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GROUNDED THEORY AND THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH IN SOCIAL SCIENCES. AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL CONTROVERSY UPON THE BUILDING OF CONCEPTS IN GROUNDED THEORY: THE FORGOTTEN CONCEPT OF INTENTIONALITY

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***Grounded Theory* and the Phenomenological Approach in Social Sciences.**

An Epistemological Controversy upon the Building of Concepts in Grounded Theory: the Forgotten Concept of Intentionality

Adrian PĂCURAR¹

Abstract

The study is focused upon the way in which *Grounded Theory*'s general frame is considering the process of conceptualization in its relation with the empirical original data. It is centered upon the issue of building the first conceptual level in order to obtain further theoretical development. The analysis begins with a description of the Grounded Theory's way of conceiving the relation between the contact with the empirical data and the first appearance of the conceptualization process. We argue that is not possible to sustain an autonomous methodology, in the way in which this is considered by the *Grounded Theory*, in order to obtain the theoretical level. The argument shows that, in terms of a phenomenological epistemological perspective, the belief that a researcher would ever be able to approach the empirical data without having a form of preconception, regardless how general this one could be, about the empirical data, could never be properly sustained. Our study shows that *intentionality*, with all its consequences upon any form of theoretical development, will be always present in any scientific methodology which could be ever accepted in the social research field. We defend the idea that is not possible to accept, at the most fundamental level, the possibility of coexistence of two different methodologies such are the *Grounded Theory* and the Phenomenological approach. We argue that phenomenological approach is inherent at the most basic level of any social research. We reject the possibility of a methodological mix at the level of contact with the empirical data.

Keywords: empirical data, social concepts, theoretical construction, intentionality, phenomenology, Grounded Theory.

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The general epistemological context of Grounded Theory. Pointing out the problem: the link between empirical data and the first level of theoretical construction

As we know, one of the main goals of any science is to deliver concepts which should be able to offer a description upon the investigated reality in a such manner that this description could be used at least to make predictions or to offer a particular type of understanding upon the facts which are subject of inquiry. Because of various reasons, which will not be discussed here, beginning with the modernity, especially in the case of sciences from the social area, the fundamental epistemological purpose of their conceptual building, which was, by tradition in the Western paradigm, the *concept of truth*, was abandoned. The epistemological, ontological and methodological reasons of this very rough shift in their inner core of theoretical structures are here less important. What is sure is the fact that in time have started progressively to appear epistemological perspectives designed to be very well adapted to this new epistemic change. Now, the main purpose had become the ability to describe the reality of their domain of interest in a such manner that, starting with the empirical data, the theories should be capable to correspond with reality, to understand it, or even to be able to make predictions, but *not necessary to offer the “truth” upon it*.

In the present, speaking from a general perspective, with some cautions, we can see that a significant proportion of the researchers from the field of social sciences accepts the existence of two fundamental parts in any methodological approach for any form of contemporary social theory. The first one concerns the *empirical domain* or, as it was said, the domain and the role of the *real-world data*. The other part is the role played by the set of theoretical efforts designed to explain the huge block of empirical informations and, later, the set of parameters extracted from the real-world data. No theory should be build against these real-world data (Punch, 1999: 8). Starting with this general perspective our aim is to disclose the way in which *Grounded Theory* is dealing with the connection between the first level of collecting the empirical data from the so called “real world” and the second level which consists ultimately in starting the process of building the conceptual structure of the theory which is designed to offer a cognitive significance to the first level.

Within the general epistemological landscape in which the search for the “truth” was abandoned the *Grounded Theory*, as a significant theoretical trend within the contemporary area of social sciences, offered indeed some creative epistemological solutions. But are these solutions really suitable to be considered solid and secure from any type of critique or an attack during a serious epistemological debate? The answer would be almost a clear “yes” from the followers of the *Grounded Theory* conceptual frame but it is clear that no epistemological debate, as it deepens into analysis, is an easy one and without any signs of doubt

about its final claims and foundation. Regarding the *Grounded Theory* it had become very soon obvious that the qualitative methodology which was adopted by its followers allows a constant and permanent improvement, adaptation and changing after all for any theoretical construction which could be made upon its methodological options. This process is possible while new evaluations for the empirical aspects of the real-world data could occur. Within the *Grounded Theory* general epistemological frame a constant process of shaping and reshaping, a permanent refining of the collected data is taking place. This allows, of course, changing in methodology but the methodology alone must not be overestimated (Charmaz, 2006: 14-15).

Let us now go further and make a brief description about what is the most important for us in the general context of this particular study. We refer here to the way in which *Grounded Theory* makes that link between the empirical point situated at the first contact with the data of the so called “real world”, and the first step of the process of building the theory and the conceptual frame upon the empirical reality which is under investigation. So, among other epistemological principles, *Grounded Theory*'s basic structure claims that exists a sort of zero epistemological level, a one which is purely empirical, yet without any form of conceptualization, a kind of an absolute nudity of the empirical data from the real world, encountered by the researcher in his first step made in order to describe and to understand that world. This zero level stands in front of the researcher and it must never be altered with any sort of preconception or, much worse, with an a priori theoretical frame designed later to be tested by the researcher. And, further on, following this line of approach, any form of conceptual building is possible to be made and to be extracted, according with the *Grounded Theory*'s most basic and general epistemological principle, only and only *after* this contact with the pure level of zero theoretical existence. In order to close the circle, as it has been stated, there were authors who even claimed that this type of qualitative research is perfectly suitable for any later improvement and changing of the theoretical structure which could appear without damaging the core of the methodological approach used within *Grounded Theory* (Seale, 1999: 96-97).

Starting with the above preliminary and general observations we intend within this study to analyze the *Grounded Theory*'s pretention that any form of conceptualization is only justified, *or even only possible*, if we follow some radical positions which sustain the *Grounded Theory*'s epistemological frame, *after* the researcher was in direct contact with that zero level of pure empirical data. Further on, we intend to disclose in which measure this claim is reasonable and to what extend it could be sustained within a solid and general epistemological debate. We do not intend to put into question the *results* or the *flexibility* of the methodological approach used by *Grounded Theory* within its possible applications in direct social research. We just want to explore the *Grounded Theory*'s claiming that any form of conceptual building must start without any form of preconception. It

should be clear by now that our study is focused upon some fundamental epistemological issues and it is not limited to epistemological problems which are specific only and only to *Grounded Theory*'s general approach.

The anatomy of an epistemological debate: approaching the fundamental level of experience in the Grounded Theory's model

Regardless the epistemological or ontological options, as we saw, any scientific theory has a fundamental level situated at the contact, so to speak, between the empirical level and the first level of conceptualization. And it does not matter how primitive this level could be. This is true even for those theories which do not have a preliminary or minimal theoretical point of departure in the process of building their later conceptual frame upon the set of empirical data. The *Grounded Theory*, with some cautions, is one of these types of theories, a type which claims its own specific perspective upon the way in which the concepts and categories are formed during the process of investigating the empirical data of the real world. Within the *Grounded Theory*, as it had been stated, the set of concepts and categories can be obtained in different methods, such are empirical generalizations or forms of comparative analysis and so on. Build upon these methodological tools is possible to generate theories and also a system to verify them (Glaser & Strauss, 2009: 23-29). Without entering here in details we just underline the fact that for *Grounded Theory* is crucial to achieve the conceptual level *without any preliminary preconception* upon the reality which is investigated. In other words what seems to be important within the epistemological context of *Grounded Theory* is to be able to extract a theoretical frame from the set of empirical data *and not to build the theory in advance of these empirical data*. As it was noticed, *Grounded Theory* is an opened-ended theory, a one which can be extended indefinitely, *because is build upon a constant contact with the experience*, and not upon some *a priori theories* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985: 206). In fact, from a historical perspective, this epistemological approach, a one which claims that the main process of obtaining a set of explications about the reality is to have a preliminary theory which later we have to test it and eventually adopt or reject, together with the idea that the phase of verification should be used only and only in relation with an existent theory, was the main target of Glaser in the early stage of building the *Grounded Theory*, even if this point was not always formulated in a clear frame (Glaser & Strauss, 2009: 21-29).

But let us go deeper, in a relatively brief manner, into the general frame through which *Grounded Theory*'s epistemological model is conceiving the first contact with the empirical data and, further on, into the mode through which *Grounded Theory* is dealing with the first step of conceptualization and building the theoretical frame for the set of empirical data in general. We will start by remembering the fact that, at the first level *Grounded Theory*'s epistemological

approach declares the empirical facts, *without yet being present any form of general concepts or hypothesis*, as the *original* reservoir for any further possible conceptual development. It is crucial, for the purpose of our study, to not forget the fundamental fact that for *Grounded Theory's* general epistemological frame there are no preconceived theoretical frames through which the researcher will eventually approach the empirical reality.

As a first step we have within the general model of qualitative research in social sciences, but also within *Grounded Theory*, the level of *description*. This level is crucial for *Grounded Theory* but also for the purpose of our study. As it has been stated, descriptions are, in the general way of this expression as it is used within social sciences' epistemological frame, any possible form through which we use the words to convey a mental image of an event, a piece of scenery, a scene, an experience, an emotion, or a sensation (Corbin and Strauss, 1998: 15). Of course, this level of describing the empirical facts is not a special feature, a one which is encountered only in *Grounded Theory*, but by the contrary, this level is a general characteristic for any form of *qualitative research* in the field of social sciences. Through it the set of social concepts can be later extracted and put into various theoretical frames. So, starting with this original level are later possible the phases of *conceptual ordering* and, finally, the appearance of *theory* (Corbin and Straus, 1998: 16-17). But how these *social concepts* could be seen and how it could be understood through the light of that original level of describing the facts from the so called "real world"? We will return to this level of description and its links with any form of building social concepts later when the phenomenological approach will be discussed.

For ending our short survey upon the level of description we add here another observation, one which was underlined by many authors. This observation is disclosing the fact that at level of description, almost in any form of qualitative research, a constant and intense interaction between researcher and the empirical data is encouraged. Upon this process later inductive phases become possible. We have to admit that this is especially true about *Grounded Theory* (Bryant and Charmaz, 2010: 46-47). Of course, following this line of approach, regardless the critics about its possible naive way of extracting the theoretical structure, what become obvious was the fact that by principle any form of a priori theoretical frame must be avoided or abandoned. This is one of the main epistemological reasons because of which *Grounded Theory* is perceived as a theory which is designed to build theoretical frames based only and only upon the so called "real-world situations" and only upon an inductive process such is the one described earlier (Oktay, 2012: 4-5). Yet, we must make no confusion between what is known as Generic Inductive Qualitative Model (GIQM) and *Grounded Theory*. As it has been observed there are indeed significant differences between these two general lines of approach regarding the empirical data and regarding the way in which these empirical data are later converted in forms of theoretical

generalizations. So, in brief, *Grounded Theory* is different from GIQM at least from the perspective of three fundamental aspects: the way in which is made the theoretical sampling in *Grounded Theory*, which is obviously different if we compare with the way in which this is done in GIQM, the fact that in *Grounded Theory* there is a constant comparison of data to theoretical categories and the fact that *Grounded Theory* is focused on the development of theory via theoretical saturation of categories rather than substantive verifiable finding (Hood, J.C., 2010: 163-164). However, these differences, and the corresponding concepts, are not so easy to understand as it could be believed at a first look. This situation was noticed by some researchers but we do not insist here upon this issue (Bryant & Charmaz, 2010: 161). We mention here these differences in order to show that they are accepted by researchers but it does not serve to the purpose of our study to insist upon them .

Regardless of these sensitive aspects what is important for us in this study is that fundamental level of the first contact with the empirical data and the original appearance of the theoretical elements. Within *Grounded Theory*, starting with the level of description, a fundamental phase is the so called “theoretical sampling”. This process, as Glaser himself stated, “is a process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst collects, codes and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them (...)” (Glaser, 1978: 36). It become clear that *Grounded Theory* is using special forms of abstracting in order to build its coding and later the set of more complex theoretical elements. We do not insist here upon some details. We just want to underline the fact that, for example, the so called process of “coding”, a concept widely used in *Grounded Theory*’s general epistemological frame, is not simple to describe or to understand. However, in brief, it means a general effort to organize forms from the empirical data, regardless if we talk about interviews or general process of collecting some social parameters, into the so called “categories” (Packer, 2011: 58-62). In addition to this we can also say that *Grounded Theory* seems to work by using a model through which concepts, especially social concepts, *are results*, are the outcome of research. By this model we can easy understand, at least in the formal way of this expression, the opposite model, a model which is using concepts in the first place in order to test it and eventually accept or reject them. These models had been very good described by some authors from the field of methodological issues from within social research (Bryman, 2012: 8-9). However, with all its critics, we should never underestimate the complex model through which *Grounded Theory* is developing its own way to extract and to build and refine the theoretical level in any social research. In time the creators and the followers of the *Grounded Theory* were very careful about the process of building and achieving the theoretical level and nobody could deny the fact that indeed serious efforts were made in order to conquer and to defend, the *Grounded Theory*’s, epistemological honorability. Among these efforts Glaser’s own theoretical

developments were among most substantial. What was maybe the most admirable thing in these efforts was his struggle to offer a solid foundation for the appearance of the first line of conceptualization, a line which in his view is directly extracted from the level of description, the level of the first contact with the empirical data. In this perspective Glaser stated very clearly that “a concept is the naming of an emergent social pattern grounded in research data” (Glaser, 2002: 24). And, further on this direction, he offered detailed explanations about how is build the process of obtaining the theory within *Grounded Theory*’s general epistemological frame: “For GT, a concept (category) denotes a pattern that is carefully discovered by constant comparing of theoretically sampled data until conceptual saturation of interchangeable indices. It is discovered by comparing many incidents, and incidents to generated concept, which shows the pattern named by the category and the sub patterns which are properties of the category” (Glaser, 2002).

But, regardless the way in which Grounded Theory is conceiving the process of getting the theoretical elements from the empirical data, codes or categories, and later any form of theoretical general structure, there will be always that fundamental level of *description*. Our question, in the light of everything which was said until now, is simple: are there any forms of “preconceptions” at this fundamental level or not? And, if the answer is “yes”, in what sense we can talk about these so called “preconceptions” on this level and which would be the epistemological anatomy, with all its connections, with the general epistemological frame of *Grounded Theory* but also with the Phenomenological approach in the field of social research?

The Grounded Theory and Phenomenology. The Empirical level and its epistemological links with Intentionality

As we saw, for the *Grounded Theory*’s epistemological frame is crucial that at the first level, at the contact between the researcher and the empirical data, *any form of conceptualization in advance or any form of preconception which could influence a later theoretical development must be avoided*. The main aspect which is encouraged by this general theoretical frame, as we also saw, is to have a constant interaction between the researcher and the set of empirical data. But how this is possible? But this type of interaction, a one which is empty of *any* form of, so to speak, “preconception” from the researcher, do really exist? Is this type of epistemological scenario possible, for example, at the level of description from *Grounded Theory*’s general approach? Here for us, due to the conceptual necessities of our study, the crucial question will be: is indeed possible to come in front of *any* kind of empirical data without any imaginable form of “preconception”? We use here the term of “preconception” in its probably the most general form and we do not necessary mean by it, within this context, a form of a

preexistent theoretical frame, a one which the researcher will eventually could use in order to describe and to understand the empirical data.

In order to be much easy to understand what we want to disclose let us imagine a very simple example. Consider that a social researcher is in front of a social phenomenon, let us say, a particular type of behavior of a small group of individuals, in relation with a set of stimulus from a particular social area. Accordingly with the *Grounded Theory's* general epistemological procedure, and about this should be no doubts, the researcher must avoid *any* form of preexistent conceptual frame designed, so to speak, to explain and to understand that particular social phenomenon (Cojocaru & Cojocaru, 2011). Until here we have no objections to the procedures adopted through *Grounded Theory's* general methodological frame used to investigate some social field or another. But our question can be formulated in this manner: *is the researcher indeed totally disconnected from any form of preconception about the part of the empirical world which is supposed to be investigated by him?* Our answer is a categorical and absolute *no*. We can accept the fact that indeed, at the most original moment of any research, usually there are no preexistent solid theories about the empirical facts but we never could accept that the absence of any form of a preexistent sort of "intuition", so to speak, about those empirical facts. *Because otherwise it will be impossible to make any type of cognitive contact with those empirical facts, regardless how vague or incoherent this contact could be.* So, at the deepest imaginable level, if we can use here this rhetorical figure, there will be always a sort of *original intuition*, a one which sometimes could be even almost impossible to formulate in a coherent manner, about the reality which is supposed to be investigated by the social researcher. Even more, if this sort of intuition is always present at some elemental level, like it is, in our virtual example, the idea about what an "social individual" means, this intuition is present, in a sort of a mental background, even about the relations and connections which exists, at the most elemental level, between those elemental so called "social facts". In short, we argue that is impossible to be, as a researcher, totally disconnected, *at the first contact with the empirical data*, from the reality which later would be a source for a theoretical frame build in order to explain it. And this *preexistent general intuition* is build and explained only and only in a phenomenological manner through the concept of *intentionality*.

Following the line which we adopt in this study, we can say that the basic structure of our argument could be reduced to the inner core of the phenomenological approach: there could be no empty frames in the consciousness. Regardless of its type any psychological event, an argument, a perception or a feeling, has always an object and it just does not matter how coherent is this object understood or perceived in the first place. *What really counts is just its existence, pure and simple.* And this fundamental level is present in any form of human conceptualization from the most simple facts to the most complicated theories. Its original level is the *individual experience* as it is been perceived and

lived in consciousness (Reiter, Stewart, & Bruce, 2010: 466-467). And this human individual fundamental experience, with that sort of a preexistent object for any psychological act, is responsible for any type of theoretical construction regardless if we talk about social sciences' area or not.

In brief, we do not challenge *Grounded Theory's* particular mode of building any theoretical structure in the field of social sciences in the manner developed by its followers. We admit the necessity and the rationality of approaching the empirical data without any preconception, but we understand this absence of any preconception *in the sense of an absence of a theory and not as an absence of any form of representation, regardless how vague it could be, about the reality which is supposed to be investigated.* We just argue that is not possible to completely renounce to any form of a sort of preexistent knowledge about the reality which the researcher wants to investigate. We cannot speak about "society", "social phenomenon", "individual", "beliefs" and so on without having a sort of intuition, again, regardless how vague this could be, about those things. And starting from this point our argument is underlying the fact that *Grounded Theory*, at its most basic level, the level of establishing a first contact with the data of the empirical world, *just cannot be completely freed from a deeper phenomenological approach about the things in general.* Even more, and following this line, we consider that is not possible to speak about *Grounded Theory* and about Phenomenological approach in the field of social sciences as two totally distinct methodological tools. It is just an illusion to believe that the whole frame of *Grounded Theory*, with its claiming that no preexistent theoretical construction is possible and sustainable, could exist without the presence of intentionality, with all its features, in the mind of the researcher. Of course, we consider reasonable the way in which is conceived, within the *Grounded Theory's* frame, the process of creating and developing the theoretical structure designed to describe to social reality which is subject of investigation. We say it again, in terms of epistemological conditions the mode through which *Grounded Theory* is considering the appearance of the theory is reasonable and relatively strong funded. We do not say that there are no issues in this process but the whole frame, *without* the level of description, could be sustained in a reasonable manner even if some concepts still must to be better explained. *We only argue that this process of obtaining the theory cannot start without the presence or intentionality.* And this presence, regardless how well is structured in the mind of the researcher, is from the very beginning, *a form of knowledge.* This point of view implies some consequences which will be disclosed later.

However, on the other side, following the phenomenological epistemological line about what means to do scientific research in the field of social sciences, we do not sustain a radical phenomenological position, a one in which the intuition of reality, which is supposed to be the subject of investigation, is everything what it should count *regardless the evolution of the interaction between the set of*

empirical data and the frames build by the researcher in order to explain it. Of course, from our position intentionality is always present, at any level of a theory *but not in the same sense in which is present at the level of establishing the contact, the first contact, with the data from the empirical world.* A theoretical structure could be developed without the need of intentionality, in the sense of which this concept is present at the first level and at the first form of any conceptualization. We just argue that we cannot ignore the phenomenological epistemological position. Even more, at the first contact with the empirical level this position *is the only one possible and reliable.* In addition to this it is also important to mention that within the process of “translating” description into preliminary concepts we need the presence of *language.* And the acts of language are also influenced by intentionality. At the limit it could be accepted, as some authors did, that any form of human theoretical ontological construction is the product of mind and language and the mind and language are totally determined by intentionality (Searle, 2010: 25-26). We do not totally subscribe to this epistemological position, we just argue here that it would be completely naive to believe that *Grounded Theory* can be build at the level of description without considering the concept of intentionality.

Conclusions

Let us return to what it has been said until now and make a systemic and brief set of conclusions. Firstly, we agree that the elimination of any form of possible preexistent conceptual and theoretical frame, in the sense of a theory about the set of social facts which presumably we intend to investigate, is reasonable and could be even desirable, in terms of *Grounded Theory*'s approach. But we disagree with the fact that at the level of the first contact with the empirical data there is no and there should be no “preconception” from the side of the researcher. To summarize this point we say that we agree, as we mention, the claim of *Grounded Theory* that no preconception, in the sense of a theoretical preliminary frame, should influence the researcher's position in front of his original set of empirical data. But we reject the *Grounded Theory*'s pretention by which is sustained the position that *any form* of so called “preconception” must be completely eliminate from the mind of the researcher. The entire process through which *Grounded Theory* tries to offer a coherent frame in order to explain the appearance of the theory in the field of social sciences cannot be developed without the presence of intentionality, in its most pure phenomenological sense, in the mind of the researcher. The researcher is not an abstract entity which has a suspended existence in a sort of pure and sterile zero ground of knowledge, regardless how vague or indefinite this knowledge could be in its most preliminary mode. Any researcher, as a human being, *has his own life-world with his own personal and strictly individual experience.* We cannot approach anything in this world, social phenomenon or anything else, and even less we can do this from a position of scientific researcher,

without having a sort of a preexistent idea about what we intend to approach. This is a phenomenological truth and it does not matter if it is formally accepted or not in *any* type of epistemological frame. *It just exists, pure and simple*. So, in order to put an end to this first line from the set of conclusions, our argument is reduced to this: we agree with the absence of “preconceptions”, in the sense of the absence of an a priori theory which is supposed only to be tested, but we reject the absence of *any* “preconception” at the level of the first contact with the set of empirical data.

Secondly, this position has a serious impact, in our view, upon *Grounded Theory*'s general epistemological frame because by accepting it we also must accept the fact that *Grounded Theory* cannot left outside phenomenology at the first level of preliminary and original *reading* of empirical data. More, with all efforts to eliminate any trace from another methodological perspective the *Grounded Theory*'s followers must to admit the fact that always will remain a sort of minimal intentionality, in the most radical sense of the traditional phenomenological method, a one which cannot be, *by principle*, eliminated from the functioning of our mind (Price, 2001: 73-75). Of course, nobody could ever deny that after was surpassed the first level of descriptions and obtained a one preliminary and minimal conceptual content about the empirical data we can go further and start to build the structure for a future theory *without being too much concerned about the necessity of using another content of intentionality at this next phase*. But, regardless how intentionality could be epistemologically integrated in the frame of any theory after was surpassed the level of making contact with the empirical data what is sure is the fact that is impossible to achieve a minimal knowledge about those data without the help, so to speak, of intentionality.

Thirdly, accordingly to what we said until now is important for us to underline the fact that we are not propose a mix methodology. We just argue that *Grounded Theory* cannot be build without the support of a phenomenological epistemological frame placed at its most fundamental level. The phenomenological approach is only reliable and justifiable when we have to deal with the task of explaining how the *original knowledge* of the world is appearing in our minds. The methodological mix is possible, with cautions, but only when already the building of a theory has begun starting with some preliminary and minimal conceptualizations in the sense which we described it. And this methodological mix could be available with all its complexity even if, beyond the general description of it, we encounter serious practical difficulties (Tashakkori & Tedlie, 2003: 3-50).

In the end we want to add few more observations about our position. The first observation underlines the fact that by claiming a fundamental role for intentionality, and the fundamental role of phenomenological approach in general, at the basic level of making the contact with the empirical data does not imply a redefinition of the concept of *truth*. *Even more, the issue of finding the truth, in its traditional sense, is not crucial in this epistemological context*. Our position only

underlines the impossibility to overcome an ontological reality, epistemologically speaking, and does not propose a new concept of “truth”. Our position only underlines the key role of analyzing the intentionality, and especially the way in which through this concept we can deal with the empirical data, *in its personal context of the individual*. As it has been stated, “phenomenology is the study of lived, human phenomena within the everyday social contexts in which the phenomena occur from the perspective of those who experience them” (Titschen & Hobson, 2011: 121). And this is just what we consider fundamental in any effort of understanding how intentionality works in the mind of a social researcher.

Also, our position does not claim to offer an answer to the old dispute between the rationalistic methodology, in its general sense, and the empirical approach in scientific methodology. We only underline an insurmountable situation. In the same time we admit to a some point the specificity of those two methodological approaches, the one promoted by the *Grounded Theory* and the one promoted by the phenomenological frame. However, we stress that these specificities must be recognized only after the step of making the first contact with the empirical data was made. Another observation is stressing the fact that by claiming the fundamental role of intentionality at the level of the first contact with the empirical data does not affect the possible practical advantages of *Grounded Theory*’s later view upon how should be developed the process of obtaining the theory. Our position is just disclosing *the epistemological limit of Grounded Theory’s general frame when in the question is how the first preliminary conceptual elements are obtained*.

And, finally, even if *Grounded Theory* does not claim to search for the “truth”, in the traditional way of doing this within Western philosophical model, yet we believe that its epistemological frame has profound philosophical implications. These are obvious at that fundamental level of making the first contact with the empirical data. Regardless of the tenacity of the authors which indeed made serious theoretical efforts in order to build its fundamental structure *Grounded Theory* is maybe nothing more than an adventure, an adventure for searching the right tool in the field of social sciences, an adventure which came into the Western epistemological model after the collapse of the traditional set of epistemological concepts regarding the “truth” and regarding human knowledge in general. The empty space left by the abandonment of the epistemological tradition, a one which goes back in time to Plato and Aristotle, was indeed filled with new epistemological trends. But are these trends really able to deliver a solid and reliable *knowledge* about the things which are investigated through them? Or are they nothing more but *new shadows* in Plato’s Cave?

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