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What is the Philosophy of Childhood?

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Abstract:

Even though childhood philosophy is less confined within the boundaries today, it is a field that embraces philosophy both in the foreground and background. In the current study, some philosophical thoughts related to childhood state are briefly reviewed to evoke the readers' willingness to think about and consider the relation between philosophy and childhood. As such, the concept of childhood is first introduced. Then, other challenging philosophical concepts related to childhood, such as wisdom, independence, and ethics, are referred to, which can pave the way for future investigation and studies.

Keywords: childhood philosophy, wisdom, independence, ethics.

什么是童年哲学？

摘要：

尽管今天的童年哲学不再局限于界限，但它是一个在前景和背景中都包含哲学的领域。在本研究中，对一些与童年状态相关的哲学思想进行了简要回顾，以唤起读者思考和思考哲学与童年关系的意愿。因此，首先引入了童年的概念。然后，参考与童年有关的其他具有挑战性的哲学概念，如智慧、独立和伦理，为未来的调查和研究铺平道路。

关键词：童年哲学、智慧、独立、道德。

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1. Introduction

As a discipline and a line of research, childhood philosophy can be traced back to different areas of inquiry in mythology, religion, spirituality, art, and cultural deeds (Jung & Kerenyi, 1969). Although the insights of childhood philosophy have affected the philosophical discourse, its emergence as a post-modern doctrine dates back to the late nineteenth century when psychoanalysis was found, in which childhood plays a pivotal role. Additionally, in mid-20th, Aries (1965) dissolved the biological belief of childhood prevalent at that time. Although childhood philosophy is less confined within the boundaries today, it is a field that embraces philosophy both in the foreground and in the background. In the foreground, childhood theories and explanations can be found as an ontological topic in the works such as by Lyotard (1992), Deleuze and Guattari (1980), and Kohan (2014). The philosophical standpoint of Matthews (1994) about childhood is formed by the insights of a child as a philosopher. Kennedy (2011) approaches childhood history, adulthood history, and their mutual interconnection from a philosophical analysis point of view.

In the background, the sociology of neo-structuralism (Jenks, 2005) and the definition of a child as an entity reflected in cultural studies are full of philosophical terms and concepts. In addition, many studies elaborate on the investigations of different philosophical dimensions and variables in childhood history, childhood anthropology, childhood and psychoanalysis, cinema, literature and theater, childhood and education. However, some have studied the issue of childhood from a natural vantage point and separately from philosophy. In contrast, others have situated childhood studies in a cultural and social context (Sajjadih & Azadmanesh, 2016). In the current study, some philosophical thoughts related to childhood state are briefly reviewed to evoke the readers' willingness to think about and consider the relation between philosophy and childhood. The concept of childhood is first introduced. Then, other challenging philosophical concepts related to childhood, such as wisdom, independence, and ethics, are referred to, which can pave the way for future studies.

2. What Does Childhood Mean?

Most societies consider childhood a separate and different stage in life; their definition of childhood is that the nature of human beings and society is not stable and that any definition of childhood is relative. The meaning of childhood and other concepts like maturity, youth, education, and development are valued and distinct in different cultures. Before we can understand the features of common behaviors among children and distinguish between children and adults, we need to find a response to questions like: "What are children like?" or "Who is a

child?" Generally speaking, philosophical schools of thought about childhood can be divided into the following two groups: first, the views that explain the natural growth of young human beings and define childhood (philosophers' views); and second, social-cultural investigations which discuss the meaning of childhood and assert that its experience remarkably differs according to different historical, cultural, and social place and time as well as different family contexts (Haynes et al., 2015). Although reading about the history of childhood is necessary for philosophical considerations of the concept of childhood, history readings are, by far, under question (Stearns, 2006) in such a way that the discussion around the concept of childhood philosophy and childhood has remained controversial. According to Matthews (1994), reading the history of childhood is relevant for two reasons. On the one hand, illuminating the existing beliefs about the child would acquaint us with the child's personality traits. On the other, many hidden aspects of the nature of human beings would be disclosed if the difference between children and adults could be clearly explained (Farzanfar et al., 2009).

3. Childhood and Wisdom

Wisdom and rationality have always been among the foremost considerations of philosophy. There is a solid and serious tradition in which reasoning ability is a human advantage and a unified and consistent strategy for arriving at plausible conclusions. The idea strongly emphasized in this tradition is the battle of logic vs. emotion. Such a contrast is necessary to acknowledge that people may arrive at different conclusions when dealing with a specific issue. Then, suppose the logical mind and the emotional heart are in contrast. In that case, a reasonable individual can easily refuse the thoughts and decisions of his/her opponents for being infected with emotions. Because women and children are said to be highly emotional (in this philosophical description) and cannot rule logic and rationality over their emotions, they cannot be considered perfect and mature human beings. Immanuel Kant's explanation of this view (wisdom) provides us with one of the most critical views. He believes that logic (of a reasonable person) imposes itself on the person's wisdom by using it. Such a definition explains that if immoral and evil behaviors control one's deeds because of being emotional, only relying on wisdom and logic can act more morally than the time emotions oriented him.

Hume opposed this view by lamenting that wisdom is the servant of emotions. Although Hume, too, contrasts wisdom and emotions, he believes that emotions override the mind. Accordingly, to investigate the philosophical areas of inquiry related to wisdom, it is necessary to consider those aspects of childhood that best suit these philosophical views. It is worth mentioning that infants are not rational beings as are adults, even though some of

their behaviors indicate partial possession of rationality similar to that of animals rather than human beings.

Sprod (1999) asserts that to take the development of children's reasoning power into account, we need to rely on experimental studies from a philosophical standpoint. The studies of children's reasoning power development tell us that it is not an intrinsic intellect that the children grow, but definitely, some characteristics related to logic which can be universal and inherited among all people. Nevertheless, social interaction is necessary for the development of reasoning power. Vygotsky's work (1962) is essential in this regard. According to Vygotsky (1962), we learn reasoning skills by becoming immersed in shared social interactions where the members interactively practice reasoning. Only when the child internalizes these skills can he develop his reasoning ability (Vygotsky, 1962).

It is important to remember that our social interactions with others are bonded emotionally in different social contexts. Therefore, emotions form an indispensable part of our reasoning ability. Emotions are, in fact, the driving force of human thoughts, and as such, they cannot oppose the reasoning power. Moreover, attention to children's emotional development and growth shows that emotions are not ineffective, immature, or unreasonable reactions to the world around us. Though it is correct that emotions are naturally rooted in such biological reactions, their expression is indistinguishably tied to the social reasoning of that emotion and its state.

Briefly, rationality, which means the combination of logic and emotion, is very dependable on the situation in which one applies the reasoning. Wisdom is much more complicated than the historical view that is widely accepted. Studying childhood would change our attitude towards the concept of wisdom.

4. Childhood and Independence

Independence is a concept that Kant discusses in the philosophy of ethics. For Kant, independence means following the rules of reason, not inclinations and interests. What Kant means by independence is that people think independently. To understand this, we have to pay attention to how a child develops into a grown-up in terms of ethics. Children are not independent ethically. Thus, the behaviors of children do not correspond to any legal responsibilities. However, it is commonly observed that children develop more independence and decision-making ability when they grow up. It is worth noting that increasing the ability to 'think for oneself' depends on one's critical interaction and bonding with others.

The people who do not think like others cannot probably decide independently since good decisions are functions of good decision-making processes, i.e., healthy reasoning. Children learn thinking by being placed in situations where others practice shared reasoning publicly. When children become better, thoughtful

beings, they would become more independent. Independence does not mean isolating oneself from others, but it means the increasing ability and interest to engage oneself in general and collective reasoning by one's intention.

Revisiting the concept of independence has important implications for teachers. It would not be an excellent excuse to underestimate the relevance and importance of teaching because we intend to respect children's independence as a logical rule. Nevertheless, we cannot treat children as if they do not have any independence and downgrade the respect they deserve as they become independent humans. Instead, the children should be allowed to develop their independence through forming mutual bonds and connections.

5. Childhood and Ethics of Virtue

Finally, Aristotle's virtue ethics will be discussed, which has recently found remarkable ground. Though the ethical philosophy of modern virtue is mainly based on the *Nicomachean Ethics* by Aristotle, it has undergone many changes. Since Aristotle, most of the theories of the Ethics of Virtue have been around adults and whatever makes a matured person an honest human being. Although childhood is not overlooked in Aristotelian ethics, it is only briefly compared to adulthood. For Aristotle, childhood is when the child gets used to moral values. Habitually, the child behaves based on those values, but in order to be able to specify which actions (behaviors) are practically consistent with those values, the child needs practical wisdom. Aristotle believes that the aim of education, like other arts, is to respond to the beckoning of good nature (Cahn, 2009).

There is a standard view that sees children as perfect obedient to parents, teachers, and other caregivers who command the children, to be honest beings. Only when they grow up and develop practical wisdom can they use it for their intentions. If children understand that they do not possess much virtue at this stage of life, they would interactively allow themselves (according to Aristotle) to become virtuous beings by studying and paying more attention and care.

Sherman (1989) points out that habituation is not a passive process on the child's side. Judgment is a prerequisite of any virtuous behavior, and in turn, reasoning is a prerequisite for judgment. For example, telling the child what to do when an adult is present would suffice. However, for the child to behave correctly and habituate this correct behavior, he should be able to decide correctly without the presence of an adult. Therefore, habituation requires the active development of a child's ethical judgment.

In other words, studying childhood can bring drastic changes to the interpretation and understanding of Aristotle's Ethics of Virtue. Virtue ethics does not mean that the child should be under constant control without

being heard. On the contrary, virtue ethics is founded on proper philosophical attention to the child and invites us to involve the child in a more philosophical exploration. Overall, the increasing effect of these studies is that we have to accept that philosophy should pay greater attention to childhood and that children should be helped to pay more attention to philosophy.

6. Conclusion

Childhood philosophy is now added to other philosophies, such as philosophy of science, philosophy of ethics, philosophy of nature, philosophy of religion, as one of the branches of philosophy. In childhood philosophy, issues such as the concept of childhood, children's rights, and the importance of status Children in society, like the exploration ring, are considered an alternative to teaching morality, philosophical thinking, and reasoning in children and children's literature.

Childhood is an essential aspect of human behavior and experience and deserves a philosophical approach as much as any other aspect of which there is a philosophy. Perhaps the main reason childhood is so unique is that it is a forgotten part of the human experience. In recent years, it has been shown that the experience of adulthood is incompatible with childhood and that the views of adolescence systematically develop childhood beliefs and intuitions. Childhood without adulthood and adulthood without childhood are both imperfect, and they build a life together.

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