

CHAPTER ONE

CHILD PLAY: PHILOSOPHICAL CHILD ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

1.1 CHILD PLAY: PHILOSOPHICAL CHILD ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Since a child is a playing being, educators are eager to know whether child play has any educative significance. To find out, the playing child must be understood in the educative situations (pedagogic situations) in which he/she is found playing. From a pedagogic situation, a playing child is viewed phenomenologically in his/her being on the way to proper adulthood; this means that, for a real understanding of a playing child-in-education, no more suitable point of departure can be found than the reality of the educative situation itself. Such a phenomenological evaluation gives rise to the fundamental anthropological truth that a person is the only being who educates, is educated, and is dependent on being Educated,⁽¹⁾ and lends him/herself to it.⁽²⁾

From an early age, there is a dialogue between child and world, and playing is one of its most meaningful forms. The most natural way of dialogue between child and world is a playful involvement with it. This play, as dialogue, is a means of being educatively involved with a young child. Initially, there is a period of few purposeful, planned educative encounters during which playing is used purposefully as a means of educating. However, as a child becomes older, the significance of playing for purposive educating becomes clearer.

Child playing is a child's spontaneous involvement in dealing unsystematically with a still unknown, although alluring world which now and again appears to be other than it seems,⁽³⁾ but which entices him/her to continually attribute meaning to and receive meaning from it. In this connection, it is emphasized that a child lives in an open world with which he/she openly communicates. This includes a variety of possible ways of dialoguing, of which playing is a fundamental one. A child and his/her world as a unity because he/she is directed to and stands open for it (this structure of consciousness is called intentionality). The meanings he/she

attributes to and receives from) the world, and each of his/her behaviors and expressions constitute a part of his/her being-in-the-world, of his/her meaning-giving communicating with his/her world. A child's openness, and his/her playing, as a means of communicating, is a fundamental part of his/her dialoguing with the world, since a young child still has insufficient language for a linguistic dialogue. In other words, a child's playing is his/her most meaningful dialoguing with the world.

Heinz Bollinger⁽⁴⁾ says: "Initially, a little child plays with his limbs, his fingers, his hands, his legs, his mouth, his tongue, and the sounds he/she can make. He/she plays with things in his/her immediate environment by feeling them, throwing them to and fro, etc. This kind of play is called function-in-practice". The following two questions now arise:

1.2 WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A CHILD PLAYS?

A person is an active being and these activities occur on different levels. Thus, e.g., thinking activities are on a different level than playing activities, an adult's playing activities are on a different level than a child's, etc. When a child plays, he/she places him/herself in the world in a certain way. Through playing, he/she designs his/her own future possibilities. This character of design is seen very early in his/her first playing. Playing with his/her limbs and their functions determine his/her future relationships with his/her body-ness. In this way, he/she acquires an unrestricted positive relation to his/her body, bodiliness, and sensuality. Only later is his/her involvement with his/her body, its organs, and functions, restricted by educating. By his/her playing involvement with his/her bodiliness, i.e., his/her "sensuality", he/she has an abundance of desirable experiences which are enjoyable, or fulfilling. In this way, his/her immediate relationship with his/her bodily-being is grounded in positive meaning.

In early child play, a first combining of the senses is possible, as are perceiving, imagining, relating, and beginning thinking, not to mention the first activities of his/her hands. In and by playing, the situation in which a playing child is, becomes united as a totality with what he/she plays with. Thus, child play is playing in the world in which his/her entire being-a-person is involved. In other words, playing is a truly existential way of being. All future potentialities are foreshadowed and tried out in play. This means that play is directed to promoting a future. When playing, a child's

potentialities are formed (designed). An his/her horizon, and way of being-in-the-world are co-dependent on the designs which are made in early and late childhood playing, as well as in the hearty play of puberty. Although a child's playing is actualized in the present, futurity is foreshadowed in each act of playing. The world of play is called an oasis of joy.⁽⁵⁾ A child's play has a fulfilling character, and is enjoyable, which constitutes its character of paradise.

Human being-there (Da-sein) is characterized by futurity. Because the future is gradually and progressively actualized in meaningful ways in the present, it is and must be foreshadowed in play. A person is a person because he/she is not imprisoned in the past and the present. In playing, he/she anticipates his/her potentialities, and embodies his/her higher and highest potentialities. Only through this anticipation can he/she progressively understand and actualize his/her potentialities in his/her historical existence.

The significance of playing for a person's becoming cannot be emphasized strongly enough. A child's early playing with his/her bodiliness (organs and their functions), although its content is nothing specific, also has a future-opening significance. Thus, a small child does not play something distinct, but plays his/her being-a-person and plays to his/her future.

The ability to play is a fundamental way in which a child influences his/her becoming. That is, it is an influencing which child existence (Da-sein) forms in certain ways, in that it progressively orders and givens form to child-living. This view of play has significance because it emphasizes the encounter. After what is said thus far, as a matter of personal becoming, play involves an encounter with the approaching future. By playing, the future is not only designed, but is progressively made present, and actualized. In a situation of encounter, there is playing, designing, and actualizing. It is pointed out that encounter constitutes an undeniable part of all human anticipations (expectations), which he/she then also introduces into his/her playing existence, and which eventually must lead to a truly personal encounter. For a small child, all encounters actualized have the character of the personal, i.e., truly personal being, and this is saturated with the personal. Personal encounter is meaningful encounter and occurs in terms of the anticipation sought by the encountering person will be found in authentic ways.

In playing with his/her mother's breasts, especially if he/she turns him/herself away from his/her mother, and then returns with obvious feelings of delight, or noticeable happiness, the initial anticipation of looking for personal encounter is realized. Hide-and-seek is another early child game of the same nature. It is observed that two-month-old children try to hide themselves behind the curtains of their cribs, and then become exceedingly happy if the mother notices this willful play, and hides, and both players once again disappear from each other, and then appear again. The anticipation of personal encounter, searching for and finding someone, are exemplified by this playing. In this way, an anticipated later, authentic, conscious, fulfilling inevitable relationship of personal encounter is also designed. For a child old enough to grasp, it is observed that any thing, e.g., building blocks, put in his/her little bed for him/her to play with, is held over the side of the bed, and after a brief hesitation, is dropped. The child expects that someone will put this thing back in his/her bed again. He/she begins this play each time anew and repeats it countless times. This play is understood as follows: A child identifies him/herself with the plaything. With this, he/she identifies him/herself with it, and this entails a personal encounter with everything he/she meets and experiences; this encounter is accomplished through this identification.

Child playing is a meaningful way in which his/her encountering being-there (Da-sein) is actualized. Playing is the fundamental way in which child being-in-the-world is actualized.

1.3 WHAT IS MEANT BY PLAY?

In the early philosophical tradition, play is seldom treated thematically. All the same, one finds in Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and others, discussions of play as a metaphor for human existence, and as a cosmic, and God-like resemblance. The play metaphor not only appears in philosophy, but also in specific religious literature, in numerous myths, and in the bible.

Only late in the history of Western philosophy has play enjoyed explicit philosophical attention. The first thematic philosophical consideration of play is written by Schiller, in **Über die Aesthetische Erziehung des Menschen** (On the esthetic education of persons). His philosophical approach is a specific explanatory theory of play. Schiller indicates that a too one-sided definition of play is dangerous because, instead of considering play as a totality, some

aspects can be overemphasized. Such overemphasis leads to an incorrect image of what play is.

Also, in contemporary descriptions there are arguments about the metaphorical and literal meaning of play. Since the publication of Huizenga's masterpiece, **Homo Ludens** (Man, the playing being), persons such as De Bruin, Buytendijk, and Sassen say that he includes too much under play and, consequently, one can call everything play.

1.4 A PHILOSOPHICAL UNDERSTANDING OF PLAY

Many writers correctly observe that play is a fundamental form of a human being's way of existing in the world. This means that play is an existentiell (Heidegger), i.e., a fundamental feature of being-human. Thus, it cannot be eliminated from the human world in thought, and action, as though it has no significance. J. Huizenga agrees with this thought when he declares that, with play, one deals with an unconditional, primary category of life⁽⁶⁾. H. Scheuer⁽⁷⁾ argues that play is a fundamental phenomenon which cannot be inferred from or explained by other phenomena. E. Fink⁽⁸⁾ notes, following A. Peters, that play (as are love, conflict, and work) is a fundamental of human Da-sein.

However philosophically clarifying this discussion might be, it also is necessary to distinguish play from other fundamental features of being human i.e., (existentiellia). A philosopher cannot rest with the given temporal-spatial forms of play but must grasp the phenomenon as it appears by illuminating its essentials, and meanings. Playing is an original way of being, and this means this existentiell its most adequately expressed in an ontological rather than a psychological, or sociological conception. This means playing must be investigated phenomenologically to disclose its essential meanings and their relations with other events. Such a philosophical reflection on playing has three phases (these phases are carried out while the phenomenological reduction, bracketing, is operative): The first phase involves the phenomenological disclosure and description of play itself. The second phase focuses phenomenologically on the horizon within which the phenomenon of play occurs. The third phase places the entire phenomenon of play in the light of the totality of human reality. The question is what is the ontological meaning of this way of being; in other words, what is the fundamental sense and meaning of playing?

1.5 A PROVISIONAL EVALUATION OF THE WORLD OF PLAY

Viewed phenomenologically, one must start with the phenomenon of playing as it is observable in its daily occurrences. One can begin by contrasting playing with the serious world of working. In this contrasting light, working is an activity which aims for a useful result. It reflects a matter-of-fact aim. Work is directed to making the world habitable. A person's assurance of existing arises through working. An atmosphere of constraint, seriousness, and necessity permeate this event. Working appears as very real because a person cannot live without the fruits of his/her labor.

In contrast with working, playing is an activity which does not occur for the sake of specific outcomes, but for the sake of the activity itself. Also, when "playing" strives for a victory, it is no longer playing. The activity of playing almost occurs by itself. It is free of difficulties, and it is spontaneous, frolicsome, and not serious, while working is an area which arises from tenseness and tension.

From this somewhat logical conceptualization of playing and working, the differences between them are apparent. However, this matter must be phenomenologically broadened and deepened. The phenomenological method also provides a perspective on the different tensions between both concepts. As a phenomenon, playing shows a more pathic (emotional) attitude toward reality. There is no being directed to working, but to an act of playing. The world of play is a form of interacting and mutually communicating. Playing with someone and something not only means I play with someone or something, but someone and something play with me. If play and concern are fundamental forms of a human way of existing, then the question is what their mutual relation is. For the sake of convenience, if playing is interpreted as antithetical to working and the serious life, then the fundamental form of playing remains in the contrasting shadow of concern and is not done justice. One then incorrectly interprets the phenomenon of playing if it is merely viewed as a diversion from or as entirely superfluous to life.

The world of play and of work shows a mutual connection and harmony. The world of play requires, in harmonious ways, the consolidated (firm) world, as a place in which to play. The "real" world offers the true possibility for the illusive (make believe) world of play. It enables one to be playing-in-the-world. But conversely, play promotes new discoveries, and is constituted by them. ⁽⁹⁾

1.6 THE SPATIALITY OF PLAY

The meaningful structural aspect or moment of the phenomenon of play is its closedness: playing occurs in its own domain and sphere. It is separated from the ordinary world and has its own field of play and rules. A playing person acts differently than in everyday associations. This "difference" is the distinctiveness and definiteness of playing. A space for actualizing play is symbolic of a delimited environment. A person can play only in a "cleared" sphere. E. Fink rightly calls play an oasis of joy in the desert of everydayness.⁽¹⁰⁾

For a clear insight into the play existentiell, a hermeneutics of this closedness and distinctness is important. It is incorrect to understand and delimit the spatiality of the phenomenon of play's being-here from the being-there of the surrounding everyday world. In this way, one is driven to the question of why and from what the being-here of the world of play is segregated. The emphasis on the player turning him/herself away from his/her concerns and directedness, and then living without concern and limits in a world of play, is a one-sided interpretation. The distinctness and authenticity of play is, in this one-sided interpretation, viewed as a denial of a factual limitation, which can be expanded without limit. This occurs by discovering the distinctness and authenticity of the phenomenon of play, since factual givens can be surpassed, e.g., work is exceeded in play.

E. Fink speaks of an inner space which is "nowhere", and yet is "there", because of the unreal sphere of being which is, and yet is not.⁽¹¹⁾ One searches this "nowhere" for support in the "somewhere" of the actualities of life. The illusive spatial character of the world of play does not mean a lack of reality, but the acquisition of increasingly more reality. Thus, playing is a way of unlocking, or disclosing reality.

The apparently limited nature of the world of play is, as it were, the landing place, the potential ability for the actual abundance of playing. The closedness of the world of play is not a being closed, in opposition to the external world.

It is a focal point from which the power of the ordinary world emanates. Playing takes place within a closed space and rejuvenates work. A person plays earnestly, authentically, and with reality.

He/she does not allow him/herself to be limited by the actualities and contents of the playing. Indeed, he/she also plays with these limits.

The world of play is not so much something separated but is something exceptional, while being interwoven with the everyday. In playing, there is no evidence of surrender. It does not progress rectilinearly. In playing, there is no opposition but a reciprocity between here and there.

The closedness of play is characterized by an intimate connectedness. Here, the trustworthy is mysterious, and the mysterious is trustworthy. Familiarity and unfamiliarity, the expected, and the surprising flow into each other. This reciprocity of familiar and unfamiliar, of expected, and unexpected expresses an essential of playing.

The surprisingly unfamiliar in the world of play must be interpreted differently from the strangely unfamiliar which a person recognizes in the everyday life of concern. In everyday life, there is a contrast between the familiar, as what is usual, and the unfamiliar, as what is strange. The less familiar something is to a person, the more it lies outside his/her experiential world.

Because play is not directed to anything, nothing special is expected. It is the expectation, as expectation which is experienced in playing. The primary concern is not the something played with but the playing itself.

The interpretation of the spatiality of playing indicates a dialectic hierarchy between play and concern, as higher and lower fundamental forms. This involves two complementary, relatively independent fundamental forms which are related to each other such that the world of play is not separated from the world of concern, but the world of concern is separated from that of play. The world of play communicates with the world of concern. A person can play only if he/she surrenders him/herself to the playing. Playing is not so much an act as it is an event.

1.7 THE TEMPORALITY OF PLAY

Also, time appears very differently within the sphere of everyday concern than within that of playing. From factual reality, one looks

at the temporal limitations of playing in terms of the experience of the succession of past, present, and future. Playing has a duration, but the inner time of playing surpasses a clock measured temporal sequence, and is characterized by a timeless presence, by an eternal now. Just as, in playing, no distance is traveled, there also is no moment of time experienced.

Indeed, there are games, such as hockey and football, which have precisely prescribed time periods. Playing lasts for a specified time. If this doesn't happen, it begins to lose its form, and then it lasts too long, and the preceding playing becomes undermined, and boredom sets in. The temporality of the world of play is characterized by an eternal now. The factually defined length of time ensures that the eternity is not an endless duration. Playing needs unlimited time to go beyond reality and play with it. With its inner infinity, playing knows no end. Only a human being sets limits from the outside and makes him/herself weary of playing. The phenomenon of play remains open to repetition. This repetition continually gives new, and original form to the playing.

Also, playing does not have a clear beginning; the factual beginning only means entering playing. A person turns him/herself over to play and is not aiming at satisfaction. Playing does not give rise to satisfaction. The player seeks an eternal moment in an endless time.

Even when a person satisfies biologically colored needs and desires, play arises as a fundamental form. Here is found the meaningfulness of play therapy, i.e., a person does not let him/herself be dragged along by a blind passion and, in playful ways, desires are elevated to a higher level. A person does not so much play a game, but the game plays (with) him/her. It is because of this that play diagnostics is possible.

The world of play shows a curious structure which seemingly includes strange contradictions. This world possesses a double ground. It is simultaneously real and unreal. A playing little girl experiences her doll as her child, and herself as the mother. Yet, she doesn't think the doll is really her child, and she is really the mother. A playing child does not mistake him/herself.

When a child becomes so swept up by the imaginary that his/her playing can no longer be distinguished from reality, then he/she

flees from reality, and no longer plays. Play becomes one-sidedly unreal because reality is playfully let go. However, a child who clings to reality, and cannot progress to illusive play is not quite free.

Child play moves between two limits: on the one side is the limit of the real and on the other, the limit of the unreal or pure fantasy. Play is neither of these, but it is both. The world of play is essentially ambiguous. This ambiguity is not a reflective awareness but is playfully experienced.⁽¹²⁾ An ambiguity can only be experienced within a playful attitude. Therefore, the sphere of the world of play is not real. The child plays with real toys, yet because of their smaller dimensions, they are unreal, and for this reason, they evoke the imaginary.

This double dimension of real and unreal is not only characteristic of child play, and of the youthful time of life, one also encounters this double dimension in the play of adults when they are "youthful". When happiness or sadness are portrayed in a play (e.g., comedy, drama), the onlooker does not experience real happiness or sadness, but also, as the actor laughs or cries, he/she does not "live" his/her mood, as an unreal experience. Here, appearance and reality are not confused for a moment. Indeed, the onlooker is a co-player in the play.

Playing as playing, symbolizes itself as a modality of human freedom which moves in a circle between possibility and facticity. Human existence, as the unity of can-be, and factual reality, loses its freedom as possibility, when its actualization, its engagement is avoided. Playing exists in experiencing the "between". Therefore, playing is not the freedom itself. Freedom actualizes that which can be as far as possible, but playing is the tangible expression of itself, as a modality of freedom.

C. Verhooft⁽¹³⁾ says, " play does not create, but only offers possibilities". Play offers possibilities to reality and actualizes reality as possibilities. The pedagogical significance of play lies here. It is not so important **what** is played, but **that** there is play. Thus, freedom and creativity do not form play in any sense, but are actualized in a playful attitude, in a playful disposition.

Play is playing with images because only images allow dynamic possibilities to be seen, which factual, objective reality cannot. In the sphere of playing, things take on different appearances. For a

player, this is not viewed cognitively as an object, but is experienced in an affective attitude as an image. Thus, there is reciprocal communication, and the image should be approached with respect, and should not be used aggressively for one's own aim. The image goes beyond the situation of harsh, unambiguous facts, and offers possibilities and surprises. In playing, it appears that reality and the image contain possibilities which are not entirely real, and yet also not unreal⁽¹⁴⁾.

However, playing is not so much a playing with images, but playing with images is a means of playing. A playing person plays in the world of the image, of the symbol. The illusive moment of play, with its ambiguous relation of image-reality, can become disturbed, either from the side of controlled reality, or from the side of uncontrolled fantasy.

Playing can represent something, but in playing, this representation does not happen as it does in art. Playing is actualized around playing in images, around the to and fro between image and reality. Thus, an essential of play does not lie, e.g., in the fact that wooden blocks or dolls represent something, but it occurs around the to and fro of the movement. Thus, art comes into being, not as play, but as culture **in** play, as J. Huizenga also says:

Each symbolic expression, or lived experience is playful because of the reciprocity maintained between expression and what is expressed, between the symbol and the symbolized. It is just by this playful and ambiguous to-and-fro that the expression is differentiated from a discharge as a "living out". Therefore, when play is viewed psychologically, it possesses a certain degree of catharsis, and this lies not so much in what is expressed itself, but in the way it is expressed⁽¹⁵⁾.

1.8 THE EXISTENTIAL VALUE OF THE PHENOMENON OF PLAY

When a philosopher wants to understand the ontological meaning, i.e., the essentials, of the phenomenon of playing, he/she must allow him/herself to be addressed by playing, as phenomenon. Playing does not imitate, but represents, portrays, and makes a higher reality visible. The image makes a person an onlooker, in the sense of a participant in a deeper human occurrence. In this way, a person is open to the symbol which appears in a higher sense. Through playing, a person steps out of him/herself and turns

him/herself over to a world which has been conjured up by playing. Playing is the to and fro between playing and being played. Play does not play itself outside a person. A person undergoes play, but this undergoing is an active participation, and positive induction and joining in. Thus, play diagnostics is possible. Play also does not play itself within a person; play asks a person to adopt a self-forgetting attitude. When the "doing" character of playing is too much in the foreground, then a person also remains too much in the foreground, and he/she stays horizontally directed. Only in a playful attitude can the depth dimension of life become vertically apparent. In a playful attitude, a person discovers that **“playing is finding.”**⁽¹⁶⁾

1.9 PLAY AS "BOUNDARY PHENOMENON" OF LIFE

It appears that playing is meaningful for interpreting the sense and meaning of life and the world. Therefore, play diagnostics is possible. To say that playing is a boundary phenomenon of life is to express the precise sense of the essence of playing. Play is the frame, the framework of life. Here one thinks of a painting. The frame captures the radiating power of the painting and allows the power of the work of art to show itself better. The frame around the painting delimits it from its surroundings in a remarkable way. What is remarkable is that the limit of the frame is not limiting but renovating. Without the frame, the power of the representation flows away chaotically. Thus, playing as boundary phenomenon of life creates a space for the emerging sense of life. The world of play is delimited from the ordinary world. It requires its own separated place. It knows its own dress codes, language, and rules. Thus, to understand the essentials of playing, the world of play itself must be taken as the point of departure for study.

Summary

The preceding philosophical reflection on playing allows one to see that it is a fundamental phenomenon of universal scope. Human and, thus, child playing is a meaningful theme out of which all fundamental concepts and existentiellia, such as intersubjectivity and intentionality can be thought about. Playing provides a person with an open horizon without which his/her ideas and experiences of reality are distorted. Playing is the frame within which reality appears. Playfulness is a person's existential practice. Playing does not mean a one-sided separation from the category of working--playing lies precisely in between reality and imagination. Playing is

the highest realm for a person; it is a way of being creative on a human level.

As a human way of being, it should also be worthwhile to view child playing from other perspectives. In this study, child playing is viewed from fundamental pedagogical (chapter two), psychopedagogical (chapter three), pedotherapeutical (chapter four), and practical (chapter five) perspectives.

References

- (1) Langeveld, M. J., **Beknopte theoretische pedagogiek**, J. B. Wolters, Groningen, 1965, 158.
- (2) Oberholzer, C. K., **Prolegomena van 'n prinsipiële pedagogiek**, H.A.U.M., Kaapstad, 1968.
- (3) Langeveld, M. J., **Ontwikkelingspsychologie**, Sesde druk, J. B. Wolters, Groningen, 1964, 51.
- (4) Bollinger, Heinz, **Das Werden der Person**, Ernst Reinhardt Verlag, Munchen/Basel, 1967.
- (5) Fink, E., **Oase des Glucks**, Freiburg/Munchen, 17-19.
- (6) Huizenga, J., **Homo Ludens**, Haarlem, 1938, 4.
- (7) Scheuerl, H., **Das Spiel**, 115.
- (8) Fink, E., **Oase des Glucks**, Freiburg/Munchen, 17-19.
- (9) Vermeer, E., **Spel en spelpedagogische Problemen**, 52.
- (10) See Gadamer, H. G., **Wahrheit und Methode**, Tübingen, 2e druk, 1965, 102.
- (11) Fink, E., **Oase des Glucks**, Freiburg/Munchen, 1959, 30-31.
- (12) Plattel, M. G., **De Filosofie van het spel en het spel van de Filosofie**, 281.
- (13) Verhochven, C., **Rondom die Leegte**, Utrecht, 1965, 120.
- (14) See Buytendijk, F., **Het spel van mens en dier**, Amsterdam, 1932, 137.
- (15) Plattel, M. G., **De Filosofie van het spel en het spel van de Filosofie**, 284.
- (16) See Buytendijk, F., **Het spel van mens en dier**, 97.