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Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52612/journals/eol-oe.2023.21177>

## Epistemology as a compass

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**Keywords:** Scientific norms, comprehensive epistemology, epistemic injustices, cognitive justice

### Extended summary:

What should we do then when we do not feel comfortable with the dominant way of considering the construction of knowledge? When one has the feeling that epistemic injustices are emerging, that neutrality produces violence? I propose to answer these questions by tracing the construction of the posture I adopt today in my research and teaching of female students in education sciences at the University of Geneva as well as at the Doctoral School in Education Sciences (EDSE). In line with the title of this paper, I consider the notion of epistemological posture as a "space for ethical reflection", i.e. a "space for reflection on how to 'direct one's conduct' as a researcher" (Matthey, 2005). The construction of this space is a journey of encounters and links. It requires audacity and authorisation, often confronts researchers with adversity and sometimes plunges them into solitude. Seeking alternatives to positivism places researchers in minority positions that force them to constantly justify themselves in relation to the dominant scientific norms.

The conception of comprehensive epistemology that I share in this contribution refers to an ethical rationality that presupposes a thought of solidarity and interdependence between people and finds its framework of application in the ethics of responsibility, in the sense of Max Weber (1963). An ethics that is concerned with the consequences of its actions. This initial theoretical anchoring immediately directs the epistemological question towards the relationship with others. When I carry out research, what place do the people concerned by my research objects occupy: do I give them a voice or do I take it from them? Do I assign them an identity pre-constructed by my categories, concepts, interview grids, etc., or do I offer them the space and time for their own identity narrative? Does my research serve a managerial logic or is its purpose emancipatory? Based on my work with Raquel Fernandez-Iglesias (2018), I start from the premise that engaging in research activity, at whatever level, implies 'contributing to shaping the course of the world' (Lagasnerie, 2017, p. 12). And in support of my research in the field of health and illness (Charmillot, 2019), I express this contribution with the title of Walter Hesbeen's (2000) book, *Taking Care in the World*. In other words, doing comprehensive research in the educational sciences is, in my view, an activity related to care insofar as it proposes "another model for the humanities and social sciences: as a set of theorisations, care studies justify distancing themselves from a narrow rationalism and formalism, they defend the integration of feminist and gender studies issues in order to build new critical representations of the social and political world" (Brugère and Gautier, n.d.).

Comprehensive epistemology is also an epistemology of the link. I refer to the main proposals of Florence Piron for restoring or strengthening cognitive justice and restoring morality to scientific activity. The epistemology of the link "attempts to preserve and make visible, in a social science text, all the human links that make the creation of knowledge possible" (Piron, 2017, p. 33). Such an epistemology is fruitful insofar as it allows for the recognition of the plurality of knowledge and its contexts of creation, without hierarchy or privilege. This epistemology serves the development of cognitive justice, namely "an epistemological, ethical and political ideal aiming at the emergence of socially relevant knowledge everywhere on the planet and not only in the countries of the North, within a science practicing an inclusive universalism, open to all knowledge" (p. 37).

The article also highlights the fact that the construction of knowledge is rooted in multiple spheres - biographical, institutional, social and political - and the relationship to knowledge is always situated and dynamic. Currently, social changes and crises (environmental, health, geopolitical) are challenging more and more

researchers who question the principle of scientific neutrality and the subordination of science to capitalism. A posture is therefore never given but constructed, it is consolidated and enriched and can be the subject of conversions, as Caroline Dayer (2010) has shown in her analysis of the tensions that researchers experience in their professional context and the transactions they develop to overcome them. These transactions involve epistemological conversions and sometimes even 'epistemological coming out'.

From there, I show that my quest has been to find a way of doing my job as a teacher-researcher that feels like I belong. The Indian thinker Vish Visvanathan (2016, p. 23), who coined the concept of cognitive justice, argues that 'knowledge is a dwelling, a way of life' and not just a 'system or formal set of disembodied properties'. The epistemology of linkage as forged by Piron is an invitation to think in linkage, by oneself and in dialogue, an invitation to bring out the voices usually assigned to silence. It is an invitation to allow oneself to lead a life of ethical authorship, with the fight against all forms of cognitive or social injustice as a horizon. The authorisation, in other words, to be epistemologically in one's place. Jeanne-Marie Rugira, a professor of psychosociology at the University of Quebec who has worked intensely with Piron, talks about the audacity of questioning our knowledge production processes. In her view, to be in one's place intellectually is to 'feel at home'. She advocates research approaches rooted in an individual and collective historical consciousness: how are the questions I ask myself relevant to this moment in my history and our collective history? It is a question of grasping the socio-historical and socio-political contexts that produce the thoughts that drive us in our research activities in education and training. The ethical issue of the epistemology of the link is deployed here from the situated point of view of the researcher: where am I, when am I, where am I at? From the theory of situated points of view, Rugira argues for taking research out of a simple knowledge production exercise and making it a motor for profound personal and social change, from the joint positions of the oppressed and the researcher. I keep this horizon in mind as I continue my journey, always listening to researchers in search of other ways of thinking about science. Raquel Fernandez-Iglesias (2016), in the conclusions of her thesis, takes up Henri Bergson's invitation to walk, who writes: "I see only one way to know how far one can go. It is to set out and walk". Such is the invitation of this contribution.