



# Global Faculty Initiative

**The Faculty Initiative  
seeks to promote the integration  
of Christian faith and academic disciplines  
by bringing theologians into conversation with scholars  
across the spectrum of faculties  
in research universities  
worldwide.**

[www.globalfacultyinitiative.net](http://www.globalfacultyinitiative.net)

Disciplinary Note

## **EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE**

Carlos Miguel Gomez

Associate Professor, School of Human Sciences, University of Rosario, Bogota, Colombia

---

Wolterstorff's aim of bringing to light and demanding attention to the role of justice in the academy should represent a fundamental commitment for all of us. This requires a constant effort to identify and fight against subtle forms of injustice, hidden behind academic practices or institutionalized in well-established forms. To evoke a basic insight of Liberation Theology, sin has a social dimension, it takes form in institutions and social relationships, it has the face of certain taken for granted economic and cultural systems.

Besides the manifold forms that first-order injustice may take in academia, in multicultural and pluralistic societies there is a kind of injustice not primarily related to forms of interaction among agents, but to recognition and the willingness to listen and enter into dialogue with forms of knowledge coming from traditions that have been neglected, invisibilized, deformed or eradicated. This may be called epistemic injustice. The very constitution of the university implies a certain form of understating of knowledge, science and scholarship based on a problematic claim to universality.

### **Traditional Knowledge**

In Latin American universities, to offer an example that has important analogies in other parts of the globe, traditional knowing systems are never included as sources of valid knowledge that may enrich and contribute to the search for a larger, more comprehensive understanding of reality. If they do attract attention, they are taken only as objects to be studied, by one or another discipline of the social sciences. Given that a practice such as traditional indigenous medicine is based on a view of reality that conflicts with many of the presuppositions of western science, it is assumed that instead of a legitimate interlocutor in, for instance, health research, it needs to be explained as merely a cultural, social or historical phenomenon. Even worse, "their knowledge", usually taken as primitive, mythical or infantile, tends to be regarded merely as an indicator of possible new resources to be exploited by modern science, technology and industry: this is the case, for example, of ethnobotanical medicines that abstracted from the belief system and form of life in which are understood and lived by a community are reduced to pharmaceutical assets. But it is precisely this lived understanding proper to a worldview what should be brought into

---

dialogue to enlarge and enrich our view of reality.

The deficiency to take the truth claims of others seriously is the hearth of epistemic injustice. Even if it has consequences on the forms we interact with people from other traditions, it takes place before those interactions. It belongs to our fore-understanding of reality and to our basic ontological commitments. Or more precisely, it is embedded in our ways of relating to what we take for granted.

## **Promoting Epistemic Justice**

How could we open ourselves to the truth claims of others? What does this openness require and how would it transform our research and pedagogical practices? What shape should an intercultural university take? These are some fundamental questions oriented to promote epistemic justice. An attitude of self-inquiry regarding one's own presuppositions, the disposition to listen to and learn from the others, and epistemic humility, that is, the recognition that reality cannot be fully apprehended in any theory or thought system, are key values to be cultivated in an interculturally just university. Building such institutions would be a decisive way "To bring good news to the oppressed" (Is 61: 3).

---

## Further Reading

De Sousa Santos, Boaventura. *Una Epistemología del Sur*. Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno y CLACASO. A classic book dedicated to the search for epistemological criteria to appraise forms of knowledge proper to marginalized communities.

Estermann, Josef. *Filosofía Andina. Sabiduría indígena para un mundo nuevo*. La paz: ISEAT, 2009. An exercise of intercultural dialogue in philosophy which attempts to bring to light the principles of indigenous thought.

Gómez, Carlos Miguel. *Interculturality, Rationality and Dialogue. In Search for Intercultural Argumentative Criteria for Latin America*. Würzburg, Echter, 2012. An exploration of the conditions of possibility for intercultural dialogue, understood as criteria to evaluate arguments formulated and justified according to heterogenous forms of rationality.

Guzy, Lidia and James Kapaló (Ed.) *Marginalised and Endangered Worldviews*. Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2017. A collection of papers dealing with different aspects relevant to the study of traditional and indigenous forms of knowledge from a global perspective.

**For more information**

**[www.globalfacultyinitiative.net](http://www.globalfacultyinitiative.net)**