Postmodern Openings
ISSN: 2068-0236 | e-ISSN: 2069-9387
Covered in: EBSCO; ERIH+; Google Scholar; Index Copernicus; Ideas RePeC; Econpapers; Socionet; CEEOL; Ulrich ProQuest; Cabell, Journalseek; Scipio; Philpapers; SHERPA/RoMEO repositories; KVK; WorldCat; CrossRef; CrossCheck

2023, Volume 14, Issue 2, pages: 31-38 | https://doi.org/10.18662/po/14.2/606
Submitted: November 7th, 2023 | *Accepted for publication:* November 23rd, 2023

Philosophical debates among children

Paraschiva Rodica RUSU (BUCEA)[1]

[1] Phd. Student University "Stefan cel Mare" of Suceava, dida_bucea@yahoo.com

Abstract: Starting from the different ideas of the great philosophers regarding the optimal age to make philosophy, this article aims to expose the essential arguments that justify the importance of philosophical debates among children, as well as the purpose of philosophy in childhood. In addition, attempts are made to provide answers to the question: What prevails in childhood: good or bad? It is thus found that although bad is present during childhood, it can also have beneficial effects in the further development of the child.

Keywords: *philosophy for children; philosophy of childhood; child development; child rights;*

How to cite: Rusu Bucea, P. R (2023). Philosophical debates among children: *Postmodern Openings*, 14(2), 31-38. https://doi.org/10.18662/po/14.2/606

©2023 Published by LUMEN Publishing. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

Introduction

When we think about childhood, the period from childhood to adolescence comes to our mind. All the stages of this period pose problems, but in essence, the entire period of time, from the birth of the child to adolescence, is a period of preparation.

Most of the time, this construct of childhood has nothing to do with the real life of children, being an imaginative idealization of adults rather than an observation of the experiences lived by children. Thus, we wondering:

How does philosophy relate to childhood?

Through questions about death, origins, about the world, God, friendship, love?

Arguments that justify the importance of philosophical debates among children

In the past, philosophy was rather preoccupied with problematic concepts such as space, time, causality, God, desire or pleasure, but in the present, the concept of a child becomes problematic from a philosophical point of view.

Lately, there have been more and more concerns about children's rights from a philosophical perspective. These concerns go beyond the theoretical aspects, emphasizing the importance of implementing proposals to reconstruct philosophy in such a way that it can be practiced by children (Tozzi, 2009, p. 52).

There are, in fact, several theories about children's rights to culture and cultural rights. Thus, the main perspective regarding children's rights highlights conventional theories that emphasize the relationship of desire/power or the interests of children, and looks at the life experience of children as the existence of an individual here and now (*hic e nunc*), underestimating the process of developing personal autonomy (Lobonț, 2019, p. 56).

In the vision of philosophers, children stay together, seated in a circle and look for answers to questions such as those presented above, questions that train their minds and philosophical thinking. It is obvious that such activities are not a defining characteristic of childhood. Only some children participate in discussions of this kind and in different contexts (Gareth, 1994, p. 12).

Two essential arguments that justify the importance of philosophical debates among children can be mentioned: the philosophical thinking of young children exists, and this fact must be harnessed, children must be respected and seen as partners in adults' attempts to understand and explain everything; on the other hand, philosophical ideas issued by children's minds can help adults better understand philosophy.

Adults are often pressured by the burdens of caring for and training their children that they forget to value what children, in turn, have to offer to adults. One of these extraordinary things that children have to offer the world is a new philosophical vision.

An example is the case of a little girl named Kristin, who at just four years old, was convinced that „the world is all made of colors". But when her father asked her, „What about glass?" (which is not colored), she thought for a moment and then concluded: „The world is made of colors... and glass." Thus, Kristin reasoned like any true philosopher, incorporating the counterexample into his hypothesis. Another interesting discovery was made at the age of five, when she learned to recognize syllables and reproduce them later, in order to form words. In one of the discussions with her father, the little girl stated that she was very happy that the letters existed, because if they had not existed, there would have been no sounds; and if we had not had any sounds, there would have been no words. And without words, we couldn't think. And if we couldn't think about it, the world wouldn't exist anymore. The chain of these reasonings might suggest the idea that without letters, there could be no world (Gareth, 1994, p. 15).

The ideas issued by a child's mind can be real treasures for the adult who has ears to listen to them. Special attention should be paid to the ideas and beliefs emitted by children, because they see the world without the filters imposed by adults and adult life.

Gareth Matthews explores this philosophical ability in his „Philosophy and the Young Child," where he argues through his writings that „young children naturally engage in a type of thinking that is truly philosophical and that they have the ability to engage in mental games that lead them to address many of the classical problems of knowledge, of value and existence; issues that need to be taken seriously by anyone who wants to understand how children think (Echeverria, 2004, p.15)."

Much of the philosophy involves giving adults up their claims to know (Echeverria, 2004, p.16). Philosophers (adults) ask themselves questions like „What is time, after all?", while ordinary people look at time from other perspectives (for example, it is important for them to know if they will have time for different weekly activities or, simply, they want to

know what time is), without asking the question of time in the manner of philosophers.

Children, on the other hand, sometimes ask nagging questions to adults, who make it difficult for them to find an answer. For this reason, for the most part, philosophy is a mature attempt to cope with the unpredictable and truly „bewildering" questions of childhood.

John Locke did not campaign for the innocence or kindness of children, as other seventeenth-century thinkers did. For him, childhood is characterized as a stage of the absence of reason, but with a potential of reason waiting to be „awakened". The children are „travelers who have recently arrived in a strange country about which they know nothing (Locke, 1989, p.120)."

Locke believed that little children had an ingrained potential for reason and that through the natural and universal path, they would understand the reason „implanted" in them by God and grow up natural as modern universal subjects.

Unlike John Locke, Jean Jeaque Rousseau advocates for a childhood elevated to the level of purity and innocence.

The construction of childhood as a primitive stage indirectly indicates the need to control and subdue children for the supposed moral purpose of helping them on their way to civilization.

The image given about childhood defines what children are and how they must be in order to fit into the wider society, to be considered a child, namely: he must be naïve, know nothing about life and the world. He must be totally inexperienced, addicted and controllable.

In Dewey's view, „the children were naturally curious and had an interest in anchoring themselves in conversation, in doing things, or in expressing their artistic side" (Dewey, 1956, p. 47).

John Dewey and John Locke have a similar perspective on children's intellect. The first strongly believed that we should treat children as rational creatures. Dewey wrote not only that children are rational, but also that in certain situations, children can be models of intellectuality and morality for adults.

Dewey states an essential aspect of his educational philosophy, namely „when we say that immaturity means the possibility of growth, we are not referring to the lack of powers that might exist; we express a positive force present, that of the ability to develop, and immaturity designates a positive force or capacity, namely, the power to grow" (Dewey, 1997, p. 42).

As Bogatu (2007, p. 182) mentions, with reference to the approach of the philosopher Dewey, the child should not be educated from the

outside, but must be ensured his growth from the inside, in the sense that it is very important to take into account the individual potential of each one.

Of all the philosophers mentioned, the greatest credibility is held by the position of the great philosopher Dewey on children as a potential model of intellectual and moral role for adults that is related to the appreciation of the distinctive qualities of the children's mind. Given that adults can become more rigid, more reluctant to new experiences, the child's creative attitude, opened and flexible, can be something that adults can learn in terms of both intellectually and morally.

John Dewey suggests that we need to find more ways to increase children's intellectual responsibilities. He wants us to see, in new ways, how adulthood is a continuation of childhood and how childhood and adulthood are similar, and reasoning takes place not only in adulthood, but also in childhood.

In studies and writings about the philosophy of childhood we can also observe the existence of differences regarding age for philosophy, given that some philosophers believe that to make philosophy means to get out of childhood. The question of age for philosophy asks us to think about what a child is. It is neither a teenager nor an adult, it is strictly about the age.

The multiple constructions of childhood have shown the different social, cultural, economic and political goals that they use at different times. What remains unclear is how the modern construction of childhood is part of the cultural project of the modern subject. In the world of modern and postmodern criticism of the modern subject, it seems regrettable that not much attention is paid to the ambiguities and intrinsic difficulties of building childhood for the realization of the modern subject.

The purpose of philosophy is a way of understanding an existential experience that allows you to distance yourself from the emotion you feel by making it an object of thought referring to the human condition, helping you grow as a human being. We can look at philosophy as a therapeutic virtue, since it takes care of our soul and has a calming effect. So, „we cannot give the child the thinking for himself, but go in time with them, even when they go astray, with the purpose of developing thought tools that will allow them to understand the whole world and find their way into it" (Tozzi, 2009, p.53).

Lately, there have been more and more concerns about children's rights from a philosophical perspective. These concerns go beyond the theoretical aspects, emphasizing the importance of implementing proposals to reconstruct philosophy in such a way that it can be practiced by children.

Educational policy should respect children's ability to solve problems, as well as their intellectual initiative in the classroom. Students should often be allowed to generate topics for study and classroom discussion, and teachers should set other teaching standards that give them freedom of expression, just as philosophy does for children.

What prevails in childhood: good or bad?

When we talk about the childhood' philosophy we cannot ask ourselves the following question that is strictly related to the first one, in fact they are connected, there is no one without the other: What prevails in childhood: good or bad?

Gheaus (2015, p. 36) believes that the childhood period is intrinsically good. Thus, speaking of the intrinsic good of childhood, it refers to those goods that have an important and direct contribution to a good childhood, and that are intrinsically important for the well-being of life.

Thus, the time and unstructured play, the feeling of being carefree and sexual innocence are among the examples suggested by Gheaus as intrinsic goods for children.

In addition, these goods must have certain developmental values for children. For example, play, as the main activity of childhood is very important for learning skills that are necessary in adulthood, which is valuable for a quality adult life. In this case, childhood play is an intrinsic good of human life, but also of childhood. But certain activities, such as sexual relations do not belong to the period of childhood, but to adult life, being an intrinsic good of human life, but not of childhood.

If scientists in the field of philosophy believed that children „should be treated like rational creatures (Locke, 1989, p. 42)", it is our duty to give children the opportunity to be able to develop harmoniously by giving them the belief that they really are rational.

We mentioned previously that there are divergences about the age at which philosophy can be made. Speaking of age and its stages, the question arises: are childhood goods valid only for childhood? Are all good things true for childhood but at the same time for adult life?

The intrinsic goods of childhood can, for a variety of reasons, be more easily accessible to children, although they can also be made in adulthood. Moments of involvement in an unstructured game and without realizing when time passes, for example, you can live them much easier if you are a child than if you are an adult and yet be a good and feasible thing to do in

both cases. If these intrinsic goods are valid for both children and adults, in the case of children they have an additional role, namely a role of development, of „growth" of preparation for adult life.

Anca Gheaus believes that this period of childhood cannot simply be „jumped", and certain aspects / things / goods that were not lived / tried in childhood cannot be recovered / compensated when you become an adult.

The role of self-standing childhood is essential. Just as Gheaus (2015, p. 51) states regarding the intrinsic good of childhood, this useful interest is fueled by the idea that it is wrong to consider childhood similar to adult life. In other words, we cannot ask children to behave like adults. It is very important that we differentiate childhood from adult life and avoid putting pressure on children to live like adults. Childhood has its meaning, role and charm in the further development of the child and the future adult.

Unlike Gheaus (2015) & Hannan (2018, p. 11) defends a difficult vision of childhood, considering childhood to be generally bad for children. She argues that four features of childhood make it regrettable: the ability affected by practical reasoning, the lack of an established practical identity, the need to be dominated, and deep and asymmetric vulnerability.

Although these traits are essential for childhood, they are bad enough to overcome any childhood goods that we can reasonably put on the other side of the ladder. Sarah suggests that, in general, childhood is bad for children.

Take, for example, one of the „bad" features mentioned by Hannah, *the practical reasoning*, which is considered by her to be bad for children, because it is harder for them to get what they want. It can be frustrating internally, and even when kids don't realize they're making errors, they'll be less effective at getting what's good for them. This is objectively bad for the well-being of the children, according to Hannah (2018, p. 19).

Conclusions

Although impaired practical reasoning does not ensure optimal well-being of the child, generating frustration or the inability of children to get what they want, I consider that the childhood stage is beneficial for the development of children's capacity for practical reasoning, which contributes to further cognitive development.

We cannot directly have the best ability to reason from a practical point of view, without practicing, without going through probation – error sequences, although apparently, they can be frustrating. Perhaps a child

considers these trials and errors as a game that he wants to complete in order to discover the correct variant or a possible reward.

How easy would it be to receive everything without a bit of effort, without frustration? How would she/he fight for what he wants? How would she/he be stimulated, motivated, provoked, if she/he did not go through these actions and activities that actually contribute to her/his development as a successful future adult?

So, these aspects and bad traits of childhood can actually be intrinsic goods of childhood, they can bring a plus to this stage in which the infant, the child can develop cognitively, intellectually and socio-emotionally.

Good covers a greater share than evil in childhood, without denying that there are exceptional situations in which children are abused or neglected and their subsequent emotional development is affected.

References

Bogatu, E. (2017). Filosofia educaţiei în viziunea lui John Dewey. In *Ştiinţă, educaţie, cultură*, *2*, pp. 181-182.

Dewey, J. (1899). *The school and society*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Pres.

Dewey, J. (1997). *Democracy and education: An introduction to the philosophy of education*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Echeverria, E. (2004). *Philosophy para-Ninos*, Ediciones SM, coleccion Aula Nueva, Mexico.

Gareth, M. (1994). *The philosofy of childhood*, Harvard University Press.

Gheaus, A. (2015). The "intrinsic goods of childhood" and the just society. In *The Nature of Children's Well-Being: Theory and Practice,* edited by A. Bagattini and C. Macleod.

Hannan, S. (2018). Why childhood is bad for children. *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, *35*(S1), February.

Lobont, F. (2019). Children's bioethics, theory of attachment, and P4C. *y IP address 192.168. 10.17 on 2022/11/20*, 55.

Locke, J. (1989). *Some thoughts concerning education*. Edited and with an introduction by John W. Yolton and Jean S. Yolton. Oxford, England: Clarendon

Tozzi, M. (2009). Helping children to philosophizing: State of the art, live issues, outcomes and proposals. *Diogenes*, *56*(4), 49-60. https://doi.org/10.1177/0392192110365294