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Epistemic Justice and Institutional Responsibility in Academia

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Toward a Comprehensive Framework for Epistemic Justice in Higher Education

A comparative legal and philosophical study

of universities' duties

to institutionalise epistemic justice

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Abstract

This dissertation examines epistemic justice as a fiduciary and ethical responsibility of universities, framing higher education institutions as stewards of an epistemic commons. I argue that universities bear positive duties to institutionalise epistemic openness and actively counter epistemic injustice. Drawing on Fricker's theory of epistemic injustice, Anderson's systemic account of epistemic justice, fiduciary ethics, and educational philosophy (Freire, Mill, Rawls), I develop a normative framework that integrates Western and Chinese philosophical perspectives, including Confucian reciprocity, Zhuangzian perspectivism, and Taoist epistemic humility.

Through comparative statutory analysis, I assess the United Kingdom's Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 alongside constitutional protections in Germany, statutory ambiguity in France, and statutory minimalism in the Netherlands. These contrasts show how legislative frameworks shape institutional practices, highlighting the limitations of purely legal protections. Empirical case studies—including participatory methodologies (Boni & Velasco), microfascist institutional dynamics (Kuyumcu & Méndez-Grueso), and controversies in Groningen and Grenoble—illustrate persistent exclusionary practices and demonstrate the necessity of internal fiduciary governance.

I propose concrete institutional mechanisms to embed epistemic openness: epistemic audits, oversight roles such as Epistemic Ombudspersons, inclusive pedagogical approaches, and transparent accountability frameworks. These measures provide universities with normative clarity and practical strategies for cultivating an epistemic culture that is open, inclusive, and resilient. By embedding epistemic justice in governance, universities can fulfil their fiduciary responsibilities, strengthen legitimacy, and sustain their role as genuine custodians of knowledge.

Keywords

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

In this dissertation, I explore the ethical and epistemic responsibilities that universities hold regarding openness and inclusivity. Traditionally, academia is envisaged as a sanctuary of intellectual freedom, committed to truth-seeking and the inclusive exchange of ideas.[1] The Humboldtian university model particularly embodies these ideals, advocating autonomy, epistemic plurality, and democratic participation in knowledge production.[2] From this perspective, universities should function as epistemic commons—shared spaces that foster genuine epistemic openness by actively engaging with diverse epistemic voices, especially those traditionally marginalised.[3]

However, contemporary higher education frequently diverges from these ideals. Driven by neoliberal managerialism and competitive market pressures, modern universities often prioritise measurable outcomes, such as rankings, publication metrics, and research funding, which inadvertently encourage epistemic enclosure and hierarchical gatekeeping.[4] Consequently, forms of knowledge that resist standard quantification or emerge from marginalised sources risk systematic undervaluation or exclusion. Recent legislative interventions, notably the UK's Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, have emerged partly in response to these concerns, imposing statutory duties on universities to actively safeguard and promote epistemic plurality and freedom of expression within institutional settings.[5] Such measures provide a crucial contemporary context for my exploration of epistemic openness.

1.2 Research Problem

My central research problem emerges from the evident tension between universities' declared commitment to epistemic openness and their practical tendencies towards epistemic exclusion. This divergence gives rise to epistemic injustices—forms of injustice centred on knowledge production and participation. Specifically, testimonial injustice occurs when prejudice leads to systematic credibility deficits for marginalised knowers, while hermeneutical injustice involves structural gaps in interpretative resources, hindering marginalised groups' abilities to articulate experiences meaningfully.[6] Such injustices undermine universities' fiduciary-like responsibilities to steward the epistemic commons responsibly and inclusively, compromising institutional legitimacy.[7]

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[1] Fricker 2007, 1–5.

[2] Collini 2012, 23–29.

[3] Code 2006, 17–20; Boni & Velasco 2020, 5–8.

[4] Stopford 2024, 3–6; Boni & Velasco 2020, 3–5.

[5] Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, ss 1–3; McGoldrick 2024, 297–305.

[6] Fricker 2007, 17–29, 147–175; Medina 2017, 42–47.

[7] DeAngelis 2014, 212–216; Harding 2013, 83–88.

1.3 Definitions of Key Terms

For clarity and precision, I define key concepts:

- **Epistemic Injustice**: Injustice related to knowledge and epistemic participation, emerging explicitly from structural power imbalances and prejudices that systematically disadvantage certain knowers. It manifests in two primary forms:

    - **Testimonial injustice**: Systematic credibility deficits arising explicitly from prejudice against particular speakers, undermining their epistemic agency.[8]

    - **Hermeneutical injustice**: Structural exclusion or inadequate representation within collective interpretive resources, explicitly limiting marginalised groups' ability to articulate and communicate their experiences effectively.[9]

- **Epistemic Openness**: Institutional commitments explicitly aimed at genuinely engaging with diverse epistemic contributions—especially from historically excluded or marginalised communities—through deliberate practices such as dialogical pedagogy, critical reflexivity, and inclusive institutional structures. Such openness explicitly aims to address epistemic injustices by actively affirming marginalised epistemic voices and contributions.[10]

- **Fiduciary Duty (in academia)**: The ethical and legal responsibility explicitly entailing loyalty, diligence, and good faith, which academics and institutions owe to students, marginalised scholars, and society at large. It explicitly involves proactive measures to ensure inclusive and equitable management of epistemic resources, actively countering epistemic injustices and promoting genuine epistemic plurality.[11]

1.4 Thesis Statement

I argue that universities possess epistemic and ethical obligations to actively cultivate epistemic openness. Grounded in epistemic justice frameworks, fiduciary ethics, and democratic social contract theory, these duties require universities to proactively recognise and engage diverse epistemic contributions, particularly from traditionally marginalised groups. While legislative frameworks such as the UK's Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 provide explicit statutory pathways for institutionalising these duties, my comparative analysis of statutory approaches in Germany, France, and the Netherlands highlights varying institutional implications, underscoring nuanced challenges and the necessity for robust internal fiduciary governance frameworks to ensure genuine epistemic openness.

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[8] Fricker 2007, 17–29.

[9] Fricker 2007, 147–155; Medina 2017, 42–47.

[10] Code 2006, 17–20; Freire 2000, 66–72.

[11] DeAngelis 2014, 212–216; Harding 2013, 83–88.

1.5 Methodology

My research synthesises insights from normative epistemology, educational philosophy, fiduciary ethics, and comparative law. Key theoretical frameworks include epistemic injustice[12], fiduciary duties[13], educational theories of dialogical pedagogy[14], and comparative statutory analysis, specifically examining:

- **UK**: Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023.[15]

- **Germany**: Grundgesetz für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland (Basic Law), Article 5(3).[16]

- **France**: Loi n° 2020-1674 du 24 décembre 2020 de programmation de la recherche pour les années 2021 à 2030 (LPR 2020).[17]

- **Netherlands**: Wet op het hoger onderwijs en wetenschappelijk onderzoek (WHW), Article 1.6.[18]

This interdisciplinary approach incorporates conceptual reflection, theoretical integration, comparative legal analysis, and illustrative empirical cases to ground my normative arguments practically.

1.6 Significance and Contribution

This dissertation contributes to scholarship on epistemic justice and higher education policy by:

- Offering an original theoretical synthesis that frames epistemic openness as an enforceable ethical duty within universities.

- Providing a novel comparative analysis of statutory frameworks from the UK, Germany, France, and the Netherlands, demonstrating how different legislative traditions practically shape universities' epistemic practices.

- Proposing a concrete institutional framework—including roles such as Epistemic Ombudspersons and structured epistemic audits—to guide universities in operationalising epistemic openness effectively.

- Integrating cross-cultural perspectives from Confucian, Zhuangzian, and Taoist philosophical traditions, thereby enriching Western-dominated discourse on epistemic justice with globally relevant insights.

- Addressing contemporary policy challenges, including the tension between protecting free speech and ensuring epistemic inclusivity, thus informing ongoing academic policy debates internationally.

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[12] Fricker 2007, 17–29, 147–175; Medina 2017, 42–47; Dotson 2014, 115–120

[13] Harding 2013, 83–88; DeAngelis 2014, 212–216

[14] Freire 2000, 66–72

[15] Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, ss 1–3; McGoldrick 2024, 297–305

[16] Grundgesetz für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Art 5(3); BVerfGE 35, 79 (Hochschulurteil); BVerfGE 111, 333 (Juniorprofessur).

[17] Loi n° 2020-1674, Art 15; Beaud 2021, 179–187.

[18] Wet op het hoger onderwijs en wetenschappelijk onderzoek, Art 1.6.

My work fills significant scholarly and practical gaps by articulating clear institutional pathways toward genuine epistemic openness, thus advancing both theoretical understanding and practical application within higher education contexts globally.

2. Historical and Theoretical Context

2.1 Humboldtian Ideals and Neoliberal Trends

The contemporary vision of universities as spaces committed to epistemic openness traces its roots to the Humboldtian university model. Developed in early 19th-century Prussia, this model emphasises the unity of research and teaching, autonomy, and freedom in scholarly inquiry, positioning universities as independent spaces dedicated to democratic and critical knowledge production.[19] Reinforcing these ideals, Karl Popper advocates for an 'open society', highlighting continuous epistemic critique and openness to diverse perspectives as essential conditions for truth-seeking and knowledge advancement.[20] Both Humboldt's and Popper's frameworks underscore the normative ideal of universities as epistemic commons—spaces actively promoting democratic participation in knowledge creation.

However, from the late 20th century onwards, neoliberal ideologies have significantly reshaped higher education institutions, challenging these historical ideals. Market-oriented managerialism, performance metrics, and competitive funding schemes increasingly dominate universities, prioritising economic efficiency and measurable outcomes such as research rankings, publication counts, and funding levels.[21] These neoliberal trends tend to marginalise epistemic contributions that resist standardisation, including interdisciplinary or critical approaches, often undermining institutional commitments to epistemic openness.[22] The interaction between these managerial pressures and statutory protections significantly shapes universities' abilities to uphold epistemic openness, a crucial issue explored further below.

2.2 Epistemic Commons and Historical Patterns of Exclusion

The concept of the epistemic commons, as articulated by Lorraine Code, provides a valuable framework for understanding universities' responsibilities toward epistemic openness. Code argues that knowledge should be understood as a collectively shared resource, requiring institutions to actively ensure diverse epistemic contributions are recognised, valued, and included.[23] This conceptualisation of knowledge aligns closely with the fiduciary duty outlined in Chapter 1.3, emphasising universities' duties to ensure equitable epistemic participation and to counteract epistemic injustices (for definitions, see Chapter 1.3).

Historically, universities have often fallen short of this ideal, systematically marginalising or excluding specific forms of knowledge. Examples include the early neglect of Gregor Mendel's genetic research due to entrenched

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[19] Collini 2012, 23–29.

[20] Popper 1945, 100–106.

[21] Stopford 2024, 3–6.

[22] Boni & Velasco 2020, 3–5.

[23] Code 2006, 17–20.

scientific biases, and Alan Turing's marginalisation despite seminal contributions to computing, reflecting enduring patterns of epistemic exclusion.[24] These historical examples illustrate forms of epistemic injustice—testimonial and hermeneutical—that persist into contemporary academic contexts (discussed in detail in Chapter 3). Recognising these historical continuities highlights the ongoing necessity for institutional measures to ensure genuine epistemic openness today.

2.3 Comparative Statutory Frameworks for Academic Freedom and Epistemic Openness

Institutional practices regarding epistemic openness are significantly shaped by legal frameworks. Here, I compare statutory frameworks from Germany, France, and the Netherlands, examining their influence on institutional epistemic practices. The comparative analysis utilises three criteria: enforceability, institutional autonomy, and practical clarity.

Germany: Robust Constitutional Protection (Basic Law, Article 5(3))

Germany's constitutional model provides robust protection for academic freedom under Article 5(3) of its Basic Law (Grundgesetz), explicitly declaring that 'arts and sciences, research and teaching shall be free'.[25] The Federal Constitutional Court (Bundesverfassungsgericht) interprets this provision expansively, imposing affirmative institutional duties on universities and the state to ensure maximum freedom for scholarly inquiry and protect against external interference.[26] While providing strong protection against political interference and safeguarding institutional autonomy, this constitutional framework does not address internal managerial pressures arising from neoliberal governance, potentially leaving institutions vulnerable to such influences.

France: Statutory Protection with Ambiguity (LPR 2020)

In 2020, France introduced statutory recognition of academic freedom through the Loi de Programmation de la Recherche (LPR 2020), which amended the Education Code to declare that 'academic freedoms are the guarantee of excellence in French higher education and research'.[27] This statutory assertion underscores the normative importance of academic freedom. However, the law provides limited practical guidance and enforcement mechanisms, creating interpretive ambiguity regarding institutional obligations.[28] Consequently, universities retain significant interpretive discretion, potentially resulting in inconsistent institutional practices unless supported by robust internal governance.

Netherlands: Minimalist Statutory Approach (WHW, Article 1.6)

The Netherlands adopts a minimalist statutory model, explicitly stating in Article 1.6 of the Higher Education and Research Act (Wet op het hoger onderwijs en wetenschappelijk onderzoek, WHW) that 'academic freedom shall be respected'.[29] This statutory provision does not include detailed criteria or enforceable guidance, relying

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[24] Martin 1999, 107–110.

[25] Grundgesetz für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Art 5(3).

[26] BVerfGE 35, 79 (Hochschulurteil); BVerfGE 111, 333 (Juniorprofessur).

[27] Beaud 2021, 179–187.

[28] Beaud 2021, 179–187.

[29] Wet op het hoger onderwijs en wetenschappelijk onderzoek, Art 1.6.

heavily instead on institutional self-governance and internal academic norms. While this model explicitly provides flexibility and adaptability, it leaves institutions vulnerable to internal managerial and ideological pressures, exemplified by recent controversies such as the dismissal of Dr Susanne Täuber at the University of Groningen, following her critical stance on institutional diversity policies (Chapter 4). Thus, the minimalist statutory approach risks inadequately securing sustained epistemic openness, underscoring the explicit necessity for complementary internal governance frameworks and accountability mechanisms.

Brief Comparative Reference: United Kingdom (Freedom of Speech Act 2023)

Briefly, the UK's Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 provides a statutory framework mandating universities to proactively protect and promote free speech and epistemic plurality.[30] This legislative intervention contrasts sharply with the constitutional clarity of Germany, the statutory ambiguity of France, and the minimalism of the Netherlands, offering an alternative approach geared towards institutional accountability and active enforcement.

2.4 Comparative Summary

This comparative analysis demonstrates that statutory frameworks significantly influence institutional practices regarding epistemic openness. Germany's constitutional model provides strong, enforceable protection and clear institutional autonomy, yet does not directly mitigate neoliberal managerial pressures. France's recent statutory framework clearly affirms normative ideals but lacks practical enforceability, while the Netherlands' minimalist model highlights significant vulnerabilities despite institutional flexibility.

Thus, while statutory protections shape universities' ability to fulfil epistemic duties significantly, achieving genuine epistemic openness requires additional internal governance mechanisms. Such measures include structured epistemic audits, explicit pedagogical commitments, and fiduciary-like oversight mechanisms that ensure institutions consistently uphold epistemic justice and inclusivity, topics explored in depth in Chapter 3. Recognising these statutory variations provides essential context for understanding institutional epistemic responsibilities, forming a robust foundation for subsequent discussions.

3. Epistemic Duties and Ethics of Receptiveness

3.1 Epistemic Injustice and Institutional Responsibility

Universities bear significant ethical responsibilities concerning epistemic openness, fundamentally grounded in epistemic injustice. As outlined in Chapter 1.3, epistemic injustice refers to systematic wrongs involving recognition and validation of knowledge. Miranda Fricker identifies two primary forms: testimonial injustice, involving unfair reductions in credibility attributed to marginalised knowers, and hermeneutical injustice, resulting from structural gaps in collective interpretive resources.[31] José Medina further emphasises that these

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[30] Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, ss 1–3; McGoldrick 2024, 297–305.

[31] Fricker 2007, 17–29, 147–155.

injustices arise not merely from passive prejudice, but from active institutional practices marginalising or dismissing particular epistemic contributions.[32]

Extending her foundational analysis, Fricker explicitly integrates recognition theory, arguing that genuine epistemic openness requires institutions to actively recognise and affirm diverse epistemic contributions, beyond mere tolerance or inclusion. This active recognition directly challenges systemic epistemic marginalisation, reinforcing institutional responsibilities to meaningfully validate marginalised epistemic voices and strengthen fiduciary ethical obligations.[33]

Consequently, universities hold clear obligations to address these injustices through deliberate practices that validate diverse epistemic contributions. Institutions must actively foster epistemic resistance and promote inclusive epistemic practices to mitigate testimonial and hermeneutical injustices. This approach enriches the epistemic commons (Chapter 2.2), ensuring knowledge production remains genuinely democratic, inclusive, and responsive to diverse epistemic perspectives. These epistemic responsibilities closely align with fiduciary ethical obligations, as explored below.

3.2 Fiduciary Duties and Epistemic Governance

The ethical obligations of universities toward epistemic openness are effectively articulated through fiduciary duty theory. Fiduciary duties entail obligations of loyalty, diligence, and good faith, requiring trustees to act in beneficiaries' best interests.[34] In the context of higher education, academics and institutions serve as fiduciaries responsible for stewarding the epistemic commons—knowledge itself—for beneficiaries including students, scholars, marginalised epistemic agents, and society more broadly.[35]

John Rawls's theory of justice, particularly his principle of fair equality of opportunity, reinforces this fiduciary perspective. Rawls argues institutions should establish fair conditions under which individuals can realise their intellectual capabilities equitably, thereby ensuring meaningful societal participation.[36] Translated into epistemic terms, universities have fiduciary responsibilities to proactively counter structural epistemic biases and inequalities, ensuring equitable epistemic agency and participation for all members of the academic community.

Listening as epistemic praxis involves active engagement, critical reflexivity, and sustained pedagogical openness. As Brust and Taylor (2023) emphasise, educators at historically exclusive institutions bear significant responsibilities in actively resisting epistemic injustices, necessitating critical reflexivity and inclusive pedagogical strategies.[37] Such strategies explicitly operationalise fiduciary ethical obligations, translating theoretical principles into tangible institutional practices.

Institutions failing to uphold these fiduciary obligations risk ethical misconduct, potentially undermining their legitimacy and the implicit trust society places in them. To mitigate this risk, universities should adopt concrete governance mechanisms such as structured epistemic audits, explicit accountability frameworks, and oversight roles, thus ensuring sustained and effective fiduciary stewardship of epistemic resources.

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[32] Medina 2017, 42–47.

[33] Fricker 2018, 3–7.

[34] Harding 2013, 83–88.

[35] DeAngelis 2014, 212–216.

[36] Rawls 1999, 72–75.

[37] Brust & Taylor 2023, 5–9.

3.3 Philosophical Foundations: Academic Freedom and Dialogical Pedagogy

The philosophical foundations underpinning academic freedom provide crucial ethical justification for epistemic openness. John Stuart Mill's classical liberal argument for freedom of expression positions open debate as essential for truth-seeking and epistemic flourishing.[38] Mill's liberal philosophy strongly supports universities' fiduciary duties by underscoring that protecting diverse perspectives and robust critical inquiry directly advances knowledge and truth.

Complementing Mill's liberal tradition, Paulo Freire's dialogical pedagogy emphasises reciprocal and dialogical relationships between learners and educators, advocating mutual recognition, epistemic humility, and collaborative knowledge creation.[39] Freire's pedagogical principles reinforce the fiduciary obligations of universities to actively cultivate environments that enable genuine epistemic inclusion and mutual learning.

Together, Mill's liberal advocacy for open debate and Freire's dialogical principles mutually reinforce fiduciary ethical frameworks, creating a coherent philosophical basis for universities' epistemic duties. These philosophical perspectives jointly underline the necessity for institutions to uphold ethical obligations through active protection and promotion of epistemic diversity.

Philosophical commitments to academic freedom and dialogical pedagogy emphasise critical reflexivity, reciprocal epistemic relationships, and active resistance to epistemic injustices. Institutional and pedagogical practices that assert epistemic rights—such as reflective teaching methods and explicit strategies to counter epistemic marginalisation—reinforce these philosophical commitments in practical terms.[40] These practices explicitly translate theoretical principles of epistemic openness and fiduciary obligations into actionable institutional frameworks, further supporting a comprehensive epistemic culture.

3.4 Ethical Implications of Comparative Statutory Frameworks

Statutory frameworks significantly influence how universities fulfil their epistemic responsibilities. Chapter 2 provided detailed descriptions of various European models; here, I briefly focus on their ethical implications concerning institutional epistemic duties.

Germany (Basic Law, Article 5(3))

Germany's robust constitutional protection explicitly supports institutional autonomy, imposing clear obligations to safeguard academic freedom against external political interference.[41] Ethically, this constitutional clarity reinforces universities' fiduciary responsibilities, ensuring strong protection of epistemic openness. However, German universities must remain vigilant against internal managerial pressures arising from neoliberal governance, explicitly addressing governance structures to maintain comprehensive epistemic justice.

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[38] Mill [1859] 2001, 15–25.

[39] Freire 2000, 66–72.

[40] Godbee 2017, 598–602.

[41] Grundgesetz für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Art 5(3); BVerfGE 35, 79 (Hochschulurteil); BVerfGE 111, 333 (Juniorprofessur).

France (LPR 2020)

France's recent statutory framework, established through the 2020 Research Programming Law (Loi de Programmation de la Recherche), explicitly affirms the normative value of academic freedom and institutional autonomy.[42] However, scholarly analysis highlights ambiguity in implementation guidelines and practical enforceability.[43] Consequently, French universities bear explicit fiduciary responsibilities to supplement statutory provisions through robust internal governance measures, proactively ensuring compliance and consistent fulfilment of ethical obligations despite statutory vagueness.

Netherlands (WHW, Article 1.6)

The Netherlands' minimalist statutory framework under Article 1.6 of the Higher Education and Research Act (Wet op het hoger onderwijs en wetenschappelijk onderzoek, WHW) explicitly emphasises institutional flexibility, relying predominantly on internal self-governance and professional academic norms.[44] Ethically, this minimalist statutory approach places substantial fiduciary responsibilities directly upon universities, explicitly requiring them to establish robust internal governance frameworks to safeguard epistemic openness. Recent controversies, notably the dismissal of Dr Susanne Täuber at the University of Groningen following her critical stance on institutional diversity policies (Chapter 4), explicitly illustrate ethical vulnerabilities inherent in minimalist statutory models, underscoring the necessity for proactive internal fiduciary governance measures and robust institutional accountability.

United Kingdom (Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, Sections 1–3)

By contrast, the UK's explicit statutory approach under the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 mandates clear institutional duties to actively protect and promote epistemic plurality and freedom of expression.[45] Ethically, this statutory clarity significantly reinforces fiduciary obligations by demanding explicit institutional accountability, providing a robust model for legally safeguarding epistemic openness and clearly delineating institutional duties and responsibilities.

3.5 Synthesis and Institutional Recommendations

Synthesising epistemic injustice theory, fiduciary duties, philosophical foundations, and comparative statutory analysis yields several key insights. Universities have clear ethical responsibilities to cultivate genuinely epistemically open environments, obligations strongly supported by philosophical traditions (Mill, Freire) and fiduciary ethics (Rawls, Harding). Statutory frameworks significantly influence these ethical obligations, revealing both strengths and vulnerabilities across different national contexts.

Effective fulfilment of universities' epistemic responsibilities requires more than statutory protections alone; proactive institutional measures are essential. Specifically, universities should adopt:

- **Structured epistemic audits** to identify and rectify institutional epistemic injustices systematically.

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[42] Loi n° 2020-1674 du 24 décembre 2020, Art 15.

[43] Beaud 2021, 179–187.

[44] Wet op het hoger onderwijs en wetenschappelijk onderzoek, Art 1.6.

[45] Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, ss 1–3; McGoldrick 2024, 297–305.

- **Dedicated oversight roles** (e.g., Epistemic Ombudspersons) to ensure continuous accountability and responsiveness.

- **Explicit pedagogical commitments** that foster epistemic diversity, mutual recognition, and inclusive dialogue.

- **Transparent accountability mechanisms** embedded within institutional governance to ensure compliance with fiduciary ethical standards.

Implementing these measures systematically ensures universities meet their ethical obligations, maintaining legitimacy and enriching the epistemic commons. The subsequent chapters discuss concrete institutional frameworks, practical implementation challenges, and recommendations for realising sustainable epistemic openness in contemporary higher education.

4. Empirical Illustrations of Epistemic Inclusion and Exclusion

4.1 Institutional Epistemic Exclusion: Dynamics and Practices

As discussed in preceding chapters, universities possess clear ethical obligations regarding epistemic openness. Nonetheless, systemic epistemic exclusion persists in practice. Research consistently reveals that epistemic marginalisation disproportionately impacts scholars from historically disadvantaged groups or those challenging conventional academic norms.[46]

Kristie Dotson identifies institutional epistemic oppression as processes by which institutions actively dismiss, undervalue, or suppress certain epistemic contributions.[47] Such institutional exclusion manifests through subtle credibility deficits, microaggressions, administrative scepticism, and restrictive evaluation frameworks. These practices reinforce existing epistemic hierarchies and exemplify the testimonial and hermeneutical injustices defined in Chapter 1.3, clearly violating institutions' fiduciary-like ethical duties (see Chapter 3).

4.2 Participatory Methodologies and Institutional Resistance: Boni & Velasco's Case Studies

Empirical research by Boni and Velasco highlights the tensions arising when universities attempt epistemically inclusive approaches. Two illustrative cases—participatory video in Lagos and service-learning at the University of Ibagué—showcase institutional responses to non-traditional epistemic contributions.[48]

In Lagos, participatory video enabled marginalised community members to contribute actively to epistemic narratives about their lived experiences. The approach directly addressed testimonial injustice by attributing due credibility to these contributors. Outcomes included enhanced epistemic agency and stronger community-

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[46] Settles et al 2021, 495–499; Dotson 2014, 115–120.

[47] Dotson 2014, 115–120.

[48] Boni & Velasco 2020, 8–17.

university partnerships.[49] However, institutional scepticism initially arose, reflecting entrenched biases favouring traditional academic methods, thereby highlighting persistent institutional resistance toward epistemically inclusive practices.

Similarly, service-learning pedagogies at the University of Ibagué fostered reciprocal epistemic exchange, significantly enhancing epistemic humility and openness among students. Yet, institutional resistance again emerged, driven by concerns over academic validity and resource allocation. These reactions exemplify how institutions inadvertently perpetuate epistemic exclusion despite theoretical commitments to openness.[50] These empirical examples clearly illustrate the necessity of institutional measures such as structured epistemic audits and oversight mechanisms to proactively address epistemic exclusion.

4.3 Microfascist Dynamics in Institutional Epistemic Exclusion: Kuyumcu & Méndez-Grueso

Kuyumcu and Méndez-Grueso provide critical insights into subtle institutional practices they term 'microfascist dynamics'. These include covert epistemic suppression, implicit scepticism, microaggressions, and administrative marginalisation—practices cumulatively reinforcing epistemic exclusion and perpetuating epistemic injustice.[51]

These subtle mechanisms create environments where scholars diverging from dominant norms experience persistent marginalisation. Such conditions directly challenge universities' fiduciary ethical obligations, necessitating proactive institutional responses. Practical interventions recommended by Kuyumcu and Méndez-Grueso include structured epistemic reflexivity training, clear accountability frameworks, and formal recognition schemes, which collectively mitigate subtle but pervasive epistemic marginalisation.[52]

4.4 European Comparative Contexts: Practical Statutory Impacts on Epistemic Practices

Comparative statutory contexts significantly influence practical institutional epistemic openness, as illustrated by specific cases from the Netherlands and France.

Netherlands: The Case of Dr Susanne Täuber

The dismissal of Dr Susanne Täuber at the University of Groningen explicitly highlights vulnerabilities associated with the Netherlands' minimalist statutory protection provided under Article 1.6 of the Higher Education and Research Act (Wet op het hoger onderwijs en wetenschappelijk onderzoek, WHW).[53] Täuber experienced institutional retaliation after publicly criticising university diversity policies, ultimately resulting in her dismissal (Chapter 4). Officially attributed to interpersonal relationship breakdowns, the case drew significant criticism, with observers explicitly arguing it reflected managerial intolerance toward critical epistemic perspectives challenging dominant institutional narratives.

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[49] Boni & Velasco 2020, 8–12.

[50] Boni & Velasco 2020, 12–17.

[51] Kuyumcu & Méndez-Grueso 2025, 84–86.

[52] Kuyumcu & Méndez-Grueso 2025, 86–88.

[53] Wet op het hoger onderwijs en wetenschappelijk onderzoek, Art 1.6.

This case clearly exemplifies testimonial injustice in practice, with Täuber's critical perspective undervalued institutionally. The minimalist Dutch statutory framework, explicitly reliant on institutional self-governance, clearly exposes universities to managerial pressures and epistemic exclusion risks. Nonetheless, statutory minimalism also explicitly provides institutional flexibility for adaptive responses—provided universities proactively establish robust internal governance mechanisms, explicitly including structured epistemic accountability and oversight frameworks.

France: Grenoble Controversy

In France, the Grenoble controversy further illustrates institutional tensions arising under ambiguous statutory protections (LPR 2020). The controversy involved heated ideological debates surrounding perceived biases in teaching, prompting national scrutiny of universities' responsibilities to safeguard academic freedom.[54]

Statutory ambiguity contributed to institutional confusion, complicating clear delineation between legitimate epistemic plurality and ideological neutrality. French institutions struggled with cautious, risk-averse responses potentially constraining epistemic openness. Thus, this case highlights the importance of clear fiduciary governance frameworks that articulate institutional epistemic responsibilities, ensuring consistent application of epistemic openness principles despite statutory vagueness.

4.5 Empirical Reflections on the UK's Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023

The UK's Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 offers a contrasting statutory approach mandating institutional accountability for protecting free speech and epistemic diversity. Early empirical observations indicate institutions are actively implementing oversight mechanisms, transparency measures, and accountability frameworks as direct responses to statutory mandates.[55]

Notably, recent controversies, such as the Oxford Union's speaker invitation disputes and campus protests over controversial academics, illustrate institutional responses under statutory obligations. Institutions now face the challenge of clearly balancing freedom of expression with preventing harmful or ideologically driven epistemic contributions. Although practical implementation challenges remain, the UK's statutory clarity provides a robust framework supporting fiduciary governance, reinforcing institutions' ethical obligations to uphold epistemic openness actively.

4.6 Comparative Summary and Institutional Recommendations

These empirical cases and statutory comparisons illustrate complex practical dynamics in realising epistemic openness. Participatory methodologies (Boni & Velasco) and subtle microfascist dynamics (Kuyumcu & Méndez-Grueso) highlight institutional practices perpetuating epistemic exclusion. Statutory contexts in the Netherlands and France demonstrate clear vulnerabilities when statutory frameworks lack clarity or robustness, potentially undermining institutions' fiduciary duties.

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[54] Beaud 2021, 179–187.

[55] McGoldrick 2024, 297–305.

Conversely, the UK's statutory framework illustrates clear advantages by directly supporting institutional accountability measures. Thus, effective institutional fulfilment of epistemic openness requires combining statutory protections with proactive internal governance mechanisms, specifically:

- **Structured epistemic audits**, systematically addressing subtle epistemic injustices such as microfascist dynamics.

- **Dedicated oversight roles** (e.g., Epistemic Ombudspersons), providing formal accountability mechanisms in cases like Täuber's dismissal.

- **Pedagogical commitments to epistemic diversity**, institutionalising inclusive methodologies such as participatory video and service-learning.

- **Transparent accountability frameworks**, ensuring consistent institutional responses amid ideological tensions like those seen in Grenoble.

Implementing these practical recommendations ensures institutions consistently meet ethical and fiduciary epistemic obligations, maintaining legitimacy and genuinely promoting epistemic openness.

The following chapter further details these practical institutional measures and provides comprehensive guidance for sustainably realising epistemic inclusion in contemporary higher education contexts.

5. Framework for Institutionalising Epistemic Openness

5.1 Institutionalising Epistemic Openness: A Normative Imperative

As demonstrated in earlier chapters, epistemic openness is a fundamental ethical and fiduciary obligation of universities. Yet empirical cases have illustrated significant practical challenges in achieving genuine openness, making clear institutional frameworks essential. This chapter proposes an integrated institutional framework combining statutory mandates with fiduciary governance practices, providing a sustainable approach to ensuring epistemic openness.

5.2 The UK Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023

The UK's Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 clearly mandates universities to proactively safeguard freedom of speech and epistemic diversity. Specifically, it requires institutions to establish governance structures, accountability frameworks, and designated oversight roles ensuring statutory compliance.[56]

This legislative approach directly aligns with universities' fiduciary ethical duties (Chapter 3), reinforcing accountability for addressing epistemic injustices. The Act translates theoretical and ethical obligations into practical institutional mandates, thus significantly strengthening institutional accountability and responsiveness.

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[56] Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, ss 1–3; McGoldrick 2024, 297–305.

These statutory obligations align closely with broader sector commitments, such as those articulated in the recent sector-wide statement from Universities UK, emphasising collective responsibility among higher education institutions to proactively uphold academic freedom and free speech principles.[57]

5.3 Comparative European Statutory Perspectives: Germany, Netherlands, and France

Building upon statutory analyses in Chapter 2, Germany's constitutional autonomy demands complementary internal governance addressing internal managerial pressures. France's statutory ambiguity (LPR 2020; see Chapter 2) necessitates clear internal procedures to guide institutional responses consistently. The Netherlands' minimalist statutory model highlights institutional flexibility but underscores vulnerabilities, requiring robust internal oversight. In contrast, the UK's clear statutory framework (Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023; Chapter 2) strongly supports explicit institutional accountability.

5.4 Practical Framework for Institutionalising Epistemic Openness

Integrating statutory analyses, empirical insights, and fiduciary ethics, this section proposes specific institutional mechanisms that directly address the issues identified in earlier chapters. Recommended practical governance measures include:

- **Structured Epistemic Audits**: Systematic reviews assessing curricula, hiring practices, research evaluation, and institutional processes, explicitly identifying and correcting epistemic exclusion. These audits address issues such as the microfascist dynamics described by Kuyumcu and Méndez-Grueso[58], ensuring ongoing identification and mitigation of epistemic injustice.

- **Epistemic Ombudsperson Roles**: Independent oversight positions responsible for addressing epistemic grievances, providing clear accountability pathways in cases of epistemic suppression such as Dr Täuber's case. Ombudspersons ensure transparent and accountable institutional responses to epistemic controversies.

- **Explicit Pedagogical Commitments**: Institutionalisation of inclusive epistemic methodologies, including participatory video and service-learning approaches (highlighted by Boni & Velasco[59]). Such commitments foster epistemic diversity by legitimising traditionally marginalised contributions, directly addressing testimonial injustice.

- **Transparency and Procedural Clarity**: Establishment of clear, publicly accessible guidelines explicitly outlining institutional epistemic responsibilities and response procedures. This addresses statutory ambiguity seen in France and provides consistent institutional responses to epistemic controversies, protecting universities from ideological or managerial biases.

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[57] Universities UK 2022.

[58] Kuyumcu & Méndez-Grueso 2025, 86–88.

[59] Boni & Velasco 2019, 7–13.

5.5 Statutory-Fiduciary Interaction and Institutional Implications

Comparative statutory analysis reveals nuanced interactions between statutory frameworks and fiduciary obligations:

- The UK's clear statutory mandates significantly strengthen institutional fiduciary responsibilities, ensuring accountability for epistemic openness.

- Germany's constitutional autonomy supports fiduciary duties externally but requires complementary internal measures addressing managerial pressures.

- Dutch minimalism demands stronger internal fiduciary governance to compensate for statutory gaps, highlighting both flexibility advantages and inherent vulnerabilities.

- French statutory ambiguity underscores the necessity of internal governance measures clearly addressing practical institutional responsibilities.

This analysis indicates that effective epistemic openness requires balanced integration of statutory clarity and internal fiduciary governance, tailored to each statutory context.

5.6 Comparative Advantages and Summary

The proposed institutional framework clearly synthesises statutory obligations, fiduciary ethics, and practical governance, providing distinct comparative advantages:

- The statutory foundation in the UK significantly enhances institutional accountability and transparency.

- German constitutional autonomy is strengthened by internal fiduciary mechanisms addressing subtle epistemic injustices.

- Dutch statutory minimalism's flexibility benefits from internal governance measures, addressing managerial vulnerabilities.

- French statutory clarity and ambiguity require complementary internal institutional frameworks, providing clear procedural guidelines.

By adopting structured epistemic audits, dedicated oversight roles, explicit pedagogical commitments, and transparent accountability frameworks, universities can systematically realise epistemic openness, effectively meeting statutory and fiduciary ethical obligations.

The next chapter explores practical implementation strategies and potential challenges, providing detailed guidance for sustainably embedding epistemic openness within contemporary higher education contexts.

6. Challenges and Further Considerations

6.1 Structural Resistance to Epistemic Openness

Despite robust theoretical foundations and statutory mandates, universities frequently encounter structural resistance when institutionalising genuine epistemic openness. Entrenched managerial cultures, bureaucratic inertia, and prioritisation of measurable outcomes often perpetuate epistemic exclusion, undermining institutional commitments to openness.[60] As discussed by Kuyumcu and Méndez-Grueso (2025), subtle exclusionary practices—such as implicit scepticism, microaggressions, and administrative marginalisation—reinforce existing epistemic hierarchies. Addressing these persistent dynamics necessitates proactive governance structures, including regular epistemic audits and clear accountability mechanisms, as outlined in Chapter 5.

6.2 Ethical Risks and Institutional Boundaries

While epistemic openness remains ethically vital, institutions must proactively manage associated risks. As detailed in Chapter 3, overly permissive approaches risk fostering epistemic relativism or unintentionally legitimising pseudoscientific and ideologically driven claims. Robert Post explicitly cautions against indiscriminate epistemic pluralism, emphasising rigorous academic standards as crucial to institutional credibility and legitimacy.[61] Similarly, Zembylas underscores the importance of clearly defined institutional boundaries and structured evaluative mechanisms to distinguish legitimate epistemic diversity from epistemically unsound contributions.[62]

Practically, institutions must establish transparent evaluative frameworks and robust governance mechanisms designed explicitly to balance epistemic openness with rigour. Clear guidelines, rigorous peer-review processes, and structured oversight (outlined in Chapter 5) help institutions safeguard genuine epistemic plurality without compromising academic standards.

Furthermore, institutions must navigate complex tensions surrounding academic freedom and free speech. Jana Bacevic (2025) highlights that contemporary debates around academic freedom often involve performative dimensions, complicating institutional responses and creating subtle ethical challenges. Institutions must critically assess how these performative aspects might unintentionally reinforce existing epistemic hierarchies, complicating efforts to safeguard genuine epistemic openness.[63]

Contemporary free speech debates also frequently reflect deeper ideological conflicts. Dragoş and Hughson (2024) demonstrate that populist narratives about a perceived 'free speech crisis' in UK higher education intertwine with ideological tensions, potentially reinforcing structural inequalities. Institutions must acknowledge and critically engage with these ideological dimensions to ensure that commitments to epistemic openness challenge rather than reinforce epistemic inequalities.[64]

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[60] Stopford 2024, 3–6.

[61] Post 2012, 45–49.

[62] Zembylas 2025, 7–9.

[63] Bacevic 2025, 5–9.

[64] Dragoş & Hughson 2024, 640–644.

Finally, broader political and ideological pressures further complicate institutional commitments to epistemic openness. Darian-Smith (2025) explicitly warns that rising antidemocratic trends globally threaten academic freedom and institutional autonomy, negatively impacting universities' capacities for inclusive and democratic knowledge production. Institutions must respond robustly by establishing clear governance frameworks explicitly designed to protect academic autonomy and epistemic diversity from external ideological and political pressures.[65]

6.3 The UK Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023

The UK's Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 significantly enhances institutional accountability by mandating clear governance frameworks to safeguard epistemic plurality and freedom of expression.[66] This statutory clarity aligns closely with fiduciary obligations, providing a strong foundation for proactive institutional measures such as epistemic audits and oversight roles.

However, the Act introduces practical challenges, particularly in navigating tensions between protecting free speech and addressing harmful epistemic contributions. Institutions face complexities defining clear procedural boundaries and managing controversial cases effectively. Overly cautious or rigid implementation risks constraining epistemic openness. Consequently, UK universities must complement statutory mandates with internal fiduciary governance frameworks, carefully designed to manage nuanced practical challenges flexibly and effectively.

6.4 Comparative European Contexts and Practical Implications

As detailed previously (Chapters 2 and 5), statutory frameworks shape institutional practices distinctly. Germany's constitutional model necessitates explicit internal measures to manage internal tensions; France's statutory ambiguity underscores the critical need for internal clarity; and the Netherlands' minimalist approach requires strong internal fiduciary oversight to mitigate vulnerabilities.

6.5 Recommendations and Further Institutional Considerations

Considering the structural challenges, ethical risks, and comparative statutory contexts discussed, universities should implement clearly defined governance measures to effectively operationalise epistemic openness. Recommendations include:

- **Structured Epistemic Audits**: Regular evaluations of institutional practices, curricula, and procedures to identify and address subtle forms of epistemic exclusion (e.g., microfascist dynamics).

- **Epistemic Ombudsperson Roles**: Independent oversight positions providing formal accountability for epistemic grievances, particularly important in minimalist statutory contexts (Netherlands) and ambiguous frameworks (France).

- **Pedagogical Commitments**: Systematic integration of inclusive epistemic methodologies (participatory video, service-learning) addressing testimonial injustices.

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[65] Darian-Smith 2025, 605–610.

[66] McGoldrick 2024, 297–305.

- **Transparency and Procedural Guidelines**: Clear, accessible guidelines defining institutional epistemic responsibilities, essential for balancing statutory ambiguity or constitutional tensions.

Institutions must also actively foster internal cultures of epistemic reflexivity and humility through ongoing training and capacity-building programmes. Integrating fiduciary ethical considerations directly into governance structures ensures sustained compliance and responsiveness to both statutory mandates and institutional ethical obligations.

6.6 Summary and Forward Connection

This chapter highlights that while clear statutory frameworks and ethical imperatives support epistemic openness, significant practical challenges remain. Structural resistance, ethical risks, and statutory variations across Europe demonstrate the necessity of proactive internal governance measures clearly tailored to local statutory contexts. By systematically addressing these considerations, universities can sustainably embed epistemic openness into their institutional cultures and governance practices.

The final chapter provides concrete strategies, implementation recommendations, and guidance for overcoming institutional barriers, ensuring effective realisation of universities' ethical and fiduciary commitments to epistemic openness within contemporary higher education.

7. Conclusion—Toward a New Epistemic Culture

7.1 Institutionalising Epistemic Openness: Normative and Practical Imperatives

Throughout this dissertation, I have argued that universities possess fiduciary and ethical obligations to institutionalise epistemic openness, proactively addressing epistemic injustices and cultivating inclusive epistemic environments. Epistemic injustice—testimonial and hermeneutical—continues to marginalise diverse epistemic contributions, significantly undermining institutions' ethical duties.[67] To fulfil these obligations effectively, universities must move beyond theoretical commitments and establish practical institutional mechanisms such as structured epistemic audits, independent oversight (Epistemic Ombudspersons), inclusive pedagogical approaches, and transparent governance frameworks, as detailed in Chapters 3 and 5.

7.2 Philosophical Foundations: Western and Chinese Perspectives on Epistemic Openness

Integrating philosophical insights from both Western traditions and Chinese philosophy significantly enriches the normative framework for epistemic openness. Western philosophical traditions—particularly Mill's advocacy for open debate and Freire's dialogical pedagogy—clearly establish institutional duties to foster epistemic plurality and mutual respect, reinforcing fiduciary ethical responsibilities (Chapter 3).

Complementing this foundation, Chinese philosophical traditions offer distinctive and valuable insights:

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[67] Fricker 2007, 17–29; Medina 2017, 42–47.

- **Confucian reciprocity** (教學相長, jiàoxué xiāngzhǎng), articulated explicitly in the Xueji (Record on the Subject of Education) within the Liji (Book of Rites), underscores the mutual advancement of teachers and learners. This Confucian principle aligns closely with fiduciary ethics and Freirean dialogical pedagogy, explicitly supporting mutual respect and reciprocal epistemic growth within institutions.[68]

- **Zhuangzian Perspectivism**, as articulated explicitly by Zhuangzi, emphasises epistemic humility by acknowledging that all perspectives capture only partial truths. Institutions adopting Zhuangzi's epistemic humility explicitly embrace diverse epistemic contributions, explicitly recognising their inherent limitations and valuing openness to alternative viewpoints.[69]

- **The Taoist principle of** 無為 (wúwéi, 'non-action') articulated explicitly by Laozi advocates deliberate institutional receptivity and restraint from imposing rigid epistemic standards prematurely. Taoism thus explicitly provides philosophical grounding for institutional practices designed to validate diverse epistemologies without constraining genuine epistemic exploration.[70]

Together, these philosophical traditions reinforce the fiduciary responsibility of universities to actively foster epistemic openness, reciprocity, and humility, providing a robust, globally informed philosophical basis for institutional epistemic practices.

7.3 European Comparative Insights: Statutory Contexts and Institutional Implications

Comparative European statutory analyses explored in previous chapters provide valuable insights into institutionalising epistemic openness, highlighting unique strengths and challenges within varied national contexts:

- **Germany (Constitutional Autonomy)**:
  Germany's constitutional model, under Article 5(3) of the Basic Law (Grundgesetz), robustly safeguards institutional autonomy and academic freedom, significantly protecting universities from external interference.[71] Nevertheless, German universities must proactively address internal managerial pressures by explicitly developing fiduciary governance frameworks, ensuring balanced epistemic openness and maintaining constitutional fidelity (Verfassungstreue) (Chapter 2).

- **France (Statutory Ambiguity)**:
  France's recent statutory recognition of academic freedom through the 2020 Research Programming Law (Loi de programmation de la recherche, LPR 2020) explicitly affirms epistemic openness.[72] However, scholarly critiques highlight practical uncertainty due to the statute's ambiguity and limited explicit enforcement mechanisms, as demonstrated in cases like the Grenoble controversy (Chapter 4). Consequently, French universities explicitly require robust internal governance structures to clarify epistemic responsibilities and ensure consistent institutional responses to epistemic controversies.

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[68] Confucius, *Xueji* in *Liji* (tr Legge, 1885).

[69] Zhuangzi, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* (tr Watson, 1968), 29–45.

[70] Laozi, *Dao De Jing* (tr Lau, 1963), 80–81.

[71] Grundgesetz für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Art 5(3); BVerfGE 35, 79 (Hochschulurteil); BVerfGE 111, 333 (Juniorprofessur).

[72] Loi n° 2020-1674 du 24 décembre 2020, Art 15.

- **Netherlands (Statutory Minimalism)**:
  The Netherlands' minimalist statutory framework under Article 1.6 of the Higher Education and Research Act (Wet op het hoger onderwijs en wetenschappelijk onderzoek, WHW) explicitly provides significant institutional flexibility, enabling universities to adapt quickly to emerging epistemic challenges.[73] Yet, minimal statutory guidelines risk leaving institutions vulnerable to managerial and ideological pressures, explicitly illustrated by the dismissal of Dr Susanne Täuber at the University of Groningen following her critical stance on institutional diversity policies (Chapter 4). Dutch institutions must, therefore, explicitly establish robust internal fiduciary governance, structured oversight roles, and clear accountability frameworks to mitigate vulnerabilities inherent in statutory minimalism.

- **United Kingdom (Explicit Statutory Duties)**:
  By contrast, the UK's explicit statutory model under the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 provides clear institutional responsibilities, actively safeguarding epistemic openness and freedom of expression.[74] Explicit statutory clarity enhances ethical accountability, strongly reinforcing fiduciary obligations. Nevertheless, UK institutions must remain vigilant against performative dimensions and populist narratives within free speech debates, explicitly establishing proactive internal governance to address subtle ideological tensions and reinforce genuine epistemic plurality (Chapters 4 and 6).

Collectively, these comparative insights clearly illustrate that statutory protections alone cannot fully guarantee sustained epistemic openness. Robust internal governance explicitly tailored to national contexts remains essential, emphasising practical institutional measures and proactive fiduciary frameworks discussed throughout this dissertation.

7.4 Practical Institutional Framework: Recommendations for Sustainable Epistemic Openness

Synthesising normative, philosophical, and comparative statutory insights, I propose the following institutional measures to sustainably embed epistemic openness within universities:

- **Structured Epistemic Audits**: Regular reviews evaluating institutional policies, curricula, and procedures to identify and correct subtle epistemic injustices, addressing dynamics such as those identified by Kuyumcu and Méndez-Grueso (Chapter 4).

- **Epistemic Ombudspersons**: Independent oversight roles addressing epistemic grievances and ensuring fiduciary accountability, particularly crucial in minimalist or ambiguous statutory contexts (Netherlands, France).

- **Inclusive Pedagogical Practices**: Institutionalisation of epistemically inclusive methodologies (participatory video, service-learning), explicitly addressing testimonial injustice by validating diverse epistemic contributions, as illustrated by Boni and Velasco (Chapter 4).

- **Transparent Procedural Guidelines**: Clearly defined institutional policies providing transparent criteria for managing epistemic controversies, crucial in addressing statutory ambiguity and reinforcing fiduciary accountability.

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[73] Wet op het hoger onderwijs en wetenschappelijk onderzoek, Art 1.6.

[74] Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, ss 1–3; McGoldrick 2024, 297–305.

Additionally, fostering institutional cultures of epistemic humility, openness, and reciprocity—actively informed by Confucian, Zhuangzian, and Taoist philosophical insights—must occur through ongoing training, professional development, and capacity-building programmes, ensuring sustainable internalisation of epistemic responsibilities.

7.5 Concluding Reflection: Toward a Global Vision of Epistemic Justice

Ultimately, achieving epistemic justice and openness demands sustained institutional commitment, clearly guided by fiduciary ethics, informed by diverse philosophical traditions, and reinforced by practical statutory insights. Universities worldwide must systematically integrate structured governance frameworks and internal accountability measures designed to proactively address epistemic injustices.

By embedding epistemic openness deeply into institutional cultures and practices—supported by clear statutory mandates, fiduciary obligations, and enriched by cross-cultural philosophical perspectives—universities can effectively realise their global responsibility to cultivate truly inclusive epistemic communities.

This dissertation contributes to this global vision by offering an integrated normative, philosophical, comparative, and practical framework guiding contemporary higher education institutions toward sustained epistemic justice and genuine epistemic openness.

Further research could fruitfully explore the long-term efficacy of proposed governance mechanisms, particularly by examining empirical outcomes from institutions that adopt these frameworks.

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