

Seeing the Same Things

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The concern with the objectivity of observations is as old as empirical study itself. Protagoras' assertion that 'Man is the measure of all things', though not particularly directed at observations, raised general doubts concerning the objectivity of our beliefs. In the twentieth century, the concern has been brought under the banner 'theory-ladenness of observation'. In simple terms, since observations are conducted and formulated in theory-specific contexts, they are inadvertently imbued with the prejudices of those contexts - the terms 'theory' and 'observation' are here broadly construed. Accordingly, it is argued, observations cannot be neutral in the testing of theories.

This paper concerns one of the central problems falling under the umbrella 'theory-ladenness of observation', namely whether we all observe the same public things. By appeal to a modified version of a well-known principle, it is argued that most of us do indeed observe the same public things, at least most of the time. Moreover, this common knowledge covers useful information about the structure of the world. In other words, the objectivity of observations *in this context* can be safeguarded. Having said this, various other problems falling under the umbrella 'theory-ladenness of observation' remain to be solved.