

PROFESSOR W. A. LANDMAN

A PATH OF THINKING ABOUT EDUCATION:
1960 to 1990 plus*

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen:

In scientific research methodological accountability has priority over stating a problem. This is because an accountable methodology safeguards against wandering on erroneous paths and it also protects the self-respect of the researcher.

On 2 March 1969 I received a letter from Martin Heidegger (1889 – 1976) in which he states that paths of thinking are subject to change and specific points in time influence this. In other words, from time to time ways of thinking can be modified.

Elsewhere he states that Phenomenology is an enduring possibility for thinking but he also warns that a time will come when Westerners are going to lose this way of thinking. Then the time will be ripe for general talk [idle talk], superficiality, essence-blindness, negativity and naiveté that can lead to false reasoning. Also he states that a privileged few want this path of thinking to persist. You who are present this evening are considered to be among these few.

If Phenomenology, as a genuine way of radical, essence-disclosing thinking, remains consistent, then it is the means that it uses, i.e., the means of thinking that can become altered in time or that must be protected against a variety of onslaughts. Means of thinking that can illuminate reality so the essentials (i.e., the truth) come to light are illuminative means of thinking (categories) that also can be used as tools of evaluation (criteria).

To abandon this way of thinking is to act as if thinking, as such, is possible while experience teaches us that thinking always is thinking

*http://www.landmanwa.co.za/landman_rede.htm English translation available at:
http://www.landmanwa.co.za/landman_oclect.htm

about something in terms of something. For example, I think of educating in terms of relationships, sequence, activities and aim that are used as illuminative means of thinking. To abandon this way of thinking also is to underestimate or even to undermine illuminative means of thinking or to choose means of thinking that undermine human dignity. This also indicates an inability or unwillingness to modify means of thinking even if a particular time in history requires it.

Mister Chairman:

I am thankful for those students and colleagues who were willing:

- by sagacious answers during colloquia, preliminary examinations and examinations, and with theses and dissertations, to contribute to essence-disclosure and essence-verification and to further refining means of thinking;
- to be unafraid of illuminative brain bleeding, i.e., thinking critically in search for truth as the genuine understanding of meanings;
- without falling into a pragmatism, to search for practice-improving meaning with the knowledge that a phenomenological demand is to return to practice as a particular form of returning to the thing itself;
- to undertake accountable and reliable research for furthering Education, always directed by the search for the essentials while avoiding the dignity-violating obstacles to which they were continually subjected;
- to create knowledge through research in order to understand and realistically solve problems, especially with the aim of protecting human dignity and this means remaining true to the essential phenomenological.

Mister Chairman,

With this lecture I gladly give an overview of the path of thinking about education covered more or less from 1960 to 1990.

The initial step was to break the stranglehold of naturalism and its disrespectful means of thinking about being a worthy human being.

Naturalism, which degrades being human to being an animal was eradicated with particular success by B. F. Nel and his students. This occurred by making a keen analysis of the meaning of the psychic life of the child-in-education and also of the teacher-in-practice by applying to the child suitable, illuminative means of thinking (categories). At the same time a deathblow was applied to Freudian psychoanalysis. Naturalism and psychoanalysis were further cracked down on by C. K. Oberholzer and his students' penetrating philosophical anthropology and ethics. Valuable support also was provided by M. J. Langeveld's Theoretical Education and child anthropology. Langeveld's disdain for Edmund Husserl's Phenomenological Philosophy and the particular value that he attributed to what he called a practical phenomenological method was brilliant.

This gave rise to the following step, namely, to bring Husserl's Phenomenological Philosophy down to earth and thus a unique South African phenomenological approach began to prosper. This occurred by:

1. clearly identifying and interpreting practically steps of phenomenological thinking and their significance for applying them as means of thinking;
2. applying the idea of verification (to which some phenomenologists were quite allergic).

A particular stumbling block that now had to be overcome was Husserl's rationalism that was obstructive of human dignity because it reduces a person to a mere rational being and his means of thinking to rational constructions (creations of an isolated mind). This necessarily led to an under-evaluation of the emotional (affective). Rationalism and rationalistic means of thinking were overcome by giving attention to Heidegger's idea of attunement, i.e., a human being's emotional being-in-the-world. This gave rise to entering into reality being supplemented by living into it and an attunement for it. With this the concept of existence was brought into the foreground, which finally crushed the naturalism monster and gave precedence to human dignity. Essences that were brought to light phenomenologically were understood and explicated as human ways of living.

Quickly it was noted, however, that a particular monster raised its head and made vulnerable especially those thinkers who had become unfaithful to the phenomenological method. Here reference is made to the dignity-violating existentialism that, however, could be checkmated effectively by:

- (i) identifying existentialism as the sum of obscuring means of thinking and by interpreting it as absolutizing being human, freedom, individuality and anxiety and by giving guidelines for successfully opposing it;
- (ii) clarifying phenomenology's essential meaning to thereby refute the simplistically false reasoning that phenomenologists are existentialists and existentialists are atheists.

When one looks into the eyes of a child with understanding and reads from his facial expressions: "Help me" and "Don't cause any harm" a particular yearning is awakened in the educationist: to begin precisely here in his reflecting in the form of disclosing essences. Quickly the thinker is filled with wondering if what he sees as essential is as it is and not otherwise. This wondering leads to an admiration of the reality of which it might only be said what that reality itself would say if only it could. This admiration deepens into a respect for that reality.

The essentials that flash like lightning during reflecting in terms of the phenomenological steps of thinking so their meaning is observed for understanding intensifies the wondering and admiration and this impels the acceptance of the demands of being scientific as demands of propriety from which the educative character acquires its binding force especially in light of the decisions to not violate human dignity under any circumstances.

On further illumination it also is possible to discover that the essences (with their meaningful relationships) really are valuable ways of living that continually are exercised from the cradle to the grave. This exercise may never be aimless but is planned and actualized in light of what must be practiced, namely, proper adulthood and being a full-fledged human. Proper adulthood as

aim suddenly refers to the normative. The norm that always is at the center for educator and educand at most is in the foreground. This means there must be a search for values and norms that are characteristic of a meaningful way of existence.

What other place will one begin with reflective thinking than with child being, itself, to insure not being sidetracked? The thinker focuses immediately and sharply on the reality of educating itself with regard to bringing to light relevant essences with their mutual relations for use as illuminating means of thinking (categories) and means of critical judgment (criteria), also especially during the research.

During his researching venture the educationist acts with discretion, especially when he realizes that the gnat created before him and the students who might sit at his feet are at least half again as bright as he is.

At this stage it became clear that it is necessary to give attention to the place and function of a philosophy of life (convincingly inspired by J. Chris Coetzee). It is possible (though nearly impossible) to ignore a philosophy of life. A second possibility is that it can be admitted that a philosophy of life can influence a science and its scientific nature can be interfered with. However, there is a third possibility:

No one ought to be willing to do anything that clashes with his philosophy of life, thus including his way of practicing science. His ways of satisfying scientific demands must be permissible to his philosophy of life. On what basis can the demand of a philosophy of life be assumed to be permissible?

A person (also a scientist) always is a religious and emotional being and a particular way of actualizing religiosity is a matter of a philosophy of life. Activities acquire the stamp of humanity if they are enlivened by a philosophy of life and this also holds for scientific activities. The scientist's intervention with reality not only is an involvement of entering into but at the same time a living into involvement: the rational is enriched by the affective and the keenest form of affectivity is a matter of a philosophy of life. In his

scientific practice, from time to time the scientist proceeds to self-judgment. A particular criterion for self-judgment is emotional criticism in light of a unique hierarchy of values, i.e., a philosophy of life that leads to particular benefits for scientific practice: enthusiasm, responsibility, emotional security and illuminating insight!

This view had a particular appeal among educationists but was thwarted by:

- i. an uncritical clinging of so-called pure phenomenologists to the view that a neutral scientific practice is possible;
- ii. a crippling inability of certain ideologues to distinguish between a philosophy of life as a universal matter and a philosophy of life as a particular hierarchy of confusing preferences;
- iii. a bitter animosity in some politically inspired circles against the Christian National idea as being an apartheid philosophy;
- iv. an increase in pressure appearing in the foreground to protect and develop human dignity as is evidenced by:
 - The South African Constitution
 - the establishment and development of educational law especially at a number of Faculties of Education
 - legislation in relevant human rights with particular emphasis on women's and children's rights
 - the Human Rights Commission
 - a particularly high number of press commentaries on the violation and maintenance of human dignity and human rights.

This compelled the scientist (educationist) to pay extraordinary attention to human dignity as an illuminative means of thinking. Subsequently, there was a brief typification of human dignity by which it ought be evident that it merits the status of an illuminative means of thinking (categories) and a means of judgment (criteria).

In this lecture it has been suggested again and again that human dignity merits the status of a means of illumination.

A person is obligated to have respect for his human dignity, thus to esteem highly his ability to know, actualize and accept values. Therefore, persons are beholden to respect each other and no person may use another as a means to an end.

Respect is a specific human way of life. It is a feeling of high regard and esteem. Respect-for-human-dignity refers to the normative and a person, as the carrier of this dignity, is obligated to not renounce it in his own person and in that of the other but to respect, preserve and protect it.

Each person is someone who actualizes values in life, is a value-acknowledging and value-realizing being. As the carrier of dignity he will be appreciated as a valued partner, fellow traveler and equal participant in life.

No person will respect others merely as dignity. He will eagerly view and understand them as persons. He yearns that other persons will appreciate and respect him and will not view and address him or anyone else as a mere thing.

Because a person is a being who chooses and acts and who continually manifests his being bound to values, he continually is directed to truth and what is valuable. In his search he discloses values and truths that provide him with security and stability.

Each person has the right to be different from other persons because he is a particular individual. His being-individual is acknowledged when other persons have respect for his otherness. Thus, other persons have respect for him as a value-actualizing being and as someone who can use values as norms for his life. In other words, they have respect for his human dignity.

Subsequently, it was perceived that phenomenology and the application of its means of thinking had so vigorously entered the educationists' foreground that the real danger of a method-monism arose. To prevent this, phenomenology was expanded to all saving methods, i.e., to avert falling into a phenomenologism it became

necessary to give attention to the solution, namely, to the possibility of eclectic thought (that was developed at UNISA).

Method-monism assumes that the essence of human activity or ways of behaving can be adequately understood by applying a single method. Such an approach is dignity violating since:

- i. it can lead to an oversimplification of being human;
- ii. these simplistic findings can be elevated to essential insights;
- iii. this can result in the underestimation (even disdain) for the fact that a person in reality is a mystery but is seen as the sum total of singular findings about him;
- iv. that a person is not viewed adequately as a person with dignity but as a mere average or as an interesting case.

In contrast, method plurality is characterized by dissatisfaction with a dignity violating rigidity because of a firm imprisonment in the shackles of value monism which leads the thinkers to purposefully and critically try to overcome a narrow dogmatism and essentialism that holds the possibility of dignity obfuscation.

The reality of educating is a particularly complex reality. Its complexity compels the educationist to apply a variety of methods that are true to reality. The results from the use of the various methods then are compared with each other and there is reflection on their ability to be integrated. This especially occurs with the aim of being careful that dignity suffocating does not occur because a person is treated as a sum of the results from various methods.

Today with respect to the human sciences there is mention of an increased methodological openness and an appreciation for alternative perspectives and paradigms that can lead to eliminating or at least greatly reducing the dignity-oppressing oversimplification of being human.

Thinkers who cling to one approach often view other possibilities as “invalid” rather than only as a different view. Too strong an allegiance to one approach can lead to a prejudiced avoidance of other possibilities. Energy that can be applied to searching for new

and better alternatives might be squandered in the defense of a specific standpoint that at most can be one possible interpretation of human experience.

Method plurality requires an attunement that encourages thinkers to concentrate on the strong points of various approaches.

A final instance that can be presented is educationists who have discarded the educational way of thinking and have increasingly become aware of the fact that false reasoning can lead to a falsification of what is reasoned about and this means a distorting and twisting of human dignity and the means of thinking that give status to it. (Developed at the University of South Africa with Prof. C. P. Jensen as co-worker).

The researcher must give reasons why pronouncements, deductions, opinions and interpretations are valid and to be accepted as truth. The discussion of these reasons can be called reasoning or argumentation.

False reasoning occurs when false reasons are used. Conclusions drawn can clash with reality and then false and misleading reasoning arises. False reasoning must be identified and eliminated in order, e.g., to elevate the scientific status of a research report.

Causes for false reasoning mostly are anti-phenomenological activities such as:

1. General talk (idle talk)

Thoughtless, fruitless and trivial talk lead to meanings and reasons being obscured. General talk distorts the human dignity of what is talked and reasoned about. Dignity-recognizing and dignity-promoting activities are a strong concentration on meanings and valid reasons;

2. Superficiality

The non-meaningful is emphasized in such a way that trivial objections and impetuous generalizations are rampant. This can

lead to dignity-distortion and can be counteracted by a clearer essence-awareness that leads to the selection of essences that can serve as means of thinking;

3. Oversimplification (or naiveté)

A lack of critical insight that often is accompanied by a rejection of the necessity for verification of the particular pronouncements (reasons). This leads to dignity-concealment and can be counteracted by critical thinking, i.e., the application of critical means of thinking;

4. Negativity

This is a resistance to essences and a preference for non-sense. The path of least resistance is attractive and the way of thinking is abandoned, with disastrous consequences.

5. A lack of illumination (intellectual clarification)

This is the result of a lack of suitable terminology, thus a lack of concepts that can illuminate essences, i.e., appearing meanings. Concepts that are vague and ambiguous are destroyers of human dignity but can be counteracted by a sensitivity to explanation and interpretation of relevant concepts to which the status of means of thinking can be attributed. Information must be interpreted to be meaningful.

Mister chairman,

The educational path ends in various destinations. One particular destination is the trained teacher.

Dignity protective teachers are aware of the high calling of their profession.

Being called implies someone who calls and someone who answers. Thus, to call is to give an assignment and to ask for obedience.

Being called is an essential characteristic implying that Someone beyond a person appeals to him and calls for obedience.

By being called, a teacher experiences his work as more meaningful and valuable. When he realizes that he is called because of his being human to guide his child to proper adulthood, this task not only is meaningful for him but he is aware that he must do everything in his ability to support the child. Thus, the school can be viewed as a teaching and educative institution that owes its origin to the idea of being-called-to-education.

The ultimate aim of a profession is to provide service; consequently, the motive of service is elevated above that of personal happiness. Teaching, par excellence, is that calling that demands of the practitioner unselfish helpfulness and service and the teaching must be protected against dignity-destroying trade unionism.

The teacher knows

- the norms that are going to be paired with his being called must be unconditionally accepted and obeyed. One of these norms is the protection of child dignity.

Teachers are persons aware of a calling who are ready to endorse and follow a code of behavior and, therefore, to earn especially the respect of the parental community. They earn not only their respect but also their support because the code of behavior is a guarantee that professional service is provided unselfishly.

The parents (as a community) also must realize that, in the first place, they can provide a quid pro quo by themselves showing respect for and promoting the teaching profession and, in the second place, by urging conditions of service and salaries suitable for a profession. In this light, e.g., the relatively poor wages and irresponsible remarks that some have made about the teaching profession are objectionable.

The teacher knows that all normal persons yearn not only to remain alive but especially to live meaningfully. This means that

everybody is attuned to surviving all kinds of problems, limitations and threats.

Thinking persons directly seek those conditions that have to be met in order to survive meaningfully.

In the Republic of South Africa teachers can inspire their pupils to work at two conditions for survival: discipline and achievement.

Life within the field of light of school rules leads to being disciplined which can guarantee survival. An attunement to achievement reinforces the achieving consciousness.

Teachers must continually encourage pupils to achieve maximally in accordance with their potentialities.

Being disciplined and achieving consciousness together form the basis for meaningful survival.

Finally, Mister Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen:

The educational path of thinking is an inspiring one that calls for persistence and that can make a meaningful contribution to protecting the integrity of human dignity.

I have particular appreciation for the patience you have shown.

Thank you very much for that.