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## OBJECTIVITY AND MILITANCY: A DEBATE

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# I Moral Models in Anthropology

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by Roy D'Andrade

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This paper examines the current trend in anthropology towards the development of a *moral* discipline with models of the world that contain explicit moral judgments. The current moral model in anthropology, with its emphasis on *oppression*, *demystification*, and *denunciation*, is outlined. Various attacks on science and objectivity, also part of the current moral model, are considered, and a defense of objectivity and science is presented. The problems involved in the use of moral models are then considered, both in general and with respect to the current moral model. An argument is made that any moral authority that anthropologists may hold depends upon an objective understanding of the world and to that end moral and objective models should be kept distinct.

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For over a decade there have been concerted attacks in anthropology on objectivity (Rosaldo 1989), science (Scheper-Hughes 1991), the notion of truth (Tyler 1986), making generalizations of any kind (Abu-Lughod 1991), doing ethnography (Dwyer 1982), and anthropology itself as a type of Western colonialism (Asad 1973). These attacks come not from some fringe group but from well-known and established anthropologists. Why should so many anthropologists attack the very foundations of their discipline? Originally, I thought these attacks came from people who had the same agenda I did, just different assumptions about how to accomplish that agenda. I now realize that an entirely different agenda is being proposed—that anthropology be transformed from a discipline based upon an *objective* model of the world to a discipline based upon a *moral* model of the world.

By a "model" I mean a set of cognitive elements used to understand and reason about something. The term "moral" is used here to refer to the primary *purpose* of this model, which is to identify what is *good* and what is *bad* and to allocate *reward* and *punishment*. In the usual language of philosophy, goodness and badness, like beauty and taste, are considered subjective, not objective things; the beauty of a human baby may not be beauty to an ostrich and the badness of killing one's lover may not be badness to a praying mantis. An objective description tells about the thing described, not about the agent doing the description, while a subjective description tells how the agent doing the description *reacts* to the object. "He is a good guy" is a subjective description of someone; "He helps his friends" would be a more objective description of the same person.

The distinction between object and subject is one of the basic human cognitive accomplishments. Normal people are expected to be able to recognize the difference between their response to an object and the object itself. Despite the cognitive salience of the objective/subjective distinction, in ordinary talk the two are often blended. To say someone is a "crook" is to refer to more than the objective fact that something was intentionally taken by someone who had no legal right to it; part of the meaning of "crook" is that the person who did this did something *bad* and is a *bad person*. Many of the terms of natural language blend the way the world is and our reaction to it, perhaps because in this way we can tell others how we want them to respond also ("respond as I do"). Although it may be impossible to present an entirely objective account, when we want to understand something outside ourselves we use terms that, so far as possible, tell about *that thing* so we can understand *that thing*, rather than our *response* to that thing. One tries to be objective if one wants to tell others about the *object*, not about oneself.

It should be noted that an objective account is not necessarily value-free. For example, the statement "X cures cancer" is not free of positive value for most people. Nor are objective accounts necessarily unbiased. One well-known way of producing a biased account is to report only those facts which reflect badly on something. As used here, *objectivity* refers just to the degree

to which an account gives information about the object being described. Finally, it should be noted that trying to be objective does not preclude investigating other people's subjective worlds. One can be as objective about what people think as one can be about the crops they grow.

One result of the attempt to be objective—to talk about the thing, not oneself—is that it is more likely that what one says can be tested to see if it is true or false. And because it is more likely that an objective account can be tested, an objective account can be attempted again by someone else and the replicability of the account assessed. For knowledge to accumulate, accounts must be objective, but they must also be testable and replicable. What Pons and Fleischman said about cold fusion was objective enough, but unfortunately what they described seems to be unreplicable.

In contrast to an objective model, which tries to describe the object, the aim of a moral model is to identify what is good and bad, to allocate praise and blame, and also to explain how things not in themselves good or bad come to be so. Typically, this is done using words that Kenneth Burke (1945) calls "god" terms, words that stand for things that are an *ultimate* good or an *ultimate* evil and which are the source of further good or evil. Thus, in the current moral model in anthropology, *oppression* is an ultimate evil; nothing can make oppression good, and it is assumed that most of the bad things in the world are the result of oppression. The truth of the badness of *oppression* is not an empirical matter. If you lack moral sense, no recounting of the facts can explain it to you. And given the ultimate badness of oppression, anything that creates or maintains oppression must also be bad. Thus colonialism is bad because it necessarily involves the use of oppression. Power is bad because it is an instrument of oppression. The hegemony of Western culture is bad because it supports and maintains Western colonialist oppression. Silencing and violence are bad because they are typical means of oppression. And so on.<sup>1</sup>

Every moral model must contain at least partially objective terms if it is to apply to things in the world. Thus "oppression" is not totally subjective; like the term "crook," it refers to something objective—the use of power by some individuals or groups to affect other individuals or groups in ways not to their liking. The subjective part of the term "oppression" is the evaluation built into it that defines this use of power as something bad and as something that brings about things that are bad.

In most moral models there is some way to correct

evil. In the current moral model in anthropology this is done by unmasking the symbolic hegemony that hides and legitimates oppression. The morally corrective act is *denunciation*. One can also act morally by giving voice to those who resist oppression; this at least identifies the oppression and the oppressors. Nowadays, one can have a moral career in anthropology; having a moral career in anthropology is being known for what one has denounced.

Nancy Scheper-Hughes's "Hungry Bodies, Medicine, and the State: Toward a Critical Psychological Anthropology" (1992a) is a good illustration of the use of the current moral model in anthropology. In her paper, Scheper-Hughes explicitly says that she wants to redirect psychological anthropology toward the new model. According to Scheper-Hughes (1992a:229):

The essential insight, derived from European critical theory, is that the given world or the "commonsense reality" may be false, illusory, and oppressive. It is an insight shared with all contemporary critical epistemologies including modern psychoanalysis, feminism and Marxism. All variants of modern critical theory work at the essential task of stripping away the surface forms of reality in order to expose concealed and buried truths. Their aim, then, is to "speak truth" to power and domination, both in individuals and submerged social groups or classes.

Demystification—"exposing concealed and buried truths"—is thus seen as a necessary remedy for the domination of individuals, groups, and classes. And the "critical theories" which do this are different from "objective" theories.

[Critical theories] are reflexive rather than objective epistemologies. Critical theories differ radically in their epistemology from positivist theories derived from the natural sciences. All theories in the "natural" sciences presuppose an "objective" structure of reality knowable by minds that are likewise understood as sharing a uniform cognitive structure. Critical theories assert the subjectivity of knowable phenomena and propose "reflection" as a valid category and method of discovery.

The problem Scheper-Hughes is addressing here, I think, involves the term "truth." Immediately before, she has said that the goal is to "speak truth to power." But isn't finding out the truth what science—old-fashioned anthropology—does? She claims that "critical theories" do something else—they know in a "subjective" way, not just an "objective" way, by "reflection." Scheper-Hughes is not explicit about how reflection works as a method of discovery, but she is clear that it is different from "positivism" and "natural science." In her view, "The objectivity of science and of medicine is always a phantom objectivity, a mask that conceals more than it reveals" (p. 229). Thus, positivistic natural science is a *bad* way to find out about the world because it is part of the process of mystification. Objectivity turns out to

1. A reviewer of an earlier draft of this article disagreed with my characterization of the "oppression model" as moral, arguing that the current "postmodern" position derives from the work of Nietzsche, Derrida, DeMan, and Foucault, all in the reviewer's opinion "amoral relativists." Whatever the merits of this reviewer's position, it is nevertheless the case that the anthropologists cited here—Rosaldo, Scheper-Hughes, Rabinow, Dwyer, Abu-Lughod, and others—are principled moralists who wish to make this world better.

be a mask for domination. One of the most salient characteristics of the current moral model is exactly this attack on objectivity.

Scheper-Hughes continues (p. 229):

At the heart of all critical theories and methods is a critique of ideology and power. Ideologies (whether political, economic, or religious) can mystify reality, obscure relations of power and domination, and prevent people from grasping their situation in the world. Specific forms of consciousness may be called ideological when they are invoked to sustain or legitimate particular institutions or social practices.

When these institutional arrangements reproduce inequality, domination, and human suffering, the aims of critical theory are broadly emancipatory.

This repeats of some of the ideas already presented: reality gets mystified to obscure relations of domination; the goal is to emancipate by revealing the ideologies which mystify such relations (pp. 229–30):

The process of liberation is complicated, however, by the unreflexive complicity and identification of people with the very ideologies and practices that are their own undoing. Here is where Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony is useful. Gramsci . . . recognized that the dominant classes exercised power both directly and forcefully through the state, and also indirectly by merging with the civil society and identifying their own class-based interests with broad cultural ideas and aims, making them appear indistinguishable from each other.

Here Scheper-Hughes begins to specify how mystification works—by the identification of the interests of the dominant classes with “broad” cultural ideas and aims. The state is the power that acts to create this mystification (p. 230):

Increasingly in modern bureaucratic states technicians and professionals—laboratory scientists, geneticists, doctors, psychologists, teachers, social workers, sociologists, criminologists and so forth—come to play the role of the “traditional intellectuals” in sustaining “commonsense” definitions of reality through their highly specialized and validating forms of discourse. Gramsci anticipated Foucault (see Foucault 1972) in his understanding of the diffuse power circuits in modern states and of the role of “expert” forms of power/knowledge in sustaining the “common sense” order of things.

Scheper-Hughes makes the case that in Northeast Brazil people suffer from a disorder called *nervos* that involves weakness, sleeplessness, heart palpitations, shaking, headache, fainting, etc., and that this disorder “is a primary idiom through which hunger and hunger-anxiety are expressed” (1992a:231). For this disorder, minor tranquilizers are considered by the Brazilian medical establishment to be an appropriate treatment. This treatment, according to Scheper-Hughes, by *not* recog-

nizing the problems of hunger that underlie *nervos*, reflects the underlying rage against domination and mystifies the source of the problem (p. 230):

In the context of this discussion, doctors occupy the pivotal role of “traditional” intellectuals whose function is, in part, to fail to see the secret indignation of the hungry poor expressed in their inchoate folk idiom of “*nervos*.” But anthropologists, too, often play the role of the “traditional” intellectual in their unconscious collusions with hegemonic interpretations of social reality fostered by powerful local interests.

The specification of the immoral agents moves from the state to bureaucratic technicians to doctors to teachers and social workers and finally to anthropologists. All are in complicity with oppression, although they may not know it. So—“What is to be done?” According to Scheper-Hughes (p. 229),

As social scientists (and not social revolutionaries) critical practice implies an epistemological struggle in which the contested domain is anthropology itself. The struggle concerns the way knowledge is generated, the class interests that it serves, and the challenge is to make our discipline more relevant and non-oppressive to the people we study. Finally, it is addressed to clinical practitioners as a challenge to reintegrate the social and political dimension in their practice so as to put themselves squarely on the side of human suffering.

The call to action is clear. Anthropology has been part of the process of mystification, serving interests that oppress others. The moral thing to do is to denounce those who maintain this mystification and transform anthropology from an objective natural science, which is just a charade and a means of continuing oppression, into a *critical anthropology* which will help change the world.

It is important to keep in mind that one can also use an objective model for moral purposes, as for example, in investigating the biochemical basis of schizophrenia in order to make possible better medicine for schizophrenics. The separation between moral models and objective models is not based on the motives or biases of the investigator. In most scientific fields which aim to help people, there are both moral and objective models, linked together. For example, in medicine, there is an objective language of physiology and biochemistry that describes what various pathogens do and how the body reacts to them. This biological model describes how things work, not whether viruses or antibodies are good or bad. Linked to this objective model is a less formal model concerning what is healthy, what is safe, what is medically ethical, etc., in which, for example, melanoma is considered a *bad* cancer while warts are usually considered *benign*. This language of health and ethics is carefully kept separate from the objective language of biological processes. One of my colleagues calls this the

"separation of church and state." You can have both, but they should be kept separate and distinct.

The separation of moral models and objective models is a crucial issue. It is exactly this separation that is explicitly attacked by anthropology's current moralists. For example, Rabinow (1983:68–70, emphasis added) offers what he calls a "schematization of relations of truth and power" as follows:

In the first position, that represented by Boas, the role of the anthropologist as scientist was to speak truth to power. Boas was a profoundly political man: a typical secular, emancipated, German, Jewish liberal with a strong faith in the force of reason as a functional tool of political emancipation and as an absolute value in its own right. The calling of the intellectual, for Boas, consisted of the advancement of reason through science and the conquest of tradition, irrationality, and injustice.

The dignity and achievements of Boas and his students are not in question—they were centrally responsible for making antiracism an accepted part of the American academic agenda—but neither are their limits and contradictions. The position of speaking truth to power, opposing humanism to nihilism, is still with us; and it is by no means the worst alternative. But ultimately *this position has not proved sufficiently hardy*, either intellectually or politically, to have spawned a science or politics which lives up to the standards of coherence and efficacy by which these individuals wished to be judged.

In an important sense, the second position, that represented by Geertz, *has no politics at all*. The ascetic imperative of Boas or Weber, who sought to separate truth and politics, still entailed an active vigilance lest these two realms fuse. It never occurred to these European intellectuals that political concerns were not central to the life of an intellectual—they saw them as so central they had to be kept in check. The sacrifice demanded of the scientist was not the loss of political passions but only that they be kept clearly distinct from scientific activities qua science. Over the time of two generations, the tension between these two callings, and hence the potential threat they posed for each other's autonomy, was gradually dissipated. In its place an ethics of scientific comportment became a code of civility. As this code took center stage, the more directly political concerns were weakened.

I am not advocating that we jettison the moral and intellectual achievements of the aggressively antiracist anthropology of Boas, nor that we discard what has been constructed and made to function as a civility which allows for dispute within a community of shared discourse. The main conclusion I draw from the analysis presented in this paper is that *it is the dogged separation of truth and power in order to construct a science which has had the most deleterious effects on anthropology*; it is the

conception of a humanist activity which has unwittingly pushed these anthropologists into a kind of nihilism which is the exact opposite of their intent.

Rabinow is clear that in his opinion the separation of moral models from objective models is a mistake resulting in an anthropology without morality ("politics" is a code word for "morality"). He presumes that anthropology *should* be moral and that the failure of anthropologists to maintain Boas's moral passion condemns the idea of separating moral and objective models; Geertz has failed us because he has no politics.<sup>2</sup>

Rabinow asserts that all anthropologists must have Boas's moral passion. I do not agree. In my moral universe, one can be an anthropologist simply because one is interested in human life and still be a good person. However, whether or not one has politics, or believes that all anthropologists should have politics, I argue that anthropology's claim to moral authority rests on knowing *empirical* truths about the world and that moral models should be kept separate from objective models because moral models are counterproductive in discovering how the world works. This is not an argument that anthropologists should have no politics; it is an argument that they should keep their politics separate from the way they do their science.

Without attempting to meet all attacks, I will first take up some of the most egregious arguments against objectivity.

#### 1. *Objective models are dehumanizing.*

According to Rorty (1983:164), "Foucault is doubtless right that the social sciences have coarsened the moral fiber of our rulers. Something happens to politicians who are exposed to endless tabulations of income levels, rates of recidivism, cost-effectiveness of artillery fire, and the like—something like what happens to concentration camp guards." Here is complete fantasy. No evidence besides a mention of Foucault is cited. Certainly I know of no research that shows that social science research findings have a dehumanizing effect on people. What seem to be operating here are the assumptions of the current moral model; objectivity is part of science, science is used in the domination of others, domination is the inhuman treatment of others, hence objectivity is dehumanizing. All this follows from first principles and need not be proved.

2. *The distinctions between objectivity and subjectivity, fact and language, knowledge and opinion, depend on a realist conception of the world and the correspondence theory of truth. This theory is flawed, and therefore the distinctions which grow out of it are confusing and unnecessary.*

The realist conception of science argues that science

2. In his Distinguished Lecture to the American Anthropological Association "Anti Anti-Relativism," Geertz (1984) protests Rabinow's characterization. Geertz makes the point that *his* politics of tolerance and understanding—of fighting against provincialism and ethnocentrism—are just as moral as other positions and that it is unfair to be labeled "without politics" by those who have *other* politics.

"works" because it corresponds in some degree and in some manner to the "way the world really is." That is, science tries to find out the "truth," and "truth" consists of statements that correspond to "reality." It is this correspondence to reality that explains why science is successful at prediction and control. The argument of Rorty (1991) and others, who call themselves "relativists," or "antirealists" or "antirationalists," is that the "correspondence" between statements and the world is not an obvious matter. Various conventions about what counts as evidence are needed in order to decide the truth or falsity of statements; in a mature science these conventions are quite complex. For example, in psychology, the value of experimental evidence depends on a variety of statistical considerations involving reliability, control cases, proportion of the variance accounted for, type 1 and type 2 errors, etc. But where do these conventions come from? They are conventions agreed upon by a community. Thus truth depends on the consensus of the community, and objectivity reduces to social solidarity (Rorty 1991:22).

This argument has also been put forward by a number of individuals working in the history of science and the sociology of knowledge. Latour (1988), Latour and Woolgar (1979), Shapin and Schaffer (1985), and others have presented specific case histories which they argue show that scientific debate is determined not by the winners' being closer to some abstract truth but by their having more social and cultural power. Philip Kitcher, a philosopher of science who is a vigorous defender of the rationality of science, summarizes the position of the antirationalists, among whom he explicitly includes Feyerabend, Barnes, Bloor, Shapin, Schaffer, Collins and Latour, as follows (1993:198):

[1] The community decision is reached when sufficiently many sufficiently powerful subgroups within the community have arrived at decisions (possibly independent, possibly coordinated) to modify their practices in a particular way.

[2] Scientists are typically moved by nonepistemic as well as epistemic goals.

[3] There is significant cognitive variation within scientific communities, in terms of individual practices, underlying propensities, and exposure to stimuli.

[4] During all phases of scientific debate, the processes undergone by the ultimate victors are no more well designed for promoting cognitive progress than those undergone by the ultimate losers.

[5] Scientific debates are closed when one group musters sufficient power to exclude its rival(s) from the community; the subsequent articulation and development of the successful modification of practice absorb all available resources, so that later compari-

sons can be made between a highly developed tradition and an underdeveloped rival. . . .

Kitcher points out that the first three points are not central to the antirationalist argument; the crucial points are 4 and 5, which deny that, over the long term, correspondence with the "truth," or with "the way the world really is," tips the battle so that scientific knowledge progresses. All five points are empirical generalizations; if they are true it is a matter not of first principles but of fact. Kitcher argues that a more empirically accurate characterization would modify points 4 and 5 as follows:

[4] During the early phases of scientific debate, the processes undergone by the ultimate victors are (usually) no more well designed for promoting cognitive progress than those undergone by the ultimate losers.

[5] Scientific debates are closed when, as a result of conversations among peers and encounters with nature that are partially produced by early decisions to modify individual practices, there emerges in the community a widely shared argument, encapsulating a process for modifying practice which, when judged by [an external standard] is markedly superior in promoting cognitive progress than other processes undergone by protagonists in the debate: power accrues to the victorious group principally in virtue of the integration of this process into the thinking of members of the community and recognition of its virtues.

There is probably no "knock-down" argument from first principles to demonstrate that the correspondence theory of truth is right (or wrong) or that scientific knowledge has advanced (or not advanced). Whether the correspondence theory of truth is right and whether scientific knowledge has advanced are empirical questions, and I think that the empirical answers are reasonably clear. As Gellner (1992:60-61) has said:

One particular style of knowledge [scientific knowledge] has proved so overwhelmingly powerful, economically, militarily, administratively, that all societies have had to make their peace with it and adopt it. Some have done it more successfully than others, and some more willing or more quickly than others; but all of them have had to do it, or perish. Some have retained more, and some less, of their previous culture.

That is, the empirical support for the hypothesis that science advances is simply the strong evidence that scientific knowledge about the world *has* advanced. Whether, on balance, scientific knowledge has been used for good or evil is another question. My own unoriginal conclusion is that, on balance, the world is considerably better off because of science. However, those who disagree on this point would, I believe, still have to agree that scientific *knowledge* has advanced. Given the obvious success of science as a way of finding out about the world, it is remarkable that many anthropologists are

attracted to philosophers and historians who flirt with the idea that there is no true progress in scientific knowledge and no way of knowing what is true.<sup>3</sup>

The antirationalists further argue that there are no independent criteria for explaining the success of science (Rorty 1991). My own opinion is that the success of science is due primarily both to the norm of presenting generalizations in a form that makes it possible to dispute them with evidence and to the norm of carrying out extensive tests of other people's generalizations. The testability of statements and the constant testing of statements ward off the very strong tendency of humans to believe what they *want* to believe. It is these two norms that give the scientific enterprise its power.

Finally, there is something inconsistent about the statements made by Rorty and others about the badness of the subject/object, language/fact, and knowledge/opinion distinctions. For example, according to Rorty (1991:41, emphasis added);

On the pragmatist view, the contrast between "relations of ideas" and "matters of fact" is a special case of the bad seventeenth-century contrasts between being "in us" and being "out there," between subject and object, between our beliefs and what those beliefs (moral, scientific, theological, etc.) are trying to get right. . . . [The pragmatist] is suggesting that instead of invoking anything like the idea-fact, or language-fact, or mind-world, or subject-object distinctions to explicate our intuition that *there is something out there to be responsible to*, we just drop the intuition.

Imagine a lazy student in one of Rorty's classes who complains that he only got a D. Professor Rorty says, "That is what you deserve." The student replies, "You are invoking the intuition that there is something out there (my performance, objectively viewed) *to be responsible to*. You should drop that intuition. Subjectively, I *feel* I did quite well, and although I said that I would turn in a paper, the *fact* that I did not simply reinvokes the language/fact distinction, which depends on the flawed correspondence theory of truth." Of course, Rorty would explain that he bases his judgments on the normal consensus about what counts as true (the professor's judgment) rather than some ultimate correspondence of the professor's judgment with reality. What Rorty means by "objectivity" and "truth" is not what the student means; Rorty is talking about ultimate truth

and complete objectivity, not ordinary judgments about course performance and broken promises. Rorty does not mean (I think) that in ordinary life the distinctions between object and subject, mind and world, idea and fact, etc., should be dispensed with (that would make an odd world). It is only in certain kinds of philosophic discourse that these distinctions are not to be made. However, in my opinion this speaks badly for such kinds of philosophic discourse.

3. *The idea that people can be objective is illusory; people construct the reality that suits them best. Hence an objective model is impossible, and any pretense that such a model can be achieved is simply hegemonic mystification.*

Scheper-Hughes's statement "The objectivity of science and of medicine is always a phantom objectivity, a mask that conceals more than it reveals" (1992:229) is one example of this position. It should be noted that the meaning of "objective" in these arguments is shifted from "an account which describes the object, not the describer" to "an account given without bias or self-interest." This is a secondary sense of the term; literally, "objective" glosses as "pertaining to the object." The secondary sense of the term "unbiased" is an extension based on the notion that those who have no axe to grind give a more objective account. By shifting from the primary sense to the secondary sense one can make the case that, since people are always biased to some degree, an "objective" account is impossible. Then, since "objectivity" (not having any interests) is impossible, any claim to objectivity must be a "mask," a mystification. However, the accusation depends on the trick of substituting a secondary for a primary meaning. Besides, who ever claimed that scientists are unbiased? A brief acquaintanceship with the history of science would certainly disabuse anyone of that notion. Science works not because it produces unbiased accounts but because its accounts are objective enough to be proved or disproved no matter what anyone wants to be true.

While I am objecting to the rhetorical tricks that are used to identify objectivity and science with badness, I should also note that similar tricks are used to identify objectivity and science with goodness. The methods of science and the use of objective accounts are the best way to find out about the world (I would argue), but the method has no *guarantee* of working. Employment of the term "science" as an honorific to give weight to unreplicated and often unsound generalizations, sometimes constructed with considerable bias, is a continuing abuse. One could even argue that there is so much positive mystification around the term "science" that some negative mystification is needed as a balance. Fine, if the result is intellectual balance—the recognition that, on both sides, rhetoric is not evidence and that "fact" is always a probability, not an absolute.

It might be thought that I am claiming that science should be value-free and outside politics. This is not the case. Science is an institutionalized activity—a means, not an end. It can be used for all sorts of ends—to create engines of war, to make new products, to cure physical

3. Bruno Latour (1993) appears to have moved to a realist position not substantially different from that of Kitcher. For example, in discussing Shapin and Schaffer's account of the controversy between Boyle and Hobbes about vacuum pumps and the role of experimentation, Latour (1993:28 emphasis added) says, "Boyle . . . invents the laboratory within which artificial machines create phenomena out of whole cloth. Even though they are artificial, costly, and hard to reproduce, and despite the small number of trained reliable witnesses, *these facts indeed represent nature as it is*. . . . Scientists are scrupulous representatives of the facts. Who is speaking when they speak? The facts themselves beyond all question, but also their authorized spokespersons."



and mental ills, and even just to discover things. The determination of the ends of scientific activity in the United States has long been a political matter in which Congress and a variety of interest groups, including those who want to do science just for the sake of enlightenment, contend for the money. Science demystified is not intrinsically good or bad.

4. *Objectivity is part of the general hegemony of Western culture, and is authoritarian and oppressive.*

Abu-Lughod (1991:150–51) writes:

Generalization, the characteristic model of operation and style of writing of the social sciences, can no longer be regarded as neutral description. . . . There are two reasons for anthropology to be wary of generalization. The first is that, as part of a professional discourse of "objectivity" and expertise, it is inevitably a language of power. On the one hand, it is the language of those who seem to stand apart from and outside of what they are describing. . . . On the other hand, even if we withhold judgment on how closely the social sciences can be associated with the apparatuses of management, we have to recognize how all professional discourses by nature assert hierarchy.

Here the contagious badness-of-oppression continues to spread like a plague; oppression's badness infects power, power's badness infects objectivity ("standing apart"), and objectivity's badness infects generalizations. Again, the badness is asserted on the basis of first principles, not demonstrated. In opposition to Abu-Lughod, I claim that it is *not* bad to make generalizations about people and that ethnographic generalizations do *not* damage people. *Nor* does objectivity. *Nor* do power differences. This is another fantasy. What damages people is the way power is *used* and the way generalizations are *used*. And what *helps* people is the way power is *used* and the way generalizations are *used*. It is irrational to hold that power as such is bad. The result is a spreading pollution that makes it bad to say that the Bedouin are polygynous (Abu-Lughod 1991:153).

One effect of the current ban on objectivity is the substitution of stories and narratives for generalizations. Abu-Lughod says, "For these reasons I propose that we experiment with *narrative ethnographies of the particular* in a continuing tradition of fieldwork-based writing" (1991:153, emphasis added). By telling a story about someone, the ethnographer does not have to make any generalizations and thereby appears to avoid the danger of hegemonic discourse. However, the appearance is deceptive; quite the reverse happens in fact. It is a natural assumption of the reader that any narrative is, in some important sense, typical of what happens in that place, unless told otherwise. Kenneth Burke (1945) calls this rhetorical strategy that of the "reductive anecdote"—the world is "summarized by" and "reduces to" the story one tells about it. *Presenting an anecdote is just as essentializing and totalizing as stating a generalization*. Consider, for example, the well-known anecdote about George Washington and the cherry tree: it

acts just like the generalization "Washington was honest" but hides the claim. Hence Burke's comment on the rhetorical use of anecdotes: beware of people just telling stories.

It is striking that these attacks on objective models do not present any evidence of the damage done by objectivity. In the same vein, evidence about the good done by science is ignored. A major reason for the unimportance of evidence, I believe, is what is being asserted is not a set of empirical facts but whether one's first allegiance is to morality or to truth. My hypothesis that what is being expressed is allegiance to a set of moral principles explains another rather odd aspect of many of the attacks—their loose adherence to the laws of logic. A number of scholars who have critiqued various post-modernist positions (e.g., Spiro 1986, Bailey 1991, Gellner 1992) have commented on the internal contradictions, principle begging, and appeals to authority found in much of this writing. These objections have not been answered; the usual response I have heard is that they are "beside the point." And, if the point is that relativism is the correct *moral* response to cultural differences, then, indeed, logic and evidence are not relevant.

One might say, "Well, some of these moral concerns may be overdone, but why not use the current moral model? Isn't it a reasonable model of reality as well as a model which shows what is right? Can't one blend together objectivity and morality in a single model?" So far as I know, a mixed model would not violate any principle of logic. However, there are reasonably well-understood problems with trying to graft moral and objective models together if one wants to find out about the world. It may need to be repeated that the argument here is not against anthropologists' having moral models. Indeed, I believe that anthropologists should work to develop more coherent, clearly articulated moral models. These moral models should, I think, describe both the anthropologist's responsibilities and a vision of what the good society and the good culture would look like. The point has often been made that if anthropologists do not try to influence the ends to which the knowledge they produce is used, others will do it for them. But—the point I am arguing—these moral models should be kept separate from the objective models with which we debate what is.

The first problem with blended models is *identification*. To use the current moral model, with its emphasis on the badness of oppression, to understand the world, one must be able to identify when something is or is not oppression. But what makes something oppression? Is taking away the freedom of serial murderers oppression? Most people would say that it is not—that they deserve to have their freedom taken away, and that it is prudent to do so as well. It is not oppression, then, if the people being dominated deserve to be dominated or need to be dominated for the common good. But who is to say who deserves to be dominated? And who is to say what the common good is? Serbs believe that Croats should be dominated for a variety of reasons. Badness and goodness are not simple properties of things but



complex interactions between events and human intentions and welfare. It becomes very difficult to define what oppression is except by one's *reaction* to the situation—whenever it seems to be a bad use of power call it “oppression,” and whenever it is a good use call it “justice” or something else. This is a central doctrine of subjectivity; what one truly feels is bad *is* bad. Of course, one can say that this is just quibbling, and that everyone—or almost everyone—can tell a good from a bad use of power. However, because of the complexity of human life we often find ourselves vehemently disagreeing even with people we respect about exactly this. The experience of people trying to find out about how the world works is that you find out more when you avoid the use of evaluative terms—otherwise you spend all your time arguing about the use of these terms, trying to make the bad things get the bad words and the good things get the good words.

A second problem in trying to meld together moral and objective models is that the objective world comes in many shades of grey but the moral world tends toward black and white. Oppression, for example, is not an all-or-none state; it varies in degree. Not every use of power is equally bad. To make a model account for what happens in the world, one usually needs to distinguish *more* from *less*. But morality does not seem to like to do this; each case of oppression must be treated as an equal horror because they all are *wrong*. Sin is sin, and if one sets up a scale of greater and lesser sins one quickly finds out that lesser sins are no longer considered *real* sins. Thus the pragmatics of morality and the pragmatics of finding out about the world pull in different directions.

A third problem is the powerful tendency to believe that good things produce good results and bad things produce bad results: “By their fruits ye shall know them.” But the complexities of causality do not respect our human wish for the good to produce good and the bad to produce bad. Furthermore, the pragmatics of morality tend strongly toward a unicausal view of events; for every bad event there is a single bad thing that caused it. This makes assignment of blame much easier. But the world tends to be strongly multicausal. When a fire burns down a building, who is to blame? Why, the man who threw the match in the wastepaper basket. But for a physicist the match would not have lit the material in the wastepaper basket if it had a higher combustion point or if there had been no oxygen in the air or if the building had been made entirely of stone. We *blame* a knowing and intentional agent, but almost always what happens is the result not *just* of a knowing intentional act but of a complex web of causes. Use of the notion that “bad causes bad” results in the kind of conclusion that Abu-Lughod reaches about generalizations: power brings about oppression, therefore power is bad. Science gives people power, therefore science is bad. Objectivity is part of science, therefore objectivity is bad. Generalizations are produced by objective science, therefore generalizations are bad. And some would take it further: generalizations are based on fieldwork, therefore field-

work is, if not bad, at least a situation that places one in very grave moral jeopardy.

A fourth pragmatic problem in trying to meld moral and objective models is that whereas an objective model can—at least sometimes—be changed by new data, new arguments, new theories, moral models are very hard to change. The history of the current moral model is interesting in this regard. So far as I have been able to ascertain, the present moral model was first outlined by Jeremy Bentham, a late-18th-century English philosopher and one of the founders of utilitarianism. Bentham said that those who govern use symbols which serve the interests of the governing class. These symbols are fictions; there is no such thing as the “Crown” or the “Church,” for example. Bentham’s interest was in revealing the rhetorical fictions and phantoms used to hide what he termed “sinister interests” (Bentham 1952). His goal was explicitly moral: to demystify and thereby denounce these fictions so that there could be clarification of the “common good.”

Marx, who read Bentham and commented on his notions of sinister interests and fictions, added Bentham’s ideas about mystification to his own model of social conflict and its resolution through socialism. He disclaimed ethical and humanitarian reasons for preferring socialism. For him it was historically determined that socialism would overthrow capitalism. The important causal machinery in Marx’s model concerns class conflict and material conditions. Symbolic hegemony might have some effect in slowing down the revolution, since false consciousness could interfere temporarily with the necessary recognition of class interests on the part of workers, but it was not a primary force. The Benthamite model was, however, often used by Marxists in their intellectual battles with other political philosophies and in their battles with each other. The standard argument was that the ideas of other philosophies were nothing more than expressions of class interests and attempts at symbolic hegemony; Marxism alone had an “objective” basis. Later, in Gramsci’s writings, the complex machinery of the Marxist model, involving forces of production, relations of production, material conditions, etc., was replaced by the role of symbols, culture, and intellectuals in the maintenance and legitimation of the status quo (Femia 1981). The material parts of the Marxist model were eliminated, and what remained was the claim that governments were able to stay in power because the state controlled ideology which became part of the common sense of the common culture. The model moved back from Marx to Bentham, except that the state remained the primary source of oppression.

By the late 1960s the current oppression model was a well-entrenched part of the ideology of the American intellectual radical left in the social sciences and the humanities. The main outlines of this model were presented in a collection of essays, edited by Dell Hymes, titled *Reinventing Anthropology*. Much of the moral stirring in anthropology at that time was a result of the Vietnam war, and *Reinventing Anthropology* reflects

the conflicts of that time. But beyond discussion of issues relating to Vietnam, the contributors were clear that anthropology should be permanently changed. In the essays in this volume (Hymes 1972), Berreman called for an end to the pervasive hypocrisy of academic anthropology, William Willis defined anthropology as the study of dominated people done in aid of imperialism, Minna Caulfield discussed cultural exploitation in terms of its effect on the colonized culture and individuals sharing it, Richard Clemmer discussed the development of resistance among American Indians, Norman Klein speculated about the effect of the 1960 counterculture on American cultural hegemony, Robert Jay described how he had come to feel that anthropological theory and anthropological fieldwork involve serious moral problems because of their dehumanizing effects on society and on anthropologists, and Bob Scholte presented an agenda for anthropology based on a reflexive and critical epistemology in contrast to "value-free" social science.

All of this was stated clearly in the 1960s. However, unlike the current moralists, the moralists of the 1960s and 1970s were, with some exceptions, young and relatively unknown and also not epistemological relativists. What seems to have happened next is that this model went "tacit" and then reemerged in full voice in the 1980s as a part of the postmodernist movement.<sup>4</sup> Postmodernism, with its concerns about the authority of representation and its interest in the deconstruction of the verities, gave the moral model a much more resplendent vocabulary and greater epistemological bite. *Writing Cultures* (Clifford and Marcus 1986) was ostensibly about a new way of writing ethnography. Behind the discussion of modes of presentation was the presupposition that the old way of writing was the expression of the old objective (realist/hegemonic) model and therefore had to be replaced. The language used in the essays in *Writing Cultures* made strong claims to upper-middle-class sensibility in esthetic matters but did not modify the basics of the moral model. It did, however, make it possible to claim that concern with writing and representation counted as a serious moral pursuit. In any case, the moral model, as developed during the later part of the 18th century, has changed very little because, I believe, of its usefulness in moral argument by intellectuals against other intellectuals.

So far, I have discussed four general problems with the use of moral models as a means of finding out about

the world: the difficulty in getting reliable identifications for basic terms, the tendency towards all-or-none thinking, the tendency towards monocausality and evaluative contagion, and the difficulty of changing a moral model. There are also a number of problems with the *particular* moral model of oppression current in anthropology.

First, in my opinion, this particular moral model is not a very good representation of the way the world is. As an explanation of what is happening globally, the model in its Gramscian form made most sense in the 1950s and '60s, when the cold war was at its height. At that time two powerful empires, one capitalist, the other communist, held sway over much of the world. The difference between the two empires was not a matter of material conditions; both were modern industrial economies. What happened to make the difference was ideology. That is, to explain how the world could be so divided, it made sense to postulate that the division was due to differences in belief and that the commitment to belief was the result of the rhetoric produced by mystifiers who managed the flow of symbols and information that created the common sense of ordinary people. The Gramscian worldview is clearly inadequate, however, to account for the breakup of the Soviet Union and the current world disorder in which nation-states are unable to contain ethnic conflicts. The present problem for any macrosocial theory is not identifying oppression but accounting for the failure of current governments to maintain order.

It can be argued that the moral model still has some representational adequacy in accounting for oppression within particular countries. However, in my opinion, oppression in China, Brazil, or the United States can be better understood by recourse to theoretical models about the privileged access of special-interest groups to governmental functions, the operation of political parties, the lack of civil society, and other standard kinds of political analysis than by explanation based on a model of mass mystification. The only situation to which the oppression/mystification/denunciation model seems to have a reasonable degree of fit is to discrimination—racism and sexism. However, even with respect to racism and sexism the moral model does not explain much; it simply condemns discrimination as oppression. It does not tell us why discrimination is worse at some times and in some places.

A number of other problems with the current moral model may be considered briefly. The moral model has no theory of *good* power or *good* inequality and so must simply condemn without understanding much of the operation of any social system. Also, the model is almost entirely negative in character; it creates a climate of denunciation and rage. Further, while those who use the model are reflexive in asking, "Am I acting oppressively?" they are not at all reflexive on other points; they do not ask, "What is there about *me* that makes *me* see oppression as bad?" or "Why should others believe *my* assertions when *I* do not believe theirs?" or

4. A reviewer of an earlier draft points out that during this period there were extensive criticisms by feminist, Third World, and minority scholars of the biases in social science writing and research. The influence of these critiques on anthropology has been very powerful, and in many cases they have been used to support a blanket rejection of objectivity and a commitment to the kind of moral model described here. However, many feminist, minority, and Third World scholars do not reject the idea of objectivity and in fact find that the epistemological relativism typical of much postmodernist writing undercuts attempts to identify what has actually happened in the world and what needs to be changed.

"Why have *I* been blessed with the knowledge of good and evil that *others* do not seem to have?" Overall, there is the unreflexive assumption that one is a member of an elect that by natural grace knows what is right, and this elect consists of those who hold the current moral model. All others are to be driven out of anthropology by "epistemological struggle," as Scheper-Hughes puts it.

Another limitation of the current moral model is that it does not seem likely that it will bring about very much good in the world. It does not lead one to do anything positive about bad conditions. Instead it leads to denunciations of various social practitioners, such as social workers, doctors, psychiatrists, economists, civil servants, bureaucrats, etc., and especially other anthropologists. Isn't it odd that the true enemy of society turns out to be that guy in the office down the hall? But the intellectual destruction of these mystifiers, however desirable within the framework of the model, is unlikely to help the truly oppressed very much. Steven Sangren, in his article "Rhetoric and the Authority of Anthropology" (1988), pointed to the will to power expressed by postmodernist advocates of the moral model. The current moral model is a good instrument for intellectual battle within the university; it hardly seems likely, even on its own terms, to accomplish much else. This is what Bentham created it for, and this has been its most important use in Marxist thought.

The best part of the model is the analysis of different kinds of mystification; these do tell us something about the world. Much weaker is the assertion that these mystifications are effective in maintaining oppression—that ordinary people do not rise to overthrow the capitalists or colonialists or sexists because of the power of these mystifications. This is undemonstrated though in some cases plausible. More often it appears to be the case that people do not revolt either because (1) they face overwhelming force, (2) they are receiving satisfaction from their lives as lived, or (3) the persons, groups, or institutions that the social scientist has identified as the source of the oppression are not the true source of oppression—the source being more diffuse and less amenable to solution than the social scientist thinks and the social scientist's explanation in fact being the one that is mystifying.

Finally, the current moral model is ethnocentric. It is strong for equality (the escape from inequality) and freedom (the release from oppression). In my opinion these are not bad values, but they are very American. These are not the predominant values of modern Japan, India, China, the Middle East, or Southeast Asia, but they are the predominant values in the United States and much of Europe. It is ironic that these moralists should be so colonialist in their assumption about what is evil.

However, even if the moral model were a more adequate representation of what is going on in the world, included a theory of good power and good inequality, were less negative in character, more reflexive about matters of moral belief, and more oriented toward doing something positive in the world, gave better explanations for why people do not revolt, and were much less ethnocentric, it would still be a mistake to try to make such a model also serve as the model for understanding how things work. The driving force of a moral model is the allocation of praise and blame, reward and punishment, and this goal *will* shape its cognitive character. The driving force of an objective model is the goal of obtaining a surer understanding of how things work, of what is happening "out there." It is nice to believe that one can have both in a single model, but the evidence is strong that one cannot. The current moral model is a case in point.

It comes down to a choice: whatever one wants in the way of political change, will the first priority be to understand how things work? That would be my choice. I believe that anthropology can maintain its moral authority only on the basis of empirically demonstrable truths. But I am afraid that my choice may be in the minority. A large and growing number of American anthropologists appear to believe that the moral agenda of anthropology should take priority over the scientific agenda. An even larger number appear to believe that the scientific agenda of anthropology is in deservedly bad repute because of its association with oppression. "Science" has become a bad word in anthropology.<sup>5</sup> Can we at least hold on to "objectivity?"

I do not know how this will turn out. Perhaps after another few years of continued moral suasion, the internal bickering of the moralists will begin to be more interesting than their message, and the current wave of moral righteousness will be followed by a period of cynicism and disillusionment. This seems to be what happened after the French Revolution, after Cromwell in England, and after Stalin in Russia. In five or ten years the New Young Turks will probably flaunt their cynicism and find the moral pretensions of their elders unbearably hypocritical. In any case, let us hope that anthropology, as a science, will survive. As estheticized journalism and moralistic pamphleteering it can easily be replaced.

5. Laura Nader has a good point with respect to the conception of "science." She says, "One question that should interest all of us has to do with clarifying the meaning of the *human* sciences qua science. In order to do this there needs to be recognition of plurality in science. . . . A recognition of many kinds of science as applied to anthropology forces us to consider that the study of the human condition requires a division of labor in the research process. . . . how do anthropologists escape from dogmatic orthodoxy? They are driven by the research question" (Nader 1989:154).