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***Beyond Scientism and Relativism:
Amedeo Giorgi's Commitment to Human Science***

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Abstract

Amedeo Giorgi has sought to offer an alternative to the scientism of psychology conceived as positive science, on the one hand, and the relativism implicit in many of the research approaches based upon hermeneutic or postmodernist philosophy, on the other hand. Giorgi's body of work strives to articulate and defend a human scientific psychological research method that does justice to the human subject. Such an approach must demonstrate fidelity to psychological subjectivity as a lived phenomenon. Additionally, the approach must be methodical, teachable, and yield intersubjectively verifiable knowledge. In other words it must yield scientific knowledge. The phenomenological tradition, broadly defined, includes an important tension between descriptive or Husserlian perspectives and the interpretive (hermeneutic) perspectives articulated by Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur. I will argue that the meaning of the tension between Husserlian phenomenology and hermeneutics depends in large measure upon whether one's motivating interest is primarily scientific or philosophical. I will seek to describe Giorgi's contribution to psychology in terms of his insistence on the scientific status of phenomenological psychological research. I will seek to situate Giorgi's body of work vis-à-vis hermeneutic approaches in order to highlight the uniqueness of his contribution to the field.

Although the genuine though never radically clarified idea of philosophy has by no means been completely sacrificed, the multiplicity of philosophies, which can hardly be comprehended any more nevertheless has the result that it is no longer divided into scientific directions, such that they could still seriously work together, carry on

scientific dialogue through criticism and countercriticism, and still guide the common idea of one science toward the path of realization, in the manner of the directions within modern biology or mathematics and physics; rather, they are contrasted as societies of aesthetic style, so to speak, analogous to the "directions" and "currents" in the fine arts. Indeed, in the splintering of philosophies and their literature, is it still possible at all to study them seriously as works of one science, to make use of them critically and to uphold the unity of the work done?

— Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences*

Why should the *scientific* status of human science research be a compelling issue for the next generation of qualitative researchers?¹ Today a current of epistemic relativism underlies many presentations of qualitative research, fed by an aestheticizing discourse which represents research in human science more as an artistic activity than a scientific one.² The result is a climate in which the pursuit of epistemological rigor is viewed skeptically, and the question "what makes human science scientific?" appears antiquated or irrelevant, the relic of a time before the so-called "death of epistemology".³ Advocates of aestheticizing approaches to research are likely to place exclusive emphasis upon the "human" in human science — dwelling upon the multiplicity of meanings and issues of interpretation — while giving short shrift to the meaning of science for qualitative research, or the demands which science, properly understood, might place upon qualitative researchers. In other words, they will tend to advocate a kind of criterionlessness in which the researcher's freedom and individual expressivity is exalted above any intersubjective, epistemological requirements to which researchers work might be held accountable. Human science research might even be envisioned as aiming primarily at conveying the researcher's experience of research, rather than to yield knowledge intended to enrich a community of fellow researchers.

When such a conception of research holds sway, a seemingly absolute gulf opens up between the natural and human sciences, with the consequence that the idea of science *as such*, that is, a science of which the natural sciences are but one species and the human sciences another, is reduced to a nullity. Severed from any larger, encompassing notion of science, human science research is reduced to a species of aestheticism indistinguishable from the writing of fiction: an activity that aims solely at creativity, objectivity (however it might be understood in relation to human being) having been dispensed with. The point of departure for the following discussion is the premise that the fulfillment of psychology as a human science depends upon the development of psychological

research approaches adequate to the study of the human person, and simultaneously able to argue their scientific status.

Amedeo Giorgi's career has been dedicated to establishing the psychology as a human science, retaining a strong sense of the scientific, which he seeks to articulate in relation to the human person. Giorgi envisions his work as a contribution to laying the foundation for a psychological science to come, one which clearly delineates its subject matter and is capable of rigorously arguing its human-scientific status. He has defined psychology broadly as "the study of subjectivity", and argued that psychology must seek to understand subjectivity "precisely as subjectivity expresses itself in the world" (unpublished lecture at University of Alberta, p. 1). Naturally, subjectivity is open to investigation in myriad ways: philosophy, literature and the arts all explore dimensions of lived subjectivity. Within these realms a multiplicity of motivating interests are possible other than a specifically *scientific, research interest*. Even within the domain of psychology, a clinical practitioner interest differs from a scientific interest to the extent that the aim of the clinician is to arrive at knowledge of an individual person in order to more adequately intervene with him or her. At stake in the following discussion are the precise meanings of "scientific" for the psychological investigation of subjectivity, from a human science standpoint. I will argue that when psychological research is shaped by an aesthetic interest, the resulting praxis and findings do not contribute to the founding of psychology as a human science, because the very criteria which would justify such a foundation are neglected. The resulting efforts, to the extent that they claim scientific status, serve to weaken rather than strengthen the case for human scientific psychology as an alternative to the dominant, empiricist paradigm.

According to the humanistic critique, psychological science in the main has been developed along empiricist lines "in dialogue with nature rather than humans" (Giorgi, 1992, 208-209). Hence mainstream psychology "never had to grapple with the meaning of human *as human*" (Giorgi, 1992, 208-209). Mimicking natural scientific praxis, psychology naturalized consciousness rather than allowing human phenomena to stand forth in their uniqueness. Such a limited empiricism continues to dominate contemporary psychological research, and as Kuhn (1996) observed, the only problems which a scientific community "will admit as scientific or encourage its members to undertake" are those that fit within its dominant paradigm (p. 37).

For Giorgi the empiricist paradigm when applied to psychical is a Procrustean bed, deforming the object it purports to investigate through the imposition of natural scientific categories upon human phenomena

(1985). However, Giorgi's work is not an attack on empiricism *per se*. Instead Giorgi follows Husserl in arguing that psychical phenomena exceed the scope of *empiricist* methods (2006). Consequently empiricist psychology has failed to provide a unifying perspective capable of embracing the full range of psychical phenomena; neither has the psychological community as a whole come to relative consensus on core epistemological and anthropological assumptions (Giorgi, 1982). These fundamental gaps lead Giorgi to conclude that the precise meaning of psychology "is still not yet an historical achievement" (2008, p. 42).

Psychology, therefore, has yet to be properly founded as a science. In the attempt to contribute to this founding, Giorgi has devoted considerable attention to delineating what the psychical realm is, and what is required for a scientific approach to psyche. Giorgi has described the psychical as a "lower level of organization of subjectivity" which is "para-objective, para-rational, and para-normative" (unpublished lecture, June 17, 2005). "Para" indicates not that psychical phenomena *oppose* categories like rationality, but that the psychical arises alongside and goes beyond the objective, the rational, and the normative (Giorgi, 1993). In order to allow these phenomena to stand out to scientific reflection without theory-laden distortion, Giorgi turned to Husserl's phenomenological philosophical method, from which he developed a descriptive method for psychological research.

Husserl presented phenomenology as a method of philosophical inquiry whereby researchers "accept as given everything we encounter in perceiving awareness, as it confronts us, but also only within the limits within which it confronts us" (Kohák, 1978, p. 167). Giorgi drew upon Husserl and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology in the attempt to develop a genuinely scientific approach to the study of subjectivity. Phenomenological psychology seeks to attain the mode of objectivity appropriate to human phenomena by "grasping subjectivity precisely as it presents itself" (Giorgi, personal communication, January 21, 2009).

Giorgi's commitment to the scientific status of psychological research is arguably the defining difference between his work and that of other qualitative researchers who invoke phenomenological and/or hermeneutic philosophy. Giorgi argues that the meaning of "science" as such must be articulated in such a manner as to embrace both empiricist and alternative approaches. He contends that whether quantitative or qualitative, a research approach must be methodical, critical, general, and systematic if it is to constitute science (Giorgi, personal communication, January 21, 2009). Like Husserl, Giorgi regards the scientific attitude as a consciously chosen attitude toward human phenomena, one which reflects a particular research

interest (1970). Giorgi thus acknowledges that the world of science and the scientific object itself are co-constituted by the scientist (1969). Therefore the discoveries of science do not represent ahistorical, de-contextualized, "Platonic" truths, but truths *for* a community of researchers in a given context.

I will argue that in the absence of a motivating scientific interest – be it quantitative or qualitative – research and its fruits are limited to the realms of individualistic reflections upon philosophy, aesthetics, or clinical practice. If research is not shaped and sustained by a scientific interest – which implies participation in a community of co-researchers – and instead focuses exclusively on the personal meaning a phenomenon has for a given writer, the resulting findings, however suggestive, do not rise to the level of scientific knowledge. An attitude which privileges the research experience while denigrating method undermines the possibility of science.

In this paper van Manen's (1990, 2002) hermeneutic phenomenology will be criticized along the preceding lines. The aim of the critique will be to show that to the extent van Manen's approach yields knowledge, it does not rise to the level of science. My aim is not to argue that van Manen's approach fails to yield valuable reflections about subjectivity, but rather that those reflections are framed in a primarily aesthetic rather than scientific manner – an important limitation. This limitation may be irrelevant to van Manen's project; however, it is critical from a foundational perspective, because such an approach does not contribute to strengthening the scientific status of qualitative human science research as a rigorous alternative to the hegemonic, empiricist method.

Criteria for Science

Those psychologists guided by empiricism have the luxury of taking their underlying philosophical premises for granted as givens. Empiricist premises are so firmly established in mainstream practice that they are equated with science as such, a state of affairs exemplifying what Kuhn (1996) termed "normal science". Advocates of alternative scientific research approaches are obliged to repeatedly argue their premises because their work represents a challenge to the scientific community's "received beliefs" (Kuhn, 1996). Consequently researchers informed by the philosophical premises of non-empiricists such as Husserl, Heidegger, or Gadamer must make an explicit case for their guiding assumptions, spending significant time laying out the philosophical underpinnings of their work. In such cases the lines between philosophy and psychology is somewhat blurred of necessity. Nevertheless, if research is guided by a scientific interest, the

philosophical discussion will be preparatory for, rather than in lieu of, a discussion of praxis. The transition Giorgi wants to make is from philosophy to science, since the two are not equivalent. A transformation is required.

Giorgi (1970) regards psychology as an as-yet unfounded science – unfounded in that the guiding assumptions and procedures of natural science were prematurely imposed upon psychology in the attempt to legitimize it. Overshadowed by these inadequately investigated empiricist assumptions, psychology has not yet articulated itself independently. As a consequence, psychology lacks disciplinary unity, since psychologists have not achieved broad consensus on the meaning of their object or upon “the methods, procedures, rules of interpretation” appropriate to the study of the psychical (1985, p. 45). Giorgi’s work is directed toward a more comprehensive, shared disciplinary understanding that is not yet an historical achievement (1985).

In order to clarify the meaning of psychology as a human science, the meaning of “science” must be freed from the exclusively empiricist, positivist interpretation with which it has become popularly and institutionally identified. This effort requires that psychologists reflect upon the notion of science per se and identify unifying criteria required for knowledge to be considered scientific. Having identified such criteria, which ought to be comprehensive enough to apply to both empiricist and other modes of scientific inquiry, it may then be asked how the criteria are to be applied when the object of inquiry is the human being. Giorgi (1997) argues that to constitute science, any quantitative or qualitative research approach must yield knowledge which is systematic, methodical, general, and critical (p. 249).

The Greek term *systema* implies an organized whole, or a body comprised of parts. Systematic knowledge means that a research approach is capable of producing interrelated findings that contribute to a picture of a whole. In psychology, this means that the knowledge produced would be interrelated and “regulated by laws, concepts, or meanings” (Giorgi, 1997, p. 249). Hence Giorgi understands “systematic” in terms broad enough to encompass natural scientific and human scientific research. So while a framework of laws might be applicable to research in chemistry, a network of interrelated meanings or concepts might be applicable in psychological, sociological, or anthropological research. A systematic approach to human science research is conducted in dialogue with existing understandings of the phenomenon under investigation, reflecting the view that “there are relations among aspects of knowledge that can be synthesized” (Giorgi, 1990, p. 113). Systematic psychological research communicates an

anticipatory sense of psychology as an organized, holistic body of knowledge.

The Greek term *methodos* implies a reliable path of inquiry that has been confirmed over time and can be shared with fellow researchers. Science aims at enriching the community’s shared understanding, not simply in yielding personal insight. Scientific discovery is never a private achievement, but always an implicitly communal one. To be scientific, knowledge must be arrived at through a praxis in which others can be instructed. If a research approach cannot be imparted to others and implemented independently by them, the accumulation of a body of knowledge would be impossible; discoveries would be limited to isolated insights lacking any necessary interrelationship. In contrast research methods achieve their results through the application of a focused, well-grounded, explicit, shared, and repeatable means of data gathering and analysis. An adequately precise and limited focus is a precondition of research, because, as Giorgi (2006) has noted, “the data will always be richer than the perspective brought to it but it is the latter that makes the analysis feasible” (p. 354). Repeatability in the context of human science does not imply a literal recapitulation of the lived experience of inquiry and discovery, which would be impossible. Instead repeatability refers to the straightforward fact that research steps are explicit and sequential and can therefore be performed again by multiple researchers in varied contexts.

A methodical research approach provides a collectively understood means of access to the phenomenon under investigation, and must be appropriate to the phenomenon being investigated, avoiding the use of “an *a priori* technique that may hinder access to or obscure the phenomenon because of reification or decontextualization” (Giorgi, 1990, p. 113). Method, *qua* method, lends itself to being taught to a community of fellow researchers. By this standard, a research approach which is incapable of methodical articulation, or whose advocates substitute an overly idiosyncratic, obscure, or artistic conception of their praxis for a methodical one cannot claim scientific status.

A research approach yields general knowledge if the findings have broad application rather than being limited to shedding light on the research participants themselves, or guiding interventions focused to specific individuals. If research is motivated by a scientific interest, its aims are disciplinary. Accordingly, a research approach which produces knowledge only of an individual or group of individuals, could yield insight without rising to the level of science. This guiding disciplinary interest does not imply a denial of the uniqueness of an individual case or diminish the meaningfulness of a participant’s experience. However, if the researcher hopes to contribute to scientific

the need for a discovery of an human scientific alternative to the empiricist research paradigm, and the simultaneous need to elucidate public criteria for human science *quâ* science which can ensure rigor, reliability, and the validity of scientific findings.

In *Researching Lived Experience* (1990) van Manen attempts to appropriate Husserl's phenomenology while simultaneously deploying Heidegger and Gadamer's philosophy to advocate what is in essence an anti-methodical research approach. In more recent writing (2006) van Manen has continued to invoke Husserl while drawing upon Derrida's postmodern philosophy to advocate an anti-methodical and anti-disciplinary research approach. In these presentations van Manen severs Husserl's core praxis terms from their original, meaningful context in the phenomenological method, and mixes Husserl's descriptive-methodological terms with arguments drawn from incompatible philosophies such as Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics or Derrida's deconstruction. In addition, van Manen (1990) equates method *per se* with mechanical technique, and makes the overly simplistic claim that research practice cannot be methodically articulated but can only be learned by doing. Van Manen's interpretation of hermeneutic phenomenology is beset by multiple internal contradictions in large part because epistemological clarity, disciplinary and methodological rigor, are framed as non-issues. Hence this type of hermeneutic phenomenology is anti-methodical for two chief reasons: because it argues explicitly against methodical praxis, and because it's underlying epistemological premises are contradictory and thus incapable of sustaining a methodical approach to research.

Anti-methodical Implication

Van Manen's standpoint vis-à-vis methodical research praxis in *Researching Lived Experience* (1990) is beset by internal contradictions. The text appears to provide guidelines for data gathering and analysis, making extensive use of the foundational terms with which Husserl described his practice of phenomenological inquiry.⁷ Husserlian terms appropriated by van Manen (1990) include bracketing, free imaginative variation, description, explication and essence. These terms have technical meanings in Husserl's phenomenology, and van Manen's deployment of the foundational Husserlian terms strongly implies that they shape the practice of his hermeneutic phenomenology as well.⁸ Van Manen's anti-methodical account of research praxis (1990), however, is incompatible with the indisputably methodical implications of the Husserlian terms he appropriates. Husserl's phenomenology is not a matter of abstract

insights or theories, but rather a systematic and carefully delineated path of methodical inquiry. As Husserl's student and translator Dorion Cairns (1973) recognized, "the peculiar character of Husserlian phenomenology lies not in its content but in the way the latter is attained. Whatever its sense, an account is phenomenological in the Husserlian sense if, and only if, it is produced 'phenomenologically'" (p. 223). For this reason, Cairns noted, "one must also know Husserlian phenomenological method" (p. 223).⁹

In arguing that van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenology is anti-methodical in its approach to data gathering and analysis I must acknowledge that while characterizing methodical praxis in pejorative terms as a merely technical enterprise van Manen (1990) simultaneously claims to be following a "phenomenological method" (p. 111). While appropriating Husserl's technical terms, he misrepresents those terms in a manner which frequently renders Husserl's actual method incomprehensible and thus inaccessible to the reader. For example, van Manen (1990) mischaracterizes Husserl's well-known insistence that the researcher adopt an attitude of presuppositionlessness as "a methodology that tries to ward off any tendency toward constructing a predetermined set of fixed procedures, techniques, and concepts that would rule-govern the research project" (p. 29). But this is a distortion of Husserl.¹⁰ As Kockelmans' (1994) overview of Husserl's phenomenology demonstrates, Husserl's methodical bracketing, phenomenological reductions, and free imaginative variation are all "procedures". Perhaps due to his desire to simultaneously follow Gadamer, van Manen, *contra* Husserl, poses an overly simplistic dichotomy between infinitely malleable, unfixed research practices (inscribed as humanistic and thus praiseworthy) and mechanical research techniques (inscribed as technocratic and thus blameworthy). He paradoxically characterizes the former alternative as constituting a "phenomenological method" and is thereby free to assert that his hermeneutic phenomenology is methodical.¹¹ In so doing van Manen confuses the openness of phenomenological research with a rejection of method and consistency. More recently van Manen (2006) has drawn upon Heidegger to argue that a genuinely phenomenological approach is a dynamic, creative endeavor that cannot be contained within a "preconceived method" (p. 720).

In addition van Manen (1990) privileges the researcher's individual freedom, making it absolute in a way, which renders methodical inquiry impossible. This consequence is evident in his claim that human science research cannot be constrained by a defined method because researchers must be free to engage in "choosing directions and exploring techniques, procedures, and sources that are not always foreseeable at the outset of a

research project" (p. 162). While appearing to grant that "human science is a systematic study of human experience" (p. 168) van Manen (1990) claims that in the practice of hermeneutic phenomenology "there is no research design or blueprint to follow"—an obvious contradiction (p. 167). His presentation repeatedly implies a dichotomy—which is conceptually awkward and unnecessary from a Husserlian standpoint—between an idealized freedom and a mechanical, technique-driven "blueprint" for the conduct of research. On van Manen's account, method is misleadingly equated with robotic procedure. This misconstrual can be read as an attempt to turn Husserl's (1970) critique of the use of natural scientific methods for the study of consciousness against the methodical implications of Husserl's phenomenology.

A range of procedures for data-gathering and analysis are mentioned in *Researching Lived Experience* (1990), including prompting research participants to report their experiences in terms of the four "existentials" of spatiality, corporeality, temporality, and relationality (p. 101), meeting subsequently with participants to engage in "collaborative hermeneutic conversations" (p. 99), and adopting a "wholistic or sententious approach," a "selective or highlighting approach", or a "detailed or line-by-line approach" in the analysis of data (p. 92-93). However in the light of van Manen's pointed rejection of methodical praxis and research design, the practices he enumerates cannot be taken as comprising a unified or sequential research *method*. Given van Manen's presentation of hermeneutic phenomenology, the procedures he references cannot be understood as steps in a repeatable method—even steps to be implemented in a manner sensitive to the data. Rather, they must be understood as varied elements or alternate strategies to be drawn upon at the researcher's discretion in the course of a fundamentally spontaneous, unstructured (and in principle unstructurable) discovery process. To argue otherwise would be to read into hermeneutic phenomenology a consistent, repeatable research design—something van Manen explicitly rejects (1990).¹²

Epistemological Inconsistencies

It may be objected that the foregoing criticism is mere nitpicking and misses the point: namely, that van Manen's work seeks to encourage researchers to maintain an attitude of openness and adaptability. Nevertheless, if human science research aims at achieving scientific findings possessing disciplinary value, then a research approach must provide researchers with adequate guidance and conceptual clarity to conduct research. In this light, van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenology demonstrates epistemological confusion.

Consider the following assertion regarding the practice of hermeneutic phenomenology:

It is a descriptive (phenomenological) methodology because it wants to be attentive to how things appear, it wants to let things speak for themselves; it is an interpretive (hermeneutic) methodology because it claims that there are no such things as uninterpreted phenomena. (van Manen, 1990, p. 180)

The former, descriptive assertion would appear to be an affirmation of Husserl's (1982) descriptive phenomenology. The latter, interpretive assertion is amplified in van Manen's claim that "understanding is always an interpretation" (p. 180). The two statements, taken as guidance for conducting research, are plainly contradictory.¹³

Obligated to acknowledge the "implied contradiction" in his argument (1990, p. 180), van Manen seeks to resolve the logical inconsistency by blurring the lines between description and interpretation.¹⁴ But as Delius (1953) observed, descriptive and interpretive research approaches embody "a difference of attitude in which [...] research is undertaken", attitudes which are irreducible to each other (p. 306). Careful reading of hermeneutic phenomenology reveals multiple such attempts to blur important differences. For example the practice of hermeneutic phenomenological research is described as "a process of insightful invention, discovery or disclosure" (1990, p. 79). This combination of disparate terms presents a problem for the researcher, because "invention", "discovery", and "disclosure" are not equivalent and imply different attitudes on the researcher's part. As a researcher, "invention" suggests that in the course of research I create an idea whole-cloth through my own efforts; "discovery" suggests a state of affairs that is already present to me and which I make explicit through my own efforts; "disclosure" implies something given to me to understand, something I receive rather than creating. Clearly, these terms are not equivalent and imply different attitudes toward the research situation, the aim of data gathering, and the meaning of findings. These differences in attitude are suppressed in van Manen's (1990) presentation, but the conceptual inconsistencies remain, with the result that hermeneutic phenomenology does not cohere in an integral approach to research.

As has been noted, van Manen frequently invokes the core concepts and practices of Husserl's phenomenology such as bracketing, imaginative variation, essence, and the call to a "return to the things themselves" (e.g. 1990). However he mixes these references with arguments drawn from philosophical hermeneutics and postmodernism,

and in so doing consistently obscures the fundamental differences between Husserl's phenomenology, Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, and Derrida's deconstruction. The latter two schools of thought – whatever their respective merits – are founded upon premises significantly different from and in some cases clearly incompatible with Husserl's work. Two examples illustrate these inconsistencies.

Van Manen asserts in *Researching Lived Experience* (1990, p. 180) that “understanding is always an interpretation”, a paraphrase of Gadamer's (1986) remark in *Truth and Method* that “interpretation is not an occasional additional act subsequent to understanding, but rather understanding is always an interpretation” (p. 274). For van Manen, as for Gadamer, reflective understanding necessarily involves *adding* meaning to one's perceptions, rather than reflectively explicating meanings which are already present, though perhaps implicitly so.¹⁵ Van Manen's assertion, while perhaps according with Gadamer's philosophy, contradicts a central tenet of Husserl's (1982) descriptive phenomenology, his “principle of all principles”.

Husserl founded his approach to inquiry upon the assertion that in perception objects are immediately (intuitively) present to consciousness. Husserl's (1982) Principle of all Principles crystallizes his strong case that inquiry, to be rigorous, must limit itself to the given as it is given to the researchers within a chosen research attitude (p. 44). Husserl regarded meaningfulness as a constituent of perception, not an interpretive addition to perception. His descriptive phenomenological investigations aimed at rendering explicit those meanings that are already present, but implicitly so. Hence a descriptive approach aims at “achieving an adequate account of a certain given phenomenon”, that is, a phenomenon which “presents itself to *direct* investigation” (Deliuss, 1953, p. 306). A premise of descriptive approaches is that a given phenomenon, recognized by a community of fellow-researchers, is capable of being investigated and research verified intersubjectively, because the phenomenon itself is *given* to researchers rather than being the interpretive *creation* of the researcher.¹⁶ As a consequence, a researcher adopting a Husserlian approach seeks to explicate what is phenomenally given, while an interpretive researcher – for example, one following van Manen's (1990) approach – seeks to creatively invent a novel understanding, making use of the data, other artistic or literary materials, and self-consciously interpretive discussions with the research participants. These two approaches are mutually exclusive because they imply radically different attitudes toward the meaning of research as a lived-activity.

Indisputably, methodical inquiry – qualitative or quantitative – relies upon an orderly sequence of steps in gathering and analyzing data. Finally,

van Manen's (2006) disavowal of “preconceived method” must be taken at face value (p. 720). A mode of inquiry which disallows “preconception” may yield spontaneous insight, but it cannot be responsibly termed methodical. Van Manen's opposition to “prescription” and “preconception” render his approach incapable of guiding methodical inquiry, since any research method must to some degree “prescribe” and “preconceive” how research is to be conducted. Van Manen (1990) draws his readers' attention to the etymological root of the word “method”, the Greek *hodos*, which he translates as “way” (p. 28). But *hodos* means “way” in the sense of a path or a road, and phenomenologically we can say that *hodos*, like “method”, is not a one-of-a-kind, idiosyncratic route which I take entirely on my own and without precedents. On the contrary, it is a well-beaten path: a *hodos* or method can be named a “path” or a “road” *precisely* because others may have traveled this way before me, others can travel this way with me, and others will travel this path after me.¹⁷ A research path is always given in the mode “for us” – never is it merely “for me”.

Appropriating Gadamer and Aestheticizing Research

This rejection of methodical praxis appears to flow from the fact that van Manen envisions research as aimed exclusively at the researcher's experience of “disclosure” and its aesthetic expression. As is well known, Heidegger and Gadamer describe the hermeneutic experience of understanding as an “event,” a “disclosure of truth” (Palmer, 1969, p. 245). On my analysis, van Manen's (1990) framing of hermeneutic phenomenological research in aesthetic rather than scientific terms results in its incompatibility with methodical research procedures. Consistent research design is regarded as obstructing the unpredictable disclosure of truth, an event van Manen (1990) compares to the creation of artwork. Such assertions reflect van Manen's reliance upon philosophical hermeneutics, perhaps particularly upon Gadamer who he frequently cites (1990). Since Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is frequently called upon not only by van Manen but by other hermeneutically-influenced philosophers critical of Husserl, or psychologists critical of Giorgi's Husserlian research approach, a digression is in order.

Gadamer (1986) insisted that in *Truth and Method* he “did not remotely intend to deny the necessity of methodical work within the human sciences” (p. XVII).¹⁸ He did, however, argue that the use of a given method of inquiry does not, in and of itself, guarantee truth – an observation fully compatible with Husserl's phenomenology (Amedeo Giorgi, personal communication, July 28, 2009).¹⁹ Gadamer contended

The aesthetic and ontological dimensions of experience are privileged over the clarification of experience, which enables van Manen (2002) to dispense with questions of method or epistemological inconsistency as uninteresting and unimportant. Such issues are dismissed as largely mechanical, vestiges of a scientific worldview, which has been transcended. Hence van Manen (2002) states that research "methods, techniques, form, and style" are "mundane issues", whereas "questions of metaphysics [...] the limits of language [...] the enigmatic nature of words, text, interpretation, and truth" occur at a "more reflective level" (2002, p. I). He writes:

Human science research as writing is an original activity. There is no systematic argument, no sequence of propositions that we must follow in order to arrive at a conclusion, a generalization, or a truth statement, because that would be to see writing itself as technical method. (1990, p. 173)

The researcher is engaged not in a methodical praxis but in "a free act of 'seeing' meaning", and in this sense his or her activity is closer to the artist than the scientist (van Manen, 1990, p. 79). The assessment is the natural consequence of van Manen's adoption of artistic expression as his guiding paradigm. Research is framed more as a personal exercise in literary creativity than as participation in a disciplinary community. Research data and phenomenological writing is conceptualized as "texts" which must validate the researcher in a personal way, having an impact seemingly indistinguishable from that of literature such as poetry. Hence van Manen (2002) claims that:

We experience an addressive moment when a text suddenly "speaks" to us in a manner that validates our experience, when it conveys a life understanding that stirs our sensibilities, when it pulls the strings of unity of our being [...] the reader must become possessed by the allusive power of the text – taken, touched, overcome by the addressive effect of its reflective engagement with lived experience. (p. 237-238)

In this move toward the artistic not only scientific criteria but disciplinary criteria are shed. Van Manen (2001) writes approvingly that qualitative researchers "have moved far beyond traditional discipline-based methodologies and methods" (p. 851). Viewed through the lens of Giorgi's approach, hermeneutic phenomenology does not rise to the level of a scientific research approach because the epistemological clarity required for methodical inquiry is lacking.

Giorgi: Human Science and the Context of Discovery

Giorgi (2009) views method in human science as requiring the articulation of understandable, sequential research procedures meant to guide the discovery process and insure rigor. Method is not envisioned as a mechanical exercise which, by virtue of its formal structure, guarantees valid research findings. Throughout his career (1970, 2009) he has consistently argued that rather than mimicking the methods of natural science, psychology must discover the unique meanings of methodical inquiry for human science. Early in his work Giorgi (1970) concluded that "in order to be faithful to the phenomenon of man, either a new type of science had to be invented or the meaning of science as it was understood had to be considerably broadened" (p. 53). From Giorgi's standpoint "technique" would be regarded critically if what is meant is a reductive, mechanical procedure – but this is arguably an impoverished conception of technique.²³ More broadly, Giorgi argues that science (human or natural) is unattainable in the absence of methodological rigor.

There is an important interplay of form and formlessness in Giorgi's articulation of phenomenological research, and this point is critical because Giorgi's phenomenology offers an alternative to the overly formless, criterionlessness of approaches such as van Manen's. For Giorgi, method is regarded as providing guidance and scaffolding, so to speak, within which the researcher may engage in an open-ended discovery process. This discovery process is understood in Husserl's terms as *intuitive*. Lacking a structure and coherence adequate to ensure that research is methodical, systematic, general, and critical, research will not yield knowledge that enriches the scientific community. Conversely, if a research method is overly theory-laden, the researcher will prejudge the phenomena to be encountered, precluding genuine discoveries.

For this reason Giorgi (1985) has emphasized that phenomenological research is conducted within a context of discovery rather than a context of verification, noting: "we are trying to systematize scientific activity within the context of discovery" (1985, p. 14). Consequently alongside or within the framework of his research method, "a certain open-endedness is also maintained so that genuine discoveries may ensue" (p. 13). Giorgi (1985) has described the phenomenological researcher's attitude using phrases such as "circumscribed indeterminateness," "empty determinateness", and "open expectancy". In these expressions Giorgi seeks to convey the lived experience of adopting a phenomenological attitude in research. This attitude is founded upon Husserl's phenomenological method of

bracketing in order to behold the given *as given*. Giorgi, like Husserl, insists upon two simultaneous needs: that a methodical praxis frame inquiry, and that this method is adequately transparent to the "things themselves" so as to allow for genuine discovery.²⁴

Consequently for Giorgi (1985) method is one of the primary means by which a discipline constitutes the research situation, within which disciplinary intuitions—perceptions framed by the shared interests of a disciplinary community of fellow researchers, a specifiable research question and approach to participants – may be fulfilled and intersubjectively verified. The psychological structures, which are intuitively (perceptually) present within such a research attitude, are not Platonic, universal, nor acontextual. Rather, they are situated within and given to a describable intersubjective research community.

Van Manen, as has been seen, emphasizes the "free act of 'seeing' meaning", as central to research (1990, p. 79). Giorgi similarly emphasizes openness. Yet for Giorgi psychological research is a scientific activity, not an artistic one; science aims first and foremost at communal knowledge, not individual, creative expression – hence it demands shared criteria for knowledge. The meaning of openness in qualitative research depends upon whether research is envisioned as a scientific or an aesthetic endeavor.

Why should such a distinction matter for the next generation of qualitative researchers? Defining human science research as an artistic activity, freed from the constraints of science, is arguably the reflection of a much larger socio-historical trajectory in European and American history. Eagleton (1990) argues that in modernity the aesthetic has come to be regarded as "providing us with a kind of paradigm of what a non-alienated mode of cognition might look like" (p. 2). Amid the "progressively abstract, technical nature of modern European thought", he writes, "art would still appear to speak of the human and the concrete, providing us with a welcome respite from the alienating rigours of other more specialized discourses, and offering [...] a residual common world" (p. 2).

The aesthetic realm promises to reunite the fragmented discourses of ethics and truth by "swallowing up" these realms, with the result that "everything should now become aesthetic", and "truth, the cognitive, becomes that which satisfies the mind, or what helps us to move around the place rather more conveniently" (p. 368). In such a context "truth is no longer in fashion", having been supplanted by a postmodernist-inflected emphasis on "ambiguity, indeterminacy, [and] undecidability", a stance presented as "subversive strikes against an arrogantly monological certitude" (p. 379-380).²⁵ It is but a short step from this philosophical stance to van Manen's assertions that the qualitative researcher seeks

elusiveness rather than clarity, writes not to be understood but "for having understood Being" (2006, p. 721), and "in a moment of transcendental bliss [...] may experience the privilege of the gaze of Orpheus" the archetype of the artist as inspired poet (2002, p. 244).

Arguably, redefining research as inspiring literature, discarding disciplinary constraints, and eschewing potentially turgid epistemological debates free practitioners to focus exclusively on conveying the lived meanings of human phenomena in the most compelling manner possible. However doing so also yields the field of science entirely to exponents of the positivist paradigm. If qualitative psychological researchers seek refuge in the arts and a postmodern equating of research with fiction, they invite the charge of subjectivism and the further marginalization of qualitative approaches as literary and hence irrelevant to science.²⁶

Reducing method to mechanical technique unnecessarily impoverishes the conception of human science. Method is a means by which, as scientists, we constitute a shared world of inquiry within which insights can arise for a community of fellow researchers, to be interrogated and refined. Van Manen and others quite rightly argue that openness to human phenomena as they are lived is the essence of qualitative research. So too, such openness is rightly regarded as not being the mechanical byproduct of any series of rote procedural steps. From a philosophic perspective the essence of one's openness to another may indeed demonstrate a dimension of mystery and "unknowing". But at the same time, as researchers we need not *mystify* our openness: if qualitative research requires an attitude of open inquiry, does not this openness reflect a describable attitude which we learn over time in dialogue with mentors, with a framing method, with fellow-researchers, and within a shared humanistic tradition? It is this current in the human scientific tradition which Giorgi seeks to continue.

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Note

- ¹ I want to express my gratitude to Amedeo Giorgi and J. N. Mohanty for their willingness to dialogue with me during the writing of this article.
- ² The terms "aesthetic", "aestheticizing", and "artistic" are used in this article not to refer to the philosophy of art or the activity of creating artwork, but rather to designate a style of thought and argumentation that has been critiqued by both Eagleton (1990) and Habermas (1996), one which in Habermas' view "would collapse the difference between logic and rhetoric, between normal and "poetic" language, between problem solving and meaning creation" (Kompridis, 1999, p. 137).
- ³ This position is associated with philosophers such as Rorty (see Dancy & Sosa, 1998, pp. 88-91).
- ⁴ Of course the term "hermeneutic phenomenology" refers to a rich tradition of philosophical inquiry including Heidegger and Ricoeur (see Spiegelberg, 1965, p. 323; Kockelmans, 1993, and Ihde, 1980). In the present discussion the term is used solely in reference to van Manen's research approach.
- ⁵ Commenting on his historical work *The History of Madness*, Foucault wrote "it is necessary that what it asserts is somehow "true", in terms of historically verifiable truths. But what is essential is not found in a series of historically verifiable proofs; it lies rather in the experience which the book permits us to have. And an experience is neither true nor false: it is always a fiction" (cited in Ransom, 1997, p. 57).
- ⁶ Himmelfarb (1997) contends that postmodern scholarship rejects "normal standards of discourse", renounces "all pretence of rational, logical, "enlightened" discourse", and abandons "the conventions regarding the presentation and documentation of evidence" (p. 172). Her analysis is made in the context of historiography, but is applicable to other disciplines.

- ⁷ For Husserl's emphasis on method, see Bernet, Kern & Malbach (1993), Chapter 2.
- ⁸ For example, he writes that "insight into the essence of a phenomenon" is accomplished by "making explicit the structure of meaning of the lived experience" (1990, p. 77); similarly, "*In determining the universal or essential quality of a theme our concern is to discover aspects or qualities that make a phenomenon what it is and without which the phenomenon could not be what it is.* To this end the phenomenologist uses the method of free imaginative variation in order to verify whether a theme belongs to a phenomenon essentially" (p. 107). Such statements initially appear to be paraphrases of Husserl.
- ⁹ As Dodd (1998) observed, "Philosophy, for Husserl, is not a perspective that we can switch to at will (though it flows from our freedom); it must be isolated, rebuilt and fortified. As such it is approachable only if reflection adopts a certain rigor; for method is the space within which philosophy emerges as philosophy, and in doing so it merges with the method itself, giving it, the method, a concrete meaning, relevance" (p. 67).
- ¹⁰ Similarly van Manen's (1990) assertion that "the method of phenomenology is that there is no method" and yet there somehow remains a "methodological ground" (p. 30) is fallacious, unless van Manen means to exclude Husserl and Husserlian thought from the phenomenological tradition!
- ¹¹ The same unfortunate dichotomizing is evident in van Manen's (1990) claim that hermeneutic phenomenology "is decidedly unmethodological in a purely prescriptive or technocratic sense", with its curious equation of "prescription" with "technocracy" (p. 3).
- ¹² Likewise, maintaining that Husserl's phenomenology rejects well-articulated techniques and procedures is unsupportable, as it would require omitting the epoché, bracketing, and imaginative variation (all of which are methodical praxes) from one's account, something which would render Husserl's phenomenology unrecognizable. The rejection of methodical research praxes cannot itself constitute a method of inquiry.
- ¹³ The argument is circular: if all phenomena are mediated by interpretation, then phenomena are in principle *never* immediately present to a researcher (or any experienter). In that case, description as such is impossible – all that remains is interpretation. But if there is no presence to be interpreted, then there is no given:

in which case, how does the subject have access to an object of interpretation? When the presence of the given is ruled out of order, it is difficult to see how interpretation would be possible. The attempt to resolve the epistemological inconsistency by incorporating description as a subset of interpretation fails logically.

14 He expands thusly: "invention (my interpretive product), discovery (the interpretive product of my dialogue with the text of life), disclosure of meaning (the interpretive product "given" to me by the text of life itself)" (p. 88). Labeling everything interpretation does not resolve the problem – rather, it conceals the implicit contradictions.

15 Warnke (1987) noted that for Gadamer, "all understanding involves projecting a meaning upon one's perceptions that is not strictly contained in the perceptions themselves" (p. 75).

16 Of course, this givenness has a context of research interest, language, culture, et cetera.

17 Hence the use of *hodos* in Matthew, Chapter 7 verse 14: "the gate is narrow and the road [*hodos*] is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it" (1977). Hermeneutic phenomenology privileges the researcher's unique subjectivity above intersubjectivity – but paths and research methods are intrinsically intersubjective.

18 As Palmer (1969) noted, Gadamer states that "he is doing ontology, not methodology" (p. 47).

19 This is so because the fulfillment of intuition, in Husserl's terms, is not the mechanical outcome of implementing fixed procedures. This includes disciplinary intuitions, i.e. intuitions arrived at in the context of a given field of inquiry such as psychology or anthropology. When it occurs, the fulfillment of an intuition takes place within a context, and in scientific inquiry the context includes multiple givens which can be specified, such as the defining of a research question. Of course an intuition may remain unfulfilled: from a Husserlian perspective, there is no guarantee that a given presentational process will result in intuitive fulfillment (Amedeo Giorgi, personal communication, July 28, 2009).

20 Gadamer appears to equate science as such with the modern natural sciences. This is important in order to properly understand why Gadamer asserts that the experience of understanding in the human sciences is closer to the arts. In a collection of essays published in 1996 he writes "the term "art" seems to belong to that domain in which someone's skills and abilities enable them to construct

something, to "make" something [...] this is not the typical way of modern science, which has learnt to erect constructive models on the basis of experience, experiment, and correct quantitative calculation" (p. 95). He writes, "Our science is based not on the experience of life but on that making and producing [...] this science is essentially [...] a kind of mechanics: it is *mechane*, that is, the artificial production of effects which would not come about simply of themselves" (1996, p. 38).

21 For Giorgi, in contrast, the humanities and the human sciences ought not to be collapsed together.

22 Van Manen (1990) asserts that "just as the poet or the novelist attempts to grasp the essence of some experience in literary form, so the phenomenologist attempts to grasp the essence of some experience in a phenomenological description [...] the artist recreates experiences by transcending them" (p. 96-97).

23 The Greek term *tekhne* has much broader connotations including art, skill, craft, method, and system.

24 Were one to address this situation in ontological terms, the question might be framed thusly: how can method simultaneously be full as a delimiting and constituting of the research situation, and empty as a transparency to the given as given? This simultaneity of seeming opposites is expressed in the philosophy of Kyoto School philosophers Nishida Kitaro and Nishitani Keiji using the Japanese term *soku*. (see Maraldo, 2003).

25 Arguably, many of the chief theorists of postmodernism such as Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault critiqued Husserl in precisely this manner.

26 As Duvenage (2003) notes, Habermas has argued "it is possible to apply non-objectivist modes of inquiry [...] in science, but this should not violate science's primary orientation toward truth" (p. 60).