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Temporary Home Bases: Reflective Analysis of A Way to Compose Reflective Analyses

Concerned that very few colleagues in the phenomenological tradition actually do phenomenology rather than scholarship on texts, i.e., chiefly speak and write about what others have written, I have published a book in the simplest terms I could manage about our approach in general, as I have come to understand it and which it seems best to call “reflective analysis.” The title of the book is then also *Reflective Analysis*. This title names not only the process but also the product. This book nevertheless takes the form of a text for advanced undergraduate and beginning graduate students, although I hope that others of higher sophistication and in different disciplines study it. When I myself had an opportunity to teach my book, I found that the questions at the ends of the chapters and the diagrams were helpful and that students appreciated the simple terminology, but that they nevertheless craved concrete examples that they might use as models when they tried to produce their own reflective analyses.

Then it occurred to me to ask a score of sympathetic colleagues who were familiar with the text through reading, reviewing, and/or translating it into various languages to compose ten-page reflective analyses for a workbook that students could learn from. In response, several of these friends said that this was a difficult challenge and one asked for further suggestions on how to proceed. The present reflective analysis is the result. If it

seems somewhat like a cookbook, that is my intention, but let me emphasize that this is my way and it not the only way.

Step 1.—Find a Topic. We live in socio-cultural worlds and these have many aspects, large and small, that invite pondering. With respect to nursing, for example, one might be led to ponder how caring differs from curing, but that seems a large topic that I am not yet prepared to investigate. This suggests that topics are to be found in areas that one is prepared in and that, for present purposes, they need to be topics about which something can be said in merely 3,000 words. For me, a suitably modest topic for present purposes is how we have not only what can be called “permanent home bases” but also various sorts of “temporary home bases.” What I am referring to should become clearer as I proceed.

Step 2.—Find a good example. We tend to be prepared to write for colleagues within our disciplines, schools of thought, and specialties. These are the others from whom we chiefly learn and regarding whom we seek approval and fear disapproval. In a reflective analysis, however, the audience is broader. It is composed of advanced undergraduate and beginning graduate students and colleagues of presumed good will in other disciplines and schools of thought. The simplest and plainest terminology possible is thus called for. In addition, I find that diagrams for cross-classifications are helpful. \

For example, what I am calling “home bases” contrast with “other locations” and are “permanent” or “temporary” and hence the following chart can be offered. It is of course part of an example and probably not enlightening enough to deserve attention otherwise. (See Figure 1)

Figure 1.

	Locations or Places	
	home bases	other locations
permanent	1	2
temporary	3	4

There are thus permanent and other locations that are permanent or temporary. #1 is one's home, where one has one's family, keeps one's books and other things, and eats and sleeps most days and nights. #2 is another permanent location, such as one's office or other place where one works or spends large parts of one's days. There may be more than one of these. "Permanent" and "temporary" are relative terms. #3. While one expects to return again and again to a permanent location, temporary locations are occupied with no more than a vague hope of returning to them. #4. I once taught a course in another country for a week and my hotel was then a temporary home base and other locations, such as the place in which I met with students was a temporary other location. Home bases are ultimately places one goes out from and returns to and are thus central in relation to the other locations temporary or permanent. And one might wonder about the routes and modes of transportation between such places, but that is not needed here. A good example serves the purposes or exposition especially well if one can refer to it throughout the reflective analysis.

3.—*Unpack major metaphors.* There is a great deal of metaphor in language and it is futile to try to reduce all of it to literal expression, but one should do so for major

metaphors when they might mislead or when it serves expository purposes to do so. Thus, for example, the expression “home base” is borrowed from the sport of baseball. It is the place where a batter tries to hit a ball and if she succeeds, then she seeks to move around the other three bases as the game progresses in order to reach home. The whole game centers on what happens there. Formulating questions about what a metaphor refers to can be useful not only in composing questions for students but also in developing one’s analysis. Thus, what sorts of locations or places are the positions of the baseball players when their team is on defense, i.e., when members of the other team are up to bat, what sorts of a position is the bench where players await their turns at bat, how do these positions relate, are they defined by anything other than the activities performed in them, and could the same cross classification be exemplified with a different game, such as billiards (is there a home base in billiards?)?

Step 4.—Ponder the topic. This is where reflection comes in but worrying about whether one is reflecting noetically or noematically (or on the engagements of the I) is probably counterproductive. Such worrying belongs to Steps 5 and 6. Pondering is clearly the most important step and unfortunately the one on which the least guidance can be offered. This is because different people come up with results of pondering things in different ways. One’s pondering has probably begun when one chose a topic and it continues until one has finished writing, but for me at least there comes a time when my position is already clear. Sometimes this is an answer to an obviously significant question. Thus in a previous reflective analysis I attempted to answer the question of what tolerance is and the major insight I came to in my pondering focused on how one does not cease to disvalue the person tolerated but, for some reason, does not act against

the person on the basis of that disvaluing. The question of what might deter the willing of harm then arose.

For me at least, there are three things to avoid in this basic pondering of the topic. One is excessive consideration of what others have said. Of course we are educated and thus willingly under the influence of others and there is no hiding the effects of such influence from sophisticated readers. But it is excessive to refer to others so that their authority helps persuade a reader, especially if that reader is a student or colleague in another discipline or school of thought who might not be as impressed as we are by this authority. But this consideration of the views of others on the topic is most excessive if one does not get beyond presenting the positions of others. It may not be possible utterly to preclude allusion to others through one's adoption of terminology, for instance, but in a reflective analysis the author speaks for herself.

Another thing that I find it best to avoid is seeking a thesis such that once can deduce consequences in a logical systematization. On my view at least, a reflective analysis is not, *sensu strictu*, an argument but rather a descriptive narrative at the end of which the reader has deeper insight into the things in question and not a deduced conclusion. Like avoidance of scholarship, to avoid what can be called "premise hunting" may go against one's training, but now I ask that one consider that there is a third approach in which neither logical form nor the opinions of others are central. Instead, one's concern can focus on the things at issue, e.g., the attitude of tolerance or, less significantly, four basic types of locations.

The third thing that I find useful to avoid in pondering is too-soon recourse to the set of distinctions in my book mentioned above. This may seem odd for the author of the

book to say, but I am cognizant that phenomenological results are refined from everyday encounterings of things and ordinary language and done for purposes that tend to leave other aspects of these sources ignored and one needs access to all sources in a new investigation. The same holds for the influence of thought that one has studied and appreciates for some reason, e.g., a distinction in Hume. In pondering one seeks to let ideas come. They cannot be sorted out before one has them.

A positive result of pondering in the present case is that what one does in a place determines what that a situation is and also how situations of the sorts classified relate with one another. Also, this structure of situations, as it might be called, does not merely fit what one particular person encounters on one occasion but may hold for all persons at all times, although it seems worthwhile to try to imagine or feign cases where it does not. In this age of naturalism, one might then find spatio-temporal locations where water vapor collects, from which rain falls, and back to which the molecules of two oxygen and one hydrogen atoms return to the sky through evaporation. But is this a matter of leaving home and returning or do such things pertain only to the cultural world? Naturalism needs always to be guarded against.

Step 5.—Think of a series of distinctions in relation to the example. This will probably begin in the pondering step, if not before. It will yield an outline either in one's mind, as it is said, or on paper in which one works out what needs to be described before what. Some people never do this, others always do it, and I tend to do it the more complicated the things and the less advanced my pondering, which it does not always hasten. Sometimes the analysis seems best systematic in the sense of going from general to specific, sometimes it best proceeds from specific to general, and various combinations

of these are possible. What earns the title of “analysis” is the series of distinctions clarified by reference to aspects of examples. One should constantly think of students to be enlightened as one’s audience rather than sophisticated colleagues.

Step 6.—Draft and polish the exposition. Here again, one needs to resist the temptation to mention authorities, quote or at least cite texts, and otherwise engage in scholarship. What one needs to do is to describe what can be observed and analyzed reflectively. The great hope is that the reader will look for herself and if she sees the things that one describes, she will be persuaded by them and nothing else. Are there permanent and temporary home bases and other situations where people do specific things in their lives? This is not intended as an earth-shaking insight, but has it advanced one’s understanding of what it is to live in a socio-cultural world?

It is nowise precluded that new aspects of things come under consideration during the composition process. Thus the allusion just above to how the world is not only cultural in the strict signification but also social (in the broad signification, selves and others, human and nonhuman, and not just allegedly inanimate things are also cultural because they have values and uses) raises the question of how social relationships and interactions play roles and even sometimes predominate in what makes a place to be of one type or another. To continue with the example here, is one’s home not where one’s family is and is getting home not a matter of rejoining one’s family after having been away, even if being away consists in staying at second base until the end of the inning of baseball and one’s “family” is the team and “home” perhaps the bench rather than home plate after all? Can a place be a home if one has no family to share it with but instead lives alone and with one’s things, such as books, and performs the activities one cares

most about in that place, such as where one works on one's reflective analyses in the morning before going to the office?

Step 7.—Examine and revise the draft. This is where I hope that my book will be useful for an exposition that enlightens the student. But I hope that it is remembered that my results are only a surface map on the basis of which one can dig deeper and that others will not hesitate to do so. Let me offer some questions derived from it that one can ask about a draft of a reflective analysis in order to become more confident of the general coverage.

a.—Is the difference between experiencing and positing and things-as-experienced and -as-positing relevant and referred to?

b.—Where relevant, is the distinction between the experiencing of real or temporal and ideal or atemporal things made clearly?

c.—Concerning real things, are places for perceiving, remembering, and expecting and the correlative things-as-perceived, things-as-remembered, and things-as-expected considered?

d.—Are believing, valuing, and willing and their correlates and modalities taken into account where pertinent?

e.—Is the role of feigning in the investigation appreciated explicitly or implicitly, i.e., is one aware of the difference between factual claims, be they serious or fictive, and general insights gained on their basis?

f.—Is there a place in the analysis for justification and if so, is that clearly described? And if not, why not?

g.—Is the exposition so conducted that the student gains deeper and deeper insight?

Steps 4 and 5 seem to me the most important and yet the least methodical. It cannot be predicted how long it will take for one's view of a set of things to settle down into what might be written. And the circumstances vary. Some get ideas while driving to work, others while falling asleep or while bathing, etc., etc. Perhaps the most important thing about the approach that I find reflectively that I follow is that the writing down and the examination in terms of the seven questions in Step 7 only help after the pondering is basically finished.

Your way of proceeding is likely different from mine. Please let me know about it so that I might refine my own approach. Are you as surprised as I am about how much can be said like this in less than 3,000 words? And is it not reasonable that students be expected to master that much before coming to class the next day for discussion with their teacher and one another? A way to review one's exposition that is useful in more than one way is to compose exercises about it for the student to prepare for the meeting of the class. Exercises are often but not always provided through questions. Some questions are offered at the end of Step 3, including one that can be re-formulated as whether a home base in baseball is actually a home base. Good questions go beyond the text reflective analysis. Thus, for example, can "home rooms," "home towns," and "homelands" be fit to the four-component model? If so, what are the contrasting situations on those three levels?

In sum, if we can provide enough concrete practice as well as methodological study, we can not only fill a semester of teaching but maybe also produce some new

phenomenologists who would show that they deserve that title by writing their own reflective analyses!