

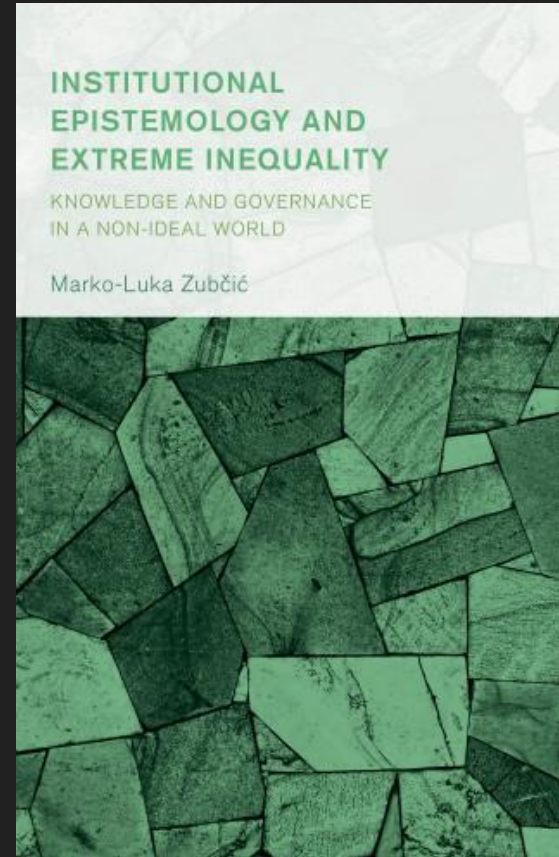
Institutional Epistemology and Extreme Inequality

Marko-Luka Zubčić
Institute of Philosophy in Zagreb
mlzubcic@ifzg.hr



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Fundamentals of Institutional Epistemology

IE is a fundamental epistemological theory, defined by constraints of idealizations:

1. individual suboptimality = Hayekian irremediable ignorance & Simonian bounded rationality

2. partially opaque normativity

= Search for knowledge is led by rules, partially unknown to those following them.

3. deep sociality = Search for knowledge is irreducibly social.

3. 1. Independence Thesis

4. reliability of pluralism

= Pluralism is the minimal condition of reliability in global complex and difficult problem environments.

= cognitive, normative, socio-economic, and institutional diversity

The Divide

democrats:

inclusive deliberation under free pluralism must rule the global search for knowledge

instrumental negative reliability in service of positive reliability (oracle-based)

transient pluralism

liberals:

evolutionary processes (competition and parallel search) must rule

fundamental negative reliability, and distributed learning (oracle-free)

sustained pluralism

Unified Theory of Institutional Epistemology

<u>problem type</u>	<u>defining characteristics</u>	<u>conditions of epistemic reliability</u>	<u>cascading condition</u>	<u>institutional design</u>
wicked	no solution, only global error & in- strategy learning	epistemic immunity = protection of free, sustained pluralism		constitutional non- domination = <i>includes protection against extreme inequalities</i>
learning	solution discoverable iff pluralism	discovery reliability = iterative testing and contest under free pluralism	reliable iff epistemic immunity holds	experimentalist open democracy polycentriclottocracy with open-access policy-making mechanisms (deliberative design and voting/signalling designs) & diversification of institutional metrics
tame	solution available to experts	simple reliability = expert structures and apt deference	reliable iff discovery rel. and epistemic immunity hold	1. freedom to develop cumulative culture 2. institutional legitimacy- awarding mechanism (education and credentialing)

Central institutional epistemic vices = **epistemic capture** and **epistemic drain**

Both constitute **vicious normalization** = a *predictable or intended* reduction of relevant diversity and consequently a *predictable or intended* violation of epistemic reliability

Epistemic drain is normalization by exclusion of some group(s) from the search for knowledge (based on their shared identity/social property).

Epistemic capture is normalization by organizing the search for knowledge exclusively according to the strategies of some group(s) in the society.

epistemic drain

= denial or systematic violation of constitutional liberties and exclusion of contributions into the common pool of epistemic resources, of some group of agents, based on their shared social property

- paradigmatically: oppression and epistemic injustice

epistemic capture

= mismatching the epistemically compromised version of simple reliability with wicked or learning problems, by 1) organizing the search for knowledge according to a single strategy (or a single set of strategies), thus violating epistemic immunity, and 2) delegating governance and deliberation (in relevant part or completely) to a specified normative community (or at best a set of normative communities) in the society, thus violating discovery reliability

- paradigmatically: technocracy (“epistocracy”) and value capture

Extreme Inequalities as Vicious Normalization

Extreme wealth constitutes epistemic capture.

Poverty constitutes epistemic drain.

Extreme wealth = epistemic capture

1. Wealth in the state (analytical term borrowed from Bennet, Brouwer and Claassen 2023)

- the *very possibility* of extremely disproportionate influence of the extremely wealthy on governance transforms these systems *in fact* into plutocracies (follows from non-domination)

- capture analyzable along three lines:

capture of political class - bottlenecking the selection of elected representatives & directing their behavior

capture of policy - conditioning the preferences of representatives (incl. implicit threat) & more means to lobby

media capture - owning media & funding manipulation of discourse (incl. astroturf movements)

Extreme wealth = epistemic capture

2. Power in economy (analytical term borrowed from Bennet, Brouwer and Claassen 2023)

normalization of markets = centralization of planning

domination of workers under normalization of labor markets

Poverty = epistemic drain

1. Poverty constitutes oppression, subjugation and exclusion, on the basis on the shared property of being poor. Thus, it constitutes epistemic drain.

- oppression = due to their shared property, the poor are deprived of basic material, bodily, medical and legal protections, and basic historical epistemic achievements *that are available to all other agents*

- subjugation = in order to survive, the poor have no other choice but to be subject to domination - *they are not free to pursue their favored strategies*, but only strategies prescribed by their “masters”

- exclusion = the poor are denied the right to choose or develop their favored search strategies, but they are also effectively denied the right to make an epistemic contribution to governance, science, economy, art and other epistemic domains to which the wider population of free and equal agents has access

Poverty = epistemic drain

2. Poverty as a result of the **epistemic inflation of the market**.

= market as sole arbiter of epistemic value

- one of key epistemic functions of the **diversification of institutional devices** in pluralist systems is that it **protects against monopolization of valuation and harvest by any single device**

3. Poverty constitutes loss of epistemic resources and redundancy.

= violation of **agent scarcity principle**

This account does **not** require any comprehensive doctrine of equality or massive totalizing restructuring of social relations according to any normative blueprint.

Instead, only focuses on the extremes - that violate pluralism.

Both epistemic democrats and - **more to the point** - **epistemic liberals**,
must accept that it follows from their **core commitments**
that the protection from extreme inequalities is one of the key conditions of
epistemic reliability of institutional systems.

Institutional Design of Protection against Extreme Inequalities

1. UBI and polycentric basic services
2. Global 100% tax above some threshold of private wealth

Possibility of pluralism?

Our oppressive regimes of elite capture are not a natural state that we must contend with because no change is possible. Just because something is difficult due to the history and the present of capture and rot of our institutions, doesn't mean that it is an ideal design of a distant world—instead, **ending any form of oppression throughout history was both immensely difficult and a mere neighborhood world**, made actual by dreams and bodies of diverse people rising together against domination.

Moreover, beyond the plutocratic capture, the world abounds with oppressions, many of which do not hide behind the metaphysics of markets and meritocracy, but exert their vicious domination nakedly, through brute force, adorned only by local variations of the old fairy tales of natural hierarchy, manifest destiny, or blood and soil.

The institutional systems of our planet are designed and utilized by competing elites committed almost exclusively to epistemically vicious ideologies—market fundamentalist, technocratic, totalitarian.

Only the luckiest among us live in societies with severely compromised universal constitutional liberties and self-governance structures, dancing to the tunes chosen by the extremely wealthy few. The unluckiest among us live under abominable domination, relentlessly abused and exploited, strangers to any freedom worthy of its name.

Is a pluralist system even possible in such a world? Of course it is.

The story of our world is not *only* a story of oppression—it is also an abundance of stories of liberations, of thriving social diversities, of institutional ecologies of self-governance, of solving problems together, of learning, and *of change*. Even as many of us around the world are still, as I write this, trapped in helpless subjugation, we are not destined for domination—or at least, **we are animals of freedom as much as we are animals of oppression.**

In his last book, Gerald Gaus (2021) argues in detail that there are no fundamental obstacles to social morality of pluralism inherent in “human nature”—our evolutionary history provides resources for all kinds of moral and social dynamics and organizations, both “tribalistic” and “cosmopolitan”, and while we are not optimized for an ultra-social system of free diversity, **we are equally not optimized for any other social system.**

Thus, however vile the powerful and however deep the path-dependencies have settled into our current captured societies, infecting our institutions and cultures, **no vicious regime can ever be safe from change.**

Thank you.

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