

CHAPTER TWO  
SOME REASONS FOR ESSENCE BLINDNESS\*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Fundamental pedagogics is a particular form of essence-pedagogics. It is the science of the pedagogical situation **as such** and one of its tasks is to reveal pedagogical *fundamentalia*. This means that particular structural moments of the pedagogical situation, also known as pedagogical essences, have to be disclosed. From the nature of its assigned task, fundamental pedagogics is characterized by **anti-essence blindness**.

Because of its anti-essence blindness, fundamental pedagogics requires an essence-disclosing method, thus a **phenomenological method**. This method is the access to real pedagogical essences. It is an access that only is meaningful if it leads to ontological understanding, thus to understanding real pedagogical essences against the universal lifeworld itself as the background for understanding. It is an access or way that is possible because of implementing categories<sup>(1)</sup> and that also has to meet two particular requirements:

- (a) the scientific necessity of the essence-disclosing steps of thinking. A step of thinking is scientifically necessary if it makes an indisputable contribution to essence-disclosure and to the verification of essence status.<sup>(2)</sup>
- (b) philosophy of life permissibility of the steps of thinking. For a Christian, a step of thinking is permissible if its implementation is in agreement with the demands of propriety that speak from his Bible-founded philosophy of life.<sup>(3)</sup>

The phenomenological method is characterized by **anti-essence blindness**. Since the real pedagogical essences are not and cannot be isolated from each other, a phenomenologist necessarily has to apply the **hermeneutic method**.<sup>(4)</sup> The hermeneutic method is a

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method for disclosing meaningful relationships and as such can be described as the way to the hermeneutic question. This means that it is asked of every essence:

"What end is served by this essence?" In other words, for which other essences is this essence a precondition? The answer to these questions is a description of a relationship and in this way there also is a further interpretation of an essence.

The hermeneutic method also is characterized by anti-essence blindness because its application assumes previous essence disclosure and then disclosing essential coherencies.

For understanding the event of educating still another method necessarily is applied by which there can be clarity about the ways in which essence actualization occurs--a method for disclosing the ways in which essences are actualized is necessary. Here there is reference to the **dialectic method**<sup>(5)</sup> that is a method for implementing hermeneutic **questions**. The first hermeneutic question is "What end is served by these particular essences?" and a movement from a first to a second possibility (way of being) is actualized. The second hermeneutic question is "What purpose is served by these two essences jointly, thus in their being integrated?" and a movement to synthesis is actualized.

In addition, the dialectic method is an inadequate method for disclosing essences because it only shows that an essence that serves as a first possibility (way of being), in a particular course of actualization, is inadequate for actualizing the essence which holds true as its synthesis, and indicates that the intensified actualization of a second possibility (essence) is necessary for this synthesis.<sup>(6)</sup> With the help of the dialectic method it also is disclosed that the ways of actualization can occur in various ways, e.g., by design, tension, intensification, life philosophy, etc.<sup>(7)</sup> Thus, the dialectic method is one that discloses the ways of actualization.

As a method for disclosing the ways of actualization, it requires anti-essence blindness because it involves the actualization of essences.

Regarding these three mentioned methods, the following additional comments are made:

- (a) the phenomenological method is hermeneutic in nature because disclosing essences already is a form of interpretation;
- (b) the dialectic method also is hermeneutic in nature because it is possible to ask hermeneutic questions through it;
- (c) the sequence of method application is: phenomenological/ hermeneutical/dialectical;
- (d) all of the pedagogical disciplines are forms of essence-pedagogics and require these anti-essence blind methods for their development (**supplemented** by other relevant methods).

## SUMMARY

- (1) **FUNDAMENTAL PEDAGOGICS** = a particular form of essence-pedagogics.  
 = science of the pedagogic situation **as such**.  
 = **anti-essence blindness**.
- (2) **PHENOMENOLOGICAL METHOD**  
 = **essence-disclosing**.  
 = **access** to real pedagogical essences.  
 = **access** that is only meaningful if it leads to ontological understanding.  
 = **access** or **way** that is possible because of implementing categories.  
 = **way** that must satisfy particular demands:
  - (1) scientific necessity;
  - (2) philosophy of life permissibility.
 = **anti-essence blindness**
- (3) **HERMENEUTIC METHOD**  
 = **method for disclosing relationships**.  
 = **way** to the hermeneutic question.  
 = **way** to further interpretation.  
 = **anti-essence blindness**.
- (4) **DIALECTIC METHOD**  
 = **method for disclosing ways of actualizing essences**.

- = method for implementing hermeneutic questions.
- = inadequate method for disclosing essences.
- = method for disclosing ways of movement.:
  - (i) Design;
  - (ii) Tension;
  - (iii) Intensifying;
  - (iv) Philosophy of life, etc.
- = **anti-essence blindness.**

Characteristic of fundamental pedagogics and the three methods it uses is their **anti-essence blindness**. Therefore, it is meaningful to discuss some reasons for essence blindness:

- (1) Lack of light
- (2) General talk [Idle talk]
- (3) Superficial curiosity
- (4) Ambiguity
- (5) Negativity
- (6) Timid thinking
- (7) Naive prejudgment (bias)
- (8) Lack of vigilance
- (9) Caricaturisms

## 2. REASONS FOR ESSENCE BLINDNESS

### (1) Lack of light

It belongs essentially to the educative event that it can be unlocked through reflection (scientific thinking), i.e., it is characteristic of educating that its real essences can be disclosed--a scientific activity that cannot be practiced meaningfully with a lack of light. With a lack of light the matter of educating cannot be adequately reached and disclosed and its essentials known--essence blindness makes its appearance.<sup>(9)</sup> Light allows one to differentiate and compile that which can be distinguished more sharply and clearly.<sup>(10)</sup> Pedagogical essences, as particular structural moments of the reality of education's inseparability, because of a lack of light cannot be differentiated and essence blindness becomes possible; also compiling the essences, thus ordering and seeing coherencies no

longer are possible. Thus, essence blindness leads to not understanding what is essential to the pedagogical.

With a lack of light, opening an aspect of reality (e.g., the reality of educating) becomes difficult or even impossible, that is, the event of bringing to light by which something (e.g., pedagogical essences) can appear, can come into the clearness of light, cannot be actualized meaningfully.<sup>(11)</sup> To allow a presence (e.g., of pedagogical essences) to occur requires opening (verb) by which appearing occurs. With a lack of light or insufficient light, opening, as the creation of an illuminated area in which a presence is given, cannot be actualized adequately.<sup>(12)</sup> In this sense **opening** refers to creating ways of access to real pedagogical essences and a lack of light means a lack of the means of illuminating that the ways of access have to create. Essence blindness, then, really is either a lack of knowing or the denial of the scientific necessity of pedagogical categories.<sup>(13)</sup>

## (2) General talk [Idle talk]

Sometimes one listens to talk, as such, without arriving at an authentic understanding. This has to do merely with the fact that there is talk and the truth of a matter is accepted because someone says so. What is said has authority. Everything is understood but nothing is grasped.<sup>(14)</sup> Under a stream of words essence blindness flourishes and then the pedagogical essences disappear because they are covered over with a blanket of words. The covering blanket of words accosts one because it is so easily understandable and, therefore, is accepted as truth. Authentic knowledge, as adequate knowledge of essences, as the structural moments of pedagogical situations that cannot be thought away (are necessary), is absent.

General talk that can be taken up by each and everyone exempts them from the task of authentically understanding. This can lead to the assumption that everything is understood well<sup>(15)</sup> and the way of least resistance, namely, the way of essence blindness is proclaimed as the way to truth. Essence disclosing is the arduous way from which idle talkers distance themselves with still more general talk.

## (3) Superficial curiosity

Curiosity is characterized by a desire to see not for the sake of understanding but only for the seeing. There is a search for the new, not to linger with it but to jump immediately to something else.<sup>(16)</sup> This means that superficial curiosity is particularly impressed by the non-essentials that even are seen as the truth. The non-essentials, as the ever new, are continually searched for and essence blindness is fallen into and one is not in a position to see the essences as persisting structural moments. Leaping from one non-essential to a new one is not conducive for thinking to linger with the reality of educating itself that is a precondition for overcoming essence blindness and for opening up the reality of educating so that real pedagogical essences can appear there.

A way of superficial curiosity is to quickly explain that a matter (e.g., educating) is mysterious and, therefore, is not accessible to essence disclosing thinking. Someone such as de Vos shows strikingly that the experience of the mysterious is the primary perception when wondering is awakened. Then, however, the desire is awakened to eliminate the absolute strangeness of the mysterious by, e.g., asking meaningful questions. However, this does not mean that a mystery (which educating is) can be reduced to a solvable problem because generally there remains a mysteriousness left over.<sup>(17)</sup> The fact that there always remains some mystery left over does not discourage the essence thinker and allow him to fall into essence blindness because there always is a remainder that is accessible to essence disclosing thinking that indeed is graspable.

#### **(4) Ambiguity**

If it is impossible to decide what is disclosed in genuine understanding and what is not, there is mention of ambiguity. For example, the impression is given that what superficial curiosity is directed to and about which there is general talk is the authentic, while in this way reality (the reality of educating) itself becomes pushed into the background. Ambiguity conceals<sup>(18)</sup> the essences and promotes essence blindness. For ambiguity essence disclosure is impossible and needless and it is merely word play.

It is ambiguity that feeds superficial curiosity and gives to general talk the semblance of final conclusions.<sup>(19)</sup> Ambiguity, superficial curiosity and general talk have already reached final conclusions

about what educating is and find a continual thinking search for pedagogical essences needless and even meaningless. Such essence blindness, because of ambiguity, also does not really illuminate what the matter is, thus what is founded in experience itself.<sup>(20)</sup>

Fundamental pedagogics' struggle against ambiguity and the correlated essence blindness primarily emphasizes the clear formulation and systematic construction of the **conceptual structure** unique to the pedagogical along with emphasizing the meaning and fundamental nature of the subject terminology (concepts) for the unambiguous understanding of the pedagogical but also the self-respect of the practitioners of pedagogics.

Clearly, a science demands that its **building blocks**, namely, the concepts as expressed in and by the subject terminology, have to be delimited exactly so that their meaning and contents can be determined unambiguously. **Unambiguous** determination means that ambiguity and superficiality are eliminated. The premise that any concept can be used that expresses only approximately what is meant has to be rejected summarily since such a view decidedly leads to ambiguity and thus to essence blindness. As far as possible, concepts have to correspond to the essentials, i.e., to the real essentials of the reality to which they are directed. A pedagogician subsequently has to strive continually to have his concepts convey the essences as particular structural moments of the pedagogical distinctly and clearly so that his conversational partners will know exactly what each concept means and implies. **Distinctness** indicates that each concept is able to be precisely and positively distinguished from other concepts, while **clarity** means that the characteristics of each concept have to be distinctly distinguished from each other.<sup>(21)</sup> Distinctness and clarity only can be effective if essence-disclosure holds a lively interest.

## (5) Negativity

The untrue (that which does not correspond to reality itself W. A. L.) produces negativity.<sup>(22)</sup> Refusing to verify all pronouncements about educating with the universal reality of educating itself, thus to proceed to a phenomenological verification, leads to negativity in the form of essence blindness. This is because it is just pedagogical essences (with their coherencies) that have to be submitted to a phenomenological verification. In this sense the phenomenological

steps of thinking<sup>(23)</sup> also can be viewed as verification steps that have to lead to overcoming essence blindness, especially by verifying the essence-status of the structural moments of pedagogical situations.

The negative essence blind do not see that pedagogical essences are the characteristics, i.e., the qualities of the reality of educating and that without these qualities this reality will become unreal,<sup>(24)</sup> that is to say, it will not become what it is and ought to be. Essences are expressions of structures and embody the **being such** of the educative event. Further, there are living characteristics<sup>(25)</sup> that cannot be expressed if essence blindness throws its blanket of negativity over the reality of educating and then the pedagogical cannot be grasped authentically.

## (6) Timid thinking

When there is a question of the task of thinking there is a question of what concerns thinking. What is thinking concerned with? A contemporary answer: the matter itself. There is mention of thinking being called to the matter itself<sup>(26)</sup> while essence blindness, as timidity in thinking, is called to something else--usually unique thought constructions or particular biases or superficialities or ambiguities or negativities or to most effectively label thinkers with whom there is no agreement.

The matter **itself** has to appear and be present and such appearing occurs in a clear light. There is mention of elucidation in which the matter shows itself, thus appears there where openness has won the battle over darkness,<sup>(27)</sup> as essence disclosure conquering essence blindness. This openness guarantees thinking access to what it reflects on and this openness is called illumination,<sup>(28)</sup> which is not possible with essence blindness because of timid thinking. This illumination is openness for everything that is present and what is illuminated is what thinking attends to,<sup>(29)</sup> and timid thinking cannot attend to this and thus falls into essence blindness with its inability to penetrate to the **eidōs**<sup>(30)</sup> (real essentials).

Illuminative thinking guarantees the possibility of a way to the presence<sup>(31)</sup> of the real essentials while timid thinking guarantees hiddenness, darkness and essence blindness.



Genuine thinking is observable as a thinking through by which there is a disclosing of and being at the essences by which the structuring of the phenomenon of educating becomes possible<sup>(32)</sup> while timid thinking is manifested as superficiality by which obfuscation and concealment become possible. In this sense genuine thinking is essence disclosing thought and timid thinking is a form of essence blindness.

### (7) Naive prejudice (bias)

Thinking involves a struggle with naive biases as superficial judgments in order to promote perceptive knowledge of an aspect of reality<sup>(33)</sup> and this also includes a struggle to move away from essence blindness in the direction of essence disclosure.

Conducive to this "movement away" is that reflecting on, verbalizing and controlling inevitable **presuppositions** (assumptions and presumptions) must occur. The character of science, then, does not require that presuppositions have to be eliminated but that the scientist has to be clearly aware of them.<sup>(34)</sup> For example, here one thinks of the necessary presupposition that real pedagogical essences exist and that it is possible to disclose them. Verification, then, follows in the sense that attempts are made to bring essences to light. If essences are disclosed the presupposition that they exist and can appear becomes a **fundamental axiom**. Should a pedagogician not succeed in showing in adequate ways and by verifying in terms of the reality of educating itself what he has presupposed, his presupposition merely is a naive bias. In this case, the pedagogician has not defended all of his presuppositions but has investigated them with the aim of verifying their fundamental axiomatic status. The essence blind generally do not succeed in seeing the differences among bias/presupposition/fundamental axiom and then it is difficult for them to begin thinking about the reality of educating itself because of essence blinding judgments. In addition, they cannot avoid imposing their personal opinions on the reality of educating<sup>(35)</sup> and this does not allow it to be seen.

### (8) Lack of vigilance

To work in scientifically accountable ways requires a vigilant accessibility to the reality of educating that has to be investigated. The degree of vigilance correlates with the quality of the access<sup>(36)</sup> to what is essential to the reality of educating. Essence blindness, as the absence of vigilance, then makes accessibility impossible or highly haphazard and this leads to a deepening of the already existing blindness. Essence blindness excludes vigilance and thereby subdues the initiative<sup>(37)</sup> to proceed to disclose essences. Subdued initiative then leads again to a lack of vigilance and sometimes to defective vigilance.

In this regard it is meaningful to note that objectivism (elimination of the human from a person) and naturalism (a human as an extension of nature)<sup>(38)</sup> leave out vigilance. Therefore, it is well to understand why those blind to essences so easily fall into an objectivism and naturalism, although sometimes there are philosophy of life reasons for trying hard not to do so. Here one thinks especially of so-called "Christian" naturalism<sup>(39)</sup> that is not able to understand the pedagogic ontologically. **In this sense the concept "ontological" clearly refers to conquering essence blindness** by means of vigilance.

Conquering essence blindness occurs by interest (inter-esse = being among), thus being present to the reality of educating itself in the form of a directedness<sup>(40)</sup> to it that has to be an essence disclosing directedness if its real essentials will be grasped. There is a position<sup>(41)</sup> taken with respect to the reality of educating itself. It is a position of essence disclosure by which the essential pedagogic is discerned. It is taking a position and attentiveness that is **lived**<sup>(42)</sup> and that refers to a lively directedness to conquering essence blindness with its passivity.

## (9) Caricaturisms

A caricaturist is someone who makes caricatures<sup>(43)</sup> in the form of misrepresentations. These misrepresentations then are attacked enthusiastically **and with emotional agitation and sometimes even passion**. A caricaturism then in reality is a sham fight (see Don Quixote) against fancied opponents that is carried out with great intolerance and by which nothing really is achieved because

the campaign is carried out against something non-existent. The caricature does not exist in reality and a struggle against it is meaningless especially because emotional flooding essence blindness is at work. Examples of caricaturisms are legion and only a few are mentioned:

(1) Phenomenologists are existentialists and existentialists are atheists. Therefore it is not permissible for a scientist who is Christian to follow a phenomenological way. The essence blind caricaturist does not see that:

- (i) thinkers who fall into existentialism do so when they are untrue to the phenomenological method;<sup>(44)</sup>
- (ii) phenomenology carries out the most effective struggle against existentialism in all of its forms;<sup>(45)</sup> and
- (iii) Christian pedagogicians apply the phenomenological method because the steps of thinking comprising it demonstrate that they are permissible by his life philosophy.<sup>(46)</sup>

(2) Sometimes there is an attempt to show that phenomenology's view of human being's unnaturalness as ontologically determined, is a suspicious proposition. It is a particular contribution of existential thinking to show the exceptional position of humans without falling into an existentialistic humanism. With the same conviction shown by some Christians (Christian naturalism!) in propagating the naturalness of humans, a Christian who is acquainted with the philosophy of existence proclaims the unnaturalness of humans because God had not created him a little better than an animal, but "For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour" (Psalms 8 v. 5).

(3) The following remarks that this author has made regarding a criticism of C. K. Oberholzer<sup>(47)</sup> are relevant to this section: "In light of this critic's approach one can expect that his "critique" of Oberholzer primarily is going to be a "denunciation". This expectation was confirmed to a great degree and the question arises if the unfounded mistrust that necessarily flows from this is justified. This is not to say that the critic has no right to his own opinion and perspective but drawing a caricature of existential thinking (not existentialism!) and then assailing this caricature as though Oberholzer is an exponent of it is scientifically

unaccountable. Oberholzer is no humanist and also will not and cannot be one. The child-centeredness proclaimed by the circle that Oberholzer criticizes indeed is humanistic in nature and even existentialistic! Related to this, naiveté is not lacking in the critique, of which the following image certainly is the worst: it is asserted that since Oberholzer has noted in the reality of educating that at least two persons have to be present before there can be mention of education, he views humans numerically! Such an assertion is diametrically opposed to all of Oberholzer's findings and, in addition, it can be asked if then no persons have to be present for there to be an educational situation! Also, this critic does not at all see that criteria really are essential categories (essences) that are used for evaluation and that to correctly understand this matter it is necessary to realize that the contrast is not between the normative and descriptive but rather between norm-description and norm-prescription, the latter has a personal decision as its precondition and thus is an extra-scientific activity.

It must also be indicated that in the so-called dialectic thinking of Oberholzer there is no mention of science as thesis and the post-scientific as antithesis. This would be the case only if with Oberholzer there is mention of an absolute dialectic. For Oberholzer the first pole and the second pole (thus, not an antithesis!) are in a relationship of being, thus in a necessary relationship to each other. Consequently, here there is mention of authentic synthesizing and not of synthetic thinking. Synthetic thinking is that mode of thinking, for example, of Christian naturalism where irreconcilables are forced into a synthesis such as, e.g., Thorndike's "law of effect" (which actually is a pathological principle) and Biblical texts in which there is reference to happiness.

Clear distinctions among concepts, thus, are not characteristic of this critic and in this way genuine confusion is created and at the same time the scientific nature of Oberholzer's format is unnecessarily disparaged because of caricature-representation.

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