Article

SURI 10:1 (2022): 20-44

A Challenges-Based Taxonomy of Epistemic Vices

Nicolo M. Masakayan
University of the Philippines, Los Baños

Abstract: One of the main strands of current work in vice epistemology is the study of specific epistemic vices, and this includes the construction of taxonomies that provide ways of organizing these vices. This article discusses one such taxonomic scheme: a challenges-based taxonomy. This taxonomy considers vices as character traits, attitudes, and ways of thinking that impair an agent's ability to appropriately respond to the various challenges or problems in inquiry. I provide a concise description of a challenges-based taxonomy of epistemic vices and show that it has advantages over other ways of categorizing epistemic vices. In the succeeding sections I attempt to demonstrate how this taxonomy can be initially constructed. I do this by first discussing an inquiry-relevant challenge, showing that such a challenge should be met in order to do effective inquiry and produce good epistemic effects. Once the challenge is established, I provide examples of epistemic vices that prevent individuals from meeting the said challenge. I conclude by discussing areas for development of this challenges-based approach.

Keywords: vice epistemology, taxonomy of epistemic vices, challenges-based taxonomy, epistemic vice

https://suri.pap73.site/files/masakayan_suri_april2022.pdf

INTRODUCTION

Producing a viable taxonomy of the various epistemic vices is one of the main projects of vice epistemology.[1] This leads us to ask: what kinds of taxonomies of epistemic vice are effective and useful? A taxonomy of epistemic vices entails an ordering of the various epistemic vices into categories based on their characteristics and differences. An effective taxonomy helps us make sense of the variety of epistemic vices and, at the same time, helps exclude borderline cases from being considered epistemic vices.

There are several possible taxonomic schemes for epistemic vices, and each has its own advantages and disadvantages. A basic taxonomy can use concepts from virtue ethics and categorize epistemic vices as vices of excess or vices of deficiency. Cassam's distinction between regular and "stealthy" vices (vices that are, by nature, able to prevent their own detection) is an example of a more particular and alternative taxonomic scheme.[2] Other examples include Kidd's capital vices,[3] Crerar's vices of apathy or inertia,[4] Tanesini's vices of self-evaluation,[5] and Medina's vices of the privileged.[6] This article discusses an alternative taxonomic scheme: a challenges-based taxonomy. This kind of taxonomy was first introduced

[1] Ian James Kidd, "Capital Epistemic Vices," *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective*, 6: 8 (2017), 11

[2] Quassim Cassam, "Stealthy Vices," *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective*, 4:10 (2015), 19-25.

[3] Ian James Kidd, "Capital Epistemic Vices," *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective*, 6:8 (2017), 11-16.

[4] Charlie Crerar, "Motivational Approaches to Intellectual Vice," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 96:4 (2018), 753-766.

[5] Alessandra Tanesini, *The Mismeasure of the Self: A Study in Vice Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 15.

[6] Jose Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and the Social Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 30.

by Jason Baehr as a challenges-based taxonomy for epistemic virtues.[7] Epistemic virtues, in Baehr's original categorization scheme, are traits that help agents respond well to the challenges imposed by inquiry. I use Baehr's definition of inquiry as "an active and intentional search for the truth about some question."[8] For instance, effective inquiry demands mental flexibility, so the corresponding virtues for this challenge would be open-mindedness, imaginativeness, and creativity, among others.[9] This article explores the possibility, initially raised by Ian James Kidd, of thinking of epistemic vices as character traits, attitudes, and ways of thinking that impair an agent's ability to appropriately respond to the various challenges or problems in inquiry, which is a complement to Baehr's approach.[10]

In the next section I will give a concise description of a challenges-based taxonomy of epistemic vices. I will show that this taxonomy has advantages over other, more popular, ways of categorizing epistemic vices. In the latter half of this article I will attempt to use this proposed taxonomic scheme to categorize various epistemic vices. I will use some of the "inquiry-relevant challenges" identified by Baehr, such as initial motivation, focus, consistency, flexibility, and endurance.[11] I will also propose two additional demands, which are lack of sources and information overload. Epistemic vices are, in essence, grouped by the inquiry-related challenges they aggravate. I conclude by discussing areas for development of this challenges-based approach. These areas are: identifying epistemic vices that affect multiple challenges, comparative taxonomy, and examining other challenges and the specific vices related to them.

[7] Jason Baehr, *The Inquiring Mind: On Intellectual Virtues and Virtue Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 18-22.

[8] *Ibid*., 18.

[9] *Ibid*., 21.

[10] Ian James Kidd, "Deep Epistemic Vices," *Journal of Philosophical Research*, 43 (2018), 43-67.

[11] Baehr, *The Inquiring Mind*, 21.

THE CHALLENGES-BASED TAXONOMY

Since the taxonomy in question is adapted from virtue epistemology, let us first discuss it in that context. The basic idea of a challenges-based taxonomy in virtue epistemology is this: every epistemic virtue is a character trait, attitude, or way of thinking that allows an individual to properly respond to various challenges or demands encountered in inquiry.[12] This taxonomy categorizes epistemic virtues under the particular challenges to inquiry that they relate to. For example, a particular challenge to inquiry, which we shall designate as CI1, has under it, let us say, the virtues VT1 and VT2. CI1 is related to VT1 and VT2 because these virtues enable an individual to respond to the challenge properly. In other words, VT1 and VT2 enable the individual to have success in inquiry despite the challenges posed by CI1.

Both VT1 and VT2 are not exclusive to CI1. These virtues can also help individuals in responding properly to other challenges faced in inquiry. For example, open-mindedness is an epistemic virtue that allows us to meet the challenge of mental flexibility. When we encounter an idea that does not jive with our usual patterns of thinking, we need open-mindedness to help us understand it. But open-mindedness is not confined to the challenge of mental flexibility. It also allows us to meet the challenge of lack of sources. When the common sources for information are not available, open-mindedness aids in the pursuit of true belief, knowledge, and understanding by making us receptive to alternative sources or ways of gathering relevant information. In sum, no virtue is exclusive to any specific challenge to inquiry. Some epistemic virtues can even help us meet multiple challenges to inquiry.

Keen-eyed observers may note that this taxonomic scheme, as well as its accompanying definition of epistemic virtue, is mainly consequentialist in nature. Contrary to classical conceptions of epistemic

[12] *Ibid*., 18.

virtue, it makes no mention of the motivational aspect of epistemic virtue. It does, however, faintly allude to the notion of virtues as excellences, insofar as virtues enable one to respond properly to challenges.

The main limitation of Baehr's taxonomic strategy is it does not provide a strict classification scheme that delineates vices exclusively enough from each other. There are significant areas of overlap between the various epistemic virtues and the inquiry-relevant demands they respond to. For instance, the virtue of curiosity may help agents respond to the challenges posed by motivation, flexibility, and endurance. Baehr notes that although his classification scheme may not be exhaustive or exclusive enough for strict taxonomic purposes, it still is able to show how epistemic virtues are related to one another.[13]

If we try to apply this taxonomic scheme to vice epistemology, we simply have to think of the "failure" aspect of the challenge instead of the "success" or "excellence" aspect. The basic idea of a challenges-based taxonomy in vice epistemology, therefore, is this: every epistemic vice is a character trait, attitude, or way of thinking that prevents an individual from properly responding to various challenges or problems in inquiry. Since a "proper response" here is defined as a response that leads to epistemic success (e.g. the acquisition of good epistemic effects such as true belief, knowledge, and understanding), then epistemic vices get in the way of our epistemic success by preventing us from properly responding to problems that we encounter in our inquiries. Virtues help us get out of these predicaments, while vices make things worse.

One advantage of this taxonomic scheme is that it avoids some of the problems that other, more traditional, taxonomies suffer from. For instance, if we borrow the theoretical structure of vices from classical virtue theory, we may classify epistemic vices based on their moral equivalents. This seems like a basic and unproblematic way of organizing the various epistemic vices, until we realize that not all epistemic vices have

[13] *Ibid.*

counterparts in virtue ethics. Some vices, like epistemic self-indulgence, have clear counterparts in virtue ethics, but others, such as distractibility, unimaginativeness, and gullibility, have no obvious moral equivalents.

One taxonomic scheme suggested by Kidd is to group epistemic vices "around the virtues they oppose."[14] This seems like a sensible approach, until we realize that it contains an additional step that the challenges-based approach already drops. If we can link epistemic vices directly to the challenges or problems of inquiry that they exacerbate, we do not need to go through the epistemic virtues just to understand what vices are. Linking epistemic vices to the virtues they oppose can be helpful in terms of understanding specific epistemic vices and their relation to other vices (and to virtues as well), but a challenges-based approach to organizing them focuses on what makes them vices without any necessary reference to epistemic virtue.

With the challenges-based approach to classifying epistemic vices, we can organize epistemic vices around issues that we confront whenever we make inquiries and investigations. This gives us the advantage of sorting out the epistemic vices that have the most substantial or far-reaching negative consequences for inquiry. This can be done by highlighting specific epistemic vices that are connected to multiple challenges or problems in inquiry. Such epistemic vices can be considered more consequential, in terms of the production of negative epistemic effects, than others because they have the ability to wreak havoc on our inquiries on multiple levels. For example, the vice of closed-mindedness prevents us from responding properly to the challenges posed by consistency in evaluation, flexibility, information overload, and lack of sources, to name a few. Since closed-mindedness affects how we respond to multiple challenges in inquiry, its effects can be more far-reaching and significant than other epistemic vices. Identifying such epistemic vices allows us to make further sense of the variety of epistemic vice.

[14] Kidd, "Capital Epistemic Vices," 11.

In the succeeding sections I attempt to demonstrate how this challenges-based taxonomy can be applied to epistemic vices. I do this by discussing first an inquiry-relevant challenge, and showing that such a challenge should be met in order to do effective inquiry and produce good epistemic effects. Once the challenge is established, I provide examples of epistemic vices that prevent individuals from meeting the said challenge.

As a preview, the table below shows a basic challenges-based taxonomy featuring some inquiry-relevant challenges and some of the possible epistemic vices related to them:

Inquiry-relevant challenge	**Corresponding epistemic vices**
Initial Motivation	Intellectual Laziness, Incuriosity
Focus	Distractibility, Inattentiveness
Consistency in Evaluation	Closed-mindedness, Partisanship
Flexibility	Epistemic Rigidity, Spinelessness, Intellectual Infidelity
Endurance	Capitulation
Lack of Sources	Un-resourcefulness, Intellectual Laziness, Capitulation, Naïve Perseverance
Information Overload	Intellectual Infidelity, Superficiality, Closed-mindedness

I borrow the first five challenges from Baehr's classification system of epistemic virtues.[15] The last two, I propose, are additional challenges that are also commonly found in inquiry.

[15] Baehr, *The Inquiring Mind*, 21.

INITIAL MOTIVATION

Initial motivation, or the inclination to start inquiry, is an important inquiry-relevant challenge because every inquiry must be "initiated or undertaken."[16] We may fail to start inquiries because we never thought about them in the first place, or our priorities were taken over by other concerns, among other things. Individuals, therefore, who are contemplative, reflective, inquisitive, curious, and full of wonder are more likely to initiate inquiry.[17] These are the kinds of virtues necessary to respond adequately to the challenge of initial motivation. What about the vices that impair our ability to respond to this challenge?

Incuriousness is an example of an epistemic vice that prevents individuals from initiating inquiry. Incurious individuals do not see the point in pursuing questions and problems. Kieran observes that incurious individuals "tend not to question, experiment, or explore the possibilities for very long" and "look for epistemic closure more quickly and tend to be more easily epistemically satisfied."[18] This makes it hard for them to respond to the challenge of initial motivation, because incuriousness leads to fewer inquiries initiated.

Limited and basic examples of incuriousness may include: reporters who neglect to check the facts of their stories because of their desire to conclude their research immediately; and political partisans who are not interested in listening to criticisms about the candidates they support because they are already satisfied with the limited information that they know.

Incuriousness may have structural causes, and looking into these causes is key to improving individuals' ability to respond to the challenge of initiating inquiry. One may have been raised in a community wherein

[16] *Ibid*., 19.
[17] *Ibid*., 21.
[18] Matthew Kieran, "Creativity as an Epistemic Virtue," in *The Routledge Handbook of Virtue Epistemology*, ed. Heather Battaly (New York: Routledge, 2019), 173.

curiosity is frowned upon, or imaginativeness is considered a frivolous pursuit. Children growing up in poor families may be discouraged from being curious because it uses time that supposedly could be better spent in helping the family make ends meet. Severely impoverished individuals may also suffer from a level of malnutrition that prevents them from initiating and sustaining inquiry. Some governments also direct their ministries of education to de-prioritize critical thinking subjects such as philosophy, literature, and history, in favor of technical subjects and specialized courses. Improving community epistemic practices and government policies can go a long way in helping more individuals cope better with the challenge of initiating inquiry.

FOCUS

Baehr notes that a "fairly standard requirement of inquiry is that of getting and remaining properly focused."[19] Inquiry requires proper focus, because without it we would just start inquiries but we won't finish them, or if we do manage to finish them they end up half-baked and of low quality.

One of the corresponding vices to the inquiry-relevant challenge of focus is distractability. This vice pertains to a state of being easily distracted. We can think of examples such as individuals who have trouble following lectures because their minds are constantly venturing off in different directions. Examples can also include individuals who find it hard to regain focus when it is lost. A person who is easily distracted cannot sustain the required degree of focus for a particular inquiry. This makes success in inquiry difficult, and increases the chances of producing bad epistemic effects such as false belief and ignorance.

Inattentiveness or inattention is another vice related to focus. Inattentiveness can be seen as a consequence of distractibility. For example, when one is trying to listen to a news report but is suddenly

[19] Baehr, *The Inquiring Mind*, 19.

distracted by an unusual bird that perches on the window, one's attention shifts to the bird and everything else about the news report never reaches one's attention.

Distractibility and inattentiveness can also have socio-structural causes. One could exist in an environment wherein distraction is so prevalent that one will find it difficult to pay attention to inquiries started. A basic response to this will be to modify the environment. Some writers, for instance, have devised ways to keep themselves away from the distractions provided by the internet. Bestselling author George RR Martin famously uses an archaic computer that is incapable of connecting to the internet in order to reduce distractions.[20]

Some personal changes we make in order to reduce or eliminate distraction need not be as extreme as those of Martin and Stevens. We may, for instance, simply leave our phone in a different room in the house when we start working. If one works using a smartphone, one can disable at least temporarily the apps that are certain to cause distraction and inattention.

The personal changes we make, however, can only go so far sometimes. Sometimes, no matter what we do, the distractions find some way of creeping back into our lives, disrupting our inquiries and other epistemic activities. This can happen when the sources of distraction are strengthened and amplified by the environment we live in. For instance, when internet service providers give free access to addictive social-media apps, it is unfair to judge the distractibility of individuals who have neither financial freedom nor the privilege of choosing their internet plan. It also makes no sense to rely on the willpower of students to improve their powers of concentration when our universities do not have adequate private study facilities.

[20] Frizell, Sam, "Here's Why George R.R. Martin Types 'Game of Thrones' on an Ancient DOS Computer," in *Time* (14 May 2014), <https://time.com/99432/george-rr-martin-game-of-thrones-computer/>

CONSISTENCY IN EVALUATION

Baehr considers consistency in evaluation as another inquiry-relevant challenge.[21] While we do our inquiries, we may become partial to certain ideas, or we may impose different or double-standards to similar situations. We might be more painstaking in evaluation during the early part of an inquiry, then we gradually become more lax and less meticulous as we go along. We may even be less thorough in investigating ideas we are more inclined to accept.[22]

We normally make partial or biased decisions on what we inquire about. One could choose to write about a specific and exceptionally narrow research topic because that is what one finds interesting. We usually need to choose the material we read and the people we listen to because of time and other relevant constraints. The problem is when we are unable to maintain the necessary objectivity, consistency, impartiality, and open-mindedness in making such inquiries. For instance, if one chooses to read specific materials that just talk about the pros of a subject then the information one gets will be at least one-half of the story. Consider also political partisans who are lax in their evaluation of evidence in support of their favored political candidates, but are stringent in their evaluation of evidence favorable to other candidates.

Consistency in evaluation is a genuine challenge in conducting inquiry. We are often subject to situations wherein we need to make fair choices about the topics we want to know more about. Making correct choices in these situations can enable us to produce epistemic goods and avoid bad epistemic effects.

[21] Baehr, *The Inquiring Mind*, 21.
[22] *Ibid*., 19.

FLEXIBILITY

Baehr defines the inquiry-relevant challenge of flexibility as one that "occurs when a person confronts a subject matter that is in itself extremely complex and demanding or that is simply foreign to her usual way of thinking." [23] If we are not mentally "flexible" or unable to "think outside the box" then we may fail in our inquiry, especially when the subject matter calls for alternative approaches.

Some examples of mental flexibility can be found in situations wherein we need to re-orient our ways of thinking in order to understand a subject matter that we are not used to. For example, a politician from a privileged upbringing will have plenty of difficulties trying to understand the plight of his impoverished constituents if he is unable to adopt a perspective that is detached from his background. A scientist undertaking interdisciplinary research with experts from the humanities will need to adjust her point of view to accommodate less quantitative methods of data gathering. The necessary virtue is similar to what Kant describes in the need to "think into the place of the other." One must learn how to view things from another person's perspective.

We can fail the challenge of flexibility sometimes because we have epistemic vices such as epistemic rigidity or unimaginativeness. Both correspond to an inability to go beyond one's default modes of inquiry, albeit in different ways.

King compares a rigid thinker to a "muscle that, due to cramping, cannot function properly." [24] Rigid thinkers have "tensed up" due their one-sided view of things, and they fail to consider other views. The basic idea is we need to try out new methods or perspectives when we know that the current one is not working anymore. Sticking to a default mode of inquiry despite its inability to shed light on problems demonstrates epistemic

[23] Baehr, *The Inquiring Mind*, 20.

[24] Nathan King, *The Excellent Mind: Intellectual Virtues for Everyday Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 214.

rigidity. Take for instance a traveler who refuses to use a map or navigation app because he believes his memory navigation skills will do just fine in getting to his destination. He continues to resist using the aids even if it is apparent that his memory and skills have not helped him reach his destination. In the absence of any clear alternative reason for his reticence, his actions demonstrate epistemic rigidity.

Unimaginativeness is similar to epistemic rigidity. Unimaginative individuals cannot move away from the accepted and familiar not because they are too attached to their default perspectives, but because they lack the creative impulse to look beyond what is apparent.

An excess of intellectual flexibility can also work against inquiry. Excessive intellectual flexibility can go under different names, such as King's notion of "spinelessness,"[25] but the main point with it is that people should also learn to hold their intellectual positions when appropriate. I propose that a more apt and easier to grasp term for the concept of over-flexibility is "intellectual infidelity." Intellectual infidelity entails excessive and indiscriminating jumps from one view to another. Someone who exhibits intellectual infidelity is the exact opposite of an intellectually rigid person: one is unable to "hold on to" a particular idea or view. This particular inability to hold on to a particular view excludes instances wherein there is sufficient counter-evidence to let go of the view. Instead, the infidelity described here entails not being able to maintain a belief *despite* there being good reasons for maintaining it.

Epistemic infidelity as an epistemic vice has some limitations, specifically with age groups. Children, or even young adults, may quickly switch from one view to another, and this may have to do more with their relative immaturity than their epistemic character or motivations. In this light, children may exhibit the trait of epistemic infidelity, but they are not vicious.

[25] *Ibid.*

Responding to the challenge of flexibility by being over-flexible also works against the aims of inquiry. Over-flexibility can lead one to abandon a successful method of inquiry just for the sake of entertaining other, sometimes irrelevant, intellectual options. When allegiance to beliefs and perspectives is too fleeting, it may lead to a lack of significant conclusions concerning the subject of inquiry. Think of the thesis student who fails to write a thesis and never goes beyond the brainstorming stage because of a predilection to constant jumping from one research topic or method to another. This may also be the case with a police investigator who fails to make any headway into the solving of a crime because he is too charitable to a large amount of possibilities, many of which are outlandish or ridiculous. Being over-flexible in our considerations also leads to failure in our inquiries.

ENDURANCE

Baehr asserts that "there are occasions in the context of inquiry where success requires an unusual amount of exertion or endurance."[26] Many types of inquiry are time-consuming and/or require a lot of effort. Scientific research requires painstaking precision and a process of repeated experiments. Police investigations are often difficult due to case-related dangers and challenges in obtaining evidence. Literary analysis often entails the reading of dozens, sometimes hundreds, of books.

Take the case of Robert Caro, who has spent more than 40 years of his life researching and writing his multivolume work on Lyndon Johnson. When asked why his books take so long to produce, he simply answers "truth takes time."[27] His research philosophy requires him to "turn every page" in terms of relevant historical documents and personal testimonies

[26] Baehr, *The Inquiring Mind*, 21.

[27] Harold Evans, "Robert A. Caro, Private Eye," in *The New York Times* (16 April 2019), <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/16/books/review/robert-a-caro-working.html>

in order to get to the bottom of his investigation.[28] He is not willing to sacrifice his painstaking method for speed in publication, and this attitude has led to quality output.

Caro exemplifies intellectual perseverance. Baehr describes intellectual perseverance as "a willingness to persist and persevere" in the face of inquiry-related difficulties.[29] Caro has described the innumerable problems he has encountered in his investigative work: the challenges of sifting through voluminous documents, interviewing uncooperative witnesses, contradictory data, and so on.[30] If Caro did not have intellectual perseverance, he would not have succeeded in his work, and he would not be still working on his massive research program today.

Epistemic vices can prevent one from successfully meeting the challenge of endurance in inquiry. Battaly posits the vice of capitulation as a vice of deficiency related to intellectual perseverance.[31] Epistemic agents who exhibit this vice "capitulate at the first sign of an obstacle."[32] The vice of capitulation signifies an extreme lack of endurance in epistemic matters. Individuals who are too quick to exit from an inquiry when they feel they cannot deal with it are examples of this epistemic vice. Examples include individuals who refuse to read a book simply because of its length, or students who drop a class because they could not understand the first lecture, as possible examples of this vice.

Giving up in the early stage of an epistemic inquiry is not the only sign that one is unable to respond to the challenge of endurance. One may quit after a significant number of setbacks, or one may even quit so close to

[28] Caro, Robert, "The Secrets of Lyndon Johnson's Archives," in *The New Yorker* (21 January 2019), <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/01/28/the-secrets-of-lyndon-johnsons-archives>.

[29] Baehr, *The Inquiring Mind*, 22.

[30] *Ibid.*

[31] Heather Battaly, "Intellectual Perseverance," *Journal of Moral Philosophy*, 14: 6. (2017), 15.

[32] *Ibid.*

the finish line. The key idea here is that we should know when it is appropriate to quit a particular inquiry or an epistemic activity.

For instance, one cannot be charged with having the vice of capitulation if one quits—no matter how late or early—a line of inquiry that leads to nowhere. Likewise, there is an expected amount of difficulty associated with any kind of inquiry. To quit while experiencing what counts as normal difficulty signals an inability to meet the challenge of endurance. For example, interviewing people entails a certain amount of difficulty, and one of the reasons for this is that many people are not used to, or are averse to being interviewed. If a reporter decides to drop a story (and the related inquiry) just because she faced a single uncooperative interviewee at the beginning, then her effort is less than what is expected of an inquirer in her position.

LACK OF SOURCES

After discussing the inquiry-related challenges listed by Baehr, let us move on to other challenges that are also worth noting. The first of these concerns is the lack of available sources, which is a common problem in particular types of inquiry. For instance, a new or relatively unexplored topic will have fewer sources associated with it than an old or established topic. In some situations, lack of sources stems from the rarity of the sources themselves, such as first-hand accounts of an event that happened a century ago. In both of these situations (and other related ones) there is always a way of resolving or coming to terms with the lack of sources.

While writing about a new or relatively unexplored topic, one has to come to terms with the fact that one is doing original research. This entails that one has scant related literature to review. When this happens the reasonable thing to do for an academic is to provide further justification why the research she is doing is nonetheless important. Simply put, if not much has been explored in one's research topic, one must be able to provide instead more reasons why academics should be interested in one's work.

This does not actually solve the scarcity of resources, but it provides a reason for the work to continue. Providing justification for one's research requires serious effort, but it establishes the significance of one's study. This approach requires intellectual perseverance, and, to some extent, flexibility.

Another way of responding to the issue of lack of sources is to look at alternative sources. This is what Christina Pantoja-Hidalgo did when she was writing her dissertation on the autobiographical work of Filipina writers. Sensing a dearth of autobiographies written by Filipina writers, Pantoja-Hidalgo sought her sources in different, non-traditional, forms such as personal essays and newspaper columns. From these sources she was able to distill the ideas in her dissertation which was later published as a book.[33]

A basic virtue needed in order to respond to the lack of available sources is resourcefulness. A resourceful person would be able to look for, and find, alternative sources when necessary. This virtue goes along with others such as imaginativeness and intellectual perseverance. Resourcefulness entails the ability to find solutions to "dead-end" problems, or inquiries that seem unsustainable. Following this logic, un-resourcefulness is an epistemic vice that prevents one from responding to the challenge of lack of available sources.

Un-resourceful individuals stop immediately when a needed source of information (usually the convenient one) is unavailable. In this sense, un-resourcefulness is related to capitulation. We can think of researchers who do not bother to follow up a lead that has gone dry, or employees who give up in figuring out a problem because of lack of readily available information, or students who refuse to do an assignment just because they were unable to download the required text from the first few links they checked.

[33] "Akdang Buhay Series: Dr. Ma. Cristina P. Hidalgo," YouTube video, 15:00, posted by UP Institute of Creative Writing (September 14, 2017), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h6MMHTFFEm4>.

Un-resourcefulness, intellectual laziness, and capitulation are some of the epistemic vices that prevent individuals from responding to the challenge of lack of sources well. For example, think of how many inquiries these days falter just because something cannot be located online. Many people have assumed that since "everything is online" already, whenever it cannot be found online they also assume that it does not exist, and further effort is not necessary. Un-resourceful individuals give up when the sources they are looking for are not easily available.

Part of the vice of un-resourcefulness rests on the unwillingness or inability to identify who may have access to the needed sources. This is because a significant part of resourcefulness entails the ability to delegate parts of the inquiry to others. Resourceful individuals, in other words, also know the right people to ask help or guidance from in case their inquiries reach an impasse.

We must also note that naïve persistence or perseverance also prevents us from responding to a lack of available resources well. Part of the virtue of resourcefulness, just as with intellectual perseverance, is the ability to know when the inquiry is already pointless. Naïve persistence prevents individuals from using their time wisely in the pursuit of epistemic goods. When we just try to get by with naïve persistence, we may be chasing dead ends without us knowing. This entails an epistemic opportunity cost: the time and effort we spend on fruitless searches in the name of resourcefulness and perseverance could have been used on more meaningful and productive inquiries.

For instance, imagine that an intrepid researcher goes looking for an epic poem supposedly written by Jose Rizal. The researcher heard about the possible existence of the poem in an informal discussion between historians and writers. The researcher follows Caro's dictum of "turn every page" and he scours the National Archives and goes around interviewing hundreds of people about the possible location of the epic poem. Unfortunately, the existence of the poem is based on an unfounded theory, which means it is no better than a hoax. The researcher however is

undaunted, and spends most of his days searching for possible leads to locate the missing poem. At some point, we expect the researcher to make a judgment on the status of his research. The researcher should be able to assess his research objectively to see that his heroic resourcefulness has yielded nothing, and that it will not be a knock against his reputation and identity as a researcher to admit that he had chased a dead end. It would have been better if he had spent his time on other, more fruitful inquiries.

INFORMATION OVERLOAD

The opposite problem to lack of available resources is information overload. In this digital age we are often swamped with information, not all of which are helpful or relevant. Sometimes we get too much information that we are unable to synthesize them into something useful. Other times we just get overwhelmed by the amount of available information that we do not know where to start. Whatever the case, an abundance of information is sometimes just as problematic for inquiry as a lack of it.

The kind of overload we will use in this discussion pertains to both the quantity and quality of information. In terms of quantity, we can have trouble making sense of information that is voluminous, such as when we need to search for specific information or data in an extensive archive. In terms of quality, we can have issues with data that has a lot of redundant, unnecessary, or irrelevant information.

Let us consider for example what the World Health Organization (WHO) labels as an *infodemic*. The infodemic is basically a deluge of information "including false or misleading information in digital and physical environments during a disease outbreak."[34] According to the WHO, the infodemic has several adverse effects on the management of a disease outbreak such as mistrust in public health authorities and confusion that leads to harmful behavior. This example demonstrates what

[34] "Infodemic," in *World Health Organization*, <https://www.who.int/health-topics/infodemic#tab=tab_1>.

can happen when the information available is problematic in terms of both quantity and quality.

In certain situations, we should also note that what counts as information overload can be contextual: what is considered too much information for one person or in one context is not for another person or another context. An individual's response to the same amount of information in one situation may be different in another situation. Sometimes, therefore, the response may be considered vicious, while sometimes it is not. For example, a medical student studying for the board exam may be dealing with information that for most of us would constitute an overload. Likewise, a jeepney driver driving through a busy road with a full load of passengers is also dealing with stimuli that many of us will find difficult to handle. Every day we handle information overloads. Specialized training, repetitive exposure, and sometimes an emergency situation can help or induce us to cope well with these information overloads.

There are various reasons why we do not cope well with information overload. Our mind can only handle so much at a given time. But what we are interested in is the ability to transcend the flood of information and zero-in on the most important data: to be able to focus on the essential in the midst of abundance. This ability gives us the best chance of responding appropriately to the information overload challenge.

Responding well to information overload requires a certain amount of intellectual flexibility in order to navigate the vast amount of data available. Similarly, over-flexibility or intellectual infidelity can work against an epistemic agent faced with an information overload. Let us return to the example of a student who cannot finish her thesis because she is constantly adding different ideas to it as she goes along. On the face of it, this is not necessarily bad, since most writers add to their initial plans as they go through the process of researching and writing. However, our thesis student in question is not responding well to the challenge of information overload. She researches one particular aspect of her study, but she turns up with a dozen other related aspects, and she believes each is worth

including in her thesis. She cannot commit to a single unifying idea. Miraculously she finishes a first draft of her thesis, but it has become the academic writing equivalent of the Winchester mansion: the excessively long draft is a hodge-podge of innumerable lightly related ideas with no real focus or central idea. She has, in essence, opted to say *everything* in her thesis, which has resulted in her actually saying *nothing*.

When faced with an information overload in research, the over-flexible researcher produces an overloaded output. By the standards of academia and research, such overloaded research is too broad to be of any significance.

Superficiality can also prevent us from making good use of the amount of information available online. Superficial thinkers may look at a search engine's results and judge even the nuisance results to be worthy of inspection. Worse, a superficial browsing of the search results may lead individuals to just look at the first few results and disregard the rest. The superficial thinker thus responds to an information overload by simply "skimming the top" of the information to avoid having to deal with too much.

In a sense, closed-mindedness can also work against us in the face of an information overload. When faced with too much information, the closed-minded individual may simply shun the overload and stick to what she already believes. Take for example a company executive who receives hundreds of suggestions for the improvement of the company. Her closed-mindedness makes her unwilling to engage seriously with the relevant suggestions she received. This, of course, can happen even without an information overload (or a "suggestion overload"), but it becomes even more problematic when there are several relevant options available.

Closed-mindedness though presents us with an interesting case in the context of information overload. For example, in certain contexts wherein the information overload is deliberately produced in order to mislead or confuse epistemic agents, one can argue that closed-

mindedness—provided one has knowledge or true belief—may actually work in our favor. If we shut out the noise, we can actually avoid confusion.

CONCLUSION

In the foregoing I have attempted to build on Baehr's work on virtue epistemology by adapting his challenges-based taxonomy of epistemic virtues to epistemic vices. Baehr's concern was to distinguish epistemic virtues by identifying which inquiry relevant challenges or demands they correspond to: which specific virtue allows agents to respond well to a particular inquiry-relevant challenge. My goal was to use the concept of inquiry-relevant challenges to classify epistemic vices: which specific vice *prevents* an agent from responding well to a particular inquiry-relevant challenge? My modest contribution was to apply Baehr's classification scheme to the variety of epistemic vices and expound on it by adding other possible challenges faced in inquiry.

A challenges-based taxonomy allows us to understand epistemic vices as character traits, attitudes, and ways of thinking that aggravate problems faced in inquiry. The defining feature of this particular taxonomic scheme is the idea that each epistemic vice is connected to at least one challenge or demand posed by inquiry. This leads to several avenues for future discussion and investigation.

One such avenue concerns the question: which epistemic vices are connected to multiple challenges? In other words, which vices are most harmful in terms of their ability to aggravate multiple problems faced in inquiry? These questions eventually lead to the possible existence of "prime" or "major" epistemic vices: vices that are bound to negatively affect our inquiries on diverse levels.

Another area for development is comparative taxonomy. How does a challenges-based taxonomy of epistemic vices stack up against other taxonomic schemes? Does it provide more stark distinctions between specific vices than other proposed taxonomies? Does it simplify the task of

organizing the different epistemic vices into relevant categories? There are several possible taxonomic schemes in a discipline as young as vice epistemology, and it would be interesting to see how the challenges-based taxonomy fares against them.

The most immediate area for the development of a challenges-based taxonomy, however, is the analysis of other challenges posed by inquiry. This article listed seven such challenges, and surely there are much more. It would be interesting, for example, to identify inquiry-relevant challenges that are specific to particular fields and disciplines, since such an analysis also entails the possibility of discipline-specific epistemic vices.

The task of producing an effective taxonomy of epistemic vices is fertile ground for research in vice epistemology. A challenges-based taxonomic scheme, as well as its areas for development, shows us that work in the classification of epistemic vices does not end in the mere ordering of concepts into neat categories. It demonstrates that there is much more work to be done in pluralizing and refining the nature of epistemic vices.

REFERENCES

"Akdang Buhay Series: Dr. Ma. Cristina P. Hidalgo," YouTube video, 15:00, posted by UP Institute of Creative Writing (September 14, 2017), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h6MMHTFFEm4>.

Baehr, Jason, *The Inquiring Mind: On Intellectual Virtues and Virtue Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Battaly, Heather, "Intellectual Perseverance," *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 14: 6. (2017): 1-29.

Caro, Robert, "The Secrets of Lyndon Johnson's Archives," in *The New Yorker* (21 January 2019), <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/01/28/the-secrets-of-lyndon-johnsons-archives>.

Cassam, Quassim, "Stealthy Vices," *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective*, 4:10 (2015): 19-25.

Crerar, Charlie, 'Motivational Approaches to Intellectual Vice," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 96:4 (2018): 753-766.

Evans, Harold. "Robert A. Caro, Private Eye," in *The New York Times* (16 April 2019), <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/16/books/review/robert-a-caro-working.html>.

Frizell, Sam, "Here's Why George R.R. Martin Types 'Game of Thrones' on an Ancient DOS Computer" in *Time* (14 May 2014), <https://time.com/99432/george-rr-martin-game-of-thrones-computer/>.

"Infodemic," in *World Health Organization*, <https://www.who.int/health-topics/infodemic#tab=tab_1>

Kidd, Ian James, "Capital Epistemic Vices," *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective,* 6: 8 (2017): 11-16.

_____, "Deep Epistemic Vices," *Journal of Philosophical Research*, 43 (2018): 43-67.

Kieran, Matthew, "Creativity as an Epistemic Virtue," in *The Routledge Handbook of Virtue Epistemology*, ed. Heather Battaly (New York: Routledge, 2019), 167-177.

King, Nathan, *The Excellent Mind: Intellectual Virtues for Everyday Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).

Medina, Jose. *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and the Social Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Tanesini, Alessandra, *The Mismeasure of the Self: A Study in Vice Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).