

Objectivity and Subjectivity in the Ethnographic Method

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The author discusses the application of the concepts of objectivity and subjectivity in ethnographic theory and research, and finds that one kind of subjectivity, that of applying a particular perspective to ethnography, is central and inevitable. Today, we acknowledge that objectivity is relative to a given perspective or preunderstanding, but the applied perspective must compete with other perspectives or paradigms in its effectiveness in our understanding and managing of a lived reality. In some situations, where no such fruitful alternative exists, a simple correspondence between word and world can be an acceptable notion of truth. Here, an all-encompassing consensus of what would be objective and subjective can be expected. Thus, the concepts retain a central function without completely altering the meanings they have in everyday and scientific language, although the values traditionally ascribed to the notions have changed to some extent and a more refined conceptualization has been reached.

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Historically, the notions of objectivity and subjectivity have played a central role in the sciences. Today, their conventional meaning and dichotomy are under attack by the postmodern ways of thinking. During the past few decades, any mention of words and expressions such as truth, knowledge, value free, objectivity, bias, fact, reality, and correspondence between word and world has come to be regarded with increasing suspicion, up to the point where many scientists seem unwilling to run the risk of using them at all. This trend, which seems to be much more pronounced in the humanities than in the natural sciences, is not merely unfortunate, as these phrases, simple and harmless as they might seem, are connected to a string of problematic implications. The expressions are integrated into our everyday language as well as the professional language of, especially, the natural sciences. In fields such as medicine, health care, and nursing science, increasing interest in and awareness of the possibilities of ethnographic methods (in particular participant observation and interviews, and the subsequent analysis of the data obtained) have developed. However, the incorporation of methods stemming from the humanities into the more quantitatively oriented medical traditions raises

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certain issues. Specifically, how should an ethnographer respond if queried about whether the work he or she does is objective or an expression of mere subjectivity?

A central problem is the nature of the generated knowledge; this can be approached from many angles. My approach in this article is an investigation of the meanings and roles of the notions of subjectivity and objectivity in relation to ethnographic research. The rationale behind this choice lies in the central role and status of the notions within the natural sciences (in which the word *subjective* still serves as a term of abuse) and in the problematic application of these words to ethnography.

In many ways, the realism/antirealism debate, which has been raging for centuries (and continues to do so today, partly under the "science war" heading), is central to the status of the question of objectivity and subjectivity. Yet, the present article will not be about realism but, rather, is a discussion of if and how one, as an ethnographer, can use the notions of objectivity and subjectivity in research. To attempt this without addressing the realism/antirealism question would not make sense, so I will refer to it. In short,¹ this discussion centers on the metaphysical question of whether the physical world exists independently of our thinking about it. Realists maintain that it does; antirealists (also known as idealists) deny this and even the meaningfulness of the question. The next question is whether this world has any intrinsic characteristics. If it does, it would imply, as philosophers of science like Popper (1972, 1983) have argued, that certain descriptions of the world are correct and others not, given the validity of the correspondence theory of truth. According to this, a proposition is true if it corresponds (in some way) to the reality that it attempts to describe. Devitt (1991) argued that realism is possible without the correspondence theory of truth and that antirealism is consistent with a correspondence theory, as the correspondence might be between propositions and something like ideas or sense data (that are not independent of us). Nonetheless, Devitt correctly stated that the correspondence theory tends to be associated with realism, and in the following, I have assumed them to walk hand in hand.

Objectivity and subjectivity are typically used in a way strongly related to this realism debate. Typically, being objective can be defined as "not influenced by personal feelings or opinions in considering and representing facts" or "not dependent on the mind for existence" (Soanes & Stevenson, 2003). Ethnographic work typically deals with both physical and nonphysical properties of the world. In the following, I will assume that this makes no difference for the questions addressed. This assumption can be made on the basis of a conception of the existence of a social and psychological reality that is as real as the physical reality. Clearly, it is, as such, not independent of what we think of it (as it is made by us), but it does hold certain properties that can be the subject of research. To a certain degree, it can be said to be independent insofar as (a) certain physical entities in the world are the result of this social reality and (b) social structures tend to be so engraved in our mental world that they do not disappear overnight (cf. Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*, e.g., Bourdieu, 1990). Objectivity in the context of this article is best understood, initially, as the conditions under which the true correspondence between word and world can take place: not the presence of the correspondence itself (in that case, objectivity and truth would coincide) but, rather, the way in which we ensure that this correspondence can take place and true propositions are stated. I will return to this meaning later in the article to develop and analyze the concept further. In the conclusion,

we will see that antirealists can actually make use of the concept in much the same way as realists do.

Within ethnography, the question of objectivity and subjectivity is of crucial importance. In the end, it deals with the most fundamental issues: What is the nature of the knowledge generated? What claims to validity exist (if any)? and What consequences will a certain research behavior have concerning this validity? If we assume that the subjective/objective distinction is outdated and should simply be abandoned along with the words themselves, we have to make clear the consequences this choice would have to the ethnographic discipline. Most important, the consequences are severe regarding the question of validity. The case of triangulation illustrates the point. Earlier, triangulation (the idea of combining different research strategies in the same study) was used to validate a given study through reducing the likelihood of misinterpretation (Flick, 1998; Stake, 2000). Today, the understanding of triangulation is influenced more by postmodernism, where it is seen as a way of enriching the study (Flick, 1998). Richardson (2000), arguing from a postmodernist tradition, has suggested the term *crystallization* as a replacement for triangulation, as it emphasizes the multitudes of angles and the infinity of refractions. Following this point of view, there is no final, single truth and no distinct, absolute object of inquiry, yet the question remains the same: If there is no external reality of a given nature that the researcher attempts to capture, why bother with the multitude of perspectives (triangulation or crystallization)? What is the point in trying to view the setting through different optics, if not the idea that the objectivity increases with each new point of view? Also, if no distinction between subjectivity and objectivity exists, how is it possible to argue for maintaining a differentiation between cases of clear bias or fraud and sound research? If the problem of bias and fraud does not consist of a lack of objectivity, ethnographers will have to explain why they would condemn such research (assuming that virtually everyone would do so). Indeed, many of the explicit or implicit values of any science would be threatened by discarding the old dualism, although it is trendy to do so.

Although some might argue that they are mere words that, as such, are of only linguistic interest, it seems obvious that the way in which we talk and think about the research affects it. It most certainly also affects the way in which researchers from other disciplines perceive the character of ethnography. In particular, researchers from the natural sciences can be expected to demand (and rightly so) answers to questions dealing with the character and validity of ethnography.

We will begin by taking a brief look at some comments from the field of ethnography about the process of doing ethnographic research, primarily as it is found in methodological and "contemplative" ethnographic literature (such as the popular *Qualitative Research Methods* series from Sage Publications) but occasionally also in other sources, for illustrative purposes. By briefly going through the commonly recognized main steps in an ethnographic study, we will understand more clearly what characterizes these steps and, at the same time, what thoughts ethnographers are having about the nature of these steps relative to the concepts. After this, we will look more directly at the role ascribed to the concepts by ethnographers. This will then be accompanied by some more traditional philosophical discussions on the topic, leading to the problematic concept of data. As this is, in many ways, central to the meaning of objectivity and subjectivity, and given the complexity of the data concept, this will receive a thorough treatment. I will focus especially on grounded

theory, as it was developed for and, to a substantial extent, was also used in different kinds of research done within the hospital sector (Bowers, 1988). Still, grounded theory is, in this article, primarily seen as an attempt to articulate and make rigid the general ideas of ethnographic research, and it is these general ideas that are in focus here rather than specific variations of the same theme (e.g., symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology, structuralism, and poststructuralism).

An inevitable problem that arises when analyzing such issues is that of general, common definitions. What, exactly, constitutes ethnography, and what is its relation to terms such as case study, participant observation, and grounded theory, and to anthropology or sociology per se? Here, I will make no attempts to suggest any strict definitions, as such definitions tend to be ignored anyway—apart from the fact that in ordinary² language, words do not gain their meanings from preconceived definitions. In a slogan-like phrase, the core of Wittgenstein's (1993) later philosophy could be, "For what we call the meaning of the word lies in the game we play with it" (p. 235); that is to say, it makes no sense to talk about the real meaning of a word, if this is to be understood as something deeper than simply the way in which we use it. Following this thread, it makes no sense to discuss what objectivity and subjectivity really mean. What we can do, however, is analyze the different ways in which it is being used in everyday conversation as well as in the ethnographic literature. Although the article is not meant as a map over every possible use, I have attempted to dig deeper into some of the more common ways in which these terms are used through examples, discussing how and when it makes sense to use them and how and when it does not. I do not claim to have solved all questions relating to the topic discussed. In the end, this article relates to questions as old as philosophy itself, questions that might never find answers. This somewhat bleak prospect should not mean, however, that the questions cannot be inquired into or that no progress or clarification can take place.

In accordance with Searle's (1995) distinction between an epistemic sense of objectivity and subjectivity and an ontological one, I focus in this discussion on the epistemological issues concerning the type of knowledge generated and how to assess it, ignoring (to the extent that this is possible) ontological issues concerning modes of existence. The latter deals with the difference in character between feelings and objects, for instance. As some of the problems dealt with in this essay concern both epistemic and ontological questions, the latter will not remain completely untouched.

THE ETHNOGRAPHIC PROCESS

I begin the analysis in a descriptive manner by taking a look at the role ethnographers ascribe to the terms *objectivity* and *subjectivity*. As this role is linked to the general process of doing ethnographic research, and because the following, more normative paragraphs also refer to this process, a brief discussion of this is needed. Analytically, the process can be divided into three parts: the definition of the object of study, the collection of data, and the analysis. The first two are presently lumped together, as in practice they are tightly connected. To illustrate the different perspectives, I provide selected examples.

Defining the Object of Study and Collecting the Data

The first step in an ethnographic investigation is the definition of the object of study. Bourdieu stressed the general importance of this: "The fundamental scientific act is the construction of the object; you don't move to the real without a hypothesis, without instruments of constructions" (Bourdieu, Chamboredon, & Passeron, 1991, p. 248). Because of the threat of creating and using constructions unconsciously (a topic that I will deal with below), awareness of the process is of utmost importance. However, this process is done not in advance (when writing the application for the research grant) but through a long series of corrections and adjustments during the research.

Although Bourdieu and colleagues' (1991) broad description, above, might seem rather uncontroversial, it does, in fact, cover a deep split in the ethnographic field, which is, in this respect, highly polarized. We find the view that any attempts to define in advance the structures, hypotheses, theories, and so on should be avoided at all costs. An example of this is offered by de Laine (1997):

Qualitative research generally lacks the structure of quantitative research provided by a hypothesis at the outset. . . . The naturalistic researcher or ethnographer typically does not work with either a priori theory or variables. These are expected to emerge from the inquiry. (p. 24)

This point of view is widespread in the field. In an ethnography, Rollins (1985) wrote, "I deliberately approached the project without hypotheses or a priori theories. I tried to enter into the research as openly as possible and allow the patterns and theories to emerge" (p. 8). Clearly, these researchers adhere to one extreme of the spectrum: that it is possible, as well as desirable, to approach the setting with no preformed ideas. When this approach is preferred, the research process will, at least in theory, be influenced by it, as the data gathering will begin in a highly unfocused way. This is expressed by, for example, Lofland and Lofland (1995), who described the earlier stages of data collection as characterized by a " 'mucking about' quality," and the researcher as a "human vacuum cleaner," sucking up more or less anything he or she comes across (p. 71). Admitting to be leaning toward social realism, they argued that a basic realist position is not threatened by the indisputable fact that all human perception is shaped by the language, personal history, and so on of the observer, and that the observer selects certain things (thereby ignoring other). According to these authors, we still do not just make up any observation we make; not all kinds of observation are synonymous with interpretation. We make reports that are capable of verification and exclude (as far as possible) inferences and judgments. The statement "There were six people in the room" is not a matter of inference and judgment, but it most certainly is a matter of importance. Inferences and judgments cannot in the same way be right or wrong, Lofland and Lofland argued.

On the other end of the scale we have Kirk and Miller (1986), who emphasized the importance of a general plan:

It is unscientific as well as maddening to initiate data collection without a language (paradigm) that precisely contrasts data and noise. The ethnographer who gathers without knowing what he or she wants (at the logical level) will find no happiness in the process. (p. 66)

Noting the use of the word *precisely*, we have here a much more stringent demand for a demarcation criterion that defines what is to be seen as data. Wolcott (1990), likewise, warned, "Do not boast of an 'atheoretical' approach that has allowed you to achieve greater objectivity, or tout your eclecticism as evidence of being 'open to everything'" (p. 60).

An intermediate position could be represented by Strauss and Corbin (1998). They argued that the golden mean is to be open minded enough that new, surprising discoveries will not be ignored but, on the other hand, also focused enough that the researcher avoids drowning in a virtual data flood. Agar (1980) has talked about a funnel approach, in which the researcher starts out broadly and becomes increasingly focused as the research progresses, a view shared by Strauss and Corbin (1998).

I leave the topic of data for now but will return to it in a later section, in which I deal with this complex issue more thoroughly.

Analyzing the Data

When it comes to the final analysis of the field data, interviews, and other possible data sources, the ethnographic field seems less divided. Everybody (more or less) can agree on the basics, which is the emergent, inductive, and open-ended character of the analysis, and that it is hard work rather than some sort of romantic inspiration, and yet creative and irreducible to some sort of algorithmic recipe. The work consists primarily of coding and memoing, the processes that allows for the categories to emerge from the immense, confused field data (e.g., Lofland & Lofland, 1995). Lofland (1995) has argued that at least analytic ethnography³ is radically different from the standard research scheme consisting of creating a hypothesis, collecting the data, and testing the hypothesis. It is not that this approach is wrong as such; it is just not the only one, nor is it the right one in the studies that analytical ethnographers perform. Lofland is clearly an advocate for the core idea of the grounded theory approach, which he holds equivalent to emergent analysis; he has found that "emergent analysis is basic human thinking and induction" (p. 63) but asserted that grounded theory tends to be nothing but a "tedious and pedantic mystification" (p. 63) of this process. When ethnography as a general concept is discussed in this article, it is to be understood à la Lofland's analytic ethnography.

The main controversy concerns the epistemological status of the analysis: Is it a neutral representation of the reality "out there?" Is it a perspective on things? Is it a mere story? and so on. This discussion will also be dealt with later in the article, but first, I will examine the consequences that the specific nature of the ethnographic process has on the ethnographers' view of the presence of objectivity and subjectivity in their research.

ETHNOGRAPHERS' SENSE OF OBJECTIVITY

A natural question to arise for an ethnographer is the extent to which his or her findings can be said to be objective and what this concept includes in the first place. Three obvious possibilities exist: to discard the term, to redefine it, or to stick to its existing, prevailing connotations, which, to a large degree, stem from the heydays

of logical positivism and further back in time, when it was used mainly in the context of natural science.

The strategy of discarding the concept altogether can be found in, for example, Agar (1986). By suggesting interpretation as a third way, as opposed to naive realism as well as extreme relativism, he wished to emphasize that the ethnographer observes a real world, with actors that were there before and will continue to be there after the research but that the ethnographer, on the other hand, is influenced by historical and cultural context as well as intended audience and the actors. In such a setting, the words *subjective* and *objective* lose their meanings, Agar argued. Lofland and Lofland (1995) have been equally unequivocal in their denouncement of such positivist values in qualitative research, as they have seen involvement and enmeshment as the counterparts to be praised here. Because participant observation requires exactly this, they concluded, "So-called objectivity and distance vis-à-vis the field setting will usually result in a failure to collect any data that are worth analyzing" (p. 17), yet when comparing this with their opinion on data as described above, one would inevitably speculate as to whether, after all, there still is not some room left for a bit of objectivity. Agar (1986), likewise, emphasized the distance between the values and methods of the received view of science (the positivist-like ideology that insists on asking questions like What is your hypothesis? How do you measure that? and How large is your sample?) and ethnography. The latter "requires an intensive personal involvement, an abandonment of traditional scientific control, an improvisational style to meet situations not of the researcher's making, and an ability to learn from a long series of mistakes" (p. 12). Emergence and revision of analytical categories are equally alien to the hypothesis, data collection, and analysis scheme of the received view of science, Agar argued.

To redefine the term to mean something that is found to be more consonant with the characteristics of ethnography was another option. Stewart (1998) attempted such a redefinition by suggesting new connotations "related to values of alertness, receptivity to the views of others, empathy, and open-mindedness" (p. 16), as participant observation to this author seems rather unrelated to the ideals of unbiased observation, absence of relations between observer and the observed, and so forth.

Adherence to the "old-fashioned" (which, by no means, is equivalent to "outdated") understanding can be represented by Kirk and Miller (1986), who stressed that qualitative research and social science are in every way as objective and scientific as physics. The basic task is the same: the quest for a true description of an empirical reality that does not accept just any description that one could come up with. The specific content of the word *objectivity* for these authors can be split into reliability (the same measurement yields the same result when repeated; that is, independent of accidental circumstances of the research) and validity (the result is correct; i.e., the researchers see what they think they see). In practice, adherents of this view will direct their efforts toward a neutral stance during their research:

It is meaningless to propose to study the processes and outcomes of change while adhering to old prejudices. Thus, I determined to lay my bias aside and to objectively observe clinical reality as it is enacted. As a result of this neutral posture, I gained an appreciation of the problems, logic and methods of physicians that I had not previously experienced. (Mathews, 1987, p. 311)

However, Mathews admitted that in practice, complete objectivity might never be fully obtained.

As we see, ethnographers tend to be caught between the postmodern paradigm of a deep skepticism toward simple, observable facts and the common sense of the practical researcher, to whom "six people in the room" is a matter not of taste or metaphorical redescription but of simple observation. Although the philosophers still have to come up with a satisfying solution to this quandary, they have some interesting points to make. In the next paragraphs, I will address some of these points in an attempt to illuminate the role of objectivity and its opposite in the ethnographic process.

PHILOSOPHICAL OBJECTIVITY

To discuss whether ethnography is objective and, if so, to what extent makes no sense unless the definition of the term is made clear. Most ethnographic authors do so, but because no clear concept of objectivity exists (this is a problem not just in the social sciences but in philosophy as such), generally, every author has his or her own definition. Objectivity can refer to such different things as metaphysics, methods, and morals (Daston, 1999). Going through the list of different philosophical ideas of what constitutes objectivity is a daunting task, so let us instead be content with two, placed at each end of the spectrum.

Nagel (1986) is a realist, which, in its simplest form, can be defined as a person who holds that the world exists independently of what we might think about it. For Nagel, this means that we, with our limited capacities, might be forever without knowledge of certain features of this independent world (e.g., Nagel, 1974). There must be an answer to the question What is it like to be a bat? but we most likely will never be able to find that answer. The position in the realist-idealist controversy has profound implications for what concept of objectivity one will find most appealing. Nagel argued that objectivity is the ability to step back, so to speak, from the specific, ego-centered point of view of me to a more detached view that includes me seen from the outside, as a part of the inventory of the world. Nagel continued,

The pursuit of objectivity requires the cultivation of a rather austere universal objective self. While we can't free it entirely of infection with a particular human view and a particular historical stage, it represents a direction of possible development toward a universal conception and away from a parochial one. (p. 63)

However, Nagel did emphasize that not all kinds of knowledge call for this type of objectivity.

Daston (1999) wrote that "aperspectival objectivity" (the view-from-nowhere type) is the most common way of understanding the concept, defining it as being "about eliminating individual (or occasionally group, as in the case of national styles or anthropomorphism) idiosyncrasies" (p. 111). Daston wrote that it is "first and foremost associated with the natural sciences: both its possibility and desirability have been controversial in the social sciences since the turn of this century" (p. 111).

Let us, then, to illustrate a quite different perspective, choose that of Rorty (1980), who is well known for his postmodern, antirealist writings. A considerable

part of his work is dedicated to an attack on the correspondence theory of truth, which is presented, most boldly perhaps, by the younger Wittgenstein (1974) in his *Tractatus*. According to this, truth is to be seen as the correspondence between the statement (in our language) and the entity (out there) that the statement is about. Unfortunately for the realists, this relationship between word and thing has never really been analyzed and explained in a generally accepted way, and with the rise of postmodernism, ironically enough with a later version of Wittgenstein in the center, many have given up the correspondence theory of truth altogether. However, if objectivity no longer is to be seen as the correct correspondence between language and reality, then what is it? Rorty suggested that the opposite of this model is to see objectivity as

a property of theories which, having been thoroughly discussed, are chosen by a consensus of rational discussants. By contrast, a "subjective" consideration is one which has been, or would be, or should be, set aside by rational discussants—one which is seen to be, or should be seen to be, irrelevant to the subject matter of the theory. To say that someone is bringing in "subjective" considerations to a discussion where objectivity is wanted is, roughly, to say that he is bringing in considerations, which the others think beside the point. If he presses these outré considerations, he is turning normal inquiry into abnormal discourse—he is being either "kooky" (if he loses his point) or "revolutionary" (if he gains it). For a consideration to be subjective, in this sense, is simply for it to be unfamiliar. So judging subjectivity is as hazardous as judging relevance. (pp. 338-339)

The consequence of this notion of objectivity and truth is that of a language totally closed in on itself, with no connections to anything outside of it, except, perhaps, to our sense impressions, but still nothing outside our brain (or the human collective of brains). Idealism in one form or the other does have something going for it: It is much easier to argue for than the correspondence theory. In Popper's (1983) expression, "What makes idealism so unattractive is, precisely, the fatal ease with which it explains everything. For idealism does solve all problems—by emptying them" (p. 103). Although the antirealist view is very much in vogue in parts of the humanities, most researchers doing empirical work will most likely have a hard time swallowing it.

Compromises between the two stances are hard to come by. Latour (e.g., 1993) is one of the few who have dared to attempt such an enterprise, but the result might be hard to distinguish from that postmodern constructivism he has seen as a main enemy.⁴ Therefore, researchers, who wish to hold that their research, in the end, has to describe something not (entirely) of their making and that what makes the research successful is the extent to which it succeeds in describing correctly the external reality that it is about, will have to deal with the correspondence theory in some variation.

WHEN DATA LOST THEIR OBJECTIVE INNOCENCE

It would be fruitful to distinguish between different sorts of subjectivity. One of them is of a damaging sort, and a positivist distance to this sort is in place. Imagine a researcher who simply leaves out the data that do not fit with his or her hypothesis. He or she knows they are there but chooses to discard them. Surely, this is a case of

subjectivity that most researchers will acknowledge as a real danger, one that might, but ought not to, take place. Another kind of subjectivity is that of using one's knowledge in the process of collecting and analyzing the data. Note that the line of demarcation between these two types is not well defined. Because the researcher does have his or her background of knowledge with her all the time, and because this cannot, nor ought it to, be switched off, it will affect (also in the sense of give meaning to) what he or she sees and concludes. He or she might be completely blind to certain aspects that for another researcher would be evident, and vice versa. Thus, he or she might very well not see what another researcher would, thereby unconsciously omitting otherwise revealing data. However, and this is the important thing, if the researcher is competent, he or she will give his or her own interpretation, his or her own perspective to the ethnography, and this is why there is no need to worry. Theoretical sampling can be seen as a vicious circle in which the researcher becomes increasingly biased as he or she uses previously conceived hypotheses to select the data on which to concentrate. On the other hand, it can be seen as a much more theory-neutral affair, as Strauss and Corbin (1998) have argued. Although they have often stressed that we cannot escape the knowledge we have in advance, they nevertheless have often argued for something like the old positivistic ideals, as also argued by Alvesson and Sköldböck (2000). For instance, Strauss and Corbin wrote, "What is important is to recognize that subjectivity is an issue and that researchers should take appropriate measures to minimize its intrusion into their analyses" (p. 43). When they stated, "The data themselves do not lie" (p. 45), or that one must always "compare what one thinks one sees to what one sees at the property or dimensional level, because this enables the analyst to use experience without putting the experience itself into the data" (p. 47), and that "it is not the researcher's perception or perspective that matters but rather how research participants see events or happenings" (p. 47), it is hard not to feel the haunting of the old (but faulty) complete separation between the data and the interpretation of the data.

Becker (1998) argued in the same way: "Careful description of details, unfiltered by our ideas and theories, produces observations that, not fitting those categories, require us to create new ideas and categories into which they can be fitted without forcing" (p. 85). Like Strauss and Corbin (1998), above, Becker emphasized that he was well aware of the teaching from the field of philosophy of science but he, nevertheless, ended up with statements that might be considered as expressing a kind of naive realism.

It would be appropriate to mention briefly some of the philosophy of science keystone arguments with regard to this lack of separation between the data and our interpretation of them; Kuhn (1970) made a good argument in his *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, using, for example, interesting experiments with altered playing cards (like a black heart) that were seen as normal ones by the subjects, who did not expect to see any such hybrids. Hanson (1958), too, stressed this when writing, "People, not their eyes, see. Cameras, and eye-balls, are blind" (p. 6). Seeing something means seeing it as something.

Popular as a metaphor for the way in which we interpret our visual stimuli without conscious control, at least since Wittgenstein's (1967) *Philosophical Investigations*, have been the gestalt switch figures that can be seen as two different things but not at the same time. Hanson (1958) wrote,

Do I really see something different each time, or do I only interpret what I see in a different way? To interpret is to think, to do something; seeing is an experiential state. The different ways in which these figures are seen are not due to different thoughts lying behind the visual reactions. What could "spontaneous" mean if these reactions are not spontaneous? When the staircase "goes into reverse" it does so spontaneously. One does not think of anything special; one does not think at all. Nor does one interpret. One just sees, now a staircase as from above, now a staircase as from below. (p. 11)

Hanson used the phrase *theory laden* to describe the way in which observations are always affected by our theories, whereas Feyerabend (1993) went further in that direction and wrote,

In a word: observation statements are not just *theory-laden* (the views of Toulmin, Hanson, and apparently also Kuhn) but *fully theoretical* and the distinction between observation statements ("protocol statements" in the terminology of the Vienna Circle) and theoretical statements is a pragmatic distinction, not a semantic distinction. (pp. 211-212, emphasis in original)

Although this debate is long running and seemingly impossible to settle, it should be clear that to say, innocently, "The data themselves do not lie" is much too simple a way of looking at data. Even if one is not willing to accept that the data are "infected" (the softer version), one should at least realize that the selection of what to count as relevant data (it does not need to be theoretical sampling as such) is, to a large extent, guided by one's theories, tacit knowledge, worldview, and so on. In this way, the data are not really neutral, as they have been selected (from an infinite amount of potential data) according to one paradigm and not another.

All of this would seem to be an argument in favor of something like Rorty's (1980) idea of objectivity, but it need not be the case. In fact, it is possible to couple something related to Nagel's (e.g., 1986) realist position with regard to objectivity (to which many researchers might subscribe) with at least some sort of theory-laden perception of data. If we acknowledge that data are to some extent a hybrid of our theories and our sense data, different researchers will obtain different data, and these, in turn, will result in different ethnographies. These different perspectives will give us new ways of seeing the world, and this is a step away from the self, as Nagel has described.

Using such somewhat postmodern ways of viewing our perception is relatively new to ethnography. It has existed in a broader context for only 3 decades or so, and there will always be a certain diffusion time from the areas in which such thoughts are propagated to other, more applied areas. Few ethnographies and ethnographic textbooks are explicit about this "new" way of looking at their practice, but an example of a widely read book that clearly propagates this is Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw's (1995) *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. The view here is much more in line with that of this essay and much less in line with the ideals of Newtonian physics:

Writing fieldnote descriptions, then, is not so much a matter of passively copying down "facts" about "what happened." Rather, such writing involves active processes of interpretation and sense-making: noting and writing down some things as significant, noting but ignoring others as "not significant," and even missing other possibly significant things altogether. As a result, similar (even the "same") events can be described for different purposes, with different sensitivities and concerns. (p. 8)

Therefore, are data that are like this objective? Hardly! Are they, nevertheless, able to increase our objectivity? Yes, as they add another perspective through which we can look at human activities.

Although the problem of correspondence between the objective reality (whatever that is) and the language that attempts to describe it remains unresolved, this does not necessarily mean that we are incapable of arguing for or against different positions. With regard to the role of sense data in ethnography, I would advocate a rather commonsensical position. Yes, different persons would return with somewhat different notes, and no, we cannot see (or ignore, for that matter) anything in a given setting. The ethnographic method(s) does not differ much from Lofland's (1995) "basic human thinking and induction" (p. 63), and as such, there is no need for making it that mysterious. After all, in most normal, everyday situations, it makes no sense to question the basic validity of our observations (the fact that we get by in so many different situations suggests that we need not do so, anyway). There is always a risk of misunderstanding a sentence or situation, but that does not suggest any fundamental problems. Furthermore, insofar as participant observation is no more than a continuation of everyday descriptions of everyday situations, there seem to be no apparent reasons to question the basic validity of these observations except traditional philosophical skepticism ("my consciousness is the only one that exists," etc.). That is irrefutable but interesting only when philosophizing. Thus, one would often have to say that a particular description is simply wrong, based on our common, interhuman ways of reasoning, and that another is objectively true (in the sense of something's being true or false in an absolute way, independent of individual interpretations). This could be the number and names of actors, the clothes they were wearing, or the words they uttered. The fact that it is still subjects that make the verdict of true and false and that this verdict is linguistic does not change the fact that it is something outside language that impinges on our language, so to speak.

The complexity of this issue is, however, far greater than such commonsense considerations might suggest. In particular, this is not to be seen as a defense of Moore's (1970) philosophical argument against skepticism through the utterance of certain truisms (see, especially, the essays "A Defence of Common Sense" and "A Proof of the External World" in Moore, 1970). Wittgenstein (1969) devoted a great deal of effort to the problematizing of Moore's ideas, arguing that Moore's paradigmatic examples of such true sentences (e.g., my body was born at a certain point in time in the past, the earth existed many years before that time, this is my hand) belong within a world picture consisting of an inherited background. This background serves as a more or less nondescribable system against which one tests the truth-value of other propositions. The truisms are, according to Wittgenstein, beyond the verdict of true or false, as they belong to this background and are really without meaning at all when stated explicitly. If one accepts the argument Wittgenstein was making, there is no such thing as truths that are true for every living being with language capabilities. The commonsense logic of Lofland and Lofland (1995) referred to in The Ethnographic Process section, above, asserts that certain simple observation reports are beyond questioning, and I am arguing for the same in this article. Logically, even the sentence "There are six persons in the room" can be disputed. The Polish logician Lesniewski (1992) has developed a logical alternative to the classical set theory (cf. Searle, 1995). According to this alternative

(mereology), it is possible to count several individual entities (e.g., humans) as one element. An example of the consequence hereof is that three persons (a, b, and c) can be considered as consisting of seven different elements (a, b, c, a+b, a+c, b+c, a+b+c). This points in the direction of a conceptual relativism, as one is free to choose a conceptual framework and then make judgments based on this. In this way, our judgments will always take place within a certain, to some degree arbitrary, inferential framework.⁵ Yet, “our common, interhuman ways of reasoning” does not include mereology, and it is therefore still fair to assert that the sentence “There are six persons in the room” is absolutely unambiguous for all practical purposes. Furthermore, Searle (1995) argued that this conceptual relativism is no threat to basic, external realism (the world exists independently of our thinking about it).

ETHNOGRAPHIC DATA ANALYSIS— ALSO GUILTY OF SUBJECTIVE INTRUSION

As we have seen, our ethnographic data are subjective, not only with regard to our conscious selection of what to count as data in the first place but also with regard to our perceptions. This will inevitably affect the following analysis based on these data. However, the analysis is based on more than these; it is also based on the ethnographer’s overall knowledge (tacit as well as explicit), her emotions, beliefs, and so on. Sanjek (1990) compared ethnography to jazz music; all the great musicians know their way around the instruments and how to read the notes, and yet it is easy to hear the difference between them. Although this jazz metaphor has a positive ring to it, Evans-Pritchard (1951), with his pre-postmodern outlook, would find it less attractive:

One can only interpret what one sees in terms of one’s own experience and of what one is . . . The personality of an anthropologist cannot be eliminated from his work any more than the personality of a historian can be eliminated from his. . . . If allowances are made for the personality of the writer, and if we consider that in the entire range of anthropological studies the effects of these personal differences tend to correct each other, I do not think that we need worry unduly over this problem in so far as the reliability of anthropological thinking is in question. (p. 84)

For Evans-Pritchard, the different perspectives different authors would use in their analyses are unavoidable, but still, we would have been better off without them. This is the kind of view one would expect to find in persons who grew up with positivistic ideals. Of course, one need not go back to the fifties to find such views. Bolton (1995) criticized an ethnographic-anthropologic analysis done by another author, who ended up comparing the patient to a ship, an analysis that Bolton found to be wrong, as it “bears little in common with the understanding of hospital workers” (p. 1658). Even some authors who are critical of grounded theory, like Emerson et al. (1995), appear to be concentrating on exploring the categories developed by the members studied. Alvesson and Sköldböck (2000), in their critique of this, went so far as to call an example of the coding procedure by Strauss “dumb and shadowy” (p. 26) and stated that the result “may be no more than reformulations (at best in other words) of what is already known at this [actor] level, implicitly or explicitly. The risk is thus that grounded theory creates trivial knowledge” (p. 29).

Whether one agrees with the rather severe critique from Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2000) or not, one has to agree that the risk is real. If it is acknowledged as a fact that the researcher's worldview will always be part of the outcome of the research, the idea of approaching the object of analysis within ethnography with a neutral, unbiased stance is an unsound ideal, apart from the fact that it is impossible as well. It is exactly the particular, individual point of view, with all of its subjective biases, idiosyncrasies, and distortions, that gives the ethnography its edge, its enlightening effect, its power. The quite often more "sloppy" research design, with its less clear research questions and in-advance definition of the object of study, which would make many a natural scientist run away screaming, is not something to be all that worried about. When diving into the lifeworld of the observed people, trying to figure out what categories to use in the description and analysis, the ethnographer has nothing to turn to but his or her (personal) background (which includes the shared vocabulary of the scientific field), and this background will, for reasons that should be evident, have a bearing on the outcome.

As a means of gaining a greater understanding of one's own point of view, in the social space, Bourdieu (2001) has been suggesting an autoanalysis or auto-socioanalysis, whereby sociologists make their subject the object of research. To Bourdieu, this serves a double purpose: It makes sociologists aware of—objectifies—the position from which they make their studies, and it makes the reader understand this as well. The autoanalysis is not done as part of a view that claims that the theories and discoveries made by Bourdieu are true only to Bourdieu or true only when seen in relation to the person who created them (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Although such autoanalytic strategies clearly serve a purpose, the degree of self-knowledge and objective distance one can reach in the process should not be exaggerated. The means available to the researcher in the autoanalysis does not transcend the means otherwise available in his or her research, so the limitations in perspectives, knowledge, and so on will be the same—the blind spots will still be there.

PROBLEMS OF OBJECTIVITY AND SUBJECTIVITY

The biggest danger in assuming that it is possible to work from some atheoretical approach all the way from the definition of the object of study through the collection of data to the analysis is that it completely blinds the researcher to all the paradigmatic assumptions he or she carries around. By not being aware of these, researchers, although claiming to be objective, are, in fact, just the opposite. First, researchers, by blinding themselves in this way, lose objectivity in Nagel's (1986) sense, as they become unable to situate themselves in the process of their research. Second, they might let their preconceptions become real biases in the negative sense, unconscious prejudices that could possibly be avoided or reduced by being aware of them. A great deal of Bourdieu's (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) work is dedicated to this problem. He described the sociologist's language as "an immense repository of naturalized pre-constructions" (p. 241) that, because of its unconscious nature, leaves researchers unaware and, hence, "infects" their work by blinding them to the constructed character of, for example, the categories they use. This puts sociologists in a "double bind" (p. 248), as their tools (the vocabulary of the profession) are indispensable but also, in a way, blinding.

The opposite idea of the view that I have been propagating in this essay, for instance that of Strauss and Corbin (1998), would imply that there is only one right way of collecting and interpreting the data in ethnographic research. This might be true in protein sequencing⁶ but not in case studies. That does not mean that there is no wrong way of doing it, that any conclusion can rightfully be drawn from any set of data, and so on. Surely, common sense tells us, there can be better or worse studies with better or worse (or even totally wrong) interpretations of the data, but exactly how this is to be reconciled with some sort of correspondence theory of truth is yet to be found out.

Few people today would share the Platonic view, believing that universals exist independently of the things or, in a more ethnographic language, that the categories exist independently of the humans who live their lives and the ethnographers that created the categories in the first place. In fact, it might be that we can discard the correspondence theory and realism without turning to relativism. Several philosophers have claimed that possibility, and the anthropologist Hastrup (1995) has made a thorough argument for it. However, this is outside the scope of this essay.

Another unresolved problem is how to distinguish formally between a point of view—a perspective on things—and an unwanted bias, formally, because in real life, matters are often less problematic. To illustrate this with a simple example that most people will recognize, a teacher sometimes gets a student that he or she, for some reason, cannot stand (perhaps it is her attitude, or she has an ugly haircut, or her political views disgusts the teacher). By not being aware of this, the teacher could easily end up giving a lower grade than the student's performance would actually indicate. This would be a case of a negative bias. By being aware of the situation, the teacher will be able to judge her more fairly, even though the teacher might still hate her. In other words, the "rules" of grade giving have been violated, as the grade is supposed to represent the student's abilities in the relevant subject, not the teacher's evaluation of certain features other than the abilities in question. An example of more ethnographic relevance could be to omit observations from the analysis because they run counter to the theory (or categories) that the analysis would otherwise point to or to omit data that would have crucial implications for the theory but might put the actors in a bad spot. Please note how bias in ethnography, in a way, can refer to the intrusion of a particular point of view, which will influence the data collection and analysis, an intrusion that would be thought to be disqualifying in, for example, clinical testing of medicine but, as has been argued, not in ethnography.

Although the unacceptable data manipulation in the last example is done with the best of intentions, most ethnographers would, I presume, agree that both examples constitute unacceptable behavior. Furthermore, most ethnographers would probably agree that the case of omission of data for purely selfish—or altruistic—reasons is, in particular, a paradigmatic example of subjective research (subjective in the good old-fashioned, negative, positivist meaning) if ever there was one. Therefore, either we agree that this sort of subjectivity exists and is considered unacceptable, or we take the opposite stance and say that in these postmodern times, the notion of subjectivity is superfluous, because everything is already subjective. However, as is evident, I think that it does exist and that examples such as the above ones support that assertion.

Notice, by the way, how this conclusion is linked to a realist conception of reality and some sort of correspondence theory of truth: The problem with the behavior

is that by omitting the data, one paints a picture of the observed reality that is less true than it could have been (or even plain false). Such a statement might provoke a reaction from many postmodernists, but they still need to give a good reason as to why, then, the behavior from the examples is unacceptable or, if they do not find it unacceptable, how that stance can be defended. The typical way of doing so would probably be to refer to the fact that there is an intersubjective agreement between the researchers that this is not acceptable behavior. The question to that statement would then be whether it is possible to imagine a science with the same efficacy in which this agreement does not exist. In other words, would a science without that agreement be equally "good," although different? Then, if they hold that it would be equally good, they should explain why it really matters what anyone does when conducting research. The point is that if obeying the rules of the research is done only with internal reference to the rules themselves, we have a circularism ("obey the rules because they must be obeyed") that explains nothing. If, instead, we refer to a lack of objective behavior, as in the case of why certain practices would be unacceptable, we get a logically sound explanation.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

Ethnographers are caught in the quandary of being empirical researchers trying to figure out something about a reality "out there" and, on the other hand, working with a "soft" subject area in which interpretation, understanding, and even solidarity can be seen as central notions. It seems reasonable to imply that some of the quotations from ethnographic books shown in this text reflect this quandary, making some authors seem self-contradictory in their insistence on, for example, being able to lay aside their bias as if it were a handkerchief and, at the same time, talking about the "value-ladenness" of facts and the inevitability of perspectives. There might not be easy solutions to this dilemma, but part of the solution chosen here is to analyze the messy problem into more handy constituents.

If we accept the definition of objectivity as given in the introduction, the crucial question is how to synthesize this objectivity (which seems to rule out the intrusion of any individuality) with the perspectivism that is inherent in the ethnographic process. Theoretically, one can distinguish between three different levels of the ethnographic study, the way these relate to the question of subjectivity and objectivity, and how this relation can be evaluated.

At the first (and most basic) level, the study must correspond to the piece of reality it attempts to describe. With regard to this correspondence between certain information stated in the ethnography and the entities in the world that this information claims to represent, one would expect an objective correspondence between, for example, the characters, utterances, and locations portrayed, and those existing in the world (excepting the anonymizations frequently done). Omission or invention of crucial data would be a lack of objective correspondence. This omission or invention could, as mentioned above, be a case of plain fraud but also the result of what would traditionally be called subjective behavior (typically ignoring data unconsciously because the researcher did not wish for them to exist).

At the second level, it is possible to evaluate the objectivity of the analysis, given the perspective. Here one would have to examine if, and to what extent, the analysis is in accordance with the chosen perspective.⁷ This correspondence can be objec-

tively present or not. The methodological foundation is included herein; if the study asserts to be grounded theory, it is possible to evaluate whether it actually follows the rules of grounded theory. Note that there might be good reasons for the researcher to transgress the limitations given by the perspective (including method), as, for instance, the feminist-postmodernist tradition often does. If this is part of the chosen perspective, there is no need to invoke a judgment of lack of objectivity. If the researcher never claimed that it was grounded theory, no problem exists.

At the third level, we have the evaluation of the perspective, which is a different task. One might wish to assume a pragmatic stance and maintain that the only way in which this can be evaluated is by its usefulness. If the perspective “works,” if it is capable of telling the reader something new, of explaining an observed phenomenon, then it might be considered “true.” If one sticks to the realist understanding, *true* does not apply. *Objective* would here be inappropriate to apply, as the perspective does not correspond to the phenomena it (re)describes and certainly is not aperspectival.⁸

The more we apply applicable perspectives, the more we will be able to understand the setting, and the more objective the knowledge becomes. The principle of multimethodology is the most important lesson from the postmodern tradition, and it follows from the point of view propagated in this article. However, contrary to the postmodernists, I argue here that this can be understood only by reference to an increase in objective knowledge gained through the different perspectives. Thus, triangulation or crystallization needs to be used not for validation purposes (understood as ensuring that the objective truth has been found) but, nonetheless, for increasing the validity (in the sense of making the study more objective, that is, less dependant on a singular perspective and thereby throwing more light on the matter).

The problem of conceptual relativism is present especially at the perspective level. When the perspective is to be seen as a conceptual framework, and a basic relativity prevails regarding such, the choice becomes, in a sense, arbitrary. The question is whether the laws of classical logic must apply, for instance, that something cannot be both A and not-A at the same time. If two different perspectives lead to directly contradictory results, according to this law, something must be wrong. However, if different ethnographic perspectives can be seen as standing in the same relationship to one another as classical set theory and mereology, we cannot even assume that the same logic applies. If this is the case (and there might be good reasons for assuming that it is), we are left with a radical incommensurability in the manner of Kuhn (1970), and in that case, it can be argued that the different perspectives do not even supplement⁹ one another. This consequence need not be exaggerated, as many perspectives will be sufficiently cognate to avoid this radical incommensurability, but one should keep in mind the possibility (at least hypothetically) that different perspectives might be so radically incommensurable as to allow contradictory results that they are, nonetheless, true on their own terms. Still, it would normally (possibly always) be the case that the words in the sentences belonging to such different frameworks will be defined differently, and, consequently, the statements will not be the same (although the words might be). For instance, the mereological sentence “There are seven elements in the room” and the classical set sentence “There are three (and only three) elements in the room” are, in a way, contradictory not vis-à-vis the real world, only vis-à-vis our way of classifying and partitioning this world. At least, this would be the realist way of under-

standing the situation; antirealists might argue differently, insisting that this situation exemplifies how the world in itself does not hold any mind-independent characteristics. Be that as it may, all parties will agree that there are three persons in the room, that is, an interhuman understanding exists independent of any particular point of view, research tradition, and so on but dependent, perhaps, on a general, human life form (cf. Wittgenstein, 1967). Based on this idea, certain statements involving simple observational statements are indisputable for (virtually) any member of the human species. It therefore makes no difference in practice whether one refers, in the traditional, commonsense, realist way, to a physical fact in the world or one refers, in the Wittgensteinian way, to a common life form. Either way, the result is the same: There are three persons in the room. (The ontological question of what really is can be ignored for this purpose.) Without speaking about reference, it is possible to judge whether the proposition is justifiably specifying the circumstances under which it would be legitimate to assert and determine what role this "assertion game" plays in our life¹⁰ (cf. Kripke, 1982). This also includes the bias and fraud discussed above, as the particular game of ethnographic descriptions and analyses must be followed.

At the second level, which is the correspondence between choice of perspective/method and execution of the study, the same approach can be taken. There are certain describable "rules" that one must follow to be, say, a symbolic interactionist, and whether these rules have been followed in a specific piece of research can also be evaluated (in principle) by people outside the field.

This interhuman agreement, however, will not be present at the perspective level. Here, there will be no agreement outside the particular perspective that this perspective is, indeed, the proper one to choose. One could, for instance, imagine proponents of discourse analysis and the Frankfurt school of critical theory, respectively, that all judged their own approach to be the right one. From a realist point of view, we are left with a difficult question: What perspective corresponds (best) to reality? (See, e.g., Note 9.) Still, in this realist point of view, the overall objectivity of our knowledge of the topic of investigation can be said to grow, as the different perspectives together will enhance our knowledge and make us less dependant on a single point of view. This is an objectivity that resembles that described earlier by Nagel (1986), in which one is able to reach a higher degree of objectivity by distancing oneself from specific perspectives. In the Wittgensteinian (1967, 1969, 1993) approach, the question would not make sense, as we are left with different life forms.

There is no doubt that in practice, there will be all kinds of difficulties associated with performing such evaluations. For instance, some of the observed phenomena might exist only vis-à-vis the chosen perspective.¹¹ A distinction between the data and the interpretation of the data must then be made. As described earlier in the article, such a distinction is no simple matter and cannot be made in an absolute way. In the same way, the demarcation between a perspective (that has no "realist truth-value" in and by itself) and an interpretation of data that has more the character of a theory might not be unambiguous.¹² However, the important issue is not whether the evaluation is problematic but whether it is, in principle, possible. If it is, the term *objective* still serves a purpose and should not be discarded. If one accepts the above description of how to apply the notion of objectivity in the evaluation of ethnographic research, it is possible to apply it in a way that grants it a clear purpose and places it within certain limits. The advantage of this analysis is that the subjec-

tivity/objectivity distinction is being used in the common, everyday way and does not imply any counterintuitive interpretations. Also, in the practical usage of the word, leaving deeper ontological issues aside, realists equipped with a correspondence model of truth and antirealists with some kind of consensus or coherence model for truth or justification, will all use the words in the same way, in the same situations.

The problem about the status of the data is as important as ever. To say that we just have to turn to the data to find the objective truth is an oversimplification, as the arguments from the philosophy of science (and the cognitive sciences) against this empiricist teaching are quite convincing. Resigning to relativism is, for many fieldworkers and natural scientists, utterly untenable. Without any easy-to-swallow third position, some kind of compromise between the two will have to do. This is clearly what some of the authors discussed above have attempted to make, implicitly or explicitly, but much more work needs to be done to make such a position seem consistent (if possible at all). The way forward proposed here consists of using elements from the postmodern view and not forgetting the commitment to the modern project of rationality, empiricism, and quest for true descriptions of the world. Even though subjective and objective are problematic terms, and although they are associated with certain meanings that are clearly irrelevant to ethnography, the words still serve a purpose, and discarding them as being obsolete, part of an outdated, modern vocabulary, would leave us with an unproductive void.

NOTES

1. Short indeed: This highly complex and elaborate debate has brought about hundreds, if not thousands, of articles and books. This is not the place for a literature review; a highly simplified description will have to suffice. A couple of famous attempts to create positions that differ from the poles of realism/antirealism should be mentioned. According to Kant's (1787/2003) transcendental idealism, an independent world exists (*das Ding-an-sich*), but we have no knowledge of it; we know only of the way this world appears to intelligent creatures like humans (*das Ding-für-uns*). However, this appearance will be the same for humans and aliens, so we can have objective knowledge about this. Continuing along the same track, Putnam (1981) used the term *internal realism* to denote his position. According to this, truth is internal coherence between our different theories and between these and our experiences. The latter is always relative to a conceptual scheme, meaning that it makes no sense to talk about objects independently of any such schemes. The word *rabbit* still refers to rabbits, but rabbits are not an independent, intrinsic property of the world; they are part of our classificatory schemes, among others. Latour (1987, 1988, 1993), with his actor-network-theory, is perhaps not that different. Latour wished to dissolve the realism/antirealism debate by establishing a position in which all entities in the world (humans, objects, theories, etc.) are seen as ontological hybrids that move around, connecting and reconnecting in a network. It is these movements that decide the existence or nonexistence of the entities. It might be fair to say that most realists would denounce these positions as nothing but antirealism in (more or less effective) disguise.

2. Yes, the language of ethnography is (at least in the English literature) quite ordinary for the most part compared to the highly technical language used in the natural sciences and certain parts of the humanities.

3. Analytic ethnography is, according to the article, to be seen as a certain branch of ethnography that could also be dubbed naturalistic or theoretical ethnography. One of its features is the attempt to provide generic explanations as opposed to mere historical descriptions in a balanced manner that emphasizes the observed data as well as the derived concepts.

4. As an example of why it might be hard not to see Latour (1987) as a proponent of some sort of postmodernism (although he has denied being any such thing), see, for instance, his claim that science

and rhetoric are different only in that science uses a lot more rhetorical arguments than did the classical rhetoric (p. 61).

5. Note that the correctness of inferences will be evaluated in the same way in any framework and by realists and antirealists alike. The correctness depends on following the internal rules given by the particular framework (for instance, the rules of classical logic in judging the correctness of a *modus ponendo ponens* syllogism). On the other hand, judgments will be judged differently depending on one's position, at least theoretically. For the realist (assuming a correspondence theory), their truth-value depends on the proper objective correspondence between word and world, whereas antirealists (at least some of them) will be satisfied with a correspondence between word and the way the world looks in the particular framework.

6. Again, the antirealist might say that this is so only because of the unity with regard to paradigm. The realist will hold that this is because the structure is the way it is. Either way, the result is the same: Here and now (at least), there is just one way.

7. To illustrate with an example, social studies of medicine can be undertaken from a Marxist perspective. According to this, the medical ideology helps maintain and reproduce class structure and social domination (Waitzkin, 1989). One might agree or disagree with this point of departure, but whichever stance one takes, it will be possible to discuss in a meaningful way whether a particular study done within this tradition is objective.

8. How do we then explain the "power" of the different perspectives (power because truth, at least as understood in a binary logic, in which the only truth-values are true and not true, will be applied wrongfully in this connection)? From a realist position (the antirealist does not seem to hold any answer to this question), this can be done by imagining the world (including the social world) as something containing certain structures that, by their nature, are beyond language. *Beyond* should not be understood as implying that these structures are indescribable but, rather, that they are complex phenomena that are describable in many different ways. There is no 1:1 relationship between perspective and world, but some perspectives will provide a better fit than others (and some, no fit at all). This superficial ontological sketch will not be dealt with further in this connection.

9. I have used supplement here in the meaning of enlarging our understanding by adding to our existing image rather than supplying a radically incommensurable, complementary model of explanation.

10. This last requirement is needed to ensure that it is a legitimate proposition and not something like Moore's (1970) examples of indisputable truths. It would be easy to give examples of everyday use of sentences such as "There were three persons in the room," ensuring that such basic observational statements are, indeed, legitimate uses of language.

11. To continue with the Marxist perspective from Note 7, one could imagine an ethnographic study that presents the reader with data that show the imperialist ideology of medicine. Here, one will have to separate the data (quotations, etc.) from the interpretation of the data (the imperialist implications).

12. An overall Marxist perspective on medicine might not be said to correspond to anything, whereas the claim of imperialist behavior in a concrete case might. The fundamental difference between a perspective and a theory must be maintained, although this will also be a point of argument. For the present purpose, this difference can be thought of as a difference in hierarchy: A perspective exists at a higher level than a theory that belongs within a given perspective.

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