of curiosity.

Consider Utopia, defined as "the perfect world", and "a nowhere land". The world we live in is not Utopia. Now it is true that some philosophers, most notably Leibniz, thought that the actual world is the best of all possible worlds, though most of us believe that the world could have been better than it actually is, and furthermore the future may be better than the past, or vice versa. In any case let us take utopia as being the world with all perfections, that are not actualized, but something we imagine to be a mere possibility. So if we go back to the Aristotelian idea that knowing is better than being curious, it should follow that in Utopia we would all be omniscient. Thus in Utopia there is no ignorance, nothing to wonder about, no puzzles to solve, no surprises, and no curiosity. Now when put as such Utopia would not appear to be a very attractive place to live in. Not only would we know all the laws of nature, but also everything about the future, including our own. There would be no motivation to change or to seek what is novel, and no need for deliberation. Everything we do we would know in advance. I would not only know what I will have for breakfast tomorrow, but also what I would feel as I take my first bite. So even if we suppose that for every proposition which we care to know, it is better for us to know it rather than be ignorant of it, it does not immediately follow that it is better to know all the true propositions. Curiosity is what keeps us going, giving us the motivation to

learn, to change and to have novel experiences. This is especially important with respect to our curiosity about the future in general, but it is even more important when it comes to curiosity about one's own future in specific. What gives meaning to our lives is partially derived from the fact that our future is open. Now what makes the future appear to be open relates to the time-honored problem of free will and determinism, an issue that I will not go into here. The future may be open in a metaphysical sense implying that the doctrine of determinism is false, or it may be open in an epistemic sense such that even if the metaphysical doctrine of determinism is true, it is impossible for us to know the future in all cases. What position we take with respect to this controversy makes no difference for the argument I am presenting here. Either way it is a simple truth that we are ignorant about many aspects of our own future. And it is exactly this that allows us to be curious about how things will unfold. Curiosity about the future, I claim, is partially what gives purpose to our lives. This does not necessarily make curiosity intrinsically valuable, but it does make it an essential element that is needed to lead a meaningful life. One may for instance claim that curiosity is needed for change, and it is a certain kind of change that has intrinsic value. Various psychologists have conducted experiments that show that perhaps all mammals have a drive or an instinct to be driven towards new sensations and novel experiences. We are no different. But the novel experiences that curiosity brings about goes far beyond the novelty involved in merely acquiring new sensations. To ask a question out of curiosity is a mental act that triggers a thinking process which results in a mental change, perhaps the most important kind of change that only humans experience. Perhaps what has intrinsic value is this mental change,

and curiosity is the essential tool by which we attain it.²³ I do not wish to suggest that any of this is conclusive. But such considerations at least reveal that the value of curiosity cannot merely be due to the fact that it motivates us to acquire knowledge and understanding of the world.

Whether we take curiosity as having intrinsic or merely instrumental value, whether we call it a virtue or not, that curiosity has value should need no argument for a philosopher. A good philosopher is, almost by definition, a curious being. It must run his blood in order for him to philosophize. But most philosophers take this for granted, and forget how precious it is. One reason for this, as I have said, is the traditional view, going back to at least Aristotle, that curiosity derives its value from the fact that it brings us knowledge. The history of philosophy reveals how strong this traditional view is, given that so much has been said about knowledge but very little on curiosity. This closely relates to the meta-philosophical problem of the value of our discipline. What is philosophy good for? The traditional answer is that it produces knowledge. But such an answer directly plays in the hand of the ones who look down upon our discipline. If one tries to derive the value of philosophy from the knowledge that it has produced, then one

²³ Since the same kind of argument could be applied to many other things apart from curiosity I have named this argument the “Utopia Paradox” in an unpublished work in progress (*A Philosophical Dialogue on Curiosity*). My former graduate student Safiye Yigit discusses it in more depth in her Master’s Thesis *Curiosity as an Intellectual and Ethical Virtue* (Bogazici University, 2011).

must show some good evidence for this. But surely even some philosophers would admit that we have never attained such knowledge. For every good philosophical question there are equally good arguments running on either side, making it very difficult, if not impossible for us to claim that we have reached knowledge of anything whatsoever. It certainly is not my intention to argue for any position with respect to this meta-philosophical problem about the value of philosophy. Suffice it to say that we should at least leave the door open for the possibility that philosophy may have some intrinsic worth even if it does not produce this promised knowledge, a view that I am strongly inclined to accept. If so, then perhaps the value of curiosity may be better appreciated. It is the asking of a good philosophical question, and attempting to search for an answer that keeps us going, or so it may be argued. I cannot imagine any better kind of change than that which is brought about by philosophical questioning. We philosophers experience mental changes at the deepest level; we inquire into our basic concepts, on how they relate to one another, we run into paradoxes, we introduce new concepts, and all this activity not only changes the way we think about things, but it gives us the chance to think about novel things which were not even imaginable before. Bold as it may sound, I am inclined to think that if philosophy has any worth, it should be within the language that it has created that allows us to ask new questions and in effect allows us to experience new forms of curiosity. It is what motivates us to tidy up our old concepts and introduce new ones. That is why some hold that it is a lot more difficult to ask a new important philosophical question, rather than finding an answer to an old one.

If we try to derive the value of curiosity from the value of knowledge, we would have to account for the fact that there appear to be cases where one is curious about something but would

be better off not knowing it. That is because perhaps there are certain truths we would be better off not to know in certain contexts. Someone for instance may be curious about whether he has a fatal illness, but if there is no cure for it, perhaps it is better for that person not to find out. Or consider death: is it better for us to know when we shall die? In any case, even if there is a way to show that for any particular truth we are curious about we would be better off knowing it rather than being curious about it, I still think that being curious about something or other, rather than not being curious at all is better. That is what the Utopia argument implies. Such considerations should also make us question the traditional view that curiosity is a kind of desire, an issue that I will come back to later.

Before closing off let me mention that there are many interesting questions on curiosity that I will not be able to deal with in this book. One for instance concerns how curiosity relates to creativity, an issue that I believe requires serious attention.²⁴ I will also not delve on the nature of philosophical curiosity in specific, and how, if at all, it is satisfiable, an issue that deserves special attention as a meta-philosophical question. Though I will have a few things to say on this in a later chapter on the limits of curiosity and its satisfaction, overall the discussion will be on curiosity in general and how it relates to the use of language regardless of whether it is directed at an empirical issue, or an a priori one.

²⁴ I discuss how curiosity and creativity both require the same kind of linguistic skills that enable us to think about the unknown in a forthcoming paper entitled “Creativity, Curiosity, and Language”.

Here then is a brief outline of what is to follow. In Chapter 1 I start off with a discussion of Meno's Paradox. I first show how this intriguing puzzle may be applied to curiosity and its satisfaction. I then take up the standard solutions offered in the literature by Plato scholars, and argue that they are unsatisfactory in resolving the original riddle as well as the one on curiosity. And then I offer my own account. This discussion introduces the notion of *inostensible reference*, which is roughly defined as reference to something unknown. By utilizing the notion of inostensible reference, in Chapter 2 I discuss how curiosity relates to the asking of a question, and how the satisfaction of curiosity relates to answering a question. After distinguishing between two kinds of terms in one's idiolect (ostensible versus inostensible terms), I then discuss how this distinction relates to four different distinctions that have motivated a lot of debates in the philosophy of language and epistemology literature. Chapter 3 is on Russell's famous distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description²⁵, Chapter 4 is on Donnellan's classical distinction between the referential and the attributive uses of definite descriptions²⁶, Chapter 5 is on the time-honored de re/de dicto distinction, and Chapter 6 is on Kripke's more recent distinction between rigid and accidental designators²⁷. These chapters serve

²⁵ Bertrand Russell, "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 11, 1910, pp. 108-128.

²⁶ Keith Donnellan, "Reference and Definite Descriptions", *Philosophical Review*, 75, 1966, pp. 281-304.

²⁷ Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972.

a double function: (i) to clarify and explicate the notion of inostensible reference by making use of the existing literature in relevant topics, and (ii) to show the significance of the distinction between ostensible and inostensible reference in relation to some of the contemporary discussions that have taken place within the philosophy of language literature. In Chapter 7 by utilizing Kripke's distinction between speaker's reference and semantic reference, I give an account of when there is merely semantic reference to the object of curiosity, when there is both semantic and speaker's reference, and when there is neither. The discussion in effect reveals important conclusions concerning how curiosity relates to the existence of its object, and in what sense curiosity is an intentional mental state. Based on the discussions of the previous chapters, in Chapter 8 I take up the question of what curiosity is and what the conditions are for one to become curious? Is it a desire? Is it a desire to know, or learn, or inquire? I argue that even if curiosity is taken to be a desire, it needs to be spelled out in more detail than what one can find in the literature. By making use of the discussions in the previous chapters, I argue that understanding what curiosity is requires us to appeal to the notion of inostensible reference. I take up certain considerations that challenge the traditional view which takes curiosity as being a form of desire and then present a more thorough discussion of how curiosity relates to reference. The conditions for the satisfaction of curiosity is the topic of Chapter 9, in which I argue that the epistemic standard for one to actually satisfy his curiosity is context-dependent. Based on this in Chapter 10 I show how this leads to a relativistic understanding of curiosity and its satisfaction. Chapter 11 deals with the issue of presuppositions; it explores what a subject must presuppose, if

anything, in being curious, and what the content of one's curiosity must presuppose semantically for it to be satisfiable. It ends with a note on the idea due to Collingwood, but which can also be extracted from Carnap and Wittgenstein, that there are absolute presuppositions that cannot be called into question. Whether these or other considerations lead to the view that there are limits to what we may be curious about is the topic of Chapter 12. Though parts of the following chapters contain discussions that make use of certain technical notions especially in the philosophy of language, I have tried my best to explain each and every such notion so that the book, or at least a good portion of it, could be accessible to ones who have no background in these areas.