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## Disciplinization in Phenomenological Perspective

**ABSTRACT:** If one appreciates the potential benefits of interdisciplinarity, one can wonder why it does not occur more, i.e., the resistance to it. After deriving a focus in the reflective-descriptive approach on questions of experience, belief, value, purpose, and culture, the attempt is made here to clarify what may be called by the ugly neologism “disciplinization” and then ponder how it relates to interdisciplinarity.

### INTRODUCTION

This essay has two parts. In the first I describe what I consider the three general properties of the phenomenological approach and how they give rise to questions that can guide reflection and in the second I investigate what an academic discipline is, how one becomes a member of a discipline, and some positive and negative aspects that can develop. This is a demonstration of how phenomenological questions can be asked and answered and it invites attempts to confirm, correct, and extend the account through more reflective analysis.

### GENERIC PHENOMENOLOGY

Phenomenology is usually encountered with disciplinary specification and, although there is phenomenology in some three dozen other disciplines, this specification is usually that of the discipline of philosophy, so that most colleagues understand phenomenology to be a type of philosophy, a philosophical school of thought. Given the phenomenological tendencies in many other disciplines, however, it would seem proper always to express the entire specification and thus to speak of ‘philosophical phenomenology,’ ‘communicological phenomenology,’ ‘sociological phenomenology,’

‘psychological phenomenology,’ etc. Then again, if one is more concerned with how there are schools of thought within disciplines, one can speak of “phenomenological philosophy,” “phenomenological sociology,” etc.

To grasp the genus of the phenomenological approach, one needs to abstract from whatever disciplinary specification one begins from. Having pondered this matter awhile, I have come to believe that ‘generic phenomenology,’ as it may then be called, has three properties, so that it can be said to be reflective, descriptive, and culture appreciative. I will take up these properties in this order and derive research questions from them.

(1) In being *reflective*, phenomenology is conducted in a theoretical attitude in which one is no longer not practically oriented but also—as is usual—unreflective or straightforward and thus oblivious of how things are given, appear, and are believed in, valued, and willed, nor does one thematize one’s own mental life itself, although the mental lives of Others are regularly observed. When one reflects, however, (a) one can observe oneself as an I with attitudes including those that are reflective and straightforward, (b) one can observe components within how one encounters things (taking ‘things’ so broadly that anything is a ‘thing’), i.e., how there are various types of experiencing and, in broad significations, various modes of believing, valuing, and willing, and (c) one can observe correlatively things-as-encountered, specifically things-as-experienced, -as-believed-in, -as-valued, and -as-willed in manifold ways. (What I have just said plainly amounts to an initial reflective analysis.)

Most accounts of reflection fail to recognize that it takes two major forms. What has been sketched in the previous paragraph can be said to be based on the type of reflection best called ‘self-observation.’ But there can also be ‘reflection on others.’ Sitting on a bench in the park, I can encounter

another person seated on a bench across the walk from me whom I notice watching a frisky puppy being walked on a leash between us. In this case I can focus on how this Other is not only perceiving in a predominantly visual way, but also how she is at least mildly enjoying the sight and also that she perceives the dog through the side opposite that through which I perceive the dog. Already I somehow have access to the mental life of the other and her predominantly visual and affective encountering and the thing encountered by her as-encountered. In saying “predominantly” I intend that auditory and tactual as well as volitional and belief aspects are subordinate or latent in what I reflectively observe in this Other. It is also interesting that she is volitionally neutral and thus neither encouraging nor discouraging the walking of the puppy by her.

Then again, this Other across the walk might have a friend seated with her and her comment or perhaps simply her noticed amused watching motivates her friend to watch the playful puppy too. In this slightly more complex case, I can reflect on a minimal group in which the two Others are members. Similarly, I might also be seated beside a friend and we form a We opposite the pair of Others and then I am able to engage in a more complicated collective self-observation as well as a more complicated collective reflection on Others. If all four of us notice what we are enjoying and how, perhaps knowing smiling with each other, then there is a reflectively observable group of four that may be articulated into two groups of two. And for all of these humans there is one thing reflectively observable as-encountered in four slightly different ways. Phenomenology is more than individual self-observation and description.

(2) On the basis of reflection and analysis, one can produce analyses or, better, *descriptions*. Because we usually have practical purposes, we

often engage in explanation hastily, quickly trying to say *why* something happens, for that can be a basis for influencing outcomes through manipulating causal circumstances. But one needs to know *what* things are before one can specify the circumstances under which they arise, change, or are eliminated.

Descriptions are of what things are. They can be of particular things, e.g., ‘The cow is in the barn,’ but they can also be in universal or eidetic terms, e.g., ‘Cows are mammals.’ We actually describe using universal terms more than we do with particular terms. Some thinkers contrast interpretation, which strictly speaking relates to linguistic expressions, with description, but both have it in common to best determine what things are before relating them to other things, their causes and effects first of all.

Being descriptive is also opposed to being argumentative. Phenomenologists of course sometimes offer arguments just as they sometimes offer explanations, but these are not predominant in the accounting for things in the reflective-analytic approach. What is typical in phenomenology is instead the procedure of beginning from something that is somewhat familiar, reflectively analyzing how it is encountered, and then expressing a richer comprehension of the thing in question. For example, one might begin with how the encountering of things include the components of believing, valuing, and willing and then go on to distinguish the modalities of positive, negative, and neutral in each of these species of positing. Then again, one can describe how there can be intrinsic/extrinsic differences in things-as-positing in the three ways, a distinction that is familiar in the relation of ends and means and intrinsic and extrinsic values.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. also “The Intrinsic and Extrinsic Existence of What is Traveled in Traveling,” in Lester Embree, *Environment, Technology, Justification*. Bucharest: Zeta Books, 2008, pp. 143-53.

Finally, phenomenological descriptions are most effective if related to carefully chosen examples, which I have attempted to do with the watching of the amusing puppy walk by in the park.

(3) My claim that phenomenology is *'culture-appreciative'* is certainly the most novel for the typical reader or hearer of this exposition. This may ultimately be due to the naturalism in at least Western thought that goes back to Pre-Socratic philosophy, because naturalism tends to exclude the values and uses of things along with all alleged supernatural causes. But just as there always are believing, valuing, and willing in mental life concretely considered, there are always also belief characteristics, values, and uses to the things that are concretely encountered.. And this is so even if such characteristics are overlooked or deliberately disregarded.

When the mentioned characteristics of things-as-encountered are not only learned but also shared in groups, they are best called *'basic cultural characteristics.'* Most technical terms in the cultural disciplines, e.g., sociology or nursing, e.g., *'mother'* or *'patient,'* include reference to cultural characteristics, i.e., values and uses, in their adequate descriptions. And better recognized than this *'basic culture'* that is always already there is the additional culture of common-sense interpretation in terms of ideal types that Alfred Schutz focused on, so that there are then two especially important types of culture. (So-called *'high culture'* of fine art and classical music and also *'popular culture'* of fashion and advertising need also to be recognized.) Under the influence of naturalism, the cultural can be overlooked or disregarded, but—again— it is always already there and needs to be recognized for theoretical and practical purposes in phenomenology.

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Can there be a mother without value and is a patient's health not that to which caring is a means?

From the analysis just offered, one can derive some questions to guide investigation in phenomenology: What are the individual and/or collective purposes reflectively discernable and describable in a give case? What is valued, including preferred? What are the things-as-believed-in? And what is the experiencing and things-as-experienced in the case considered?

#### WHAT IS DISCIPLIZATION?

'Disciplinization' is the distinctive property of the groups called disciplines and also their members. This is cultural in that it is learned by individuals and groups and, for at matter, historical in that it can and usually does change over time. The likely reader or hearer of this presentation might be said then to be, in an odd signification, 'disciplined,' but to avoid the connotation of children being punished, the ugly neologism, 'disciplinized' and other derivatives from 'disciplinization' will be used here. This seems best clarified beginning with a crude description of how individual disciplinarity is developed in so-called advanced societies such as ours and then a more refined analysis attempted.

Humans are born into preexisting societies and acquire culture from those around them as they grow up. By going to school they may then become somewhat educated. As college undergraduates they begin to be disciplinized in the disciplines that they major in and this can be continued more intensively in subsequent graduate or professional schooling. What they learn is a specific jargon for the field, "deducible," for example, being probably less used in history than in philosophy. One also learns what counts and does not count as a theoretical or practical problem in the disciplinary

perspective being inculcated. Then again there are the types of texts that one ought to try to write and publish and the best outlets through which to do so and the same goes for speaking at professional societies. Most disciplines have distinctive citation forms by which outsiders can recognize authors as different and by which insiders can recognize one another. Furthermore, there is a hierarchy of institutions in each discipline at which it is better or worse to study and work, which sometimes changes so that the disciplined member needs to keep up with.

Another thing members of disciplines learn about is founding figures and texts. They do not always know these well, but they are expected to express at least conventional interpretations when necessary. Even outsiders can connect disciplines and even famous books with figures such as Adam Smith, Charles Darwin, Emil Durkheim, David Hume, John Maynard Keynes, and Niccolò Machiavelli. Disciplines also typically have conventional histories, which are often rather simplistic and mythological.

Within disciplines there are, furthermore, specialties, such as theory of logic, which some seem to think is the whole of philosophy, and then there are schools of thought, such as Strausianism in political science, which members within the discipline support or oppose. Marxism, phenomenology, and positivism are schools of thought found opposed to one another in many cultural-scientific disciplines. Within schools of thought there are professionally more and less powerful positions that one learns to be aware of. Finally, there is variation in disciplines due to nationality and language that the disciplined professional also needs to know something about. French phenomenology is different from German.

A colleague once challenged my interest, following Alfred Schutz, in disciplinary definitions on the ground that I was fostering orthodoxy. To the

degree that I succeed in calling attention to disciplinarity, however, I hope to get orthodoxy, which is usually subtle and implicit to be explicitly confronted. Possibly the biggest problem with unexposed orthodoxy is that excessive narrowness works against learning from convergent research in other disciplines. Good fences make good neighbors if they are not too high that one cannot look and talk over them.

Let me now attempt reflectively to analyze better this thing, disciplinization, that has just been crudely described and to do so let me look for the components of experience, belief, value, and purpose, but still try not to get too technical. I begin with what seems a typical high-school student's perspective. Such a student regularly recognizes who is an English teacher, a Chemistry teacher, etc., and it is not unusual for one teacher to teach several subjects. Thus I learned geometry with great pleasure and insight from a gym teacher who was most appreciated as our basketball coach. If such high-school teachers consider themselves members of disciplines, it seems unlikely that their disciplinarity be recognized by students. I did not think of my geometry teacher as a mathematician and it never occurred to me that any of my teachers engaged in research, got grants, published, or went to conferences.

In college this typically begins to change. Teachers are in disciplinarily identified departments, such as sociology, and are then believed by themselves and fellow sociologists and also by members of other disciplinarily identified departments to be sociologists, which is something students learn from early on to believe. They also learn to appreciate this, especially if they become majors, and this is so even if the teachers are still called 'professors' when they have forgotten that they need to conduct research so that they have original or at least well-founded

opinions to profess. And the college student not only begins to learn discipline-specific terminologies and titles, but also learns to believe in the sources of her professors' 'professions,' first of all where the professors studied, but also various subsequent experiences, including research projects and special workshops. Besides positively appreciating such disciplinization in her professors the student committed to the discipline enough to be a major probably also has a positive self-appreciation as well as belief in her involvement.

Besides learning generally academic and disciplinarily specific discourse and coming to believe many things that are important in a discipline, the student comes to value and will with respect to disciplines encountered in college indirectly as well as directly. Disciplinarity is directly encountered when the undergraduate student takes a class in a discipline, but before that the decision about whether to take a class is influenced by what friends as well as advisors say, among other things. One can dislike, e.g., economics, on the basis of what one hears about it. In that case, one decides not to take a course and does not begin to become disciplinized in that discipline. Phenomenologically speaking, economics thus acquires negative value and negative use for the student in question. Clearly this is irrational, but it does seem how things often happen

The contrary can occur, however. The student accepts advice about trying a course in a discipline, enjoys it, her positive valuing is then intensified when she takes additional courses, and eventually she decides to become, e.g., an economics major, no doubt in part because she has also come to believe there are opportunities for employment that she would enjoy and that a degree in the discipline would qualify her for them. The positive

valuing is intensified and positive willing of outcomes from the acquisition of disciplined preparation is motivated by that valuing.

But the student can be subject to disapproval and worse by her peers as well as by her professors, e.g., when a student in a positivistic school of thought within a social science disparages mathematization, which is unconscionable and even the mention of interpretive and qualitative approaches might not be tolerated.

This process of social approval and disapproval can lead to and then continue with more intensity in graduate school, where the sense of belonging to a disciplinary in-group grows stronger along with how often stereotypical belief, valuing, and willing attitudes toward other disciplines are encouraged, e.g., how sociology is superior to all the other social sciences, not to speak of naturalistic scientists who scoff at the notion that social sciences are anything more than social studies disciplines that develop stories rather than genuine knowledge. As mentioned, members of disciplines tend also to join various tendencies and schools of thought within them and these can be competitive and even antagonistic, but within them there is again mutual approval and assistance against the background of discipline-wide mutual approval and assistance. Tendencies and schools of thought as well as disciplines are continued only if their members work together. This even holds on the interdisciplinary level.

These processes continue beyond graduate school into the professions. 'Disciplinizing' is a type of enculturation by which much that is specific about language, experiencing, believing, valuing, and willing is learned, belongs to members of groups, and is thus cultural. It does not stop, although as one advances in one's career, one tends to become more active in disciplinizing others than in being disciplined by them. Also, one can tend

to become more conscious of disciplinarity and disciplinizing. Finally, it needs to be recognized that disciplines are historical and can change over time and that a good professional constantly seeks not to fall too far behind.

What I have said is familiar to the likely hearer or reader of the present exposition, but if some aspects of the disciplinarization that all professionals participate in throughout their careers is clearer, then I have made a contribution. Moreover, by the emphasis on experiencing, believing, valuing, and willing and things as-experienced, as-believed in, as-valued, and as-willed, makes this sketch phenomenological in a rudimentary way that leaves it obvious that investigation can go deeper. In this respect I would be grateful for corrections and additions.

#### POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE ASPECTS

Disciplines are good things because research and improvements in practice benefit from being distinctly focused and matters that are not relevant to the tasks at hand are excluded and this requires not only study and experience but what amounts to a type of indoctrination, as I have attempted to sketch. But disciplinization can be a bad thing. Being too narrow and focused to appreciate convergent thought in other disciplines has been alluded to above. Effective interdisciplinarity presupposes on all sides good preparation in the interacting disciplines and serious respect between them as well.

Interestingly, disciplined professionals tend to have and enjoy what can be considered ‘superiority complexes.’ Some sociologists believe in their hearts of hearts that theirs is the master social science, while some historians can be sure that deeper understanding of how things have come to be and change over time is the most important form of understanding, yet ethnologists question the objectivity of results from thinking out of a single

culture, while economists are sure that they are the ones who investigate what is really fundamental, etc.

Wise professionals are acquainted with the conceits of members of other disciplines as well as their own. Smart professionals do not express such high appreciations of their own disciplines and thus do not manifest ‘disciplinary arrogance.’ That is counter-productive in many ways, above all with its effect on interdisciplinary projects and but also including politics within academic and professional institutions. ‘Disciplinary modesty,’ even if feigned—as modesty often is—is more effective, especially when one encounters how very strange the foreign cultures of other disciplines can be. And tolerance must always be cultivated if maximum interdisciplinary benefits are to be reaped on all sides by the inevitably disciplined.

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