

Need ForRAs 11-20-11

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The Need for Reflective Analyses

During the past 40 years I have attended probably four phenomenology conferences a year and heard at least six presentations at each of them. This is nearly 1,000 presentations in addition to which I have read at least that many journal articles and book chapters that are considered phenomenological in these years as well. On this basis I can report that practically all these expressions that are considered phenomenological are actually scholarship in which often penetrating interpretations of the usually difficult writings by giants in the past of our tradition are offered. I greatly enjoy hearing and reading such scholarship and have myself contributed several dozen items to it where Dorion Cairns, Aron Gurwitsch, and Alfred Schutz as well as Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Jean-Paul Sartre and even the American proto-phenomenologist William James are concerned, and not only do I happily participate in this scholarship, but I also recognize that it is and will always be deeply needed to help us gain maximum benefit from our great past. And where scholarship is concerned, I only wish there was more that is comparative of aspects of the positions of our giants because this would, I believe, foster more phenomenology.

However, almost all of what I have just referred to is fundamentally of the type of research best called scholarship. I often use “philology” as a synonym for “scholarship” because it nicely contrasts with “phenomenology.” This scholarship

or philology is secondary and not primary literature. To be sure, many of the interpretations I have heard and read indicate commitments to pre-established positions, usually that of the author of the text interpreted. What is rare are objections to this or that aspect of the position interpreted and rarer still are phenomenological alternatives offered to those aspects objected to, which is to say phenomenological corrections, not to speak of deepening extensions of the descriptions of the things in question.

Where agreement with the position interpreted is indicated, it is also rare that this agreement is said to be based on reflective observation of the things in question. I have gently challenged friends within our tradition in this respect and have sometimes been told that they can see the things in question even as they interpret these texts by others. When I follow up by asking why they did not say that or, more importantly, go on to refine the position they have interpreted, my friends have typically had no answer. Nor have they answers when I ask if they have phenomenological objections, objections based on observation of the things themselves in question.

An interpretation is as such true if what is asserted in it can be found expressed or implied in the writings of the author of them. (Interestingly, this can be by the same author as the author interpreting them, e.g., when one of her earlier texts is interpreted by an author.) If what is asserted in the scholarship cannot be found in the texts of the author interpreted, then the interpretation as such is false. It might nevertheless be true of the things themselves in question, but this is not the same as being true of the texts.

In contrast with scholarship or philology, which again is true or false with respect to texts already produced, the species of accounts produced in what I prefer

to call “investigations”—and which in our tradition are often called “descriptions”—are true or false with respect to things. It is possible that the things in question are texts and in that case one pursues such questions as What is a text? How do texts or speeches refer to things as well as to other texts or speeches? How is a text true or false with respect to texts or speeches as well as to other things? etc. and thus develop a phenomenology of interpretation or hermeneutics. Usually, however, a description is true or false of a thing in question other than a text and its truth or falsity is judged in phenomenology on the basis of reflective observation of the things in question.

The upshot of what I am saying is that very little of what is or would be called by its author “phenomenology” in the perhaps 2,000 expressions I have heard or read down through my years in our tradition is not phenomenology at all, but rather scholarship or philology. Here, as mentioned, I am somewhat guilty, although since my first essay and increasingly of late I have been trying to produce phenomenological texts in a genre that I now call “reflective analyses.” These are about things themselves and written in such a way that I hope the hearer or reader does not in effect ask “Where does a great figure from the past express what is here being asserted interpretively?” but is rather turned to the things in question and asks whether they are as I have asserted they are. Mentions of major authorities, quotations, and footnotes are among the ways in which one can direct one’s hearer or reader to examine what one expresses as a piece of scholarship, whereas it is best to include little or none of such “scholarly apparatus” in a description or reflective analysis based on reflective analysis of the things in question.

If one asks about the audience of the ca. 2,000 speeches and texts I have tried to comprehend down through the years, the answer is easily found: They are typically my fellow professional colleagues who are conversant about such

technical scholarship and thus belong to a given specialty, school of thought, or at least discipline. If one asks in contrast whom investigations rather than scholarship might also be addressed to, one can include hearers and readers not necessarily versed in technical apparatuses and then one can think of professional colleagues in other specialties, schools of thought, or disciplines, but, above all, one can think of students. Set aside professional colleagues, what do students learn besides how to do scholarship if all of what they hear and read is scholarship? Is it anything other than how to do more scholarship and are the methods of scholarship not text interpretation rather than reflective observation of things in question, which are usually not texts? Not surprisingly, a few colleagues have wondered whether our magnificent tradition is not degenerating into merely a curious type of history of 20th C. philosophy. To avoid that, I assert that we need a great deal of teaching as well as writing not of philology but phenomenology or, again, reflective analysis.

I have of course published a text in now ten languages, with more to come, on what I believe reflective analysis to be and I even fancy that it is a reflective analysis of the approach of reflective analysis. (I have encouraged translations into the smaller as well as the world languages of Castilian, English, French, Portuguese, and Russian because, while ever more of the professional-to-professional communication is in English, colleagues tell me that they mostly teach in their local languages and can use more written materials in those languages for the sake of their students.) My text acknowledges the figures I have learned from in one paragraph, has only one footnote, and no quotations.¹ I have also gathered

¹*Análisis reflexivo. Una primera introducción a la Fenomenología / Reflective Analysis. A First Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. into Castilian by Luis Román Rabanaque (Morelia: Editorial Jitanjáfora, 2003, 543 pp.). Original English as *Reflective Analysis* (Bucharest: Zeta Books, 2006, 196 pp.); Translations: *Лестер Эмбри Рефлексивный анализ. Первоначальное введение в феноменологию*, trans. Victor Moltchanov (Moscow: Triquadrata, 2005, 223 pp.); *使える現象学* (Tokyo, 2007); *Analiza refleksyjn.* (Warsaw, 2006); *性分析：現象學研究入門* (Taiwan, 2007; also from Peking

eleven separate reflective analyses into another collection.² Furthermore, I am accumulating more such analyses on a dedicated website (www.reflectiveanalysis.net). And, to be sure, I am not the first to produce texts that fit this genre, for lots of them can be found in our tradition, beginning at least in *The Principles of Psychology* (1890) of Willian James. By the way, the giants of our tradition whom we should emulate did very little scholarship.

What I hope happens is that these descriptions by me and by others are taught by being assigned one at a time to advanced undergraduate or graduate students for study the night before and then seminar sessions conducted by the instructor in Socratic fashion by asking such things as What is the theme of this reflective analysis? Is there a better name for it? Have you ever pondered it before? Can you find in your own mental life serious or fictive examples of the things in question? Are they as described in this reflective analysis? If they are not, how might they be better described? Do you find corrections and refinements that have been expressed by fellow students true? If you find them true as far as they go, can you advance them further, i.e., refine them yourself with description based on further reflective analysis? We all have some sense of our mental lives to begin with and can then, especially with help, go on to refine it with extensive practice into skill. In this way, I hope that there can be more phenomenologists rather than

University Press, 2007); *Analiza Reflexivă* (Cluj Napoca: Casa Cărții de Știință, 2007); *Analyse réflexive*, trans. Mathieu Trichet (Bucharest: Zeta Books, 2009); *Analisi riflessiva. Una prima introduzione all'investigazione fenomenologica*, trans. Angelo); Bottone (Roma: Edizioni Studium S.r.l, *Análise reflexive, Uma primeira introdução na investigação fenomenológica*, trans. Antonieta Lopes (Bucharest: Zeta Books, 2011), (Catalan translation also in press).

² *Environment, Technology, Justification*. Bucharest: Zeta Books, 2008, 173 pp. *Ambient, Tecnología, y Justificación*, trans. Luis Román Rabanaque (Bucharest: Zeta Books, 2010), 210 pp. (Also planned for publication in Chinese and Japanese).

philologists produced in the future. The need is for more phenomenologists and reflective analyses are a means to the end of supplying this need.

I do not currently teach doctoral students, but if I did, I would first of all teach them reflective analysis and thus to be phenomenologists. But I would also encourage them chiefly to publish scholarship once they graduated and until they got tenure. This is because scholarship is easier to do and more can be produced year by year, because it is easier for colleagues in other schools of thought to understand, and because it is safer because supported by passages written by recognized authorities rather than by one's own reflective observations that call for confirmation through reflective analysis by others. But I would also advise them to remember once they have gotten tenure to produce more and more phenomenology and thus to be the phenomenologists they prepared to be.

One reason why students and many already established professionals sometimes hesitate to produce phenomenology is because the giants of the past have often produced daunting book-length analyses, which few of us feel able to emulate. But I urge that we consider reflecting to begin with on things the understanding of which can be advanced in perhaps a dozen pages, which is something that I have tried to do. Other reasons why one might hesitate to try to do phenomenology rather than philology must include what one has become deeply in the habit of doing and also what one sees others do. But if one looks again at what the giants of our marvelous past have done, one can also see short as well as long reflective analyses and one can then resist conformism and find the courage to struggle against habit through continual disciplined practice. And no doubt reflective analysis requires practice.

This urging of much more phenomenology and much less philology is nowise original with me. Only my explicit urging of the genre of concise and thing-focused reflective analyses for Socratic teaching in small classes might be unusual. Without skill at reflective analysis being learned and done in the next generation, our tradition is dead.