

Global Faculty Initiative

Renewing Christian intellectual life in the world's research universities

DISCIPLINARY BRIEF

Justice in Academic Publishing and the Academic Calling: A Perspective from the Global South



Dinesha Samararatne

University of Melbourne

Justice · Law · 4 min read

facultyinitiative.net/article/justice-in-academic-publishing-and-the-academic-calling-a-perspective

Contents

Academic Publishing	2
Academic Work and Societal Activism	3
Epistemological and First-Order Justice	4

Wolterstoffs' Brief on 'Justice and Rights' clarifies the central role of justice in the academy (writ large). I find his distinction between first and second order justice to be useful in organizing my own thinking on the matter. The Brief has provoked me to reflect on two aspects of academia which have been areas of struggle and frustration for me. They both involve the academia from a global perspective and the relationship between justice and the production of knowledge and involve first order justice. One is that of publishing in academia and the barriers encountered by academics in academic publishing. The other is that of determining the role of an academic. Both aspects implicate several issues of first order justice when one approaches them from a global south perspective, and that is a perspective that is often missing. However, I do think that these questions require a global approach and response as well.

Academic Publishing

The inequality in the distribution of intellectual, financial, and social resources have resulted in unjust conditions for academic publishing. It is near impossible for an academic in the global south (however understood) to publish in leading journals in her discipline, except as a matter of exception. Those exceptions are often personal to the academic, it is rarely a matter of institutional support. The exceptional circumstances almost always include supportive colleagues located elsewhere in the academy, often in well supported universities in the global north. These allies play a supportive role by way of offering invaluable feedback on draft work and extending invitations to academic events where one could get useful feedback on work in progress. It also includes the sharing of material that the academic in the global south is unable to access. Equally and perhaps more importantly, such allies sup-

port and encourage academics in the global south at a personal and emotional level too.

Due to the issues surrounding academic publication, the production of knowledge is incomplete in many fields and the development of theory is inadequate. To frame it in a provocative way – the production of knowledge is captured by elite actors, speaking to a limited audience that has access to that knowledge. Access has to be understood not only in terms of accessing expensive data bases or subscriptions but also access in terms of the relatability of the knowledge that is being produced. To give you a simple example, Wolterstoff references several books in this Brief. I cannot afford to buy those books (my monthly income is approximately 2000 USD and we are now a single income family). Even if I could, I would have to wait indefinitely to receive the books. Or, I have to rely on the good will of colleagues overseas to share pdf versions of specific chapters or the whole book. This is the daily reality of an academic in the global south. Is this just? What obligations to academics in other contexts have, to address this situation? What is the responsibility of individual institutions and networks? Do they have any responsibilities beyond what they have already accepted in terms of scholarship schemes etc?

Academic Work and Societal Activism

The academic is required to engage in the pursuit of truth through the production and dissemination of knowledge. Activism, if and when an academic engages in it, is deemed optional and a matter of secondary value. I find this demarcation of the role of an academic to be meaningful and useful as a matter of principle. However, again, as a scholar in the global south, I find it unhelpful in navigating the daily challenges I face. Almost on a daily basis, I face a choice between lending my knowledge and other skills to a matter of political and social significance, which requires support on the one hand, and academic work (more traditionally understood) on the other (for a recent example of my contribution, see [here](#)). When I do choose to devote my time to academic work at the expense of responding to the call of activism, I feel guilty and irresponsible. In a context where resources are severely limited, ethical commitments to activism are limited among the elite, saying ‘no’ to activism can mean sometimes that no one else will actually make the intervention

that you may have made. Even when you do choose to intervene, sometimes you do so at personal risk. All of this consumes intellectual, emotional and physical energy too.

Epistemological and First-Order Justice

Others before me have written about these challenges. I do think that these debates must continue to remain alive and be recognized for what they are. They are issues of epistemological justice. These are issues of first order justice. There are examples of how individuals, institutions and systems have sought to address these injustices. I, for instance, have benefitted from the Fulbright scholarship program, a tuition waiver from Harvard University and an Australia Awards Fellowship. At the Melbourne Law School, where I was a postdoctoral fellow, I thrived in an intellectual environment in which I was supported to reach the highest levels of academic publishing and I forged excellent collaborations which I now continue. These are experiences of how systems can work well to address the first order injustices that I highlight here.

The question I ask myself is, is this enough? What more ought to be done, particularly to address injustice in the development of theory and in meeting the dilemmas of having to choose between activism and academic work? Finally, in studying these issues from a global south perspective, what insights does this offer to the academia in the global north and then to academia from a global perspective? My intuition, at the moment, is that asking these questions from the perspective of the global south will offer us useful insights that we can build upon in perhaps even rethinking epistemic justice at a global scale.

ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

Document type	Disciplinary Brief
Dialogue	Justice
Discipline	Law
Author	Dinesha Samararatne
Read online	facultyinitiative.net/article/justice-in-academic-publishing-and-the-academic-calling-a-perspective



Global Faculty Initiative

Renewing Christian intellectual life in the world's research universities