

Qualitative Inquiry and the Self-Realization of Psychological Science

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Abstract

It is commonly assumed that qualitative inquiry in psychology, whatever its virtues, does not lend itself as readily to the development of (real, true) scientific knowledge as those ostensibly more objective approaches found in quantitative inquiry. At the same time, it is also assumed that qualitative inquiry aspires to be more faithful to “real-life” phenomena in all of their richness. The situation is thus a paradoxical one: Despite the fact that qualitative inquiry seeks to uphold what is, arguably, the first and most fundamental responsibility of scientific knowing—fidelity to the phenomena—it continues to be questioned, if not condemned, for falling short of the scientific mark. Bearing this paradox in mind, it is argued herein that the social sciences in general, and psychology in particular, have operated with a problematically restrictive view of science and that qualitative inquiry can be instrumental in the fashioning of a more inclusive, capacious, and indeed adequate view. A corollary argument is that it can do so to the degree that it becomes more artful in at least a portion of its work. The paradoxical promise of qualitative inquiry thus lies in its potential to artfully re-imagine both the meaning and the practice of psychological science.

Keywords

art, hermeneutics, objectivity, qualitative inquiry, science

What Can We Say?

The year was 1996, the event was the Psi Chi (National Honor Society for Psychology in the States) induction ceremony, I was the featured speaker, and I was determined to speak my piece on behalf of qualitative inquiry. In fact, what I proposed in the talk, titled “Narrative Psychology and the Study of Human Lives (Or, the Importance of Category C),” was making qualitative inquiry as integral a part of our department’s curriculum as all the rest. “After many, many years and many false starts,” I said, “psychology is finally arriving at an appropriate way of speaking about the human realm.” This language, I proclaimed (somewhat self-servingly), was tied to the idea of narrative, which I described as “the interpretive study of human lives, in their ‘natural habitats’ (as in ‘real life’ rather than the lab); in time (i.e., over the course of time); and, finally, in culture.” So far so good. Now, “Just in case some of you out there think this new movement is a fantasy construction of mine,” I continued, “I might note that there are actually a whole lot of “name brand” psychologists—Jerome Bruner, Carol Gilligan, and others—who are moving in this direction, seeing in the idea of narrative an important inroad into issues that, for too long, have fallen outside the scope of “legitimate” psychology.”

Name brand psychologists, of course, don’t necessarily translate into good psychology, I acknowledged; sometimes it’s just the opposite. “But in this case,” I said, “I’m convinced that there is more real momentum in this area of the discipline than there has ever been before . . . I won’t be so audacious as to claim that it’s *the* wave of the future. But it’s almost certainly *a* wave.”

And on I went, trying to tell everyone what it meant to ride the wave and how it might transform not only our department but the entire discipline: “Holy Cross, in its own modest way”—it seemed like a bit of modesty was in order—“has the potential to become something of a leader in charting this new area of psychology,” partly because there were several people doing narrative work in the department but mainly because “we’re in the process of actually making these issues a regular part of our curriculum.” At the time, the curriculum consisted of Introductory Psychology, Statistics, Research Methods, History and Systems of Psychology, and selections from what was

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called "Category A," which covered psychology as a natural science (through courses such as Physiological Psychology, Learning, Sensation and Perception, and Cognition and Memory), and "Category B," psychology as a social science (through courses such as Social Psychology, Abnormal Psychology, Developmental Psychology, and Personality). Well, I asked, "what, if anything, is left? That is, what remains of structured psychological interest after we've subtracted Category A and B phenomena?" The answer was clear:

What remains . . . is the living, breathing, loving, suffering, praying, dying human being. Or, to put the matter another way, what remains is precisely the being who learns, senses and perceives, thinks and remembers, who develops a personality and is engaged socially, with others, and occasionally behaves in somewhat abnormal fashion. Or, to put the matter another way yet again—and to return to the definition I offered earlier—what we're talking about here are human lives, real human lives, existing in time and in culture.

And so, to make a long story short, it was high time to launch Category C: psychology as a human science. I then went to describe both the defining features of the category and the kinds of courses that would likely fall under it. The students were excited, as they generally are in these kinds of situations; what I was describing to them is what they had once thought psychology was actually about. A few of my colleagues seemed interested too. I'd made the whole thing seem so cutting-edge, humane, and, not least, Holy Cross-compatible (we take pride in emphasizing our commitment to "the whole person," engaging students in "basic human questions," and so on), that the entire performance emerged as a truly winning one. Until the very end, when a well-respected colleague came up to me, expressed some appreciation for what I had said, and then asked, "Why do you call yourself a psychologist?" And what did any of it have to do with *science*?

I might mention one additional story in this context. It was a few years later, I had put myself up for full professor, and the day had come for me to receive my departmental report. I wasn't particularly anxious at the prospect; knowing that most of my colleagues probably hadn't read what I had written but saw that it was getting published somehow, I figured things would go okay. Then I received the report. And what the cover letter said was that my colleagues very much enjoyed my work but had absolutely no way of gauging its value for psychology. Consequently, they had passed my dossier on to the English Department, who would clearly be able to make better sense of things than they could. *What?! Just kidding*, they said. They were of course kinder this time around, but of course the question being posed was much the same. Why do you call yourself a psychologist? And what place does your work have in psychological science?

I wasn't at all prepared for the first encounter. The second I was able to brush off as a (more or less) good-natured, teasing gesture. Now that I have had the time to really digest these questions, however, I believe I am a much more prepared to provide a serviceable answer—or at least the one I would want to provide if I really wanted to engage them in the issues at hand. It would go something like this: "*I'm* the one who's doing true science here! Not, of course, the kind of (objectifying, reductive, positivistic) science you've been reared on but one that's much more adequate to the phenomena we're (supposedly) interested in learning about! In fact [I might go on to say], the promise of qualitative/Category C inquiry is that it can lead to the *self-realization* of psychology itself—that is, the coming-into-being of its distinctive potential as an arena of scientific inquiry." After putting forth this audacious assertion, I would almost certainly have to explain myself. "*You?*" they might say. "True science? Self-realization of the discipline? What *on earth* are you talking about?" "Well," I might respond, "let me begin by offering a premise that undergirds much of what I have to say. And that is that much of the work that gets done in psychology, in its aim of being scientifically objective, actually ends up distorting the phenomena and in this sense ends up being *less*, rather than more, faithful to reality." There will likely be some measure of confusion at this point if not outright disdain: "What *we* do is objective," our colleagues may say. "What *you* do is clearly not." Operating from the framework of mainstream social scientific inquiry, there is some justification for them saying so. But the conception of objectivity from which they are working needs to be interrogated, radically.

As Heidegger (1977) has pointed out in his essay on "Science and reflection," time was when the "real" connoted that sort of fullness and plenitude that many of us would associate with the fabric of human lives. Eventually, however, the meaning of the real would change, moving in a much more discrete, circumscribable direction. It is "neither an accident nor a harmless caprice in the change of meaning of mere terms that, since the beginning of the modern period in the seventeenth century, the word 'real' has meant the same thing as 'certain'" (p. 162). Nor it is accidental that "objectivity" came to be associated with that which could be objectified, that is, encapsulated, contained, as object. What we therefore find in a good portion of social scientific inquiry as we approach the modern era is the idea that we achieve the greatest degree of objectivity by limiting our objects of interest to the most containable—and, in turn, measurable. So it is that we can study personality (for instance) by exploring questionnaires and scales, which isolate variables and permit us to see what's related to what. I have no interest whatsoever in condemning personality

inventories and the like. But nor would I want to mistake their surface scientificity for a *truly* scientific approach. That is simply because what is being explored in this context are *abstractions* rather than that “living, breathing, loving, suffering, praying, dying human being” I referred to earlier (see also Freeman, 1997).

Bearing these issues in mind, let me translate this premise we have been considering into a paradox of sorts: *Insofar as the living, breathing, loving, suffering, praying, dying human being is in fact of primary concern, and insofar as the first responsibility of science—broadly conceived—is to be adequate to the phenomena, then much of psychology hasn’t been nearly scientific enough.* It may of course be argued that this particular image of the human being is not a primary concern—indeed, that it can’t be. It may be deemed too messy, amorphous, and ambiguous and thus better addressed by poets and painters, those more willing to get down and dirty with the recalcitrant stuff of humanity. In psychology, there is some truth to this, which is precisely why it hasn’t been more of a central focus in the discipline. But this restriction-of-view is surely a problem for any science worthy of the name.

So, the question now is: What exactly is to be done to allow psychology to become *truly*, rather than falsely or superficially, scientific? Before trying to answer this question, I feel compelled to offer something of a personal disclaimer. It might seem strange that I am using the words “science” and “scientific” as much as I am. The truth of the matter is, much of the work I do is probably closer to the humanities. Having said this, I think it is important, still, to employ a language for articulating what we do that our non-qualitative colleagues can get near. Without building this sort of bridge, we run the risk not only of further isolation and marginality but also of a kind of impotence vis-à-vis the discipline. What, then, can we say in response to those of our colleagues who are inclined to “wonder” about our contribution to the hallowed pantheon of Science? In all honesty, I don’t know that I would tell them exactly what I am about to say here—drawing on some of the finer points of Heideggerian thought may not fly with that crowd—but it would be something like the tenfold list of ideas I am about to enumerate. This might even be considered an explanatory “manifesto” of sorts, geared essentially toward articulating some of the fundamental principles central to qualitative inquiry, in psychology and beyond.

Responding to Our Colleagues: A 10-Point Explanatory “Manifesto”

“Why,” I had been asked, “do you call yourself a psychologist?” Why not a literary critic? Or a philosopher? Or an intellectual dilettante, scouring other disciplines for whatever might suit your own idiosyncratic predilections? My colleague didn’t actually ask these follow-up questions, but

I am quite sure they were there. Of course I could have just said, “Who are *you* to be the gatekeeper of the discipline?” or “Why are you being so hostile?” or “Life is short; live and let live.” I could also have said, “You know what? You’re right. I have no business at all calling myself a psychologist. I apologize for having done so. May I keep my office?” Oh, the possibilities! But no; it was important to try to play the game in some way—or at least it seemed so at the time. (Sometimes I really have no interest in doing so at all.) What might I have said to this person and my other colleagues had I the presence of mind (and the time) to explain why, through it all, qualitative inquiry of the sort I had proposed in that fateful talk was not only in the service of psychological science—broadly conceived—but was in fact instrumental in the discipline’s very self-realization *as* a science? In line with the paradoxical premise considered before, I might offer the following responses:

Response 1: “Appearances Aside, Qualitative Inquiry Is All About Objectivity.”

This opener would likely throw them for a loop. It may well be throwing some readers for a loop too. “*Objectivity?*” you might be saying to yourself. “I thought we were *against* that.” Some clarification is therefore in order. “We are anxiety-ridden animals,” Iris Murdoch (1970) writes, “Our minds are continually active, fabricating an anxious, usually self-preoccupied, often falsifying veil which partially conceals the world” (p. 84). Objectivity, therefore, has to do with our capacity to “unself” ourselves, to resist our own egocentric fantasies and reveries and to thereby see what is really there, before us. We can extend this idea in the present context by saying that it has to do with our capacity to resist those objectifying schemes that occlude, rather than reveal, reality. I have already suggested that much of psychology employs just these sorts of schemes, such that there results a kind of *faux* objectivity, or *pseudo-objectivity*. But if Murdoch is right, there is a much deeper form of objectivity, one that entails a kind of mindful beholding of whatever object comes before us. Following her lead, we might therefore speaking of an *objectivity before objectivity*—which is to say, a form of objectivity that honors and respects its object no matter how messy, elusive, and ungraspable it may be. It doesn’t matter much to me whether we continue to use the word “objective.” If we do, then it would clearly be important to rethink it, along the lines being drawn here. It might also be desirable, however, to use different words, to articulate a different language, for better conveying what it means to be adequate to the phenomena. “Fidelity” or “faithfulness” are possibilities; there are others as well. Whatever words we choose, the main aim is to practice a mode of mindful, attentive beholding that preserves the other in his or her otherness. For those critics of qualitative work who see it as just too “subjective,” we therefore have

in hand a good response: "On the contrary, the main aim, for many of us, is to be as objective as we possibly can." (So there!)

Response 2: "The Key to Objectivity Is Subjectivity."

This one, also seemingly paradoxical in its way, could be tougher to defend. Students often hear, in Research Methods courses and the like, that it is imperative that we, as researchers, "keep ourselves out of the picture" as much as possible; otherwise, our biases will intrude and the data will become contaminated. For this reason, we have devices such as one-way mirrors that are designed, explicitly, for the purpose of maintaining the proper distance from those we are observing. But there is another way entirely of looking at this situation. As I sometimes ask my students, how do you actually get to *know* someone? The answer is simple enough: You spend time with them, you have conversations, and so on. And so, your presence in their lives, far from being some sort of intrusion, is in fact the condition of possibility for you to have any understanding of them at all. Why (I then ask) should it be so utterly different in psychology? This doesn't mean we have to go home with the people we study or anything like that. What it does mean is that the more subjectively engaged we are—the more we are connected to them rather than dis-connected, dispassionately, from them—the more likely it is that we will be faithful to the realities they are living. To put the matter a bit more formally: Psychology, operating with the "ideal" of methodological detachment, tends to be largely *monological* in its orientation: The research subject is given a test or fills out a questionnaire or is observed through one of those one-way mirrors while the researcher remains behind the scenes. This more objectifying mode surely has its place, and in one sense of the word it is in the service of objectivity. But in another, deeper sense, it's not. What is required here is a more *dialogical* or *relational* perspective, one that acknowledges the rich subjectivity needed to truly *see* and *hear* the people before us.

Response 3: "Hermeneutics Is Absolutely Central to the Scientific Endeavor."

This could be a tough one too, and for similar reasons. The process of interpretation—the *hermeneutical* process (e.g., Gadamer, 1982; Ricoeur, 1981a)—is frequently considered to be a problem for mainstream psychology. We can interpret the findings, the results, in the discussion section; all sciences have to do that. But generally speaking (the story often goes), you don't want to rely on the interpretive process when it comes to the data themselves. What generally gets done, therefore, in experimental work especially, is that data are sought that essentially obviate, or at least severely

minimize, interpretation: We will study behaviors, neurotransmitters, incidences of this or that discrete phenomenon. This approach too has its place. But there is no way, I would argue, this interpretation-free (or interpretation-"light") perspective on inquiry can do justice to the lived human world. For, insofar as we live in a world of culture, language, *meaning*, it is essential that psychology, or at least a portion of it, include the interpretive process. Doing so is not to be seen as some sort of "necessary evil" either. Not unlike subjectivity, it too is the very condition of possibility for our making any sense at all of the realities before us. It is true that the interpretive process can, and sometimes does, "intrude" on these realities. Put in hermeneutical terms, there can be "bad" prejudice, preconceptions, or projections that occlude what's there rather than reveal it. But there is "good" and necessary prejudice too, a preparedness, or "pre-understanding," that allows meaning to emerge. "Interpretation, therefore," we might say, "far from working against the cause of science, is very much in its service."

Response 4: "Cultural Realities Are Part and Parcel of Psychological Realities."

There is one very basic sense in which this is so, and it has been recognized by those who would much prefer that psychology remain as quantitatively rigorous as it can. Here, I am referring to the idea that culture is itself "ingredient" not only to human personhood but, on some level, to human *nature*. That is to say, our nature comes into being in and through culture; it is the medium, so to speak, in which *human* being emerges. There is another, more immediately relevant sense, however, in which cultural realities are ingredient to psychological realities. I noted earlier that one of the reasons for the primacy of interpretation is the fact of our existence in culture, especially in language. What this means is that a portion of the discipline *must* become cultural—"local," as Clifford Geertz (1985) might put it—in its approach. And so, as important as it may be to seek replicable, context-independent findings (this being another one of those aims associated with real and true science), it is equally important, I would argue, to study more local, context-specific phenomena. Whether this ought to be considered *truer* science is, I suppose, open to question. But there is no reason whatsoever to assume that cultural realities have no place in science. On the contrary, once again: insofar as human lives are lived in context, in the world, in culture—in language, social relations, communities, in intricate webs of quite specific rules, conventions, beliefs, genres of communication, and so on—then not only is there no "escaping" the cultural dimension but this very dimension, again, must itself become a part of the scientific project.

Response 5: "Studying Human Lives Requires Narrative."

There is a very obvious sense in which this is true: Narrative is the natural "method," one might say, of charting the movement of human lives over time, at least in the contemporary West (see Freeman, 1997). But there is another, more "scientifically respectable" way of insisting on the centrality of narrative in studying human lives. In written discourse, Paul Ricoeur (1981a) has suggested, there is a kind of "fixing," or "fixation," that takes place in the form of the text. This text can, and will, be read and received differently by different interpreters, in different times and places. With written discourse, therefore, the author's intention and the meaning of the text no longer coincide: "The text's career," as Ricoeur (1981a) had put it, "escapes the finite horizon lived by its author" (p. 201). The same may be said of human action: Something happens, and it means something, however indeterminate, at the time. But this meaning can and does change, as subsequent events come along and retroactively transfigure it. The meaning of the action—and, more generally, the meaning of the *past*—thus gets revised, rewritten. My own interest in hindsight and in the process of "rewriting the self" is very much about this process (see Freeman, 1993, 2010a). Self-reflection and self-understanding, as we have come to know it, is narrative at its core.

Ricoeur also tells us that in making sense of the human world, as inquirers, it is not enough to simply chart the movement of lives, chronicle-style, following the arrow of time. That may be a valuable thing to do at times. But when it comes to making sense of human action, and human lives, a more complex conceptualization is required. What happens in narrative—as in life—is a kind of two-way temporal traffic, such that what comes before "leads to" what comes later but what comes later refigures the meaning and significance of what's come before. Ricoeur (1981b) speaks in this context of the *episodic* and *configurational* dimensions of narrative—the first referring to the sequence of events that transpires and the second to the poetic act of "seeing-together," as he puts it, that synthesizes a whole out of a succession. What this suggests is that interpretation, in the human realm, is also narrative at its core and is bound to the distinctive features of human being-in-time. The turn to narrative is therefore in the service of fidelity to who we are, as beings-in-time. Bearing this in mind, there is an important challenge that emerges here, and it is one that is particularly significant for narrative work. I am referring here to the challenge of finding language that *does justice* to this reality, that opens it up, discloses its potential. What kind of language is this, and how can it be made a part of science? What does psychological science require for such disclosure to occur?

Response 6: "Science Frequently Requires Art."

In a well-known passage from *Studies on Hysteria*, Freud (1955) expresses a measure of puzzlement, and embarrassment, over the nature of his writing: "I have not always been a psychotherapist," he reminds us. "Like other neuro-pathologists, I was trained to employ local diagnoses and electro-prognosis, and it still strikes myself as strange that the case histories I write should read like short stories and that, as one might say, they lack the serious stamp of science." His only consolation is that "the nature of the subject is responsible for this . . . The fact is that local diagnosis and electrical reactions lead nowhere in the study of hysteria, whereas a detailed description of mental processes such as we are accustomed to find in the works of imaginative writers enables me . . . to obtain at least some kind of insight into the course of that affection." (pp. 160-161) What this passage suggests to me—and as I have argued elsewhere (e.g., Freeman, 2007a)—is that, in at least a portion of qualitative inquiry, it makes good sense to move toward a more *poetic* mode of writing—not for the sake of ornamentation or flourish or "romance" but for the sake of using language, using *words*, in such a way that they can carry the weight, and the depth, of the phenomena at hand. There are of course other, more performative modes of inquiry as well. These too can be extremely valuable in carrying this desired weight and depth. Now, one might argue that these more artful modes, oriented as they are to particularity, cannot approach the sort of generalizing function that science is assumed to have. But there can also be what might be called a "resonant" particularity in such work, one that, in its very richness and detail, points beyond itself and allows us to see, and understand, the world anew. This brings us to another seemingly paradoxical idea that is really at the heart of this article: *the more art, the more science*.

Response 7: "There Can Be Great Value in Such Artful Inquiry, Useless Though It May Appear."

It may seem difficult to justify and defend this kind of work. It doesn't seek to predict and control. It may not yield profound implications for policy. And it may not seek to change the world—not directly, at any rate. (This is undoubtedly one of the reasons why qualitative psychologists seeking to carry out artful inquiry generally don't get great big grants from government agencies and the like.) This manifest uselessness notwithstanding, such inquiry surely possesses some measure of value, even virtue. For, having the opportunity to behold reality in its fullness—in this case, the

reality of human lives, in all of their messiness and possible beauty—can serve to further *humanize* us and enlarge our understanding of who we are and what is possible. Indeed, just as art is sometimes said to be as much about the possible as the actual, so too with the stories we tell and the other forms of qualitative inquiry we pursue: They can awaken readers to other modes of life and, in so doing, can open up new regions of being. Alongside such awakening, qualitative inquiry, artfully crafted, can serve to strengthen such noble virtues as empathy, sympathy, and compassion. On the face of it, these two functions—the aesthetic and the ethical—may seem far removed from science, at least as customarily conceived. It might also seem like they don't have anything to do with applied issues, the world of practical affairs. But there is another way entirely to think about this issue. For, the more that qualitative inquiry can carry this aesthetic and ethical weight—the more it can evoke and appeal to readers by virtue of its depth and humanity—the more likely it is that they will *care* enough to want to *do* something on behalf of the people in question.

Response 8: "What We're Seeking to Know, Ultimately, Is Reality."

Plato occasionally voiced uncertainty and skepticism about the value of the arts—poetry, in particular—due to their distance from reality. A (somewhat) similar issue has emerged in discussions of narrative. Reality, it is sometimes assumed, is what goes on *now*, moment to moment. So, narrative, because it looks back upon experience, through the distanced perspective of the narrator, cannot help but distort reality in some way, or at least create a kind of illusory order that "life itself," moment-to-moment life, does not have. There is unquestionably an important distinction to be made here: The reality of the moment-to-moment isn't quite the same as what we see, what we *can* see, in retrospect, through memory and narrative. Nevertheless, I would suggest that narrative, rather than necessarily distorting or falsifying reality, can actually point the way toward a deeper, more capacious view of it than the one often presumed. Much the same may be said of qualitative inquiry more generally, especially when it moves in the direction of art. Indeed, the poet and critic Yves Bonnefoy (1989) has written, "this world which cuts itself off from the world seems to the person who creates it not only more satisfying than the first but also more real." Bonnefoy also speaks of the "impression of a reality at last fully incarnate, which comes to us, paradoxically, through words which have turned away from incarnation" (p. 164). In the context of narrative, I have spoken of such incarnational bearing-witness in terms of the aim of allowing the stories of those we study to "live on the page" (Freeman, 2007b). On one level, of course, this aim can never be met. (Strictly speaking, there is nothing alive on the pages of

our works.) But on another, deeper level, it surely can. Following our earlier consideration of the objectivity, we might speak here of a *reality before reality*. Bringing it into being is a most worthy aim.

Response 9: "In Disclosing Reality, We Also Seek to Speak the Truth."

There is a tendency, in academia especially, to see science and art in binary terms. Qualitative inquiry seeks to move beyond this way of thinking. Indeed, in an important sense, qualitative inquiry is precisely where art and science meet. It therefore has the capacity not only to lessen the distance between the two terms but also to reveal their latent meanings and hidden potentialities. But what exactly are these meanings and hidden potentialities? More to the point: How might we begin to think the deep affinities between science and art? And how might the idea of truth enter the picture?

In *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, Hans-Georg Gadamer (1986) asks a similar question: "What is the importance and significance of this particular experience which claims truth for itself, thereby denying that the universality expressed by the mathematical formulation of the laws of nature is the only kind of truth?" (pp. 16-17). And, "What is this truth that is encountered in the beautiful and can come to be shared? Certainly not the truth or universality to which we apply the conceptual universality of the understanding. Despite this, the kind of truth that we encounter in the experience of the beautiful does unambiguously make a claim to more than subjective validity." (p. 18) As Gadamer adds, "(W)hen we take aesthetic satisfaction in something, we do not relate it to a meaning which could ultimately be communicated in conceptual terms" (p. 20)—not fully, at any rate. "Art," therefore, "is only encountered in a form that resists pure conceptualization" (p. 37). Now, one might of course argue—as many have—that this is precisely what prevents art from speaking the truth. This view, however, presumes that the only route to truth is through conceptualization. That this is *one* route to truth seems fair enough. But it is surely not the only one. Indeed, if Heidegger (1977) is right, the truth of conceptuality, tied as it is to the idea of "objectness," that which can be encapsulated and contained as object, is a *secondary* form of truth, emerging out of a "more primordially fundamental" realm. In a distinct sense, he is therefore positing the existence of a *truth before truth*, one that is the very ground and source of those more discrete propositions, conceptualizations, and theories that have become enshrined in modern science. The irony is that what is secondary has been elevated to the primary, while what is primary has been demoted to the secondary. A principal aim of this article has been to redress this strange state of affairs by underscoring the importance of

exploring and embracing the more primordially fundamental realm out of which modern science grows.

Response 10: “And So, My Esteemed Colleagues, the Self-Realization of Psychological Science Is Through Qualitative Inquiry.”

Here, we reach the final paradox. As Heidegger (1977) writes,

Science sets upon the real. It orders it into place to the end that at any given time the real will exhibit itself as an interacting network, i.e., in surveyable series of related causes. The real thus becomes surveyable and capable of being followed out in its sequences. The real becomes secured in its objectness. From this there result spheres or areas of objects that scientific observation can entrap after its fashion. Entrapping representation, which secures everything in that objectness which is thus capable of being followed out, is the fundamental characteristic of the representing through which modern sciences corresponds to the real. (p. 168)

As suggested above, it is also the fundamental model of the idea of truth, with the result that other modes of attaining truth—such as those disclosed through art—become seen as lesser, inferior, perhaps purely subjective. But there may be another way of framing what science is and does. In keeping with what was said earlier regarding the ideas of “objectivity,” “reality,” and “truth,” I am speaking here of what might be considered a *science before science*. This science might be termed *poetic science* (e.g., Freeman, 2007b, 2011).

Given my work on narrative, it might seem strange for me to be using the idea of poetry in setting forth the promise of qualitative inquiry. In narrative, there is generally thought to be some measure of temporal order, a thread of continuity that links past and present, as well as an aspect of “emplotment” that renders it different from those sorts of semantic structures we tend to associate with the poetic. But there are two large reasons why the idea of poetry does well in this context to push us in the desired direction. The first has to do with its potential for openness, its refusal to be bound by coherent plotlines and the like. Rarely do our lives have tidy beginnings, middles, and ends and rarely do they possess the coherence of “classical” storylines. Bearing this in mind, some have questioned the very idea of narrative, finding in it a too-tidy home for the vagaries and vicissitudes of messy life (see especially Sartwell, 2000). From my perspective, however, there is no getting around or beyond narrative due to our very being-in-time and the nature of the process by which make—and re-make—sense of our lives. The challenge, therefore, is to rethink the idea of narrative so as to better accommodate life’s messiness, its twists and turns and unanticipated consequences (see Freeman, 2010b). One way of doing so is to push it in the

direction of poetry, poetic form. For, “At its best,” Jay Parini (2008) has written, “poetry is a language adequate to our experience” (p. 9).

The second reason for turning to the idea of poetry has to do with its very aims. Yves Bonnefoy (1989), from whom we heard earlier, recounts his youthful fascination with language, particularly “the ‘excess in words’ highlighted in surrealist writing.” But, “what are all the subtleties of language, after all, even turned upside down in a thousand different ways, next to the perception one can have, directly, mysteriously, of the movement of the leaves against the sky, or of the noise fruit makes when it falls into the grass?” What, indeed? “And always throughout this whole time I kept in mind, as an encouragement and even as a proof, the moment when the young reader opens passionately a great book and finds words, of course, but also things and people, and the horizon, and the sky: in short, a whole world given all at once to his thirst.” (Bonnefoy, 1989, p. 162) As Heidegger (1971) puts the matter, “The work holds open the open of the world” (p. 45).

For Heidegger, poetry is the world-opener *par excellence*, its foremost aim being to disclose what had heretofore been mute, inchoate. If this is so, it might plausibly be said that *the self-realization of psychology is through poetic science*. I am not suggesting that we begin to write poems about the people whose lives we explore (though there are worse things to do). Nor am I suggesting that poetry replace narrative as an organizing principle for research. What I am suggesting instead is that the poetic impulse, oriented as it is toward opening the open of the world, inform and infuse the work we do. Only then will we see more clearly the poetry of human lives. And only then will we have a science worthy of the name.

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