Social Epistemology and its Politically Correct Words: Avoiding Absolutism, Relativism, Consensualism, and Vulgar Pragmatism

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Abstract

Where social epistemology has been applied in environmental education research, certain words have come to be associated with it, such as, "social," "contextualized," "strategic," "political," "pragmatic," "democratic," and "participatory." In this paper, I first suggest interpretations of these words that potentially avoid absolutism, relativism, consensualism, and vulgar pragmatism. I then identify interpretations that succumb to these problems. To support my argument, I draw on Peircean scholars, critical realist scholars, and scholars who rely on a tranche *of metaphor that evoke images of connections, partnerships, webs, and rhizomes. These writers suggest a social epistemology in which in which relationships, not objects, are primary.*

Résumé

Où l'épistémologie sociale a été appliquée en recherche en éducation écologique, certains mots sont venus à y être associés, tels « social », « contextualisé », « stratégique », « politique », « pragmatique », « démocratique » et « participatif ». Dans cet article, je suggère premièrement des interprétations de ces mots qui potentiellement évitent l'absolutisme, le relativisme, le consensualisme et le pragmatisme vulgaire. J'identifie alors des interprétations qui succombent à ces problèmes. Pour appuyer mon argumentation, je m'inspire des érudits peirciens qui sont critiques et réalistes, et des érudits qui s'appuient sur une tranche de métaphores évoquant des images de connections, de partenariat, de réseaux et de rhizomes. Ces écrivains suggèrent une épistémologie sociale dans laquelle les relations et non les objets, sont primaires.

"Social epistemology" is a term that has gained popularity because of the linguistic turn in research. We can, in short, understand it to be a proposed alternative to epistemologies that reify ontology by assuming a simple correspondence between what is researched and *what is said* about what is researched. We are now aware that such a simple, easy correspondence is unlikely (Peirce, 1868; Foucault, 1965; Derrida, 1974; Bhaskar, 1989; Lather, 1991; Latour, 1991, 1993, 1999; Sayer, 1999; Haraway, 1997; Haack, 1998; Eco 2000, to name a few). Where social epistemology has been applied in educational and development research, certain words have come to be

associated with it, such as, "social," "contextualized," "strategic," "political," "pragmatic," "democratic," and "participatory" (for example, in the work of such authors as Lather, 1991, Cornbleth, 1990, Chambers, 1997, Chambers, Pacey, and Thripps, 1989, Hope and Timmel, 1996, Cherryholmes, 1999 and Popkewitz, 1984, 1998). In this paper, I offer my preferred interpretations of these words and suggest how certain other interpretations may be both epistemologically and ethically unsound.

How Might Environmental Education Research Epistemology be Social and Contextualized?

In naming, identifying, and explaining, researchers are also drawing forth and transforming—we could almost say "creating"—provided we understand that we are not creating from a vacuum, but from what existed before. Additionally, our research is never-ending since there is no absolute knowledge at which we ultimately arrive. In the words of Bhaskar (1993), "We never start from scratch … or finish with nothing … to do …" (p. 76). Likewise, that which we would research is also, continuously, transforming and even creating us (again, given the same proviso with regard creating). As Haraway (n.d.) put it, "The arrow goes both ways."

Significantly, in this mutually constituting relationship (Gough & Price, in press), we need to acknowledge the role of researchers in mobilizing knowledge; giving it its narrative form and packaging it to allow it to move from where it exists in its unmobilized form (our research localities) to where it exists in its mobilized form (our research journals and publications, our policy documents and newspaper articles) (Latour, 1999). In mobilizing knowledge, the researchers must draw on their previous knowledge and experience, their understandings of epistemology and their understandings of what the knowledge is going to be used for. They are giving knowledge a social countenance, to allow it to better participate in social life (Latour, 1999). In this sense, we can say that knowledge is "social."

Given the above, it follows that context and researcher identity will affect knowledge production. Different cultures will provide different language resources, different histories, different geographical potentials, constraints and evocative imagery; thus, the same phenomenon, mobilized by people from different cultural, geographical, and historical heritages may have significantly different characteristics. In the words of Sayer (1999), with regard the differences between the mobilized knowledge of the researched and the researcher, "At times, social scientists' analyses of discourses, action and images are likely to be as different from actors' understandings as an art historian's interpretation of a painting is from a layperson's" (p. 46). Yet, if researchers have acted with integrity, these differences should complement each other and add to the richness of our understanding of the phenomenon (Sayer, 1999).

Where different knowledges appear to contradict each other, this is a useful source of research information. The questions we ask in trying to understand the contradictions can greatly enhance our understanding of the phenomenon in question (Bhaskar, 1993). The contradictions may merely be artefacts of the metaphors used, or may lead to a deeper, more true understanding of the phenomenon. I say "more true" because in this social epistemology, knowledge is not absolute; rather it is more or less true and may vary with changes in spatio-temporality. In the words of Haack (1993), "… justification comes in degrees; … whether or to what degree a person is justified in believing something may vary with time" (p. 72).

This is not to say that eventually we can come up with one single, unified story, in the positivist sense, to which all others are reducible. Rather, the different views of the phenomenon, from the different perspectives which come from different knowledge systems, need not be contradictory but rather usefully complementary (Haack, 1998). For example, laboratory research on the immune system may indicate the importance of "love" chemicals, such as endorphins, in maintaining a healthy immune system (Dan & Lall, 1998), but poetry may be a better medium for inter-personal sharing of what it means to "love." Such different, contextual, knowledges, mobilized by such different word-websters as laboratory scientists and poets, can thus be complementary, but nevertheless, not reducible into one story and one set of metaphors.

How Might Environmental Education Research Epistemology be Strategic, Political, and Pragmatic?

In giving knowledge its social countenance, we[1] researchers make use of metaphors and language that we think will make knowledge recognizable, understandable, and work for us to adequately express that knowledge and to adequately explain the world. When I say "work for us," I do not mean that *the measure of truth* is how much a truth-claim helps us achieve our social or political goals, which would make it acceptable for falsehoods to be considered true provided we could justify that "believing" in the falsehoods would further our social and political aims. Our social, political, and economic goals may be facilitated through the appropriateness of the way that we socialize our knowledge, and will to some extent affect *how* we socialize knowledge, but, to reiterate, this does not mean that our knowledge is *verified or validated* by the success with which it helps us achieve our social, political and economic goals. Rather, verification and validity are questions of evidence, or legitimate inference (Haack, 1993, 1998).

This is not to say we must return to absolutist, naïvely objectivist ideas of knowledge that force interpretations of "the" truth onto unsuspecting readers. We can avoid dishonest word-play by making clear the process of socialization

of the knowledge. We should also aim for "naked" rather than "loaded" statements (Latour, 1993). Foucault's (1965) archaeological writings on, for example, madness is an example of how we can make naked the historical socialization processes of our knowledge. Similarly, discourse analysis of texts can indicate socio-political underpinnings perhaps not obvious on first readings (Price, 2005). As researchers, an imperative is that we become aware of the grammatical ploys we ourselves use, often unconsciously, to load our statements. For example, passive language, common in academic literature, hides the agent and therefore responsibility. Thus, the "loaded" passive sentence, "It was found that students commonly fall asleep in lectures," hides the identity of the person who made the discovery. A more "naked" (active) sentence would be, "I found that students commonly fall asleep in lectures." The former sentence also implies greater "objectivity" and therefore makes a stronger (but questionable) claim to knowing "the" truth.

Suggesting that knowledge should "work for us" is an understanding of pragmatism which is close to the Peircean pragmatism (or, as he preferred later, "pragmaticism") reinterpreted by Eco (2000) and Haack (1998). I say reinterpreted because both Haack and Eco make some adjustments to Peirce's original thesis. In this form of pragmatism, we may usefully contain knowledge—Latour might call it "black-boxing"—and thus make it into a more active thing: "Black-boxing is a way of simplifying the social world .... Black-boxing ... makes it possible for innovators and users to get on with their jobs" (in Kendall & Wickham, 1999, p. 74).

This is quite different from the post-modern concern with "black-boxes." Post-modernists would see black-boxes, at best, as a necessary evil and, at worst, have us avoid them altogether. This post-modern concern places researchers in an impossible position. Every time they write (that is, construct "black-boxes"), because their words simplify the world and cannot carry it exactly, and because their words refuse myriad other possible words, they commit acts violence. Also, the possibility of them ever achieving "truth" is questioned. Furthermore, they contradict themselves because, having denied a relationship between the world and representation (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985 in Sayer, 1999), they deny the possibility of choosing between better and worse representations and thus there seems to be little point in writing at all (Sayer, 1999). Latour's realistic realism, along with the other non-naïve realisms mentioned in this paper, offer an alternative to this relativist post-modern scepticism.

For example, in a poster campaign, the statement "smoking is detrimental to health" is appropriate, or perhaps "true enough," and in this simplified form it may save lives. A highly academic, but extremely comprehensive, account of the effects of smoking may be "more true" but may not be read by the majority of people who smoke; we could say it would be less active and thus save fewer lives. However, the simplified black-box statement that "smoking is detrimental to health" may be inappropriate in some circumstances;

people with Parkinson's disease may find the benefits of smoking out-weigh the risks and require a detailed, medically-based explanation of the effects of nicotine on the neurological system (Hernan et al., 2001; Tanner et al., 2002).

Thus, our knowledge takes on a social visage; we change its appearance strategically and pragmatically to make it as socially mobile as possible. However, no matter how much we simplify the world or "black-box" knowledge, what we say must somehow carry us honestly from "words to things and from things to words" (Latour, 1991, p. 106). Thus, there remains some part of the truth, in its different stories, which is immutable. Eco (2000) also talks of this immutable aspect when he talks of a "hard core." He says:

> As usual, metaphors are efficiacious but risky. By talking of a "hard core" I do not think of something tangible and solid, as if it were a kernal that, by biting into being, we might one day reveal. What I am talking about is not the Law of Laws. Let us rather try to identify some lines of resistance, perhaps mobile, vagabond, that cause discourse to seize up so that … there arises within the discourse, a phantasm, the hint of an anacoluthon, or the block of an aphasia … being places limits on the discourse through which we establish ourselves in its horizon …. (p. 50)

And also:

> To state that there are lines of resistance does not mean that something, (concealed behind the appearances that would mirror it) has, like a mirror, a rear side that eludes reflection, a side that we are almost sure we will one day discover … it is that reality imposes restrictions on our cognition only in the sense that it refuses false interpretations. (p. 54)

Bhaskar would call the immutable aspect, Eco's (2000) "hard core," the alethic truth, or "the nature of things regardless of what we or others think or say about them" (in Sayer, 1999, p. 58). It is the alethic truth, which, by respecting it, keeps researchers honest and helps them avoid relativism. For example, we might interpret a screw driver as a parcel opener; but the nature of the screw driver itself refuses an interpretation of it as a tool "for rummaging about in your ear" (Eco, p. 50).

How Should Environmental Education Research Epistemology be "Democratic" and "Participatory"?

The "participatory" and "democratic" components of a social epistemology imply that we should take the time to genuinely listen to "the other" (Merchant, 2003). We should also acknowledge the fallibility of our knowledge (Bhaskar, 1989; Sayer, 1999; Haack, 1998). Genuinely listening means refusing to be absolutely certain that "our" knowledge is better than "the other's" knowledge; where "ours" might be the scientific knowledge of the West, but just as possible "ours" might be a marginalized knowledge, such as a traditional

knowledge. If we are absolutely sure of the infallibility of our way of gaining knowledge, there is little incentive for listening to the knowledge of others.

Being a democratic researcher, however, also requires self-reflexivity, or knowing oneself, because unexamined prejudices may prevent us from genuinely listening. Such prejudices are part of our *habitus* and are deeply ingrained in us (Bourdieu, 1998). Being able to see past our prejudices[2] and thus being able to move towards a democratic vision, requires us to reflect on our practice; it requires a willingness to ask questions about the honesty of our view-points. This self-reflexivity opens us up the possibility of really listening to others, and even being changed by them, since "who we are" is inextricably linked to "what we know" (Bourdieu, 1998). Self-reflexivity, with its implied movement and change, is therefore different from simple reflection. Haraway (1997) also emphasizes the need for reflection to result in change when she suggests that we speak of knowledge in terms of "diffraction" rather than "reflection."

When we write about "others" we are not referring only to "other people" but also to non-human "others." Half-jokingly, Latour (1993) goes so far as to suggest that we "enfranchise" non-humans. He asks whether we need a different democracy, "A democracy extended to things?" (p. 12). Thus, a social epistemology, for me, includes taking into consideration the information provided, not just by human, but also by material, non-human, objects of the collective. For example, when assessing claims for and against climate change in the world, not only would we listen to human opinions, but we would also look to the material evidence of climate change, and even evidence for climate change that we have personally experienced. The different pieces of human and non-human evidence should interlink and support each other like clues in a crossword: where there are contradictions, this is an indication that further clarification and revision is needed (Haack, 1993, 1998). This is a naturalistic coherentism. As one anonymous reviewer pointed out, a non-naturalistic coherentism based only on what humans say, and relying on knowledge based in cultural assumptions and conventions etc., would conceivably run into the problematic situation in which there are no contradictions but everyone is just wrong. We should be seeking a fit between what we say, what others say and our experience of *the world*, not just a fit between what we say and what other people say.

Finally, a democratic epistemology must emphasize freedom of thought and expression. Being able to listen to "the others" requires that they must have a voice. We must assume that any "voice" will not be free from the discourses that colour it; there will be no one absolute voice. If the "other" which is being given a voice is voiceless (such as young children or the Earth), then extra care must be taken to listen carefully to the evidence available to us. Sometimes, we cannot just sit back and *let* them speak; we need to *actively create the space* for them to speak. For example, in a world where, "Women are 'queried,' they are interrupted, their opinions are discounted and

their contributions devalued in virtually all of the mixed-sex conversations that I have taped" (Spender, 1980, p. 87), we may need to teach men to be less aggressive and more respectful of others in conversation to make space for women's voices to be heard. For "the other," which is not human, to allow its "voice" to be heard we may need to actively research and mobilize information. In terms of "the environment" as "the other," this freedom of expression would mean supporting (relatively) independent research institutions which are committed to monitoring the environment and publishing the results of their research. By "independent" I do not imply these institutions will be capable of simplistic objectivity. There will always be dissent and complexity, but institutions dedicated to relatively truthful (albeit arguable) representation of the earth's vital signs are possible and I would argue necessary in our attempts to protect, and give a voice to, the environment. Some extreme post-modernists might argue, relativistically, that since there is no knowledge claim that is not a will to power, such institutions should be abandoned completely. In a sense, these research institutions are speaking for the Earth and its current experience of the environmental crisis. Foucault (in Faubion, 1994) remarks on non-human speech, "After all, it could be that nature, the sea, the rustling of trees, animals, faces, masks, crossed swords, all of these speak; perhaps there is language that articulates itself in a manner that is not verbal" (p. 270).

The idea of having representatives of the Earth speak for the Earth is explored by Merchant (2003); she calls it a "partnership ethic." She writes, "Both nature and humans will have voices, and both voices will be heard" (p. 229).

How Should Environmental Education Research Epistemology not be Social, Contextualized, Political, Strategic, Pragmatic, Democratic, and Participatory?

When we realized that there was not a simple correspondence between the truth out there and what we said about the truth, we gave up our epistemological privileges: the possibility of having absolute, infallible knowledge (Latour, 1999; Haraway, 1991, 1997; Haack, 1998; Irwin, 2001). Sometimes, however, in our desire to be right in an argument, such as about the best way to deal with climate change, or the best way to protect people's livelihoods whilst at the same time protecting the environment, it is tempting to exchange the old absolutism for newer ones, in the form of "strategy," "contextual," the "social," "participation," and "democracy." We might do this in various ways (Bhaskar, 1993; Latour, 1999). We might claim that the truth is absolutely what the individual thinks is the truth (a phenomenological absolutist perspective), for example:

> In phenomenological terms, the relationship between perceptions and reality is also seen to be "interdependent and dynamic," so much so that our perceptions

come to mean reality itself, or at least the only reality we are able to subject to scrutiny. (van der Mesche, 1996, p. 44)

Or, we might want to claim that truth is relative to what the community, in context, says it is. This is typical of strong social constructionist "participatory" approaches to knowledge, such as that suggested by Robert Chambers (1997) in his book *Whose Reality Counts? Putting the Last First*.

Rorty (in Haack, 1998) describes this relativist, consensual epistemology thus:

> I do not have much use for notions like … "objective truth." The pragmatist view is of rationality as civility, … as respect for the opinions of those around one, … of "true" as a word which applies to those beliefs upon which we are able to agree …. (p. 32)

Popkewitz (1984) also describes this relativist, consensual approach to epistemology:

> Pluralism reinforces a belief in individual self-actualization by its attention to the role of small interests groups in achieving the good life. There is also a relativism in that it considers no one way of life or view better than others and thus relies upon the market place of competing interests to produce consensus. (p. 100)

An alternative to this sort of consensual, contextualized, participatory, democratic approach to epistemology, although often mixed together with it (as we see in Rorty's quote above) is to make "usefulness," or "strategy," or "pragmatism" our measure of absolute truth. I define pragmatism here as: "philosophy that evaluates assertions solely by practical consequences and bearings on human interests" (*Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, 1984). I do not, use it in the philosophical sense in which it was used by Charles Sanders Peirce. Rather, I use it in the sense that something is true if it benefits society. This kind of (vulgar) pragmatism is commonly found where researchers are trying to choose between an objectivist, absolutist epistemology and a narrative/constructivist-based epistemology. Beck (in Irwin, 2001) uses this approach when justifying his choice of epistemology but he might equally have used this approach in deciding any knowledge claim. He writes, "The decision whether to take a realist or a constructivist approach is for me a rather pragmatic one, a matter of choosing the appropriate means for the desired goal" (p. 186).

Lather (1991) also suggests this Machiavellian, vulgar pragmatic approach to deciding contradictory epistemological issues in feminist research. She quotes Riley:

> Riley advises "foxiness" and versatility" in negotiating between awareness of the indeterminacy of the term of "women" and a strategic willingness to speak "as if they existed"…. Sometimes it will be a soundly explosive tactic to deny it, in

the face of some thoughtless depiction, that there are any women. But at other times the entrenchment of sexed thought may be too deep for this strategy to be understood and effective. So feminism must be agile enough to say, "Now we will be 'women'—but now we will be persons, not these 'women'." (p. 30)

This substitution of the old absolute, for the new ones, of Machiavellian pragmatism and questionable interpretations of democracy, consensualism, the social, and social constructionism leads to a dangerous sort of relativism. For example, in Zimbabwe, more than 60 % of people believe that it is a husband's right to beat his wife (Hindin, 2003). Given the consensualist, democratic view being critiqued here, such information should indicate that therefore Zimbabwean husbands' right to beat their wives should be entrenched in the law. There would be no need to discuss the real merits of such a position, or to consider that possibly most Zimbabweans are misinformed with regard to this issue; all that is required is a cynical acceptance that this is just how things are. Haack (1998) expresses her concern with regard certain interpretations of what a democratic epistemology means: "True, freedom of thought and speech are important conditions for scientific enquiry to flourish; and it may be that some who favour 'democratic epistemology' have confused the concept of democracy with the concept of freedom of thought. … Unless you are befogged by the emotional appeal of the word 'democratic', it is clear that the idea is ludicrous that the question, say, what theory of subatomic particles should be accepted, should be put to the vote" (p. 113). Haraway (1991) explains the dangers of making truth relative to social constructionism:

> All truths become warp speed effects in a hyper-real space of simulations. But we cannot afford these particular plays on words—the projects of crafting reliable knowledge about the "natural" world cannot be given over to the genre of paranoid or cynical science fiction. For political people, social constructionism cannot be allowed to decay into the radiant emanations of cynicism. (p. 184)

Some interpretations of a pragmatic or strategic approach to assessing knowledge claims lead to a reduction of freedom of thought and expression, since they imply that we should only speak if what we are going to say is supposedly going to benefit society, and not because we believe that what we say is true. This is a problem, because, *who is to decide what is good for society*? Charles Sanders Peirce (in Haack, 1998) had strong views about making epistemology a definitively political enterprise:

> I must confess that I belong to that class of scallawags who purpose … to look the truth in the face, whether doing so be conducive to the interests of society or not. Moreover, if I should ever attack that excessively difficult problem, "What is for the true interest of society?" I should feel that I stood in need of a great deal of help from the science of legitimate inference …. Against the doctrine that social stability is the sole justification of scientific research …. I have to object, first that it is historically false …; second, that it is bad ethics; … and third that its propagation would retard the progress of science. (p. 44)

The kind of "pragmatic" approach to epistemology that advocates "politically adequate research and scholarship" (the words of the feminist researcher Harding, in Haack, 1998, p. 97) is therefore chilling, whether suggested by totalitarian governments or feminist researchers. Haraway (1997) also criticizes Harding on this aspect of her epistemological stance when she says of Harding that "I do not share her occasional terminology of macrosociology and her all-too-evident-identification of the social" (p. 36) whilst at the same time acknowledging the usefulness of Harding's basic argument "that is committed as much to knowing about the people and positions from which knowledge can come and to which it is targeted as to dissecting the status of knowledge made" (p. 37).

Sayer gives two examples of totalitarian leaders who have made use of the relativism found in this particular interpretation of the idea that epistemology is social:

> There is no such thing as truth. Science is a social phenomenon and like every other social phenomenon is limited by the benefit or injury it confers on the community. (Hitler, in Sayer, 1999, p. 47)

> Everything that I have said and done in these last few years is relativism by intuition …. From the fact that all ideologies are of equal value, that all ideologies are mere fictions, the modern relativist infers that everybody has the right to create for himself his own ideology and to attempt to enforce it with all the energy of which he is capable. (Mussolini, in Sayer, 1999, p. 47)

As is clear from the quotes above, it is important that we are sure of what we mean when we use the words associated with a "social epistemology" to guide us in our research endeavours.

Metaphors for an Appropriate Social Epistemology

There are writers who manage to remain true to a sort of social epistemology, yet avoid the various kinds of absolutisms, relativisms, consensualisms, and vulgar pragmatisms. They achieve this by using a *tranche* of metaphor that evokes images of connections, relationships, partnerships, webs, and rhizomes. These writers consider *relationships*, rather than *objects*, to be primary. Callon, for example, (in Kendall & Wickham 1999), suggests that divisions between human and non-human objects, nature and society are the results of relational networks, rather than their starting points. Latour (1993) says that:

> A nonmodern is anyone who takes simultaneously into account the modern's Constitution and the populations of hybrids that the Constitution rejects and allows to proliferate … "it's nothing, nothing at all," it said of the networks, "merely residue." Now hybrids, monsters—what Donna Haraway calls "cyborgs" and "tricksters" whose explanations it abandons—are just about everything. (p. 46)

Haraway (1997), also making use of the network, rhizome *tranche* of metaphor, suggests the use of the image of "playing cat's cradle games" (p. 268). She says, "Oddly, embedded relationality is the prophylaxis for both relativism and transcendence" (p. 37).

It is not in the scope of this paper to extensively discuss how these metaphors can assist environmental education researchers. However, as one example, I will touch on how it might change the way that we ask research questions. For example, say a researcher is interested in class and environmentally aware practice. Rather than starting with the objects "class" and "environmentally aware practice" and finding out how they affect each other, she would *start* with the *mutually constituting relationship* between "class" and "environmentally aware practice." She might ask: "How is class reproducing or transforming environmentally aware practice?" and "How is environmentally aware practice reproducing or transforming class?" Note the sense in which asking questions this way implies that the objects lack firmness (they are mutable). They are not things that exist separately, but rather they are constantly in relationship, constantly being reproduced or transformed. An analogy might be the way that a whirlpool is distinct, but not separate from the stream; constantly being reproduced or transformed by the flow of water.

Conclusion

A social epistemology for environmental education research should allow knowledge to be social and contextual in the sense of allowing different, pluralistic interpretations, not in the sense of making truth status dependent on social consensus. It should be strategic and pragmatic, in the sense of mobilizing knowledge appropriately, not in the sense of deciding content in order to further preconceived ideas of what is good for society. It should be democratic and participatory, in the sense that it will ensure a voice for all actors, human and non-human, not in the sense that we should put truth to the vote. A potentially fruitful set of metaphors for this kind of social epistemology might evoke images of networks, rhizomes, webs, and relationships.

Notes

[1] One anonymous reviewer wondered why I used the pronoun "we" as frequently as I do. S/he was worried that I was setting up a "them vs. us" dichotomy, daring to speak for others and actively enrolling readers. Whilst I agree that these concerns are valid in some writing, I would argue that my use of this pronoun in this instance makes my claims personal, that is, not absolutely "objective." It refuses the distance of the less personal, but more appropriately academic, "researchers." It also makes it clear that I, too, am

one of the researchers. The same grammatical strategy used to dubious purpose in one context may be innocuous, even useful, in another context (Price, 2005, internet paper, pages absent). As researchers/writers, we cannot avoid generalizations, classifications of difference or speaking for others. What we can do is make these occurrences "naked" and thus easier to argue with. By using the word "we" I am purposefully inviting readers to check with their own first hand experience: does it match my claims? I am assuming that there is not a huge gulf between the readers and me. Also underpinning this decision of mine to use "we" is a refusal of the mind/body split; I avoid portraying myself as an all seeing mind preaching about the object of my gaze. My use of the word "we" is based on my own self-reflexivity and I hope it will encourage reader self-reflexivity.

[2]   One anonymous reviewer asked if it is possible to see past our prejudices. My answer is that whilst we can never avoid the social and thus, to a degree, the relative component of knowledge, this does not mean that there is no way to judge better and worse assumptions. Prejudices are assumptions that, relative to other assumptions, are likely to have a poorer fit with the alethic truth because they have not been adequately examined; in other words, there is likely to be more evidence against them. This evidence, if examined, is likely to make the prejudices seem indefensible. For example, racial prejudice is fuelled by racial segregation. The more races get to know each other, the more their unexamined assumptions (prejudices) about each other begin to seem untenable.

Notes on Contributor

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