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An Empiricist Manifesto

Martyn Hammersley¹ 

Qualitative Inquiry

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Abstract

A call to empiricists to rise up and reclaim reality.

Keywords

empiricism, fact, reality, truth

Three cheers for empiricism.
Not your new empiricism, Deleuze and all that.
Don't be deluded.

No, back to the good old empiricists.
Not that they knew they were empiricists, of course.
Just underlabourers of science, helping to build knowledge.

Let us search for facts worth knowing.
Not "facts" clothed in scare quotes, but naked facts.
We've gone round the ontological bend, after all.
No need for squeamishness about "reality" or "truth."
Truths about reality are just what we need,
Hasn't that always been the task?

No need for a "theoretical lens,"
You are not a brain in a cultural vat,
But free to discover how things are.
Look, listen, and think; over and over again.
No guarantees, but there is no other way.

So, as Husserl had it: Back to the Things Themselves!
Though not the transcendental things he poked around at.
A social science instead, focusing on
The real things that make a difference to our lives.
The things that cause misery and despair.
The things we need to understand if we are to change them.

Empiricists of the world unite!
You have nothing to lose,
And a reality to rediscover.


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ORCID iD

Martyn Hammersley  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6842-6276>

Author Biography

Martyn Hammersley is Emeritus Professor of Educational and Social Research at The Open University, UK. Much of his work has been concerned with the methodological issues surrounding social enquiry. His books include (with Paul Atkinson) *Ethnography: Principles in Practice* (Fourth edition, Routledge 2019), *The Politics of Social Research* (Sage, 1995), *Reading Ethnographic Research* (Second edition, Longman 1997), *Questioning Qualitative Inquiry* (Sage, 2008), *The Limits of Social Science* (Sage, 2014), *The Radicalism of Ethnomethodology* (Manchester University Press, 2018), *The Concept of Culture* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), and *Troubling Sociological Concepts* (Palgrave Macmillan 2020). Website: <http://martynhammersley.wordpress.com/>

¹The Open University, Milton Keynes, UK

Corresponding Author:

Martyn Hammersley, The Open University, Milton Keynes MK7 6AA, UK.
Email: martyn.hammersley@open.ac.uk