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by bringing theologians into conversation with scholars  
across the spectrum of faculties  
in research universities  
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Disciplinary Note

## **JUSTICE AND TRUST IN INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH**

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In his Theology Brief *Justice and Rights*, Prof. Nicholas Wolterstorff indicates that first-order justice pertains to how agents engage each other, how they interact. This assertion is true; however, deep interpersonal relationships require more than mere justice. In my opinion, they can only develop in a climate of trust.

This has important implications for academic work. In recent years, I have directed several interdisciplinary research projects. Through them, we have tried different ways to foster collaborative work between scholars with diverse academic backgrounds. I understand interdisciplinary research as a practice that, without denying the individual identity of the disciplines involved, results in the production of innovative knowledge with insights from different fields. In interdisciplinary research, experts from diverse disciplines work in a joint, not independent, manner on a common problem, engaging in a creative pluralism that requires them to share the way of thinking of others, and not only to learn new content from different fields.

Nevertheless, interdisciplinary research faces a series of challenges related, mainly, to the interaction between specialists and the reciprocal evaluation of their different points of view. In particular, collaborations between philosophy/theology and sciences are challenging because each researcher is used to working within the framework of a theoretical doctrine and following their own methods and procedures. Therefore, the lack of knowledge of many empirical details challenges the philosophers, while the sophistication of the underlying philosophical discussions challenges the scientists. Furthermore, since many terms change their meaning depending on the disciplinary context, the problem of communicating correctly challenges everyone. As interdisciplinary research involves a greater effort than that required by an exclusively disciplinary approach, the willingness of the researchers is necessary to carry the investigation through to the end.

Consequently, interdisciplinary research demands a very particular and deep type of interaction between academics. Collaborative intellectual work requires a mutual appreciation and respect among the members of the research team to promote among them an attitude of openness that consolidates the desire to learn from others. These attitudes can only be developed in a climate of trust.

First-order justice is a founding pillar of trust. When there has been a violation of first-order justice, trust between people

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is broken. Although second-order justice is a fair way of responding to that violation, second-order justice hardly restores trust. Since a climate of trust is essential in collaborative teams, and since situations of injustice among team members could alter this climate, transparent relationships of fairness and justice among investigators should be a concern when conducting collaborative research.

The first step in developing trust among members of the research team is a fair recognition of the contributions of others, since both empirical developments and bibliographic studies or conceptual analyzes all contribute equally to clarify the object of study in an interdisciplinary research. The next step could be achieved through the concerted effort to produce a joint publication. Publishing the results in co-authored articles is a deeper manifestation of trust and mutual recognition among researchers. However, as the practice of co-authorship does not follow the same rules in all disciplines, a fair authorship policy must be established. Another important aspect is transparency and equity in the management of research funding, because an unbiased distribution of the resources obtained also consolidates the trust of the researchers. In this sense, a climate of deep trust among interdisciplinary researchers could only be achieved to the extent that all of them are open to learn from each other and are firmly committed to the effort of understanding and respecting the characteristics of those epistemic fields in which they are not specialists.

## Further Reading

Vanney, Claudia E. 2021. "Virtudes intelectuales para la investigación en ciencia y filosofía." In *Ciencia y filosofía. Estudios en homenaje a Juan Arana*, edited by Francisco Rodríguez Valls and Juan José Padial. Sevilla: Thematha. In press.

Vanney, Claudia E., and Ignacio Aguinalde. 2021. "Second-person perspective in interdisciplinary research: A cognitive approach for understanding and improving the dynamics of collaborative research teams." *Scientia et Fides* 9 (2). In press.

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