Why Qualitative Research?

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Introduction

This is an exciting time to be writing about the character of inquiry in social science, for there is a growing interest in and openness to new forms of inquiry. Researchers throughout the social sciences are increasingly working with qualitative data – interview transcripts, verbal reports, videos of social interactions, drawings and notes – whether they view these as "soft data" (Ericsson & Simon, 1984), "messy data" (Chi, 1997, p. 271) or "the 'good stuff' of social science" (Ryan & Bernard, 2000, p. 769). Research projects that include such empirical material are increasingly popular. In addition to self-styled "qualitative researchers," investigators in the learning sciences, in developmental psychology, in cultural psychology, even in survey research, and in many other areas have turned to non-quantitative materials and are exploring ways to collect, analyze, and draw conclusions from it.

At the same time a strong backlash has developed against this kind of inquiry. In the United States, as in England and Australia, the funding priorities of government agencies emphasize "evidence based" research. We are told repeatedly that there is a "gold standard" to research in the social sciences, the randomized clinical trial. Other kinds of research – typically cast as naturalistic, observational, and descriptive – are viewed as mere dross in comparison, good only for generating hypotheses, not for testing them. They are seen as lacking the rigor necessary for truly scientific research, and as failing to offer practical solutions to pressing problems. Clinical trials, in contrast, are seen as having relevance because they test treatments and interventions, and as rigorous because the involve direct manipulation, objective measurement and statistical testing of hypotheses. Any suggestion that there might be inquiry that follows a logic of inquiry different from that of traditional experimental research is dismissed. The possibility that complex human phenomena might require a kind of investigation that traces them in time and space and explores how they operate is not considered.

In the 1980s there was general agreement that the "paradigm wars" had ended. For many, the correct way to proceed seemed to be with "mixed methods" which combined qualitative techniques with aspects of traditional experimental design and quantification. Arguments against mixing "qual" and "quant" are often dismissed as an unnecessarily belligerent perpetuation of the conflict. But now the "Science Wars" are being fought over much the same territory (Howe, 2005, Lather, 2004). It seems we need to revisit the arguments against applying a naïve model of the natural sciences to human phenomena.

Researchers must bear some responsibility for the evidence-based movement. There is, for example, a bewildering variety of types of qualitative research. For some this is a potpourri to be savored and celebrated, but for others social science research has "become unhelpfully fragmented and incoherent," divided into "specialist domains… that are too often treated in isolation" (Atkinson, 2005). This plurality

makes it difficult to establish criteria for evaluating research or design curricula for teaching research methods. It creates the impression that non-experimental research cannot provide genuine knowledge. The enormous number of *How To* books currently published is one indication of the profusion of approaches to social scientific research, and also of the huge appetite for guidance. But at the same time the sheer number suggests that this appetite isn't satisfied. Readers find themselves left with fundamental confusions and buy book after book in a search for clarification.

In the face of all this the student who wants to learn how to do qualitative research, or the more experienced researcher who wants to try something new, or something better, could be forgiven for being confused. This book is an attempt to bring some clarity. It is not a book on how to do qualitative research – it is not a *How To* book. Instead it raises the question that must come first: *why* are we doing qualitative research? Once we have figured out why we are doing research we will have much more clarity about how research should be conducted, because in any activity we can't really know what to do if we don't know what we're aiming for. Only when we are clear about *what* we are doing and *why* can we figure out *how* to do it well.

Qualitative research is, in my view, frequently misunderstood. It is often equated with any kind of investigation that doesn't use numbers, but we will discover that quantification has its place, in the *descriptive* phase of qualitative inquiry. It is often defined as the objective study of personal experience, but we will see that such a view, in, for example, empirical phenomenology (refs), interpretative phenomenological analysis (refs), and grounded theory (refs), gets helplessly tangled in the opposition of subjectivity and objectivity. Finally, qualitative research is often seen as the ethnographic study of culture and intersubjectivity, but here the problem turns out to be the uneasy combination of participation and observation.

How then should we understand qualitative research? It seems to me that fundamental mistakes are made today in many approaches to qualitative inquiry, and that important opportunities are being missed. Researchers are not asking the right questions. We are not asking sufficiently difficult or interesting questions – we are not aiming high enough. At the same time we are not digging deep enough; we are not questioning our basic assumptions about human beings and the world in which we live, our assumptions about knowledge and reality. I have been practicing and teaching qualitative research for almost thirty years, working to make it accessible and comprehensible, and while it is gratifying to see this kind of research becoming increasingly widespread, at times I find myself frustrated that the potential of qualitative research is not being realized. This potential is, I believe, profound. Attention to human forms of life, to the subtle details of people's talk and action, to human bodies in material surroundings, can open our eyes to unnoticed aspects of human life and learning, to unexplored characteristics of the relationship between humans and the world we inhabit, and to unsuspected ways in which we could improve our lives on this planet.

This book I will try to demonstrate this potential by taking the reader through contemporary debates that generally don't cross the boundaries between disciplines, and to historical, conceptual and ethical aspects of qualitative research that are often forgotten or ignored. I will examine the central practices of qualitative research – interviewing, ethnographic fieldwork, analysis – in order to tease out the assumptions embedded in these practices and suggest new ways to think about, collect and analyze qualitative material. I will suggest new kinds of questions we should set out to answer, and outline the general form of a program of qualitative inquiry. Qualitative research is sometimes viewed merely as a set of techniques – as a toolbox of procedures for the analysis of qualitative materials – but in my view it is something much more important, the basis for a radical reconceptualization of the social sciences as forms of inquiry in which we work to transform our forms of life.

What is a Human Being?

An important part of this reconceptualization is a new sense of who we are. Humans are products of both natural evolution and history. As products of evolution we are material beings, one kind of biological creature among many others, participants in a complex planetary ecological system. The longstanding belief that we are somehow not only different from but also better than other animals has been complicit in an attitude towards our planet as merely a vast repository of raw materials, resources which we can exploit for profit. We are witnessing the dire consequences of this attitude, and running up against the limits of this lifestyle of 'development.' A change in attitude will require a change in our understanding of our place in nature and our responsibilities as stewards of the planet, a role which we have forced upon ourselves as a consequence of our efforts to satisfy a craving for power over nature.

As products of history – of cultural evolution – we are cultural beings, and in this regard we *do* differ from other living creatures. We share 99.5% of the genetic material of the Neanderthals who lived 30,000 years ago, but our lives are 100% different. We can shape our environment in ways that Neanderthals never dreamed of and that other animals are unable to compete with, and our environments have changed us in return. Our continuing naïve beliefs in 'human nature' fly in the face of important cultural differences and the deep penetration of our being by cultural practices, and they serve to justify our dangerous tendency to demonize people whose way of life is different. Each human group tends to presume that it is internally homogeneous and identical and that the only significant differences are those that distinguish it from others. This attitude fosters a simplistic conception of good and evil and a destructive impulse to 'civilize' other peoples and impose our values on them. A change in this attitude will require the recognition that humans are not identical, that there is no universal mental apparatus and that different traditions, customs and ways of living have created a variety of ways of living: ways of thinking, seeing, and being.

A Time of Crisis

Thirty years ago, proponents of qualitative research (e.g., Dalmayr & McCarthy, 1977; Rabinow & Sullivan, 1979) wrote of a crisis in the social sciences

which they linked to an underlying human crisis – the lack of meaning which the failure of Enlightenment rationality had exposed. In the eighteenth century thinkers such as the Austrian philosopher Immanuel Kant – still sometimes described as the most influential philosopher ever – proclaimed the existence of a universal capacity for reason, the same for all cultures and all times, which could provide an objective foundation for knowledge, morality, and ethics. Every book needs a villain, and mine will be Kant. The model of human beings which he defined has caused many more problems than it solved. It is a model in which each individual constructs personal and private representations of the world around them. It separates people from one another, divides mind from world, value from fact, and knowledge from ethics. It is a big mistake!

Today we are facing a crisis more profound than a loss of meaning, the crisis of mounting environmental damage and escalating war between civilizations. It would be naïve to suppose that qualitative research alone could provide a solution to world-wide crises. But we can at least ask that qualitative inquiry counter, rather than bolstering, the attitude of seeking to dominate not only other peoples but the planet as a whole. I will argue that qualitative research has the potential to change our attitude of domination because it is sensitive to human forms of life in a way which traditional research cannot. It can draw upon powerful new conceptions of human rationality, alternatives to Kant's model. In this book I will trace a line of theoretical and empirical work which has developed the proposal that the basis for rationality and order of all kinds is the hands-on know-how, the embodied, practical and social activity, of people in a form of life. This line of work leads to new ways of conceptualizing social inquiry.

Ethical Imperatives

It might seem strange to link a form of research to a moral imperative. Yet traditional social science has just this kind of linkage, although it is disguised. As we shall see, the German philosopher Jurgen Habermas (1971) has argued that scientific knowledge is never disinterested and that the sciences, both natural and social, are generally motivated by a "technical" interest, an interest in fostering our instrumental action in the world and increasing our mastery of our planet. To some degree qualitative research has succeeded in adopting a different attitude, one which Habermas calls (rather misleadingly) a "practical" interest: an interest in understanding other people. This is certainly an admirable goal, but one of the points I will make in this book is that too often this understanding has been based on the reduction of others to the status of objects for objective observation.

Studying humans as objects – albeit complex and sophisticated objects – is not the same as studying humans as beings who live in particular cultural and historical forms of life, and who are made and make themselves as specific kinds of subjects. What we need is a human science that is able to grasp this "constitution." Such a science would not abandon objectivity in favor of relativism, either epistemological or cultural. Rather, it would adopt a moral and epistemological pluralism, resting on what has

been called a "plural realism" (Dreyfus, 1991, p. 262). Such a science, I suggest, is exactly what qualitative inquiry is, properly understood.

What is needed is a kind of inquiry that is motivated neither by a technical interest, nor by a practical interest, but by what Habermas called an "emancipatory" interest. This is an XX How can we create this? The imperatives to change our paradigm, to assume a new ontology, to adopt a new view of understanding and knowledge, emerge *within* qualitative inquiry as much as they are demanded by the crisis we face. Much qualitative research is stuck in contradiction and anxiety, and it is crucial to understand why. By refusing to abandon a posture of detached neutrality, much qualitative inquiry today continues to bolster the attitude of domination. Neutrality is equated with objectivity and viewed as genuine knowledge. This kind of research promotes a way of knowing other people which leaves them feeling misunderstood and treated as objects, and fails to recognize either the political and ethical dimensions of understanding or its own transformative power. When we understand another person we don't merely find answers to our questions about them (let alone test our theories about them), we are challenged by our encounter with them. We learn; we are changed; we mature. Contemporary qualitative research, with a few welcome exceptions, fails to recognize these things, or even to allow space for such recognition in its repertoire of techniques and its methodological logic.

I believe that if we think carefully about what we are doing, if we examine our own conduct carefully, we will see the inconsistencies in our current research practices and we will start to notice where new possibilities lie. We will start to ask new kinds of question, we will become able to see different kinds of connections, different kinds of causality, and perhaps we will view ourselves and our planet in a new light. This book, then, is a wide-ranging review and overview of types and varieties of qualitative research throughout the social sciences. It is selective rather than exhaustive; indeed, the qualitative research literature is now so extensive that trying to cover it comprehensively would be impossible. But in this literature certain issues and dilemmas recur. Studying these can help us envision a new program for qualitative research.

What is Qualitative Research Good For?

So what *is* qualitative research good for? I will be making the case that qualitative research is good for *the cultural-historical ontology of ourselves*. I am modifying here a phrase that Michel Foucault coined in an article – *What is Enlightenment?* – written towards the end of his life. Foucault sketched "a historical ontology of ourselves" which, he proposed, would involve "a critique of what we are saying, thinking, and doing." It would attend to the complex interrelations of knowledge, politics, and ethics. It would foster personal and political transformation without resorting to violence. It would be an investigation that could create new ways of being.

Foucault was, I think, describing the kind of inquiry that many of us have been looking for. He viewed it as a form of investigation, even a particular attitude or ethos, which would be scientific without being disinterested, because we need knowledge that

is relevant, not knowledge that is disengaged. In Foucault's terms it would include both "genealogical" and "archeological" components, and would have an "ethical" aim. That is to say, it would include a historical dimension, attentive to genesis and transformation without reducing these to the linear unfolding of a unidimensional 'progress.' It would include an ethnographic dimension that would be sensitive to power and resistance. It would carefully examine practical activities – "discourse" – to discover how we human beings are made and how we make ourselves. And it would foster social change not through violent revolt but by promoting "a patient labor giving form to our impatience for liberty" (p. 319), working to change who we are.

Such a program of investigation defines what qualitative research can do and organizes its tools – interviews, ethnographic fieldwork, detailed study of interactions – and its tasks – to offer knowledge, provide critique, foster transformation – in powerful ways. But before we can grasp what such a program involves we need to reexamine the way these tools have been used. The first part of this book explores how the qualitative research interview has been used a way to study subjective experience, and suggests that it is better understood as an interaction between two (or more) people. The second part examines the theory and practice of ethnographic fieldwork, uncovers its tacit ontological assumptions, explores the popular notion that reality is a "social construction" and distinguishes two forms of this claim, one radical, the other not. The third part turns to the ethical dimension of research, understood as a critical and emancipatory or enlightening practice.

The natural sciences have investigated the ways the natural world works in order to enable us to manipulate and control it. In doing so they have created the means for great destruction as well as, hopefully, instruments with which we may undo the damage we have caused. The traditional social sciences have investigated the way humans operate as information-processing organisms, and have helped design better manipulation in the form of advertizing and spin. We desperately need a program of inquiry which can ask questions whose answers would empower us to transform our forms of life, our moral paradigms, our discursive practices, for the better. Qualitative inquiry could overcome its current confusion and fragmentation by adopting a program such as this.

Changing the attitude of seeking to dominate the planet, exploiting its raw materials and exporting one way of life to those who do not share it, will be no simple matter. It is a matter not merely of changing what we believe, but of changing who we are. Finding the freedom to do this will require that we engage in a critique of how we became who we are, to identify the limits placed on us by history and by culture and step beyond them.

Overview of the Book

In chapter 1 I frame what follows by showing how our thinking about science is still influenced by the logical positivism of the early 1900s. The positivists tried to outlaw talk about "ontology" – the kinds of entity that exist – because they considered such talk untestable and unscientific. Science, in their view, should be a solely logical

process. The prohibition of ontology is still prevalent today, and proponents of randomized clinical trails have the same vision of science. Yet, as Thomas Kuhn showed, the natural sciences operate within qualitatively distinct paradigms, and a central component of any paradigm is the ontological commitments embedded in its practices. Science is not a purely logical process, it is a social practice in which some aspect of the world is explored systematically. The lesson is that what we need to do is not *avoid* ontology but adopt an ontology that is appropriate.

Part One: The Qualitative Research Interview - Beyond Coding

The first part of the book examines two of the most common practices of contemporary qualitative research, the semi-structured interview and the analysis of interview material by coding. Chapter 2 compares the qualitative research interview with both the traditional survey interview and everyday conversation. The semi-structured interview is more flexible than the survey and makes use of the resources of everyday interaction. But compared with a typical conversation the interview is asymmetric in its use of these resources, shifting the focus away from the interviewer. This would make sense if an interview provided a window onto an individual's experience. But this way of thinking about interviewing rests on a common but misleading metaphor about language – that it is a 'conduit' through which 'meaning' is transferred from one individual to another. This metaphor clashes with the idea that an interview is always a joint production. If experience is subjective and personal, then knowledge always has a personal and private basis. But that it is unclear how scientific knowledge can be obtained from subjective experience.

Chapter 3 finds the conduit metaphor at work in the analysis of interviews by coding. Coding involves practices of abstraction and generalization which divide an interview transcript into separate units, remove these units from their context, identify abstract and general 'categories' among them, extract the 'content' of these categories, and then describe this content in formal terms. The product is then taken to be the "idea" that was "expressed" by the speaker.

Grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) is a key example of this approach to analysis. Its aim is, indeed, to obtain objective knowledge from subjective experience. Consequently a paradox underlies coding, for it celebrates individual subjectivity but tries to eliminate the researcher's subjective experience. It ignores context, the diversity of participants, and the influence of the researcher. Language is treated as a collection of words that are labels for concepts, and coding as a process that 'opens up' these words and 'takes out' the meanings they contain. The key ontological assumptions embedded in this practice are that speech is a conduit and words are containers.

The anxiety behind the insistence on coding and the confusion over how to do it stem from the conundrum that objective knowledge seems impossible to obtain from personal experience. Objective knowledge is assumed to be abstract, general, and formal, and so abstraction and generalization are the aims of coding. Particular things are treated merely as exemplars of general concepts. Specific experiences are viewed

merely as cases of general knowledge that can be formally expressed. But both philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein and sociologist Harold Garfinkel have questioned the central assumption that grounded theory makes: that the meaning of a general term is what is *common* to all its exemplars. They recommend instead that the meaning of a word is to be found in its *use*. In practice, coders unavoidably rely on their tacit understanding of the material they are coding, especially their everyday understanding of how words have been *used*.

Coding doesn't do what is claimed: it doesn't work. But what is the alternative? Chapter 4 turns to hermeneutics – the theory of interpretation – and the 200-year debate over what it means to understand a text. An early position in this debate was the claim by Wilhelm Dilthey and Friedrich Schleiermacher that to understand a text one needs to reconstruct the author's subjectivity. But Hans-Georg Gadamer argued convincingly that understanding a text always involves its active "application" to a current situation. Meaning is an *effect* of reading the text, and this will be different for each reader. This means that there can be no single correct interpretation of any text, but readings that have relevance to a specific time and place.

In chapter 5 I explore the implications of Gadamer's argument for the analysis of interviews. To cut the Gordian knot of subjectivity-objectivity we need to attend closely to the language of an interview transcript, its rhetorical structures, techniques and strategies. A text – written or spoken discourse – is a cultural artifact which engages a reader and invites them to see the world in a new way. The work of literary critic Woolfgang Iser and historian Hayden White helps us discover how to study the *effects* of reading a text. A text has *ontological* power, the power to change how the world is understood. Analysis needs to focus on the way the text works: how an interviewee crafts a way of *saying* to invite a way of *seeing*.

Our understanding of what someone tells us in an interview builds unavoidably on factors which are not personal or individual but *intersubjective*. Language itself is an intersubjective phenomenon, and the researcher's knowledge of language plays a crucial role in both the conduct and the analysis of an interview. A seemingly straightforward personal and individual source of data turns out to involve shared, public linguistic conventions and practices. At the same time, seemingly simple notions such as 'subjectivity,' 'experience,' and 'meaning' turn out to be surprisingly slippery. This suggests that we should think of qualitative research as the study of *intersubjective* phenomena, such as language, culture and society.

Part Two: Ethnographic Fieldwork - the Focus on Constitution

So the second part of the book turns to how intersubjective phenomena have been studied. Chapter 6 begins with three calls for a new kind of interpretive social science that were made in the 1970s. Charles Taylor argued that political science cannot avoid interpretation. Anthony Giddens pointed out that the logic of sociology involves a double hermeneutic. Clifford Geertz proposed that a culture should be viewed as a collection of texts that requires an interpretive anthropology. In each case immersion in the social practices of a community – ethnographic fieldwork – was considered crucial,

rather than surveys, questionnaires, or even interviews. In each case interpretation – hermeneutics – was regarded as a central aspect of inquiry. In each case the new approach was expected to resolve core dualisms which plagued the discipline. And in each case it was said that we would study the key relationship of *constitution* between humans and world.

The term constitution is rarely defined, but it can be traced back to Aristotle's recognition, in 2500 BC, that humans are by nature "political animals," that is to say, we are born to live in social groups, in communities (*Politics*). The citizens of a community "constitute" it: they decide, formally and informally, how to live together. Sometimes there is an explicit "constitution." At the same time, a community doesn't just regulate its citizens' activity, it fosters their flourishing. Only by living together with others can humans actualize their capacities, both intellectual and moral. So communities "constitute" the people who live in them.

Culture is a form and product of collective human activity, while at the same time each human is a product of culture. How best to grasp this interconnectedness and study it adequately? The notion of "constitution" is developed in chapters 7 and 8 by tracing the history of two distinct treatments. One approach has been to make the *epistemological* claim that a human being's *knowledge* of the world they live in is constituted by social practices. I trace this first approach from Kant to philosopher Edmund Husserl and sociologists Alfred Schutz, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, and propose that ultimately it fails to escape from Kant's individualistic model of human being. With such a model we can only explore how the world can *appear* objective to an individual subjectivity. This kind of "social construction of reality" can never establish a distinction between what is mere opinion and what is valid knowledge.

The second approach has been to make the *ontological* claim that social practices constitute *real* objects and subjects. This approach is much more powerful and has interesting implications. In chapter 8 I begin with Georg Hegel's response to Kant, then trace the work of philosophers Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and sociologist Harold Garfinkel. Their work has emphasized a *non-dualist ontology* and shifted the focus from *conceptual* knowledge, studied with a detached, theoretical attitude, to practical, embodied *know-how*, studied in an involved way. They show how we can see reason and thinking as cultural and historical and grounded in practical know-how, and how we can see research as thinking that doesn't take itself for granted.

One of the implications is that the processes of what I call 'ontological work' can be studied by researchers, and I illustrate this in chapter 9. Such research pays attention not to *what* people say so much as to what they *do* by saying.

Chapter 10 returns to the debates in cultural anthropology over the manner and purposes of ethnographic fieldwork. Traditional ethnography was wedded to the image of the researcher "alone on a tropical beach close to a native village," as Malinowski put it, and to the ontological presuppositions that culture is bounded, systematic, and integrated (Faubion, 2001). These imply that a fieldworker must enter

a culture and participate as a member, describing a member's point of view of *their* world. A more adequate ontology presumes that a culture is a dispersed, dynamic, and contested form of life. Ethnographers need to find and trace this form as newcomers who are representatives of what is 'elsewhere.' Rather then try to describe structures *behind* everyday life they need to focus on the practices in which order is constituted (including the members who live in it), the *local ontology* of a form of life is how people and things 'show up' in it. Ethnographers write accounts which will have an *effect* on readers, inviting them to see the world in a new way. Malinowski was surely right to see fieldwork as a way of understanding other people in order to better know ourselves and grow a little in our wisdom.

Part Three: Critical Inquiry – an Emancipatory Interest

But participation in the practices of a form of life can lead not to understanding these practices but *mis*understanding them, and this means that inquiry needs to have a *critical* dimension. Part 3 explores different approaches to research with a critical component. Chapter 11 traces the origins of critique back to Kant, whose exploration of the conditions for the possibility of knowledge in the *Critique of Pure Reason* defined one aspect of the term critique. When Karl Marx's analysis of capitalism showed that the exploitation of workers, their labor squeezed to extract value, is the condition for the possibility of capital accumulation, the term came to mean both the exploration of the conditions that make a phenomenon possible and the exposure of exploitation.

Marx anticipated the new ontology of ethnography when he proposed that capitalism is open, dynamic and contested. He argued that the notion that knowledge and research are disinterested is a myth, an ideology, and he practiced instead a critical and emancipatory kind of inquiry. He did this by seeking a *historical* perspective that people lack in everyday life. The implication that critical inquiry requires that the researcher adopt a XX perspective.

Marx drew his conception of history from Hegel. The next chapters explore three attempts to base critical and emancipatory investigation on a different kind of history.

Chapter 12 focuses on the German philosopher Jurgen Habermas, who has considered how research can be emancipatory inquiry. He suggests that a researcher needs both the know-how of a member and also a historical perspective in the form of a rational, theoretical reconstruction of ontogenesis and societal history. Such a history provides a lens through which a form of life can be studied and critiqued. Habermas has accepted Kant's conception of enlightenment, but he looks for the source of rationality not in transcendental reason but in communicative practices. Research, for Habermas, involves articulating what participants in a form of life presuppose unquestioningly, and questioning what they recognize unthinkingly. In doing so the researcher "deepens and radicalizes" the context of communication that is being investigated.

Chapter 13 turns to French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, for whom research is a reflexive enterprise that objectifies its own techniques of objectification. Bourdieu's

"reflexive sociology" centered around the relational concepts of "habitus" and "social field." Where Habermas focused primarily on people's intellectual judgments Bourdieu emphasized their embodied and situated practical know-how, and how this often serves to reproduce an inequitable social order. Bourdieu was more radical than Habermas in his insistence that reason is historical and embodied, and that each of us has acquired bodily dispositions to produce strategic action in a social field that is the site of a game, a struggle, which only the researcher can grasp as a whole. It is the reflexive aspect that gives social science its special status among such games and its ability to produce knowledge that transcends a specific time and place.

In Chapter 14 the central figure is French historian Michel Foucault. Foucault criticized the human sciences for adopting the view that humans are at one and the same time objects and subjects, assuming, paradoxically, that people are both determinate and uniquely free. When we examine the historical record, he insisted, we find a *variety* of kinds of human beings, in multiple forms of life. Foucault developed a way to study how humans are formed, which had three aspects. First is an *archaeology*: a form of investigation which excavates not bones, pottery and metalwork but official theories or concepts. The second is *genealogy*: tracing the family tree of these official pronouncements to write "histories of the present" which treat historical change as contingent, marked by ruptures and discontinuities. The basis of official knowledge (*connaissance*) must be explored in the power relations (*pouvoir*) of practical activity (*savoir*). The third aspect is an *ethics* which focuses on the techniques for formation and care of the self. If Kant is the villain of this book, Foucault is its hero. His work pulls together the threads of our various concerns. He explored the linkages between formal knowledge and embodied, social know-how. He emphasized the constitution of both objects and knowing subjects in practical relations of power. He emphasized history without reducing it to logic or progress. He practiced a form of inquiry intended to be emancipatory without being authoritarian. He searched for local truths – ways in which an aspect of life is problematized – rather than universal, objective truth-with-a-capital-T. For Foucault, inquiry needs to problematize problematization.

At the end of his life Foucault articulated the three central questions that he had tried to answer, and that defined a broad program of research he called a "historical ontology of ourselves." The questions were: "How are we constituted as subjects of our own knowledge? How are we constituted as subjects who exercise or submit to power relations? How are we constituted as moral subjects of our own actions?" This is not a *How To* book, so it does not end with a discussion of techniques for posing these questions, or detailed specifications for the program of a *cultural-historical ontology of ourselves*. Instead, chapter 15 returns to the larger question of what science is, in the light of what we have learned about the critical investigation of constitution. We need to think of human science itself as having theoretical, practical and ethical dimensions.

Such a program has three phases: an archaeological phase (fieldwork), a genealogical phase (the study of practice), and an ethical phase (ethology, in its original sense as the study of character). Researchers conducting field work will

acknowledge that they can rarely be members of the form of life they study. They are strangers, visitors from the academy, and their fieldnotes and ethnographic accounts need to have local accountability. Their detailed analysis of practice will go beyond the kinds of discourse analysis currently available to focus on the pragmatics of interaction and how it is embedded in material settings. Their analysis of interviews will attend to the way rhetorical devices are used to invite us to see the world in new ways. Their research will be reported in texts which offer both a way of saying and a way of seeing, because thinking is a social practice of seeing and saying which exploits the power of language. Scientific accounts can offer *phronesis*, practical/political relevance. Scientific inquiry, practiced this way, can open our eyes to fresh ways of being human. This is the excitement, and the importance, of qualitative research.