



Why We Must Reject the Colonial Peer Review

Fiduciary-Epistemic Duties, Epistemic Agency, and Institutional Openness in the Age of Generative AI

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Abstract

In this paper, I critically examine traditional academic peer review systems as mechanisms perpetuating colonial epistemic structures. Drawing explicitly on fiduciary-epistemic theory, democratic epistemology (Anderson 2006), and my comparative analysis of constitutional and statutory governance frameworks across Germany, the United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands, and the United States, I argue that universities and institutional epistemic gatekeepers have clear moral, epistemic, and fiduciary obligations to proactively address testimonial and hermeneutical injustices. Traditional peer review processes, as I demonstrate, systematically marginalise multimodal, interdisciplinary, indigenous, and cognitively diverse scholarship, thus reinforcing epistemic homogenisation and structural epistemic injustice.

Through recent institutional controversies—such as the cases involving Kathleen Stock at Sussex, Arif Ahmed at Cambridge, the Sullivan Review, governance failures at the Oxford Union, and recent fiduciary governance gaps at Harvard—I highlight critical practical vulnerabilities and fiduciary accountability challenges within contemporary institutional structures. These examples underscore the urgency for explicit fiduciary reforms in peer review. Furthermore, I argue that the rapid rise of generative artificial intelligence (AI) presents urgent ethical and practical challenges inadequately addressed by existing peer review governance models.

In response, I propose a comprehensive epistemocratic governance model, explicitly integrating fiduciary transparency, distributed epistemic agency, multimodal epistemic inclusivity, and responsible AI oversight. Grounded in comparative legal analyses, institutional case studies, and my own scholarly framework of fiduciary epistemic duties, I urgently advocate fiduciary-informed institutional reforms as essential to achieving epistemic justice, scholarly autonomy, democratic epistemic inclusivity, and genuine epistemic openness within contemporary academia.

Keywords

peer review, epistemic colonialism, colonality of knowledge, fiduciary duties, epistemic justice, testimonial injustice, hermeneutical injustice, epistemic agency, multimodal scholarship, epistemic pluralism, generative AI, epistemocracy, responsible AI integration, institutional openness, epistemic governance, comparative legal analysis, democratic epistemology

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1. Peer Review and Colonial Epistemic Structures

1.1 Unpacking Coloniality in Peer Review

Traditional peer review, conventionally perceived as a cornerstone of scholarly legitimacy, is not merely an impartial mechanism ensuring research quality. Beneath its reputation for neutrality, I argue that peer review operates as an epistemic gatekeeping practice deeply entrenched within colonial structures of knowledge validation. Institutional peer review processes—conducted by universities, journals, repositories such as PhilPapers and JSTOR, publishers, and editorial boards—systematically privilege scholarship conforming to established Western disciplinary conventions. These epistemic forms typically emphasise textual, quantitative, and standardised methodologies, reinforcing epistemic hierarchies while marginalising multimodal, interdisciplinary, Indigenous, and non-Western epistemologies.

This systematic marginalisation manifests in two central forms of epistemic injustice: testimonial injustice, where the credibility of epistemic agents—particularly scholars employing marginalised or unconventional epistemologies—is unjustly discounted, and hermeneutical injustice, involving structural gaps in interpretive frameworks that prevent marginalised groups from meaningfully articulating their epistemic contributions and experiences {Fricker 2007; Medina 2013; Spivak 1988}.

In my work, I identify specific institutional practices by which peer review mechanisms reinforce colonial epistemic hierarchies. Firstly, they perpetuate an optocratic drift, whereby institutions increasingly evaluate scholarship primarily based on quantifiable metrics rather than epistemic quality or diversity. Secondly, peer review systems engage in fiducial hollowing, a phenomenon I describe as fiduciary responsibilities becoming superficial administrative procedures devoid of genuine epistemic accountability. Lastly, they foster epistemic domestication, a process through which epistemic plurality is standardised, simplified, and commodified, fitting diverse epistemic forms into institutional evaluation frameworks. Such domestication marginalises genuine epistemic autonomy and diversity, undermining scholarly integrity and reinforcing epistemic inequalities {Kahl, ‘Epistemic Gatekeepers and Epistemic Injustice by Design’ (2025); Kahl, “Foucault’s Dream: On the Domestication of Knowledge and Epistemic Subjugation” (2025)}.

Raewyn Connell critically assesses global university structures, highlighting how dominant Western institutions systematically exclude diverse epistemologies—especially those from the Global South—through peer review practices predominantly aligned with Northern epistemic traditions {Connell, *The Good University* (2019)}. Walter Mignolo similarly emphasises how colonial epistemic frameworks systematically marginalise subaltern knowledges, advocating for ‘border thinking’ as an essential shift away from colonial knowledge hierarchies towards genuine epistemic plurality and cognitive diversity {Mignolo 2012}. Additionally, Naude (2019) persuasively argues that non-Western epistemic and ethical frameworks, particularly Ubuntu ethics, offer transformative possibilities for countering epistemic marginalisation reinforced by colonial epistemic structures.

A clear practical illustration of these injustices is evident in the institutional treatment of Indigenous epistemologies within research evaluation processes. Janet Smylie demonstrates how Indigenous methodologies are systematically marginalised through institutional review practices that categorise diverse Aboriginal epistemic contributions under simplified pan-ethnic labels. This categorisation reinforces testimonial and hermeneutical injustices by obscuring the complexity, credibility, and autonomy of Indigenous epistemic practices {Smylie 2005}. Gloria Nziba Pindi (2020) similarly underscores how traditional academic gatekeeping systematically marginalises intercultural and performance-based epistemologies, reinforcing colonial epistemic hierarchies and suppressing diverse scholarly identities and voices.

Although some institutions and publishers, such as journals like Nature, have begun to embrace greater transparency by publishing peer review reports and author responses, transparency alone remains insufficient to dismantle underlying colonial epistemic structures. Without explicit structural fiduciary reforms—such as reviewer diversity initiatives, inclusive evaluation criteria accommodating multimodal and cognitively diverse epistemologies, and clearly defined fiduciary oversight roles—the fundamental epistemic injustices embedded within peer review persist. As Mignolo argues, genuine structural reform demands the institutional embedding of epistemic plurality, what he terms ‘border epistemology’, to effectively counteract epistemic marginalisation {Mignolo 2012}.

Thus, I argue that peer review must be recognised as an epistemic gatekeeping practice extending beyond mere scholarly quality control. Instead, it must encompass explicit fiduciary-epistemic responsibilities that ensure epistemic justice, openness, and genuine diversity. Acknowledging and actively dismantling peer review’s colonial epistemic structures constitutes an essential first step toward achieving epistemic pluralism, scholarly autonomy, and robust institutional integrity.

1.2 Problem Statement and Importance

In this paper, I address the central epistemic issue of colonial epistemic structures embedded within traditional academic peer review. Institutional peer review processes—conducted by universities, journals, publishers, and repositories such as PhilPapers and JSTOR—systematically marginalise diverse epistemic contributions, perpetuating testimonial injustice (the unfair discounting of scholars’ epistemic credibility) and hermeneutical injustice (structural exclusion of certain epistemologies from meaningful recognition). Furthermore, traditional peer review practices irrationally delegate scholars’ epistemic agency to anonymous institutional gatekeepers, assessing scholarship based on narrow, entrenched, and predominantly Western epistemic standards.

Addressing epistemic injustice in peer review systems is crucial for several reasons. First, epistemic marginalisation undermines scholarly autonomy, authenticity, and institutional legitimacy. Second, adherence to colonial epistemic practices restricts genuine epistemic pluralism, inhibiting scholarly innovation and institutional capacities to effectively address complex contemporary challenges. Third, epistemic injustices within peer review reinforce broader societal inequalities, as knowledge validated through colonial epistemic structures disproportionately shapes societal policies, educational curricula, and public discourse, thereby deepening systemic marginalisation. Mantz (2019) and Leonardo (2018) critique how institutional Eurocentrism perpetuates epistemic biases, exclusion, and colonial epistemic structures within scholarly evaluation processes. Settles et al (2021) demonstrate how institutional epistemic practices—such as traditional peer review and scholarly evaluation—systematically exclude and marginalise scholars of colour, devaluing their contributions and perpetuating testimonial injustice. This exclusion undermines institutional efforts toward epistemic pluralism and cognitive inclusivity, reinforcing the urgency of fiduciary-epistemic governance reforms.

The urgency of confronting colonial epistemic structures in peer review is heightened by contemporary developments—particularly the rapid emergence of generative artificial intelligence (AI). AI-assisted methodologies enable scholars to produce submissions at unprecedented rates, exacerbating existing backlogs and potentially rendering traditional peer review processes unsustainable. Such systemic delays threaten to intensify epistemic injustice, disproportionately marginalising innovative, multimodal, interdisciplinary, Indigenous, and cognitively diverse scholarship due to structural overload and entrenched institutional biases.

Equally crucial is the proactive accommodation of cognitive diversity within traditional peer review. Scholars whose cognitive and communicative modes differ significantly from prevailing institutional norms—often problematically labelled ‘neurodivergent’—frequently experience testimonial injustice, with their epistemic

contributions unjustly discounted based on form rather than substance. The continued use of such labels within peer review perpetuates epistemic violence, framing diverse cognitive experiences as deviations from presumed normative standards. Radcliffe (2017) demonstrates how institutional epistemic hierarchies marginalise Indigenous and cognitively diverse epistemologies, underscoring the necessity of proactive fiduciary governance to safeguard cognitive and epistemic diversity.

Antonia Darder's scholarship (2017; 2019) on decolonising methodologies and critical pedagogy further enriches this critique. Darder argues that traditional academic institutions reinforce epistemic subordination through exclusionary evaluation practices and epistemic hierarchies, marginalising subaltern and Indigenous epistemologies. Drawing from Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, Darder emphasises transformative institutional practices rooted in epistemic inclusion, care, and social justice—principles aligning closely with my fiduciary-epistemic governance framework. Similarly, Henry Giroux (2011) highlights institutional responsibilities to actively dismantle epistemic marginalisation through critical pedagogy, advocating institutional accountability, epistemic transparency, and active inclusion of diverse epistemologies within scholarly evaluation processes. Together, Darder and Giroux reinforce my argument that institutions must actively reform epistemic governance to foster genuine epistemic pluralism, social justice, and democratic inclusivity—principles at the heart of this paper.

Extending fiduciary theory into epistemic governance contexts, my recent scholarly analyses—'Directors' Epistemic Duties and Fiduciary Openness' (2025) and 'Epistemic Justice and Institutional Responsibility in Academia' (2025)—emphasise that institutional fiduciary responsibilities encompass epistemic duties, proactively safeguarding epistemic plurality, cognitive diversity, and scholarly autonomy. These works provide authoritative foundations for epistemic governance, extending fiduciary obligations beyond traditional legal frameworks (Frankel 2011; Barnett 2020).

Moreover, Elizabeth Anderson's democratic epistemology (2006) further reinforces the importance of transparency, epistemic openness, and inclusive governance structures within scholarly evaluation processes. Anderson's insights support my argument that democratic epistemic practices enhance institutional legitimacy, epistemic accountability, scholarly diversity, and cognitive inclusivity, directly countering the colonial epistemic injustices embedded within peer review.

1.3 Thesis Statement

In this paper, I argue that traditional academic peer review operates as a colonial epistemic gatekeeping practice, systematically marginalising multimodal, interdisciplinary, Indigenous, and cognitively diverse forms of knowledge. By irrationally delegating epistemic agency to anonymous institutional gatekeepers who enforce entrenched Western epistemic standards, peer review perpetuates both testimonial injustice—the unjust discounting of scholars' epistemic credibility—and hermeneutical injustice, involving structural exclusion of particular epistemologies from meaningful recognition. I contend these epistemic injustices constitute explicit breaches of fiduciary-epistemic responsibilities held by universities, academic journals, publishers, and repositories.

The growing integration of generative artificial intelligence (AI) into academic scholarship exacerbates these structural challenges. As AI-assisted submissions rapidly increase publication volumes, peer review backlogs grow more prolonged, disproportionately excluding innovative and diverse scholarship. Consequently, traditional peer review is becoming not only epistemically unjust but also practically unsustainable.

To effectively counter these epistemic and fiduciary challenges, I propose the adoption of an epistemic governance model. Explicitly grounded in fiduciary transparency, multimodal epistemic pluralism, cognitive inclusivity, and responsible AI integration, this model draws upon my recent scholarship—‘Directors’ Epistemic Duties and Fiduciary Openness’ (2025), ‘Epistemic Justice and Institutional Responsibility in Academia’ (2025), and Foucault’s Dream: On the Domestication of Knowledge and Epistemic Subjugation (2025)—and insights from democratic epistemology (Anderson 2006), critical pedagogy (Darder 2017, 2019; Giroux 2011), and decolonial theory (Mignolo 2012; Connell 2019).

By clearly embedding fiduciary oversight roles, structured epistemic audits, and inclusive epistemic governance mechanisms, the epistemic governance model I advocate aims to ensure authentic epistemic openness, epistemic justice, scholarly autonomy, and robust institutional integrity within contemporary academia.

1.4 Raz on the Irrationality of Delegating Epistemic Agency

Joseph Raz’s philosophical analysis provides valuable insights into the epistemic implications of delegating judgment and autonomy to external authorities. In *The Morality of Freedom* (1986), Raz argues that genuine autonomy requires individuals to maintain responsibility for their own judgments, beliefs, and evaluations. Delegating this responsibility to external authorities, according to Raz, is fundamentally irrational, as it undermines the necessary conditions for authentic autonomy and moral agency {Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* (1986)}. Although Raz does not explicitly employ the term ‘epistemic agency’, his analysis of autonomy supports my interpretation that scholars bear fundamental epistemic responsibilities towards truth, scholarly authenticity, and epistemic accountability.

In my view, traditional academic peer review exemplifies precisely this problematic delegation of epistemic judgment. Scholars submit their work to anonymous reviewers whose evaluations reflect entrenched institutional norms, conventions, and biases. Under this colonial epistemic practice, scholars relinquish their epistemic autonomy, conforming instead to externally defined criteria and expectations. Consequently, traditional peer review systematically transforms scholars from active epistemic agents into passive recipients of judgments made by gatekeepers whose authority rests largely on established institutional conventions rather than genuine epistemic pluralism.

This problematic delegation aligns closely with colonial epistemic traditions, historically characterised by externally imposed standards overriding individual or community-based epistemic agency. By perpetuating this irrational epistemic delegation, traditional peer review systems reproduce colonial structures, thereby undermining scholarly autonomy and institutional accountability, and reinforcing testimonial and hermeneutical injustices.

From a fiduciary-epistemic perspective, I argue that universities and other epistemic gatekeepers have a clear ethical and epistemic duty to protect scholars’ epistemic agency and intellectual autonomy. Traditional peer review models breach these fiduciary responsibilities by institutionalising irrational epistemic delegation. As I have previously demonstrated in my work ‘Epistemic Gatekeepers and Epistemic Injustice by Design’ (2025), such fiduciary breaches necessitate proactive institutional reform. Raz’s philosophical framework now reinforces and clarifies this urgency, providing a compelling rationale for transitioning institutional governance away from entrenched colonial epistemic practices toward the fiduciary model I advocate, one that actively safeguards epistemic pluralism, scholarly openness, and authentic epistemic autonomy.

1.5 Heidegger's Critique of Technological Enframing Applied to Peer Review

Martin Heidegger's analysis of technological enframing (*Gestell*) provides another valuable theoretical framework to critically examine colonial epistemic structures embedded within peer review. In *The Question Concerning Technology* (1977), Heidegger describes enframing as a mode of thinking that transforms entities—including knowledge and scholarship—into mere resources to be managed, quantified, and controlled according to institutional convenience and standardisation {Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology* (1977)}.

Applying Heidegger's concept to traditional peer review, I argue that peer review functions as an epistemic technology that systematically commodifies scholarly work, reducing inherently diverse and pluralistic epistemic contributions to standardised forms. Under the logic of enframing, peer review privileges quantifiable metrics, disciplinary conformity, and standardised epistemic formats, marginalising multimodal, interdisciplinary, Indigenous, and non-Western epistemologies.

Heidegger's critique highlights the epistemic alienation inherent within traditional peer review structures. By imposing rigid evaluative standards, peer review alienates scholars from authentic epistemic engagement, compelling conformity to externally imposed criteria and institutional norms. This institutional practice of epistemic domestication fundamentally contradicts Heidegger's concept of authenticity (*Eigentlichkeit*), which emphasises genuine, responsible, and autonomous epistemic engagement with diverse forms of knowledge.

Consequently, I argue that institutions operating under Heideggerian enframing perpetuate colonial epistemic structures within peer review, systematically marginalising diverse epistemologies and cognitive expressions. Heidegger's analysis thus provides a powerful philosophical rationale for reconsidering and actively dismantling the colonial epistemic frameworks embedded in traditional peer review practices. It further reinforces my call for academic institutions to embrace genuine epistemic pluralism and scholarly authenticity by adopting responsible fiduciary-epistemic reforms. These reforms should aim explicitly at transforming peer review into an open, inclusive, and accountable scholarly practice.

1.6 Generational Challenges: AI and the New Epistemic Landscape

Beyond philosophical critiques of peer review, contemporary developments—especially the rapid emergence of generative artificial intelligence (AI)—present significant practical and epistemic challenges to traditional peer review structures. A new generation of scholars, increasingly proficient in AI-assisted methodologies, is producing scholarship at unprecedented speeds and volumes. Traditional peer review processes, already under considerable strain with delays commonly spanning one to two years, risk becoming unsustainable as the proliferation of AI-generated scholarship exacerbates existing backlogs. Consequently, I argue that traditional peer review systems are increasingly incapable of effectively managing this unprecedented volume of scholarly outputs. As a result, innovative, multimodal, interdisciplinary, Indigenous, and cognitively diverse scholarship is likely to experience further marginalisation due to institutional overload and entrenched evaluative biases.

Moreover, contemporary epistemic challenges extend explicitly to issues of cognitive diversity. Scholars whose cognitive styles and communicative methods significantly differ from prevailing institutional norms—often problematically categorised as 'neurodivergent'—regularly face testimonial injustice. Their epistemic contributions are unjustly discounted due to institutional biases favouring conventional forms of scholarly communication rather than genuinely assessing the epistemic value of their scholarship. Continued reliance on such normative standards within peer review perpetuates epistemic marginalisation and entrenches epistemic violence by framing cognitive diversity as a form of deviation.

I therefore argue that institutions hold fiduciary-epistemic responsibilities to ensure that peer review practices evolve toward greater inclusivity and explicit recognition of cognitive diversity. Fiduciary governance frameworks must proactively accommodate diverse epistemic expressions, actively safeguarding cognitive pluralism and scholarly autonomy. Such reforms are particularly urgent given the rapid growth of AI-assisted scholarly production, where cognitive diversity and innovative epistemologies risk intensified marginalisation.

While fully open scholarly repositories have been proposed as potential solutions to epistemic marginalisation, they risk becoming vulnerable to misinformation, epistemic manipulation, or political interference without robust fiduciary oversight. Consequently, institutions must adopt structured fiduciary oversight mechanisms designed to balance epistemic openness with clear accountability, actively safeguarding the integrity and legitimacy of scholarly outputs, as I advocate explicitly in my recent scholarship, particularly in ‘Directors’ Epistemic Duties and Fiduciary Openness’ (2025) and ‘Epistemic Justice and Institutional Responsibility in Academia’ (2025).

Given these intersecting generational and epistemic challenges, I argue that universities and other epistemic gatekeepers must proactively integrate cognitive inclusivity, responsible AI oversight, and fiduciary transparency into comprehensive epistemocratic governance frameworks. These fiduciary-epistemic reforms in peer review will enable institutions to effectively navigate contemporary epistemic complexities, ensuring genuine epistemic justice, scholarly pluralism, and institutional integrity in an evolving scholarly landscape shaped increasingly by AI and diverse cognitive expressions.

1.7 Toward an Epistemocratic Response

Considering the philosophical critiques I have advanced drawing from Raz and Heidegger, and addressing contemporary epistemic and practical challenges posed by generative AI and cognitive diversity, I argue that traditional peer review is no longer tenable as an epistemic practice. In response, I propose epistemocracy, a transformative governance model explicitly designed to dismantle colonial epistemic structures embedded within traditional peer review, restore scholarly epistemic autonomy, and proactively manage emerging epistemic complexities. This model, which I introduced previously in my scholarly work ‘Epistemocracy in Higher Education’ (2025), directly counters epistemic injustice by integrating fiduciary accountability, epistemic pluralism, cognitive inclusivity, and responsible AI governance into institutional peer review mechanisms.

My epistemocratic model rests upon four foundational principles:

1. **Fiduciary Transparency:**

Institutions bear clear fiduciary responsibilities to safeguard epistemic pluralism and prevent epistemic marginalisation actively. Institutional peer review processes must be transparent, accountable, and responsive, effectively countering testimonial and hermeneutical injustices through open governance practices.

2. **Distributed Credibility:**

Rather than delegating epistemic judgment exclusively to anonymous reviewers or institutional gatekeepers, my epistemocratic framework promotes equitable distribution of epistemic agency and credibility among scholars, epistemic communities, and relevant stakeholders. This approach fosters epistemic autonomy, reduces reliance on entrenched institutional norms, and ensures genuine epistemic diversity.

3. **Multimodal Epistemic Plurality:**

Institutions explicitly recognise and actively support multimodal, interdisciplinary, Indigenous, and culturally diverse scholarship as epistemically legitimate. Epistemic governance resists epistemic homogenisation, actively cultivating authentic scholarly plurality and openness.

4. **Responsible AI Integration:**

Generative AI tools are integrated within clear fiduciary-epistemic frameworks, emphasising responsible human oversight and algorithmic accountability. This oversight actively safeguards epistemic justice, mitigates risks of algorithmic bias, and prevents AI-driven epistemic homogenisation and marginalisation.

However, epistemocracy requires a careful balance between scholarly openness and fiduciary accountability. While fully open scholarly repositories offer greater epistemic inclusivity, they risk becoming vulnerable to misinformation, epistemic manipulation, or political interference without robust fiduciary oversight. Explicit moderation mechanisms, fiduciary oversight roles, and clearly defined ethical-legal frameworks are thus essential to ensure epistemic integrity and institutional legitimacy.

To operationalise epistemocracy within institutional peer review practices, I propose concrete governance structures including:

- **Structured Epistemic Audits:**

Regular institutional assessments designed to proactively identify and address epistemic injustices, biases, or instances of epistemic marginalisation.

- **Dedicated Epistemic Oversight Roles:**

Clearly defined institutional roles, such as epistemic ombudspersons, explicitly tasked with fiduciary-epistemic accountability, transparency in review practices, and prompt ethical responses to epistemic grievances.

- **Transparent Evaluation Criteria:**

Clearly articulated criteria that explicitly accommodate multimodal, interdisciplinary, Indigenous, and cognitively diverse scholarship, aligned with fiduciary-epistemic principles and relevant legal-ethical standards (e.g., Equality Act 2010).

- **Community-Based Moderation and Peer Accountability:**

Active involvement of scholarly communities tasked with moderating and responding to epistemic misuse, manipulation, or misinformation, thereby promoting democratic, transparent, and accountable peer review governance.

By explicitly embedding these fiduciary-epistemic governance practices into institutional peer review processes, my epistemic model proactively addresses current and emerging epistemic challenges. This governance model actively safeguards scholarly autonomy, epistemic plurality, cognitive inclusivity, and institutional accountability, effectively dismantling colonial epistemic structures inherent in traditional peer review practices, and cultivating a genuinely inclusive scholarly landscape.

1.8 Contributions, Significance, and Originality

This paper offers several original scholarly contributions to current debates concerning colonial epistemic structures in peer review, epistemic justice, and fiduciary-epistemic governance. Its significance lies in both

theoretical clarity and practical applicability, specifically addressing epistemic injustices within traditional peer review practices and proposing transformative institutional reforms.

Key contributions include:

- **Critique of Colonial Epistemic Structures in Peer Review:**

The paper identifies traditional academic peer review as an institutionalised colonial epistemic practice. It systematically highlights how conventional peer review mechanisms perpetuate testimonial and hermeneutical injustices, marginalising multimodal, interdisciplinary, Indigenous, and cognitively diverse forms of scholarship.

- **Integration of Fiduciary Theory and Epistemic Justice:**

This work extends fiduciary ethics into epistemic governance contexts, presenting the novel concept of fiduciary-epistemic duties. Academic institutions are shown to hold fiduciary responsibilities to safeguard epistemic pluralism, cognitive inclusivity, scholarly autonomy, and institutional openness within peer review processes.

- **Philosophical Analysis of Epistemic Agency and Technological Enframing:**

By engaging with the philosophical frameworks of Joseph Raz and Martin Heidegger, this paper provides robust philosophical grounding for the critique of epistemic agency delegation and technological enframing within peer review. This analysis clarifies how traditional peer review structures undermine scholarly autonomy, authenticity, and epistemic integrity.

- **Forward-Looking Analysis of Generative AI in Peer Review:**

The paper explores generative AI's transformative impact on peer review processes, diagnosing emerging practical and epistemic challenges such as increased review backlogs, intensified marginalisation of innovative scholarship, and amplified epistemic injustices. In response, it proposes an epistemocratic governance model, designed to integrate responsible AI oversight within clearly articulated fiduciary frameworks, safeguarding epistemic pluralism and cognitive diversity.

The significance of this analysis lies in its rigorous theoretical clarity and practical applicability, diagnosing and addressing colonial epistemic injustices embedded within traditional peer review. By integrating fiduciary ethics, philosophical critiques, and practical governance solutions—particularly those addressing generative AI and cognitive diversity—this paper provides a comprehensive framework tailored to contemporary scholarly needs. Its proposed epistemocratic governance model offers institutions robust pathways toward epistemic justice, authentic scholarly plurality, democratic accountability, and institutional integrity, clearly positioning peer review as a site of transformative epistemic reform.

1.9 Methodology and Theoretical Framework

In this paper, I employ a conceptual, analytical, and comparative interdisciplinary methodology. My approach integrates philosophical analysis, fiduciary governance theory, epistemic justice frameworks, comparative legal analysis, multimodal epistemologies, and institutional critique, explicitly addressing the colonial epistemic structures embedded within traditional academic peer review.

My theoretical framework draws upon five core scholarly areas:

Fiduciary Ethics and Epistemic Justice

I integrate fiduciary-epistemic theory with Miranda Fricker’s epistemic justice framework (*Epistemic Injustice*, 2007), focusing on testimonial and hermeneutical injustices. Building upon my previous works, particularly ‘Directors’ Epistemic Duties and Fiduciary Openness’ (2025) and ‘Epistemic Justice and Institutional Responsibility in Academia’ (2025), I emphasise the fiduciary obligations institutions hold toward safeguarding epistemic plurality, cognitive diversity, and scholarly autonomy within peer review governance frameworks. Comparative fiduciary obligations derived from statutory and constitutional instruments across multiple jurisdictions—including Germany’s Basic Law (Grundgesetz), the UK’s Equality Act 2010 and Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, France’s LPR 2020, the Netherlands’ WHW, and the US ADA—provide clear comparative depth for my analysis.

Philosophical Critiques of Epistemic Agency and Technological Enframing

Philosophical perspectives from Joseph Raz (*The Morality of Freedom*, 1986) and Martin Heidegger (*The Question Concerning Technology*, 1977) illuminate epistemic injustices arising from irrational epistemic delegation and technological enframing within traditional peer review. This philosophical grounding helps clarify how institutionalised epistemic structures compromise scholarly autonomy, reinforcing epistemic marginalisation and perpetuating colonial epistemic injustices, as I articulate in my analysis.

Critical Scholarship on Epistemic Pluralism and Decoloniality

Theoretical insights from Walter Mignolo (2012), Zeus Leonardo (2018), Frank Mantz (2019), Kamna Patel and Romola Sanyal (2024), Raewyn Connell (2019), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988), Bruno Latour (1993), and Donna Haraway (1988) inform my critique of epistemic homogenisation, Eurocentrism, epistemic racialisation, and coloniality in contemporary peer review practices. These scholars clearly illustrate how institutional epistemic gatekeeping marginalises multimodal, interdisciplinary, Indigenous, and cognitively diverse scholarship, reinforcing colonial epistemic structures.

Comparative Legal Analysis of Fiduciary Governance

My methodological approach includes a comparative legal analysis of statutory and constitutional frameworks governing fiduciary-epistemic obligations in higher education. This analysis clarifies how clearly defined fiduciary obligations—or their absence—impact institutional accountability, epistemic justice outcomes, and scholarly autonomy. Comparative legal analysis across jurisdictions thus clarifies practical strengths and weaknesses in institutional governance for addressing epistemic injustices within peer review.

Multimodal Epistemologies and Original Case Studies

To ground theoretical insights practically and innovatively, I integrate multimodal epistemological case studies drawn from my own scholarly works:

- ‘Dalf’s Dream’ (Kahl 2025)
- ‘Who is Afraid of Free-Range Knowledge?’ (Kahl 2025)
- ‘On Canine Knowing’ (Kahl 2025)

These original multimodal studies clearly illustrate how testimonial and hermeneutical injustices are perpetuated by the marginalisation of multimodal, interdisciplinary, Indigenous, and cognitively diverse scholarship. They demonstrate methodological innovation by highlighting epistemic violence embedded within traditional peer review mechanisms. Additionally, Janet Smylie’s (2005) analysis reinforces my critique by illustrating the institutional marginalisation of Indigenous epistemologies, underscoring the urgent necessity of epistemic governance reforms to counter colonial epistemic biases.

My methodological approach also incorporates institutional critique by examining real-world peer review practices, fiduciary governance frameworks, and concrete scenarios of epistemic marginalisation and testimonial injustice—such as those documented in recent OCR findings against Harvard University (OCR Complaint No 01-24-2155, 2025). By integrating conceptual clarity, philosophical rigour, comparative legal analysis, multimodal epistemologies, and practical applicability, I propose fiduciary-epistemic governance reforms specifically tailored to proactively address epistemic challenges posed by generative AI, cognitive diversity, and colonial epistemic structures within peer review.

This clearly structured methodological and theoretical framework thus advances scholarly discourse on epistemic justice, fiduciary accountability, democratic epistemic pluralism, multimodal epistemologies, and transformative institutional reforms designed to dismantle colonial epistemic injustices embedded within traditional academic peer review practices.

2. Fiduciary-Epistemic Duties – Institutional Accountability and Responsibility

2.1 Defining Fiduciary Duties in the Epistemic Context

Fiduciary duty refers to an obligation to act in the best interests of another party, guided by principles of loyalty, care, transparency, and accountability (Frankel, *Fiduciary Law* (2011)). Emerging initially within legal and corporate contexts, fiduciary principles emphasise that individuals entrusted with authority must prioritise beneficiaries’ interests above personal convenience or institutional expediency. Ronald Barnett’s concept of the ‘ecological university’ (2020) reinforces these fiduciary obligations by highlighting universities’ responsibilities to actively nurture diverse knowledge ecosystems, institutional openness, and epistemic sustainability.

In academia, fiduciary principles naturally extend into the epistemic realm. Universities and scholarly institutions, I argue, serve as fiduciary custodians of the epistemic commons—a collective resource encompassing diverse epistemologies, perspectives, methodologies, and traditions. As previously articulated in my scholarship, particularly in ‘Directors’ Epistemic Duties and Fiduciary Openness’ (2025) and ‘Epistemic Justice and Institutional Responsibility in Academia’ (2025), institutions hold clear fiduciary-epistemic responsibilities to proactively steward epistemic diversity, pluralism, cognitive inclusivity, and scholarly autonomy. These obligations extend beyond traditional legal definitions, explicitly encompassing the proactive safeguarding of epistemic openness and institutional integrity (Frankel 2011; Barnett 2020).

Epistemic fiduciary duties thus require institutions to function not merely as passive administrators, but as active guardians fostering epistemic justice, openness, and autonomy. Institutional practices—particularly peer review and scholarly evaluation—must actively uphold scholars’ epistemic autonomy, enabling independent judgment and authentic epistemic agency. Raewyn Connell (2019) underscores universities’ fiduciary responsibility to dismantle global epistemic inequalities by recognising and legitimising diverse epistemologies

historically marginalised by Northern academic structures. Connell advocates for active institutional efforts to democratise and redistribute epistemic resources, thereby promoting genuine inclusivity.

Antonia Darder's scholarship (2017; 2019), explicitly building on Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, further reinforces my argument that transformative epistemic inclusion requires institutions to actively challenge entrenched epistemic hierarchies. Darder highlights methodologies explicitly grounded in social justice, love, and critical consciousness as essential for addressing epistemic marginalisation and coloniality effectively.

Framing universities as fiduciary trustees of the epistemic commons thus clearly articulates their ethical and epistemic responsibilities. Explicit fiduciary-epistemic stewardship proactively addresses epistemic injustice, counters irrational delegation of epistemic agency, and actively promotes scholarly diversity, autonomy, and institutional integrity. In doing so, it provides a robust theoretical foundation for epistemic governance reforms aimed explicitly at dismantling colonial epistemic structures within peer review contexts. Consequently, this fiduciary framework advances epistemic pluralism, democratic inclusivity, and institutional accountability.

2.2 Epistemic Justice: Institutional Obligations

In my analysis, the fiduciary obligations of scholarly institutions are fundamentally grounded in the concept of epistemic justice, a theoretical framework articulated prominently by Miranda Fricker. According to Fricker, epistemic justice involves ensuring fair and equitable participation in epistemic practices—specifically, avoiding and rectifying systematic injustices related to knowledge production, evaluation, and dissemination (Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice* (2007)).

Fricker distinguishes two primary forms of epistemic injustice: testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice. Testimonial injustice occurs when an epistemic agent's credibility is unfairly undervalued or dismissed due to prejudicial stereotypes or institutional biases. Hermeneutical injustice emerges from structural gaps in collective interpretive resources, preventing certain groups from articulating or meaningfully understanding their experiences within dominant epistemic frameworks.

Both forms of injustice are particularly evident within traditional peer review practices. Institutions employing restrictive epistemic criteria—predominantly textual, disciplinary, quantifiable, and institutionally familiar—systematically marginalise alternative epistemic forms, including interdisciplinary, multimodal, Indigenous, or culturally situated knowledges.

In my previous scholarly work, notably 'Epistemic Justice and Institutional Responsibility in Academia' (2025), I outlined a fiduciary-epistemic framework explicitly underscoring institutions' fiduciary responsibilities to actively counteract testimonial and hermeneutical injustices. Such responsibilities involve explicitly adopting evaluation processes that validate diverse epistemic contributions, respect epistemic autonomy, and foster authentic scholarly pluralism.

Accordingly, I argue that institutional fiduciary obligations necessitate active measures to prevent epistemic marginalisation. Scholarly institutions must establish governance structures and evaluation criteria explicitly grounded in epistemic justice principles. These institutional practices proactively counter the epistemic injustices embedded within traditional peer review mechanisms, safeguarding authenticity, autonomy, and legitimacy within scholarly epistemic practices.

2.3 Hermeneutical and Testimonial Injustices in Current Peer review

Miranda Fricker distinguishes two primary forms of epistemic injustice: testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice. Testimonial injustice occurs when an epistemic agent's credibility is unfairly discounted or dismissed, often due to prejudice or entrenched institutional biases. Hermeneutical injustice arises from structural gaps in collective interpretive resources, preventing certain groups from effectively articulating or interpreting their experiences {Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice* (2007)}. I argue that current peer review practices actively perpetuate both forms of epistemic injustice by systematically marginalising specific types of knowledge.

Testimonial injustice frequently manifests when peer reviewers undervalue or dismiss scholarship because it diverges from established disciplinary standards or traditional representational forms. For example, multimodal, interdisciplinary, Indigenous, or non-Western epistemologies often face undue scepticism or outright rejection within institutional peer review processes. This systematic marginalisation is clearly illustrated in research involving Canada's Aboriginal populations. Janet Smylie (2005) demonstrates how Indigenous epistemologies and methodologies were marginalised due to inadequate consultation and superficial engagement with Indigenous communities. Categorising diverse Aboriginal experiences under simplified pan-ethnic labels exemplifies testimonial injustice, unjustly denying credibility, autonomy, and nuance to Indigenous epistemic contributions {Smylie, 'The Ethics of Research Involving Canada's Aboriginal Populations' (2005)}.

Hermeneutical injustice is equally evident within traditional peer review. Institutional evaluation frameworks regularly fail to recognise or interpret epistemic contributions that do not fit neatly within established scholarly conventions. For instance, multimodal scholarship—such as visual, poetic, or culturally situated research methodologies—is often structurally excluded because it lacks recognisable disciplinary frameworks or familiar evaluative criteria. Such systematic exclusion denies entire epistemic traditions the interpretive resources necessary to meaningfully articulate and evaluate their contributions, perpetuating hermeneutical injustice.

These injustices directly align with Raz's critique of epistemic delegation (Section 1.4), highlighting that traditional peer review imposes externally defined evaluative frameworks, compelling scholars toward conformity rather than fostering authentic intellectual autonomy. Heidegger's analysis of technological enframing (Section 1.5) further elucidates how institutional peer review processes reduce scholarly inquiry into standardised, institutionally manageable forms, systematically marginalising authentic epistemic engagement and diversity.

In my earlier work, particularly 'Directors' Epistemic Duties and Fiduciary Openness' (2025) and 'Epistemic Justice and Institutional Responsibility in Academia' (2025), I explicitly advocate that to effectively address testimonial and hermeneutical injustices, institutions must proactively rethink traditional peer review mechanisms. Institutions must actively foster conditions that respect scholars' epistemic autonomy, promote genuine epistemic diversity, and uphold explicit fiduciary responsibilities toward epistemic openness, transparency, and cognitive inclusivity.

3. Multimodal Epistemologies as Resistance

3.1 Multimodality as Authentic Epistemic Engagement

In this paper, I position multimodal epistemologies as scholarly practices actively resisting epistemic domestication and colonial structures of knowledge validation. Unlike traditional textual, disciplinary, or

quantitative scholarship, multimodal approaches incorporate visual, poetic, performative, embodied, and culturally specific methods of knowledge production. By recognising diverse modes of knowledge creation and expression, multimodal scholarship highlights the inherent plurality of epistemic practices.

Institutional peer review processes typically prioritise conventional scholarly formats, systematically marginalising forms of knowledge production that diverge from established norms. Multimodal scholarship directly confronts this institutional homogenisation by advocating epistemic autonomy, cognitive inclusivity, and genuine epistemic diversity. Through this resistance, multimodal epistemologies actively counter testimonial injustice (the unfair discounting of scholars' credibility) and hermeneutical injustice (structural exclusion of certain epistemologies from meaningful institutional recognition).

Raewyn Connell's (2019) critique of global academic monocultures further supports my position on the necessity of multimodal epistemologies. Connell demonstrates how dominant university structures privilege Western knowledge traditions while marginalising diverse epistemic forms—particularly from the Global South and alternative scholarly traditions. Such institutional monocultures perpetuate epistemic inequality and reinforce colonial hierarchies of knowledge production. Multimodal epistemologies directly challenge these entrenched institutional practices, proactively advocating epistemic pluralism, democratisation of knowledge, and equitable recognition of diverse scholarly contributions {Connell 2019}.

Beyond methodological diversity alone, multimodal epistemologies hold broader significance for epistemic justice. They legitimise and validate forms of knowledge typically undervalued or overlooked by traditional peer review systems. Such validation is crucial for overcoming epistemic marginalisation and ensuring genuine inclusivity within scholarly communities.

From a fiduciary-epistemic perspective, institutions bear clear obligations to uphold epistemic plurality and autonomy. Recognising and actively supporting multimodal epistemologies constitutes a practical and ethical imperative aligned with the fiduciary responsibilities institutions hold toward scholars and epistemic communities. Thus, multimodal scholarship is not merely methodological innovation; it embodies active epistemic resistance, promoting fiduciary transparency, distributed credibility, and cognitive inclusivity—as demonstrated through my multimodal scholarly works, such as 'Dalf's Dream' (2025), 'Who is Afraid of Free-Range Knowledge?' (2025), and 'On Canine Knowing' (2025).

Further practical strategies can enhance epistemic pluralism. For example, encouraging scholars to publish or cross-post their multimodal scholarship—in institutional repositories, personal websites, or alternative open platforms such as GitHub—can significantly expand visibility and accessibility. GitHub's open structure exemplifies resistance to epistemic domestication, enabling scholars to share diverse epistemic contributions outside conventional institutional gatekeeping frameworks. Such practices decentralise scholarly dissemination, thereby promoting broader epistemic access and diverse scholarly contributions. In doing so, these strategies strengthen scholarly autonomy, epistemic justice, and institutional accountability.

In sum, multimodal epistemologies constitute authentic epistemic engagement. By actively addressing testimonial and hermeneutical injustices, these practices align institutional scholarship with epistemic principles, proactively promoting scholarly autonomy, epistemic diversity, and robust institutional integrity.

3.2 Case Studies from Original Multimodal Scholarship

To illustrate how multimodal epistemologies effectively challenge epistemic injustice and institutional gatekeeping, I briefly discuss three original multimodal scholarly works I authored. Each demonstrates

multimodal epistemic resistance, incorporating linguistic diversity, visual representation, and diverse forms of scholarly expression.

Dalí's Dream (Kahl 2025)

In “Dalí's Dream”, I critique epistemic domestication using poetic, visual, and multilingual epistemologies, published in four languages: Catalan, Castilian Spanish, French, and English. This linguistic diversity challenges institutional epistemic homogenisation, validating epistemic plurality inherent in linguistic and cultural expression. The visual illustration included in the work further enriches multimodal scholarly engagement, reinforcing resistance to traditional institutional marginalisation and illustrating how diverse epistemic forms can be effectively integrated within scholarly communication.

On Canine Knowing (Kahl 2025)

In ‘On Canine Knowing’, I explore interspecies epistemologies through embodied, multimodal, and multilingual scholarship, published in three languages. This linguistic plurality explicitly reinforces epistemic diversity and resists anthropocentric epistemic homogenisation. Additionally, the visual illustration featured in this work conveys epistemic symbolism, clearly supporting the multimodal approach and reinforcing resistance to conventional scholarly evaluation norms.

Who is Afraid of Free-Range Knowledge? (Kahl 2025)

In ‘Who is Afraid of Free-Range Knowledge?’, I present a monolingual (English) multimodal critique of institutional epistemic domestication. Combining visual, poetic, and interdisciplinary epistemic expressions, this work exemplifies active resistance to epistemic homogenisation. Its visual illustration complements textual analysis, further advocating scholarly autonomy, epistemic plurality, and the adoption of inclusive evaluation criteria within academic institutions.

Together, these case studies illustrate how multimodal epistemologies—including linguistic diversity and visual representation—counter institutional epistemic domestication and injustice. Each of my works embodies epistemic pluralism, cognitive inclusivity, and fiduciary-epistemic accountability, aligning directly with the epistemocratic governance frameworks I propose in this paper.

3.3 Resistance to Epistemic Homogenisation: Theoretical Foundations

Multimodal epistemologies constitute a critical form of resistance to epistemic homogenisation within academic institutions. Two influential theoretical perspectives—those of Bruno Latour and Donna Haraway—provide foundational support for my argument about the necessity of appreciating epistemic plurality and cognitive diversity in scholarly practices.

In his critique of modernist epistemology, Bruno Latour challenges the rigid and reductionist tendencies of conventional scientific and academic methods. Latour argues that modernist epistemic frameworks impose artificial separations among disciplines, forms of knowledge, and modes of expression, systematically marginalising diverse, hybrid scholarly approaches. He advocates recognising the inherent plurality and complexity of knowledge production and encourages resistance to restrictive epistemic standards that discount unconventional epistemologies (Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, 1993). Latour's critique aligns with multimodal epistemologies by validating diverse scholarly forms and interdisciplinary approaches—such as poetic, visual, and embodied scholarship—thereby promoting authentic epistemic pluralism and cognitive diversity.

Donna Haraway’s influential concept of ‘situated knowledges’ similarly emphasises the partial, embodied, and context-specific nature of knowledge production. Haraway explicitly critiques claims to universal or neutral objectivity, arguing instead that knowledge arises from embodied positions, experiences, and specific contexts of epistemic agents {Haraway, ‘Situated Knowledges’, 1988}. Multimodal epistemologies embody Haraway’s perspective by validating diverse epistemic positions and culturally situated methodologies. Such multimodal approaches actively resist institutional homogenisation by highlighting that scholarly knowledge is inherently diverse, embodied, and context-dependent.

My multimodal scholarship—such as “Dali’s Dream” (2025), ‘Who is Afraid of Free-Range Knowledge?’ (2025) and ‘On Canine Knowing’ (2025)—clearly illustrates Haraway’s situated knowledges and Latour’s epistemic pluralism by embracing diverse modes of scholarly expression. These multimodal epistemic practices foreground embodied, multilingual, and culturally specific knowledge production, effectively resisting institutional epistemic domestication and promoting genuine epistemic diversity.

Together, Latour and Haraway provide robust theoretical foundations supporting multimodal epistemologies as authentic forms of epistemic resistance. Their insights reinforce my argument that academic institutions hold fiduciary responsibilities to actively support epistemic pluralism, scholarly autonomy, and cognitive inclusivity. Building upon these theoretical perspectives, I advocate the explicit development of governance structures aligned with epistemic principles, promoting epistemic justice and robust institutional accountability. The practical institutional implications of these theoretical foundations will be explored in detail in the following sections.

3.4 Practical Institutional Implications for Multimodal Epistemic Practices

To genuinely adopt multimodal epistemologies, academic institutions—including universities, scholarly journals, publishers, and knowledge repositories—must implement practical changes in governance structures and peer review practices. Institutions hold clear fiduciary responsibilities toward epistemic pluralism, inclusivity, and justice. Accordingly, several institutional measures are necessary to fulfill these obligations:

Recognition and Validation of Multimodal Scholarship

Institutions must actively recognise multimodal scholarship—including visual, poetic, performative, embodied, and culturally situated methods—as legitimate and valuable epistemic contributions. Practical measures should include clearly articulated evaluation criteria specifically designed for multimodal research. Editorial guidelines, publication platforms, and academic assessments, such as tenure and promotion criteria, should explicitly value these diverse forms of scholarship equally. Raewyn Connell advocates institutional structures that democratically embrace and validate diverse epistemologies, reinforcing the necessity of multimodal recognition as integral to broader institutional accountability toward epistemic justice {Connell, *The Good University: What Universities Actually Do and Why It’s Time for Radical Change* (Zed Books 2019)}.

Fiduciary Oversight and Governance

Effective governance requires robust fiduciary oversight mechanisms. Institutions should establish structured epistemic audits—regular institutional reviews designed to identify and proactively address biases or epistemic injustices within existing evaluation practices. Appointing dedicated epistemic oversight roles, such as epistemic ombudspersons, can ensure accountability, transparency, and timely responses to concerns regarding epistemic marginalisation or testimonial injustice. This governance approach aligns directly with fiduciary duties

articulated in my earlier works, particularly in {“Directors’ Epistemic Duties and Fiduciary Openness” (Kahl 2025)}.

Inclusive Moderation and Reviewer Training

Given the rise of generative AI and increasing scholarly outputs, institutions must develop inclusive moderation mechanisms within peer review processes. Moderation guidelines and reviewer training programmes should promote awareness of epistemic diversity, cognitive inclusivity, and potential implicit biases. These moderation strategies are essential for safeguarding scholarship against misinformation, epistemic manipulation, and potential geopolitical interference—especially within open scholarly repositories.

Cross-posting and Decentralised Knowledge Repositories

Institutions should encourage scholars to cross-post or openly publish research across multiple platforms, including institutional repositories, personal websites, and alternative platforms such as GitHub. Such practices actively decentralise scholarly dissemination, enhance visibility, and promote inclusive access to diverse forms of scholarship. Institutional policies should explicitly support cross-posting and decentralised publication as part of broader epistemic governance strategies, actively resisting epistemic domestication and institutional gatekeeping.

Legal and Ethical Alignment

Institutional epistemic governance practices must align with relevant legal and ethical standards. In the UK, for example, the Equality Act 2010 explicitly requires universities to promote equality, protecting cognitive diversity and inclusivity. By clearly integrating ethical and legal standards within governance policies, institutions can ensure accountability, legal compliance, and effective protection of scholars from epistemic injustice {Equality Act 2010}.

By embedding these practical governance measures within institutional structures, I argue that academic institutions can meaningfully foster epistemic justice, cognitive inclusivity, and scholarly autonomy. This clearly aligns with the epistemic principles outlined earlier in my argument. Multimodal epistemologies, supported by practical fiduciary reforms, therefore represent a robust pathway toward achieving genuine epistemic plurality, integrity, and responsible academic governance.

4. Institutional Fiduciary Governance—Comparative Perspectives

4.1 Introduction: Fiduciary Governance and Epistemic Justice

As previously established, I argue that traditional peer review functions as a colonial epistemic structure, systematically marginalising diverse forms of knowledge through testimonial and hermeneutical injustices. Accordingly, I contend that academic institutions—universities, scholarly journals, publishers, and repositories—hold fiduciary-epistemic responsibilities to actively safeguard epistemic plurality, cognitive inclusivity, and scholarly autonomy within peer review practices.

While fiduciary-epistemic obligations apply broadly across academia, I acknowledge that their practical implementation within peer review varies significantly across jurisdictions. This variability arises due to diverse statutory frameworks, institutional cultures, and governance traditions. To clearly understand implications for

reforming colonial peer review practices, I now undertake a concise comparative analysis of fiduciary-epistemic governance structures relevant to peer review in selected jurisdictions: the United Kingdom, Netherlands, France, Germany, and the United States.

Through this comparative analysis, I explicitly aim to identify practical strengths, critical limitations, and clear fiduciary governance measures directly relevant to addressing epistemic injustice and colonial epistemic structures embedded within traditional peer review. These insights will directly inform concrete institutional recommendations (Section 4.8), explicitly guiding actionable fiduciary-epistemic reforms toward genuinely inclusive, pluralistic, and accountable peer review processes.

4.2 United Kingdom: Statutory Precision and Fiduciary Governance in Peer Review

Statutory Basis for Fiduciary-Epistemic Duties

The United Kingdom provides a robust statutory framework for fiduciary-epistemic governance through the Equality Act 2010 and the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023. The Equality Act requires universities to make ‘reasonable adjustments’ to support cognitive diversity and epistemic plurality, directly addressing testimonial injustice (unfair discounting of scholars’ epistemic credibility) and hermeneutical injustice (structural marginalisation of diverse epistemologies) [Equality Act 2010, s 20, Schedule 13 para 4]. The Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act further mandates institutions to proactively safeguard academic freedom and diverse scholarly perspectives [Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023].

Institutional Implementation and Peer Review Challenges

Despite clear statutory foundations, I argue that institutional compliance within UK peer review practices remains inconsistent and predominantly reactive. Recent controversies highlight substantial gaps between statutory duties and practical fiduciary governance:

- **University of Sussex (Kathleen Stock, 2021–2025):**
In March 2025, the Office for Students (OfS) fined Sussex £585,000 for failing to adequately protect academic freedom and epistemic diversity during the Kathleen Stock controversy. Reactive governance exacerbated testimonial injustice, clearly highlighting systemic vulnerabilities caused by insufficient fiduciary oversight. Consequently, the OfS required proactive reviews of epistemic governance policies across UK universities [Turner 2025; BBC News 2025; Times Higher Education 2025].
- **University of Cambridge (Arif Ahmed, 2020–2023):**
Debates concerning academic freedom, prominently led by Professor Arif Ahmed, resulted in substantial policy amendments at Cambridge. Yet initial institutional resistance clearly illustrated fiduciary governance shortcomings, underscoring the necessity of structured oversight roles to proactively safeguard epistemic pluralism [Ahmed 2023; Times Higher Education 2023].
- **Sullivan Review on Sex and Gender Data (2025):**
Professor Alice Sullivan’s Independent Review attracted criticism from advocacy groups and Parliament for methodological biases and epistemic exclusions. Parliamentary debates questioned the review’s epistemic legitimacy, reflecting how unclear governance structures can perpetuate epistemic injustice. These findings reinforce the urgent need for structured epistemic audits and fiduciary oversight [Sullivan 2025; HC Deb 25 March 2025; TransActual 2025]. Mantz’s (2019) critique of Eurocentrism similarly

highlights how implicit institutional practices embed epistemic injustices within scholarly evaluation processes.

- **Oxford Union Controversies (2023–2025):**

Recent governance failures during debates at the Oxford Union revealed fiduciary accountability risks and epistemic governance vulnerabilities. AFComm documented potential legal liabilities stemming from inadequate oversight, underscoring the necessity of proactive fiduciary mechanisms and explicit institutional guidelines {AFComm 2025; Cherwell 2023; Young 2023}. Leonardo (2018) and Patel and Sanyal (2024) further emphasise how colonial epistemic structures shape institutional practices, resulting in systemic epistemic marginalisation.

Connection to Colonial Epistemic Structures in Peer Review

Collectively, these UK cases illustrate institutional failures consistent with colonial epistemic structures inherent in traditional peer review. The Stock and Sullivan controversies exemplify how epistemic marginalisation arises when institutions fail to proactively uphold fiduciary-epistemic responsibilities. Reactive governance mirrors traditional peer review's reliance on exclusionary epistemic standards, perpetuating systemic testimonial and hermeneutical injustices. Likewise, Cambridge's Arif Ahmed controversy and Oxford Union governance failures demonstrate how insufficient fiduciary oversight systematically silences diverse epistemic perspectives, reinforcing colonial epistemic gatekeeping. Mantz (2019) and Leonardo (2018) support these findings, highlighting how institutional epistemic biases reinforce Eurocentric dominance and epistemic homogenisation.

Critical Assessment and Recommendations

While the UK's statutory framework provides strong legal foundations for safeguarding epistemic plurality, cognitive inclusivity, and scholarly autonomy in peer review, I find practical implementation gaps remain significant. These institutional controversies underline the urgency of fiduciary-epistemic governance reforms, aligning with Patel and Sanyal's (2024) and Mignolo's (2012) calls for transformative epistemic practices and subaltern epistemologies. Institutions must establish structured fiduciary oversight roles (e.g., epistemic ombudspersons), conduct regular epistemic audits explicitly tailored to peer review, and develop clear fiduciary guidelines and mandatory training informed by these comparative insights and my own scholarly frameworks ('Directors' Epistemic Duties and Fiduciary Openness', Kahl 2025; 'Epistemic Justice and Institutional Responsibility in Academia', Kahl 2025).

Thus, the UK's statutory precision provides a comparative benchmark, underscoring the necessity of robust institutional governance mechanisms to proactively dismantle colonial epistemic injustices embedded within traditional peer review practices.

4.3 Netherlands: Fiduciary Risks for Peer Review under Statutory Minimalism

In contrast to the explicit statutory framework exemplified by the UK's Equality Act, the Netherlands employs a minimalist statutory model under the Dutch Higher Education and Research Act (WHW). This minimalist approach grants universities significant institutional autonomy but provides limited statutory guidance regarding epistemic inclusivity, cognitive diversity, and peer review practices {WHW 1992, arts 1.3, 1.9, 9.15}. While such autonomy ostensibly promotes academic freedom, I argue that it also creates substantial fiduciary risks due to ambiguous accountability mechanisms, potentially perpetuating colonial epistemic biases and marginalisation.

Institutional Risks in Peer Review: The Susanne Täuber Case

The 2023 dismissal of Dr Susanne Täuber from the University of Groningen exemplifies these fiduciary vulnerabilities. Dr Täuber, whose scholarship critically examined institutional diversity and inclusion practices, was dismissed under circumstances widely perceived as retaliatory for her epistemic critiques. Institutional statements emphasised managerial autonomy permitted by the WHW framework, implicitly justifying actions without adequate fiduciary oversight. This incident illustrates how minimalist statutory guidance can reinforce epistemic marginalisation and testimonial injustice within peer review and scholarly evaluations {NL Times 2023; Kahl, ‘Epistemic Justice and Institutional Responsibility in Academia’ (2025)}.

Critical Assessment of Fiduciary Accountability in Peer Review

While statutory minimalism under the WHW provides institutions with flexibility to shape governance frameworks, the absence of clearly defined fiduciary-epistemic obligations creates significant accountability gaps within peer review contexts. Without explicit statutory duties, fiduciary accountability depends heavily upon institutional culture and individual leadership, increasing the risks of epistemic injustice. Leonardo (2018) argues that epistemic homogenisation evident in curricula and scholarly evaluation practices reflects deeply embedded colonial epistemic frameworks. Mantz (2019) similarly demonstrates how Eurocentric epistemic standards, ingrained within institutional curricula and evaluation mechanisms, perpetuate the marginalisation of diverse epistemologies.

Radcliffe’s (2017) examination of epistemic coloniality in relation to indigeneity and knowledge production further emphasises that without clear fiduciary mandates and proactive institutional oversight, marginalisation of diverse epistemologies remains institutionally entrenched. This analysis aligns closely with the Groningen case, highlighting how minimalist governance structures directly contribute to ongoing epistemic injustice.

To effectively mitigate these epistemic injustices, fiduciary governance reforms are essential within Dutch peer review contexts. Institutions must introduce structured fiduciary oversight roles (such as epistemic ombudspersons), implement regular epistemic audits tailored specifically for peer review processes, and articulate clear institutional guidelines explicitly protecting multimodal, interdisciplinary, Indigenous, and cognitively diverse scholarship. Such governance measures are critical in ensuring fiduciary accountability within the WHW’s minimalist statutory framework, as I have argued previously in ‘Directors’ Epistemic Duties and Fiduciary Openness’ (2025).

In comparison to the UK’s statutory precision (Section 4.2), the Netherlands’ minimalist approach illustrates the necessity of clearly defined fiduciary governance mechanisms to effectively address colonial epistemic injustices embedded within traditional peer review practices.

4.4 France: Ambiguity and Fiduciary Risks in Peer Review

In contrast to the statutory clarity seen in the UK and the minimalist autonomy observed in the Netherlands, France adopts an ambiguous statutory approach through its recent Research Programming Law (Loi de Programmation de la Recherche, LPR 2020). While broadly recognising inclusive institutional practices, the LPR provides limited fiduciary guidance regarding epistemic justice, cognitive diversity, or multimodal epistemologies relevant to peer review {LPR 2020, arts 3–5}. I argue that this statutory ambiguity undermines fiduciary accountability, leaving institutions vulnerable to reactive governance and heightened risks of epistemic injustice—consistent with Mantz’s (2019) critique of Eurocentric institutional structures and epistemic gatekeeping in scholarly contexts.

Institutional Risks Illustrated: The Grenoble Controversy

The risks arising from statutory ambiguity were clearly demonstrated during the 2021 controversy at Sciences Po Grenoble (L'affaire Grenoble). Initially centred on scholarly definitions and usage of terms such as 'Islamophobia', this dispute escalated into significant public controversy and disciplinary actions. Institutional responses exposed fiduciary accountability gaps, with governance measures proving reactive and inconsistent, exacerbating epistemic marginalisation and testimonial injustices against scholars advocating epistemic pluralism {Daub 2025; IGÉSR Rapport No 85, April 2021; MESRI 2021}. Leonardo's (2018) analysis identifies such epistemic crises as symptomatic of broader colonial epistemic hierarchies deeply entrenched within Western academic institutions, reinforcing my argument about the necessity of structured fiduciary governance mechanisms.

Critical Assessment of Ambiguity for Peer Review Governance

France's statutory ambiguity provides institutions interpretive flexibility and governance autonomy, yet significantly compromises fiduciary accountability in peer review contexts. This ambiguity fosters reactive rather than proactive governance, with institutions typically responding only after epistemic conflicts have escalated. As I've argued throughout this work, proactive fiduciary governance requires transparency, structured oversight, and clearly defined fiduciary obligations. Patel and Sanyal's (2024) analysis further highlights how epistemic racialisation and territorialisation reinforce institutional biases and epistemic marginalisation, underscoring my emphasis on clearly articulated fiduciary accountability frameworks.

To effectively mitigate epistemic injustices and proactively dismantle colonial epistemic structures embedded in peer review, French institutions must adopt explicit fiduciary governance measures specifically tailored to peer review contexts. These measures should include structured fiduciary oversight roles (such as epistemic ombudspersons), regular epistemic audits addressing peer review processes, and clear institutional guidelines protecting multimodal, interdisciplinary, Indigenous, and cognitively diverse scholarship. I have articulated such measures in my previous scholarship, particularly in 'Directors' Epistemic Duties and Fiduciary Openness' (2025) and 'Epistemic Justice and Institutional Responsibility in Academia' (2025).

In sum, the ambiguity characterising France's statutory approach underscores the critical importance of clearly articulated fiduciary governance frameworks. In comparison to the UK's statutory clarity and Germany's constitutional fiduciary model, France's experience highlights the necessity of explicitly defined fiduciary obligations to effectively address and dismantle colonial epistemic injustices inherent in scholarly peer review practices.

4.5 Germany: Constitutional Clarity as a Fiduciary Model for Peer Review

In direct contrast to the statutory ambiguity observed in France (Section 4.4) and minimalist autonomy found in the Netherlands (Section 4.3), Germany anchors fiduciary-epistemic governance for peer review within a robust constitutional framework. Article 5(3) of Germany's Basic Law (Grundgesetz) guarantees academic freedom (Wissenschaftsfreiheit), obliging universities and research institutions to proactively safeguard epistemic pluralism, cognitive inclusivity, and scholarly autonomy in evaluative processes, including peer review {Grundgesetz, art 5(3); BVerfG 2010}. This constitutional foundation provides strong fiduciary accountability, directly addressing testimonial and hermeneutical injustices entrenched within colonial epistemic structures.

Institutional Implementation: Universität Hamburg's Kodex Wissenschaftsfreiheit

Institutional fiduciary governance tailored specifically to peer review contexts is exemplified by Universität Hamburg's comprehensive Kodex Wissenschaftsfreiheit (Academic Freedom Code). The Kodex clearly outlines fiduciary responsibilities to protect cognitive diversity, epistemic plurality, and scholarly autonomy, explicitly mandating structured epistemic audits, fiduciary oversight roles (such as epistemic ombudspersons), and clear grievance mechanisms relevant to peer review processes {Universität Hamburg 2022, arts 2–4; Universität Hamburg, 'Gegen die Bedrohung von Forschung und Lehre' (Press Release 2/2022)}. This institutional approach effectively operationalises Germany's constitutional fiduciary-epistemic obligations, demonstrating practical accountability and proactive epistemic justice within peer review.

Universität Hamburg's model aligns closely with Leonardo's (2018) critique of epistemic coloniality, underscoring the necessity of structured fiduciary mechanisms to resist epistemic homogenisation and marginalisation within academic governance. Radcliffe's (2017) analysis of epistemic coloniality further emphasises the importance of clearly defined fiduciary oversight roles for safeguarding cognitive and epistemic diversity, reinforcing the proactive fiduciary governance exemplified by Universität Hamburg.

Moreover, the recent joint declaration issued by Germany's Alliance of Science Organisations and the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) clearly reaffirms institutional commitment to actively protecting academic freedom and epistemic plurality, further underscoring the proactive nature of Germany's fiduciary governance approach {BMBF and Allianz der Wissenschaftsorganisationen, 'Gemeinsame Erklärung' (March 2025)}.

Critical Assessment: Constitutional Strengths and Peer Review Challenges

Germany's constitutional clarity provides a notably strong fiduciary governance model, requiring institutions to proactively address epistemic injustices in peer review contexts. However, practical challenges remain. Fiduciary governance practices relating specifically to peer review vary considerably across German federal states. While Universität Hamburg demonstrates a robust fiduciary approach, other institutions, such as the University of Cologne, have exhibited comparatively slower responses and weaker fiduciary oversight concerning epistemic inclusivity and cognitive diversity. Such variability illustrates practical limitations, despite constitutional clarity.

Therefore, Germany's constitutional model highlights the importance of structured institutional implementation to effectively dismantle colonial epistemic structures within peer review. Practical fiduciary reforms I recommend include nationwide adoption of structured oversight roles, regular epistemic audits targeting peer review processes, and clear institutional policies protecting multimodal, interdisciplinary, Indigenous, and cognitively diverse scholarship. These measures align closely with Mantz's (2019) advocacy for decolonising institutional curricula and Patel and Sanyal's (2024) call for epistemic de-territorialisation, demonstrating how proactive fiduciary governance can effectively counter institutional Eurocentrism and epistemic marginalisation.

In conclusion, Germany's constitutional approach provides a clear fiduciary governance benchmark. In comparison with France's statutory ambiguity (Section 4.4), the Netherlands' minimalist statutory framework (Section 4.3), and the statutory reliance observed in the US (Section 4.6), Germany's constitutionally defined fiduciary obligations illustrate clear advantages of structured fiduciary governance in effectively addressing colonial epistemic injustices embedded within scholarly peer review practices.

4.6 United States: Fiduciary Challenges for Peer Review under Anti-Discrimination Statutes

In contrast to Germany's constitutional protections and the UK's explicit statutory mandates, fiduciary-epistemic governance of peer review in the United States primarily derives from broader anti-discrimination legislation—most notably the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. While the ADA explicitly prohibits discrimination based on disability—including cognitive diversity—it provides limited fiduciary guidance tailored specifically to safeguarding epistemic pluralism, scholarly autonomy, or equity within peer review processes {ADA 1990, s 12132}. In my analysis, this implicit statutory framework leads to inconsistent institutional compliance, creating substantial fiduciary accountability challenges at the practical level of peer review implementation.

Institutional Implementation and Peer Review Challenges

Since the ADA relies on a reactive enforcement model—primarily triggered by individual complaints rather than proactive fiduciary oversight—I argue that institutional implementation of fiduciary-epistemic obligations across US universities varies significantly. Recent litigation involving Harvard University, extensively documented by the US Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR), explicitly demonstrates fiduciary governance gaps concerning institutional responses to harassment based on national origin and shared ancestry. OCR's investigation has highlighted Harvard's inadequate policies and insufficient institutional responses, exposing significant vulnerabilities in proactively safeguarding epistemic diversity. Consequently, these institutional deficiencies exacerbated testimonial and hermeneutical injustices within Harvard's academic environment and peer review structures {US Department of Education, OCR Complaint No. 01-24-2155, 17 January 2025}.

In my recent works, I have explicitly advocated proactive fiduciary-epistemic governance frameworks, including structured fiduciary oversight, systematic epistemic audits, and institutionally embedded accountability mechanisms to safeguard epistemic plurality, cognitive diversity, and scholarly autonomy. I maintain that clearly articulating institutional fiduciary duties and embedding proactive oversight mechanisms significantly mitigates epistemic exclusion and systemic injustice, particularly within peer review contexts {Kahl, 'Directors' Epistemic Duties and Fiduciary Openness' (2025); Kahl, 'Epistemic Justice and Institutional Responsibility in Academia' (2025)}.

Further scholarly contributions support my call for explicitly defining fiduciary duties to counteract institutional marginalisation and epistemic bias. Mantz (2019), for example, emphasises that clearly articulated fiduciary guidelines are essential to address institutional Eurocentrism and epistemic exclusion. Similarly, Patel and Sanyal (2024) argue that governance frameworks lacking explicit fiduciary accountability inadvertently perpetuate epistemic racialisation and cognitive marginalisation, reinforcing my position that fiduciary reform is critically necessary in US peer review.

Critical Assessment for Peer Review Governance

While the ADA provides a clear anti-discrimination mandate requiring institutions to protect cognitive diversity and epistemic inclusion, I argue that its statutory framework lacks explicit fiduciary-epistemic provisions tailored specifically for peer review governance. Institutions that fail to proactively adopt clearly defined fiduciary mandates thus risk perpetuating testimonial injustices—unfairly discounting cognitively diverse scholars' epistemic credibility—and hermeneutical injustices—systematically excluding innovative epistemic frameworks from scholarly discourse.

The persistence of these fiduciary gaps underscores my argument for urgently needed governance reforms explicitly tailored to peer review in the United States. I propose that institutions adopt comprehensive fiduciary-

epistemic reforms, including clearly articulated fiduciary guidelines, structurally independent oversight roles (such as epistemic ombudspersons), and systematic epistemic audits specifically targeting peer review processes, aligning with the best practices articulated in my recent scholarship [Kahl, ‘Directors’ Epistemic Duties and Fiduciary Openness’ (2025)]. By proactively embedding fiduciary accountability mechanisms, institutions can significantly enhance their capacities to protect cognitive diversity, epistemic plurality, and scholarly autonomy, directly addressing the structural epistemic injustices inherent within traditional peer review processes.

In comparison to Germany’s constitutional clarity (Section 4.5) and the UK’s statutory precision (Section 4.2), I conclude that the ADA’s implicit fiduciary framework vividly demonstrates the necessity of explicitly defined fiduciary-epistemic governance obligations to systematically dismantle colonial and epistemic injustices embedded within academic peer review.

4.7 Comparative Summary: Fiduciary Governance Best Practices for Peer Review

In this comparative analysis, I have identified fiduciary governance practices relevant to addressing colonial epistemic injustices in peer review contexts, focusing on the UK (Section 4.2), Netherlands (Section 4.3), France (Section 4.4), Germany (Section 4.5), and the US (Section 4.6). My findings reveal strengths and limitations across jurisdictions, providing practical insights for fiduciary reforms in peer review.

Clearly Defined Constitutional or Statutory Mandates

Jurisdictions with explicit fiduciary mandates—Germany’s Basic Law {Grundgesetz, art 5(3); Section 4.5}, and the UK’s statutory framework under the Equality Act 2010 and Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 {Equality Act 2010; Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023; Section 4.2}—demonstrate greater potential to safeguard epistemic plurality and cognitive inclusivity. However, controversies at Sussex, Cambridge, and Oxford Union illustrate a critical gap between statutory clarity and institutional practice, resulting in ongoing testimonial and hermeneutical injustices {Turner 2025; Ahmed 2023; AFComm 2025; Cherwell 2023}.

By contrast, statutory ambiguity (France, Section 4.4), minimalist frameworks (Netherlands, Section 4.3), or implicit fiduciary obligations (US ADA, Section 4.6) foster reactive governance practices, exacerbating epistemic marginalisation. Such governance vulnerabilities align with critiques by Mantz (2019) and Leonardo (2018), highlighting embedded Eurocentrism and coloniality.

Structured Fiduciary Oversight Roles

Clearly defined oversight roles, such as epistemic ombudspersons or dedicated fiduciary committees for peer review, are vital. Universität Hamburg’s structured oversight, supported by explicit fiduciary guidelines, provides an effective institutional example of safeguarding epistemic diversity and scholarly autonomy {Universität Hamburg 2022, arts 2–4}. Conversely, absence or inadequacy of structured fiduciary roles—as observed at Sussex, Cambridge, Sciences Po Grenoble, Groningen, and Harvard {OCR Complaint No. 01-24-2155, 2025}—highlights institutional vulnerabilities to epistemic injustice. Patel and Sanyal (2024) and Radcliffe (2017) reinforce the necessity of such clearly defined oversight structures to counter epistemic marginalisation.

Institutional Transparency through Epistemic Audits

Regular epistemic audits, as practiced by Universität Hamburg and mandated by the UK’s Office for Students, offer proactive mechanisms to address epistemic injustices in peer review contexts {Turner 2025; Universität Hamburg 2022}. Mantz (2019) emphasises how transparency can mitigate embedded epistemic biases and

colonial frameworks. Institutional failures at Sussex, the Oxford Union, and Harvard University further underline the importance of consistent auditing mechanisms to ensure accountability.

Fiduciary Guidelines and Mandatory Training

Institutions must articulate clear fiduciary guidelines and provide regular fiduciary training to sensitise reviewers to testimonial and hermeneutical injustices. Universität Hamburg exemplifies effective institutional guidelines {Universität Hamburg 2022}, aligning closely with my fiduciary framework presented in “Directors’ Epistemic Duties and Fiduciary Openness” {Kahl 2025} and ‘Epistemic Justice and Institutional Responsibility in Academia’ {Kahl 2025}. Absence or inadequacy in such guidelines perpetuates epistemic marginalisation, as demonstrated by institutional controversies previously noted.

4.8 Practical Institutional Recommendations for Fiduciary-Epistemic Reform in Peer Review

Drawing from fiduciary governance best practices identified through my comparative analysis (Section 4.7), I propose institutional reforms specifically designed to address colonial epistemic injustices embedded within traditional peer review practices. These reforms proactively safeguard epistemic pluralism, cognitive diversity, and scholarly autonomy.

4.8.1 Clearly Defined Fiduciary-Epistemic Duties

Institutions must articulate fiduciary-epistemic duties within governance policies, ensuring that peer review processes safeguard cognitive diversity, epistemic plurality, and scholarly autonomy.

Recommended Practical Actions:

- Develop fiduciary governance guidelines outlining institutional responsibilities regarding cognitive diversity, multimodal scholarship, epistemic plurality, and inclusion, as exemplified by Universität Hamburg’s Kodex Wissenschaftsfreiheit {Universität Hamburg 2022, arts 2–4}.
- Integrate explicit fiduciary obligations addressing testimonial and hermeneutical injustices into institutional mission statements and operational guidelines, consistent with my framework in ‘Directors’ Epistemic Duties and Fiduciary Openness’ {Kahl 2025}.

4.8.2 Structured Fiduciary Oversight Roles for Peer Review

Institutions should establish structured fiduciary oversight roles—such as epistemic ombudspersons or fiduciary committees—to proactively safeguard epistemic diversity, cognitive inclusivity, and scholarly autonomy.

Recommended Practical Actions:

- Establish permanent institutional oversight roles responsible for fiduciary-epistemic accountability in peer review.
- Empower oversight committees to regularly monitor peer review practices and proactively address epistemic marginalisation and testimonial injustices.

Implementation Consideration:

Institutions may face resistance from managerial stakeholders, as exemplified by the Täuber controversy at Groningen (Section 4.3). Clear communication of fiduciary benefits—including enhanced institutional reputation, reduced legal risk, and improved academic integrity—can facilitate proactive implementation, as supported by insights from Leonardo (2018) and Mantz (2019) on institutional epistemic biases.

4.8.3 Regular Institutional Epistemic Audits for Peer Review

Institutions should conduct regular epistemic audits designed to identify and address epistemic injustices within peer review processes.

Recommended Practical Actions:

- Conduct annual institutional audits assessing peer review processes for testimonial and hermeneutical injustices.
- Transparently publish audit outcomes to ensure clear institutional accountability and responsiveness.

Implementation Consideration:

Regular audits counter reactive governance practices evident in controversies at Sussex, Cambridge, Sciences Po Grenoble, Groningen, and Harvard (OCR Complaint No. 01-24-2155, 17 January 2025), reinforcing my advocacy for proactive fiduciary accountability.

4.8.4 Clear Institutional Guidelines and Mandatory Fiduciary Training

Institutions must develop fiduciary guidelines and implement mandatory fiduciary training specifically tailored for peer review personnel, proactively sensitising staff to epistemic injustice.

Recommended Practical Actions:

- Develop fiduciary governance guidelines outlining institutional responsibilities toward cognitive diversity, multimodal scholarship, epistemic plurality, and inclusion, as modelled by Universität Hamburg’s Kodex {Universität Hamburg 2022, arts 2–4}.
- Implement mandatory fiduciary training programmes addressing testimonial injustice, hermeneutical injustice, and epistemic exclusion, as advocated in my work ‘Directors’ Epistemic Duties and Fiduciary Openness’ {Kahl 2025}. Such training cultivates awareness of epistemic biases, embedding fiduciary principles effectively into peer review practices.

Implementation Consideration:

Institutional resistance due to administrative burdens can be proactively addressed by clearly communicating fiduciary benefits—enhanced reputation, increased academic integrity, and reduced epistemic injustice risks—as reinforced by Patel and Sanyal’s (2024) analysis of institutional epistemic racialisation and marginalisation.

4.8.5 Responsible AI Integration in Peer Review Governance

Institutions should implement fiduciary oversight tailored specifically for responsible AI integration within peer review processes, mitigating algorithmic biases and epistemic marginalisation.

Recommended Practical Actions:

- Establish dedicated AI ethics oversight committees responsible for fiduciary governance of AI tools and algorithms used in peer review.
- Mandate regular fiduciary reviews of institutional AI policies, aligning explicitly with epistemic justice principles, cognitive diversity, and scholarly autonomy.

Implementation Consideration:

Concerns about academic freedom and technological constraints should be proactively addressed through clear communication emphasising fiduciary benefits—including safeguarding epistemic integrity and reducing algorithmically driven epistemic injustices. Mantz’s (2019) insights support structured fiduciary oversight to prevent epistemic homogenisation driven by institutional biases and generative AI.

4.8.6 Summary of Institutional Recommendations for Peer Review Reform

Institutions should proactively adopt the following fiduciary-epistemic governance measures, informed by my comparative analysis:

- Clearly defined statutory or constitutional fiduciary mandates (Germany’s Grundgesetz {Grundgesetz, art 5(3)}; UK Equality Act 2010 {Equality Act 2010}, Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 {Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023}).
- Structured fiduciary oversight roles specifically tailored for peer review (epistemic ombudspersons or fiduciary committees), as exemplified by Universität Hamburg’s Kodex Wissenschaftsfreiheit {Universität Hamburg 2022}, and recommended in my work “Directors’ Epistemic Duties and Fiduciary Openness” {Kahl 2025}.
- Institutional transparency through regular epistemic audits targeting peer review practices (Universität Hamburg {Universität Hamburg 2022}; UK OfS {Turner 2025}; and as discussed in ‘Epistemic Justice and Institutional Responsibility in Academia’ {Kahl 2025}).
- Clearly articulated fiduciary guidelines and mandatory fiduciary training tailored for peer review personnel (Universität Hamburg {Universität Hamburg 2022}; ‘Directors’ Epistemic Duties and Fiduciary Openness’ {Kahl 2025}).
- Proactive fiduciary oversight for responsible AI integration in peer review governance (Mantz 2019).

These recommendations provide a robust fiduciary-epistemic governance framework proactively designed to dismantle colonial epistemic injustices embedded within traditional peer review practices. Drawing from my comparative analysis and recent scholarly contributions {Leonardo 2018; Mantz 2019; Patel and Sanyal 2024; Radcliffe 2017}, I propose these institutional reforms to achieve epistemic justice, inclusivity, and robust accountability in contemporary peer review.

The concluding summary (Section 4.9) synthesises these comparative insights and fiduciary recommendations, transitioning clearly towards the epistemocratic governance model I propose in Chapter 5.

4.9 Concluding Summary: Toward Epistemocratic Governance of Peer Review

In this comparative analysis of fiduciary governance practices, I have demonstrated that traditional academic peer review—across the United Kingdom (Section 4.2), the Netherlands (Section 4.3), France (Section 4.4), Germany (Section 4.5), and the United States (Section 4.6)—continues to embed colonial epistemic structures. These structures systematically marginalise multimodal, interdisciplinary, Indigenous, and cognitively diverse scholarship, perpetuating testimonial and hermeneutical injustices.

The comparative insights clearly highlight that jurisdictions with explicit constitutional or statutory fiduciary mandates, such as Germany and the UK, provide stronger institutional mechanisms to safeguard epistemic plurality, scholarly autonomy, and cognitive diversity. Nonetheless, even these systems reveal practical implementation gaps, as exemplified by recent controversies at Sussex, Cambridge, and Oxford. Jurisdictions characterised by statutory ambiguity (France), minimalist statutory frameworks (the Netherlands), or implicit statutory reliance (the US) demonstrate even greater vulnerabilities to epistemic injustices due to reactive governance practices and limited fiduciary accountability.

I have identified specific fiduciary governance best practices—including structured fiduciary oversight roles (e.g., epistemic ombudspersons), regular institutional epistemic audits, clearly articulated fiduciary guidelines, and mandatory fiduciary training—that institutions must proactively adopt to effectively dismantle colonial epistemic injustices embedded in peer review. Moreover, the increasing influence of generative AI further highlights the urgency of clear fiduciary governance to proactively manage algorithmic biases and epistemic marginalisation.

Drawing explicitly from my comparative analysis and the theoretical frameworks advanced in my earlier works—particularly ‘Directors’ Epistemic Duties and Fiduciary Openness’ {Kahl 2025}, ‘Epistemic Justice and Institutional Responsibility in Academia’ {Kahl 2025}, and ‘Epistemocracy in Higher Education’ {Kahl 2025}—I propose an epistemocratic governance model. Epistemocracy integrates fiduciary transparency, distributed epistemic agency, multimodal epistemic pluralism, cognitive inclusivity, and responsible AI integration to foster authentic epistemic openness, scholarly autonomy, and robust institutional integrity.

Thus, this chapter’s comparative insights and practical fiduciary recommendations provide clear guidance for institutional reform. The epistemocratic governance model outlined in Chapter 5 builds directly upon these foundations, establishing a robust pathway toward epistemic justice, democratic inclusivity, and responsible academic governance within contemporary peer review contexts.

5. Epistemocratic Governance—A Fiduciary-Epistemic Model for Reforming Peer Review

5.1 Introduction: From Colonial Peer Review to Epistemocratic Governance

My comparative analysis of fiduciary-epistemic governance in Chapter 4 reveals significant strengths and critical weaknesses across multiple jurisdictions. Robust statutory frameworks in Germany (Article 5(3) Grundgesetz) and the United Kingdom (Equality Act 2010; Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023) clearly establish fiduciary obligations designed to safeguard epistemic diversity, cognitive inclusivity, and scholarly autonomy. Yet recent institutional controversies—such as the Kathleen Stock case at Sussex {Turner 2025; BBC News 2025}, debates involving Arif Ahmed at Cambridge {Ahmed 2023}, the Sullivan Review controversy {Sullivan 2025; HC

Deb 25 March 2025}, and governance failures at the Oxford Union {AFCOMM 2025; Cherwell 2023}—illustrate that statutory or constitutional clarity alone does not guarantee proactive fiduciary governance. Institutional responses frequently remain reactive, oversight inadequate, and epistemic marginalisation persistent, perpetuating colonial epistemic structures within traditional peer review practices.

These institutional cases reinforce theoretical insights from Mantz (2019) regarding Eurocentric epistemic biases in scholarly evaluation, Leonardo’s (2018) critique of institutional epistemic homogenisation, and Patel and Sanyal’s (2024) analysis of epistemic marginalisation and racialisation in institutional knowledge practices. Collectively, these scholars emphasise the persistence of colonial epistemic gatekeeping within academia, underscoring the urgency of proactive fiduciary governance reform.

In direct response to these fiduciary gaps and epistemic injustices, I propose a transformative model of epistemocratic governance. This fiduciary-epistemic framework proactively addresses testimonial and hermeneutical injustices in peer review processes, actively safeguards epistemic plurality and cognitive diversity, and ensures institutional accountability and transparency. Building directly upon the comparative best practices identified in Chapter 4 and my earlier scholarly contributions—such as ‘Directors’ Epistemic Duties and Fiduciary Openness’ {Kahl 2025}, ‘Epistemic Justice and Institutional Responsibility in Academia’ {Kahl 2025}, and ‘Epistemocracy in Higher Education’ {Kahl 2025}—the epistemocratic model provides structured, actionable institutional reforms specifically designed to dismantle colonial epistemic biases and governance inadequacies within peer review.

The subsequent sections of this chapter outline the key principles, institutional structures, and practical implementation strategies of epistemocratic governance. These strategies explicitly address contemporary epistemic challenges posed by generative AI, epistemic marginalisation, and the diversity of scholarly perspectives. In doing so, I propose a clear fiduciary-epistemic governance pathway toward authentic epistemic justice, scholarly autonomy, democratic inclusivity, and robust institutional accountability in contemporary academia.

5.2 Principles of Epistemocratic Governance for Peer Review

The epistemocratic governance model for peer review comprises four interrelated principles: fiduciary transparency, distributed epistemic agency, multimodal and cognitive epistemic pluralism, and responsible AI integration. Each principle addresses fiduciary-epistemic gaps and colonial biases identified in my comparative analysis (Chapter 4) and informed by recent institutional controversies and scholarly critiques.

Fiduciary Transparency

Fiduciary transparency involves accountable governance practices within peer review to proactively address testimonial and hermeneutical injustices. Institutions must clearly disclose peer review criteria, decision-making processes, and governance mechanisms, safeguarding cognitive diversity and epistemic pluralism. Such transparency helps institutions identify and correct epistemic biases, as illustrated by the cases of Kathleen Stock at Sussex and Arif Ahmed at Cambridge {Turner 2025; BBC News 2025; Ahmed 2023}. Leonardo (2018) argues that institutional transparency effectively counters epistemic homogenisation embedded within colonial academic frameworks. Similarly, Anderson’s (2006) democratic epistemology emphasises how transparency strengthens institutional accountability, epistemic legitimacy, and scholarly diversity {Anderson 2006}.

Distributed Epistemic Agency

Epistemocratic governance promotes the equitable distribution of epistemic authority among diverse stakeholders involved in peer review. Instead of centralising epistemic judgment in anonymous gatekeepers or dominant institutional frameworks, my epistemocratic model decentralises epistemic authority, actively valuing diverse scholarly perspectives. Such distributed epistemic agency challenges traditional exclusionary peer review practices, fostering epistemic pluralism, inclusivity, and scholarly autonomy. Anderson (2006) further supports my view by emphasising that democratic epistemic practices enhance scholarly legitimacy, accountability, and epistemic diversity {Anderson 2006}. Additionally, Mignolo's (2012) concept of 'border thinking' highlights the necessity of distributing epistemic authority to dismantle Eurocentric epistemic hierarchies and colonial structures {Mignolo 2012}.

Multimodal and Cognitive Epistemic Pluralism

Institutions must actively value multimodal, interdisciplinary, Indigenous, and cognitively diverse scholarship within peer review. My epistemocratic framework explicitly rejects traditional colonial epistemic hierarchies that systematically marginalise unconventional forms of knowledge. Institutional guidelines should explicitly support diverse cognitive and epistemic methodologies, addressing testimonial injustice (unfair marginalisation of credibility) and hermeneutical injustice (systematic exclusion of certain epistemic frameworks). Mantz (2019) highlights how institutional Eurocentrism excludes diverse epistemologies {Mantz 2019}, while Patel and Sanyal (2024) stresses the importance of integrating diasporic and cognitively diverse epistemologies into institutional evaluation frameworks to counter epistemic racialisation and marginalisation {Patel and Sanyal 2024}. Anderson (2006) further emphasises that inclusive and democratic epistemic practices strengthen institutional legitimacy, epistemic accountability, and scholarly diversity {Anderson 2006}.

Responsible AI Integration

Given the growing reliance on generative artificial intelligence (AI) in scholarship, epistemocratic governance demands fiduciary oversight mechanisms explicitly tailored for responsible AI integration in peer review. Institutions must ensure algorithmic accountability, proactively addressing risks of algorithmic bias, epistemic marginalisation, and homogenisation of scholarly evaluation standards. Clearly defined fiduciary oversight roles—such as AI ethics committees—should supervise AI integration within peer review, safeguarding cognitive diversity and epistemic plurality. Institutional controversies, notably at the Oxford Union, highlight fiduciary governance vulnerabilities when oversight roles are inadequate {AFCOMM 2025; Cherwell 2023}. Mantz (2019) similarly argues that structured fiduciary oversight is essential to safeguard epistemic diversity against Eurocentric institutional biases reinforced through generative AI {Mantz 2019}. Anderson's (2006) democratic epistemology further supports this fiduciary oversight, highlighting that democratic accountability of AI algorithms enhances institutional legitimacy and epistemic transparency {Anderson 2006}.

Taken together, these four principles—fiduciary transparency, distributed epistemic agency, multimodal and cognitive epistemic pluralism, and responsible AI integration—establish a cohesive fiduciary-epistemic governance framework. Explicitly designed to dismantle colonial epistemic gatekeeping practices within traditional peer review, my epistemocratic framework proactively safeguards epistemic justice, cognitive inclusivity, scholarly autonomy, and robust institutional accountability.

5.3 Institutional Structures for Epistemocratic Peer Review

To operationalise the epistemocratic governance model effectively, institutions must establish clear structures and mechanisms. These institutional frameworks proactively ensure fiduciary oversight, accountability, and

epistemic justice within peer review processes, addressing the colonial epistemic injustices identified throughout this analysis.

Institutional Oversight Roles: Epistemic Ombudspersons and Fiduciary Committees

Institutions should establish dedicated fiduciary oversight roles, such as epistemic ombudspersons or fiduciary oversight committees, specifically tailored to peer review. These roles would involve proactive monitoring of peer review practices, prompt handling of epistemic complaints, and active safeguarding of epistemic pluralism, cognitive diversity, and scholarly autonomy. Recent institutional controversies—including the Kathleen Stock case at Sussex, Arif Ahmed debates at Cambridge, and governance failures at the Oxford Union—highlight governance gaps that structured fiduciary oversight roles could proactively address {Turner 2025; Ahmed 2023; AFComm 2025; Cherwell 2023}. Frankel (2011) provides a foundational framework for fiduciary governance, emphasising clearly defined oversight roles to ensure accountability. My own scholarly analysis in ‘Directors’ Epistemic Duties and Fiduciary Openness’ {Kahl 2025} extends fiduciary duties explicitly into epistemic contexts, emphasising the need for oversight roles that safeguard epistemic openness and institutional responsibility within academia.

Structured Epistemic Audits

Institutions should implement regular epistemic audits specifically targeting peer review practices. Such audits proactively evaluate institutional procedures, decision-making processes, and epistemic standards to identify and rectify biases, exclusions, or injustices. Transparent publication of audit outcomes ensures fiduciary accountability and demonstrates institutional responsiveness, directly addressing governance vulnerabilities evident in controversies at Sussex, Cambridge, and the Sullivan Review {BBC News 2025; Sullivan 2025; HC Deb 25 March 2025}. Mantz (2019) reinforces that structured epistemic audits are essential to proactively safeguard diverse epistemic frameworks. In ‘Epistemic Justice and Institutional Responsibility in Academia’ {Kahl 2025}, I argue explicitly that regular institutional audits significantly enhance epistemic accountability, transparency, and integrity within academic governance contexts.

Clear Fiduciary-Epistemic Guidelines and Regular Training

Institutions must clearly articulate fiduciary-epistemic guidelines governing peer review. These guidelines should outline explicit institutional responsibilities related to cognitive diversity, epistemic pluralism, multimodal scholarship, and epistemic inclusivity. Furthermore, institutions should implement regular mandatory fiduciary training programmes proactively designed to sensitise peer review personnel to epistemic injustice, cognitive biases, and marginalisation. Universität Hamburg’s comprehensive fiduciary guidelines and structured training exemplify practical best practices that proactively safeguard epistemic justice and inclusivity {Universität Hamburg 2022}. Radcliffe (2017), Leonardo (2018), and Patel and Sanyal (2024) further emphasise the importance of clearly articulated guidelines and fiduciary training to proactively address epistemic marginalisation and institutional biases. My epistemocratic framework detailed in ‘Directors’ Epistemic Duties and Fiduciary Openness’ {Kahl 2025} and ‘Epistemic Justice and Institutional Responsibility in Academia’ {Kahl 2025} explicitly extends fiduciary duties beyond traditional interpretations (Frankel 2011; Barnett 2020), emphasising fiduciary obligations toward epistemic openness, cognitive diversity, and institutional responsibility.

Responsible AI Oversight Mechanisms

Given increasing reliance on generative AI tools in peer review, institutions must establish fiduciary oversight roles specifically for AI governance, ensuring accountability and proactively addressing algorithmic bias, epistemic marginalisation, and homogenisation. Clear institutional policies and structured oversight, such as AI

ethics committees, are necessary to maintain scholarly integrity and epistemic diversity, aligning with Mantz's (2019) analysis of algorithmic biases within Eurocentric frameworks.

Collectively, these institutional structures underpin my epistemocratic governance model, proactively ensuring fiduciary oversight, safeguarding epistemic pluralism, cognitive diversity, scholarly autonomy, democratic epistemic inclusivity, and robust institutional accountability. Informed by fiduciary governance theory (Frankel 2011), democratic epistemology (Anderson 2006), epistemic justice frameworks (Fricker 2007), critical scholarship (Leonardo 2018; Mantz 2019; Patel and Sanyal 2024; Radcliffe 2017), and my own scholarly analyses explicitly extending fiduciary duties in academia ('Directors' Epistemic Duties and Fiduciary Openness' {Kahl 2025}; 'Epistemic Justice and Institutional Responsibility in Academia' {Kahl 2025}), these reforms effectively dismantle colonial epistemic structures embedded within traditional peer review practices.

5.4 Responsible AI Integration in Epistemocratic Peer Review

As generative artificial intelligence (AI) increasingly shapes scholarly activities, epistemocratic governance requires robust fiduciary oversight to ensure responsible AI integration into peer review processes. This principle addresses epistemic risks including algorithmic bias, marginalisation, and homogenisation—concerns highlighted by recent institutional controversies, notably the Oxford Union debates and methodological criticisms surrounding the Sullivan Review {AFCOMM 2025; Sullivan 2025; TransActual 2025}. Mantz's (2019) critical analysis further illustrates how institutional Eurocentrism can be reinforced by algorithmic systems, underscoring the fiduciary necessity of proactive oversight mechanisms.

Fiduciary Oversight Mechanisms for Generative AI

Institutions must develop clear fiduciary oversight mechanisms to monitor AI use in peer review, proactively identifying and correcting algorithmic biases or unintended epistemic exclusions. Establishing explicit accountability for AI-driven decisions ensures protection of cognitive diversity and epistemic plurality, responding directly to concerns raised by gender-critical scholarship and methodological diversity debates highlighted by the Sullivan Review controversy {Turner 2025; Sullivan 2025}. Leonardo's (2018) critique of epistemic homogenisation emphasises the fiduciary necessity of institutional mechanisms to prevent algorithmic biases from perpetuating epistemic injustices.

Institutional AI Ethics Committees

Institutions should establish dedicated AI ethics committees tasked specifically with fiduciary oversight of AI tools and algorithms employed in peer review processes. These committees should comprise diverse stakeholders, including ethicists, epistemic ombudspersons, scholars specialising in epistemic justice, and experts on AI bias and cognitive inclusivity. Regular evaluation of AI algorithms and peer review tools by these committees ensures transparency, fairness, and compliance with epistemocratic principles and fiduciary governance obligations. Patel and Sanyal (2024) underscores the necessity of integrating diverse epistemic perspectives into institutional governance structures to proactively counter epistemic racialisation, marginalisation, and coloniality within knowledge production.

Regular Reviews of AI Policies in Peer Review

Institutions must conduct regular reviews and updates of AI governance policies specifically relevant to peer review processes. Such reviews should proactively assess AI-driven peer review practices, ensuring they support cognitive diversity, epistemic plurality, and epistemic justice. Transparent reporting of policy reviews enhances

ongoing institutional accountability, responsiveness, and alignment with fiduciary commitments. These updates enable institutions to proactively address emerging epistemic risks, biases, or governance weaknesses. Mantz (2019) reinforces the fiduciary importance of routinely reviewing and adjusting institutional epistemic frameworks to prevent Eurocentric biases and algorithmic homogenisation.

Collectively, these fiduciary oversight mechanisms—dedicated AI ethics committees and regular policy reviews—equip institutions with robust frameworks for responsible, fair, and epistemically just integration of generative AI within epistemocratic peer review practices.

5.5 Implementation Considerations and Practical Guidance

While my epistemocratic governance model provides clear institutional pathways to address epistemic injustices within peer review, practical implementation may encounter institutional resistance and administrative challenges. This section addresses potential barriers and provides practical strategies, supported by illustrative examples, to ensure effective and sustainable epistemocratic reforms.

Addressing Institutional Resistance through Proactive Strategies

Institutional resistance often arises due to concerns regarding administrative burdens, managerial scepticism, or potential disruptions to established peer review practices. To proactively overcome these concerns, institutions should adopt strategic communication emphasising the fiduciary and institutional benefits of epistemocratic governance. These benefits include reduced legal risk, enhanced institutional reputation, strengthened epistemic accountability, and improved scholarly integrity. Recent controversies at Sussex (the Kathleen Stock case), Cambridge (the Arif Ahmed debates), and the Oxford Union clearly demonstrate how proactive fiduciary governance structures could have prevented or mitigated epistemic injustices, enhancing overall institutional credibility and transparency [Turner 2025; BBC News 2025; Ahmed 2023; AFComm 2025; Cherwell 2023]. Leonardo (2018) reinforces my argument, highlighting that clear institutional communication effectively counters epistemic biases and fosters broader stakeholder acceptance of governance reforms.

Communicating Fiduciary Benefits to Stakeholders

Clear and explicit institutional communication is essential for securing stakeholder buy-in for epistemocratic reforms. Institutions must clearly articulate how structured fiduciary oversight roles, regular epistemic audits, fiduciary guidelines, mandatory fiduciary training, and responsible AI integration proactively enhance institutional reputation, academic integrity, and epistemic credibility. Communicating these fiduciary benefits explicitly aligns institutional practices with statutory obligations, mission statements, and scholarly commitments to inclusivity, epistemic plurality, and academic freedom. Patel and Sanyal's (2024) analysis underscores how transparent institutional communication effectively counters epistemic marginalisation and institutional racialisation, reinforcing the practical value of fiduciary-epistemic reforms.

Facilitating Effective and Sustainable Epistemocratic Reform

Institutions should adopt structured implementation plans clearly outlining timelines, responsibilities, and monitoring mechanisms for epistemocratic governance reforms. Pilot projects or trial periods for fiduciary oversight roles—such as epistemic ombudspersons—and structured epistemic audits can demonstrate practical efficacy, providing empirical evidence of institutional benefits and facilitating smoother transitions to full-scale implementation.

Institutional examples clearly illustrate successful practical strategies: Universität Hamburg’s comprehensive Kodex Wissenschaftsfreiheit exemplifies effective fiduciary governance through structured oversight roles, clear guidelines, regular epistemic audits, and transparent reporting {Universität Hamburg 2022}. Additionally, regular stakeholder consultations—including scholars, administrative staff, and governance bodies—are essential to ensure epistemic governance structures remain responsive, inclusive, and institutionally supported over the long term. Mantz (2019) highlights the fiduciary importance of structured institutional engagement, ongoing evaluation, and proactive stakeholder participation to effectively counter epistemic marginalisation and institutional Eurocentrism.

Together, these practical implementation considerations and illustrative institutional examples, notably Universität Hamburg’s Kodex Wissenschaftsfreiheit, ensure epistemic governance reforms are effectively integrated, proactively maintained, and sustainably embedded within institutional peer review practices. These proactive strategies clearly address the colonial epistemic injustices identified throughout this analysis, directly facilitating genuine epistemic pluralism, cognitive inclusivity, scholarly autonomy, and robust institutional accountability.

5.6 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have proposed and detailed the epistemic governance model, a fiduciary-epistemic framework explicitly designed to address colonial epistemic injustices embedded in traditional peer review practices. Drawing on the comparative analysis established in Chapter 4, I have presented institutional strategies to proactively safeguard epistemic pluralism, cognitive diversity, and scholarly autonomy.

The core principles underpinning epistemic governance for peer review include fiduciary transparency, distributed epistemic agency, multimodal and cognitive epistemic pluralism, and responsible AI integration. Essential institutional mechanisms identified for effective implementation include structured fiduciary oversight roles (epistemic ombudspersons and oversight committees), regular epistemic audits tailored specifically to peer review, clearly articulated fiduciary guidelines, and mandatory fiduciary training programmes.

These recommendations address practical gaps in existing fiduciary governance, exemplified by recent UK institutional controversies—the Kathleen Stock case at Sussex, Arif Ahmed debates at Cambridge, the Sullivan Review controversy, and Oxford Union governance failures—highlighting the necessity for proactive institutional reform {Turner 2025; BBC News 2025; Ahmed 2023; Sullivan 2025; AFCOMM 2025; Cherwell 2023}. Scholarly analyses by Mantz (2019), Leonardo (2018), Patel and Sanyal (2024), and Radcliffe (2017) further reinforce my argument regarding the importance of structured fiduciary governance mechanisms to effectively counter epistemic marginalisation, Eurocentrism, and coloniality within academia.

I have also addressed practical implementation considerations, providing strategies to overcome institutional resistance. Clearly communicating fiduciary benefits, developing structured implementation plans, conducting stakeholder consultations, and employing proactive pilot projects are key strategies proposed to facilitate successful and sustainable governance reforms.

In summary, epistemic governance offers a robust fiduciary-epistemic model that proactively dismantles colonial epistemic gatekeeping, safeguarding epistemic justice, cognitive inclusivity, scholarly autonomy, and institutional accountability within contemporary peer review practices.

The concluding chapter (Chapter 6) will synthesise core arguments, articulate the significance of epistemocratic governance for contemporary academia, and identify future research directions to further sustain and enhance epistemic justice, cognitive inclusivity, and scholarly autonomy.

6. Conclusion—Toward Decolonising Peer Review through Epistemocratic Governance

6.1 Restatement of Core Arguments and Insights

In this paper, I have argued that traditional academic peer review functions as a colonial epistemic gatekeeping mechanism, systematically marginalising multimodal, interdisciplinary, Indigenous, and cognitively diverse scholarship. Despite robust statutory frameworks in the United Kingdom (Equality Act 2010; Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023) and explicit constitutional mandates in Germany (Article 5(3) Grundgesetz), reactive rather than proactive governance persists, reinforcing testimonial and hermeneutical injustices within peer review. Recent institutional controversies—including the Kathleen Stock case at Sussex, the Arif Ahmed debates at Cambridge, the Sullivan Review controversy, and governance failures at the Oxford Union—highlight fiduciary governance gaps even in jurisdictions with strong statutory and constitutional mandates {Turner 2025; BBC News 2025; Ahmed 2023; Sullivan 2025; AFComm 2025; Cherwell 2023}. Comparative analyses clearly illustrate how explicitly defined fiduciary obligations—or their absence—critically shape institutional capacities to proactively address colonial epistemic injustices.

In response, I have proposed an epistemocratic governance model explicitly grounded in fiduciary transparency, distributed epistemic agency, multimodal epistemic pluralism, cognitive inclusivity, and responsible AI integration. Informed by theoretical insights from Anderson (2006), Fricker (2007), Mignolo (2012), Leonardo (2018), Mantz (2019), Patel and Sanyal (2024), and Radcliffe (2017), as well as my earlier scholarly contributions including ‘Directors’ Epistemic Duties and Fiduciary Openness’ {Kahl 2025} and ‘Epistemic Justice and Institutional Responsibility in Academia’ {Kahl 2025}, this epistemocratic governance model provides structured institutional mechanisms proactively designed to dismantle colonial epistemic biases, safeguard epistemic plurality, enhance scholarly autonomy, and ensure robust institutional accountability.

6.2 Contributions and Significance

The epistemocratic governance model I have developed significantly contributes to contemporary debates on epistemic justice, fiduciary governance, and academic peer review. Its significance arises both from its original theoretical insights and clear institutional applicability.

Scholarly Contribution and Originality

First, I have identified traditional academic peer review as embedded within colonial epistemic structures. My analysis demonstrates clearly how testimonial and hermeneutical injustices systematically marginalise diverse forms of scholarship. By integrating fiduciary governance theory {Frankel 2011; Barnett 2020}, democratic epistemology {Anderson 2006}, epistemic justice frameworks {Fricker 2007}, and my own earlier scholarly work, particularly ‘Directors’ Epistemic Duties and Fiduciary Openness’ {Kahl 2025} and ‘Epistemic Justice and Institutional Responsibility in Academia’ {Kahl 2025}, I explicitly extend fiduciary duties into epistemic

governance contexts, highlighting institutional responsibilities toward epistemic pluralism, cognitive diversity, and scholarly autonomy.

Second, by engaging philosophical critiques from Joseph Raz [Raz 1986] and Martin Heidegger [Heidegger 1977], I clarify how traditional peer review undermines scholarly autonomy through irrational epistemic delegation and technological enframing, reinforcing epistemic homogenisation and marginalisation.

Third, I introduce the epistemic governance model as a practical institutional response to contemporary epistemic challenges posed by generative AI and cognitive diversity. My emphasis on fiduciary transparency, distributed epistemic agency, multimodal epistemic pluralism, and responsible AI integration constitutes a novel theoretical and practical framework designed explicitly to dismantle colonial epistemic biases embedded in traditional peer review.

Practical Significance for Institutional Governance and Peer Review Reform

Practically, my epistemic governance model provides structured institutional mechanisms to proactively dismantle epistemic gatekeeping and biases in peer review. Drawing on recent institutional controversies—including the Kathleen Stock case at Sussex, Arif Ahmed debates at Cambridge, the Sullivan Review controversy, and governance failures at the Oxford Union [Turner 2025; BBC News 2025; Ahmed 2023; Sullivan 2025; AFComm 2025; Cherwell 2023]—I demonstrate the urgent need for structured fiduciary oversight roles, regular epistemic audits, explicit fiduciary guidelines, mandatory fiduciary training programmes, and responsible AI integration.

By embedding these governance structures into institutional practice, universities can proactively address testimonial and hermeneutical injustices, enhance institutional transparency, and actively safeguard epistemic pluralism, cognitive diversity, scholarly autonomy, and democratic accountability. Supported by critical insights from Mantz [2019], Leonardo [2018], Patel and Sanyal [2024], Radcliffe [2017], and Darder [2017; 2019], my epistemic model provides institutions clear and actionable pathways toward inclusive and epistemically just peer review processes.

6.3 Implications, Future Directions, and Final Remarks

Broader Implications for Scholarly Practice and Institutional Governance

My epistemic governance model has significant implications for scholarly practice and institutional governance. By implementing structured fiduciary governance mechanisms specifically tailored to peer review, institutions can proactively address epistemic injustices across academia. Such reforms can positively influence curriculum design, faculty recruitment, institutional policymaking, and broader academic culture, fundamentally enhancing academic integrity, cognitive diversity, epistemic pluralism, and institutional accountability.

Future Research Directions

Future research should focus on the empirical evaluation of epistemic governance reforms, including structured oversight roles, epistemic audits, fiduciary training programmes, and responsible AI integration mechanisms. Comparative international studies examining how epistemic principles are adapted across diverse jurisdictions would provide valuable insights into context-specific governance innovations. Additionally, research exploring how epistemic governance affects societal attitudes toward epistemic diversity and

scholarly autonomy could deepen our understanding of the broader societal and institutional impacts of fiduciary-epistemic reforms.

Further research opportunities also include examining the practical impacts of epistemic governance on scholarly productivity, epistemic innovation, and institutional reputation. Both quantitative and qualitative analyses of these outcomes would significantly enhance the empirical basis for fiduciary-epistemic governance reforms.

Final Remarks

Traditional peer review, deeply entrenched in colonial epistemic hierarchies, continues to perpetuate testimonial and hermeneutical injustices by marginalising diverse epistemologies, interdisciplinary scholarship, and cognitive diversity. In response, the epistemic governance model proposed in this paper provides structured fiduciary-epistemic mechanisms explicitly designed to dismantle these colonial epistemic structures. By proactively adopting these governance reforms, institutions can meaningfully advance inclusive, epistemically just, and transparent peer review practices, fundamentally enhancing scholarly integrity, epistemic justice, institutional accountability, and cognitive diversity within contemporary academia.



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