Overview

MARTIN J. PACKER AND RICHARD B. ADDISON

Hermes was messenger to the Greek gods. (He went by the name Mercury, too.) Himself the god of travel, commerce, invention, eloquence, cunning, and thievery, he acquired very early in his life a reputation for being a precocious trickster. (On the day he was born he stole Apollo’s cattle, invented the lyre, and made fire.) His duties as messenger included conducting the souls of the dead to Hades, warning Aeneas to go to Italy, where he founded the Roman race, and commanding the nymph Calypso to send Odysseus away on a raft, despite her love for him. With good reason his name is celebrated in the term ‘hermeneutics,’ which refers to the business of interpreting.

Hermes brought messages of advice, warning, and instruction to humans from the gods. Since we don’t have a godly messenger available to us, we have to interpret things for ourselves. This century has been a time for special recognition of the importance of messages, of translation and interpretation. It has also been marked by an appreciation that these all have a tricky side to them. We’ve come to appreciate that misunderstanding is as common as understanding, and that not only those we disagree with show prejudice. We’ve come to see that the past, and cultures foreign to us, can be reappropriated, comprehended and studied only in a partial manner.

Yet we’ve also come to realize that interpretation of messages is central to our existence. This is not a consequence of the disappearance of Hermes (or not literally so); rather it has been a matter of increased awareness that we are cultural and social beings, rather than natural creations or biological entities. And it comes from changes in life style that have left many of us dealing with human messages far more often than natural phenomena. An awareness of the importance of interpretation has stirred in popular culture. William Safire, pundit to the people, wrote in the New York Times Sunday magazine in early 1988 that Hermes brought him a message: “He’s back in the news.” Safire says of hermeneutics, “Watch that word; when it gets tied firmly to a concept in many people’s minds, it will be taken as a sign of our times.”
Interpretation of messages takes much of our time. We worry about the message that television conveys, and frown over the latest press release from the White House. We advise each other to 'give clear signals' in our relationships. Some among us argue about such arcane topics as the difficulty of divining the intentions of the framers of the American Constitution. We even talk of the messages in cellular DNA that are read when cells are built. Some of this talk confuses texts and codes, languages and logics, but this only confirms that Hermes is a tricky fellow.

This is no small change. It represents, in the eyes of some, the failure of the Enlightenment project, of modernism, of the idea that progress is to be achieved through the scientific accumulation of knowledge with which to design and build a utopian world. The shapers of the Enlightenment emphasized the autonomy of the individual, in both ethical and epistemological matters, distinct from church and state. They were confident that reason—exemplified by Galileo's physics—would free us from our passions, our history, our traditions. The end results of this project have been positivist objectivism and ethical relativism. The project has self-destructed, its limits and mistakes exposed in part by its undeniable successes. But where do we go next? A powerful sense of who we are and what we should be doing, one that went unchallenged for two centuries, is now crumbling.

Heidegger's hermeneutic investigation of human being in *Being and Time*, published in 1927, has become one source for our modern (or postmodern) understanding of the centrality of interpretation. For Heidegger, our everyday action always embodies an interpretation of who we are, albeit one generally concealed and misunderstood. Each of us grows up in and into a traditional way of interpreting ourselves, which lays out possibilities for our being. Grasping these possibilities, we take a stand on our existence. Heidegger's analysis loosens up and dissolves the hardened paint of the traditional picture of individuality, subjectivity and objectivity, knowledge, reason and emotion, thought and action, identity, and inquiry. Sixty years later, the flux he initiated continues to swell.

The behemoth that is psychology is stirring under the impact of all of this. Research psychologists become aware that some tricky and problematic assumptions underlie the research methods that have been customary to many of them. Clinicians recognize they sometimes take for granted the interpreting that is central to their practice. A professional journal like the *American Psychologist* becomes the arena where a variety of novel approaches are paraded: hermeneutic, phenomenological, constructionist, humanistic, dualistic, Aristotelian (e.g., Aanstoos 1985; Faulconer & Williams 1985; Gergen 1985; Jennings 1986; Packer 1985a; Silverstein 1988) along with fierce and heady debates on the philosophy of science (e.g., Champion 1985; Dar 1987; Farrell 1986; Cholson & Barker 1986; Kimble 1984; Krasner &
This book springs from the ferment of all this activity. The concern behind it is to present a selection of accounts of exemplary interpretive research projects in developmental, clinical, social and educational psychology. A wealth of literature exists that examines the philosophical and metatheoretical bases of the interpretive approach (and much of it is referred to in the chapters of this book). The reader who absorbs this literature will be in a position to critique the metatheoretical assumptions that lie, unexamined, behind much research and theory in the human sciences. Yet such a reader will find little in this literature to guide her or him in actually conducting an interpretive inquiry. There is comparatively little published writing that addresses the practical and methodological aspects of research conducted from the hermeneutic stance. In addition, and compounding the problem, relatively few psychological journals publish or encourage the submission of reports of interpretive research, so that few exemplars of such research are available for study. There are indications, though, that this too is changing: in the past few years mainstream journals have indicated a tentative willingness to publish interpretative research.

The chapters of this book are arranged in a manner that reflects three phases that can be distinguished in interpretive inquiry. The first phase is that of entering the hermeneutic circle in the right way: discovering an appropriate workable perspective from which interpretation can proceed. The second is the conduct of inquiry within that perspective. The third phase is one of critical reflection upon and evaluation of the interpretive account that is the outcome of inquiry. Chapters in the first section describe how a new approach to the understanding and interpretation of a phenomenon is sought, or how an existing perspective is found unsatisfactory. Those in Section Two describe inquiry where an established perspective is the basis for interpretive articulation of a phenomenon. Chapters in Section Three critique the perspective of their own or another's inquiry. Some of the investigations embody elements of more than one phase; in such cases we have placed the chapter in the section that represents the authors' major emphasis.

In the Introduction we draw a comparison between interpretive inquiry and the two dominant perspectives in psychology that, together, embody the traditional world-view: empiricism and rationalism. Individual research programs and theoretical schools unreflectively adopt one of these two perspectives to provide their root metaphors, common-sense notions about the world, basic conceptions of explanation and description, and standards of judgment and evaluation (Brown 1986). We contrast the traditional world-view with the hermeneutic perspective in four respects: the kind of domain that inquiry is considered to be directed toward; the origin or source of knowledge; the form
of explanation that is seen as the goal of inquiry; and the manner of inquiry that is considered most appropriate. One of our aims is to draw a distinction between the traditional view of method as interpretation-free procedure or technique and, on the other hand, an interpretive view of method as establishing a point of view from which inquiry can proceed, and evaluating the account produced. We think this distinction is germane to an understanding and appreciation of the interpretive research described in the other chapters of this volume.

Section One. The first section includes chapters that describe the initiation of an interpretive research program, and discuss how a new interpretive perspective is adopted. One of the major thrusts in research described in these chapters is reaching an appropriate starting point for interpretation.

1. As a clinician and researcher, Richard Addison (chapter one) is concerned with the problem of the professional socialization of family physicians. His approach is one of participant observation and interviewing, immersing himself in the everyday world of family practice resident-physicians. Spending considerable time with the residents as they saw patients, attended conferences and lectures, ate, and slept in the hospital, Addison kept detailed notes of what he saw and how he felt as he became involved in the residents' efforts at “surviving.” These observations became the basis for an account of two “modes of being” that dominated the residents' lives: “covering-over” and “over-reflecting.” Addison developed a narrative account of how these modes developed and came to be problematic. He also developed an account of a more integrated way of being. At the residents' request he led a group to help them cope with the stress of residency and integrate the maladaptive modes of being (see Addison, in press). In doing so, he acknowledged his stance as a critical researcher within the hermeneutic circle.

After laying out his grounded interpretive approach, Addison discusses some of the key hermeneutic elements of his method. These include the circular relationship between understanding and interpretation, the importance of background context in interpreting actions, the contribution of a researcher's preunderstanding to the writing of a narrative account, and the role a narrative account can play in opening up possibilities for researcher, research participants, and the structure of residency training.

2. Robert Selman is a researcher and clinician working in the area of children's social development (cf., Selman 1980). In chapter two Selman and his colleagues Lynn Hickey Schultz, Brina Caplan and Katherine Shantz look at the social interactions that take place in the context of the "Pair Therapy" of two troubled adolescents. These interactions are "fixed" as a text by video recording and narrative accounts by observers and the therapist. The researchers begin analysis of the clinical sessions by outlining a set of four hierarchically organized developmental levels that, as descriptions of compe-
tence, reflect the structuralist perspective they are moving from. But they discovered these levels unable to account for the rich interpersonal context they believed to be the source of change, and for the detailed course of interaction during the therapy sessions.

The researchers were led to articulate a set of "interaction indices" that organize their analysis by pointing out key aspects of the interactions between therapist and adolescents. They were moved to change their method of inquiry by a recognition that forms of understanding already embodied in their clinical practice were eluding their study. The accounts they developed articulate their practical understanding of the troubled adolescents and their concerns. Theory and practice are in a circular and dialogical relationship here; practice is guided in part by theoretical conceptions of development and change, but those conceptions are modified as a result of reflexive and interpretive examination of practice. And Selman perhaps comes closest to being a modern Hermes, as he transforms messages from each boy into a form more suited for the other.

3. In chapter three, Martin Packer discusses occasions of betrayed agreement among college students in an analog task setting. The textual records here are video recordings of the students' exchanges. Packer describes a self-consciously circular analysis, beginning with the choice of a conceptual approach to action that provided entry to the circle of interpretation.

For Packer, three aspects of interaction became conspicuous: the interpersonal distance people maintained, relative moral status, and the "mythology" of what was talked about. He interprets the conflicts over betrayal (cf. Packer 1985b) in terms of three sequential phases that followed the "burning" (as the young people called the broken agreement): an initial reaction to it, followed by accusation and response, and ending with articulation or standoff. Unspoken "concerns" over responsibility and trust shaped action in the first phases, while explicit "issues" were talked about in the final phase.

Working notes made during the research are used to explicate the circular movements of interpretation. Drawing on Heidegger's (1927/1962) hermeneutic approach, Packer discusses the relationship between interpretation and understanding, and the manner in which a researcher's preliminary understanding of a text or text-analog provide an essential, but corrigible, access to it and a starting place for interpretation. He addresses the need to prepare for an interpretive analysis, and suggests ways to foster the articulation of understanding, including writing "simple descriptions," focusing on the problematical, tolerating and sustaining ambiguity in order to avoid premature interpretive closure, and seeking both confirmation and refutation.

4. John Mergendoller also deals, in chapter four, with a lived moral issue, that of draft resistance. He addresses the considerations and problems he met in using interview texts as the basis for, first, narrative portraits of the consci-
entious objectors he talked with and, then, a comparative analysis of the communalities among these individual histories of resistance to the war in Vietnam. Mergendoller argues convincingly that writing a narrative portrait is not a matter of summarizing the events chronicled in the interview transcript so much as it is a reflection on and renewal of the dialogue between researcher and interviewee. As a reconstruction it is, then, already an interpretation.

The comparative analyses became for Mergendoller a reflective process of repeated rereading of the portraits and interviews, during which the question guiding the research (draft resistance as moral action) became re-examined and reformulated. Moral deliberation and moral enactment were two aspects that came to the fore, both linked to the reaffirmation of moral identity in the face of a situation challenging that identity. Resistors related their actions to two aspects of identity in their narratives: selfhood and tradition. Mergendoller concluded that the acts of resistance generally provided an affirmation, and sometimes an extension, of moral identity.

Section Two. The second section is made up of chapters that describe research conducted from an interpretive perspective that has already been identified. These studies aim to move beyond the discovery stage of research, utilizing an established perspective to investigate and articulate social action.

5. In chapter five, Lyn Brown, Mark Tappan, Carol Gilligan, Barbara Miller and Dianne Argyris report on their work interpreting narratives from open-ended interviews concerning moral conflict and choice. They regard these narratives not as the products of an underlying competence—the cognitive-developmental position adopted by Kohlberg—but as texts where different “voices,” that speak from distinct orientations or perspectives, can be discerned. Their method of reading is one that aims, (after an initial perusal of the text in which the dramatic form of the story becomes established,) to identify the two moral voices of care and of justice, and the manner in which the interviewee places self in the narrative (cf. Gilligan 1982). In this way they begin to see how an individual constructs a moral conflict. The two moral voices reflect and find their source in the premise that we experience our relationships with one another in terms of attachment and equality; that we all have concerns over intimacy and power. It is noteworthy that in Brown et al.’s analysis one portion of the text may be evidence for both a justice reading and a care reading; there is no one-to-one matching between text and interpretation, as would be the case if one were “stage-scoring” the narrative.

Brown et al. proceed to place their narratives within a categorical typology based on the presence and relative dominance of the two moral voices, and on the alignment of self with those voices. Such a categorization permits them to ascertain degree of agreement among interpreters, and to assess group differences.
6. Robert Elliott's inquiry (chapter six) focuses on significant change events that occur during therapy: incidents that clients themselves identify as helpful and important occasions. The texts that Elliott and his coworkers work from are transcriptions of audio-recorded conversation between client and therapist during the therapeutic hour. His "Comprehensive Process Analysis," as the approach is named, aims at a consensual expansion of the factors contributing to change events, and the impact of these events. Portions of client-therapist discourse are expanded as series of propositions, and their event "pathways" charted. Elliott characterizes the approach as exploratory, discovery-oriented and theory-generating rather than hypothesis-testing.

The perspective that Elliott previously worked within, and which he came to find inadequate, was an empiricist one. Ratings of isolated therapist and client behaviors proved devoid of clinically or theoretically significant findings, despite Elliott's awareness as a clinician of those aspects of the therapeutic intervention apparently responsible for change. The empiricist approach imposed distorting assumptions upon the phenomena of study; assumptions such as the independence of events from their setting, the desirability of objective measurement, and the need to find mechanistic causal links. Recognition of the inadequacy of these assumptions provoked Elliott into developing the alternative approach he describes here. Nonetheless, Elliott remains closer than the other contributors (perhaps excepting Spence) to the possibility of an objective account of the interaction between therapist and client, an account of what they are "really" saying, free from "contamination" by observers.

7. Theodore Sarbin has developed a form of interpretation that seeks out "tropes"—figures of speech—and other rhetorical devices. The texts he examines are accounts of the everyday experience of emotions, typically anger. Sarbin regards the human events that we call emotions or passions as being best considered "narrative emplotments," organized as narratives, with plot, actors, and setting. Sarbin has expanded on the general application of the narratory principle elsewhere (Sarbin 1986). Here (chapter seven) he narrows his focus to illustrate the way in which roles, plot, and the rhetorical actions that make up an emotion can be identified: the acts such as insult and retribution that constitute an "attack" of anger. The rhetorical aspect of emotions is to be located, Sarbin argues, in the cultural prescriptions at work behind all dramatistic acts. These prescriptions themselves take a largely narrative form, as myths, parables, songs and stories. Each is "a symbolized account of actions of human beings that has a temporal dimension to it" (Sarbin 1986, 3), and each one develops or solves a moral problem in a manner that alters the valuation of the protagonists' social and moral identity.

Section Three. The chapters in the third section critique the unidentified, unacknowledged, and unexamined perspective of the research studies of
others. They do so from an explicitly acknowledged and spelled out hermeneutic or interpretive perspective. These chapters explicitly refer to the way interpretation involves reflection upon ways of understanding and thinking that have become taken for granted and customary, but which turn out to be illusory.

8. The chapters by Donald Spence and Robert Steele provide an interesting contrast in several respects. Donald Spence has compared narrative truth and historical truth (cf. Spence 1982). His textual target here (chapter eight) is the published account of a psychoanalytic case study, which he submits to a critical examination of its forms of argumentation. Spence focuses on a contrast between "rhetorical" and "evidential" arguments. The former aims to persuade by appeal to authority, is secretive, protective of theory, and shows repeated shifts from assumption to putative fact. Evidential argument, in contrast, is egalitarian, objective and participatory, with its procedures and data in the public domain. The case-study tradition in psychoanalysis, he argues, shows disturbing parallels, in its reliance on such elements as metaphor and the substitution of word for thing, with the occult tradition of alchemy. Since case studies are employed frequently in interpretive research, Spence's remarks have application beyond their immediate psychoanalytic focus. And of course Spence's chapter is itself an analysis of a single text, with the consequence that his interpretation becomes intriguingly reflexive.

9. Robert Steele (chapter nine) also aims to uncover the rhetoric he sees at work in a text. But while Spence wants to expunge rhetoric, Steele delights in it. His view is that "rhetoric...[is] a living, if denied, part of a text." Steele's previous work has included an analysis of Freud's and Jung's psychologies as "two model hermeneutic systems which...provide complementary schemata which can both be used to restore human lives" (Steele 1982, viii). Like Spence, Steele here examines a published journal article. His deconstructionist approach is "to make visible that which by training and custom has been rendered invisible," starting with the "average expectable reading" of a text and reading what is "between the lines." The text must be viewed from odd angles and different perspectives in order to seek out its tropes and hidden meanings, and articulate them. Reality, declares Steele, is contradictory and ambiguous, and we must read with a radical eye in order to make sense of it.

10. In chapter ten Kenneth Gergen explores the constraints—or rather the absence of constraint—on the common-sensical interpretation of reports of opinion and behavior. Gergen has developed a constructionist position (cf. Gergen 1982, 1985) that, while not identical to hermeneutics, shares with it a common ground. Many personality researchers have adopted the armamentarium of psychometrics with vigor in an effort to infer consistent personality characteristics ("traits") on the basis of surveyed opinions. The assumption that motivations and dispositions comprise a stable, underlying structure to
personality, one that can as a consequence be objectively measured, has been
critiqued by those of an interpretive persuasion (e.g., Shweder & D'Andrade
1980). Gergen found when he asked people to "read counter" (see Steele,
chapter 9, this volume) to their regular readings of typical personality-test
statements that this was an easy task for them. The statements were items
from a commonly used personality assessment measure, the Rotter measure
of perceived locus of control. An opinion like "Who gets to be boss depends
on who was lucky enough to be in the right place first" turned out to be
interpreted just as easily as an expression of oversensitivity as one of boldness,
as the reader supplied a plausible context to replace the one stripped away by
the psychometrician. And in constructing these diverse interpretations,
Gergen's readers show us that the apparent orderliness of items in a personal-
ity measure is a deceptive result of non-critical and non-contextual reading.

11. The chapter by Dieter Misgeld and David Jardine (chapter eleven)
further illustrates the way in which interpretation can involve scrutiny of a
taken-for-granted approach whose justification proves on examination to be
illusory. Their work is a "reflective investigation of the interpretive grounds
of phenomena relevant to psychological-educational research."
The text whose
analysis exemplifies this approach is a document concerning the educational
mission of elementary schooling. Misgeld and Jardine uncover within it an
unquestioned technical understanding of childhood and adulthood, and of
development and maturity. They point out that research in educational psy-
chology has frequently adopted Piaget's structuralist genetic epistemology
and defined adult "competencies" as end-points toward which development
proceeds and which education must foster. The technical objectivism of psy-
chometrics has then been brought to bear, resulting in an effort to define
competencies in objective, value-free terms so that educational processes and
their outcome can be assessed and evaluated.

Misgeld and Jardine point out that the hermeneutic orientation is often
assimilated into this technical approach by being considered simply one more
technique to be picked from a selection. But they argue that, unlike the tech-
nical procedures of rationalist and empiricist inquiry, hermeneutics involves
"reflectively explicating the assumptions, prejudices, or understandings in
which we already live." From the hermeneutic stance understanding cannot
be separated from self-understanding, and interpretive inquiry is critical of
technical approaches on the ground that they distort our understanding of
ourselves. And hermeneutic inquiry is pedagogical rather than theoretical,
moving us to action as it leads us to gain a deeper understanding of ourselves
and others.

12. In chapter twelve the editors consider the question of the evaluation
of interpretive accounts. We argue that several reasonable approaches to eval-
uation already have been suggested, but they have sometimes been suggested
for the wrong reasons, and sometimes rejected for similar incorrect reasons. Evaluation cannot be reduced to validation by means of interpretation-free procedures. On too many occasions efforts are made to evaluate interpretive accounts in terms of the correspondence theory of truth. We propose instead that Heidegger's account of truth as "uncovering" provides a new sense of what we do when we evaluate an interpretation.

Taken together, these chapters direct our attention to many aspects of interpretive inquiry. Interpretation works with a text, but this can be a written text, an interview narrative, narrative observations, or action that has been "fixed" in the way Ricoeur (1979) describes. Gergen shows us that such a text is qualitatively distinct from the isolated statements, stripped from context, that can be found in so many psychological tests and coding forms. We learn that an interpreter must read the text in both a usual manner and a special manner, a radical manner, deliberately shifting perspectives. Brown et al. talk of the different "voices" that a text can reveal; Steele of the "extraordinary text" that must be read; Selman et al. of "indices" that direct attention to the various aspects of interaction. Several authors talk of the complexity disclosed in a text when it is read in this way, and they emphasize the need to recognize and be tolerant of ambiguity, to be aware of the possibility of multiple perspectives.

The outcome of interpretation, of course, varies widely from chapter to chapter, and depends on the aim with which inquiry was undertaken. But it is possible to say in general that reading leads to an articulation, a more explicit laying out of forms of understanding that have their source in the two "poles" involved in the reading process: interpreter and text. In part the reading discloses what the interpreter brings to the text, and so Spence can talk of the autobiographical element in his explication de texte, and Selman et al. can draw out and make more explicit their experience as clinicians, their practical "know how," in understanding what transpires in Pair Therapy. And in part the interpretation uncovers themes, arguments and concerns that were hidden in the text, and so Steele talks of the "textual unconscious"; Sarbin of the textual character of emotion as being disguised by reifications; Misgeld and Jardine of tacit manipulative tendencies. These are not elements that lie "behind" the text, as an abstract structure that could replace it, but facets "within" the text that become obvious only as it is scrutinized from various perspectives.

Looking over the chapters we can see that interpretive reading can be guided by forms of analysis that have been developed for studying written texts: analyses of the rhetorics of justification, influence and persuasion, of plot, character and figures of speech (Sarbin; Steele; Spence). Or reading can be guided by a sense of the character of concerns that "move" us in our conduct together: concerns over care and justice (Brown et al.), intimacy,
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autonomy and status (Caplan et al.; Packer), identity (Mergendoller). These two forms of analysis reflect different emphases in the metaphorical connection between action and text: the first regards text as the primary term, and considers human action understandable only in narrative terms. The second places priority on action, and argues that texts can have dramatic organization only because life itself has a dramatic character.

We remarked above that academic psychology has been dominated by two perspectives that stem from a single world-view. *Empiricist* approaches such as behaviorism, social learning theory, and experimentalism are complemented by *rationalist* approaches such as structuralism, cognitive-developmentalism, and cognitive science, with its computer-models and flow-diagrams. Empiricism and rationalism are twin perspectives because, despite obvious surface differences, they share many of the same assumptions about reality, knowledge, science, and the kind of explanation science provides. Hermeneutics counters this traditional world-view, calling into question many of these basic assumptions. In so doing it opens up fresh possibilities for psychology (some say a can of worms!) that we have only just begun to explore. The following are some of these possibilities:

The possibility that our accustomed and accepted means for reporting our research is not always appropriate. The accepted format for publishing research reports rests upon and expresses questionable assumptions about the way we do research, and may need rethinking. Students are groomed to write in “APA format,” where a manuscript is divided into parts they are told reflect the stages in the research process. But division into “introduction, method, results and discussion” imposes a linearity that research does not possess, even in its most hard-nosed experimental manifestations.

The possibility that we should reconsider the traditional way we treat the people we study. We describe them as our “subjects” (meaning, presumably, that the researcher should be treated like royalty!). In the name of scientific necessity we have come to accept that these subjects must be spied on from behind screens and one-way mirrors, manipulated, and deceived. But all these devices stem from a mistaken view of science.

The possibility that the research training we give our undergraduate and doctoral students is inappropriate. Rigor and professionalism have been equated with quantification and statistical analysis. We tell students that we are training them to be neutral, objective, and value-free. We tell them they will be investigating a reality whose existence is independent of them, a reality about which there are objective “facts,” and which is value-neutral. From the hermeneutic perspective, these are all false claims.

Even students who will become practicing clinicians are required to demonstrate familiarity with experimental design and analysis, when most of them will never use these skills again. Wouldn’t it make more sense to help
them hone and develop their interpretive abilities? Particularly with the growing acceptance of the Psy.D. degree as an equal to the Ph.D., there is an opportunity now to reconsider the research component of doctoral-level professional training.

The possibility that we can renew the communication between practitioners and researchers. At a time when the American Psychological Association appears to be undergoing a painful meiosis into scientist and practitioner camps, the notion that they might be able to talk together in a shared language about interpretation, as a phenomenon common to both psychotherapy and the world of research, is an intriguing one.

The possibility that we should rethink the relationship between theory and practice in psychological research. The practical implementation of research results, whether it is in clinical, educational, or commercial settings, is looked down on by some researchers. Science, they feel, is detached observation, description and explanation, and so implementing the results of this work in practical settings is mere application that follows after the real work. In contrast, from the hermeneutic perspective the researcher is intrinsically involved in whatever inquiry is directed toward, and should not take steps to shake off that involvement. Detachment is not an essential prerequisite to objective, undistorted description and explanation. On the contrary, it is a distorting move that removes or covers up the practical involvements—cultural, social and personal—that enable us to understand other people in the first place. This suggests that psychological research, to the extent that it becomes interpretive, is intimately tied to practical issues.

All that is still required from us at this point is to invite the reader to feast on what lies ahead, and to do so in the spirit of excitement and exploration that has motivated the contributors to this volume.
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Albany: SUNY press.

Introduction

MARTIN J. PACKER AND RICHARD B. ADDISON

Twin perspectives have come to rule research and theory in contemporary psychology: the twins of empiricism and rationalism. They are stances taken and attitudes adopted on the concern of how best to be psychologists (even on the question of how best to be). They have been dominant in our discipline, and in our intellectual culture, for so long that they go unnoticed and unquestioned. They provide the taken-for-granted background assumptions that run throughout modern psychology, from empiricist approaches such as social learning theory and positivist experimentalism to rationalist approaches such as structuralism and much of cognitive science. The empiricist perspective endorses talk of stimulus and response, of dependent and independent variable, of significance test. Rationalism shapes discussion of information-processing, memory retrieval, scheme and structure, sensory input. Along with ways of talking they regulate techniques of inquiry. Experimental manipulation of variables and the prediction and testing of observable associations are empiricist programs. Computer simulation and formal modeling are rationalist lines of attack. The story of this dual hegemony is as manifold and complex as the branches of institutionalized psychology, and so we shall content ourselves here with giving a brief overview of these perspectives and some of the claims they make about the world and the proper place of psychology in it. We shall consider arguments that these claims are mistaken, even though they have come to be seen as undeniable. And we shall draw a comparison between these twin perspectives and hermeneutics.

A project to evaluate the competing claims of traditional and interpretive approaches to inquiry in psychology would, if done properly, need to make manifest the assumptions fundamental to both rationalism and empiricism, show where and how these assumptions are flawed, and then demonstrate what interpretive inquiry uncovers to deal with the difficulties. (And difficulties of this kind are not always dealt with by being resolved, as we shall see.) A simple review of the various efforts (by Heidegger, MacIntyre, Taylor, Dreyfus, Bernstein and several others) to accomplish this project is in itself too large a
task for this introduction. What we shall provide instead is more a thumbnail sketch of what lines of argument have been drawn out by these writers.

Even attempting this simpler task, we soon stumble over the difficulties of conducting an argument about perspectives as broad as those of empiricism, rationalism and hermeneutics. Terms and lines of argument that make sense in one perspective can seem meaningless when viewed from a second. Guiding values for one ("objectivity," say) are understood as misleading myths or chimeras from within another. Forms of argumentation become incommensurate: formal proof stands against narrative history. And we are working at a level where, ex hypothesi, there is no higher level to move to in order to arbitrate the conflict. It would be easy, and very tempting, to relax and say that it is all relative: that the choice between an empiricist, a rationalist, or a hermeneutic perspective is arbitrary; they are equally valid alternatives. This route has often been taken, but it is one we want to avoid here. It can lead to a nihilistic skepticism that can only undercut the concrete inquiries we conduct. We believe that interpretive inquiry is not just another alternative alongside more familiar methodologies.

We shall follow a path that seems the only route possible: arguing that hermeneutics provides a better perspective on the world than the traditional twins. Sometimes the argument is straightforward, and the traditional perspectives fall into self-contradiction, failing in terms of their own standards of logic and truth. At other times one can only see the flaws in empiricism or rationalism by shifting to the interpretive perspective. On such an occasion, the argument turns into something close to a brawl: once empiricism and rationalism are shown to be flawed, then cracked open on their flaw-lines, hermeneutics becomes the only game left in town. As Sherlock Holmes declared, "Once the impossible has been eliminated, whatever remains, no matter how improbable, must be true."

**Comparing World-Views**

Although the origins of empiricism and rationalism (and indeed hermeneutics) can be traced as far back as ancient Greece, we shall begin our account with what has been called the beginnings of modernity, in the seventeenth century. It was then that Descartes (1641/1668) made his first programmatic moves in what was to become a dominant mode of philosophical analysis, one which has found expression in psychology too, via Kant, Piaget, Chomsky, Kohlberg, Miller, and many others. And it was then, too, that Locke (1690/1975) articulated a related account of the person, of the world, and of the character and limitations of knowledge and scientific inquiry; an account whose descendants are also multiple in contemporary psychology. Descartes,
of course, was a progenitor of modern rationalism; Locke, a founding father of modern empiricism (as well as democratic constitutionalism). Descartes' and Locke's accounts seem opposites in key respects: Descartes emphasized the dubitable status of sensory knowledge and the need for mind to examine itself in an active and systematic manner; Locke in contrast wrote of the primary qualities of objects in the world—"solidity, extension, figure, motion or rest, and number"—and of ideas in the mind being copies or "resemblances" of these qualities. In one account mind is essentially active, doubting and questioning, in the other mind is largely passive, mirroring an external reality. But the two accounts are complements rather than genuine opposites. Two sides of a single coin, struck from the same metal, they share unexamined assumptions about reality and knowledge. This communality reflects Descartes' and Locke's common admiration of the new developments in the sciences of their time, especially Galileo's geometry and optics, and also their common abandonment of elements of Christian dogma. Common to both accounts is a dualistic view of mind and world as two distinct realms, a belief that they had identified the source of genuine knowledge, and a view that physical science provided a clear and satisfactory model for all analytical inquiry. What both these early statements of empiricism and rationalism celebrated (and to a large extent invented) was the individual, as a kind of inquirer after and a carrier of knowledge distinct from both church and state. What was, understandably, brushed aside was the interdependence of individual and larger institutions. Two results of this emphasis on individual knowing were, first, a habit of mind we now call naturalism—a belief in the fixed objective character of both mind and world—and, second, the earliest account of what Taylor (1985, p. 9) calls the "disengaged modern identity." Locke in particular adopted a naive realism, a belief that our ideas of the world (at least as far as primary qualities are concerned) correspond to qualities that "do really exist in the bodies themselves." Here lie the roots of the "correspondence theory" of truth, which have twisted themselves hidden through the ground of contemporary research practice, and trip us still.

Four Areas of Comparison

Rationalist, empiricist and interpretive inquiry can be usefully compared in four areas: In terms of (a) the kind of domain that inquiry is considered to be directed toward; (b) the origin or source of knowledge; (c) the form of explanation that is seen as the goal of inquiry; and (d) the manner of inquiry that is deemed most appropriate. In each of these four—object, origin, explanation, and method—interpretive inquiry makes a radical break with empiricism and rationalism (cf. Palmer 1969; Bleicher 1980).
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Every kind of systematic inquiry requires that assumptions be made about the characteristics of the domain studied. Empiricism, rationalism, and hermeneutics each construe the domain of inquiry differently, so that investigators work within quite different preconceptions of the sorts of entity toward which their inquiry is properly directed. This is not to say that the three simply have different domains of inquiry, but rather that they interpret a common reality in incompatible ways.

In empiricist inquiry it is taken for granted that the world is made up of basic objects or elements that can be described in a manner that involves no interpretation. These building blocks have properties that are independent of human concerns and practices. The task of scientific inquiry in psychology, from this stance, is to take these elements as its object and describe their properties and interactions. But on closer examination there is a hidden context to this preconception, that of 17th-century mechanical science. Empiricist inquiry in the human sciences today inhabits essentially the same world that Locke borrowed from Galileo (as distinct from, for instance, the world of modern quantum physics): a world where physical objects have absolute, context-
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independent properties such as size, mass, position, and velocity that can be measured unambiguously with simple procedures and instruments, and a world where such measurements allow precise prediction of subsequent behavior (analogous to Galileo’s prediction of a body’s movement down an inclined plane). By analogy, people can be described in terms of objective properties such as personality traits, intelligence quotients, or attachment strengths, that are assessed in categorical or quantitative terms with psychometric tests and measures. Modern psychometrics assumes the mental and behavioral worlds are each made up of independent entities that can be collated and measured. The objects of empiricist inquiry are literally objects—entities whose behavior and characteristics are analogous to those of the physical entities whose mechanical interaction was studied by Galileo. Far from this being the only, natural, objective way of seeing the world, it is a product of particular social and intellectual circumstances. There are, perhaps, excuses for the belief of the time that the true way of understanding reality had finally been achieved by the new “scientific method.” There is no longer any excuse, though, for this naive realism of 17th-century empiricism to continue unabated in contemporary psychological research. It is time to acknowledge that so-called objective reality is a product of human invention.

While empiricist inquiry undertakes to discover lawful generalizations about events in an objective universe, rationalist approaches have, in general, taken on the task of reconstructing a portion of human knowledge or experience. Rationalists are concerned with a realm of formal abstraction to which they give greater credence than everyday appearances. Descartes and Kant, both rationalist philosophers, took on the task of reconstructing human knowledge in its entirety, and determining the conditions for and limits to genuine knowledge; structuralist researchers—one contemporary form of rationalism—have dealt with more restricted subdomains in the same way: de Saussure (1915/1959) and Chomsky (1957, 1965) examine language; Piaget (1977) studies the domain of operational intelligence; Kohlberg (1971) looks at the realm of moral judgment. In each case the aim has been to provide an orderly reconstruction that would introduce clarity and indubitability into a realm that is seen as filled with ambiguity and error. Speech, for Chomsky, and action, for Piaget, are occasions of mere “performance,” and are distorted by errors, memory constraints and other cognitive limitations. Performance is also shaped in a way structuralists find uninteresting (or, at most, secondary) by the demands of specific situations, and by concrete concerns and interests. The structuralist aim is that of all rationalist approaches: to reconstruct a “competence” or “deep structure” that underlies this performance. Abstract systems of language (de Saussure’s “la langue”; Chomsky’s “transformational grammar”) are held to underlie the speech one uses in everyday conversation; intellectual operations (Piaget’s “schemes”) are posited to underlie a child’s actions with objects and people.
A rational reconstruction of competence provides a transcendental structure whose subject is also a transcendental one: the “ideal speaker-hearer” for Chomsky; the “epistemic subject” for Piaget; one who would operate in “the ideal speech situation” for Habermas. Performance, on the other hand, is viewed as unhappily tied to a subject who is an individual in particular historical, cultural, social and personal conditions. The internal relations of the abstract system of competence are considered far more interesting than the connections between action and setting, which are merely “external.”

Furthermore, the underlying structures are assumed to be formal ones, composed of syntactic rules and elements (Williams 1978): rules whose application can proceed automatically, in a definite and established manner that requires no interpretation or judgment. (The computer program is the contemporary exemplar par excellence of a syntactic rule.) So while rationalist inquiry doesn’t deal with the simple isolated elements of empiricism, the structures it reconstructs have only formal internal relations, and are stripped of all relationship to context and setting. Piaget recounts a central structuralist postulate “that structures are self-sufficient and that, to grasp them, we do not have to make reference to all sorts of extraneous elements” (Piaget 1970, 4).

The object or domain of rationalist inquiry is, as rationalists describe it, not an immediately apparent one; it lies behind appearances. But rationalists are faced in the first place, just like the rest of us, with occasions of situated speech and action, and their inquiry must do something with these in order that the underlying structures become apparent. As Piaget puts it, “Structures are not observable as such, being located at levels which can be reached only by abstracting forms of forms or systems of the nth degree; that is, the detection of structure calls for a special effort of reflective abstraction” (Piaget 1970, 136). This abstraction is one that removes an utterance or action from its immediate context, from the particular circumstances of a human situation, and from individual interests and concerns.

So, unlike the mechanical world of empiricism, with its inclined planes and swinging pendulums, rationalist inquiry recognizes a non-mechanical interdependence among psychological entities, but one where the connections are purely formal syntactic ones, and the context of human concerns and projects is considered something that can, indeed must, be stripped away. Is anything wrong with this position?

The central criticism of rationalism has been that when human action (including speech) is abstracted from its context it is, unfortunately, not cleaned up but distorted. The assumption that skilled human performance is just sloppy competence, as structuralists would have it, is a distorting one. Distorting in what way? The cost of abstraction is that the object is “mummified, as everything becomes when it is torn out of its context” (Musil 1930/1979). The counter claim from the hermeneutic stance is that action and
context are not separable without consequences that undercut the aims of rationalist inquiry. Performance and context cannot be teased apart; what abstraction really does is introduce a "privation," an absence of practice. Rationalism sees a dirty baby splashing in scummy bathwater and pulls her out to spruce up and put her on display in pristine condition. The hermeneutic argument is not that the baby gets washed out with the bathwater but that she turns out to be a water-baby who dies on dry land, and so must be studied in her original setting.

One way this argument has been made is to say that the "indexicality" of action—the way in which aspects of context are pointed out and used to bear meaning when we act and talk—is destroyed by rationalist abstraction (Garfinkel 1967; cf. Packer, this volume). Practical activity is intrinsically linked to its context and has a complex temporal organization: the very things that an analysis of competence is designed to eschew. A hermeneutic stance focuses our attention on these contextual and temporal aspects of action; the structures of action are unspiritual and worldly rather than transcendent and eternal.

What might be the consequences of abandoning both empiricism's naive realism and rationalism's inclination to abstraction? What follows once we regard reality as a historical and cultural construction, and recognize action's mundane indexicality? Once empiricism's historical origin in 17th-century mechanics is uncovered, the search by psychologists for mental and behavioral entities analogous to the physical objects studied by Galileo comes to seem an inappropriate strategy of inquiry. (This is true whether the inquiry is psychological, sociological, anthropological or historical, of course). In the empiricist stance the constituents of human life are objects. In the hermeneutic stance they are events and entities that have status and significance by virtue of involvement in our practices. We deal daily with books, cars, VCRs, computers, lovers, pets, plants, classes, universities, relatives, cafes, bureaucracies, regulations, permits. Empiricist inquiry sanctions the effort to study and describe these as though their character and properties are independent of the parts they play in human lives, and their relevance to human concerns and projects. Interpretive inquiry embraces the view that these phenomena cannot be understood independent from human interests and activities, and considers claims to have done this mistaken.

Interpretive inquiry focuses on human activity situated in context and the offspring of such activity: institutions, histories, accounts, records, texts, stories, lives. It makes no sense to imagine any of these existing in the absence of beings like ourselves, who wish to study them and, conversely, it would make no sense to think that we could exist, as psychologists and inquirers, apart from or independent of a whole range of practices, institutions, and accounts. People both constitute and are constituted by their social world;
we contribute to sustaining it as what it is (or changing it); it made us what we have become. We are not, and cannot become, the neutral and dispassionate observers that both empiricism and rationalism would have us be.

A Foundation to Knowledge, or a Starting Place for Inquiry?

The three perspectives differ in their assumptions about the origin or source of the knowledge that inquiry (hopefully) leads to. Throughout the 300-year span of the empiricist stance a recurrent theme has been the claim to have identified the basic components of knowledge: elements that are simple, irreducible and ultimate; terms "for which the correspondence between name and experience is immediately understood" (von Mises 1956, 80). For Locke these basic building blocks of knowledge were "simple ideas, the materials of all our knowledge" (p. 75). In more recent times the logical positivists proposed similar candidates. Ernst Mach, the physicist whose epistemological views were admired by the Vienna Circle founders of logical positivism, considered all experience to consist of elemental sensations: "colors, sounds, warmths, pressures, spaces, times, etc." and their compounds (cited in von Mises, op cit). For the logical positivists, logic is used to connect and manipulate statements about these basic givens, and logic itself is empty of content, being merely the tautological restatement of truths in new forms that may be more convenient and economical (cf. Hahn 1930/1980). Simple ideas or experiences provide the foundation upon which all knowledge is built; logic is just the mortar that holds the bricks together.

Although logical positivism has been declared dead many times, its underlying empiricist assumptions haunt us still. Psychology and the other human sciences resound with nervous and hollow appeals to the self-evidence of objective information. Taylor's definition of these brute facts can hardly be bettered: they are claimed to be:

data whose validity cannot be questioned by offering another interpretation or reading, data whose credibility cannot be founded or undermined by further reasoning. If such a difference of interpretation can arise over given data, then it must be possible to structure the argument so as to distinguish the basic, brute data from the inferences made on the basis of them. (1979, p. 30)

Data of this kind are commonly taken to be the basis of psychological theories in many contemporary research reports. And what is wrong with this? The major difficulty stems from the claim that any data are self-evident: observed and recorded without interpretation. If the phenomena we study are not isolated independent objects with fixed properties, then we can't observe them in a primordial, objective experience that makes reference neither to their setting nor our concerns.
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Even in the natural sciences, which the logical positivists considered the epitome of value-free description, seemingly objective and interpretation-free observations turn out to be dependent on contexts of several kinds. It has become recognized that what counts as an observation depends on current theory; observations are “theory-loaded” (Hanson 1958, and cf. Dreyfus 1980). Successive theories are incommensurable in the sense of requiring radical translation between superficially equivalent terms. With the shift in physics from the Newtonian to the Einsteinian paradigm, basic terms like “mass” and “inertia” changed their meaning, and were applied in different ways to natural phenomena (Kuhn 1970b, 267; cf. Hacking 1983, 167ff).

Positivist efforts to catalog simple observables and prescribe the objective manner by means of which they can be identified have run into many problems. But statements with a positivist tone still linger in introductory psychology texts, and serve to obscure the role that an understanding of culture and humanity inevitably plays in the very identification and description of actions and events; they deny that the observer “presupposes an interpretation of the behavior as having a certain point, as situated within a cultural and institutional framework, as obeying or infringing relevant norms, rules, or expectations, and so on” (McCarthy 1978, 148).

Empiricism, then, claims to have identified a foundation for scientific inquiry in the form of unquestionable observables that are directly given to the senses. Rationalist inquiry seeks a foundation too, but one whose validity is provided by the consistent procedures of formal logic. Rationalism seeks to establish a scaffolding of indubitable principles, preferably formal ones, from which structures that reconstruct human phenomena can be logically generated. Descartes described his aim “to build anew from the foundation, if I wanted to establish any firm and permanent structure in the sciences” (1641/1969, p.144), “…to discover [at least] one thing only which is certain and indubitable” (p. 149), and he aimed to do this through the systematic application of reason, examining each of his beliefs to ascertain the degree of its certainty. In this way he believed he could arrive at an Archimedean point on which to base his reconstruction of all genuine knowledge: the famous “cogito.” Descartes’s “Cogito ergo sum” was the base upon which he was able to build a proof of the existence of God and of order in the natural world.

Chomsky’s structuralist linguistics (here described by Piaget) has an analogous beginning:

Instead of looking for an inductive step-by-step procedure to help us collect the properties of particular languages and ultimately language in general, Chomsky inquires: What grammatical postulates are necessary and sufficient to describe the universal principles of language structure and to furnish a general method for selecting a grammar for any given particular language? (Piaget 1970, 84).
Here again a foundation is sought in the form of basic principles from which the rules that make up any particular grammatical competence can be derived. In Piaget's own work on the cognitive-developmental analysis of intelligence, basic structures are described that underlie a child's overt actions, and these themselves are products of "functional invariants" or biologically-based tendencies: assimilation and accommodation. Piaget was interested in describing underlying structures of intelligence, stages of development that ignore setting and activity, and so he was only indirectly interested in the thought and action that a child engages in when confronting a puzzling task.

But the foundation sought in rationalist inquiry, the basic principles or axioms from which a formal reconstruction can be logically derived, has proved as unreachable, or at least as misleading, as the empiricist foundation. Members of the Vienna Circle (e.g., Hahn 1933/1980) were happy to point out that formal logic is unable to bear the weight that rationalists wish to place upon it: logic cannot provide a foundation for knowledge about either the world or the mind. Newton's cosmology and Euclid's geometry, once thought to be fruits of a universal logic and, at the same time, true statements about empirical reality have turned out to be neither. They turn out to be conventions: two among the many possible ways of describing physical phenomena. Relativity theory displaced Newton's universe, and the discovery in the late 19th century of alternatives to the "natural" geometry of Euclid showed that it was a mistake (the "shipwreck of formalism"; Rosen, 1987, 153) to think that logical propositions somehow match reality; rather, their explanatory power is a product of the contingent choice of their axioms. That is to say, Newton's and Euclid's systems both worked because they were ingenious systems for representing natural phenomena in a manner relevant to our need to control and manipulate nature, not because they mirrored an objective reality. Furthermore, Godel's theorem (Nagel and Newman 1958) showed that a system of formal logic may be incomplete and inconsistent; hardly properties that are desirable for a truth-preserving instrument of thought.

So both these attempts to establish a foundation on which inquiry could build final truths have run into major difficulties. It seems time to say that foundationalist efforts have failed, and also time to recognize that scientific inquiry does not require an indubitable foundation. Rationalist axiomatic reconstructions and empiricist brute-data building blocks are both Rube Goldberg devices designed to enable people to escape from what they fear is a vicious circle: the circle of interpretation, the hermeneutic circle. The gadgets don't work; the foundations have crumbled; and the hermeneutic circle turns out to be an inevitable part of our efforts to understand human phenomena.

Discarding the apparatus that is supposed to make psychology truly scientific, and the efforts to avoid the fearsome circularities of interpretation,
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is proving to be no casual matter. The problems that foundationalist moves have run into have given rise to what Bernstein (1983, p. 18) calls "Cartesian Anxiety": "not just radical epistemological skepticism but the dread of madness and chaos where nothing is fixed, where we can neither touch bottom nor support ourselves on the surface." Researchers working within the empiricist stance fear that if their search for a method that achieves objectivity fails then relativism must be an inevitable result, and inquiry will reflect only subjective opinions. And when those who have embarked on the never-ending rationalist quest for total explicitness become confronted by the recognition that there is unavoidable ambiguity in human affairs and understanding, their fear is a similar one, that this ambiguity will be a total one, leading inexorably to the same relativism.

Hermeneutics is repeatedly challenged to explain its apparently relativist position. The difficulty in meeting this challenge stems from the challengers' expectation that the solution to the puzzle must take the form of procedures or criteria, whereas the guarantees against relativism (and against totalitarian objectivism, for that matter) lie in our practices (MacIntyre 1984, 1988; Kuhn 1977, 320ff; Bernstein 1983, 223ff).

Both everyday understanding and scientific knowledge have their starting place in practical activity: in our direct, everyday practical involvement with tools, artifacts, and people in the world. Geertz (who describes his own anthropological work as hermeneutic) points out that "science owes more to the steam engine than the steam engine owes to science" (1983, p. 22). A similar practical starting point is the place where we, as psychologists, inevitably begin our research, but it is located in human interactions, not mastery of the environment. One might say that psychology owes more to the cocktail party than the cocktail party owes to psychology (we think of Cherry 1953). Both our everyday actions and our research are embedded in the social practices of our home, our workplace, our society. This practical activity is distinct from any psychological theorizing we do, and it would continue if we stopped forming theories. Practical understanding is not an origin for knowledge in the sense of a foundation; it is, instead, a starting place for interpretation. Interpretive inquiry begins not from an absolute origin of unquestionable data or totally consistent logic, but at a place delineated by our everyday participatory understanding of people and events. We begin there in full awareness that this understanding is corrigeble, and that it is partial in the twin senses of being incomplete and perspectival. Understanding is always moving forward. Practical activity projects itself forward into the world from its starting place, and shows us the entities we are at home among. This means that neither common sense nor scientific knowledge can be traced back to an origin, a foundation.
We have considered views of the domain of inquiry in each of the three perspectives and conceptions of the origin or starting place of the knowledge sought in each approach to inquiry. Our third topic is intimately related to both of these: the form or character that an explanatory account is taken to have.

The programmatic statements of logical positivism still influence many psychologists' notions of what makes an adequate explanation. For many, an explanation has been provided when observation-statements are linked to form theoretical-statements. An explanation is a hypothesized lawful relationship of co-occurrence that has been tested through empirical observation; a combination of a general law and description of specific conditions. Conceived in this way, as a statement of regularities, explanation has the same formal character as prediction. If certain conditions exist, laws such as Newton's allow one to deduce (i.e., predict) a future outcome. Conversely, a particular outcome is explained if, given a general law, one can show that the requisite initiating conditions transpired. The billiard ball entered the pocket because the cue ball hit it with specified velocity and angular momentum; the child moved toward her mother because appearance of a stranger induced anxiety that was reduced by closer proximity.

From this stance, a scientific theory is often viewed as merely restating factual observations in a simple, handy and economical form: it aims to be "a complete and clear inventory of the facts of a domain" (Mach 1896/1986, 415). Explanation is provided by laws, and laws express regularities in the observable data. "The general laws of physics . . . are not essentially different from descriptions" (op. cit., p. 396). Newton's laws of motion are paragons of explanation. Consider for instance the First Law of Motion: \( v = u + at \). This general statement permits calculation of a body's velocity (\( v \)) at any future time (\( t \)), given knowledge of the initial conditions: the acceleration acting upon it (\( a \)) and its initial velocity (\( u \)).

We have described how a rationalist explanatory account takes the form of a reconstruction: a precise formal delineation of structures underlying performance. Here, explanation is provided by a set of rules, an algorithm, whose relationship to the domain of inquiry is that of a formal logic to the set of well-formed statements deducible from its axioms. For example, Chomsky's (1957) transformational grammar generates all and only the grammatically well-formed sentences of American English. Cognitive scientists set great store by computer models of psychological processes such as depth-perception, semantic memory, or text comprehension, because the formal algorithms and data structures involved in such a model provide, from this stance, a full explanatory account of the process. The widespread interest in machine intelligence reflects this deeper quest for a successful reconstruction in logical
terms of some area of human understanding, a success that would finally
vindicate the rationalist project. Minimal progress has been made in this effort
at reconstruction, however (cf. Dreyfus 1979; Dreyfus & Dreyfus 1986).

One telling criticism of both causal laws and formal reconstructions is
that such explanations are what they claim to be (interpretation-free and
fully explicit descriptions of reality) only when the elements they operate on
are uninterpreted ones. The measurements of objective properties and the
syntactic units that make up a system of competence are indeed claimed to
be uninterpreted. But we have already outlined the case for the hermeneutic
view that human understanding is not made up of elements of this kind, and
that it traffics instead in "thick concepts" that meld fact and value (Williams
1985). To the extent that an explanatory account of human action has its
starting place in human understanding, it will not be formal. Instead, interpr
tive inquiry yields narrative accounts and "thick descriptions" (Geertz 1983).
McIntyre argues that:

In successfully identifying and understanding what someone else is doing we
always move towards placing a particular episode in the context of a set of
narrative histories, histories both of the individuals concerned and of the
settings in which they act and suffer... It is because we all live out narra
tives in our lives and because we understand our own lives in terms of the
narratives that we live out that the form of narrative is appropriate for under
standing the actions of others. (McIntyre 1984, 211).

Even if agreement were reached that the elements in causal laws are
context-bound and that interpretation plays a part in their identification, the
search for regularities and predictive laws remains a far from satisfactory
mode of psychological explanation. First, prediction is impossible in many
cases where we may nonetheless achieve understanding. For instance, soci
ey changes through conceptual, practical, and technological revolutions whose
form cannot be predicted (the introduction of computers into business, gov
ernment and research provides a powerful contemporary example), and one
consequence is that we cannot predict the terms in which the future will be
understood (historical changes in notions of trading, for instance, illustrate
this). Furthermore, social life has a game-like quality to it that can be identi
fied only in retrospect, if at all, and so evades prediction ("the problem about
real life is that moving one's knight to QB3 may always be replied to with a
lob across the net," MacIntyre 1984, 98). Third, the outcomes of individuals'
decisions effect social life at the cultural, institutional and personal levels,
but cannot be predicted. (Which social scientist anticipated Gorbachev's intro
duction of Glasnost?) Pure contingency has had profound consequences that
we may comprehend without anticipating. (The length of Cleopatra's nose
played a role in the declaration of war.) Human life resembles the weather in being an open system that never reaches equilibrium; like the weather we can recognize what transpires (storms, sunny days) even when unable to say what comes next.

Predictive laws are inadequate explanations for a second reason. The few generalizations in social science that hold up are qualified by *ceteris paribus* conditions; they hold true "other things being equal," meaning their scope of application is extremely ill-defined. They are secondary phenomena, the results of social practices and institutions whose functioning is symbolic and representational, not causal. They are the consequence of factors such as the necessity for scheduling and coordinating our actions (brushing teeth after eating breakfast). They reflect the way that knowledge of statistical regularities shapes our action. (We know we catch more colds in winter, and predictably stock up on Vitamin C. They work only because our understanding of the casual regularities of nature constrains social life. (Storm clouds bode rain, so we tend to seek shelter when thunderclouds form.) (Cf. MacIntyre 1984, 83ff; Taylor 1979, 69ff).

Both empiricist and rationalist inquiry seek a kind of explanation that only makes reference to interpretation-free elements and formal rules. In the natural sciences such an approach works because scientists can forget the conceptual and practical framework they are working within: the accepted paradigm. In a human science like psychology the same approach leads to distortions and trivial "findings," because it suppresses the framework of concerns and interests of the people being studied. It also assumes, falsely, that researchers have reached consensus on the best perspective from which to conduct their inquiries.

*What is "Scientific Method" in Psychology?*

We have examined arguments that say that both empiricist and rationalist forms of inquiry concern themselves with domains of inquiry that exclude and deny context and setting, that both seek an unattainable foundation of certainty upon which to construct scientific knowledge, and that both seek explanations in the form of elements and rules that avoid both interpretation and human interests and concerns. And we have reviewed arguments that both rationalism and empiricism inevitably require interpretation of the phenomena they aim to explain, at the same time as they deny doing so.

We can now reconsider the conception of method that is involved in each form of inquiry. If interpretive inquiry makes a radical break with the fictions of a pre-existing, independent object to scientific investigation and of an epistemological foundation upon which objective theories can be based, the break in the view of what is appropriate method is a radical one, too. It is easy
to set up a straw man when discussing conceptions of scientific method. In a sense there are as many methods in psychology as there are research programs. But the fact remains that over the centuries various programmatic statements have been made about proper scientific method, and psychology has been more than susceptible to their appeal.

In both empiricist and rationalist inquiry, method is what is considered necessary to obtain foundational knowledge and systematically generate an appropriate kind of explanation. In empiricist inquiry, procedures are necessary to collect reliable data under selected or manipulated conditions, and then to identify regularities among these data that meet stringent and objective criteria (generally levels of statistical significance). In rationalist inquiry, formal principles must be defined that will serve as the basis for an axiomatization of the domain of knowledge under investigation. In both stances method is considered a matter of procedure or technique, involving analytical operations that require no involvement of human judgment and valuation. This is no surprise; since the grounding (in a foundation of either brute data or formal axioms) and the explanation (by description of regularities, or formal derivations) are by intention interpretation-free, it follows that the method linking them must also be interpretation-free. If either the empiricist or the rationalist program is to succeed, reflection, judgment and evaluation must be replaced by technique. And, equally, if both an interpretation-free foundation and a value-neutral explanation turn out to be fictional notions in the human sciences, then method will not prove to be reducible to procedure. Within both rationalist and empiricist approaches to inquiry there are two aspects of method we shall discuss: establishing a point of view from which to proceed, and evaluating the explanation produced.

**Empiricism**

The **Objective Point of View**. The empiricist researcher aims to achieve what might be called an absolute perspective; a God's eye view, from which the world could be described in objective terms. Such a perspective would be distinct from that of any particular observer. The researcher must try to become detached from any personal involvement and adopt what Nagel (1986) calls "the view from nowhere." But cultivating the appropriate "scientific attitude" is hardly a matter of mere procedure. Being value-neutral, free from prejudice, objective and unbiased (to the small extent that these are possible at all) involves adopting a special posture of distance from or denial of one's personal interests and concerns. And being unconcerned or disinterested is as little achieved through procedures and techniques as is being concerned. Paradoxical though it sounds, detachment is itself a kind of perspective, a way of viewing the world, that cannot be reduced to technique. Computers,
though they implement procedures, are not detached: they are blind. They
don't see from nowhere; they see nothing.

*The Correspondence Problem.* In empiricism, evaluating an explanation
is, in large part, a matter of employing techniques or procedures that aim to
assess correspondence with a reality independent of the researcher. This of
course is where positivism placed its weight: improving the hygiene of sci-
ence by specifying operations, checks and rules that would ensure that theo-
ries and statements were grounded through chains of logic to the bedrock of
fundamental data. Bacon and Hume appealed to inductive logic to guarantee
the truth of a theory; since Popper the claim has been that the logic of falsifi-
cation guarantees rejection of false theories. In either case truth is viewed as
a matter of fit between theory and reality. But the whole enterprise of
employing procedures that will validate a hypothesis or theory is based on
a conundrum: the impossible "correspondence theory" of truth that began
with Locke and was continued by Mach and the Vienna Circle positivists.
Scientific procedures are, on this account, those that establish and maintain
a correspondence between theory and world: that provide accurate descriptions
of an independent reality. But how could such a correspondence ever be
assessed? Who can be in a position to decide whether our ideas, our theories,
or even our observations correspond with an independent reality? Locke
himself saw the paradox:

> It is evident that the mind knows things not immediately, but only by the
intervention of the ideas it has of them. Our knowledge therefore is real only
so far as there is conformity between our ideas and the reality of things.
But what shall be here the criterion? How shall the mind, when it perceives
nothing but its own ideas, know that they agree with things themselves?
(Locke 1690/1975).

Locke tried to finesse his way out of this problem with an unconvincing
appeal to a correspondence "ordained and adapted to" "by the wisdom and
will of our Maker" (op. cit.). Again we find that method cannot be a matter of
procedure. Validating an explanatory account by establishing degree of cor-
respondence with reality cannot be done by procedure, because no pro-
cedure could possibly accomplish the desired comparison.

The logic of falsification (Popper 1959) seems at first glance to avoid
the correspondence problem, but it does not. This logic runs, in brief, as
follows. From the theory to be assessed, a hypothesis is derived. This hy-
pothesis makes explicit prediction about the character or co-occurrence of
states of affairs, given specified conditions (that may be brought about
through manipulation, if needed). The hypothesis is counted as falsified if
the prediction is observed to be false. A theory stands or falls, is "corrobo-
rated” or uncorroborated, on the basis of its power to make unfalsified predictions. Through rebuttal of predictions that are not realized, theories are refuted and rejected. We hang onto a theory whose predictions are not false, always bearing in mind that it may just have been lucky; a theory is never verified, it just escapes falsification. We never make positive claims that a theory is valid; only negative claims that it has survived the tests that its competitors failed.

Thus far, we seem to need no reference to notions and claims of correspondence. But note that the hypotheses, the conjectures or predictions, must be tested through observation of the states of affairs they describe. It is still assumed, then, that there are factual states of affairs that can be objectively, neutrally, described. Indeed, Popper believes that the correspondence theory has been “rehabilitated” (1979, p. 314) because, he claims, we can develop metalanguages that both refer to the statements in a theory and describe facts about the world, and so put them side by side for comparison. Popper fails to see this merely shifts the problem’s location: how does a metalanguage get the access to reality, to “a certain fact” (op. cit., 315) that would be needed to know that its “description” is correct? Kuhn (1970, p. 283) sees the need that falsification retains to somehow relate sentences and actual observations and experiments, and argues that Popper “is entirely silent about how it can do so.” Kuhn concludes that “rather than a logic, Sir Karl has provided an ideology; rather than methodological rules, he has supplied procedural maxims” (op. cit., 283). Even in the guise of falsificationism, empiricist method is actually a matter of maxims, not rules.

Rationalism

The Detached Point of View. The rationalist researcher aims for a viewpoint that is similar to that sought after in empiricism: an attitude of detachment from the concerns and interests of everyday life that supposedly leads, through abstraction, to clarity. Descartes’ own account of his meditations provides a clear example of this aim. Descartes deliberately cultivated a special attitude of detachment; to prepare himself he made a concerted effort to abstract himself from all practical involvements and their attendant cares, predicaments and significances, in order to engage in exercises of reflection and cogitation. He aimed for a physical setting and a state of mind where he could be devoted solely to his inquiry, with no other interests or distractions, generally by retreating to a comfy chair by the fire. “Sitting by the fire, wearing a dressing gown” (1641/1968, p. 96) he describes his technique: “I shall now close my eyes, stop up my ears, turn away all my senses, even efface from my thought all images of corporeal things” (op. cit., 113), aiming to get to a point where “my mind is free from all cares” (op. cit., 95).
This aspect of Descartes' method is an unwitting attempt to establish the kind of engagement that Heidegger calls the "present-at-hand" (Heidegger 1927/1962; cf. Packer 1985). This is a mode of detachment from practical activity, and Heidegger argues that it is derivative and privative: experience in this mode is distorted, a shadow of the kind of understanding provided by concerned involvement. Again it is evident that what is going on here is not the application of an interpretation-free procedure; it is the adoption of a certain kind of "detached involvement" with the world, a short-lived laying aside of one concerns and interests. Rationalist method also turns out not to be what it claims to be.

Intuitions of Correctness. Recall that a rationalist account of a psychological phenomenon aims at a reconstruction of the formal structures that underlie appearances. For instance, slips of the tongue might be explained with a computer simulation of cognitive processes of retrieval from memory, limited-capacity processing, and output production. Now the phenomena themselves don't provide any guidance for assessing the reconstruction. Rather, this is a matter of showing that a reconstruction is consistent and complete. In practice this means, first, demonstrating that the system follows its own rules and, second, that the output carries a sense of appropriateness; that it accords with "the intuitive knowledge of competent subjects" (Habermas 1979, 9). For instance, in our tongue-slip example, the program should not only be able to use its rules to generate slips we've observed, it should also make new slips of its own. And these should seem appropriately "slippery" to us. Similarly, the syntactic rules of a Transformational Grammar can be examined to see that they will generate sentences, and novel sentences must be examined to decide whether they seem "grammatical." The first of these is a straightforward matter, but the second leads to problems. Appeals of this type, to an intuitive sense that a particular rational reconstruction satisfies the relevant criterion—be it one of logical indubitability, linguistic equivalence, moral adequacy, or slippiness—can be found from Descartes to Chomsky. Descartes resolved to "accept nothing in my judgments beyond what presented itself so clearly and distinctly to my mind, that I should have no occasion to doubt it" (Descartes, cited in Williams 1978, 32). Saussure made the same assumption that indubitable intuitions can be found. He "seems to assume that the native speaker is normally able to make a correct identification of features of linguistic structure, by some simple process of introspection and reflection" (Harris 1987, 11). Harris points out that this appeal to intuition is central to Saussure's structuralist project, not just an afterthought: "The theoretical significance of this assumption it would be difficult to exaggerate. Only its unquestioned acceptance will justify Saussure's lack of concern with providing any systematic 'discovery procedure' for the identification of linguistic signs." In just the same way, for Chomsky the reconstruction of
linguistic competence must "meet the empirical conditions of conforming, in a mass of crucial and clear cases, to the linguistic intuition of the native speaker" (Chomsky 1965, 21).

Despite their long history, intuitions of this kind provide, at best, dubious validation of a formal explanatory reconstruction. First, intuition and logic can go in contrary directions. For this reason, in mathematics there has long been an effort to replace intuitions of validity with formal proof (Hahn 1933/1980). Second, intuitions may carry a sense of clarity and certainty that turns out to be illusory. We have seen that empiricist inquiry involves a hidden, and indefensible, assumption that an observer has direct, unproblematic access to the real world. Rationalist inquiry involves an equally suspect assumption that we can have accurate intuitive knowledge about the operation of some portion of our cognitive apparatus. (Psychologists especially should doubt this!) Habermas apparently finds acceptable the consequence that "linguistic intuitions can be 'false' only if they come from incompetent speakers" (1979, p. 212). Such a view ignores the likelihood that even people we would not consider incompetent (researchers included) may have a partial, incomplete or distorted understanding of themselves and what they are doing. It also overlooks the fact that the judgments being requested (grammatical well-formedness, semantic equivalence, moral adequacy) require supposition of a putative setting or usage. Intuitions draw upon and reproduce a background understanding of typical situations and usual aims, an understanding which is however not part of the reconstructed competence. And, viewed in this light, intuitive judgments turn out to involve interpretation: they appeal to and grow out of areas of know-how, skill, style, and expertise that elude formalization. So, to return to our main theme, the appeal to intuitions as a basis for evaluating a reconstruction can hardly be said to involve the simple application of procedures or operations.

In light of the dubious status of their claims to successfully define scientific method in terms of interpretation-free procedures or techniques, it is perhaps not too strong to say that rationalism and empiricism are fundamentally ideological stances. Reports of research framed within each of these perspectives (accounts both ancient and modern) deal not so much with what is done in systematic inquiry as with what it is wished could be done. Unwarrantable claims are made, and both empiricism and rationalism cover up the role and particular character of human interests and concerns. For if method cannot be reduced to procedure and technique, it follows that, here as before, what empiricist and rationalist researchers do is not what they claim to be doing. If the two aspects of traditional objectivist inquiry that we have discussed—establishing a point of view and evaluating an explanation—are not procedures, what is going on? Both empiricism and rationalism turn out to contain a hidden interpretive component. Psychological inquiry involves
the researcher forming a relationship with research participants, and assessing and evaluating, communicating and acting on what has been learned. The relationship will involve an attitude or posture on the researcher's part; the evaluation will appeal to shared values and norms.

**Does Interpretive Inquiry Have a Method?**

The tacit assumption in traditional psychological inquiry that scientific method must involve only technique or procedure explains a curious anxiety about method that runs through the interpretive research literature. In large part, the attraction of an interpretive approach lies in the relief it offers from the procedural strictures of experimentalist psychology, which many of us feel loosens our grip on the baby in an effort to ensure that the bathwater is handled properly. Experimental design and statistical analysis, for example, are often taught as though they are keys that will unlock any psychological puzzle-box, rather than as adjuncts to an understanding of people and their actions.

Perhaps in reaction to these strictures, some who have adopted an interpretive stance have argued that hermeneutics has **no** method. In this volume Misgeld and Jardine come closest to this position. They cite Gadamer's claim that "the problem of hermeneutics goes beyond the limits that the concept of method sets to modern science. The understanding and the interpretation of texts is not merely a concern of science, but is obviously part of the total human experience of the world. The hermeneutic phenomenon is basically not a problem of method at all. It is not concerned with a method of understanding, by means of which texts are subjected to scientific investigation like all other objects of experience" (Gadamer 1960/1986, xi). But what Gadamer calls "Method" (with capital M) and sets up in opposition to "truth" is not the actual methods of science but the sloganistic statements of positivism; explicitly the canons of induction laid out by Hume and Mill, and by extension the procedures of hypothesis and deduction asserted by Popper. As Bernstein points out:

Gadamer tends to rely on an image of science which the postempiricist philosophy and history of science have called into question .... Method [in natural science] is more like hermeneutical understanding than Gadamer frequently acknowledges, and when it comes to validating competing understandings and interpretations we are confronted with the type of critical problems that are so fundamental for understanding scientific inquiry (Bernstein 1983, 168).

In other words Gadamer's distinction between Method and understanding is somewhat overdrawn, and perpetuates a mythology about the way
the natural sciences operate (and cf. Warnke 1987; Weinsheimer 1985). The same mythology, of course, finds expression in the empiricist (especially, but the rationalist also) conception of proper research method in psychology. A fundamental change in our role as researchers and inquirers—such as a hermeneutic stance requires—surely involves a correlative change in our sense of the appropriate way to conduct our inquiries. Our understanding of method must change. But to throw method away entirely, as Gadamer does, is to accept the very mythology that needs to be debunked.

Scientific method is not interpretation-free procedure and technique. We have suggested that even in the traditional stances it involves two aspects: establishing a point of view, and evaluating the account that results. If this is so, then interpretive inquiry has a method that can be called scientific, because the chapters in this volume are amply involved with both these aspects. Of course the point of view is not one of objectivity or detachment, and evaluation does not take the form of validation. Furthermore, in the myth of procedure, these two aspects of method are described as two poles, the start and end of inquiry. First, we are told, develop the objective, detached attitude that will be necessary to observe and reflect. Then build a theory (or at least a hypothesis). Finally, end by evaluating what you have by applying rigorous validity tests. From the interpretive stance, the researcher's point of view and the evaluation of explanatory accounts are not seen as being separated in this way, but as in a constant dialogue. Rather than opposite ends of a straight line, they are on the circumference of a circle: the hermeneutic circle. Establishing a point of view, a perspective, is the forward arc, and evaluation forms the reverse arc. Getting a perspective, adopting a point of view, is a forward movement because of a phenomenon which Heidegger identified and analyzed, and which he called "projection."

*The Essential Circularity of Understanding*

One of Heidegger's foremost contributions to our views of both philosophy and science has been to show that there is a circularity to understanding. When we try to study some new phenomenon we are always thrown forward into it. Unless it is totally alien we will have some preliminary understanding of what kind of phenomenon it is, and of what possible things might happen to it. This means that we both understand it and at the same time misunderstand it; we inevitably shape the phenomenon to fit a "fore-structure" that has been shaped by expectations and preconceptions, and by our lifestyle, culture and tradition. Understanding always takes place within this horizon or framework that is "projected" by human being ("Dasein"): 
Understanding has in itself the existential structure which we call “projection” [Entwurf] ... Projecting has nothing to do with comporting oneself towards a plan that has been thought out, and in accordance with which Dasein arranges its Being. On the contrary, any Dasein has, as Dasein, already projected itself; and as long as it is, it is projecting. As long as it is, Dasein always has understood itself and always will understand itself in terms of possibilities (Heidegger 1927/1962, 185).

It is important to emphasize that the hermeneutic circle is ontological rather than simply epistemological or methodological. Projection is, first of all, a structure of our way of being in the world, our living, our actions and interactions, before it characterizes our knowledge and our sciences. “Understanding is projective because the Being of Dasein is projective” (Caputo 1987, 61). Projection is an existential structure; our existence is such (unlike that of the objects around us) that we are thrown into future ways of acting that are made possible by our cultural and personal history. We live toward a future whose possibilities are both created and limited by the present and the past.

Because this circularity is essential, intrinsic and unavoidable, the empiricist and rationalist attempts to break away from interpretation and reach an epistemological foundation were inevitably futile. As Caputo (1987, p. 61) puts it, “to understand means to project a certain horizonal framework within which the being is to be understood. Entities can appear only insofar as a certain horizon of Being has already been laid out for them in advance ... [This means] there are no pure, uninterpreted facts of the matter but only beings already set forth in a certain frame, projected in their proper Being.”

The circularity of understanding, then, is that we understand in terms of what we already know. But the circularity is not. Heidegger argues, a “vicious” one where we simply confirm our prejudices, it is an “essential” one without which there would be no understanding at all. And the circle is complete; there is accommodation as well as assimilation. If we are persevering and open, our attention will be drawn to the projective character of our understanding and—in the backward arc, the movement of return—we gain an increased appreciation of what the fore-structure involves, and where it might best be changed.

In interpretive inquiry, projection has finally become acknowledged as an inevitable and essential part of our understanding, both everyday and scientific. Consequently, the choice of a point of view or perspective often becomes a careful and deliberative one. And it is often seen to involve establishing a relationship with those who participate with us, and working out a mode of engagement with them. Far from being detached and neutral, we need to adopt a perspective that is engaged and concerned. In our science
as much as in our everyday living we shouldn't try to throw away either our culture or our past. Knowledge can't be built (or even rebuilt) from scratch, nor can it be guaranteed satisfactory for all people and all times.

We talked earlier of an anxiety about method in interpretive research, an anxiety, we argued, that drove Gadamer to deny that interpretive inquiry has a method. The same anxiety can be seen in the fact that one issue seems to arise again and again in discussions of interpretation: that of ensuring "validity in interpretation" (to borrow a phrase from the title of an early and influential book on this topic, Hirsch 1967). Not surprisingly this issue is raised by empiricist and rationalist critics of interpretive inquiry, but it also recurs among practitioners. There is a central concern behind this issue of validity: that interpretations should not turn out to reflect the prejudices and biases of the interpreter. And this concern in turn stems from a recognition, although often not fully explicit and articulated, of the circularity of understanding.

The concern is not an unreasonable one: every day we are confronted with one-sided accounts of events, political and personal, that claim to be "interpretations" but are partisan and slanted. But the answer to it will not be the identification of "validation procedures" for interpretation. Rather, the answer lies in an examination of the flip side of the circle, the reverse movement of evaluation. This aspect deserves detailed consideration in its own right, but we shall postpone this to an Endpiece.

Some Final Thoughts

We've said that when we conduct hermeneutic inquiry we must look for a starting place, one that will vary from inquiry to inquiry, and not an absolute foundation. Something more follows from this. Objectivist psychology, rationalist or empiricist, has sought a foundation in order to build something that will rest upon it: a fixed construction, an edifice. Generally the plans for this construction have sketched it as a unification of all the sciences; an accumulation and systemization of all knowledge. Hermeneutic inquiry is not oriented toward such a grand design. Any final construction that would be a resting point for scientific inquiry represents an illusion that must be resisted. If all knowledge were to be at last collected in some gigantic encyclopaedia this would mark not the triumph of science so much as the loss of our human ability to encounter new concerns and uncover fresh puzzles. So although hermeneutic inquiry proceeds from a starting place, a self-consciously interpretive approach to scientific investigation does not seek to come to an end at some final resting place, but works instead to keep discussion open and alive, to keep inquiry under way. Seen in that light, the chapters that follow make exciting, provocative reading.
Our purpose here has been to provide an inoculation against the twin maladies of rationalism and empiricism; ills that we feel are stunting our discipline. Once the reader has been protected from them we hope the chapters that follow will, in their accounts of interpretive investigations, induce a fever of a more energizing character. We are aware we have not provided a neat, succinct account of how interpretive inquiry escapes the pitfalls and solves the problems we have argued traditional inquiry has fallen into. In part this is the role of the other chapters in this volume. But in part we must admit we find ourselves in agreement with Clifford Geertz when he says:

I do not believe that what 'hermeneutics' needs is to be reified into a para-science, as epistemology was, and there are enough general principles in the world already .... The stuttering quality of not only my own efforts along these lines but of interpretive social science generally is a result not (as is often enough suggested by those who like their statements flat) of a desire to disguise evasion as some new form of depth or to turn one's back on the claims of reason. It is a result of not knowing, in so uncertain an undertaking, quite where to begin, or, having anyhow begun, which way to move. (Geertz 1983, 5).
Notes and References

Overview

References


NOTES AND REFERENCES


Introduction

Notes

1. And Musil ought to know. Although best known as a novelist, Robert Musil wrote his dissertation on Ernst Mach’s work (Musil 1908/1982).
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Notes and References


Chapter 1

Notes

1. The author wishes to express his thanks to Lu Sucholaski for her help in transcribing endless field notes and to Margo Addison for her excellent comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of this chapter.

2. Primary-care physicians are those physicians who specialize in family medicine, pediatrics, and general internal medicine. Physicians who specialize in obstetrics-gynecology are sometimes also considered to be primary-care physicians.


4. For the most part, I was not impressed with the quality or conception of the research I encountered. At an annual workshop of the Society for Research and Education in Primary Care Internal Medicine, researchers admitted that the desired outcomes of medical training were unclear; no one knew what the relevant "variables" were. While this statement indicated the emptiness of positivist research endeavors, I saw the possibility inherent in the statement: perhaps medical researchers would begin to reflect on their own practices.