

Objectivity applied to embodied subjects

Objectivity is a contested concept, especially when applied to human beings. Subjectivity is pervasive in human life, and personal passions and feelings are spices of daily existence. We argue that a cognitive concept of objectivity is appropriate in most circumstances, professional or not, to make objective descriptions and assessments. The concept takes its point of departure from social life. But in refining the concept, we encounter one of the most treasured doctrines of physics – that an objective reality exists independently of our mind. Cognitive objectivity means that statements about perceptions, opinions, facts or states of affairs are valid for everyone because everyone can test them by perceptions or by a reasonable argumentation.

Philosopher John Searle has defined the following four useful concepts:

- A) Objectivity in the ontological sense, which refers to physical entities whose mode of existence does not depend on being experienced by the mind. This concept of objectivity refers to quantitative measurements of material entities.
- B) Objectivity in a cognitive sense, which refers to statements that can be shown to be true or false independent of emotions, attitudes, and prejudices.
- C) Subjectivity in the ontological sense, which refers to entities or awareness that depend totally on being experienced by some human (or animal) subject.
- D) Subjectivity in a cognitive sense, which refers to statements that depend for their truth basically on attitudes, emotions, passions and particular loyalties. An example: «Bach was a greater composer than Mozart».

Humans are both biological organisms, based on physical entities, and subjective experience. In some way, which is not scientifically explainable today, these two kinds of reality cannot be regarded as separated or independent of each other, but as an integrated whole that we designate “embodied subject”.

Based on an analysis of social security certificates from mental health care, we have defined a comprehensive concept of cognitive objectivity. The essential condition for this concept is that judgments, beliefs, assessments, theories, ideas, and perceptions should be supported by reasons that others can accept as valid, to be accepted as objective. We have also formulated four criteria for its application in social life:

First, the person in context: In a situation, the social context should be taken into consideration, not only the person. His/her thoughts, experiences, observations or values (first-person perspective) should be recognised.

Second, the person as embodied subject appears as a living, cognitive object to an observer, perceived through empathy and imagination. Various kinds of quantitative and qualitative data from the human being, its functioning, and meaningful expressions are relevant in the different settings. The person's expressions regarding their personal world, e.g., reflections on future goals can be essential.

Third, the need of interpretation: The myriad of meaningful data about the other person has to be interpreted in light of the social context and the purpose of an assessment. Professionals should be aware of their use of scientific models to understand data to facilitate access to the phenomena in case. Data from the material realities are often called "objective findings" and have their important but limited place among the other data.

Fourth, the application of general principles of knowledge to ensure objectivity in the concrete situation. The first principle is professional expertise (German *Sachlichkeit*). Professionalism means that an account should be built upon available facts/data and be supported by arguments. Other principles are impartiality, accuracy, correctness and dialogical intersubjectivity. The use of all these criteria presupposes genuine communication between the observing subject and the other person. As should be clear from this presentation: cognitive objectivity is a relative concept: a person can be more or less objective.

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