

An Interpersonal-Epistemic Account of Intellectual Autonomy: Questioning, Responsibility, and Vulnerability

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Abstract : *The nature and value of autonomy has long been debated in diverse philosophical traditions, including moral and political philosophy. Although the notion dates back to ancient Greek philosophy, it was during the Age of Enlightenment that autonomy drew much attention. Thus, as may be known, moral philosophers tended to emphasize self-regulation, particularly one's own will to abide by universal moral laws, as the term "autonomy" originates from the Greek words "self" (auto) and "rule" (nomos).*

In parallel, modern epistemologists supposedly espoused the idea of intellectual autonomy as self-reliance. In this classical view, an intellectually autonomous explorer of knowledge must not depend on a belief that is obtained from another's testimony, until one can justify it to oneself. However, accompanying the growing focus on the importance of social dimensions of acquiring knowledge and understanding, recent epistemologists have doubted the classical view and have since reconsidered intellectual autonomy from distinct approaches such as social and virtue epistemology.

This paper propounds an interpersonal-epistemic approach to intellectual autonomy. First, it is argued that thinking through questioning both individually and with other epistemic peers is an interpersonal-epistemic practice. Second, it is demonstrated that with particular cognitive features inherent within us, an intellectually autonomous person must think through questioning in necessary situations. This interpersonal account of intellectual autonomy can conceptually enrich intellectual autonomy by considering its relationship with not only responsibility but also with vulnerability. Specifically, regarding responsibility, an intellectually autonomous person must be responsible for his or her own actions throughout questioning processes. Regarding vulnerability, our intellectual autonomy lies in retaining autonomy with vulnerability in the plastic control of the questioning processes.

This distinct notion of intellectual autonomy may be characterized as "interpersonal-responsibilist". In this view, intellectual autonomy is praiseworthy in

fulfilling the responsibility to think through questioning as an interpersonal-epistemic practice in pursuit for an epistemic good. This opens up scope for further research to examine interpersonal and diachronic dimensions of our epistemic practices pertinent to intellectual autonomy.

1. Introduction

The nature and value of autonomy has long been debated in diverse philosophical traditions, including moral and political philosophy. Although the notion dates back to ancient Greek philosophy, it was during the Age of Enlightenment that autonomy drew much attention. Thus, as may be known, moral philosophers tended to emphasize self-regulation, particularly one's own will to abide by universal moral laws, as the term "autonomy" originates from the Greek words "self" (*auto*) and "rule" (*nomos*). In parallel, modern epistemologists supposedly espoused the idea of intellectual autonomy as self-reliance. In this classical view, an intellectually autonomous explorer of knowledge must not depend on a belief that is obtained from another's testimony,¹ until one can justify it to oneself.

However, accompanying the growing focus on the importance of social dimensions of acquiring knowledge and understanding, recent epistemologists have doubted the classical view of intellectual autonomy. For example, is it really the case that all the beliefs obtained from others' testimony are unreliable? Or, is it really true that all the beliefs that we justify on our own are free from implicit cognitive biases? The notion of intellectual autonomy has since been examined from distinct epistemic approaches, such as social and virtue epistemology.

Even so, the idea that thinking for oneself is exclusively an individual's mental activity remains unquestioned. It often involves, either partly or entirely, shaping one's standpoint through questioning: students may encounter an intriguing question while reading a historic book, such as *Theaetetus*, and start to consider it for themselves with their parents. Researchers may become inclined to articulate their views by eliciting elaborate responses from their peers and critics. Even when

¹ The term "testimony" in epistemology refers to reports that are obtained from what other people tell us. We often rely on the reports of others for our beliefs about the food we eat, medicine we ingest, products we buy, discoveries in science, historical events, and so on. For example, I have a belief that eating excessive snacks can be harmful to health based on what I have watched on television, as well as a belief that Japan accepted the Potsdam Declaration in 1945 based on my reading a history textbook.

one deliberates on a particular matter for oneself, one may engage in questioning in conformity with the principles of one's epistemic communities, such as a particular scientific community. As the above illustrates, we think through questioning individually and with interlocutors in a disciplined manner.

This paper propounds an interpersonal-epistemic approach to intellectual autonomy. First, it is argued that thinking through questioning both individually and with other epistemic peers is an interpersonal-epistemic practice. Second, it is demonstrated that with particular cognitive features inherent within us, an intellectually autonomous person must think through questioning in necessary situations. This interpersonal account of intellectual autonomy can conceptually enrich intellectual autonomy by considering its relationship with not only responsibility but also with vulnerability. Specifically, regarding responsibility, an intellectually autonomous person must be responsible for his or her own actions throughout questioning processes. Regarding vulnerability, our intellectual autonomy lies in retaining autonomy with vulnerability in the plastic control of the questioning processes. In this view, an intellectually autonomous person is praiseworthy in pursuing an epistemic good while fulfilling the responsibility to think through questioning as an interpersonal-epistemic practice.

The argument will proceed in five parts. Section 2 examines the literature on intellectual autonomy. Section 3 elaborates on thinking through questioning as an interpersonal-epistemic practice. Section 4 illuminates the internal connection between intellectual autonomy and responsibility. Section 5 explores the relationship between intellectual autonomy and vulnerability. Section 6 concludes by summarizing my distinctive approach.

2. A brief overview of the contemporary debate

To understand the backdrop of the literature on intellectual autonomy, let us first clarify the classical view of intellectual autonomy as self-reliance. This view is illustrated by René Descartes' episodes in *Discourse on Method*. As a boy, Descartes, once aspiring to gain clear and certain knowledge of everything useful in life, found himself bewildered by innumerable uncertain claims and errors in academic books. Descartes considered it impossible to become closer to the truth by learning from books that are assembled from mere pieces of others' testimony. In

scenarios such as this, it appears that Descartes was sensible to eventually put aside what he had acquired through others' testimony to retain intellectual autonomy.

Social epistemologists have eschewed the individualistic assumption underlying this classical view of intellectual autonomy and examined the relationship between epistemic dependence on others' testimony and thinking for oneself (e.g., Coady 2002; Fricker 2006). Fricker (2006)'s social-epistemic approach is distinctive in exploring intellectual autonomy in light of humans' limited sensory and perceptual faculties and their fallible cognitive capacities. Admittedly, others' testimony sometimes contains false beliefs, whether intentionally or otherwise, which can render the recipients of the testimony epistemically insecure. Still, it is fair to bear in mind that beliefs that are justified on our own are not always guaranteed to be true. People may be epistemically insecure when they memorize all the phone numbers of their colleagues at the office for themselves. Similarly, people may not trust themselves epistemically when they conduct complicated calculations even after reflectively ascertaining the consequence. Conversely, some people can be better equipped to obtain a particular truth than other people are. For instance, one may possess excellent cognitive competences, such as good memory and outstanding reasoning skills, and reliable expertise regarding particular subjects.

In my understanding, Fricker's consideration is illuminating in highlighting intellectual autonomy that is unique to humans with particular cognitive features. This insight should not be regarded as relative to the epistemic environment of a particular society. Rather, the point is that intellectual autonomy that fits us must hold in its relationship to our social-epistemic interactions. To put it differently, the following holds true:

- (1) With cognitive limitations, an intellectually autonomous person must appropriately engage in social-epistemic practices.

Take the case of testimonial exchange. It seems reasonable to think that with intrinsic cognitive limitations, an intellectually autonomous person must discreetly depend on others' testimony vis-à-vis the epistemic environments (Fricker 2006, 239). For example, as a recipient of information, an intellectually autonomous person must be capable of sensibly identifying reliable epistemic authorities in a particular field, such as a trustworthy doctor.

Conversely, a criticism of Fricker is that her argument draws exclusively on the transmission of knowledge through testimony from informants to recipients.

However, there is another distinctive social-epistemic activity we often confront: questioning. In essence, “questioning” refers to the dynamic process of asking questions and answering them in combination with prepared arguments. For example, in receiving others’ testimony, one may unwittingly make biased judgments on the credibility of informants due to their political views. This is known as “testimonial injustice” (Fricker 2007, chap. 2). Although no one may be free from such risks in testimonial exchanges, such as the news in mass media, questioning may help us recognize our own implicitly unfair judgment on a belief by opposing informants. As this suggests, the focus on questioning will likely expand the range of epistemic approaches to intellectual autonomy. I examine questioning more closely in the next section.

Now, concerning virtue epistemology, Linda Zagzebski has focused on the relationship between pre-reflective trust and reflective thinking. In the view of intellectual autonomy as self-reliance, self-reflection helps one obtain an epistemic good, whilst the unreflective intake of perceptual and memory beliefs is believed to make one epistemically insecure. However, a point that recent epistemologists arguably agrees on is that it can be rational by default for a person to pre-reflectively trust the functioning of our sensory faculties and cognitive competences (Zagzebski 2012, chap. 2). By a default condition, I refer to the case in which people obtain perceptual and memorial beliefs by exercising their faculties and competences as usual under normal circumstances. To illustrate, eyesight functions as a reliable source of perceptual beliefs under normal circumstances, and, thereby, a person can trust the functioning of his or her eyesight to gain beliefs reliably. For instance, an angler may tell if today’s fish is fresh or not at first sight, which shows that his or her eyesight is a pre-reflective yet reliable source of the angler’s belief.

Thus, it is necessary for an intellectually autonomous person to exercise “epistemic conscientiousness”. Concerning this notion, Zagzebski gives a concise account:

I call the quality of using our faculties to the best of our ability in order to get the truth *epistemic conscientiousness*. I think of this quality as the self-reflective version of the natural desire for truth. . . . Once a person becomes reflective, she thinks that her trustworthiness is greater if she summons her powers in a fully conscious and careful way, and exercises them to the best of her ability. What I am calling conscientiousness is the state or disposition to do that (Zagzebski 2012, 48).

Conscientiousness is defined as the disposition to reflect on a conflict in one's mental state, called "dissonance", when one recognizes it by obtaining a new, and alternative, belief. In this understanding, an intellectually autonomous person pursues the ideal by reconciling pre-reflective trust in sensory and perceptual faculties and conscientiousness in the best way. Suppose that Tom had to pay the fare for a trip that was planned for the New Year's holiday and that it was due today. Remembering that a sufficient amount of money was left in his bank account, he tried to withdraw the money but found that his available funds were inadequate. He wondered what was going on, relying on his memory (not merely wishful thinking) and his belief that enough money was left in his bank account. If Tom had a normal memory, his action of relying on his memory might be reasonable. Here, if Tom were intellectually autonomous, he would not neglect the dissonance caused by the recognition of the discrepancy between the fact and his earlier memorial belief. He would reflect on the matter to resolve the apparent inconsistency.²

Zagzebski's virtue-based approach to intellectual autonomy seems insightful, in that it can reconcile the requirement of a reflection process, as has been emphasized in moral and political autonomy, and the unreflective yet reliable functioning of one's perceptual and cognitive faculties. Also, on the basis of her critique of intellectual autonomy as self-reliance, her approach can give credence to trust in other's wisdom, such as in testimony delivered by experts.

However, Zagzebski's view of intellectual autonomy still seems to be individualistic, as it assumes that conflicts in beliefs get noticed by a conscientious person and dispose him or her to reflect on them. Conversely, because of our cognitive limitations, as in (1), even a reflective thinker, or a conscientious thinker, may implicitly have particular stereotypes and fail to recognize inconsistencies in the web of their beliefs. To identify such inconsistencies, one often needs other peers as interlocutors who are in an equally good or better position in regards to the discussed matter. This suggests that although our intellectual autonomy requires reflective thinking on our part, it also has a lot to do with the questioning conducted with other peers. I pursue this line of argument in more detail in the next section.

3. Thinking through questioning as an interpersonal-epistemic practice

² Zagzebski (2012, 2013) referred to intellectual autonomy understood this way as self-governance.

Although some research has examined the relationship between questioning and some character traits, such as inquisitiveness (Watson 2015), none has focused on the relationship between intellectual autonomy and questioning. Given this omission, this section focuses on this relationship and demonstrates that an intellectually autonomous person must think through questioning, which is understood as an interpersonal-epistemic practice, in necessary situations. So, let us begin by articulating several relevant concepts, such as “questioning”, “epistemic peers”, and “a chain of arguments”.

Questioning is an epistemic practice seen in everyday intellectual lives as well as in argumentative dialogues in law, science, politics, medicine, and education. With regard to the notion of practice, I draw on Roberts and Wood (2007)’s clear account:

Intellectual practices aim intrinsically at such goods as understanding (of texts, of natural processes, of historical events, of historical human actions, of human nature and its conditions of flourishing and conditions of dysfunction, etc.), acquaintance, and confirmation of beliefs (evidence, insight about coherence with well-established beliefs). Intellectual practices aim at the justification and warrant of beliefs (Roberts and Wood 2007, 117).

Their account of intellectual practice seems reasonable because any type of epistemic practices involves people’s different actions to obtain epistemic goods, such as knowledge and understanding. For example, doctors may see their patients and consider the best treatment for them, and citizens may debate the political policy regarding how they can accommodate immigrants and satisfy their needs. In this light, questioning is an epistemic practice that has the purpose of attaining epistemic goods. Suppose, for example, a child, say Ben, is keen to ask why the sky looks blue in sunlight, while the outer layer of the Earth in the picture of the universe looks dark. His science teacher may assist his questioning by helping him expound on his question and attain targeted understanding about the color of the sky.

Questioning reflects bi-directional relationships among epistemic peers. “Epistemic peers” refer to people in an equally good or better position on a topic of

questioning.³ Suppose that Ben found an intriguing question about the sky's color while reading an illustrated reference book on science. He became curious about the question in the book and considered it based on the testimony and advice of the book's authors. Similarly, consider a scenario in which Mary is a medical scientist who has been developing a medicine to avert an epidemic and discovers the risk of a side effect caused by the medicine. This fact may urge her to discuss the problem of what specifically causes the side effect with her collaborators and other reliable experts. Accordingly, Mary engages in questioning with her peers to attain her research goal.

Furthermore, questioning is structured to represent the relationship between arguments, that is, a chain of arguments, in the form of asking and answering.⁴ Suppose that a scientific study reports that an increasing number of Japanese people of working age are diagnosed with obesity, which is more likely to lead to serious diseases. Suppose also that, asked about the measure to curb the increase, a physician advises people over 40 to have a detailed medical checkup every two years for free. The physician also illustrates the point by claiming that, as cars in Japan must be inspected every two years, or three years after the registration of a new car, analogically, it is advisable that people over a certain age undergo regular medical checkups. In this instance, the physician's answer assumes the validity of the scientific study's result and is based on the analogical linkage between the cases of people over 40 and used cars. In this way, this answer is embedded in the particular chain of arguments and will be evaluated accordingly.

Based on the clarifications on questioning, let us consider thinking for oneself. As the term "thinking" is used widely and differently depending on the contexts, I shall confine the following argument to thinking in the form of asking and answering questions in the pursuit of epistemic goods. I simply call this type of thinking "thinking through questioning".

Thinking through questioning can be done both individually and with epistemic peers. In both cases, it must be deemed as an interpersonal-epistemic practice with some qualifications.

First, consider individual thinking through questioning. An individual's thinking through questioning is an interpersonal-epistemic practice only if the

³ As one can be an imaginary interlocutor who is in an equally good position in one's mind, one's epistemic peers include oneself. This individual thinking is discussed in more detail below.

⁴ See Hintikka (2007) for a more detailed analysis of how questioning behaves logically in argumentative terms.

thinking, consisting of a chain of arguments, conforms to certain principles and frameworks, such as reasoning, accepted by an intellectual community. For example, suppose a pupil, say Emily, is keen on how a parachute works when it descends at the same speed from a certain height. If she considers it herself, but her consideration is based on valid reasoning and presuppositions based in Newtonian physics, such as Newton's first law of motion, her thinking through questioning may be deemed as an epistemic practice in physics. Likewise, suppose that Mary, the aforementioned medical scientist, addresses the problem of how to produce a safe and effective medicine without consulting her colleagues and supervisors. In this case, Mary is deliberating on her question, presumably with an imagined interlocutor in her mind, and her conduct of questioning constitutes a chain of arguments in conformity with the principles of the scientific community to which she belongs. Roberts and Wood (2007) observe that "even solo epistemic practices have a social dimension: the laboratory scientist will belong to a tradition of experimentation; Descartes's thoughts are responses to a historical intellectual and political situation" (114). Sole reflective thinking, as a chain of arguments in accordance with a particular standard, is regarded as an interpersonal-epistemic practice.

Second, thinking through questioning with epistemic peers may likely bring one closer to one's own epistemic good. To explain this, let us consider the difference between moral laws as moral goods and truth as an epistemic good. A morally autonomous person might individually recognize moral laws, such as that one must keep a promise, and could bind himself or herself to them. That person would neither need other people to recognize moral laws nor to obey them. By contrast, an intellectually autonomous person needs epistemic peers to recognize truth as an epistemic good. To illustrate, questions from epistemic peers can help one recognize hitherto one's own doubtful stereotypical beliefs. Stereotypical beliefs are often implicitly held and go unnoticed by ourselves. For example, contemporary epistemologists have posed a question about the value of knowledge, which was supposedly implicitly assumed. This question has gained momentum to explore the values of different epistemic notions, such as understanding, in so-called "value-driven epistemology" (Riggs 2008).⁵

Moreover, questioning with epistemic peers helps one to guide questioning in a better direction. Suppose, for example, that a child, say Cindy, asks how she can know she is awake. By asking this question, Cindy may want to know the difference

⁵ See also Pritchard, Millar, and Haddock (2010, part 1) for an exposition of the value problem.

in how our brain functions between the time the brain is active and the time when we are asleep. Alternatively, Cindy may be curious about the philosophical question of how it is possible to know we are awake and not in a dream. Her teachers may help Cindy to develop an initial question, so her inquiry can be directed toward the goal that she wants to achieve.

Considering this, epistemic peers' questions can work as epistemic promoters in terms of *prima facie* obtaining epistemic goods.⁶ Admittedly, they can also function as epistemic defeaters empowered to cancel or downgrade the degree of the power of one's justification. A defeater either renders a part of the arguments unjustified or the whole chain of arguments unjustified. To illustrate a local unjustified state, suppose that a leap in a scientific theory is found during a review process. The theory will be incomplete, but a scientist and a reviewer can identify a previously unjustified part in the theory in their dialogue.

However, questions that appear to defeat the justification at first can turn into promoters. Consider the aforementioned case in which a leap in a theory a scientist proposes is found during a review process. This does not ruin the scientist's whole theory, but it can maintain a degree of certainty. Although the reviewer pointed out an unquestioned yet doubtful assumption in the theory, it may have facilitated the necessary questioning to solve the problem and make the entire theory compelling. In this example, the question defeats the part of the scientist's original argument, while it simultaneously promotes good questioning between the scientist and the reviewer in the sense that they will be able to come closer to the research goal collaboratively.

Hence, with some qualifications, thinking through questioning both individually and with other epistemic peers must be regarded as an interpersonal-epistemic practice.

Let us articulate the relationship between thinking through questioning and intellectual autonomy. It is granted that our intellectual autonomy requires thinking through questioning on our part. The present focus is on thinking through questioning with epistemic peers or individual reflective thinking, comprising a chain of arguments in accordance with certain standards within an intellectual community. These forms of thinking are regarded as interpersonal-epistemic practices. Suppose that "S" represents a person. Given the above,

⁶ The *prima facie* condition is necessary because questioning is essentially open to further questions. See also Hookway (2008) for a different consideration about the role of questions.

(2) S is intellectually autonomous only if S thinks through questioning, as an interpersonal-epistemic practice, in necessary situations.

I will refer to this understanding of intellectual autonomy as an interpersonal account of intellectual autonomy. Note here that the justificatory state regarding any claim in questioning as a chain of arguments is not necessary for intellectual autonomy. As detailed above, there are many cases in which a claim is locally unjustified, but an unjustified part can later be justified once identified and examined. A person can be seen as intellectually autonomous if that person thinks reflectively and responds to a defeater at a later time.

The interpersonal account of intellectual autonomy with our cognitive limitations can offer the perspective to relate intellectual autonomy to the notions of responsibility and vulnerability. I consider this in the following two sections.

4. Intellectual autonomy and responsibility

The first significant point of the interpersonal account of intellectual autonomy is that it makes it possible to conceptually connect intellectual autonomy and responsibility. It was implicitly assumed that epistemic responsibility concerns one's own belief, while moral responsibility involves one's own action. In this understanding, unlike the case of moral responsibility for their actions, people do not have voluntary control over their beliefs (cf. Kornblith 2014, chap. 2). Perceptual beliefs, such as beliefs gained through eyesight, come to people involuntarily, and thus they occur spontaneously.

However, Lorraine Code, a founder of virtue responsibilism, presents a different perspective to consider in regard to epistemic responsibility:

I call mine a “responsibilist” position in contradistinction to Sosa’s proposed “reliabilism”, at least where it is *human* knowledge that is under discussion. This is because the concept “responsibility” can allow emphasis upon the active nature of the knower/believer that the concept “reliability” cannot We would speak of a “reliable” computer, but not of a “responsible” one. A person can be judged responsible or irresponsible only if s/he is clearly to be regarded as an agent (in this case a cognitive agent) in the circumstances in

question. It is because of its active, creative nature that human knowledge-seeking endeavor requires evaluation in terms of responsibility (Code 1984, 39–40, emphasis original).

Inspired by Sosa's view, Code proposed a distinct responsibilist virtue epistemology. I leave the question of the relationship between two versions of virtue epistemology here. I want to call attention to Code's suggestion that epistemic responsibility is borne not by perceptual beliefs but rather by epistemic practice, in which people aim for epistemic goods.

As observed in section 3, people engage in various intellectual practices and can choose actions, through which they arrive at true beliefs. To exemplify, people can be circumspect about how to receive testimonial beliefs. For example, one can be cautious to stay away from the information on unreliable websites. In the same vein, through the process of questioning, one can choose actions, such as giving an elaborate response to their epistemic peers. If people choose actions on their own will in questioning, they can responsibly maintain the resulting beliefs.

Here, the above responsibilists' insight can lend support to the view that people can engage in questioning responsibly. What, then, is the relationship between intellectual autonomy and responsibility?

An intellectually autonomous person must be responsible for actions in questioning. Remember that an intellectually autonomous person is required to think through questioning as an interpersonal-epistemic practice. That person must then be responsible for handling questions as either defeaters or promoters. To illustrate, an intellectually autonomous person takes the responsibility to respond to a question as a defeater in a chain of arguments by removing an unnecessary assumption from a set of premises. Otherwise, that person is not deemed as intellectually autonomous because he or she waives reflective thinking. Alternatively, an intellectually autonomous person may have the duty to forestall possible questions that may arise in the prepared arguments. This can prevent the occurrence of a defeater to that person's answer. Conversely, an intellectually autonomous person does not have to respond to irrelevant questions. In this case, that person is not irresponsible but is merely not responsible for responding to such questions.

Hence, with regard to the relationship between intellectual autonomy and responsibility,

- (3) An intellectually autonomous person must hold responsibility for his or her actions in the questioning processes.

As explained earlier, this does not require an intellectually autonomous person to have voluntary control over his or her belief. Instead, as that person can choose actions in questioning, one must have responsibility for one's performance and, consequently, must hold the resulting beliefs. This is what it means for an intellectually autonomous person to "believe responsibly".

There are several notes regarding a questioner's responsibility. First, an intellectually autonomous person does not need to convince his or her interlocutor. Suppose that a person is *prima facie* justified in responding to a question before a peer. This response acts to defeat a defeater but does not ensure that the opponent is necessarily persuaded. The person may be obstinate in his or her own view due to forming an unfair judgment. In addition, a person can persuade peers regardless of how compelling his or her response is. Suppose that a politician has a charismatic eloquence that can allure listeners. The listeners might be persuaded by the politician's claim, even when it is not based on good responses. As persuasion often involves evaluations other than epistemic ones, a person does not have to persuade to be intellectually autonomous.

Second, an intellectually autonomous person can reasonably depend on what epistemic authorities say, including an encyclopedia, as Fricker suggested. It can function to either defeat justification or promote questioning. An illustrated reference book based on a trustworthy expert's testimony may help an intellectually autonomous person to accomplish an epistemic goal. Conversely, if the source of a testimony is considered unreliable, an intellectually autonomous person must think critically and believe the resulting belief responsibly. In addition, an intellectually autonomous person can pre-reflectively trust his or her cognitive faculties under normal circumstances, as Zagzebski observed. What is required for intellectual autonomy is to fulfill the responsibility to think through questioning after noticing questions in some way or other.

5. Intellectual autonomy, vulnerability, and plastic control

Another significant point of the interpersonal account of intellectual autonomy is that it enables us to consider intellectual autonomy and vulnerability in the control of

questioning processes. This section demonstrates that with cognitive limitations as explained in stipulation (1), people are epistemically vulnerable to questions from epistemic peers. Then, it argues that despite our vulnerability, intellectual autonomy must sustain interest in a topic of questioning with a plastic plan for fulfilling an epistemic goal.

As a starting point, let us consider the relationship between moral autonomy and a life plan as broadly understood in the political and moral spheres. Traditionally, alongside the requirement of reflective thinking, moral autonomy supposedly requires us to decide and control our life courses and to fulfill the objectives of our lives accordingly (cf. Slote 2013). To exemplify this, suppose that Susan is a Japanese anime fanatic and wants to work at a Japanese company in the future. If she is morally autonomous, she might make a plan to learn Japanese at a language center, act on her own will to specialize in Japanese at a university, and might see a professor whose study pertains to Japanese culture. In this way, Susan would be willing to control her life to accomplish her goal, and would not be manipulated by external forces, such as being at her parents' disposal. As this example shows, in the classical view of autonomy, a morally autonomous person may ideally be someone who designs his or her life course and never becomes frustrated in pursuing the life plan's objective.

Assuming that the classical view of moral autonomy is the case, an intellectually autonomous person would be required to control a questioning process according to his or her initial plan. If so, that person's failure to control the process would render him or her intellectually heteronomous. However, in the process of questioning, one frequently faces epistemically challenging situations, such as being exposed to unforeseen questions that are not easily dealt with. Even a conscientious researcher might become stuck on a crucial question. Thus, the requirement of being able to control the questioning processes as initially planned seems too strong for a person to retain intellectual autonomy.

What, then, is wrong with the classical view? It fails to consider the cognitive limitations inherent within us, as stipulated in (1). As people can only anticipate future events from their own present perspectives, they are susceptible to unforeseen yet relevant questions. People may struggle to handle the questions and even become frustrated by such questions.

We may call "epistemic challenges" questions that are pertinent to an epistemic goal yet difficult to answer. They may hinder, delay, and spoil the initial planning to achieve an epistemic goal. Here, it might be wondered if one can

disregard questions as epistemic challenges. Unlike in the case of practical challenges, epistemic ones do not involve physical or financial issues and can seemingly be disregarded. However, as explained in (3), during the process of questioning, an intellectually autonomous person must hold responsibility to respond to questions as defeaters and promoters.

Thus, an intellectually autonomous person is vulnerable to such epistemic challenges. However, this vulnerability differs from heteronomy. First, vulnerability concerns epistemic challenges that arise as a result of active engagement in questioning. Presumably, as one becomes aware of more relevant and distinct details of knowledge and understanding in a particular field, it enables one to be more sensitive to the relevant questions, although the range of such questions may be smaller (Sato 2016). Thus, an intellectually autonomous person may be vulnerable to questions, yet its vulnerability results from good questioning in the pursuit for an epistemic good. By contrast, intellectual heteronomy may render people merely obedient to what their peers request.

Second, vulnerability allows one to possess the willingness to address epistemic challenges, while intellectual heteronomy makes one frustrated by them. If the aforementioned medical researcher, Mary, who is struggling to deal with the unexpected side effect of the medicine, is vulnerable yet not heteronomous, she may be willing to assess how difficult it is to identify the cause. She may also contemplate whether she should change the initial research method. As this illustrates, by granting vulnerability, she can be responsive to epistemic challenges and also retain intellectual autonomy.

Hence, our intellectual autonomy lies in retaining autonomy with vulnerability. Being vulnerable is not an embarrassing fact for intellectual autonomy, as vulnerability arises from people's active engagement in questioning. Grounded in a questioning-based notion of thinking, there is a gradation in the extent of intellectual autonomy and vulnerability.⁷

How then can intellectual autonomy with vulnerability withstand the control of the questioning process? It is necessary for an intellectually autonomous person to not only prepare an initial plan for a whole questioning process but also redesign it accordingly with changing epistemic situations. This can be referred to as the ability to plastically control questioning. Take the aforementioned case in which a scientist

⁷ In accordance therewith, intellectual autonomy can be considered as developed. On one hand, expert inquirers may welcome critical questions and be more acquainted with their vulnerability. On the other hand, children may be in need of care from adults in questioning at school and at home, as children are generally novice questioners.

identifies a leap in his proposed theory during a review process. The scientist may need longer time to complete his theory than initially planned. However, the scientist can maintain his research by altering his earlier plan to consider the best way to cope with the epistemic challenges. Considering this, it can be granted that

- (4) An intellectually autonomous person must plastically control his or her questioning process.

Certainly, in confronting epistemic challenges, even a person who is strongly motivated to solve them at first could lose the willingness to think through questioning. However, while plastically regulating a questioning process, an intellectually autonomous person must sustain interest in an explored topic to be able to come closer to an epistemic good.

6. Concluding remarks

I have thus far expounded on an interpersonal-epistemic approach to intellectual autonomy by critically examining the idea of thinking through questioning. By evaluating the literature on intellectual autonomy, Section 2 argued that with particular cognitive limitations, an intellectually autonomous person must appropriately engage in social-epistemic practices. Section 3 proved that with some qualifications, thinking through questioning both individually and with other epistemic peers must be regarded as an interpersonal-epistemic practice. Based on this, this section also argued that an intellectually autonomous person must think through questioning. Section 4 demonstrated that an intellectually autonomous person must be responsible for his or her own actions throughout the questioning process. Section 5 argued that granting vulnerability, an intellectually autonomous person can be vulnerable to questioning to different degrees.

We may characterize this distinct notion of intellectual autonomy as “interpersonal-responsibilist”. In this view, intellectual autonomy is praiseworthy in fulfilling the responsibility to think through questioning as an interpersonal-epistemic practice in pursuit for an epistemic good. This opens up scope for further research to examine interpersonal and diachronic dimensions of our epistemic practices pertinent to intellectual autonomy.

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