

Knowledge Is a Commons

Standpoints on open knowledge, the Anthropocene, nature, medicine and open technology — stated plainly, as a basis for discussion

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PRELIMINARY NOTE: STANDPOINTS, NOT DOGMAS

This paper states standpoints, not prescriptions. Syntagma imposes no duties; everyone calibrates their own moral-ethical compass. What follows is the direction we think in — open to re-examination, open to dissent. The argument decides.

1 KNOWLEDGE AS A COMMONS

Knowledge and education are common goods. This position predates any open-access movement: classical sociology of science counts the common ownership of results among the basic norms of science — findings belong to the community, not the discoverer (Merton, 1942/1973). Research on knowledge commons has shown that knowledge is a non-scarce good whose value grows through sharing (Hess & Ostrom, 2007). A special right to claim a discovery permanently for oneself and to exclude others cannot be grounded in the matter itself — every discovery presupposes the knowledge of generations it stands on.

For us it follows: whoever knows, has found out or developed something, shares it. Not as an imposed duty — but as a self-commitment that follows from the character of the good. Passing on knowledge and education is, in our view, simply what is adequate to the matter.

2 THE ENCLOSURE: BARRIERS, TITLES, CONSECRATION

The actual state contradicts the character of the good. Publications sit behind paywalls even where the research was publicly funded. Access to knowledge is coupled to titles, institutions and origin; academic consecration filters whose argument is heard at all. Our own works describe this structure in detail: the risk-disposition asymmetry (ρ/δ) — whoever sets categories and access keeps disposition while risk

and consequence-load fall elsewhere; the enclosure of openness ("Disclosure as Enclosure"); education as an apparatus of sorting rather than enabling; the "borrowed magnitude" of consecration asymmetry. The finding is consistent: it is not the argument that is examined but the speaker's entitlement.

Our standpoint: an academic dignity built on exclusion — on barriers, titles and elite institutions — cannot be maintained in this form. Dignity belongs to what withstands re-examination. Origin or title do not decide; the argument decides.

3 ANTHROPOCENE: FRAME AND HUMILITY

We work in the Anthropocene (Crutzen & Stoermer, 2000): there is hardly a state on this planet left that is not directly or indirectly influenced by humans. We draw two consequences at once. First, responsibility: what we research and build has effects — on the living world, nature and next generations. Second, humility: we cannot and should not control everything. A thinking that treats nature merely as a control problem repeats the very error that shaped the Anthropocene. A rethinking is needed — from control to responsibility, from domination to preservation.

4 NATURE AND THE LIVING WORLD

Progress justifies no exploitation. Concretely, for us:

- **No exploitation of animals and nature for progress.** Knowledge built on the suffering of sentient beings carries its costs within it. Where alternatives exist or can be developed, they are the way.
- **Letting nature be nature.** Nature has an intrinsic value that does not dissolve into its usefulness for us. No killing, no caging as a means of knowledge where the knowledge can be had otherwise — and, in doubt, abstention.
- **Preserving biodiversity.** The documented loss of biological diversity (IPBES, 2019) is a loss account paid by future generations. Preservation is part of the research mandate, not its opposite.

In our understanding, science and research serve further development — of mind, environment, body and nature together, not one at the expense of the other. The imperative of responsibility (Jonas, 1979) states the measure: act so that the effects are compatible with the permanence of genuine life on earth.

5 MEDICINE FOR THE HUMAN BEING

Medicine serves the health and well-being of the human being — not capital. That is not a radical sentence but the core of the medical self-understanding: "The health and well-being of my patient will be my first consideration" (Declaration of Geneva, WMA 1948/2017). Where medical knowledge, diagnostics or therapy vanish behind price barriers no longer justifiable by development and production

costs, this self-understanding is violated. Medical knowledge is a commons in the strictest sense — sharing it saves lives.

6 A VOICE FOR THE QUIET

Research that belongs to everyone does not orient itself upward. Our standpoint: knowledge and skill are to be used first where they are lacking — for the weaker, the disadvantaged, the next generations, and the living world that has no voice of its own. That is not charity but the consequence of section 1: a commons that serves only the already well-equipped is none.

7 OPEN TECHNOLOGY

What holds for texts holds for technology: open source, open hardware, hackable, repairable, understandable and traceable. A device that can be neither opened nor understood nor repaired disempowers its users and produces waste. Our tools are open source (AGPL), our texts freely licensed (CC BY). Under exploration is the RETURN model as a possible further step: use stays permanently free for individuals, research and education; whoever profits commercially at scale gives back to the commons by an open, fixed formula — openness that sustains itself instead of consuming itself.

8 NO ENDPOINT: REVOLUTION AS PARADIGM SHIFT

Science does not advance only cumulatively; it renews itself in leaps in which basic assumptions themselves come up for revision (Kuhn, 1962). In this sense — and only in this sense — we understand research as revolutionary: prepared to change its own paradigm when the findings demand it. A final truth, an endpoint, will in all likelihood never come in this work; there is always smaller, better, faster, different. Which is exactly why the work stays open: rescale, rethink, reconnect — everything with everything, and all of it for everyone.

9 WHAT THIS IS NOT

This statement is no catechism. We do not pass final judgment on right and wrong; we hold standpoints, assessments, opinions — and submit them to re-examination. There are no duties imposed by us; there is the invitation to calibrate and apply one's own ethical compass. Two limits, however, we set absolutely for our own work: no paywalls before our results, and no cooperation with military, weapons or defence industry — in licence, content and operation, without exception.

The standpoints of this paper are developed from ongoing research, among others: the risk-disposition asymmetry (p/6 master theorem, FORSCH-0083); "Disclosure as Enclosure" (the enclosure of openness); "Education as Apparatus" (FORSCH-0264); "The Borrowed Magnitude" (FORSCH-0199, consecration asymmetry); the Bologna Process analysis. The works are or will be published openly in the corpus.

§ REFERENCES

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