

## Epistemological Considerations in Snauwaert's *Teaching Peace as a Matter of Justice*

Jeffery H. Warnke  
Walsh University

**Abstract:** In the peaceful society the right to justification is a fundamental right. Justification forms a working framework for moral reasoning in the public use of reason. Snauwaert's *Teaching Peace* is not only telling us about or making a case for its recommended approach to the moral reasoning behind the constitution of justification and knowledge, but also inculcates epistemically valuable moral reasoning by presenting readers with opportunities to make reasoned judgments themselves. Snauwaert shows us how to show ourselves that there is an epistemological nature of justice and peace that coincides with and supports the academic aims of education.

In *Teaching Peace as a Matter of Justice*, Dale Snauwaert (2023, p. 1) describes the purpose of his book to be “to articulate a normative philosophical framework for the development of an educational approach to teaching peace as a matter of justice, specifically through the lens of moral and political philosophy.” Within this discussion of the normative philosophical framework of justice and moral reasoning is the question posed in Chapter Six “Who’s Truth?” In his discussion of “Whose truth?”, Snauwaert explicitly addresses the relationship between epistemology and justice while exploring questions of the meaning of reality and truth. In addition, Snauwaert discusses both the epistemological criteria that establish a basis for “knowing” truth and reality and the way knowledge and power are connected. However, epistemic beliefs are inherent or implicit in Snauwaert’s discussion of moral reasoning and the educational theory underlying his pedagogy of moral reasoning. In this discussion, I will address these epistemological matters, both the explicit treatment of epistemological considerations in Chapter Six and the implicit epistemic beliefs underlying the normative framework and the pedagogy of moral reasoning discussed in the book.

*Teaching Peace* begins with an exploration and definition of peace, in a positive sense, as the presence of justice. Justice then hinges upon an idea of justification, or more precisely the right to justification (Forst, 2014). The right to justification is a fundamental right, it is mutual and reciprocal, grounded by values of equality and liberty. The free and equal status of persons includes freedom from coercion and a freedom to participate in the space of reasons, where moral reasoning provides criteria for validity and justifiability, including moral justification (Snauwaert, 2023, p. 50-52).

Yet, as an introduction to moral philosophy and normative theory, Snauwaert provides the student/reader with alternative, competing approaches or criteria for answering the questions regarding the source and basis for normativity, or more precisely normative justification. Alternatives discussed include objective moral truth and rational intuitionism, Kantian constructivism and the Categorical Imperative, communitarianism’s cultural situatedness that rests justification upon “social acceptance,” and the idea of moral reasoning. Snauwaert rebuilds the framework of moral reasoning from a political constructivist, social contractarian approach (Snauwaert, 2023, p. 40-52). In the ideas of reasoning, justification, and validity, we see clearly concepts that have an epistemological nature. For the reader, the text is an exercise in clarifying understanding of this field of political and moral philosophy and its key thinkers/authors. By ‘understanding’, I mean synthesizing a broad philosophical literature on justice, finding key insights, and making connections to the discourse on justice in forming a working framework for

moral reasoning and for the public use of reason. Snauwaert allows the reader to form their own judgments about these fundamental questions. Justification and validity as epistemic concerns are built from this intersubjective space of reasons and the iterative and recursive processes of reflection, dialogue, and (re)constitution. As Snauwaert developed the text, the questions of justice and the answers of various writers/philosophers to those questions, model the dialogical, reflective practice that forms the framework of moral reasoning. *Teaching Peace* is not only telling us about or making a case for its recommended approach to moral reasoning, but also demonstrates moral reasoning by presenting alternative conceptions and asking the readers to make reasoned judgments themselves. Snauwaert's *Teaching Peace* provides a dialogue in which to engage with these ideas broadly and deeply.

There is much in this text that is of interest. It is a wonderful contribution to several fields of study, especially Peace Education and Philosophy of Education. The text is an excellent resource for anybody teaching about justice and peace for its pedagogy of moral reasoning gets at the heart of any civic education in the democratic context. It is built upon epistemic educational aims that guide the development of critical knowledge constructing capabilities, that inculcate capacity to think critically about a set of fundamental questions of justice, and of ability to analyze and critique the testimony of philosophers' conceptions and responses to the questions Snauwaert poses. Furthermore, the reader is challenged to reflect upon the meaning and validity of positions Snauwaert presents, which recognizes the epistemic dependence of humans on others as a basis for developing capacities to make personal judgments on the validity of various positions. In this way, Snauwaert preserves the readers' epistemic autonomy. And finally, as a text for any course or group of readers, Snauwaert provides the tools for extending the reflective practice to the context of a learning community. Working through the Peace Constitution Project is a group effort which engages students in the deliberative and dialogical nature of public reason that is fundamental to both positive peace and justice (p. 72-73).

Snauwaert gives us a strong framework and outline, or even a lesson plan if you will, for setting up this novel learning experience. Students enter into dialogue with theory/theories and with peers to interpret and then negotiate a shared meaning. Participants not only learn content about the subject of justice and peace but engage those capabilities necessary for participation in the larger context of the public sphere. The pedagogy and the classroom become the model or microcosm of our democratic lifeways consistent with the Deweyan tradition (Dewey, 1916). The Peace Constitution Project is a space where the student can experience and practice value conflict and the political process of adjudicating that conflict through peaceful means. As they arrive at a place of shared meaning or a shared sense of a reasonable constitution, students have had the chance to be co-authors and co-legislators. Development of capacities for reasoning and justification are the educationally interesting aspects of this pedagogy. More important than any episteme of knowledge, the pedagogy gets at the very epistemic aims of education, which is to learn how to think freely, to understand the veracity of evidence and claims, to make judgments about the justifiability of those claims from a place of critical reflection, including a social or public use of reason which involves judging the veracity of testimony.

From an educator's perspective, I'm drawn to the idea of moral reasoning as a pedagogy and then, in turn, how this democratic purpose guides not only pedagogical considerations, but the very aims of education. Pedagogical themes of *Teaching Peace* converge on the intersection of the epistemic aims of education and the moral and political or social aims of education (Brighouse, 2009; Robertson, 2009). As Snauwaert shows, knowledge is connected to power,

and thus this relationship must be confronted and reflected upon. The road to validity runs through the social practices of what Snauwaert has described as “knowledge constitution”. The elements of intellectual practices that are familiar to those of us in the academy (such as free, open, rational inquiry and critical public scrutiny where transparency, publicity, and replicability are essential), construct the epistemic beliefs of the educated community of practice. But they are not always the focus of education especially in the data-driven, standards-focused realm of K-12 formal schooling, where the answers are in the back of the book, where knowledge is objectified and measurable, where teachers are technicians delivering what Freire has described as a banking model of education (Biesta & Stengel, 2016; Freire, 2003). At its most insidious, the banking model is a form of indoctrination which amounts to what Miranda Fricker (2009) has described as “epistemic injustice” and, in terms of peace education, we can call forms of cultural violence (Galtung, 1990; Snauwaert, 2023).

Snauwaert has an excellent chapter devoted to the question of *Who’s Truth?* that lays out a discussion of the epistemological nature of justice and peace. Epistemology is connected to the idea of moral reasoning and to democracy as a practice and way of life. In other words, the way knowledge is related to justice and the way knowledge creation is connected to justice is conceived as resting upon a right to justification. The challenges to epistemic beliefs or positions posed by alternative approaches to judgments about knowledge, including the challenge of authoritarianism, heightens Snauwaert’s critique of the relationship between knowledge and power (Snauwaert, 2023, p. 121-123). Authoritarians use invalid justifications rooted in demagogic propaganda that uses, manipulates, and coerces through rhetorical device to blur rational judgments, to stir emotional/affective responses (Stanley, 2015). Such disinformation and misinformation create an ecosystem that challenges what is a fundamental educational concern: a capacity for persons to experience cognitive conceptual change. Where there is resistance to change of mind in the face of clear evidence for doing so or avoidance of the uncomfortable recognition of invalidity, Snauwaert sees positional bias and confirmation bias as environmental aspects of what he describes as a “post-truth ecosystem” (p. 122).

As is consistent with Snauwaert’s perspective, education is a vital concern in a society that values democratic processes and patterns of life. And education derives its purpose from these democratic imperatives. Moral reasoning as the basis for justice and the manifestation of peace involves an intersection of epistemic aims with the moral, social, and political aims of democratic life. Civic education serves the development of the capacities of moral reasoning and is implicated in each of these spheres in an interconnected way. These tools of moral reasoning give us a way to reflect upon our deepest considered convictions, to find coherence among our own conflicts of value and to explore how to offer reasons to others and to listen to them authentically while assessing the veracity and reasonableness of their claims. This is the basis of what John Rawls (2005) has called public reason, with his idea of the burdens of judgment that represent those areas of conflict in values, interests, and meaning. And Rawls also suggests we enter this space of public reason with the duty of civility to offer reasons and to listen to others, moving from the “I and they” to the “we” in the constitution of knowledge. Emily Robertson (2009, p. 29) demonstrates this connection between epistemic aims and the social, political aims of education:

The independent thinker is not someone who works everything out for herself, even in principle, but one who exercises a controlling intelligence over the input she receives from the normal sources of information whether their basis be

individual or communal. Such a conception of epistemic independence does not require the impossible task of extricating oneself from social influences but, rather, that one become capable of evaluating and criticizing particular received views, assessing the credentials of experts, and examining the potential biases of social pathways to knowledge if there is reason to do so. Such assessments and evaluations will often be a collaborative enterprise... there is a social and political dimension to becoming an independent thinker: individuals should be taught to understand the importance of supporting social institutions that make us all less gullible. Here consideration of the epistemic ends of education becomes an aspect of civic education.

Studying epistemology shows us the fallibility of human perception and knowledge which puts us in reliance or dependence on others and on this social terrain. But if democratic values of freedom and autonomy are of any concern to us, this kind of epistemic dependence presents a challenge for us. We must be conscious of how power operates and manifests in forms of knowledge, how knowledge can be connected to injustice when it lacks validity and instantiates the conditions of oppression as normalcy or as natural, or when it arouses fear and animosity. Snauwaert's discussion provides a deep investigation of this conception and the pedagogy related to it, giving students/readers tools for naming, identifying, and conceptualizing both epistemological injustice and epistemological justice. As Snauwaert states:

The constitution of knowledge is comprised of the rules, values, and principles that govern and support the pursuit of knowledge based in public critical scrutiny. These rules, values, and principles include the fallibilist rule, the empirical rule, basic rights to freedom of thought, conscience, speech, inquiry, and association, toleration, and the right to and duty of justification. Together they comprise the constitution of a well-ordered global epistemological social network. It can be arranged further that the principles of this constitution are normatively justifiable, that is, consistent with the elements of fairness. We also explored the ways in which society and the process of establishing justifiable claims to knowledge and truth can be undermined for political purposes through the weaponization of tribalism and bias through the propagation of disinformation. The method of science [in a Peircean sense] and the principles of the constitution of knowledge are a bulwark against post-truth, and thus, political authoritarianism. (p. 124)

One challenge I face as an educator is to have students recognize the distinction between moral or normative judgments and the factual or empirical judgments that are connected to observations of the world. I see the discussion here of moral reason as a way to help students make a connection to often abstract concepts and to see how normativity operates in our ways of thinking, and what that kind of inquiry entails. The collection of concepts and the way they are woven together into this task of constitution building through moral reasoning is a valuable approach to not only the epistemic aims of education, but also those political and moral aims of a democratic civic education. On p. 118, Snauwaert cites John Dewey's (1916; 1927) contention that "the knowledge most worth knowing is knowledge of the ways by which anything is entitled to be called knowledge instead of being mere opinion or guess-work or dogma." This speaks to Dewey's view of democracy as a conjoint communicated experience where peaceful resolution of conflict reigns and where free association and consent rest upon a shared practice of community actively building that space of shared meaning and interest we call the public. To

enter into dialogue with theory and with peers to interpret and then negotiate a shared meaning is to model the three forms of reflective equilibrium Rawls (1995/2005) describes in his “Reply to Habermas.” Criteria and focus shift across the philosopher’s domain of theoretical reflective equilibrium (*pro tanto justification*, judging the veracity of reasons within a conception of justice); the personal reflective practice of finding coherence between the concept of justice and one’s personal moral and ethical convictions (comprehensive doctrine, full justification), and, thirdly, to the domain of public reason where reflective practice is shifted to an intersubjective dialogical and deliberative context (public justification). Snauwaert provides the framework, content, and exercises necessary for the development of these flexible cognitive capabilities: Capabilities fundamental to the aims of education and to the development of citizens who are agents of peace and justice.

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