BOOK REVIEWS

Lincoln, Yvonna S. & Guba, Egon G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverley Hills: Sage Publications, 416 pp. $25.00 U.S. (hardcover).

This reviewer's reaction to *Naturalistic Inquiry* is so unequivocal that it must be stated forthright: This is an *outrageous* book, and it is equally outrageous that it is being used as a text in some graduate courses in research methods in North America. Stripped of its rhetoric and jargon-laden veneer, it is in essence an intellectually dishonest polemic.

To recognize why, one has only to compare two "versions" of the book, one skillfully written six-page Preface and the other one that the authors unfold in the text. The commendable objectives and methods sketched in the former are unconscionably negated in the execution of the latter.

In the Preface, we are told, first, that this book is a reaction to the failure of the dominant world view of our time — the "scientific" or "positivistic" paradigm. In view of the pervasiveness of scientism, it is reasonable to assume that documenting the nature of positivism and then critically examining its claims and methods would occupy a considerable amount of the authors' energies.

Second, this book is a search for an alternative to the scientific paradigm, not, we are cautioned, a final articulation and not to be viewed as a completed product" (p. 9). At most, the authors hope to sketch the salient structural characteristics of a viable improved alternative to the traditional scientific perspective. Thus, what they label "naturalism" is a generic category. In the author's own words: "nowhere in the book will the reader encounter a sentence of the form, 'Naturalism' is defined as . . ." (p. 8).

The alternative sketched and advocated by the authors is "generic" in two senses. On the one hand, it encompasses a wide variety of current methodological orientations, or "aliases" as the authors dub them: "the post positivistic, ethnographic, phenomenological, subjective, case study, qualitative, hermeneutic, humanistic" (p. 7). The alternative is also generic in that its infrastructure has not been sufficiently articulated to make completely clear and concrete its basic structure, fundamental axioms and logical coherence. It eludes fully conscious, formal, articulation.

The third promise made in the Preface is to provide methodological guidelines for "naturalistic" inquiry. Importantly, specific research procedures derive their legitimacy from the theoretical framework from which they are deduced. They are specific conclusions whose validity is wholly determined by the logical integrity of the argument they follow from and the empirical/rational soundness of the axioms upon which that logical argument is itself founded.

All this constitutes quite an agenda, promising an exciting intellectual journey during which we shall peer deep into the heart of a world-view which has

entrapped us and obfuscated our thinking. The camouflage will be stripped from positivism and its flawed infrastructure revealed. From there, the monumental intellectual task of constructing an alternative paradigm will begin. Finally, once the new *Weltanschauung* is constructed, its ontological, epistemological and cosmological principles will yield specific praxiological tenets in the form of concrete social-science research methodologies and axiological guidelines for the conduct of such research. What the above authors promise is nothing less than a blueprint for a fundamental shift in the entire field of the logic of inquiry. It is the stuff paradigm revolutions are made of. The substantive 364 page body of the work, however, is a poor reflection indeed of the promise.

To begin, in the very first chapter the authors do not undertake a straightforward and accurate exposition of the "scientific" paradigm, but instead, build a straw man and then gleefully destroy him. They tell us that positivism is "discredited by vanguard thinkers in every known discipline" (p. 15), and lest there be any doubt, recite a litany of condemnations of positivism from a host of "authorities." The main differences between these authorities is that they attack the scientific paradigm from slightly different positions, but we are assured that "these authors do agree on one point: Positivism is passé" (p. 24).

The task of demolition supposedly complete, the authors continue by begging the question: "What is the nature of the challenges to and critiques of positivism that have brought it to its metaphoric knees?" (p. 24). Included in this final devastation are irrelevant observations such as that positivism's adherence to the principle of determinism is "repugnant because of its implications for human free will" (p. 27). So cavalierly do the authors dispense with the paradigm that we are left wondering how on earth positivism ever managed to so capture the intellectual imagination of the 20th century. What is noticeably missing in all this is that positivism is seen only through the eyes of its critics. Where are the voices of its most able exponents? Were the authors willing to let the likes of Karl Popper, or Ernest Nagel speak for themselves, through their own text, the simplistic picture of their paradigm would disappear and its compelling power would have been felt. The biased, distorted, picture that the authors draw of the position they attack violates the criteria of fair play and objectivity we might expect even at the level of an undergraduate paper.

It is only in those sections of the work where the authors manage to refrain from hurling insults upon positivism that the reader is treated to an illuminating and insightful exposition of the assumptions, structure, and methodologies of the naturalistic paradigm. For example, a short descriptive section (pp. 39-43) on the "fourteen characteristics of operational naturalistic inquiry" is an excellent summary of the major articles of faith and practice held by proponents of naturalistic inquiry. Similarly, Chapter 2 provides a fine blueprint for examination of the question "What criteria must an aspiring paradigm meet to begin to be taken as a 'legitimate guide for inquiry?'" (p. 62). Such discussions are truly valuable, interesting, and of heuristic significance. Unfortunately, they are intellectual gems scattered upon a sea of polemical guano.

One may speculate that the reason Lincoln and Guba adopt such an openly inflammatory and combative stance toward positivism has to do with the fact that a major focus of the book is to argue for the *legitimacy* of the naturalistic paradigm. As the authors themselves put it: "Why should anyone accept the naturalistic paradigm as a logical successor to the positivist view? Why should the mantle of legitimation fall on the shoulders of naturalism?" (p. 47). The inevitability that the mantle of legitimation should fall on the shoulders of naturalism requires that two conditions be met. First, the basic inadequacy of positivism has to be documented. Second, naturalism must be shown to meet the demand one would make of any paradigm which may aspire to the "mantle" of paradigmatic pre-eminence.

The obvious failure of *Naturalistic Inquiry* to meet this first requirement is enough, by itself, to pronounce the endeavor a failure. The authors add to their troubles however, in establishing the "legitimacy" of their paradigm, and why "the naturalistic paradigm is *the* paradigm of choice" (p. 50, emphasis in original), by the mode of argument upon which they insist on falling back. Essentially, they claim that [naturalism] is resonant with vanguard thinking in almost every form of discipline that exists" (p. 50). How odd is the following logic: "Is the naturalistic paradigm the genuine article? . . . Is it a legitimate guide for inquiry? The answer to these questions seems to be a resounding 'yes'!" (p. 62). Why? Among other reasons, the authors note with pride that they "were able to make a series of arguments that indicate a greater degree of acceptability for the new paradigm than might have been the case even a few years ago" (p. 64).

Similarly, we have blatant examples of argument from authority when the authors rely upon the work of Schwartz and Ogilvy, who have evidently drawn up a list of some seven characteristics of some supposedly 'leading edge' thinking in the field of logic in inquiry. Because what the authors call naturalistic inquiry is in basic congruence with the seven tenets, this is some sort of proof that the naturalistic paradigm warrants our acceptance. Those skeptics among us who might want to examine the authority which is being relied upon are told, in a footnote, that the monograph abstracted by Schwartz and Ogilvy "is but a summary of a much larger collection of documents produced by the project. Unfortunately, the project is funded by a consortium of businesses and industries that hold a proprietary interest in the outcomes. Copies of the larger collection of documents are available only to sponsors or to subscribers at a $500.00 fee" (p. 68). Not that we are tempted to pursue this elusive document; from Lincoln and Guba's description of it, it seems that Schwartz and Ogilvy argue from analogy, using examples from physics and biology which are extrapolated to the social sciences.

It appears, in short, that Lincoln and Guba are themselves guilty of the crudest reductionist arguments which they so vehemently condemn positivists for employing.

Naturalistic Inquiry is replete with errors in the rules of argument. At the very least, within the text are to be found examples of the fallacies of semantic ambiguity, argument by innuendo, begging the question, false alternatives, faulty

analogies, irrelevant thesis, assigning irrelevant functions or goals, *ad hominem*, appeal to authority and to public opinion, distortion, attacking a straw man, creating red herrings, and ridicule. In order not to prolong the agony, we might well ask ourselves whether there is anything in the remainder of the text which redeems this work. In some places, yes; overall, no.

Thus on the negative side, problems are numerous. The crux of Chapter 3, titled "Constructed Realities," obviously has to be a repudiation of the positivist notion that there is not only an "objective" reality outside the human observer, but that the observer can also accurately perceive that world (this latter point becomes the subject of Chapter 4). In response to such fundamental ontological questions, the authors lead us through a bizarre collection of tales by everyone from Jocko Conlan (a National League umpire), Alexander Haig, George Will to Carlos Castaneda. Somehow, even the game of Parcheesi and the quest for that elusive entity, the "G spot," are thrown in for good measure. No doubt the authors are seeking to be "relevant" and "hip," perhaps to reach a young graduate student audience.

Such flippancy belies the seriousness of the point to be demonstrated. When the authors finally do get around to the core of their argument, we are treated to the same, familiar, approach. The arguments are from authority; a brief four pages cover four "ontological positions" and the notion of an independent, objective reality is summarily disposed of. We are assured that reality is either "created" or "constructed" — without any compelling arguments to prove the point. This troublesome theoretical requirement brushed aside, the authors again become flippant and offer, as examples of constructed realities, such things as the proceedings of a law court, dictionaries, and advertising. But then, this reviewer supposes that to demand a clear defense of the authors' position is to reveal oneself as hopelessly "passé" and definitely incapable of *avant-garde* thinking. After all, "A person need not be a psychologist, a chemist or a physicist in order to confront the clashes that are the daily fender-benders of reality . . . they are there for the looking and the reading" (p. 90). It is equally needless to note that, given the fact that reality is itself a construction, the classical subject-object distinction cannot be maintained. Thus Chapter 4 reiterates how the act of observation changes the phenomena (social and physical). Clearly, however, because the ontological presuppositions of naturalism were very far from proven in Chapter 3, the epistemological corollaries in Chapter 4 ring equally hollow.

Similar flaws manifest themselves in Chapters 4 - 7 which argue that the act of observation inherently and necessarily disturbs the phenomena being studied; universal generalizations are not possible; linear causality is a reductionist view of the complexity of reality; and the notion of value-free inquiry is not only incorrect but undesirable. These chapters are a sort of "mopping-up" operation. The key points that they elaborate are of necessity structurally and functionally compatible with the ontological, epistemological and cosmological foundations for the naturalist paradigm laid out at the beginning of the book. Accordingly,

these sections suffer the same weaknesses and possess the same strengths as the authors' exposition of the metaphysics of the naturalistic paradigm.

The real strength and value of *Naturalistic Inquiry* is to be found in the eighth and subsequent chapters. These chapters constitute an excellent primer in both 1) the rationale for undertaking any one of the research orientations the authors group under the heading naturalistic inquiry, and 2) the guidelines on initiating, conducting, and evaluating such investigations. Indeed, to understand the fundamentals of "qualitative" research, the reader might well be advised to begin reading at Chapter 8. Here, the authors are clear, lucid, and direct in their exposition. This reviewer must, however, note two caveats.

First, it was noted at the beginning of this review that formulating specific methodologies is essentially a deductive exercise. The methodologies can be clear, concrete, practical and very "grounded" as they require no defense as to their legitimacy. All they require is demonstration of technical efficacy. In other words, methodologies do not have to justify what is being done, only that it is being done correctly. The rationale for the "doing" is found at the level of theory. The soundness of theory is directly proportional to the soundness of the conceptual paradigm within which it functions. Therefore, the reader may ask him/herself whether Lincoln and Guba have indeed convincingly articulated the naturalistic paradigm. In the opinion of this reviewer, they clearly have not. Therefore Chapters 8 - 13, the so-called doing chapters, are technically flawless; they guide us however in the execution of an investigative mode which has not itself been justified properly.

The reader is therefore cautioned (to use an unkind analogy) to consider that the methodological guidelines so clearly and convincingly presented may perhaps be akin to a procedure manual for performing bloodlettings. That is to say, the medieval practice of bloodletting had an elaborate and well-defined methodology. Unfortunately, it was a logical derivative of a terribly flawed paradigm. When the paradigm lost its legitimacy, no amount of tinkering with procedures could save it or its attendant practices. Therefore, the reader should be wary of embracing whole-heartedly the methodologies demarcated in Chapters 8 - 13 if the best argument for the legitimacy of the paradigm underlining those methodologies is the inadequate argument found in Chapters 1 - 7.

Second and ironically, when Lincoln and Guba settle down to the nitty gritty of discussing research procedures, at times they appear indiscernible from the hardnosed "scientists" of whom they are so contemptuous. We are cautioned about sampling. We are sensitized to the need to train members of an investigation team. Data collection modes are refined. We discover that "just as the conventional investigator must attend to the question of how internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity will be provided for in the design so must the naturalistic inquirer arrange for credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability" (p. 247). (Presumably, if the former four criteria cannot be differentiated from the latter four, then you are not an *avant-garde* researcher.) Novice researchers are cautioned that "inquirers should prepare a form in advance of any contact

with the respondent, which, should contain [specific] information . . .'' (p. 254). The pitfalls of interviewing and observation are discussed. The virtues of documents and records are extolled. (One interesting virtue is that ''they are often *legally unassailable*, representing, especially in the case of records, formal statements that satisfy some accountability requirement'' (p. 277, emphasis in original). The dilemma of making valid generalizations (i.e, in the jargon of naturalism, ''transferability'') is agonized over.

While ''objectivity'' has, of course, been dismissed as a positivistic pipe dream, we are told that a ''qualitative'' connotation of the term is perfectly acceptable, indeed necessary. This elusive qualitative definition of objectivity ''removes the emphasis from the investigator (it is no longer his or her objectivity that is at stake) and places it on the data themselves. The issue is no longer the investigator's characteristics but the characteristics of the data: Are they or are they not *confirmable*?'' (p. 300, emphasis in original). We are told that there are ''means whereby the naturalist's alternative trustworthiness criteria may be operationalized'' (p. 301). And this is followed by an earnest discussion under the category of ''credibility,'' ''transferability,'' ''dependability'' and ''confirmability.'' We are introduced to a systematic method of data processing, and the virtues of the comparative method are extolled. The final stage of any inquiry, reporting and auditing, are also attended to in meticulous detail. Remarkably, even the computer is introduced, and, the authors reluctantly admit that it would be ''inappropriate to conclude that the computer cannot be of substantial assistance'' (p. 352).

Concluding Comments

The need for works such as *Naturalistic Inquiry* is great indeed. In an age when graduate courses are increasingly reverting to an instrumentalist approach to the teaching of research methodologies, texts that stimulate students to recognize that they work within paradigms and that paradigms are extremely problematic theoretical constructs are absolutely essential.

This reviewer's criticism of *Naturalistic Inquiry* has been blunt, but only in response to the biased, blatant, scathing attack that Lincoln and Guba themselves launched upon the dominant paradigm of our time and its attendant research methodologies.

The unfortunate result is that graduate students, unless they already have a refined understanding of positivism and other paradigms which offer an alternative to the naturalistic paradigm proposed by Lincoln and Guba, may be unequipped to reach their own conclusions. Furthermore, this reviewer is astonished that the author rarely mentions other powerful paradigms, thereby portraying the paradigm battles of our generation as but a single battle between two titans, and severely hampering the persuasiveness of the argument for the naturalistic alternative.

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1. The reviewer is consciously using lay terminology in labeling what are properly fallacies in the logic of argumentation. Many excellent texts on this subject are available, all using slightly different terms for the various fallacies. The reviewer has relied upon the excellent text: Damer, T. Edward. (1980). *Attacking faculty reasoning*. Belmont, California: Wadsworth.

References

Popper, Karl R. (1972). Two faces of commonsense: An argument for common sense realism and against the common sense theory of knowledge. In *Objective knowledge: An evolutionary approach.* (pp. 32-33). Oxford: Clarendon Press.

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Kimball, Bruce A. (1986). *Orators and philosophers: A history of the idea of liberal education.* New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 292 pp., $19.95 (cloth).

History without philosophy
Is like a guide who has lost his compass:
Very good in familiar territory
But always nervous on safari.
Zadic

In *Orators & Philosophers*, Dean Bruce A. Kimball makes a valiant effort to sort out two thousand years of earnest but snarled thinking about liberal education. In his examination of the ancient texts, he notes that in Roman antiquity, *liberalis* meant an activity suitable for free men (p. 13). Looking further, he finds that the Greek word *skholé* was used to denote leisure and came to signify that schools were places where those with leisure went to learn (p. 15). Those etymological roots are used to link orators like Isocrates and Cicero to modern defenders of the classics. For example Meiklejohn and Hutchins are portrayed as advocating the classics because classics will enhance human freedom when studied for their own sake and provide a kind of egalitarianism by turning democracy into a universal aristocracy (p. 223).

Although the etymological argument is not central, the tangle it produces is characteristic of the confusion that develops as Dean Kimball reckons with the various views of liberal education set forth by numbers of advocates. When he deals with scholars as profound as Plato, Descartes, or John Dewey, he hardly touches on the weighty thoughts that give depth and substance to their views on education. For example, in dealing with Dewey's Pragmatism, Kimball makes no mention of how Operationalism, with its view of a different concept of length for every way of measuring it, led to a relativism about knowledge that made Experimentalists skeptical about the enduring truths the Classicists claimed to find in literature. As a result of such omissions, the educational views of conceptual lightweights like F.A.P. Barnard, Frank Aydelotte of Swarthmore and A.L. Lowell, President of Harvard University, are inflated. That is, by slighting the grounds on which serious thinkers have based their arguments for one kind of