

Confounding the Grim Reaper: An Evaluation of Some Criticisms of Educational and Social Science Research

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According to a school of thought that has been gaining ground for about a century, the social sciences are best conceived as styles of humanistic inquiry akin to hermeneutics rather than as branches of naturalistic inquiry paralleling the natural or physical sciences. In the past decade or so, advocates of this position have been active in providing critiques of educational research. It is argued that, although the case has some merit, the prognosis is mistaken—traditional naturalistic inquiry in education and the social sciences will continue to have an important and strong role.

D'après une école de pensée qui gagne du terrain depuis environ un siècle, les sciences sociales devraient être considérées comme des enquêtes humanistes apparentées à l'herméneutique plutôt que comme des disciplines cherchant à comprendre la nature des choses comme le font les sciences naturelles. Au cours de la dernière décennie, les partisans de ce point de vue ont multiplié leurs critiques à l'endroit de la recherche en éducation. On affirme que, même si ce point de vue est valable à certains égards, le pronostic donné est erroné: les recherches en éducation cherchant à élucider la nature même de son objet d'étude et les sciences sociales continueront à jouer un rôle clé.

The report of my death was an exaggeration.

Mark Twain

Social science, especially as it is practiced by many in North America, is dead. This message emerges clearly from a great deal of 20th century philosophical and methodological writing and from the polemical statements of those who support different non-positivistic approaches to inquiry into human affairs. The trouble is that social scientists, and educational researchers who model their own activities on the doings of their brothers and sisters in arms, stubbornly refuse to heed the call of the grim reaper. They still display what Russell (1948, pp. 32–33) once described as a great deal of “hustle and pep” and refuse to slow down enough to enable burial to take place. Appropriating Russell’s further words, “to the plain man, such as the present writer,

this situation is discouraging.”¹ In this essay, I aim to explore the hypothesis that the grim reaper has not been heeded because he is not the genuine article. The reports of the death of social science may have been greatly exaggerated!

THE CORE HERMENEUTICAL CASE

The criticisms of traditional social science and educational research, as practiced in the U.S. in particular, are noteworthy for their variety. There is a burgeoning literature, and I have spilled my fair share of ink—including making the charge that the critics represent “tender-minded, anti-formalistic, extravagant idealism” (Phillips, 1984, p. 287); I have also pointed out that the critics of positivistic research sometimes have more in common with this position than they realize (1983). But the core, the philosophical heart, of the swelling criticisms is undoubtedly a set of arguments deriving from the broad hermeneutical movement; representative philosophical authors are Dilthey (Rickman, 1976), Gadamer (1981), Macdonald and Pettit (1981), Ricoeur (1977), Taylor (1977), and Winch (1958)²—though it must be stressed at the outset that these men are not in full agreement and some may even object to the descriptive label hermeneutical. (In response to this latter point, it is worth recalling that the Bard of Avon noted that “a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.”) At any rate, this rough initial characterization will suffice to indicate the scope of my present discussion, the focus of which will be the strengths but more particularly the weaknesses of the core hermeneutical case (CHC).

Almost every article about hermeneutics contains a brief genealogical statement; in keeping with this tradition, I, too, will begin with exposition, holding assessment and criticism for later. The term hermeneutics itself is taken from the name of the messenger of the gods in Greek mythology, Hermes, whose job it was to interpret or communicate the desires of the deities to mortals. Hermeneutics as a discipline was driven in its early days by the necessity to interpret Biblical sources—the word of God, recorded in terminology suitable for cultures and conditions long since gone, needed interpretation in order for the meaning to become apparent. St. Augustine, for example, struggled with the meaning of Old Testament passages, apparently realizing that his problems arose because he was so distant in time from the texts. A similar situation arose in the legal field, where the import of laws enacted in bygone days needed to be ascertained. But by the late 19th century, due to the work of scholars such as Schleiermacher and Dilthey, hermeneutics broadened out. As Hans-Georg Gadamer has noted,

But even Schleiermacher, the founder of the more recent development of hermeneutics into a general methodological doctrine of the *Geisteswissenschaften*, appealed

emphatically to the idea that the art of understanding is required not only with respect to texts, but also in one's intercourse with one's fellow human beings. (1981, p. 113)

The import of this passage is heightened if it is realized (this itself is a hermeneutical act) that the term *Geisteswissenschaften* is the German translation of John Stuart Mill's expression "moral sciences," Mill's way of referring to the social sciences. In short, then, hermeneutics came to be seen as the study of the interpretation and understanding not only of texts but also of human actions and customs and social practices. In Dilthey's words,

We explain nature, but we understand mental life.... This means that the methods of studying mental life, history, and society differ greatly from those used to acquire knowledge of nature. (cited in Rickman, 1976, p. 89)

In the 20th century, although this line of thinking about hermeneutics developed apace on the Continent, it was only about two decades ago that the English-speaking world caught on. With hindsight it is clear that Wittgenstein and Winch were saying similar things to their Anglo-American audiences in works published in the 1950s.

Winch (1958) argued a theme that later became commonplace—namely, that the social sciences were more like philosophy than they were like the natural sciences. In the latter, understanding—and more precisely explanation—proceeds by bringing a puzzling phenomenon under the rubric of a law of nature. The way human actions are accounted for is quite different. Winch was much taken with Wittgenstein's notions of a rule and a form of life, and he held that to understand a social activity the rules that were constitutive of it had to be comprehended and that this involved understanding the form of life in which the activity in question was embedded. In general, this understanding was not unproblematical when our own society, or similar Western societies, came under investigation, but even more severe problems emerged when exotic cultures were concerned. The understanding of primitive religion became a topic of controversy, and there were lively disputes between Winch and his critics (such as the Popperians) about how the rationality of other cultures was to be judged. The Azande became famous as a test case, and their beliefs and practices were dissected even by those who had never been within thousands of miles of them.

Gadamer's major work was published in 1960, not long after Winch's, but it was not translated into English until 1975; Palmer's introductory exposition of the issues in hermeneutics for an English reading audience appeared in 1969 and went through six printings in about thirteen years. In 1983, Bernstein published *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis*. Although these are all worthy of discussion, this "potted history"

will focus briefly upon two papers published in 1971. Ricoeur, who had written on psychoanalysis, argued in his "The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text" that although hermeneutics had developed as the study of interpretation of written texts, it could be validly extended to the study of human action:

Now my hypothesis is this: if there are specific problems which are raised by the interpretation of texts because they are texts and not spoken language, and if these problems are the ones which constitute hermeneutics as such, then the human sciences may be said to be hermeneutical (1) inasmuch as their *object* displays some of the features constitutive of a text as text, and (2) inasmuch as their *methodology* develops of ...text-interpretation. (1977, p. 316)

Of course, to many who use the same kind of procedures as these hermeneuticists, spoken language presents fewer interpretive problems than written texts since the spoken word is directed at a listener, a person dialectically engaged with the speaker; meaning can be underscored by such devices as intonation and gestures. Be that as it may, Ricoeur's article argued that the human sciences *did* have enough in common with texts to warrant the extension of hermeneutics in this direction.

Ricoeur's argument had a simple structure: he distinguished four characteristics that discourse (written or spoken) possesses and that human actions must also be shown to possess if they are to be subject to hermeneutical scrutiny. Briefly, these were as follows. First, to become an object of science, discourse (including human action) must be objectified or fixated in the way that speech becomes fixated in writing. He was satisfied that this happens with actions, for the *meaning* of an action can be detached from the *event* of the act. "We say that such and such event *left its mark* on its time" (1977, p. 324). Here, as elsewhere in his paper, Ricoeur was indebted to the speech act theory developed by the philosopher Searle. Second, discourse and action must become autonomized—that is, just as a text is detached from its author and becomes a separate entity, so "an action is detached from its agent and develops consequences of its own" (1977, p. 324). He pointed out that this autonomization of action "constitutes the *social* dimension of action" (1977, p. 324). Third, like a text, a meaningful action has an importance that transcends its relevance to the situation in which it originally occurred. And, fourth, as texts are "open works," addressed to an indefinite range of potential readers, so it is that human actions are open "to anybody who can read" (1977, p. 327). Ricoeur must be understood as arguing not that all human actions have these characteristics (after all, most of our actions are ephemeral and have little later significance even to the actor, and indeed all trace of them may rapidly fade), but that all actions *potentially* have these characteristics.

At the same time, in 1971, another philosopher, Taylor, writing in *The Review of Metaphysics* made much the same case (1977). His argument had the same structure, but he reduced the conditions that must be met by the object of any "hermeneutical science" to three: "The object of a science of interpretation must thus have: sense, distinguishable from its expression, which is by or for a subject (1977, p. 102). Having shown that human actions indeed meet these conditions, he illustrated the fruitfulness of the hermeneutical approach with a brief discussion of some examples from the field of political science. Taylor's final conclusion was straightforward:

There are thus good grounds both in epistemological arguments and in their greater fruitfulness for opting for hermeneutical sciences of man. But we cannot hide from ourselves how greatly this option breaks with certain commonly held notions about our scientific tradition. (1977, p. 130)

Within a few years this general position was orthodox. Macdonald and Pettit, two British philosophers of social science, wrote in 1981 that "social science, insofar as its concern is the explanation of social behaviour, begins to look like a discipline which belongs with the humanities rather than the sciences" (p. 104). In 1983, Carr treated the hermeneutical position as a well-established research tradition in the social sciences; he pointed out that many now adhere to the "interpretive view,"

which holds that because social action is intentional and rule-governed it cannot be studied "scientifically." ...In contrast to naturalism ...interpretive approaches to educational research insist that their principal task is not to construct scientific theories that can be experimentally tested, but to construct interpretive accounts which grasp the intelligibility and coherence of social action by revealing the meaning it has to those who perform it. (p. 36)³

Carr's point is sound, although it should be noted in passing that his exposition is not without fault; hermeneuticists, as we have seen, are not unduly concerned with what an action may mean to the person who acted. But there can be little argument with the judgment that the interpretive approach is now a flourishing one and that it stands as a major rival to what Carr has called the *scientific approach* (and what others, even more uncharitably, have labelled the *positivistic approach*).

In the last decade or so, another noteworthy and related development has taken place. Researchers and methodologists of a more traditional mold have started to shift ground, adopting some of the insights of the interpretive school. Perhaps one of the first, and one of the most important, was Donald Campbell. Well known in educational and social science circles for his standard work on experimental and quasi-experimental designs (written with Julian Stanley), Campbell also has been an important figure

in the emerging field of evaluation, and he is no mean philosopher of science. Reading a paper in response to an award at the 1974 convention of the American Psychological Association, Campbell argued that quantitative understanding in the sciences is built upon a foundation of qualitative understanding—a base that scientists take for granted and rarely if ever discuss or examine.

Most of this underpinning of common-sense knowing is so ubiquitous and so dependable that we fail to notice it. But I believe that such a base underlies all quantitative knowing in the social sciences. (1978, p. 193)

In essence, Campbell was pointing out that the interpretive process very often takes place unconsciously, but nevertheless occurs—indeed, it *must* occur.

TOO MUCH OF A GOOD THING

It must be made clear, at the outset of the somewhat critical discussion that will ensue, that there is much merit in the CHC. Just what its merit, and what its implications for social science and educational research, are to be determined. But the discussion must not be interpreted as a wholesale attack on the hermeneutical approach to human affairs.

When Interpretation is Needed

1. While Ricoeur's argument that human action closely resembles textual material is strained, it nevertheless seems incontrovertible that much action (whether text-like or not) requires explicit interpretation. In the first place, there is the problem of simple ambiguity, amply illustrated in the well-known case of raising an arm. It may not be clear, even taking the context into account, whether the person is stretching, hailing a friend, seeking attention, wanting to ask a question, or what. So, interpretation is called for.

More substantial are problems of understanding that arise when the person being observed (or interacted with) comes from a foreign culture. Interpreting a figure of speech, a gesture, or even words that to us are everyday terms may be fraught with difficulty. In the first few months following my immigration to the U.S. from Australia, I found that my style of joke-telling was not understood by American students, and I learned to signal an upcoming witticism; but, at first, the students' behaviour—or rather their lack of it—had to be interpreted for me, and vice versa.) Finally, hosts of actions are unabashedly symbolic; behaviours at worship, in school, at dinner, at college commencements, at an auction, at the Masonic Lodge, or at a military

parade may all be unintelligible to the uninitiated and require interpretation. In many cases, too, the meaning is constitutive of the action—the action cannot even be *identified* unless its meaning is understood (“ah, that’s what he is doing,” we sometimes say, as a puzzling situation is resolved). Sometimes, even when an action has been identified—when its meaning has been interpreted—that action has also been explained. (We often ask for explanations when the meaning of what we see is not apparent.)

In education, all of these problems can be located. In a culturally diverse classroom, for example, the behaviour of individual students may require sensitive interpretation even to be identified. Is this boy’s refusal to make eye contact a sign of defiance, or does it reflect his culture’s way of showing respect to an authority figure? Is that girl distracting her partner by gossiping, or is she talking about the work they are supposed to be doing? And, when an observer seeks an explanation for a child’s puzzling behaviour (“Why is she behaving like that?”), to provide the meaning may also be to provide the explanation (“She is rehearsing a classroom presentation she has to give later in the day”).

2. Although human actions may require interpretation, then, it does not thereby follow that Ricoeur and Taylor were right in treating them as being on a par with texts. Their form of argument, it should be noted, is risky, although it is a venerable one in philosophical circles. Any two things can *always* be shown to be similar in at least some respects, so it is no surprise that Ricoeur and Taylor were able to show that social action and textual material have some similarities—indeed, the surprise would have come if they were not able to do so! The risk enters because any two things can also be shown to have some differences, and plenty come to mind in the cases in question here. Textual material is produced by an author, and the author had some meaning in mind. (There are two trivial exceptions: when an author deliberately constructs an ambiguous or open passage—as did the Delphic Oracle; and when the author was a successful one of those proverbial million monkeys set in front of typewriters to see if their random tapplings could produce Hamlet’s soliloquy.)

Now, it is a controversial issue in literary hermeneutics whether or not an author’s meaning has any special significance (or whether there is any such meaning at all), and although I will touch upon the views of Stanley Fish later, it is sufficient to point out here that unless the author of a text is held to have some meaning that he or she is attempting to convey, hermeneutics is a forlorn endeavour. As Hirsch has put it, the doctrine of “authorial irrelevance ... has frequently encouraged willful arbitrariness and extravagance in academic criticism,” and has led to “skepticism and disarray” (1967, pp. 2–3).

Thus, when critics deliberately banished the original author, they themselves usurped his place, and this led unerringly to some of our present-day theoretical confusions. Where before there had been but one author, there now arose a multiplicity of them, each carrying as much authority as the next. (p. 5)

Wherever one stands on this matter, it should be apparent that social practices, traditions, ceremonies, customs, and the like only rarely have *an* author and only rarely were specifically designed to convey *a* meaning. Usually, these practices evolved over a period of time, different contributors to the evolution of a particular practice probably had different things in mind, and the innovations caught on (*diffused* is the currently popular term) for a variety of reasons. (Think of the following rich example: the evolution and spread of games such as rugby in the English public schools over the past two hundred years or so.)

There is a major ambiguity here. Such social traditions and practices have *significance*, but it is far from clear that they have a *meaning* in the same sense that Hamlet's solitary musings have a meaning (whatever it may be).

Interpretation versus significance

An important ambiguity, then, surfaces in our customary way of voicing some of the difficulties we experience in cases requiring interpretation, like those above involving the student who does not make eye contact. Often we ask "What is the meaning of this behaviour?" And, in these cases, this may well be a straightforward request for interpretation or hermeneutical understanding, on a par with St. Augustine asking himself "What is the meaning of this Old Testament passage?" The ambiguity arises from the fact that a request for meaning can often be a query about *significance*, as when we ask "What was the meaning of President Nixon's resignation?" Asking about the effect or significance or consequences of an action is *not* a hermeneutical question, but it can very often be a straightforward social science question. (For example, "What is the effect of the recent election results in New Zealand?" is a political science or international relations issue if ever there was one, and it retains this status even if misleadingly phrased "What is the meaning of the recent election results in New Zealand?")

David Thomas very effectively debunked the notion that this particular sense of "meaning" marks an important difference between the natural and the social sciences (i.e., the notion that social science deals with meanings and natural sciences does not, and thus there is a fundamental difference between the two). Using as an example Levi-Strauss' remark that the meaning of the incest prohibition that exists in most societies is to establish social bonds between different biological groups, Thomas wrote:

To label social scientific explanations “meaningful” or “interpretative” in a way which is meant to differentiate them from natural scientific explanations is mere confusion. If we wish to use the rather quaint locution that the meaning of the incest prohibition is to create social bonds between different biological groups, then we are also entitled to say that the meaning of a thermostat is to control the temperature in the house. (1979, pp. 83–84)

In other words, Levi-Strauss was talking about the *significance* of the incest prohibition (or its effect or consequence), and this was a perfectly reputable scientific undertaking that should not have been dressed up as a hermeneutical one.

How Hermeneutics Does not Exhaust Social Science Inquiries

It can be imagined that an enthusiastic supporter of the hermeneutical approach, or perhaps a person who found Campbell’s article persuasive, might argue that even these latter questions about significance or consequences depend upon a hidden foundation of understanding. After all, it might be said, one cannot inquire about the significance of an action or event that one has not understood. Add to this the fact that meaning in the first sense remains unsullied by criticism (i.e., the sense in which the meaning of raising an arm may need to be determined), and what results is a strong case that interpretive or hermeneutical activity is central in the social sciences. To this argument, which goes to the heart of the issues, there are several lines of response.

1. Campbell’s paper makes an important point, the validity of which I do not intend to question. But it is noteworthy that although he argues that *all* science is based on a foundation of qualitative understanding, he does not conclude that thereby *any* science is undercut or shaken. In Campbell’s view, physics as well as social science are built on this foundation; he does not regard this as a blot on the escutcheon of physics, and in no way does it challenge the status of physics as a science. He uses the example of a scientific paper on the quantum nature of light and argues that

the few scientific terms have been embedded in a discourse of pre-scientific ordinary language which the reader is presumed to (and presumes to) understand. This language is demonstrably incomplete, elliptical, metaphorical, and equivocal. In addition, in the laboratory work of the original and replicating laboratory, a common-sense, pre-scientific perception of objects, solids, and light was employed and trusted in coming to the conclusions that revise the ordinary understanding. (Campbell, 1978, p. 187)

Read carefully, this passage offers little succour for those who believe that the necessity for hermeneutical understanding undercuts the scientific

status of social science. Of course social phenomena need to be understood, and of course a scientific investigation of them, as thus understood, is still possible—and perhaps, as Campbell indicated, the scientific inquiry might lead to a revision of the ordinary understanding.

This central issue deserves another example—this one not from physical science but from a social activity where norms or rules are centrally a part of the activity and where, without understanding, the activity cannot even be engaged in. (In Searle's terms, the rules are constitutive of the activity.) Baseball is played according to rules; indeed, the rules are constitutive because, if they are departed from, then it is not baseball that is being played but some other game (or no game at all). Nevertheless, knowing the rules is not the same as being able to play baseball and coaching a Little League team involves much more than teaching the rules or helping team members understand the game. One can coach pitchers by showing them how to hold the ball for various types of pitch, and one can coach batters by teaching them how to hold the bat and by giving them some insights into strategy (such as when to bunt). These matters transcend the rules, and though there is a sense in which the coach is helping the players to understand the game, this is not understanding in the hermeneutical sense that knowledge of the rules is. It takes little imagination to guess the coach's probable reaction to a suggestion that all one requires to carry out such duties is hermeneutical understanding; translated into polite language, and with the expletives deleted, the coach's reply might refer to the additional factual, theoretical, and tactical knowledge that must be used. Hermeneutical understanding no more exhausts what there is to know about baseball than it does social science and educational research. (Similarly, to identify what the youngsters are doing as "playing Little League baseball" may be to explain all that was puzzling, but it may not. Lots of questions can be asked here, and the hermeneutical activity does not exhaust the inquiries that can be pursued.)

2. Social science can transcend or go beyond the level of ordinary understanding in a variety of ways. Or, to put it differently, much in social science does not involve hermeneutical understanding in any central or significant way (any way that differs from the way that understanding is involved in the procedures of physics, for example). Thus the claim that "if the social sciences can be shown to involve hermeneutical understanding this is the end of social science as science" is nonsense. A few examples will show why. Which of massed or distributed practice is more effective in influencing mathematical achievement? Is group work more effective than individual work as a way of teaching mathematics? What is the optimum size for classroom groups in order to maximize learning? What is the most

effective composition of groups by sex and ability (given some pre-set criterion measure)? Would educational vouchers cause a flight from the public schools? Do humans process information serially or in parallel? How do innovations diffuse throughout a system? None of these (and literally thousands more could be cited) are centrally hermeneutical issues in the same way that determining the identity of the mysterious passenger in the fifth act of Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* is a hermeneutical or interpretive task.⁴ (The aficionado will have noted that the present discussion skirts around the issue of whether or not the explanation of individual human action is nomological. As a closet Hempelian, I am inclined to argue so, but the arguments I advance in this paper do not depend upon taking a specific stand on this contentious issue.)

3. Even if the understanding of the action of an individual is hermeneutical, it does not follow that the understanding of *groups* of individuals is necessarily hermeneutical (although understanding *some* group activities might be). Neither does the hermeneutical understanding of the individual or the group exhaust the inquiries that can be made, as the list of examples just given should amply illustrate. Schelling (1978, chap. 1) gives the example of understanding groups to put flesh on this point. Individuals coming into an auditorium for a lecture pick their seats for a variety of reasons, and a social scientist could perhaps hope to come to understand why certain people chose to sit in certain locations, but would have little hope of predicting where given individuals might sit. (Seating preferences are interactive, and this adds complexity.) Nevertheless, there is an overall pattern to the way the seats fill, and this pattern holds over a variety of audiences made up of different individuals. This pattern can be discovered, and used to make predictions. Whatever the understanding of the seating decisions of individuals involves, the task of determining the overall pattern is clearly not a hermeneutical one.

Is Hermeneutical Activity Non-scientific?

There is a final general issue to take up. The tone of the preceding discussion might be taken to concede that in so far as social science is hermeneutical (although it has been argued that this is *not* so far as has been supposed), then it is not "scientific." It is not my intent, however, to make such a concession, vague as it is.

One way for the discussion to proceed would be to give a general account of the nature of science and to show that hermeneutical investigations fall under this rubric. This would not be difficult to do, especially in this age of the new philosophy of science, when science is recognized to be a more

open and speculative endeavour than had been believed in bygone positivistic days. Hermeneutics being somewhat open and speculative and non-positivistic, the case would fall into place.

Life is short, however, so I will take an even quicker route. A few simple but suggestive points will be made, and the discussion will end.

1. Although it seems to be a matter of controversy within hermeneutics itself, a good case can be made that extensive use is made of the hypothetico-deductive method. Hermeneuticists advance interpretations that they believe to be warranted by textual evidence. If a rival account is put forward, it is because it is felt that in some way the new one does more justice to the evidence at hand. If an interpretation is advanced quite spuriously—that is, if it does not withstand scrutiny in the light of the text in question—it will be dismissed as nonsense. Harré (1980) alludes to the importance of the hypothetico-deductive method, and the classic hermeneutical work by Hirsch makes the following important point:

The identity of genre, pre-understanding, and hypothesis suggests that the much-advertised cleavage between thinking in the sciences and the humanities does not exist. The hypothetico-deductive process is fundamental in both of them, as it is in all thinking that aspires to knowledge. (1967, p. 264) Follesdal (1979) argues the same point at length.

2. Some scholars in the field of literary criticism have a much more liberal (if not anarchistic) view. Fish, for example, denies that he uses a text in his class—for, although all students read one book, it is not the *same* for different readers. He also tells the amusing story of leaving up the blackboard notes and jottings from the lecture given to one class and telling the next class (taking a different course) that it was a poem and they had to write interpretations of it. All members of the class succeeded in doing so. His point was not to show that the interpretations were spurious, but quite the reverse:

Skilled reading is usually thought to be a matter of discerning what is there, but if the example of my students can be generalized, it is a matter of knowing how to *produce* what can thereafter be said to be there. Interpretation is not the art of construing but the art of constructing. Interpreters do not decode poems; they make them. (1980, p. 327)

This does seem quite antithetical to the scientific spirit and is moving in the direction of a rampant relativism and subjectivism that are not readily applicable to the interpretation of social life. It is far from clear that Fish's controversial position is viable (Hirsch's contrary views have been alluded to); but if Fish is right about literary hermeneutics, it is indeed far from

science—although there is the added complexity that a few folk would argue that, on the new understanding of science that is emerging, the two are very close! (Fish's position is somewhat more complex than this discussion has indicated, and it may not be fair to label him in an unqualified way as an adherent of these unpleasant *isms*; Fish points to the directive role of the community of interpreters to which any individual interpreter belongs.) Leaving these complexities aside, it would seem that, while social scientists may disagree about what is going on at some ceremonial event—say a Catholic mass—it is not the case that any and all interpretations are equally acceptable, and neither is it the case that the observers themselves construct what is happening. To pursue this line of discussion further would involve bringing in the contentious notions of reality and truth, and this is too mammoth a task for the present occasion.

CONCLUDING HOMILY

It is fitting to end by quoting a passage from a text that has been pored over by countless hermeneuticists and interpreters, so there is a chance that their modern descendants might understand its meaning. In Proverbs 22:10 it is written: "Cast out the scorner, and contention shall go out; yea, strife and ignominy shall cease."

NOTES

- ¹ Russell was referring to the American behaviourists.
- ² Many are hard to characterize but at times come close to the tradition I have in mind—e.g., Harré and Secord (1973). Researchers who have done some relevant work are Geertz, Eisner, Jackson, Parlett, and Hamilton.
- ³ Carr's paper is mainly concerned to see how much attention is paid to the notion of education.
- ⁴ This example was taken from an engaging paper by Dagfinn Follesdal (1979).
- ⁵ It is noteworthy, too, that Harré and Secord (1973) think that their method of ethogeny is quite scientific.

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Eine geistige Richtung, die sich seit etwa einem Jahrhundert stärker durchsetzt, sieht die Socialwissenschaften am ehesten als Arten humanistischer Untersuchung, die mit der Hermeneutik verwandt sind, denn als Zweige der naturalistischen Untersuchung, die den Natur- oder Physik-Wissenschaften gleichen. In den letzten zehn Jahren etwa waren Vertreter dieser Schule aktiv damit beschäftigt, kritische Abhandlungen über erziehungswissenschaftliche Forschung vorzubringen. Es wird argumentiert, daß die gestellte Prognose falsch ist, wenngleich die Sache einen gewissen Wert hat—traditionelle naturalistische Forschung in den Erziehungs—und Sozialwissenschaften wird weiterhin eine wichtige und starke Rolle spielen.

De acuerdo a una corriente de pensamiento que ha estado ganando terreno durante un centenar de años, las ciencias sociales se conciben como estilos de investigación de índole humanística, similares a la hermenéutica, más bien que como ramas de

una investigación naturalística paralela a las ciencias naturales o físicas. En aproximadamente la última década, los partidarios de esta posición han estado activos en preparar críticas de la investigación en educación. Se argumenta que, aunque su caso tiene algún mérito, la prognosis que dan es equivocada; la investigación tradicional de índole naturalística en educación y en ciencias sociales seguirá teniendo un papel fuerte y importante.

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