

The Ethics of Knowledge Creation: Anthropological Perspectives

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Abstract

A core historical narrative about anthropological knowledge is that it is created in relations with others, with fieldwork seen as 'a series of apprenticeships' whose success is determined by the quality of those relations. An ethnographer connects with the conditions of those studied in 'circulating exchange'; but on leaving the field a degree of closure is needed to formulate and communicate anthropological knowledge. These obligations and requirements in the creation of knowledge entail attachment and detachment, carrying the seeds of betrayal that can compromise that knowledge. Each epistemological enquiry has its own core ethical imperatives, but as long as knowledge posits a knower, 'the self of the knower will be at epistemological issue'. In discussing the ethics of knowledge creation I consider the following questions, among others: To what extent is the creation of a particular kind of ethical and epistemic person required for knowledge? How can ethnography produce knowledge about others without betraying them? Can relations of knowledge exchange confer or withhold 'rights to speak'? Is it possible that unethical relations may destroy or hold up the unfolding of knowledge? And are there circumstances in which it is unethical to disclose knowledge?

Key words: Ethics of knowledge creation; Types of knowers; Epistemological enquiry; Knowledge exchange; Knowledge unfolding; Knowledge disclosure

1 Introduction

'Why does an epistemology need an ethics?' Daston and Galison begin with this question in their study of objectivity as a scientific concept. Their answer speaks to the anthropologist's predicament: epistemology and ethics are intertwined, because a

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way of being is at the same time a way of knowing (2010, p. 39, 4). It follows then that as long as knowledge posits a knower, ‘the self of the knower will be at epistemological issue’ (ibid., p. 40). This linking of the knower to that which is known leads to the cultivation of a distinctive scientific self in whom knowing and knower converge.

This convergence is to be found at the heart of the historical narrative about anthropological knowledge, which is considered to be created in relations with others, forged in fieldwork as ‘a series of apprenticeships’ whose success is determined by the quality of those relations (Jenkins 1994, p. 442). The ethnographer engages in ‘circulating exchange’ with those studied, living with them as a ‘participant observer’. In this received view, which nonetheless has variants, anthropological knowledge creation is seen as grounded in an ethnographic encounter whose ethical perspective is the basis of a methodology of understanding. As Jenkins writes, we understand others only by engaging with them in practical activities, in which knowledge itself is created. This knowledge does not exist independently, prior to the interactions, as objective, uninvolved, and there for the taking. Much of social life is practical, embodied in habits and dispositions, and behaviour is ‘constructed or improvised’ on the basis of these habits; it is not made up ‘of rule-governed responses to stimuli’. Social actors are thus able to generate ‘an infinite number of practices adapted to endlessly changing situations, without this basis ever being constituted as explicit principles’ (Jenkins, 1994, p. 439). This is the territory of Bourdieu’s (1977) theory of practice, as Jenkins reminds us.

To some extent, Carrithers (1992) follows a similar trajectory, in that he rejects notions of understanding as grounded in pre-existing structures. He also denies that knowledge is gained from observations of enacted meaning. Instead, he aims to demonstrate that ethnographic understanding is achieved through intersubjectivity that goes beyond words. His work thus falls into the spectrum of existential anthropology, a perspective that has attracted swathes of established anthropologists with impressive sets of studies (in particular, see Jackson, 2005 and 2013; Jackson & Piette, 2017; Ingold, 2011). Jackson defines existential anthropology as ‘an anthropology whose object is to understand through empirical means social Being’ (Jackson, 2005, p. xxviii). Despite the situation of the individual, he contends, the question of being is universal (2005, p. xii). Jackson thus refuses to ontologise such notions as ‘having culture’, ‘being oneself’ – because he rejects the notion that ‘our humanity consists in our individual will-to-be’ (ibid.: xii). Instead, he demonstrates an ‘anthropology of events’ by exploring critical moments, ‘moments of being’ that ‘allegorize the precariousness of all human existence’ and transform events that befall us into scenarios of our own choosing (ibid., p. xx; (see also Josephides, 2014). For his part, Ingold (2011), in his decidedly mobile ethnographies, emphasises movement and being alive in the world with a distinct Heideggerian flavour.

While Hastrup and Hervik (1994, p. 1) accept the significance of autobiography and the situatedness of the anthropologist in the creation of anthropological knowledge, they wish to ‘demystify’ subjectivity – by which they mean an obsession with the self. The starting point for anthropology, they write, is not the self but the field. Experience trumps dialogue in the field – in fact the field is experienced as performed (ibid., pp. 2, 3). What is internalised in fieldwork is not a culture as a given text to be interpreted (despite Geertz), nor a system of cognitive categories (*malgré* Lévi-Strauss). Rather, it is a holistic, total social experience comprising of thought, feelings

and emotions. Nonetheless, it could be argued that a precondition for scholarship is a shift from the ‘implicit knowing’ of how people know their own culture, to explicit knowledge. It is not enough just to ‘let the natives speak for themselves’. Analysis and reflections are needed for scholarly knowledge (Josephides, 2008a).

The above is just a brief review of how anthropologists have reflected on the creation of their discipline’s knowledge. Despite variations, their accounts have in common a stress on the person of the knower, the importance of the ethical conditions of knowing, and the relations that make knowing possible. Does knowledge creation link the knower and knowledge with value, virtue and goodness? And can the content and ownership of knowledge be linked to the conditions of its creation? In what follows I begin with an overview of philosophical and anthropological perspectives on knowledge and ethics and their relationship. Then I move to the creation of the knower, considered from four perspectives. Finally, I discuss the future of anthropology beyond primary sites. In a conclusion I revisit the notion of betrayal.

2 Knowledge Creation: Philosophical Perspectives

Philosophical debates on knowledge tend to link knowledge with value, virtue, and goodness (see Josephides, 2015). They combine the ability to think rationally with a reflective attitude about living well. When Aristotle outlined the five intellectual virtues that can be called knowledge (*techné*, *epistémé*, *phronésis*, *sophía* and *nóus*), he insisted that they were powers of the mind that are ‘truth-apt’ (Chappell 2014, p. 271), but also stressed that the aim of his enquiry was not to attain knowledge about what excellence [virtue] was, but to become good [virtuous] (Chappell, 2014, p. 24). Some ambivalence remained, however (especially for Plato), around the question of whether virtue as knowledge can be learned, or if it is more akin to ‘correct opinion’, possessed as a gift from the gods (Plato, 1997, pp. 888–97).

Modern philosophy of knowledge identifies three types of knowledge: propositional knowledge (knowing-that, factual or descriptive knowledge), experiential knowledge, and knowing-how (practical knowledge and including moral knowledge) (Chappell, 2014, pp. 270–1). All three types of knowledge carry ‘epistemic credit’, which can be claimed only with the relevant knowledge-how, experimental knowledge, or propositional knowledge (Chappell, 2014, p. 265). Chappell (*ibid.*, p. 269) reminds us of two points that are relevant to the current enquiry: first, even scientific knowledge is not exclusively propositional (Daston et al., 2010, also underline this point); second, any argument to the effect that systematic moral thinking must be based on knowledge of the good makes ethics into propositional knowledge (2014, p. 277). Chappell’s subsequent statement, that the ‘capacity to feel ourselves into things’ ‘is the basis of our understanding of and connectedness to the world’ (2014, p. 289), puts him in the camp of many anthropologists. Though not directly addressing the ethics of knowledge exchange, Chappell moves in this direction when he defines ‘objectual knowledge’ in terms that recall the anthropologist’s stock-in-trade: knowledge of objects, which may be material or abstract; or dispositions (such as virtues) (Chappell, 2014, p. 284). Objectual knowledge is ‘value-loaded’, a ‘humble and unending pilgrimage towards the demands set by an external reality’, while the aim of propositional knowledge is con-

trol and domination (ibid., pp. 288-9). The trajectory of objectual knowledge recalls the description of fieldwork as a ‘series of apprenticeships’ (Jenkins, 1994, p. 442). Chappell reasoned further in terms that appear to describe the anthropologist’s craft:

The point [as philosopher Iris Murdoch outlines] is to approach something outside oneself, something indefinitely demanding and in some ways mysterious, and to try to be both truthful and illuminating in one’s understanding of it. This exercise . . . is something that requires humility, patience, persistence, imagination, and resourcefulness from the inquirer. And notably, it is part of the way things are that the seeker after objectual knowledge never completes his quest; there is always more to know about any object, especially about any complex and interesting object.

Another writer, a novelist this time, outlines the difference between knowledge and judgement. In his epistolary novel on the Roman Emperor Augustus, John Williams (2003 [1971], p. 128) has Maecenas write the following chastisement in a letter to Livy:

[It] seems to me that the moralist is the most useless and contemptible of creatures. He . . . would expend his energies upon making judgments rather than upon gaining knowledge, for the reason that judgment is easy and knowledge is difficult.

Ethnographers suspend judgement during fieldwork, simply living and focusing on the analysis of experience. Since knowledge is entangled in relations and engagements between people, the ‘capacity to feel ourselves into things . . . is the basis of our understanding of and connectedness to the world’ (Chappell, 2014, p. 289). The person and ethics meet most productively in the creation of the knower, a multiple personage I discuss in a later section. But first, some background on anthropological knowledge.

3 Ethnography, Theory, and Knowledge Creation as ‘Partial Connections’

Historically anthropological knowledge was built on the findings of fieldwork, used to construct ethnographic monographs on which theorizations were grounded. Over the years there have been refinements of the understandings of the mechanics of this relationship. To a large extent these changes were in response to perceptions of creative and epistemological gaps between ethnographic and anthropological knowledge and redefinitions of fieldwork itself (see e.g. Josephides, 2008; Ingold, 2013; Rabinow, 2003; Rabinow et al., 2013), but also reflected shifts in ethical stances and critiques of authenticity and legitimacy levelled at anthropology’s knowledge-building. They ranged from arguments that question the possibility of representation from epistemological, political and ideological perspectives to questions of the rights of the anthropologist to speak at all (see, e.g., Clifford, 1986). In Ingold’s view, ethnography (understood as the monograph, not the fieldwork) and anthropology are antithetical ways of knowing, the first creating a ‘transformational space for generous, open-ended comparative and critical enquiry’ and the second turning participant observation into qualitative data

‘to be analysed in terms of an exogenous body of theory’ (2013, pp. 4-5). Ingold’s aim was to refute notions of the separation between knowing and being, or data-collecting and theory building. His insightful comments open up a discussion on what is the field, what are different ‘fields’ corresponding to different ways of creating knowledge, and what is the role of fieldwork in contemporary anthropology (on the last point, see also Rabinow et al., 2013, below).

A significant current in anthropology in the 1970s and 1980s, but particularly prevalent in Melanesian ethnography, was represented by followers of Dumont’s view of hierarchical encompassment (Barnes et al., 1985; Iteanu, 1984), according to which each culture was a totality containing its own unique version of the truth. Marilyn Strathern, who was not particularly drawn to notions of the unifying aspects of culture, proceeded instead to deconstruct the edifice and identify ‘partial connections’ between its elements (Strathern, 1991). ‘Partial connections’ were Wittgensteinian-type family resemblances that accounted for cultural divergences within a region that shared a common historical origin. Strathern saw the ‘postmodernist’ development as a growing realization of anthropology’s major problem: to overcome its own referential impossibility. If anthropology understood itself as the social science that describes other cultures, then its mission was severely compromised by its acknowledgment that all its descriptive terms had their own cultural context (‘meaning’) in the describer’s social world. (The discussion below draws on Strathern, 1987.) When Malinowski first constructed the figure of ‘the lone fieldworker’ who experiences cultural otherness as functioning wholes, he attributed his authority to his claim that he was describing the people’s own experience and their own understanding of how their culture worked. Malinowski, as a traveller between the two cultures, unscrambles unfamiliar habits by contextualizing them within a culture that as a totality ‘makes sense’. A double distance is established by the ethnography: it is premised on a disjunction between the observer and the observed, and the writer and the reader; the latter is not invited to share in participant observation, but merely to be convinced by an account of the writer’s experiences. For the postmodernist this self-conscious creation of distance and the privileging of certain voices became intellectually indefensible.

Having started with the pitfalls of representing others, postmodernist critique then faced the problem of representation itself (see Clifford, 1986). An ethnographic monograph cannot ‘represent’ an entity to a reader, because it does not describe a reality ‘out there’ that can be grasped some other way. Strathern suggested we think of an ethnographer’s ‘conception’ of a culture to which ethnography provided a ‘connection’. The connection was made when the ethnography evoked in the reader a ‘realisation of an experience’ (1987, p. 3). This discussion suggests that we communicate by analogy and share experiences in parallels.

But if ethnographers did not report on any social or cultural facts and their narratives consisted merely in evocation, what (Strathern asks) happens to comparison, the much-vaunted project of anthropology? Well, it gives way to ‘partial connections’. Strathern imagined that Papua New Guinea Highland societies comprised extensions of one another, their connections carried out through communications in which people expanded, developed and contracted ideas they held (Strathern, 1987, p. 44). Strathern did not suggest that these societies were connected as particular manifestations of a universal or any other overarching structure; rather, each was a ‘variant of some other concrete form’ (Strathern, 1987, p. 44), evoking interactions

without implying shared meanings or common interpretations, but rather working as instruments of sociality (Strathern, 1987, p. 46). Analogy can work only through an investigation of how one item is substituted for another in people's thoughts and actions. Images and artefacts are 'enablements' that extend the capability of the actor. In this understanding, the proper job of anthropological knowledge is to describe cultures by attention to the substitution of meanings within symbols, necessitating that the ethnographer remain a 'two way traveller' who thinks one society through another. Strathern questions whether human subjects are necessarily the subject of the research. She suggests instead that the subjects of the research are the products of people's interactions (2000, p. 294), including interactions between researchers and those studied. (For a critique of 'the new Melanesian ethnography', see Josephides, 1991.)

4 Ethics: Anthropological Perspectives

The relationship between knowledge and virtue, or virtue ethics has been increasingly debated by anthropologists (e.g. Faubion, 2011; Laidlaw, 2014). James Laidlaw (2014, p. 52) sets out the various relevant concepts: deontological, consequentialist and virtue ethics pit *phronesis* (prudence) against *sophia* (wisdom), and judgement or practical reason combine the capability of rational thinking with a type of knowledge that is not just skill but the ability to reflect about living well. Thus knowledge and ethics, or virtue, appear as subsets of each other, impossible to separate either methodologically or substantively.

For James Laidlaw (2014, pp. 44-45), ethics is reflective evaluation. To acquire knowledge about the lives of others, a person must gain 'an imaginative understanding' from the ethical concepts of those others and 'learn to use and think with those concepts and participate in the form of life', but without 'having to adopt its concepts and values as his or her own' (2014, p. 45). This is the ethnographic stance, a variant of 'participant observation' which requires that we take seriously the forms of life we describe, learning from them in such a way that they become 'resources in our own critical reflection and self-constitution' (2014, p. 46). This is a precondition for anthropology as ethical practice (see also Kresse, 2007), and a reason for being concerned with the person in any discussion of knowledge, as will be outlined below in the four figures of the knower.

A crucial aspect of anthropological ethics is the mode of access to field sites, as these are the homes of people studied. This is especially sensitive when ethnographic research is in dystopian spaces. Pradeep Jeganathan describes the worst of such spaces, places of torture, and how ethical practices in these spaces constitute the person of the anthropologist, who becomes a particular kind of knower because of this ethical construction. An ethical and epistemological link can be drawn with Stengers' (2011) discussion of 'obligations and requirements'. But Jeganathan turns to Lorraine Daston's argument, in which the empirical is secured by three modes of knowing, testimony, facticity and novelty: 'testimony works through trust, facticity through civility, and novelty through transformation of curiosity into a virtue' (2005, p. 160). The 'investigative self' of the researcher develops the knowledge through 'disciplined curiosity', in a process that Jeganathan identifies as a moral economy (2005, p. 161). Jeganathan extends Daston's argument to a moral economy of anthropolog-

ical knowledge that doubles the personal and the disciplinary, through trust (2005, p. 164); trust as part of a moral economy links to the relationship between ethics and knowledge (2005, p. 164). Jeganathan notes the difference between experimental and experiential, and the differences in imagination and interpretation between the sciences and ethnography. Anthropological truth combines a sense of ‘moral’ as ‘certain, well-known, and well-accepted’ with the more seventeenth-century idea of ‘moral’ as “sentiment,” as disciplined affect’ (2005, p. 165).

In their introduction to the edited volume *Embedding Ethics*, in which Jeganathan’s chapter appears, Lynn Meskel and Peter Pels emphasize the need for negotiation between experts and their diverse audiences. They question ‘the artifice of abstracting ethics from scholarly practice’ and argue against a conception that ‘turns the ethical code into a kind of “constitution” for the profession’, calling for a redefinition of the location of anthropological expertise itself (2005, pp. 3, 7). They reject the reliance of symbols that customarily dismiss large parts of the everyday workings of knowledge and morals (ibid.), and also dismiss the ‘autonomous self’ in favour of embedded setting and listening to local voices (2005, p. 8). Meskel and Pels are surely right to caution against ‘disembedding ethics’ through various forms of ‘professionalist ideology’, especially as it has such a deleterious effect on how anthropologists relate to people during research (2005, p. 23).

Pels identifies the ethics concerned in the trickster’s dilemma as part of a ‘specific technology of the (professional) self’ (Pels, 2000, p. 136). In Pels’s account, the term ‘technologies’ suggests the possibility of subterfuge rather than a developmental practice or a more general part of being a person or a self, as in the ancient Greek practices of care of the self. Pels’s uncomfortable conclusion encourages this reading: ‘owing public allegiance to both research sponsors and research subjects’, he argues, anthropologists can show neither of them a ‘true’ face (2000, p. 137). But while it is true that dilemmas and quandaries are legion, they are not confined to anthropologists; as Stengers tells us, this is the fate of the practitioners of the sciences of contemporaneity, who share the same temporality as those about whom they produce knowledge (Stengers, 2011, p. 378). Nonetheless, the rise of audit means that anthropologists must learn to distinguish between ethics ‘as a set of quasi-legal principles’, the ‘ethic’ in which a set of principles is deployed, and ‘the technologies of self that make both “ethics” and “ethic” operative’ (Pels, 2000, p. 146; see also Strathern, 2000, 2005, and 2006).

5 The Creation of the Knower

Much of this paper has been a preamble to the introduction of the knower. I begin with a broad historical discussion, drawing mostly on Daston and Galison, on the creation of the kind of knower necessary for a particular sort of knowing and knowledge. Then I home in on descriptions, of varying depth and length, of four kinds of knowers: the pure observer, the thinking man/woman, the same captured by apparatuses, and the researcher tackling the obligations and requirements of knowledge. Finally, I consider the anthropology of the contemporary, which goes beyond primary sites.

How do we know? (for anthropological debates, see Chua et al., 2008; Halstead et al., 2008; Harris, 2007). Since knowledge is entangled in engagements between people, implicit in these debates are questions about the place of the ethical in human life

(Lambek, 2010), how an ethical life is lived, and how one constructs oneself through ethical practices (Rabinow, 2003). Here I start with the ‘epistemic virtues’ of the scientist as knower, then move on to some comments on four types of knowers.

In their study on the historical emergence of objectivity as a scientific concept, Daston and Galison identify three distinct codes of epistemic virtue occurring in a historical series: ‘truth-to-nature, mechanical objectivity, and trained judgment’ (2010, p. 18). Trained judgement required classification that went beyond a fixed set of standard criteria; an evaluative process that was not necessarily a conscious one; a cognitive process represented as holistic; and precision (2010, p. 335). These were the qualities of the scientist, who emerged as a new type of intellectual in the mid-nineteenth century and needed a coherent, well-ordered self (2010, p. 217). The history of scientific objectivity, Daston and Galison contend, is to be understood as part and parcel of the history of the scientific self, for whom epistemic virtues were a prerequisite for knowing the world (2010, pp. 37-39). Though objectivism split knower and knowledge, there remained a core ethical imperative about how to do science, which linked the mastery of scientific practices to self-mastery. These practices – or technologies – included ‘training the senses in scientific observation, keeping lab notebooks, drawing specimens, habitually monitoring one’s own beliefs and hypotheses, quieting the will, and channeling the attention’ (2010, p. 199). Together they forged and constituted the kinds of selves that meet the demands of epistemic virtues (ibid.), to the extent that knowers could be reconstructed from biographical literature. The suggestion here is that an ethos was grafted onto a scientific persona, and an ethical and epistemological code became imagined as a self. In this way, ‘epistemology and ethos fuse’ (2010, p. 204).

If ‘doing science’ moulds the scientist, may we say likewise that ‘doing ethnography’ moulds the anthropologist? Other parallels may be drawn. Subjectivity became feared as ‘the enemy within’, the ‘untrustworthy scientific self’ (2010, pp. 197-98), while in the 1860s, when ‘passive observation’ came to be opposed to ‘active experimentation’, the scientist had to be both ‘speculative and bold’ and a passive observer (2010, p. 243). By the mid-twentieth century objectivity and subjectivity no longer seemed to be opposites, but appeared more as a complementary pairing necessary for the understanding of the workings of science (2010, p. 361). Daston and Galison reach some bold conclusions: all epistemology begins in fear, they write. Subjectivity is the core self, ‘the root of both knowledge and error’ (2010, p. 374), while objectivity is a ‘sacrifice’ (ibid.), denying subjectivity out of fear of what it may reveal. A seismic change occurs in the era of nanoculture, when in the move from representation to presentation fidelity to nature (formerly a triple obligation: visual, epistemological, ethical) is abandoned and nature merges with artefact in nanomanipulable images (2010, pp. 363, 382). Scientists as knowers move from the contemplative life to the active life of science, to the position of intervention (2010, p. 392). Ontology is not of much interest to engineers-as-knowers, who just want to know what will work; efficacy trumps explanations (2010, p. 303).

To extrapolate: how would ethnographies-as-tools be, rather than ethnographies-as-evidence? (2010, p. 385). In the realm of nanomanipulation, Daston and Galison write, ‘images are examples of right depiction – but of objects that are being made, not found’ (2010, p. 391). This observation is reminiscent of a comment by Bruno Latour, philosopher and anthropologist, on the relationship between truth and arte-

fact: ‘Yes, it is true, I made it in the laboratory’ (2010a, p. 19). Ethnography as actual, as interpretation, as tool, meshing with a new kind of knower: the engineering self. The final paragraph of *Objectivity* invites a comparison with anthropology. Are images of truth-to-nature/idealized world equivalent to perceptions of the ‘noble savage’? Is scientists’ ‘vaunted objectivity, all nature and none of us’ equivalent to cultural relativism? Are trained judgement, images as bridges, ‘part us, part not-us’ equivalent to the postmodernist 1980s turn of fieldwork as creating something new? What corresponds to the latest phase of images as part tool kit and part art, nanomanufacturers’ aesthetic objects and marketing tags? (2010, p. 415). These new creations of knowledge correspond in anthropology to secondary fieldwork, moving to new sites, and engaging in the anthropology of the contemporary (see discussion of Rabinow et al. below).

6 Four types of Knowers:

The pure observer; the thinking man/woman; ditto captured by an apparatus/shaped by content and context; and the researcher placed between obligations and requirements¹

ONE: THE PURE OBSERVER – The philosopher Peter Sloterdijk (2012 [2010]) outlines the ‘near-death’ conditions for creating the historical agent of a particular kind of knowing. The ‘pure observer’ practises a profession dedicated to theory in a life that must be seen as ascetic. This kind of knowledge requires ‘bracketing’, a sort of suspended animation (hence ‘near-death’) defined as abstention from judgement but also real life. By ‘stepping back’ from existential involvement, the pure observer allows the ‘phenomenalization’ of things in a process that invests the objects of consciousness with meaning, making phenomena present in the sphere of understanding. In an exercise of abstaining from judgement, consciousness temporarily keeps real existence at bay. The term ‘epoche’, borrowed from the Greek sceptics, denotes this ‘bracketing’.

How can the bracketing of objects arising from life, and their replacement by stable logical objects (that is, ideas) in consciousness, be plausible? Sloterdijk proffers an explanation that encompasses political and epistemic developments. After the ancient Greek polis collapsed, the brilliant individual no longer needed a political afterworld to live on in the memory. Knowledge, gathered from the external world, became internalized and then transcendent, entailing a retreat from profane (or external) life. Knowledge became the noetic (knowing) soul’s memory of itself and its transcendent origin. This ‘beautiful death’ exchanged a small subjectivity for the ‘great soul’. Sloterdijk sees the idea of cosmopolitanism, arising with the Cynics and proclaiming that thinkers were citizens of the universe, as part of this sort of transcendence. But later, ‘cognitive modernism’ brought about the assassination of the neutral observer. As a result of the secularization of cognitive processes, the ‘pure observer’ is dead (2012, pp. 4-5).

Some points here recall Daston and Galison on the rise of the scientists and especially the comment about objectivity and subjectivity. Subjectivity appears here

¹These categories and arguments were aired in Josephides (2017).

to be the sacrifice, in return for the ‘great soul’ – that is, death. The sacrifice of subjectivity is death.

TWO: THE THINKING MAN/WOMAN – In a very short introduction to *The Accompaniment*, the anthropologist Paul Rabinow describes the creation of Herr Keuner. The scant two pages draw on a collection of very short stories, some of them mere aphorisms, by the German poet and dramatist Bertolt Brecht as interpreted by Brecht’s philosopher friend, Walter Benjamin. Rabinow cites two of these short stories. The moral point made in the second story catches Rabinow’s interest: ‘He who bears knowledge has the virtue of bearing it as well as having the obligation to care for the knowledge and the bearing of it’ (2011, p. 3). The thinking man is justly angry, comments Rabinow, when the virtue of knowledge is devalued through indifference. Rabinow traces the genealogy of the ‘thinking man’ back to Socrates and the care of the self (*melete* and the creation of the historical agent of knowledge). He exemplifies the virtues of holding knowledge in respect and recognizing its obligations; he is serious, precise and meticulous, and he practices care of the self. He demonstrates that ethics is not just a matter of attentiveness to others, but also attentiveness to the self.

THREE: THE THINKING MAN/WOMAN CAPTURED BY AN APPARATUS/SHAPED BY CONTENT AND CONTEXT – The philosopher Giorgio Agamben considers living beings as being partitioned into two classes: living beings and apparatuses (what Foucault calls ‘dispositif’). Agamben asks: ‘What is an Apparatus?’ Answer: it is a ‘heterogeneous set consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, moral and philanthropic propositions’; in other words, a set of strategies of the relations of forces supporting, and supported by, certain types of knowledge (2009, p. 2). The apparatus has a concrete strategic function and is located ‘at the intersection of power relations and relations of knowledge’ (2009, p. 3). Living beings are ‘incessantly captured’ in these apparatuses that ‘seek to govern and guide them toward the good’ (2009, p. 13).

Agamben’s discussion captures the idea of the knower as shaped simultaneously by what is known and the context of knowing. As every apparatus implies a process of subjectification, the operation of the apparatuses as a network of discourses goes towards clarifying how the conditions of knowing can create different kinds of knowers in different social, cultural, epistemic and political milieus at different historical times, thus linking this paragraph to the two above. Only the paragraph below, on obligations and requirements, describes conditions of knowing that are shared by all knowers at all times.

FOUR: THE RESEARCHER PLACED BETWEEN OBLIGATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS – In her extensive work on cosmopolitics, the philosopher Isabelle Stengers considers the mechanics of knowledge practices as constituted by two types of exchange: a circulating one (the obligations of ethics, which acknowledge the ethical moment of their formation) and one leading to closure (the requirements of knowledge itself as epistemology, seeking recognition for its achievements). Anthropologists experience this divergent pull particularly strongly in the different stages of fieldwork and writing up; the ethnography provides ‘us’ with a knowledge of others, yet the relationship with those others ‘appears only in the service of the science that produces it’ (Stengers, 2011, p. 305). Such knowledge practices assume a difference in kind

between ‘us’ and the ‘others’, ‘as expressed in the possibility “we” claim of judging “others” in terms of beliefs without ever encountering them’ (ibid.). (Ethnographers clearly do encounter the ‘others’, so the reference here is to the further dissemination of that knowledge, as for instance described by Rabinow following the exit from the field – see next section below.) While obligations refer to field-type relations (which usually do not end with exit from the field), requirements relate to the knowledge questions themselves: whether they tackle the research questions, use appropriate forms of evidence, and can be broadened beyond the field situation. The figure of the diplomat is a good one for elucidating these contrasts.

Like the diplomat, the practitioner of a science for which “the conditions of the production of knowledge for one are, inevitably, also the conditions for the production of existence for the other” should situate herself at the intersection of two regimes of obligation: the obligation to acknowledge that the dreams of those she studies, their fears, their doubts, and their hopes, pass through her, and the obligation to “report” what she has learned from them to others, to transform it into an ingredient in the construction of knowledge. (Stengers, 2011, p. 377)

In approaching knowledge practices simultaneously as having scholarly requirements and obligations, the ethnographer faces an invidious task. She/he must connect with the conditions of the local culture during fieldwork in a ‘circulating exchange’ (‘participant observation’) that abides by the *obligations* of knowledge. But as a scholar she/he must achieve a degree of closure and contextualize herself/himself within the written corpus of the discipline in order to formulate and communicate what she has learned, in an account that avoids constructing universals or being subsumed by them, but instead retains its specificity and integrity. These are the *requirements* of knowledge, its internal necessity of a kind of ‘closure’ needed for the production of knowledge as a coherent unit. Since they entail both translation and interpretation, they contain the seeds of betrayal. For Stengers, this risk is not confined to anthropologists but is the fate of all practitioners of the sciences of contemporaneity, who share the same temporality with those about whom they produce knowledge. In continuing to translate, the anthropologist, like the diplomat, risks betrayal.

Marilyn Strathern (Josephides et al., 2015, pp. 191-223) suggests a way out of this quandary. She reminds us that knowledge exchange is all about transformation. Rather than seeing the pair ‘obligations and requirements’ as having contradictory pulls, she recontextualizes them as ‘two modes of responsibility, recognizing both the reaching out entailed in any study and its counterpart in an orientation to an end product’, neither excluding ethics. She notes that following ‘the detached nature of any specific object of enquiry’, the knowledge produced by that enquiry likewise becomes detached and enables us to create something else. Thus the requirement of knowledge ‘precipitates its own context’ and in this it starkly identifies detachment as a necessary aspect of knowledge creation.

This detachment is part of what I understand as the requirement of knowledge (on attachments and detachment, see also Latour, 2004; 2010). The requirements/obligations pair is not envisaged as a simple opposition between exchanges that are open and circulating (good) or seemingly closed off (bad); they are two modes of responsibility. Does this understanding entirely satisfy qualms about betrayal? Different weighting

may still be allocated to each of the pair. The difference may be seen this way: one mode of responsibility ('requirement') prioritizes the requirements of knowledge itself, while the other locks the anthropologist in relations and contextualizations within the local culture. Kristen Hastrup (1995) offers a useful insight when she contrasts authenticity with a concern with audience (or reader) understanding. She comments that the former expresses loyalty to the 'source' (the people studied), while the latter betrays the source by inviting readers to become co-builders of knowledge. The difficulty of remaining true to both the source and the audience captures the meaning of the distinction between 'obligations' and 'requirements'. A more poignant and nuanced reading is found in Andrew Moutu's (2015) reflections on an ethnographic study in his own country of Papua New Guinea (though not his cultural area). The exercise of translation and interpretation here arouses conflicting emotions which are felt especially keenly by scholars who are both ethnographers and subjects of study.

Strathern's recontextualization of the obligations/requirements pair as 'two modes of responsibility' encourages me to revisit Ingold's harsh assessment, mentioned in an earlier section of this paper, of ethnography as turning participant observation into qualitative data 'to be analysed in terms of an exogenous body of theory' (2013, pp. 4-5). I chafe somewhat at the words 'exogenous body of theory', having argued in my own monograph that I did not take Aristotle to the Kewa, they handed him back to me through their life stories (Josephides, 2008b). But of course I found Aristotle at the end of my analysis, not an analysis by a Kewa person.

7 Beyond Primary Sites: Knowledge as Demands of the Day (and Possibility of Betrayal)

Rabinow and Stavrianakis' *Demands of the Day* offers seminal discussion on 'second order participant observation', after the exit from the field, when the knowledge developed no longer relies directly on 'the field' represented by a contributing set of actors ('informants') (2013, Preface). Two terms came to exemplify a contrastive set of relations as experienced in this second-order setting, which followed the authors' participant observation with bioscientists: collaboration and cooperation. The authors sought collaboration, which required a minimum of common definitions, but after many frustrating exchanges they had to make do with cooperation, an expectation only of 'demarcated labor with regular exchange' (Rabinow et al., 2013, p. 6). Though collaboration was blocked, the authors, if they were to respond to the call of their 'daemon', could not abandon 'flourishing' as a metric of science as a vocation (ibid., p. 6). The term 'daemon' – traced back to Socrates – stands for a 'task-master' who demands a job be well-done according to its own standards, leading to flourishing or a 'well-lived life'. Responding to Foucault's claim that 'equipment is the transformation of logos into ethos', ethos being a conceptual, political and ethical process of self-formation or an attitude, Rabinow saw care of the self as not just a state of consciousness but also an activity, 'an essential aspect of how a moral existence had to be lived' (Rabinow, 2003, p. 10).

Knowledge as demands of the day, argue Rabinow and Stavrianakis (taking up Max Weber's notion) are no longer primarily about the relations of fieldwork and the knowledge produced there, but about how one exits from the field. They describe this

exit as a ‘gathering’, when ethnographers ‘recuperate and curate’ (2013, p. 47) by taking up the objects from the fieldwork and working through them, away from the direct experiences of participant observation. They create a narrative by ‘turning objects into artifacts and artifacts into terms’ (2013, pp. 49, 51). This process is similar to the one I describe as ‘virtual returns’, defined as the impact of fieldwork ‘recollected in tranquillity’ on what is considered to be ethnographic evidence (Josephides, 2008a; the method was used by William Wordsworth in his poetry). Rabinow and Stavri-anakis argue that following the relationships and obligations as they are transferred from the field is a kind of ‘phenomenology of the logic of anthropological inquiry’ (2013, p. 98). This being collaborative work, loyalties and communities were of a different kind from those of the ‘lone ethnographer’.

The awareness of the ‘relations between knowledge and care in terms of mutual flourishing’ challenged the authors to design a model of collaboration that would contribute to flourishing. The blockages they experienced forced an existential realization on them – that ‘contemporary anthropology did not begin or end either with fieldwork or with anything resembling traditional ethnography’ – yet post-fieldwork participant observation and writing up have barely been addressed in the disciplinary literature (Rabinow et al., 2013, pp. 5-7). Despite the lack of collaboration in this case, the authors insist that ‘knowledge-seekers whose knowledge achieves any degree of authority do not work alone’ (ibid., p. 86). The challenge is to move to an anthropology of the contemporary, which is ‘anthropological and not ethnographic in that it attends not directly to the present but rather only to the doubly curated objects and artifacts originally taken from the present’ (ibid., p. 104). It is not enough to remain ‘open’ to everything, because openness diminishes the capacity to follow a logic of inquiry from the present and the actual to the contemporary (ibid., p. 105). A degree of openness is required during fieldwork, but second-order participation and observation require different techniques and have greater need of asceticism (through equipment, meditation, etc). Ethics and epistemology may be inseparable, but collaboration and cooperation, roughly corresponding to obligations and requirements, are not both available in all relations of knowledge exchange. Nonetheless, knowledge-seekers whose knowledge achieves any degree of authority do not work alone. The anthropology of the contemporary attends to the doubly curated objects and artifacts originally taken from the present; thus it is anthropological and not ethnographic and needs different strategies.

In a suggestive table (Rabinow et al., 2013, p. 102) the authors set out the differences between ‘Research’ and ‘Work’ as a way to examine how *logos* and *ethos*, standing for knowledge and ethics, might be compounded’ (ibid., p. 101). The two-column chart aligns/opposes two sets of descriptions, not unlike Agamben’s apparatuses in their heterogeneity. One set represents current anthropological practices; the other outlines the requirements of an anthropology of the contemporary, towards which anthropology must move if it is to keep up with the demands of the day. The pairs that are directly relevant to the current argument are: morality and procedure versus equipment; method versus meditation (care); individualism versus collaboration; ethnography versus second-order participant observation; and reconstruction versus narrative modes. In the first column, morality, method, individualism, ethnography and reconstruction describe ‘research’ or fieldwork in its ‘traditional’ form. In the second column, equipment, meditation (care), collaboration, second-order participant

observation and narrative modes describe ‘work’ in the anthropology of the contemporary. Morality and method give way to equipment and meditation (care) in the move from ‘research’ to the ‘work’ of the anthropology of the contemporary.

In the second-order anthropology of the contemporary, what does it mean to replace morality with equipment, and method with meditation (care)? It would bode well if Enlightenment had been achieved, and human beings had reached their seniority and were responsible (Kant, [1784] 1983; Nietzsche, various; Foucault, 1984). ‘Equipment’ is not the same as the apparatuses described by Agamben, which are largely enforced from the outside, but a set of ethical practices developed and designed according to the needs of the work (Rabinow & Stavrianakis, 2013, p. 17). An additional distinction that may notionally be added to the table (*ibid.*, p. 102) is ‘bricolage’ on the side of ‘research’, and ‘engineering’ on the side of ‘work’. Research is cold; work is hot. The second case (replacing method with meditation (care)) also points to such Enlightenment seniority having been achieved.

The exit from the field is at the same time an entry into a different field, with its own network of obligations. Here we have colleagues—scholars, fellow anthropologists—engaged in the creation of a mutually constitutive world. The contemporary is said to be anthropological and not ethnographic, ‘in that it attends not directly to the present’ but to the ‘doubly curated objects and artifacts originally taken from the present’ (*ibid.*, p. 104). (It is worth noting, however, that layers of relations are congealed in all knowledge.) What the authors neglect here is a discussion of how the curated objects parallel a transformed self (*ibid.*, p. 105), an operation that has been well described in the case of the traditional ethnographic self. Nonetheless, the authors are aware of the need to specify a mode of subjectivation for the anthropologist, as the ‘thinking man/woman’.

The setting out of this new field of the anthropology of the contemporary answering to the demands of the day is necessary and to be applauded. It should be assumed that anthropological ‘research’ and ‘work’ will be carried out in tandem. The latter may be a second research for a more seasoned researcher and the two neat columns in the table may sometimes become blurred. Ethical aspects, especially as outlined in Stengers’ distinction between obligations and requirements, may need more attention. Changing context is a sort of closure, engaging in relationships with different others and acquiring new team-building. But the new distinction between cooperation and collaboration alerted Rabinow et al. to the particular kind of closure of limited exchange. The authors may have realised that scholars in the humanities and social sciences exhibit a different spirit of collaboration, or understand collaborative practices differently. Closure is actually an opening up to different relationships, an entry into another field, whether this is virtual (Josephides, 2008a), an ‘open-ended comparative and critical enquiry’ (Ingold, 2013, pp. 6, 4), or another meta-level or register (Rabinow et al., 2013).

8 Conclusion

The main aim of this paper has been to trace the creation of persons as knowers. What makes them ethical in their very essence and construction? I considered, historically and in terms of professional, personal and human relations, how knowers and knowledge developed in tandem with the current ‘demands of the day’, under-

stood as the calls issuing from the practical and epistemological contexts of those knowledge-creation relations. In the case of anthropology, ethnographers in the field proceeded as in Stengers' description of the primatologist, attentive to the questions posed by those they were observing, 'because [they] demanded it of them in order to be well-studied' (Stengers et al., 2014, p. 37). The exigencies of the profession made good scientific practice (2014, p. 38).

The paper identifies four types of knowers on a historical and epistemological continuum. The 'pure observer', stepping back from existential involvement, sacrifices subjectivity in return for the 'great soul' of death. The 'serious thinker' bears knowledge in full awareness of the grave responsibility of bearing it, but equally aware of the importance of 'care of the self'. The knower who is 'captured by an apparatus' is shaped simultaneously by what is known and the form and context of knowing, thus is contextualised in and subjectivised by a network of discourses in different social, cultural, epistemic and political milieus at different historical times. The knower who recognises the 'obligations and requirements' of knowledge as two modes of responsibility entailed in two types of exchange and two types of attachment and detachment, rather than representing a split between ethics and epistemology, describes conditions of knowing that are shared by all knowers at all times, and necessary for knowledge to be taken forward.

The problematic question of how to take knowledge forward is particularly relevant for the anthropology of the contemporary, which places itself beyond primary sites. Second-order fieldwork involves 'curating the past', in a procession, development and layering that surely merely names the sedimentation of all knowledge. But does this sedimentation imply or contain the seeds of betrayal? If so, betrayal is an inevitable accompaniment of knowledge creation. Or is faithfulness merely transferred or expanded to other objects and relations, creating not only doubly but multiply curated objects and artifacts, all originally taken from their present (a present also made up of a curated, sedimented past...). As Rabinow et al. (2013) write, anthropology does not begin or end with fieldwork of traditional ethnography, and exiting the primary field does not have to entail betrayal. In implicit opposition to Ingold's comment cited earlier in this paper, Rabinow et al. argue that it is not enough to remain 'open' to everything, because openness diminishes the capacity to follow a logic of inquiry from the present and the actual to the contemporary (ibid., p. 105). Second-order participation and observation require different techniques and have greater call for an 'asceticism' which places the self of the researcher in question.

Knowledge exchange is full of ethical pitfalls. To paraphrase Strathern (Josephides et al., 2015, p. 198): Our citations allow us to put persons together as authors, just like our ethnographies 'invent' cultures; while remaining 'true' to the author or the people we study, the rules of ethnographic writing and citation enable us to create something else, and the detachment involved in all these processes is a necessary aspect of knowledge creation. Strathern cites 'incomplete knowledge' and a good awareness of the consequences and entailments of speaking as the biggest deterrents to feeling free to be a critic. The bar she sets for the 'requirements of verifiable knowledge' is so high that it becomes clear that what is at issue is the moral right to speak at all in certain circumstances. The role of ethics, then, stretches beyond the primary site of knowledge-production.

A final comment concerns how relations of knowledge exchange may confer or with-

hold ‘rights to speak’. At first sight this might seem ‘meta-ethical’ or even strategic in character. It recalls Rapport’s question (Josephides et al., 2015, p. 213) about whether there are some truths that ought not to be enunciated. But on closer inspection layers of conundrums interpose themselves: ‘the right to speak’ the truth too easily assumes that the truth can be known unequivocally, whereas in reality it is embroiled in rights and perspectives from the outset. The many layers result in plural obligations, imposed by what is being studied, by those participating in the study at all levels and stages and by the complex responses called forth from our own humanity. The thinking man/woman bears the obligation to care for the knowledge at all times.

Lest we rest too easily on eloquent arguments, Jeganathan’s paper cited earlier, returns us to sobering thoughts. Jeganathan (2005) describes how the person of the anthropologist, as an ‘investigative self’ in places of torture, is created as a particular kind of knower because of his or her ethical construction there. This relationship is built entirely on trust, and is the only one that can confer the right to speak. Rights to speak are wrung out of relationships of trust.

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