



Reflections on *Phenomenology and Pedagogy*¹

Martinus Jan Langeveld
Bilthoven, the Netherlands

As we all know, nothing is so silent as that which is self-evident. Thus it becomes our task to render audible, readable, articulate, that which is silent. As we all know too, humans are not simply born; they do not just grow up into mature adults. For what we call a child is a being that calls to be educated.

From ancient days to the present, humans have known a multiplicity of choices for dealing with the newly born, and they have known that the presence of these choices does not simply mean the new-comer must be kept alive. There is not just the old alternative of the throw-away child, but rather another essential possibility, one which implies the resolve to bring into being for the sake of this child and with the help of this child, all that is essential to its being human. Again we must note that this occurs in manifold ways. It does not mean that parents and other educators have always (or ever) had a clear or adequate idea of what all the pedagogical possibilities consist of, or concretely, what educational purposes are to be served. For that reason also, possibilities arise from others, from our contemporaries and predecessors—from all those other than the parents and teachers of *this* child. The bringing into being of both possibilities for being and being itself calls forth the phenomenon of the helping relationship which manifests itself in practical reasoning and acting in a multitude of social forms, documents, and institutional practices.

Society and culture, parents and friends, have evolved what they tend to consider “reasonable” ways of dealing with children. And yet, commonly, these reasonable and taken for granted practices steer us inevitably toward a reflective rethinking of this lifeworld, of this human being, of this way of being in the world. In the context of everyday life, we engage in such natural reflection in an ongoing way. Often for example, we draw positive or negative conclusions from this or that concrete situation and often this leads to an exchange of ideas, a conversation with others, such as the children, the parents, or whoever is part of “the” family, or “the” school.

How many generations or centuries does it take until a reflective, systematic, and engaged form of thinking emerges which directly or indirectly makes a real difference in the practical acting of everyday life? It is exactly the lifeworld oriented “sciences” which only gradually develop their lasting forms and contents. Essential to the form and content of the lifeworld sciences is their vital link to praxis and their orientation to the inter-personal of everyday life. Only in this gradual manner does thought and speech connect with practical action in the lifeworld of human beings. In our Western culture a particular variation of this thinking/speaking came to be known by the modern term of “science.” *Geisteswissenschaften* it was called at first, and more recently it is being referred to as “human science.” And in this development one notices a persistent attempt to come to terms with the practical acting and practical reasoning of everyday life.

Education first of all is confronted by tasks which inevitably have real and concrete consequences—consequences which are, or which are to become, the lived experiences of the lifeworld. Another consequence is that we are confronted by questions which concern the essential meaning of being human itself, and so the need for a philosophical and practical anthropology becomes an inevitable presupposition. These questions are now being fully addressed. But these questions always are linked to the lived reality of the lifeworld wherein we are concerned (not abstractly but concretely) with *this* issue, in *this* context, for *these* people, in *this* social structure. Our questions have moved beyond the dusty pages of the classic volumes of our libraries. We are in need of direct communication, and the public forum of the journal provides an essential location for such exchange.

From a phenomenological point of view, we seek the essential meanings in the human encounter, rather than in pure reflection or in speculative theories, which only pretend to have practical import. If we seek our grounds in a human science and, therefore, as practically engaged social actors, we must enter the human spaces of the encounter in concreto. To speak of the encounter does not mean that we meet “others,” but it means that we meet “each other”: that is, in a human and undeniably creative social reality; in a complex but never completely understood network of circumstances and problems to which human thinking and acting responsibly must be responsive.

6

The realization that we will never be able to construct a form of knowledge which could tell definitively what we are to do in every conceivable circumstance has emerged only late as the defeat of an epistemological illusion in Western consciousness. That which often seemed to be so self-evident all too often turned out to be “self-ignorant”; everything still had to be brought to explicit and self-reflective speech. What are the assumptions of establishing and publishing a journal of phenomenology and pedagogy? It assumes that thereby we are entering the world wherein children and young people live, wherein they must learn to live a life that is worth living. In this lifeworld the pedagogue must discover and give form to his or her full task. “Full” means here rich in diversity and full of responsibilities and problems, especially the full reality of the idea of being human, of which the educator has a rich vision and which must now be brought into being in the midst of the living reality of “both parties.” Amongst other things this presupposes a bringing into being in a form which ultimately and essentially derives its concrete manifestation in the encounter and in the social space of human development, processes wherein one inevitably must experience not only constructive growth and communicative self-actualization but also conflict and even deviance.

No ready-made rationality can gain access to the pedagogical situation by a priori fixing of the social forms and methodologies which give positive shape to pedagogical relationships. And yet, all pedagogy is socially and historically situated. The study of pedagogy is a precondition for all other possibilities of human science; not because pedagogy is “ex-act,” that is, situated outside human acting, but indeed

because it realizes itself “in-act,” within the realm of human acting, conduct, encounter, and so forth. We must dedicate ourselves to the aims of this journal because from a phenomenological understanding of the human lifeworld in all its possible forms, we come to an understanding of ourselves, of our being, and of the meaning of the Being of our being. And, most importantly, phenomenology permits us an understanding of the lives of those for whom we bear pedagogic responsibilities. They did not ask for this life and, therefore, they are our task, our life.

Notes

1. Translated by Max van Manen, University of Alberta.