OBJECTIVE RESEARCH? IN THE SEMINARY?

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What About the Researcher?

Many conversations about the “researcher” emphasize an expectation that she will approach a topic with an “open mind”. But what does this mean? And what sort of thinking may be valid? However, because the “object” in this framing remains external to the researcher, the commodified expression of the researcher is often being viewed and validated by others as a newly created object in and of itself. This should not be disconcerting. While each and every author lives within the same constraints of time, place, language, etc., each author also brings to the conversation the breadth of his/her expertise and experience. Thus it is in the robust conversation of many that a clearer understanding of the truth can be achieved. In 2 Peter 1:5-7, a positive orientation on this question is offered. “His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by our own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us a very great and precious promise, that through faith you may participate in the divine nature.”

According to this, the telos of research is to honor the calling to “participate in the divine nature” by “making every effort” to add the virtue of “knowledge.” While a consumerist mindset might picture this quantitatively, Peter reminds that it is qualitative knowledge, and that the full flourishing of this knowledge in the life will lead to love. Thus, the researcher who is fulfilling her vocation, making every effort to grow in virtue, can trust her work will be fruitful, and that her efforts will be rewarded, that she will grow in knowledge. This path can be pursued with delight because she can trust that “the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials” (2 Pet 2:9), and that by grace it is possible to learn and grow.

Concluding Observations

The accomplished researcher may understand tacitly this ontological framework, and may approximate the nuances that emerge with increasing levels of abstraction. On the other hand, the novice researcher would benefit from an intentional application of this ontology to specific research assignments. This would add another assumption that “research” can only be done one way, that it is done the same way regardless of the topic, that it is about technology and not about knowledge.

This ontology may provide a novice researcher a way of thinking that clarifies the process in a multidisciplinary context, facilitating shifts from one class of object to another.

OBJECTS

Natural Objects — An example of research on “natural objects” in the Seminary is the work that engages the artifacts proper in the Museum. “Primary Sources” are the artifacts themselves, and serve as the focus of the research. “Secondary Sources” include the various references sources that document the artists perhaps including time, location, and translation of any writing. “Tertiary Sources” include any of the writings that discuss the object itself, or objects like it. Library resources include the secondary and tertiary sources that document the analysis of the object within the community of experts. Research that creates new knowledge may include a rigorous description of the object, with definable interpretations of its origin and purpose. New knowledge may also be created by correcting prior misconceptions.

Social Objects — An example of research on “social objects” in the Seminary is the work that engages the referred and commodified information that authors have created to communicate something to readers for a purpose. The “Prime Sources” are the texts themselves, which then serve as the focus and anchor of the research. The most pertinent text for study is that of the Holy Scriptures. “Tertiary Sources” include the various reference sources used to interpret the texts, including works that escalate the time, location, language and audience of the author. “Secondary Sources” include any of the writings that discuss the text itself, and can be considered as the “conversation” of scholars. The library resources include the primary object, as well as the secondary and tertiary sources that document the analysis of the object within the community of experts. Research that creates new knowledge may include a rigorous description of the object as both a communication medium and a message from an author to a reader, with definable interpretations of its origins and purpose in view of both author and reader. New knowledge may also be created by correcting prior misconceptions. This becomes interesting as it informs timeless human values that remain pertinent today.

In summary:

What if the researcher

1. Seeks to define the question
2. Identifies the research approach
3. Library resources

what the novice researcher needs to do

1. Understand the question
2. Consider the research approach
3. Identify the library resources

Definitions

Research is the grounded, intentional and error analysis of an “object” in conversation with a community of peers/ experts for the purpose of creating knowledge. The definition assumes a “published” document as closure.

“Grounded” — (a) Sufficient knowledge to identify, understand and appreciate the “object” to be studied, including the capacity to ask the right questions. (b) Sufficient awareness in the appropriate methods of analysis for the object.

“Intentional” — (a) Purposeful, well-focused, such as in answering a research question. (b) Methodological (i) Learning driven, so that when the research project is complete, new knowledge is acquired. (ii) An audience or readership consistently in mind.

“Analytic” — (a) Attention to the actual nature of the field within which the “object” lies. Meaning, “analytic” is not merely a methodological focus, but pertains to the intellectual apparatus of the researcher. (b) Charitably, but not naively, allowing for the normative conditions on verbal communication through contextualized documentation, such as the author’s time, place, audience, language, technology, access to information, documentation parameters, etc.

“Object” — Submitting the “object” to careful, thorough, systematic examination using the best practices as developed within a discipline. This anticipates the researcher stepping apart from and outside the “object.”

“Conversation” — (a) Engaging the “object” in its conversation with other objects. This conversation is delimited by time and location of the researcher. Most knowledge is acquired second hand. It is wise to learn from the trustworthy and authoritative experts for the purpose of engaging knowledge.

References


