

# THE SCHOOL AS A MEANS TO DESIGNING A WORLD

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## 1. Introduction

The statement that a school is placed in the child's way in order to help him design his own world so that he can independently and meaningfully dwell in it is closely examined. In order to gauge the deeper grounds of this statement, attention is given to terms such as "school", "means", "world", "design", "dwell", "meaning", "help", etc. There is a search for the essences, grounds or preconditions underlying the aim, establishment and maintenance of schools. In other words, what is always invariant about a school that makes the above pronouncement generally valid?

In a search for the essence of a matter or particular reality there is a questioning about those structural characteristics, truisms or categories without which the matter of concern or phenomenon cannot be thought and its essence is not manifested. Accidental characteristics are put out of view or provisionally placed between brackets while the investigator pushes through to the essence structures. Essence structures must then be viewed from the "*quaestio iuris*", i.e., the validity of (their) reality<sup>1</sup>, the logical structure of a constellation of values and norms by which the phenomenon shows itself—how it must be and not only from the "*quaestio facti*", the that-ness and what-ness or factuality of the phenomenon.

Husserl's appeal "back to the things themselves"<sup>2</sup> has a bearing on the "*quaestio iuris*", the essence, ground, meaning and value of a particular meaning-carrying or intentional object that represents the typical humanness of humans as this functions in the human world.

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<sup>1</sup> Translation (2014) : S. J. Gous (1968) Die skool as weg tot wereldontwerp. Suid-Afrikaanse Tydskrif vir die Pedagogiek/South African Journal of Pedagogy, 2(1), 39-54.

In connection with what has been said above about the essence of a matter, the question can be asked if an investigator can finally, absolutely and completely see any particular reality. The contrary of this must be accepted. “The disclosure of the sense of any being, even the smallest, in principle and in fact is inexhaustible.”<sup>3</sup> This means that one can approach and view each matter from an incalculable number of points of view. These perspectival looks and approaches from many possible points of view (also of a school) deserve additional brief specification. On the one hand, there is a search for the essence, ground or what is always valid of a school and, on the other hand, an account must be given of its continual change, development and progress—two themes that seemingly contradict each other.

In order to find an adequate answer to these questions it also is necessary to find an answer to the following question: what sort of worldly being is a human being who can and must design his own world (including a school) and what intervenes in his own designs?

De Waelhens makes the following observation: “The being of a human being is an understanding of Being”<sup>4</sup> according to Heidegger’s<sup>5</sup> ontology of being human. This means a human being is a being whose particular way of being depends on his participation in what generally is real.

By virtue of a human being’s ontic openness (openness for and meaning-giving directedness to the world) it is possible that he can approach a particular phenomenon from an inexhaustible number of perspectives. The title of this article assumes a particular perspective from which the author examines the problematic central to the school. Each perspective includes a certain location, thus an area of reality that is surrounded by a horizon.<sup>6</sup> “Human living, his deeds and thoughts take place within perspectives”<sup>7</sup>, according to Van Peursen. A perspective, then, implies that a thing, object or area of study cannot be simultaneously seen from all sides. A world without perspective is not human and imaginable. The total coherency of surrounding reality is never given as such but is grasped in perspectival aspects. Perspective means to see through, behold.<sup>8</sup> Perspective is essential for all human orientation in reality. As being-conscious-of-being a human being must give a decisive

answer about what really is but he is never instinctively or as a matter of course placed in reality.<sup>9</sup> He has a knowledge of himself and even a pre-reflective awareness of a reality in which he is involved. This implies that he must continually determine his own position with respect to reality. Within the dialogue of the mutual implication of person and world, meaning arises or reality is disclosed. As such, a human being is the way of access to meaning. However, this way of access is not straightforward. One can also formulate this as a human being continually views reality under new perspectives. The sum of the data of these given perspectives also can never make the matter fully present. The succession of changing, mutually complementing and correcting make change, progression and history possible.<sup>10</sup> What has been said thus far must in no way be interpreted as a radical relativism. Each perspective discloses its own truths and must continually be understood in connection with the truths from other perspectives. Thus viewed, pronouncements about the essential grounds of a school must be concluded with “and so forth”. It is clear that a human being continually designs in order to situate himself, but through reconsideration he re-designs and intervenes in existing designs. In doing so, one is continually involved in transcending his existing situatedness and his world comes to stand in a new perspective for him.

## **2. The term “school”:**

As a second-order human design, during the course of time the school has undergone fundamental changes in meaning as a result of the mutually correcting perspectives from which it is examined. The term “school” is derived from the Greek word “schole” that expresses the Greek perspective on “free-time” during which truth was diligently sought for its own sake. These activities were elevated above any connection to labor or economic motives. In the “schole” scientific practice was independent of being human as laborer.<sup>11</sup> The Latin word “schola” refers to another perspective. “Schola” means “scholarly research” to distinguish this particular way from “explaining” things as a way of investigating. Both perspectives, however, refer to a person’s attempt to orient himself to life and reality. Today the school is considered from other perspectives. The practice of the science of teaching is an

involvement in the world of labor. Whoever thinks about the school today thinks about a design that has the future of the child in view and, again, this cannot be considered apart from his particular vocation, life task, work, view of life, etc. This does not mean that the modern system of labor in all respects determines the baseline of the systems of educating and teaching, although in a deeper sense, the Greeks misunderstood the more profound significance of labor.

As a second-order design the school is not a primordial or original human phenomenon. It is not given with being human as is educating (bringing up a child), suffering, striving, dying, etc. Even so, the possibility always existed that at one time or another a school could be designed. It is a later addition to human reality and as such is an integral part of culture. As a cultural design, it carries the imprint and symbols of being human and gives evidence of human intentions or strivings. In his activities with the child in the school the adult is involved in assisting him to humanize the human world as a matter of propriety. These activities reveal spontaneity, freedom and creativity as aspects of propriety in the sense of adhering to the normative.

When there is a search for the structural characteristics, primordial structures or essences of a particular reality there is an inquiry about its reality- or ontic-status, i.e., about what is irreducibly or absolutely given primordially. As a second-order design, the school indeed is a reality, but what is its ontic status? In other words, how is it possible that a human being could create a school? In which primordial human reality does the school have its source? There is only one answer: The school is grounded in family upbringing as a primordial human reality where “primordial” refers to a truth that now is as it always has been and will continue to be and whose existence cannot be thought away or denied. Upbringing was not discovered, invented or created or called to life later by persons. In its normative, teaching and learning aspects it is ontic; it is a primordial, original and integral part of being human and of the human world. The naïve, spontaneous and natural home upbringing is used by a parent, as an adult, to normatively orient his not-yet-adult child in a world of adults. The educator stands at a juncture between the world of the child and that of the adult.

Both adult and child know the latter cannot remain a child. His destination is the adult world and upbringing in the home is the primordial way, par excellence, that must be followed to that destination. In the family, upbringing and teaching also are not two separate matters. Each thing that a child must do or learn there must occur in terms of norms. If the school interprets the continuation of the educative teaching of family life in the school as different, although related, the school must justify why this view is justifiable.

### **3. Upbringing in the family and educating in the school as means:**

Every human orientation implies a method as a means or way of realizing a certain aim. The aim refers to truth, to experiencing, realizing, anticipating values and eventually to fulfilling and affirming life. There is a close connection between means and end but they are not the same. A means can never be an end in itself but leads to an aim. A means thus has a referential character: it points to something other than itself. Hence, a school is a means for a child to reach his destination.

The choice of a particular means is valued/evaluated to the degree that it optimizes attaining the aim. There are always wrong ways that obscure aim attainment. In this light, a school is an illuminating, standardizing and normalizing means. As such it should never be child or teacher centered. It is a norm-centric institution because it is in terms of norms that its aim can be reached. Both didactic and pedagogic activities must realize the criteria of norms and values. The school event as a means is considered by the author to be educative teaching. Within this structure the participation of teacher and child must be understood as a conversation about the adult world (learning content).

It is observed that the school is a means by which a child must be helped to design his own world in order to ultimately dwell in it independently and meaningfully. If this aim is attained the means become superfluous. However, designing, planning and using such a means would not have been possible if it had not been already [spontaneously] implemented in the original family situation. Thus

viewed, the school, as a means, is an extension or re-constitution of family upbringing by which the child must be helped to design his own world.

Logically it follows that the concept “world” ought to receive attention below because the method or means of being concerned about the world shows and includes a variety of perspectives. In the methodical course of thinking and practicing science the world is accessible and transparent. Thus viewed, the school is a means to help open up the world and reality for the child. It offers the opportunity for the child to explore and orient himself in the human world.

#### **4. The term “world”:**

In modern thinking about the total human situation the human world is viewed from various perspectives. The “lifeworld” with its unimaginable number of “horizons” has a central place in the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl. The lifeworld is the intentional correlate of a human’s many-sided oriented intentional life.<sup>12</sup> This world precedes all categorical thinking, logical constructions, scientific formulations, derived explanations and reflective judgments that are all grounded in the lifeworld. The lifeworld is the bedrock and ground of all human activities, creations, behaviors, achievements, beliefs and contents of faith, expectations, values, in which each person participates daily and by which he designs, aims at, signifies, plans, organizes, shapes and marks as a world-for-him. Thus, the lifeworld is not an independent thing or data but a phenomenon which a human knows because he says something about it. The concept “lifeworld” does not mean the earth, the raw, untouched nature or the cosmos that exists independently of any form of human attribution of meaning. The existence of the latter is not denied but it is only part of the human world as soon as a human has said something meaningful about it. This means a human being is continually involved in humanizing his world. “World” means the human being’s meaningful, cultural world, his total field of meaning and existence, landscape, field of presence or the total spiritual situation of a person as a matter of propriety. This is corroborated in the Scriptures. In 1 John 2,

verses 15-17, the Apostle states the meaning of the concept “world” from a Christian perspective. Verse sixteen says:

“For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.”

This Scripture warns against the world’s finiteness and desirability and against a worldly love that supplants the love of God. However, here the author’s perspective is phenomenological. The concrete, everyday, naïve ground of human existence is relevant here. It is a world that already is in motion and underway before any scientific or philosophical thought about it. The sciences, philosophical systems, life views, etc. spring from this world. Without it, all second-order human designs are absolutely impossible. There are no separate objectified “subjects” or sciences in this world. It comprises the pre-reflective experiencing of persons that as an integral unity is experienced and lived through in light of its obviousness to everyone.

In contrast to this phenomenological perspective on the world an objectivistic one can be put forth. In the Western world it is acceptable to mention a natural scientific world image of the Westerner. This objectivistic vision posits a subject who stands in opposition to the entirety of all beings and these beings exist in a meaningful way independent of a human being’s intentions, evaluations and meanings. It is a world of things, a world of bodies and a human being is part of this reality in the same way as a meteor or any other body.<sup>13</sup> Such a world is objective in its functions and lawfulness and is knowable in itself. It is devoid of all human additions, evaluations, meanings and subjective experiences. So viewed, a snake is gruesome because it is so itself and the earth turns lawfully each twenty four hours on its own irrespective of what humans say. It can be asked if there really is such a world that is totally cut off from all human giving of sense and meaning, intending, evaluating and formulating.

The school arises in the lifeworld of humans. In the search for the grounds or essences of a school the question arises whether this

naïve, integral, undifferentiated lifeworld shows essential structures. If primordial, ground or essence structures of it can be indicated that for all time have validity for the ground situation of being human, the possibility exists that the deeper ground of a school, that arises as a second-order design within the lifeworld, can be indicated. Indeed, a school cannot arise “outside” of life and come to life. This means that the essence of the school must show essential ties to the lifeworld. The mentioned fundamental structures then must be purely possible, generally and necessarily valid expressions of the world. Each particular world, including the school as a special “world”, must adhere to this formal structure of the lifeworld irrespective of the fact that the particular lifeworlds of persons, communities, etc. differ from each other on the basis of their historically varying contents. Once the structures of the lifeworld are determined the anchor, ground, justification and design of the school in the human world can be better understood. Such structures must answer to the same a priori as mathematics, logic and arithmetical formulations and are construed in the same way. All factual sciences, each possible human activity, calling, design (including educative teaching in the school) find their ground in these structures and are anchored in them. It is necessary that each person, also each child, must design his own world within the possibilities of the lifeworld. In each structure, form and content must always be distinguished. If “the normative” is a generally valid structure of the lifeworld, this normative [moment] of the form remains invariant but the content that a person or people give or have given to the normative must necessarily differ with time, place and person.

Elsewhere<sup>14</sup> I have fully elaborated the structures of the lifeworld and because of limited space only the following structures are mentioned. The human world is a temporal-spatial, finite, discussed, open, normative, religious, personal (subjective), relational, cultural, affective, situated, tattered, destitute, heterogeneous and mysterious world. In addition, it is a person’s standing and dwelling place and it nourishes every human creation or design. It furnishes stability in his wavering existence and is experienced as a task, command and gift. Outside of these structures, no human being can design or create his own world, a

fact that applies equally to the school. This implies that the school must be a normative, religious, relational, cultural, etc. creation.

## **5. The term “design/create” – human orientation in the world:**

From the above the following is inferred and empirically demonstrable, i.e., is generally valid and necessary:

- a) The lifeworld is radically human – it carries the mark of humanity.
- b) The familiar world in which humans thrive is designed by them.
- c) The designed character of the human cultural world is evidence of fundamental human possibilities. The cultural world points to the culture-creating achievements of humans.
- d) Human and world make each other understandable. To understand a particular person his world must be understood. A human being is a being-in-the-world.
- e) There are not two worlds that exist: on the one hand, a world that someone imagines and thinks, an imminent world, and on the other hand, a naturalistic world of things that exists “outside” of a human being. There is only one world: a human intentional, meaning carrying world as planned, designed and signified as a world-for-him. A conscious being can never think in isolation from the givens of his consciousness.
- f) In this everyday, pre-reflective world that is lived-through as it is experienced by each person each day in his association with life and reality there are no “subjects” or sciences. It is the source of each science and is already underway before any science can have its start. Take language as an example: In the lifeworld of a Boer language is not experienced as a separate subject. It is integrally interwoven with the total coherency within which each person is embedded. This also holds for norms; If a distance is taken from a language or norm and it is objectified, systematized and, as it were, torn away from the lifeworld, a linguistics or ethics can arise.

- g) There is a smooth transition between the lifeworld and the scientific data about it because a human being transforms the scientific designs into customary things and they then are experienced and used as such.
- h) Each possible particular design of the world must realize itself within the generally valid structures of the lifeworld and must be consistent with them.
- i) A human's communication/dialogue with the world is ontic. It is an original [primordial] human event.

The question now is how such a world arises as a human design. A generally accepted and current understanding that announces itself as a possible answer is the concept "learning". What each person eventually is, what he knows and can do he has "learned". Thus he learns to breed cattle, farm, engage in commerce, justice and its administration, about norms and values, constructing a house, town, city and means of communicating. As he is educated he also "learns" the difference between right and wrong, and to do what is good and avoid what is bad. He learns to know other people: their appearance, manners and thoughts. He also learns about animals, plants and things. In addition, he also learns what other persons have said about and how they described the aforementioned. The great encounter event between a learning person and that which he is not is then a formidable and prolonged "learning process".

[For an empiricist] generally what is learned is meaningful and independent of the learning person. Therefore, what is learned is already meaningful and learnable because a person has at his disposal sense organs that like open windows give access to a meaningful outside world. This "meaningful" external world projects light rays that reach a person via receptive sense organs. The senses transform the stimuli into images in the mind and are mysteriously interpreted as knowledge. A person "reacts" to these stimuli and adapts himself in his involvement with the world.

In contrast to this empiricist interpretation of learning is the idealist view: the external world can never really be known. What one knows about it is only what a person can imagine or think.

Both of these perspectives are one-sided because person and world (subject and object) are isolated from each other. In contrast to these theories of the communication between person and reality, Husserl poses the theory of consciousness as intentionality in order to bridge the subject-object problem. The implication of this latter theory for the knowing life of a person is briefly formulated as follows: There is an unbreakable connection between consciousness and that which consciousness is not, namely the givens of consciousness. This also implies that consciousness, as ontic openness, includes meaning-giving, meaning-experiencing, sense-giving and sense-experiencing functions. These latter point to the normed and normative function of intentionality. Being human implies “existing”: stepping out of oneself; existing implies intentionality (the world is a human-intended world) and it implies giving sense to and designing [constituting] a world. Intentionality characterizes a new relationship between the knowing subject and the object known. Meanings, values and evaluations are added and attributed to objects by which they are transformed into meaning-carrying or intentional objects. They then bear the mark of humans. In this way the non-human becomes humanized and part of the human world as cultural world. A human being shows himself as a being who organizes and plans his own world. This planning and organizing continually occur in terms of norms and criteria. Moreover, it is worth noting that a person does not merely maintain his encounter and association with the world through an intellectual orientation. This encounter is also embedded in his life of beliefs and trust, his willing and his sense for values. It continually realizes itself in a stream of emotion; thus, a person’s world is affectively colored. Ethical, social, religious, juridical, historical, etc. perspectives of the world arise from this encounter. Thus viewed, a person can never bring about a totally chaotic world but always an ordered, organized world as dwelling. However, this last statement must be qualified. Viewed broadly, a person’s design of his own world can be divided into two categories: an authentic or genuine world design or an unauthentic one. World design always remains an adversary matter because of a human being’s basic recalcitrance in his world conversation. Because of this the world never shows itself with complete clarity. A person’s total world image is a dawning obscurity.

The conversation with the world is an advancing event by which the world horizon of each person continually widens. Person and world are a relational unity indicating that a person's original experience with the object had a dialogical character. This dialogue is executed in four main fields of conversation:

- a) a conversation with himself;
- b) a conversation with fellow persons;
- c) a dialogue with nature; and
- d) a conversation with God or a Transcendent Power greater than himself.

A distinction must also be made between a pre-reflective orientation in the naïve lifeworld and scientific and philosophical ways of orienting to the world. In the case of the latter, as a consequence of conscious reflection, a discontinuity arises in the course of the lifeworld. Distance is taken from a particular object and by objectifying it is elevated to a particular known object. The integral and original data of the lifeworld are gradually formulated in language and its extensions, such as artificial languages, and are preserved as an objectified culture of words. By ordering, sectors of the lifeworld are categorized from different perspectives into so-called categorical systems of ordering. In this form the world is brought into the school as syllabi. The cloak of ideas that a person lays on the world provides him with a powerful grasp of everything that is.

This world orientation occurs mainly within the primordial familiarity and encounter with fellow persons. Within this mutual understanding the world is accessible. Mutual understanding is a ground form of the totality of human existence and orientation. Thus viewed, the human world is a large field of encounter and the school is a re-designed and canalized field of encounter that has its origin in family life.

Learning, educating [upbringing], play, making things his own, educative teaching, instructing, laboring, acting, religious practice and the arts must be seen within the framework of this world orientation. The school must help a child have a part and take a part in humanizing the world. Alas! No child can do this

independently on his own accountability. Consequently, a child is dependent on the help of an adult. In the last instance, the human world is an adult world.

#### **6. The term “help” [“aid”]:**

The fundamental helplessness of a child makes an appeal to adults. With the birth of a child the primordial relational involvement of parent and child immediately springs into view. Filiation and parenthood are anchored in this. The ontic need of a child summons the parent to help and to commiserate with him by which the parent establishes a world [for the child]. The terms, help, guide and commiserate are strongly imbued with normatively significant connotations. As a normative matter, help refers to a bipolar state of inter-human relatedness. At one pole, the accent is on the helpless, help-seeking, threatened existence of the one in need and at the other it is on someone who is capable of addressing the distress and is in a position to do something about it. On the basis of this fundamental relationship, in its normative aspects, the conversation between parent and child thrives. The parent must see his child in his child-being while he himself portrays the norm-image or idea of adulthood by exemplifying to the child how he generally ought to be.

#### **7. The term “to dwell meaningfully”:**

Human being is a being who dwells. To do this meaningfully implies appreciating norms in their unconditional, demanding nature. Dwelling means the realization of security. As the experience of security diminishes and declines, dwelling loses content.<sup>15</sup> Even though “dwelling” refers to being at home and security, this can never be viewed as a self-sufficient and closed human condition. This “secure dwelling” must be achieved anew each day. The human world is a large, natural living room but at the same time also a show room in which the humanity of humans ought to be displayed. This “ought to be” calls for a dwelling- and working-together. As existence, co-existence is the way of human beings for which the way of the family constitutes its fundamental form. The family offers opportunities for exploration that must result in the

child's becoming free on his journey to maturity, being formed and adulthood.

## **8. The modified [redesigned] world and the school:**

As a consequence of being redesigned by adults, the modern world has become very complex and unsurveyable. Nowadays parents and children communicate with distress about their child's orientation in the world. The redesign of the natural educative teaching of family life into a second-order institution such as a school is a great human achievement that creates the opportunity for realizing the idea of adulthood as a particular way of being, but by way of a detour.

## **9. The teacher:**

The idea "teacher", as a cultural creation, arises from the ontic structure of the norm-image of adulthood. To realize his intentions with his child, a parent "extends" himself through a teacher. In professional ways, a teacher must build a bridge between the world of the adult and the child. This implies that he must be familiar with both of these worlds. His participation assumes that he must meaningfully implicate himself in both worlds. If the teacher does not identify himself with the world of the child, the latter will not readily follow his example. On the other hand, a child has need of an adult who will make the world of the adult optimally visible. As one who gives, experiences and interprets meaning a teacher must invite and summons each child to participate in the conversation about the world (learning content) of the adult. A parent as well as a teacher has a purpose with a child so far as they have a purpose with their own lives. Many pupils discover their own purpose in life to the extent that a teacher has made the purpose of his own life visible to them. In school a child also ought to push through to the universalities without neglecting his own unique design.

Finally, the following characteristics of an educative teaching situation in the school are noted:

- a) The situation involves norms and is normative.

- b) It is a formally ordered situation but shows signs of informality.
- c) In contrast to the naturalness of a family situation, school situations often show a certain degree of arbitrariness.
- d) School situations are woven through with meanings but in a more ordered and synoptic form than in family life.
- e) It is an authoritative situation by virtue of the norms, values, and meanings of adults.
- f) These situations are dialogic: a conversation that is realized in terms of the most highly valued data of the adult world.
- g) There are large qualitative differences among the conversational partners.
- h) It is formative and orienting.
- i) The demand that the situations must continually be broken through refers to their dynamic character. Temporality is an important characteristic of these situations.
- j) The mutual involvement of the participants, on the one hand, and their openness for and directedness to the world, on the other hand, are essences of these situations.
- k) In these situations wonder is often awakened that results in life fulfillment and the experience of meaning.
- l) The referential character of the situations must be noted. They embody the task character of this world to which the participants are called. They have the future of the participants in view.
- m) The design of school situations is possible because a human being answers, adds, appends, includes, brings about, enlivens, brings to light because he himself stands in the light of everything that is.

It is the author's hope that the perspective in which the school is viewed in this article might open new perspectives for discussing the school.

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