

# Bildung as educational purpose: reimagining the goals of religious education

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## ABSTRACT

This paper develops work undertaken by the *After Religious Education* project which seeks to reimagine Religious Education in schools for a context in which both religious and non-religious worldviews are taken seriously. One of the longstanding challenges for RE teachers in schools in England has been how to reconcile the broad range of aims and purposes it is supposed to support in a context in which RE is increasingly perceived as confused, inconsistent, and irrelevant. Through a discussion of selected meanings and histories of '*Bildung*', from Eckhart through Heidegger culminating in Biesta's renunciation of the term, this paper considers whether *Bildung* could offer a way to rethink the educational purposes of RE. It explores how the varied and competing purposes of RE might be harmonized partly because this concept provides an educational direction without over-specifying the destination: it invites 'unbidden' aspects to enter educational processes.

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## Introduction

This paper develops the work undertaken by the *After Religious Education* project.<sup>1</sup> Inspired by the *Commission on Religious Education* 2018 report which proposed a number of reforms intended to make Religious Education (RE) more reflective of religious and non-religious attitudes (CORE 2018), the *After RE* project aspires to reimagine RE in schools for a context in which both religious and non-religious worldviews are taken seriously. Unashamedly interpretive in orientation (Aldridge 2015; Shaw 2023), the project develops a pedagogical framework that teachers could find useful in developing their own curriculums. Drawing on the broadly defined tradition of 'continental pedagogy' (Friesen and Kenklies 2022) and employing the theories of continental pedagogues like Wolfgang Klafki and Martin Wagenschein (Lewin and Korsgaard 2024), the project emphasizes the importance of educational purposes in the process of

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curriculum production (Lewin et al. 2023). But this focus on educational purposes risks prioritizing an overly instrumental attitude to educational processes. In this paper, I explore whether the German concept of *Bildung* provides a way to understand the future-oriented nature of education, without falling foul of an overly instrumentalist attitude (Korsgaard 2024).

First, I show how purposes are intrinsic to the concept of education as an intentional process (Friesen and Kenklies 2022). While a unity of purpose would, one might hope, mitigate the problems that arise from confused and competing purposes, a false or imposed unity of purpose might not help. I suggest that the concept of *Bildung* would be welcome here because it accommodates diverse orientations, offering some direction without over-specifying the destination. Through a discussion of religious and philosophical registers of *Bildung*, specifically Eckhart and Heidegger, I argue that the idea has long concerned the paradox at the heart of a theological and educational process: how to cultivate goodness or freedom. The paper suggests some parallels between the theological dynamics of detachment in Eckhart, as a process of being freed of sensual impressions to allow the self to be molded by the form (*bild* or image) of God, and education, as a process of cultivating freedom.

I then consider Biesta's objections to the concept of *Bildung*: that it entails a kind of cultivation which lays excessive emphasis upon the idea of fitting into an existing culture, or as he calls it 'socialisation.' Through its theological roots, I suggest that the term could be used more dialectically to offer a direction without a destination. In educational terms, this means having an intention while creating conditions for something 'unbidden.' Finally, I return to the question of whether the vagueness of *Bildung* could be helpful in education generally, and more specifically for RE.

## The context of RE in England

One of the longstanding challenges for RE teachers in schools in England has been how to reconcile the broad range of aims and purposes it is supposed to support. In a multi-faith, multi-secular context (Ofsted 2021), not only is RE expected to promote a better understanding of a range of religious and non-religious worldviews, it is also expected to contribute to community cohesion, support moral/ethical inquiry, promote spiritual development, encourage good citizenship and forms of patriotism (e.g. through the dubious notion of 'fundamental British values' - FBV), enhance understanding of the specific religious culture and history of the nation, prevent radicalization and extremism and so on (Conroy et al. 2013). Considering the theme of this Special Issue around postcolonialism, these aims can also be interpreted in light of the tensions that arise when coming to terms with colonialist histories and how religion has served as a context (or pretext) for different kinds of religious influence (Nye 2019) and how RE these days needs to encourage reflection on these complex

histories (Gearon 2020). Freighted with diverse and often competing aims, RE is in danger of being perceived as confused, inconsistent, and consequently irrelevant. Little wonder, then, that the statutory requirement to teach RE in England (roughly that every child should have one RE class a week) is widely ignored (Cooling, Bowie, and Panjwani 2020).

There are varied calls for new ways to reimagine RE: to present RE as an academic subject rooted in the secular study of religion (Alberts 2017; Jensen 2008); to make explicit the multi-disciplinary foundations of RE (Georgiou and Wright 2018); to unashamedly orient the subject to the assessment of truth claims and ultimately to the pursuit of religious knowledge (Easton et al. 2019). Despite the many and varied views on the nature and purpose of RE, a persistent trend can be detected: a recognition that RE must respond to its perceived irrelevance in an age of declining religious commitment. In these complex circumstances, what should RE aspire to achieve? Is it possible to imagine a singular purpose to unite the diverse aims and interests that seem only to pull the subject in different directions? Would a unifying principle be conceivable or desirable?

My argument takes the view that educational intentions are important: that education is, by definition, an intentional process (Friesen and Kenklies 2022) and that therefore the nature of the intention or purpose governing education is important to consider. A unity of purpose would, one might hope, mitigate the problems that arise from confused and competing purposes. But a false or imposed unity of purpose might not help. A false unity might occur if the ambitions of an educational system dictate the intentions of teachers working within it or when teachers feel obliged to enact the purposes of another for any number of reasons. So how might one ensure some measure of unity here without the imposition of a general purpose upon teachers? The answer is not that difficult at one level: we could ensure that the general purpose is sufficiently vague so that teachers are likely to support it or at least would find it unobjectionable. This seems, in fact, to be a familiar strategy. There are numerous commonplace expressions that try to capture educational aspirations in generalized terms that are likely intended to inspire, or at least not offend: e.g. realizing the student's potential; forming the whole child; cultivating autonomy.

Even though such expressions can sound trite or hollow (Kenklies, Lewin, and Tonner 2022), I do not deny that often the aspiration behind such expressions is sincere and possibly even worthwhile since they seem to hope to articulate a general educational purpose that does not narrowly prescribe intentions in ways that are too readily instrumentalized. As will become clear with the analysis of *Bildung*, I am sympathetic to attempts to articulate capacious educational purposes. After all, educators need a sense of their orientation and direction but not to the extent that they would be entirely determined by those directions or constrained by educational processes. While educators have plans, the educational process is not mechanical or causal, but has the

quality of a living process whose final destination is not prescribed. There is an important reason for describing education as a living process which cannot be entirely predicted or causally determined: that education entails creating conditions for something unexpected, unbidden, or interruptive (Biesta 2014),<sup>2</sup> or at the very least, the possibility of an unanticipated yet positive outcome should not be foreclosed. So, while I present education as an intentional process, the relations between intentions and outcomes are always complex, even discontinuous (English 2013). To understand the scope and limits of what we can intend and what we can know about education, I employ the figure of the pedagogical triangle (Figure 1) in which there are three essential elements: educator, student (educand), world, or subject matter.

The educational process is initiated by the intention of the educator to improve the educand-world relation, as illustrated by the direction of the dotted line and arrow in Figure 1. While this figure indicates the process beginning with the educator, each corner of the triangle has a certain kind of activity and responsibility in relation to the other elements which could be described as a mutual and co-operative process (Lewin and Waterman-Evans 2024). The dynamic encounter that drives the pedagogical process can be described, in terms of continental pedagogy, as *Bildung* (Friesen and Kenklies 2022). So, my argument draws on the continental pedagogical tradition, first through the lens of the nineteenth-century Herbartian pedagogue Wilhelm Rein to set the scene before coming more directly to the concept of *Bildung*.

In his *Outlines of Pedagogics*, Rein makes two basic but important observations. First, that what he calls *special didactics* are largely derived from *general didactics*; that is, the didactic principles of any particular subject, including RE, are largely defined by their relation to general didactic principles. This means that ideas concerning how to teach RE should largely be derived from how to teach in general. This is important to note because there is a tendency to treat RE as special, unique, or exceptional partly because, unlike all other subjects in England, there are statutory obligations to teach it, and yet there is relative freedom concerning what to teach since there is no prescribed national

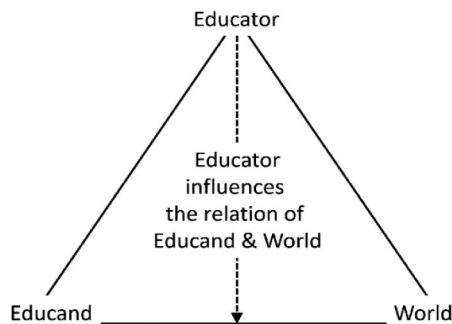


Figure 1. The pedagogical triangle (Friesen and Kenklies 2022).

curriculum (Lewin et al. 2023; Salter 2021). The second related observation is that the purpose of RE cannot be differentiated from the general purpose of education itself. For Rein, education can have only one ultimate purpose, which, being a nineteenth-century Neo-Kantian Herbartian pedagogue, he expresses as the ‘ethical cultivation of the will’ (Rein 1895).<sup>3</sup> While it might be possible to reinterpret Rein’s overarching purpose in different ways, I turn to what I take to be a related formulation of the goal of education, namely, *Bildung*. What is *Bildung* and is it a helpful concept for elaborating the general purpose of education and therefore of RE?

### What is *Bildung*?

Once upon a time, we awoke to discover humanity as task. We were already human, to be sure. But we were not yet fully or perfectly human. We discovered ourselves as internally riven, divided, torn by opposing forces. We found ourselves unformed, immature, not yet capable of taking responsibility for ourselves. Nor could we simply await our full humanity, like the ripening of a fruit. No, it was something we had to take into our own hands. (Herdt 2019, 1)

So begins Herdt’s persuasive book, whose overarching ambition is to give expression to an underlying unity behind the diverse theories of *Bildung*. This opening passage presents a lucid impression of the concept, alluding to its theological dynamics: that the sense of what we are not yet, is somehow awoken within, or discovered by us. Here an immanent transcendence is implied, which prefigures a subtle teleology. This teleology, so I would argue, imagines a direction without over-determining a destination. Later, Herdt defends a view of *Bildung* with the idea that human beings are ‘oriented toward a telos conceived as the harmonious development of all their various capacities . . . into a balanced, unified whole’ (p. 82).

In short, *Bildung* can refer to the German tradition of self-cultivation denoting the holistic formation of human powers (Deng 2021) through an encounter with culture, or, more broadly, the world. With deep roots in theological and philosophical anthropology, the concept of *Bildung* seems to offer some resistance to the reduction of education to learning processes that are governed by empirical-analytical educational sciences (Masschelein and Ricken 2003). For those working in human science pedagogy, that is part of the concept’s appeal (Friesen and Kenklies 2022). Some have expressed concern that *Bildung* is not translatable (Hermeling 2003), or that, even in the German context, its meaning is too vague. The fact that the term is often left untranslated by contemporary Anglophone educationalists could suggest a kind of fetishization. We English speakers suffer from a terminological deficit when having to apply ‘education’ to a range of activities, influences, and processes (Biesta et al. 2012; Engelmann and

Kenklies 2023) while wishing to expand the educational analysis beyond the narrow orbit of institutions (i.e. schools and universities). *Bildung* might have just the right *systematic mystique*. But that very *mystique* may leave it vulnerable to being coopted by the ‘dominant form of subjection’ (Masschelein and Ricken 2003, 150). Still, the vagueness or untranslatability of *Bildung* is considered a virtue by some (Taylor 2017). Yet the historical associations of the term are also suggestive of an elitist tradition of cultivation into high culture, one too closely tied to an assumed universalist *Bildungs-rhetoric* associated with colonialism and racism (Herdt 2019), and at odds with its rather specific and localized history (Stieger 2020). Biesta characterizes *Bildung* in similar terms when he calls it ‘the becoming of the individual as “this or that” individual through engagement with “culture”’ (Biesta 2016, 839). More recently, Biesta has argued that *Bildung’s* emphasis on cultivation amounts to a form of socialization that does not leave sufficient space for his conception of education as a call to becoming, of summoning of the world to existence, or subjectification (Biesta 2021). Here, *Bildung* as cultivation is thought to put too much emphasis on external influence, leaving insufficient space for the exercise of the freedom of the person to respond to the call to action. I will return to Biesta’s concerns later.

The complexity and ambiguity of the term derives in part from its history. With roots in the Christian mysticism of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the concept underwent historical transformation through processes of religious reformation, secular enlightenment, through aesthetic idealization, and more recently to post-war skepticism about the place and propriety of cultural education. While I can scarcely trace this complex lineage in this paper, there are some interesting connections that I wish to sketch out. These connections are of interest since they point to possible reinventions of religious and cultural education. So, with that brief summary in place, let us delve more deeply into the history of the term.

As has been widely discussed (Hedley 2018; Herdt 2019; Hermeling 2003), *Bildung* as a term can be traced back to the writings of the German theologian, visionary, and mystic, Meister Eckhart (1260–ca. 1328), a Dominican monk and Prior whose teachings (especially on the unity of God and the soul) were in part condemned by the Roman Catholic Church. Such a different context to our own entails a very different anthropology and theology, and so comparison of concepts is not straightforward. Yet, there is one aspect of Eckhart’s teachings that has some contemporary resonance, and which offers a hypothetical link to an interpretation of the nature and process of *Bildung* today. This aspect is illustrated by asking the question: how are we to become good, to become as God? While Eckhart does not offer an entirely systematic answer, there is a consistent theme in his teachings on becoming God, namely, detachment (*Gelassenheit*).

For Eckhart, detachment is a practice of living without why, an ethical model that is said to be resolutely anti-instrumental (McGinn 1986, 296ff). To become good is to become an image or *Bilde* of that supreme Goodness that is God. But how are we to achieve this? Eckhart says:

When I preach, I am accustomed to speak about detachment, and that man should be free of himself and of all things; second, that a man should be formed again into that simple good which is God; third, that he should reflect on the great nobility with which God has endowed his soul. So that in this way he may come to wonder at God; fourth, about the purity of the divine nature, for the brightness of the divine nature is beyond words. (Eckhart 1983, 203)

Through a process of freeing the self of created things, the novice or student can be 'formed again' into God by a process of discovery of God within. Through detachment, one can give form to God in the soul. Susanne Hermeling draws out the dynamics of detachment as a process of being freed of sensual impressions to allow the self to be molded by the form – the *Bild* or image – of God:

In the tradition of Neo-Platonic teaching the soul can receive impressions, sensual and spiritual. It has to be freed of sensual impressions; the mystics called this *entbilden* (or *entbildern*), before it is ready to mould itself into the form of God, or to take the imprint of God's form. This act of rebirth of God and man alike, the mystical process of *inbilden* (imprinting), *überbilden* (transforming) or *bildwerdung* (becoming the image) reverses the separation of God and human being. (Hermeling 2003)

This (non)activity of being freed from sensual impressions *entbilden* is some kind of preparation for rebirth (Eckhart speaks of the birth of God in the soul). Here, Eckhart presents an image which suggests that the lines of activity, or 'agency' (to use a modern term), are unclear. I want to emphasize this ambiguity of activity and agency since it will indicate the educational relevance of *Bildung*.

I turn briefly to Martin Heidegger's work on Eckhart where this ambiguity of activity is explored and emphasized (Moore 2020). Heidegger spends a good deal of time exploring a kind of thinking (*Denken*) that is not calculative or analytical, but receptive, which, explicitly recalling Eckhart, he characterizes as *Gelassenheit* - detachment (often translated as releasement) (Heidegger 1968, 2020). Here thinking as a kind of detachment refers to a mode of being which involves a kind of passive activity. What is the nature of thinking as detachment?

At least since Descartes, we are accustomed to regarding the thinking subject as the intentional agent who initiates calculation or analysis, the type of thinking we engage in when, in our planning, researching, and organizing, we reckon with the conditions before us with the intention of them serving our specific purposes. Heidegger's notion of thinking as detachment means something quite different: it refers to a patient waiting, listening, and attending (Heidegger 1968). One way of reading Heidegger, and which resonates with the concept of *Entbilden*, is to see this as a turn away from sensual impressions related to beings in order to pay heed to Being. Patient attention to Being is not,

in his account, passivity. But how are we to conceptualize this kind of active receptivity and what does it have to do with *Bildung* as a key educational aim?

In general, thinking as detachment is not actually so strange: In English we colloquially speak of thoughts *occurring to us*, or being *struck by a thought*. When it comes to Heidegger's notion of thinking as detachment (from beings), the intending subject (in Heidegger's terms, the thinker) is not the source, nor does the thinker's intention provide an unambiguous goal or telos (Lewin 2015). But thinking gathers the space in which something may come into appearance. There is a relation between thinking and Being in the unfolding of thought, a relation that might be understood as necessary for creating conditions in which Being may arrive. The dynamics of the unfolding of Being in thinking as detachment is suggested by John Caputo to have direct parallels for understanding how we can speak of the soul approaching the good in Eckhart. We might say that the good is not intentionally sought by, or formed in, the soul; yet we can say that the soul has a role to play through the practice of detachment. As Caputo puts it, the birth of God in the soul:

cannot be accomplished without the soul's assistance. So necessary is the soul's participation in this process, so intimately does it share in the Father's work, that Eckhart does not hesitate to say that the soul 'cobears' (mitgebiert: Q, 161) the Son, that it 'collaborates' (mitwirkt: Q, 94–95) with God. There is only one work, which the Father initiates and with which the soul cooperates. (Caputo 2018, 68)

We can see how this cooperative process, from Eckhart to Heidegger, might throw light upon more modern notions of *Bildung*: that teaching provides a space in which the student-world encounter may happen. Heidegger does not, of course, inhabit the same Christian cosmos as Eckhart, and the cooperation of educator, student, and world in *Bildung* suggests the need for translation to a more secular educational register.

According to Friedrich Schlegel, 'Becoming God, being human, educating (*bilden*) oneself are expressions that mean exactly the same' (Hermeling 2003, 171). If we dare associate this idea/process with *Bildung*, then we can ask how it is that secular processes of formation implied in a dynamic of self and other can be said to resemble the theological dynamics of God and the soul. What makes them similar or the 'same'? I suggest that a connection lies in the way we think education as the cooperation or collaboration of self-formation and influence from outside: to *allow ourselves* to be formed, we must create space through a kind of detachment. While the educator might intend an influence, only the student can allow that influence. In Eckhartian terms, it is only through putting aside the created image that the uncreated image may be born. But uncreated and created images co-mingle or collaborate in the process of *Bildung*.

These attempts to articulate the relations between what comes from outside (or above) and what emerges from within suggest a parallel with the fundamental paradox of education articulated by Kant – how to cultivate freedom –



but now we can see it as emerging out of a theological tradition, a tradition through which we could explore a range of responses. We have already outlined Eckhart's response: the good is realized by emptying the soul of created images. What makes this apparently paradoxical is that the renunciation of created images seems to rely on an image of God as the ground of our being. We seem to rely on an image to renounce all images. This suggests an interpretation of *Bildung* as a dialectical process in the sense that it requires the formation and subsequent renunciation of images to generate some movement along the *via negativa* (path of negation) as it is sometimes called. It is at least partially for this reason that Christian mystics have described the union of God and the soul in paradoxical terms. Note that the 'direction of travel' along the *via negativa* can only be indicated by reference to paths or images that it is not (Turner 1998). Rather, like the idea that there is some value to vagueness in educational purpose, here there is direction of travel, but it is not entirely clear whether we go and certainly the destination cannot be grasped.

### **Biesta and Bildung**

Let me now turn to Biesta's concerns about *Bildung*. Biesta seems to place a strong idea of educational purpose on *Bildung* when he states that it 'is about initiating children and young people into existing traditions and practices' (2021, 15). For him, this suggests cultivation from outside which relies too much on socialization:

As long as one thinks of education as cultivation – the cultivation of a human 'organism' towards his or her own freedom – the educational interest in this is indeed paradoxical, as if we can *make* children and young people free. (14)

We cannot make people free any more than we can make them good (or God). Would Biesta say something similar about becoming God and becoming educated: that thinking in terms of *Bildung* as cultivation results in a paradox? The paradox of education entails the fact that education often seems to be about an attempt to do the impossible: cultivating freedom, autonomy, or independence. The attempt to bring about the union of God and the soul seems just as paradoxical. Perhaps, it would be sufficient for this paper to establish a parallel between the paradox of education and the paradox of the union of God and the soul or becoming good. But there is one further step I want to take: how to deal with, or resolve, this paradox.

In his attempt to resolve the paradox, Biesta refers to Dietrich Benner's phrase *Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit* – roughly translated as summoning the child, or arousing a desire, towards self-action. Presented by Biesta not as *Bildung* but as *Erziehung*, this call to be a self is something that comes from outside of the student. It is not a latent power that is drawn out but entails an encounter with the world that may call the child to self-action. But how does the educator

create conditions for this summoning or call? Biesta has provided a nice example: he recounts Homer Lane's story of Jason, a 'rough' 16-year-old boy who is confronted with his own freedom in the form of a provocation to smash some things up: first some 'fussy tea-things,' and then a watch belonging to the teacher apparently in order to summon Jason to self-action (Biesta 2020, 90–91). Indeed, Lane says that the situation 'brought the real Jason to the surface' (Lane 1928, 168) one in which Jason is both confronted by freedom and making the right choice. This seems to be an interpretation that Biesta accepts, and one can see why. But one must wonder if there are other potential interpretations, not least because the story is so richly complex. I am not objecting at all to Biesta's attempt to illustrate this elusive idea: some of the most interesting educational moments resist clear interpretation or formulation but that does not mean we should not create images of them to study and reflect upon.

On this basis of this and other similar stories,<sup>4</sup> I would argue that there is no clear answer as to how to call a student to self-activity because it is not in the educator's gift to determine that call partly because it is not the educator who does the calling or summoning, certainly not directly; we might call this indirect education (Saeverot 2022). The most of the educator can do is create certain conditions in which the call of Being might be heard. So, to the extent that there is no 'how' to actively generate a call from without, we are left with no clear path. Put in more theological terms, the question of *how* to encounter transcendence (or God) remains. We can, perhaps, provide images and intimations of transcendence by offering a view on the world. But these remain created images (or beings).

It will be no surprise, then, to learn that both Eckhart and Heidegger disclaim direct methods by which to practice detachment. It appears not to be something we can straightforwardly *decide* to do even though there are many practices and rituals that we are invited to engage in. While this kind of paradox might not be resolved philosophically or theologically, education is more practical<sup>5</sup>: insofar as it begins with an educator's intention, education will always come up with some kind of 'how.' A dialectical interpretation of *Bildung* could describe how the educator can have intentions and can create conditions for education while disclaiming those intentions and conditions as fixed points or final destinations. To be educated, the student needs an image – *Bild* – of the good. This proffered image cannot be the whole story; it is, in this sense, a (pedagogical) reduction (Lewin 2019, 2020). At some point, the preliminary nature of the image becomes evident and must be supplanted by a new image. This suggests that education is governed by a dialectical process of give and take. It is because we can say that images are what are given and taken that we call this a *process of Bildung*.

I suspect that Biesta would reply by saying that the educational task is, in fact, to create conditions for an encounter with the world, the other, or

transcendence, not just images. We live, as he puts it, 'in a world that is not of our own making, but that exists independent from us' (Biesta 2020, 96), a world not constructed by images that we can decide to present. It is in the context of coming to terms with this world that the call to freedom is given shape and bounds. The climate crisis, for example, hits us and summons us to action. The freedom to respond to such a summoning seems different from the freedom of the voluntarist agent (to do as they choose). The task of the educator is to point not to images, but to the world.

The problem here is which world is the educator to point to? Every invocation of *the* world looks rather like an invocation of *a* world (something particular) (Law 2015). The compelling example of the ecological crisis (Biesta 2020, 96) provokes a range of responses: from forms of despair, activism, or denial, to extending the grip of capitalism either through apparent green washing or the still more insidious talk of the green economy. Our responses are so varied that one might ask whether we really see the same world. Are we still encountering beings rather than Being? While talk of the crisis is a perfectly reasonable pedagogical strategy, it is a pedagogical (or political) reduction nonetheless. It is encountered through *an arrangement* of data, metaphors, aesthetics, and narratives that comprise the 'climate crisis.' Invocation of the crisis might be entirely justified, but it is a way of interpretation.

Is there something complacent about the rather fashionable educational reference to 'the world' (e.g. Biesta 2022; Vlieghe and Zamojski 2019), as though we can readily point to that which is unencumbered by human thought, that we all see the same environmental crisis? Risking the charge of *hermeneuticism* (Hannam and Biesta 2019) I emphasize that our looking is a condition for the disclosure of the world. This does not reduce the world to our disclosure but suggests that speaking of *the* world is not innocent or descriptive; it is strategic.

## Conclusion

So is *Bildung* a helpful concept? Is its vagueness/mystique helpful? Does it provide a star by which we may navigate the uncertain waters of educational influence? Are we encouraged to keep in view the hermeneutical nature of the educational process with such a term? I admit to have scarcely scratched the surface of these issues but as they relate to Religious Education let me make two final points.

Firstly, the principles and purposes of RE are not unique or special. In fact, one of the difficulties for RE as a subject has been its presumed 'specialness,' as though it has something unique to contribute to spiritual formation. Inspired by Rein, I emphasized principles and processes derived from general didactics and elaborated this through a concept of *Bildung*. In both its theological and educational register, *Bildung* suggests a direction without defining a clear destination, thus seeming to provide an impetus while allowing for diverse aims

within its general concern. *Bildung* acknowledges the necessity for images in human becoming.

Secondly, the suggested change of name of the subject of Religious Education to 'Religion and Worldviews' (CORE 2018) to be more inclusive seems to be motivated by a concern with acknowledging the hermeneutic condition of understanding the world. In contrast to the world-centred education of Biesta and others, the shift to worldviews suggests an incomplete and ongoing inquiry into ways of interpreting, as much as trying to understand, and bear witness to, what is seen. Acknowledging our interpretive relation to subject matter is a vital aspect of becoming part of something (socialization into an inter-subjective realm) as well as becoming a self (subjectification) both of which are vital dimensions of (religious) education as *Bildung*.

## Notes

1. See <https://www.afterre.org>. The project has been funded by Culham St Gabriel's Trust.
2. One can envisage many forms of technical training in which such unbidden elements are not so positively construed (e.g. learning to drive). And yet, of course, every human activity is surrounded by a field of possibility, which means the unexpected must always be 'expected.'
3. For Kant a good will is a given and so we might wonder whether Kant would make sense of the idea of the cultivation of the good will.
4. There are many stories we could discuss to try to get at this indirect and delicate process from Rousseau's account of the indirect education of Emile by going for a walk through the country and waiting for hunger to initiate a motivation to navigate back to the village (Rousseau 1762/1979/1979), to Kierkegaard's account of indirect Christian influence in Practice of Christian (Saeverot 2022) to the many coming-of-age stories that explore human formation through life's rich and complex patterns.
5. There is more than a hint of the practical in some of Eckhart's writings, for instance the Talks of Instruction (Eckhart 2009, 486–524).

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