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This paper explores a particular kind of freedom which is termed 'epistemic' – the freedom to formulate or construct beliefs and ideas, to discuss these with others and to revise one's ideas accordingly. It is in part stimulated by reading Miranda Fricker's *Epistemic Injustice* (2007) ; at the core of epistemic injustice is the denial of freedom itself.

The notion of epistemic freedom is implicit in a range of theories that address the phenomenon of domination. For example, the historical idea of republican liberty holds that a key component of freedom consists in non-domination – that one is not in any way beholden to the will of another (Skinner, 1998). Antonio Gramsci (1971) can be interpreted as further developing this idea through his notion of hegemony which essentially articulated the idea of structural domination. This was further developed by Gilles Deleuze (1992) through his idea of a 'society of control'. Gramsci never mentions the term 'epistemic freedom'; but when he proposes that "all men are philosophers" (Gramsci, p. 323) he is suggesting that all persons have the capacity for *epistemic* freedom – the ability to entertain, develop and discuss ideas. Of course, in the twenty-first century is is a commonplace that everyone has the capacity to learn; but Gramsci was attempting to articulate a conception of cognitive ability that goes beyond learning. Indeed, I would suggest that the focus in contemporary times on learning can inhibit epistemic freedom.

For we need to recognise the distinction between learning and education. Learning can take place under many different kinds of regime, including those intent on keeping children and students in a subaltern status. Unfree individuals still must learn; indeed, learning may be an intrinsic part of the identity of unfreedom. For those who are not free still have many tasks to complete and need to achieve what is expected of them. Although education does indeed contain learning as one of its necessary components it does something else: education promotes epistemic freedom. In particular, it encourages its participants to entertain ideas in the form of formulating, creating, debating, rejecting and accepting. Without a commitment to epistemic freedom education just becomes learning.

One crucial ingredient of epistemic freedom is a recognition of the role of theory. Its importance has been defended by the radical feminist American writer, bell hooks, in her book *Teaching to Transgress*. In the chapter entitled "Theory as Laboratory Practice" she recognises the way in which the appropriation of theoretical vocabularies can be used to exclude and marginalise. Nevertheless she goes on to criticise those who eschew theory : "by internalising the false assumption that theory is not a social practice, they promote the formation of a potentially oppressive hierarchy where all concrete action is viewed as more important than any theory written or spoken." (hooks, 1994, 65-66). hooks affirms the 'healing' nature of theory in which fresh ideas can be used to cleanse the mind of dull, sterile thinking. She goes on to say that we should "necessarily celebrate and value theory that can be shared in oral as well as written narrative." (p. 70) I suggest that an essential part of epistemic freedom is precisely the celebration and valuing of theory and ideas.

How might this be best achieved – in the seminar, in the classroom ? hooks emphasises the role of dialogue and discussion in bringing about the understanding of ideas. But here a degree of caution is needed. In his book *Freedom to Learn*, Bruce Macfarlane has pointed out how academics in British universities have started to adopt learning methods using group presentations, peer assessment and group dialogue. His concern is that the freedom to learn passively or individually is being undermined; students have a right *not* to participate (Macfarlane, 2016). My concerns overlap with Macfarlane's but have a different focus. First, if group presentations and projects are made the principle vehicle for learning there is a risk that the group never really gets beyond descriptive analyses of ideas that are underpinned by common sense and easily available evidence. To put this point a different way: if one was wary of promoting epistemic freedom a good way of doing this would be to make group presentations one of the main vehicle of learning and assessment. Students would 'play safe' in order to garner higher marks; they might back away from risky ideas; moreover, the group dynamic would make it difficult to get unconventional ideas accepted by the all members of the group.

Academics, if they are interested in promoting epistemic freedom, need to give each *individual* student the time and space to think through ideas for themselves in addition to dialogical scenarios. Ideas cannot be just 'learnt' in the manner of, e.g. mastering the use of grammar in a foreign language or interpreting data in a bar chart. The difficult process of thinking ideas through – comparing them with other ideas, challenging them through hypothetical scenarios, comparing them with ideas one has already grasped – can only be achieved by thinking through ideas for oneself. Time is needed to think, to make mistakes, to backtrack, to read and re-read. Time is also needed to familiarise oneself with the vocabulary of a new idea which at first may seem strange or alien.

I also suggest that a *sole* focus on texts and writing is misplaced. It is true, of course, that ideas drawn from the humanities and the social sciences are largely text-based. It is a barrier to their epistemic freedom if students do not learn to read complex material and write with confidence. Nevertheless, epistemic freedom does not have to be text-bound and the requirement that this must be so may inhibit imaginative expression. For teachers of younger children, this is nothing new: but even in higher education there is no reason why ideas – including complex ideas – cannot be understood through the use of artefacts, of fictional stories, of musical sounds and , of course, visual expression.

In British universities there is still plenty of scope for developing epistemic freedom providing academic teachers recognise the importance of the concept and are prepared to develop appropriate pedagogies which go beyond 'learning'.

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