

Reading For Childhood in Philosophy and Literature:
An Ethical Practice For Educators

STEPHANIE A. BURDICK-SHEPHERD

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Abstract

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Despite the ubiquitous presence of children in society, the dominant discourse of childhood does not admit room for much of the complexity that the condition of children presents. This project shows that reading for childhood in philosophy and literature makes space for re-imagining childhood as a complex and valuable concept that impacts both the experience of children and their relationships with others and the world. This project situates childhood as a magnified time of growth and development, a unique aspect of human life. At the same time childhood cultivates an interest in and with others, it is also a constructed concept.

This inquiry engages this complexity by a reading of rich descriptions and inquiries of childhood in texts of philosophy and literature. These foundational texts are: Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Emile*, John Dewey's *Democracy and Education*, Simone De Beauvoir's *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, Vivian Paley's *The Boy Who Wanted to Be a Helicopter*, and Harriet Cuffaro's *Experimenting with the World*. Childhood in the texts functions to complicate and reframe conventional and historical interpretations of childhood.

The readings in the project challenge a conventional rendering of childhood that serves to distance childhood from its wider community. Childhood is reframed as a concept of inclusion of the other, particularly the adult educator. The project expands scholarship examining how adult interactions with childhood manifest changes in conceptual understandings or practices. The

project concludes that cultivating habits of reading for the concept of childhood assists educators in engaging their teaching practice meaningfully.

Uncovering the complexity of the concept of childhood invites educators to uncover such ethical aspects of the educational relationship as responsibility, recognition, acceptance of difference, acknowledgement of power dynamics, freedom, and growth. In this context childhood functions as an ethical construct - a guiding value - in education. Multiple ways of viewing and reflecting on the concept of childhood illuminate possibilities for renewing and reengaging these ethical aspects within an educational context.

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Dedication

“Mama, but where was I?”

“You hadn’t been born.”

“I know. But where was I?”

“You just weren’t there yet, you didn’t exist.”

*“But I **was** there.”*

“Well, maybe you were in my imagination?”

“Yes. And now I am real.”

“Yes, now you are real.”

“And we can imagine a story.”

“Yes, and we can imagine a story.”

“Mama, tell me a new story.”

~ Fiona, may we learn to tell our stories together. ~

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Childhood is often viewed as a gift or a blessing. Philosophical inquiry is also a gift. Philosophical inquiry gives the gift of making meaning from what is often the chaotic twirling mess of the everyday. Neither childhood nor philosophical inquiry occurs within a vacuum. This project would not have been possible without the support, guidance, and constant gifts of friends and family.

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Preface

Dear Reader,

I wish to preface this project with the introduction of three persons. First, a young boy named ‘Sam,’ age 3. I met him fresh from university as a teaching assistant at a local preschool. His mother dropped him off in our classroom and he cried the whole day. The next day was worse, not only did he cry he went running through the hallways screaming, shrieking and generally unable to stop throwing his body around. The next day Sam was able to come into the classroom and sit down near a teacher but he refused to speak, to even look up from the ground. His only response to any request was a loud and a definitive no! In a space of about a week Sam had ruined a pair of my eyeglasses, bit a child, and managed to run out of the classroom into the field behind the school. Before the month was over the director and the head teacher of our classroom had concluded after several parent teacher conferences that Sam was not yet able to attend school. It was indicated that he needed a year of maturity. I have always felt, in some way, that we had failed Sam.

Second, meet ‘Anthony’. Anthony was a young boy of 7 who had no idea that letters were symbols for sounds. I met him as my first client in a volunteer-tutor program. Anthony was performing below grade level and was having difficulty in primary school. His mother was a single mother who always dropped him off in a rush at the student education library. She would return in an hour often towing a little boy with big eyes who adored his older brother. Anthony never once challenged me; he followed my directions without complaint, pushing his small fingers across his books trying to form the sounds of the letters on the page. The week of 9/11, only two weeks into our tutoring sessions, he asked me why everyone was always so sad. I

always had crackers or small cookies with me for our sessions together and he ate slowly, savoring each bite. I didn't feel it was my place to discuss world events with him but over the course of that fall I realized that he was very concerned, even starting to hoard our snacks. I tried talking to his mother about it once, inquiring as to whether or not there was counseling available through his school but she stopped me and said, "He doesn't understand. It's not worth talking to him about it all. Just help him read."

Third, I introduce, 'Mr. Big', as a first year graduate student I had written a paper on engaging ethical constructs in literature. It had been accepted for a reading at a local conference in philosophy. After the reading, I left the podium to convene for the general session. Rather satisfied with my overall presentation, I happily turned when a professor from the local college called me by name and said he had something he wished to discuss. He asked me my year of study, my university and then said, "I want you to know, that you had a nice paper, but of course, once you mature and move beyond childhood, you will change your mind about ethics. You will grow up and recognize the impetuosity and optimism of your youth." With that I was dismissed.

While a dissertation project always reveals a bit of the psychology of its creator I do not take time in this preface to share these stories for mere revelation. Rather, I wish to show that the motivations for this project have been funded by the continued challenge of childhood that has been presented to me throughout my student life.

For in these short examples what I find is a dismissal or a lack of space for childhood's presence in the world. Childhood is not readily accepted as something that is complex, rich, and ambiguous. And yet childhood continually presents itself in the world in ways that challenge the standardized conception of it as immature, silly, and weak.

I believe that just as the social sciences have uncovered childhood experience that challenges the status quo: the transgendered, homeless, bi-racial, serious, wise, special needs, reserved, wild, technological, informed, and questioning child, philosophy too must uncover conceptions of childhood that opens up complexities rather than dismiss or collapse them.

For me this is essentially a question of advocacy for childhood. I truly see my work as being grounds for scholarship that communicates just how important childhood is for a flourishing world, particularly a world that grows better through education.

Although there are numerous studies that engage the questions and concerns of participatory research none make the case quite so well as that of Meghan Cope, whose research focuses on geography, urban movements, and childhood. Cope writes,

I have long felt for myself, and have advised my students, that the best scholarship comes from the heart and has the potential to resonate broadly around an important problem. In part, finding one's niche based on one's true interest is important for sustaining the energy and commitment that are needed for long-term projects. I believe this forms the foundations of good public scholarship because issues we care deeply about are the ones for which we make extra efforts to reach out, disseminate, and advocate.¹

Cope makes an important and impassioned plea to make sure that advocacy is an important and integral aspect of scholarship, particularly scholarship that centers around children and their lives. It is difficult to do such scholarship; it requires patience and strength to follow inquiry as the guide. The researcher must be honest about bias, shortcomings, and the challenges faced in the field or throughout the inquiry. It is important that researchers interested in working with children and childhood admit their 'stake-in-the-game,' publishing work that admits of and is

¹ Cope, Meghan, "Becoming a Scholar-Advocate: Participatory Research with Children," *Antipode* 40, no. 3 (2008): 428.

proud of the personal aspects of such work.

In support of this suggestion I admit that that this project is a work of advocacy in as much as it is a work of scholarship. I wrote this project as a new mother who was very much concerned with the perception of childhood by the wider culture. My interest is directed towards seeing childhood affect its wider communities –deregulating it from the confines of the school building. I would like to be able to discuss childhood across my community, locating its role in economic development (or lack thereof), civil rights, recreation areas, environmental policy, as well as the goings-on in the schoolyard. This kind of engagement cannot be accomplished without communities and educators seriously considering the capacities and complexities of children and the concept of childhood they inhabit and to which they contribute.

I wanted to find a way into holding this idea that is always present in whatever classroom (from preschool through university) I have found myself, that childhood is complex, rich, and full of ambiguity. Thus, I took two spheres of our world and tried to hold them close: the practice of reading and the concept of childhood.

My tool to accomplish this task is philosophical reading. For me, this is the tool of philosophy that is often forgotten when we think of the philosopher breaking open, breaking down, deconstructing or building up. But the philosopher is also a close reader of the text as well as her world. The philosopher can open up these texts and help others to read them, not as one reads a recipe card but to open up the world and see it anew. I hope that others will see how reading is not a small activity in human life. That reading well is intimately connected to living well. This goes beyond basic literacy, for it is not enough to be able to sound out the letters, it is a going beyond to make meaning and connections with others. It is to point out that there is a call

to understand the world, even as children who like Sam are still developing, like Anthony who want to know more, and adults like 'Mr. Big' who do not know how to see anything new.

I open the project with a note, what this project most clearly shows is that childhood, like personhood, is not held within one frame, theory, or model and this is the real knowledge of poets, philosophers, artists and children.

Making a space for childhood: Reading for childhood in philosophy and literature

*Life's greatest risks are in its beginnings; the less one
has lived, the less one ought to hope to live.¹*

I am very much concerned with the struggles of children and women the world over. In 2012, 15.9% of children in the United States lived in food insecure households and 22% of children lived in poverty.² The United States loses on average 4 to 6 children per day from abuse and neglect.³ In 2001 38% of all fourth graders in the United States scored below 'basic' in literacy test scores.⁴ There are 6.9 infant deaths out of every 1000 live births in the United States.⁵ In the United States only 31 states have banned corporal punishment in public schools.⁶

Despite the condition of childhood, however, children might very well be called ubiquitous in modern Western society. There are parenting blogs, child-friendly gourmet restaurants, and guides for having, raising, and educating children. There are clothing stores, television shows,

¹ Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *Emile*, New York: Basic Books, 1979, 79.

² "Child Hunger Facts." Feeding America. Accessed Jan. 26, 2014, http://feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/hunger-facts/child-hunger-facts.aspx#_edn2

³ "National Child Abuse Statistics." Childhelp. Accessed Jan. 26, 2014. <http://www.childhelp-usa.net/pages/statistics>

⁴ "Facts about Children's Literacy." National Education Association. Accessed Jan. 26, 2014. <http://www.nea.org/grants/facts-about-childrens-literacy.html>

⁵ "NCHS Data Brief." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Accessed Jan. 26, 2014. <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db23.htm>

⁶ "Corporal punishment policies around the world." CNN World. Accessed Jan. 26, 2104. <http://www.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/asiapcf/11/08/country.comparisons.corporal.punishment/>

apps, music, and party-planners for children; children even have their own reality television shows.

Thus, though children may appear a ubiquitous presence, in society the dominant discourse of childhood does not admit room for much of the complexity that the condition of children presents, offered above in the stark contrasts in a society where a child is the ultimate consumer and yet allows children to go hungry.

One might say that there is not room for childhood as an essential, complex, and morally embedded concept. This project shows that reading for childhood in philosophy and literature makes space for re-imagining childhood as a rich concept that impacts both the experience of children and their relationships with others and the world.

The key component to re-imagining the concept of childhood is to make room for what seems a paradox of any thinking about childhood: childhood, has value in itself, it does not require others to give it value; yet, it does not then follow that childhood is closed to construction or relationship. Put another way: childhood is a magnified time of growth and development, a unique aspect of human life. Yet, at the same time childhood cultivates an interest in and with others.

This is the paradox of thinking about childhood as a concept: To value childhood in itself, that is seeing its intrinsic value, while at the same time recognizing that that there is a relational or constructed aspect of how the adult or a society interacts with childhood. Yet, this is the position that situated humans inhabit. Importantly we must learn to inhabit this paradox well. Thus, this is not a paradox of ontology to solve but rather a question on the complexity of ethics, of what it means to live well.

My position is thus: It is not simply that childhood exists because adults exist in relation to it. Rather, it is that there is something with which to relate, and relate with morally. Thus, it is possible for persons to construct meaning and knowledge about childhood without negating that it has its own intrinsic worth and ontology.

I turn to a field of applied philosophy, the field of Environmental Ethics to explain this move in more concrete terms. In this field much of the debate on moral action depends on arguing between two positions: One, that nature has its own intrinsic value, or two, that value/worth/understanding of nature is humanly constructed. Notable philosopher of environment, Holmes Rolston III, considers the folly in choosing the extreme sides of this debate. For he concludes that though applied ethics implies a necessary constructivist view of reality, at the same time there is something intrinsically real that invites ethical consideration and action. He writes:

Environmental ethics is a lived ethics on a geographical landscape. This ethics must be inhabited; it takes narrative form and needs personal backing, interacting with nature. So why not accept that in such an encounter, nature always wears a human face? Why all this insistence on otherness out there? Because the appropriate behaviour for humans, faced with ethical decisions here, often involves knowing what good there is in other lives, and remains there when humans face in other directions. Environmental ethics is about being native to a place, so why not think of it as choosing our human story? Because there is more story to consider, solidarity with a larger biotic community with whom we share this place, about whom we must gain truth enough to know something of their places before we can rightly choose ours. Nature may not be as given as the naive realists suppose; but, upon finding this out, we make an equally naive mistake to think that nature is not given at all. Moral agents are not found outside society; but it does not follow that morality, arising within society, cannot or need not find value in the natural world.⁷

Likewise, though our knowledge of childhood may be skewed, relative, and subjective, in that it exists, particularly as it exists through relation, we must consider childhood, like the Earth, something that can be its own thing, that it can exist in-itself.

⁷ Rolston, Holmes III. "Nature for Real: Is Nature a Social Construct?" In *The Philosophy of the Environment*, ed. T.D.J. Chappell, Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, 1997, 62.

It is possible that the very richness of childhood in situation, its intrinsic value of itself, does not negate its constructive affects. Instead of holding a paradox, we hold a complex and better way of situating our understanding. My inquiry heeds this call. I aim to foster a new consideration of childhood and our relation to it.⁸ We have a moral imperative to promote its (childhood's) welfare.

One small way of taking care or promoting the welfare of childhood's intrinsic value is to recognize that though it is an, in-itself, others relate to and with it. Understanding better this aspect of childhood makes it possible for the unknown known aspect of its intrinsic nature to be valued, for-itself. I refer to Immanuel Kant's construction of the humanity condition for his categorical imperative: "Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means."⁹ The point here is not to champion Kantian Ethics or the Environmental Ethics of Rolston III. Rather, the point is to highlight that philosophy has always been concerned about what it means to consider and relate to the world from the vantage point of the human being. And that many in philosophy have successfully argued that having relationships with the world as a human being does not necessarily negate the possibilities for there to be intrinsically valuable and good 'in-themselves'.

⁸ This intrinsic view does not mean that childhood cannot lend value to other components; rather it is to first see that childhood is itself valuable, not simply for its usefulness. Thus, the existence of childhood admits something integral to human life.

⁹ Kant, Immanuel, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans, James W Ellington, Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing, 1981, 36.

This is the point of this project, that our consideration of childhood is not only a project of ontology or epistemology but it is one of ethics.¹⁰ By considering the way in which childhood calls on us, the adult educator, to relate to it, we may value more its intrinsic aspects. The point of this project is to read for this complex consideration of childhood, that it is an in-itself, something that must be cared for and valued for what it is. Just what it is may not be as important as just what is the best way to think about our relationship to it.

I am aware that intellectual exercise can be empty when it ignores the real plight of persons in the world. In light of these desires, I view my inquiry as a preparation in sustaining positive engagement with the real conditions of women and children.

This then is a project both of philosophy and childhood. Philosophy begins in wonder, questioning that which is assumed to be the truth or the real. Childhood begins in wonder as well. Our life as humans begins with questioning and exploring the world around us. Children go after the world. They turn over rocks and ask questions. As Maria Montessori writes, “A child is a discoverer. He is an amorphous, splendid being in search of his own proper form.”¹¹ Like children philosophy does not rest. Philosophy critiques. Philosophy draws limits and shows the boundaries of a subject. Philosophy makes space for dialogue between texts and subjects.

Philosophy puts forth a thesis and creates argument. Above all children seek to make meaning of their lives. Philosophy is dedicated to this activity. Yet, childhood is not theoretical; it is a lived,

¹⁰ Kant, Immanuel, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, 37-38, “This principle of humanity and of every rational nature generally as an end in itself is the supreme limiting condition of every man’s freedom of action. This principle is not borrowed from experience, first, because of its universality, inasmuch as it applies to all rational beings generally, and no experience is capable of determining anything about them; and, secondly, because in experience (subjectively) humanity is not thought as the end of men, i.e., as an object that we of ourselves actually make our end....”

¹¹ Montessori, Maria. *The Secret of Childhood*, New York: Ballantine Books, 1966, 99.

experienced part of being. Children dance when they hear music, and smile when they see a person. Philosophy can often be cold and overtly analytical. Childhood offers philosophy grounds for expressing itself in the practical arena where it matters and can make a difference.¹²

Reading for childhood

Thus, the task of this project is not to find and champion one description of childhood. The task is to create a space for multiple readings of childhood. Inquiry into childhood offers a chance to uncover and see its complexity within ordinary experience.

For I see that childhood is an experience. It is an experience that is multi-temporal, situated, and embodied. It occurs within a specific existence with individual and unique subjects. It is full of tastes, smells, pains, and feelings. It occurs over many days and months. It does not start in one moment or stop abruptly. It is an experience that is carried in memory and imagined in the future. It is a time of learning and newness. It is a time of quick development. Yet it is a time where development takes much time. For this reason, childhood is also time of mistakes and miseducation. Childhood is astonished, it is joyful, and it is surprised at seeing itself so unmoored from adult life. Childhood is suffering; it is full of the pain that is part of inserting itself in the world. Childhood is full of secrets and pain, trauma and violence. In childhood, the struggle between the pull of the self and the pull of the other is amplified. Childhood is a time of extreme dependency, yet this dependency does not negate the powerful aspect of childhood.

¹² Matthews, Gareth, *Philosophy and the Young Child*, Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1982. Lipman, Mathew and Sharp, Ann, *Growing up with Philosophy*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1978. Cavell, Stanley, "Time and Place for Philosophy," *Metaphilosophy* 39, no. 1(2008). 51-61. All offer insightful work that exposes the deep relationship between philosophy and childhood.

It also inhabits a conceptual space that is within society, and currently this space is not quite roomy enough to contain all its complexities. For childhood as concept is connected to commerce, government and laws. Childhood is the ambiguous and unknown. It is centered in the imagination and it enacts a forward movement. Childhood is free, it is happy, and it is full of hope. At the very same time, childhood is also not free, not care-free, not only happy, not only hopeful. Childhood is beauty and serenity; it can also be ugly and full of chaos. Childhood instigates social responsiveness in the world.

Methods

Four major premises center my project. First, childhood and adulthood interact with one another. Second, childhood is a part of the human condition long after the stage of development conventionally understood as childhood.¹³ Third, I accept childhood both as a condition and as a concept.¹⁴ Fourth, and finally, I accept this project as a project of ethics. It is an exercise in living well.

This project accepts the premise that children need to be engaged with in developmentally appropriate ways. Developmental views of the child have assisted in locating the importance of play in the early childhood classroom and are an important component of work in early intervention that assists children with speech, motor, and cognitive delay in realizing and

¹³ Childhood is framed consistently in developmental literature as the ages 3-12. Childhood as experienced is more fluid and dynamic.

¹⁴ Here, concept does not imply universal form, i.e. dog, is the universal form, dog. It is certainly not to indicate that child is idea or ideal of, child. Rather, here concept refers to the meaning made by something that is seen to be a general quality or term used within practical life whose meaning comes from engagement with the world. Thus, conceptual work mandates interaction and experience.

achieving important aspects of being a child in the world. To accept developmentally appropriate practice however does not negate the need to lend critique and new insight to its practice.

Likewise, the psychology of child life is an integral aspect to understanding the development of a person's subjectivity. Important work in developmental psychology has established that gender and sexuality are full components of childhood. However, this project seeks to expand the view of childhood beyond development and mind.¹⁵

John Dewey writes in *Democracy and Education*, "To a grown-up person who is too absorbed in his own affairs to take an interest in children's affairs, children doubtless seem unreasonably engrossed in their own affairs."¹⁶ Like Dewey, I propose that childhood must interest us. Instead of drawing comparisons between adults and children, Dewey argues that we must recognize those moments in life that call out for childhood.

This comparative standpoint is legitimate enough for some purposes, but if we make it final, the question arises whether we are not guilty of an overweening presumption. Children, if they could express themselves articulately and sincerely, would tell a different tale; and there is excellent adult authority for the conviction that for certain moral and intellectual purposes adults must become as little children.¹⁷

The moments in life that call for childhood are the moments in which we are enjoined to interact well with one another. As with justice, love, or freedom, childhood is a fundamental concept. Childhood is not simply a condition—a stage. Childhood permeates multiple aspects of

¹⁵ In the project I have bracketed psychological discussions on the formation of subjectivity. I wish to concentrate on the ethical possibilities in order to ascertain the value of inquiry on childhood. My assumption is that once childhood is viewed as valuable and connected to a rich human life, psychological studies can ascertain better ways of funding and providing these rich connections.

¹⁶ Dewey, John. *Democracy and Education, The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899-1924, Vol. 9*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978, 48-49.

¹⁷ Ibid.

life, sometimes in ways not seen or understood. Such aspects might be more obvious - children's rights or duties of the family. Other aspects that might not be so obvious are marriage rights, environmental impact, and the obligations of the nation-states. Without deep inquiry on childhood, I fear risking these aspects. I fear not making a full inquiry into what it means to live well as a human being within society.¹⁸

Dewey leads us to consider that deep inquiry into childhood is not without real import. Embarking on a journey of reading for childhood, both in texts of philosophy and in works of literature, makes it possible to see a complexity and richness in the concept of childhood.¹⁹ Childhood cultivates an ethical interest in and with others. Childhood makes claims upon such concerns as responsibility, freedom, and power dynamics.

In this project I select texts that offer descriptions or inquiries rather than arguments about childhood. The foundational texts I consider in the project are: Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Emile*, John Dewey's *Democracy and Education*, Simone De Beauvoir's *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, Vivian Paley's *The Boy Who Wanted to Be a Helicopter*,

¹⁸ Wall, John, *Ethics in Light of Childhood*, Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2010, 2. Wall writes, "Because children are full human beings, neglecting children diminishes the humanity of us all." Wall convincingly argues that any moral consideration is resoundingly less meaningful if it is not considered through the light of childhood. He posits questions of the child's morality and repositions them as situations that affect us all. For Wall, to neglect children is not only to forget to care for them as a parent or to not provide access to health care, or good schooling; neglect includes and perhaps happens all the more so when we forget about children and childhood in our thinking life.

¹⁹ Nussbaum, Martha, *Love's Knowledge*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992, 24. She writes: "And here it must be stressed, what we really want is an account of ethical inquiry that will capture what we actually do when we ask ourselves the most pressing ethical questions. For the activity of comparison I describe is a real practical activity, one that we undertake in countless ways when we ask ourselves how to live, what to be; one that perform together with others, in search of ways of living together in a community, country or planet. To bring novels into moral philosophy is not – as I understand this proposal – to bring them to some academic discipline which happens to ask ethical questions. It is to bring them into connection with which the influential philosophical conceptions of the ethical were originally developed, the searching we pursue as we compare these conceptions, both with one another and with our active sense of life. Or rather, it is to recognize that the novels are in this search already: to insist on and describe, the connections the novels have already for readers who love them and who read like David Copperfield, for life."

and Harriet Cuffaro's *Experimenting with the World*. The descriptions of childhood in these texts are connected through three major threads, cementing them as rich and complex that invited new ways for the adult educator to see childhood.

The first thread acknowledges that rich descriptions of childhood are an invitation to relational thinking among the description, the described, and the addressee. This invitation is a catalyst for self-reflection. It also motivates a relationship between adults and children. This relationship enriches the description, making it complex by admitting that the description is moving between author, reader, and world.

The second thread suggests that rich descriptions of childhood are concrete and particular; they are within time and space. They are seeped through and through with descriptors that allow the reader to 'see' the place and time of that childhood. They are rich because they reflect many values or multi-layered interpretations. They are also rich because they might take on various perspectives or voices.

The third thread is summed up in an imperative: these rich descriptions are to be read. What does it mean to "read"? I do not mean that they must be 'read' as in the sentence, "I will read this book tonight." Rather, all descriptions of childhood, whether portrayed by a painter, a musician, a playwright, a poet, are to be 'read', because the text requires interpretation.. Someone must make meaning from them; they retain significance within the reading itself, in the contemplation of where that reading takes place, when that reading takes place, and who does the reading. This interpretation leads to complexity, ambiguity, and contradictions. This is where I believe that each of these texts holds the paradoxical consideration of childhood argued above. The reader is

invited to see how childhood is both an in-itself and something that calls out for interpretation and relationship.

My textual exegesis is a creative exercise of reading, in order to explore different aspects of childhood as a concept that reflects moral considerations. My approach is informed by hermeneutics, non-theoretical readings of ethical practice, and by the idea of reading as a practice.

This method of reading is closely linked to the idea of play found in philosophical hermeneutics outlined in Hans-Georg Gadamer's seminal text, *Truth and Method*. For Gadamer, a text is not empty of meaning, the reader does not place meaning upon a text, because in the text, meaning is already present.²⁰ When we read a text there is recognition that between text, reader, and author there is a sharable truth or reality. What this compels is not a stabilization or closed definition of what the text signifies but a dialogue to engage more with the text and its meaning. He writes:

Hence the meaning of a text is not to be compared with an immovable and obstinately fixed point of view that suggests only one question to the person trying to understand it, namely how the other person could have arrived at such an absurd opinion...We can now see that this is what takes place in conversation, in which something is expressed that is not only mine or my author's, but common.²¹

For Gadamer this is a form of play, not in so much as we are playing (as a child may play with a ball) but in that we are players within a game of culture, history, and meaning.

²⁰ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald Marshall, New York: Continuum, 2004, 390. "Thus written texts present the real hermeneutical task. Writing is self-alienation. Overcoming it, reading the text, is thus the highest task of understanding."

²¹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 390.

At its core, this project is a reading of childhood through several texts. This reading relies on interpretation and critique, and there is a fair bit of play involved.²² My method consists in engaging the text as an ethical reader. There is now a sustained and critical field in connecting philosophy to the world of literature.²³ Here, however, I wish to engage only one critical reader of this work, Amelie Rorty. Her essay, *The Ethics of Reading* grounds the method of this project. Rorty puts forth a guide to reading well at the end of her piece.²⁴ What follows is my guide for engaging the texts of the project.

This project insists upon the ability of the reader, myself, to engage the texts both for their content as well as their form. This does not mean that my interpretation is the only interpretation possible, or that I am the only reader who has engaged them well. I choose to find meaning within them through interpretation and analysis. I turn to texts in wonder and amazement. I am concerned with allowing the texts to have voice. I play with them. Like Rorty, I do not find ‘Truth’ to be the end goal of reading well.²⁵ Although I might disagree with an author I entertain the author’s argument, and my method of critique shall be to push this play further.

²² Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 103, "For play has its own essence, independent of the consciousness of those who play."

²³ Weston, Michael, *Philosophy, Literature and the Human Good*, London: Routledge, 2001; Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*.

²⁴ Rorty, Amelie, "The Ethics of Reading: A Traveler's Guide," *Educational Theory* 47, no. 1 (1997), 85. Rorty writes: "Virtually all we do involves reading. We read one another's faces and gestures; we interpret - and are affected by - the architecture of buildings, the design of a classroom, the style of a haircut. We construe the meaning of rituals of religious services and university commencements. Like all we do, reading requires balance of fairness and critical evaluation, of tact and self-protection; and like all we do, reading reveals the self, its preoccupations, and obsessions."

²⁵ Rorty, "The Ethics of Reading," 86, "But important as truthfulness is, there are also other measures of getting things right. In reading as elsewhere, there is playfulness and exuberance, there is damn-it-all-I-won't-bow-to-claims-of-power-or-authority; there is admiration and revulsion, suspicion, and flight from danger."

My interpretation will be contextualized, that is, I shall interpret the texts acknowledging the time and place in which they were written. I shall allow these texts to speak to one another. I shall place the texts side by side to support the multiple descriptions of childhood found within them. Above all this methodology should be considered open - an actual practice of inquiry. That is, each move and point of entry should open up more thinking on childhood and living well.²⁶ I recognize that I have not only engaged philosophical argument and critique but that I have engaged my own self. In order to read the text of childhood within these texts I had to recognize that the world itself can be read and that it can be read well.

By describing childhood, the authors I consider take on the meaning of reading childhood as something within which to participate. I relate description to participation with the assistance of philosopher Cora Diamond. She notes that description cannot be disjoined from the context of human life and from their normal interactions: "Against this, I have claimed that the capacity to use a descriptive term is a capacity to participate in the life from which that word comes; and that what it is to describe is many different kinds of activity."²⁷ The readings I offer in the project reveal a capacity to participate in life with the concept of childhood.

The texts of this project are descriptions that actively engage reader and author participating in childhood. One might posit that these descriptions are ways of being with others. Each of the authors I consider struggled to allow childhood to be present in the writing. This presence meant that the descriptions and analysis were often conflicting, always full of complexity. Foremost it

²⁶ Rorty, "The Ethics of Reading," 89, "Learning to read well is on the way to learning to live well."

²⁷ Diamond, Cora, "Losing Your Concepts," *Ethics* 98, no. 2 (1998): 267.

meant that the texts moved very quickly from questions about ‘what a child is’ (an ontological position) to questions about living well (an ethical position).

History of childhood

No work on childhood today is possible without mentioning the canonized work on the history of childhood conducted by Philip Ariès. In his work *Centuries of Childhood*, Ariès established childhood as a historical and socially created concept. In his account, childhood was not defined until the late seventeenth century. Particularly in the medieval European age, children were treated brutally and introduced to what the modern age would call ‘adulthood’ early in life.²⁸ By the seventeenth century there were childhood games, toys, and clothes. The seventeenth century also saw the rise of private family life. Although there was a growing interest in the child and childhood, the eighteenth century was still a brutal time for children as they were used in industrial and agricultural labor. By the nineteenth century growing circles of citizens and organizations concerned with child welfare critiqued these practices. According to Ariès, the concept of childhood morphed as the states of now modern Europe and the Americas went through the growth of small farming villages, industrialized nations, and finally global commercialization.²⁹

Recent work on the history of childhood shows that, while integral to the recognition that childhood has a history and is socially constructed, Ariès’ research is less valuable for its

²⁸ Ariès, Phillip, *Centuries of Childhood*, trans. Robert Baldick New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962.

²⁹ Ariès records: “In time these words would come to denote a child who was still small but already beginning to find his feet. There would still remain a gap where a word was needed to denote a child in its first months of life; this gap would not be filled until the nineteenth century, when the French would borrow from the English word ‘baby’, which in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had denoted children of school age. This borrowing was the last stage of the story: henceforth, with the French word bébé, the very little child had a name.”

overarching thesis. Newer historians of childhood and sociologists of childhood critique Ariès' thesis claiming that there always was a concept of child that pervaded most societies in historical Western society.³⁰ Aristotle mentions children and childhood as does St. Augustine. Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, Plato, Heraclitus.³¹

There were always children in Western history and always some conception of childhood. Tragically, children were often beaten, forced into slavery, and died at alarming rates. Civilized Western society has been a decidedly unfriendly place to children and childhood. Throughout most of the Greek, Roman, and Medieval times child did not signify a component of life to 'save' or to 'protect'. Rather, child slavery, infanticide, and child prostitution were accepted practices.³² Child labor was not outlawed until the 20th century in most countries.³³ Schooling for all children was not widely considered necessary until the late 19th century.³⁴

The realization that childhood and the child had a history (and were socially constructed) led to a resurgent interest in childhood as a topic of research and study. This has motivated new thinking about the child in the fields of history and sociology of childhood. In turn, new projects in curriculum (how do children learn), psychology (who are these children), and pedagogy (how

³⁰ Elkind, David, *The Hurried Child: Growing Up Too Fast Too Soon*, Reading: Addison Wesley, 1981. Cunningham, Hugh. *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500*, London: Longman, 1995. Postman, Neil, *The Disappearance of Childhood*, New York: Vintage Books, 1982. All authors that show nuances of the debate.

³¹ Chedgzoy, K. Susanne Greenhalgh and Robert Shaughnessy, *Shakespeare and Childhood*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. There is even growing research on the Shakespearian child and childhood.

³² Korbin, Jill, "A Perspective from Contemporary Childhood Studies" *In Coming of Age in Ancient Greece: Images of Childhood from the Classical Past*, ed. Jenifer Neils and John H. Oakley, 7-13, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2003, 8-9.

³³ Frost, Ginger. *Victorian Childhoods*. Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2009, 55-73. Frost explores the progression of laws against child labor that slowly grew through the Victorian era.

³⁴ Horn, Pamela, *The Victorian Town Child*, Phoenix Mill, UK: Sutton Publishing, 1997, 71.

best to teach children) have been developed. More recent rethinking of childhood and the child has moved to see how the child and childhood theory can reframe other theoretical fields. The concept of childhood now pervades multiple disciplines from psychology to feminism.³⁵

My project outlines this brief history of childhood's consideration in Western thought to show that a decidedly strong shift in attitudes both to the concept of the child and to childhood practices (parenting, educating, clothing, caring) in Western societies began in the early beginnings of the Romantic era and through the 21st century. Yet, even though massive changes occurred in the attitude towards children, the underlying concept of childhood remains constant.

For though there is research that shows childhood is a constructed concept, this has only served to mark the difference between childhood and adulthood. Conventional definitions of childhood and child rarely move past defining the differences between adult and child. Either the child is the 'other' (evil or innocent) or the child is the not-yet, the not-adult, the lack of subject. Hence, conventional descriptions of childhood vacillate between one of these two poles.³⁶ Classic descriptions from various Western motifs of childhood define it as magical, mystical, innocent, and good. Alternatively, childhood is a time of freedom, discovery, and given from God. Thus, what has occurred is that the lines of thought have either chosen to value the intrinsic nature of the 'child' and its childhood or to recognize the child as something that is not quite a person, not quite whole or complete.

³⁵ Daniela Caselli. "Kindergarten theory: Childhood, affect, critical thought." *Feminist Theory* 11, no. 3(2010): 243. See Caselli for a more complete list of the theories reframed by childhood studies.

³⁶ Cooper, Karen, "Beyond the Binary: The Cyclical Nature of Identity in Education," *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing* 22, no. 3(2006): 119-131.

These conventional conceptions of childhood follow two philosophical lines of thought. The first is attributed to Aristotle. The second can be traced to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Emile*. Here, I trust the reader to observe that these remarks reflect the generalization of both lines of thought inherited from Western conventions.³⁷

Aristotle defines children as beings without full faculties of reasoning. He also accords them the capacity to learn such things as friendship, virtue, and reason. He reasons that children's nature is to become adults. It is too simple to define children as brutes (creatures of pure desire). Children are best viewed as not-adults or even better, not-yet adults. For Aristotle, childhood is a time of potential. The argument is that children have the potential to fulfill their *telos* – becoming self-sufficient citizens of the polis.³⁸ As such, the duty of parents and the community are to guide the young towards this activity. Moreover, for Aristotle, thinking of childhood in such a way ensures that nurturing relationships remain a key part of the ordering of a society.³⁹

Aristotle's understanding of childhood should not seem strange to modern readers. Children are often viewed according to their lack of adult traits. Moral training and education is seen as the process in which potential virtuous citizens can learn to become full functioning reasonable adult citizens. The problem with this viewpoint is twofold. Since a child only exists in reference

³⁷ This is simply to acknowledge that both Aristotle and Rousseau deserve much study into their works on childhood. My task for this chapter will be to adequately describe each viewpoint in such a way that defends a move to new ways of conceiving childhood.

³⁸ Aristotle, "Nichomachean Ethics," In *The Complete Works of Aristotle, Vol. 2*, ed. Johanthan Barnes, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984, 1734. "From the point of view of self-sufficiency the same result seems to follow; for the final good is thought to be self-sufficient. Now by self-sufficient we do not mean that which is sufficient for a man by himself, for one who lives a solitary life, but also for parents, children, wife, and in general for his friends and fellow citizens, since man is born for citizenship."

³⁹ The polis is not founded by a group of individuals, rather, it functions as a communal society and hence morals and ethics must enhance this relational way of society. These relationships are viewed in levels of friendship and relationships with children are particularly strong.

to the adult that the child will become, childhood exists only in reference to adulthood. Secondly, this emphasis on *telos* does not accord anything to the stage of childhood itself. It makes childhood only something to pass through, to get beyond, something out of which to grow.

On the other hand, modern readers are easily compelled to view childhood as a time of free play, removed from the chaos and complexity of modern civil life. This line of thought can be traced directly to Rousseau's *The Emile*. There, Rousseau describes three major qualities of the child: he is good, he is weak and dependent, and he is active. For Rousseau, dependency is a liability that must be carefully directed towards the natural world rather than towards the social world in order that the weaker child's goodness is not overcome by the much stronger adult world.

The concept of childhood derives from an amplification of the insight that all people, adult and child alike, feel the struggle between the pull of self (for Rousseau, the climax of the natural world) and the pull of other humans (for Rousseau, civil society). In this case, childhood is a developmental stage completely separated from adulthood. According to this view, children are beings that are completely different from adults. Rousseau then admits that children are good in themselves but are not their own final end.⁴⁰

Though these viewpoints of childhood differ greatly, each fosters separation between adults and children. For, either the child is unable to contribute to the world of adult citizenry, or adults are fundamentally damaging to the fragile child. Neither considers that children and adults interact both in daily life, historical memory, and throughout development. Whether childhood is conceived as a pre-developmental stage before the fully developed adult stage, or as the fragile

⁴⁰ My thanks to James Stillwaggon for making this point clearly.

unfolding of the natural person, neither view takes into consideration that thinking about childhood might be a continual and essential aspect of human experience.⁴¹ There is reason to believe that just as childhood as experienced is both a time of itself and also a complex period of growth and newness, so can our thinking about it encompass both these views.

A brief review of the contemporary discussion on childhood as concept will help frame how this project seeks to show how this way of thinking can be enacted. Concentrating on four scholars that engage the conceptual work on childhood in current literature, I specifically engage scholarship that examines how adult interactions with childhood manifest changes in conceptual understandings or practices. This newer line of scholarship in childhood studies opens up avenues of inquiry.

Current scholarship on the conceptual history of childhood cannot deny the influence of David Kennedy's work on the development of childhood as a parallel and even consequential development of adulthood. Kennedy sees the division between adults and children arise in the development of reason over desire in Western intellectual thought. Because the child is the place of desire and lack of reason, subjects are those (adults) who have become reasonable and can control their desire. Thus, the child is set in opposition to full human subjectivity, the adult. However, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the binary between the human subject as white, adult, male, and the 'other' or 'stranger' as foreign, female, and child begins to unravel.

⁴¹ La Vaque-Manty, Mika, "Kant's Children" *Social Theory and Practice*, 32 no. 3(2006): 365-388. Immanuel Kant ascribes some powers of agency to children (they can contort their body for instance) but also notes that children are not fully rational agents. And, La Vaque-Manty argues that knowing how to use and move one's body is a way of developing self-agency. Hence, Kant sees childhood as a time to allow children to play where children can learn by themselves and at their own pace. While this certainly seems to align with Rousseau, Kant questions the role of autonomy in childhood and its development. Thus, as in the more Aristotelian conception, children are passive citizens in Kant's political writings and the state has a certain obligation to constrain and train them properly. Kant has a complex theory of personhood that deserves its own mention. Moreover Kant's framework lends to consideration of how childhood can allow one to think through certain other concepts, i.e. autonomy.

He writes, in regard to the child: “The child no longer represents an incomplete but an alternative epistemology.”⁴²

Kennedy explores this 21st century development where children and adults interact with one another within the world as a possible “historical shift in the adult-child balance.”⁴³ This shift shows “the extent to which the adult’s construction of the child is at the same time his or her self-construction as an adult –whether through mechanism of distancing children or attempting to relive re-evoke, or exorcise his or her childhood through them.”⁴⁴ For Kennedy this offers insight into reframing possibilities for what schooling and education may be.

If Kennedy is correct that the 21st century offers a space for a new hermeneutics of childhood, adults that meet children in the spaces of education (teachers) might be better served by seeing children differently. Therefore locations of adulthood and childhood need to be permeable to one another. Conceptual inquiry can assist in making this tenable. An example of seeing children as interlocutors might be learning to describe childhood as a time of richness and complexity beyond categories of good/bad/innocent/wild.

The paradoxes and limits of this conceptual inquiry are a concern of Bernadette Baker. Baker is one of only a few scholars in philosophy of education who write specifically on early childhood and its connection to philosophy and history of thought. Baker sees the concept of childhood in play throughout the Platonic texts of *Timaeus* and *The Republic*. Baker shows that the images of the child in these texts serve not only as examples of who and what should be

⁴² Kennedy, David, “The Child and Post-Modern Subjectivity.” *Educational Theory* 52 no. 2, (2002): 157.

⁴³ Kennedy, David, *The Well of Being*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006, 6.

⁴⁴ Kennedy, *The Well of Being*, 7.

educated, they also have an impact on the way education could even be enacted.⁴⁵ Baker asks questions that break open theoretical engagement with childhood. She proposes that theories develop within a concept of childhood that then become its own boundary. Theories may reinforce images of childhood that oppress and disengage possibilities for new conceptions of education and development. For Baker, childhood is not intrinsic, rather, it is a tool and a limit-point for theories that construct the child in the world.

As much of my project seeks to disrupt theoretical conceptions of childhood, Baker's concern is valid. Consequently I seek to uncover literature that questions the role of childhood within theory. I find that current research in feminist theory offers insight into what this kind of work may entail. Feminist theorist, Claudia Castañeda argues that within much of feminist theory using or describing the figure of the child is caught in a contradiction, for at the same time that it seeks to dismantle or deconstruct norms of subjectivity in order to uncover the hegemony of the male privileged subject, it does so from a similar privileged position concerning the child.⁴⁶

Castañeda shows, even those oppressed from other standpoints (i.e. the female subject) gaze on the child from the position of adult privilege. How may adults see or describe 'child' without subjecting the child? Is it possible to see 'child' as its own end, seeing it intrinsically rather than simply a means to an end? For Castañeda this is almost an impossible task. Yet she finds possibility in interrogating one's own concept of 'child' or 'childhood.' Her position challenges

⁴⁵ Baker, Bernadette, "Plato's Child and the Limit-Points of Educational Theories." *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 22, no. 6 (2003): 439-74.

⁴⁶ Castañeda, Claudia, "The Child as a Feminist Figuration: Toward a Politics of Privilege," *Feminist Theory* 29 no 2 (2001): 49.

Baker's concern and indicates that though childhood is both constructed and constructs theory, there is value in dismantling these relationships and locating intrinsic aspects of childhood. For Castañeda this means finding ways to describe children as their own ends.

Liselott Borgnon's scholarship focuses on this concern with finding ways and methods of describing children without relying on developmental psychology or theory. In describing a child learning to walk, Borgnon then uses images of surfing. Surfing, precisely because it is not the language of development, offers a way for adults to see childhood beyond the language of theory, particularly of theories that rely on a developmental or stage models.⁴⁷ Moreover, it is possible that it situates the description as an ethics or a move towards relationship with the child as its own end and not as a boundary of the theoretical or construction of one's self. It becomes a relative ethics. It moves the adult to consider the value of childhood in-itself while underscoring the importance of connection, nurture, and relationship.

This highly critical and engaging literature situates the reader to recognize that how one how one conceives of education is problematic if inquiry into childhood is neglected. Clarifying childhood conceptually assists in freeing it from cultural mores about what a child should 'be' or 'act like'. Moreover, childhood assists one in seeing, as if through a clear lens, interactions between adults and children, specifically in an educational context. For surely, as the concept of childhood changes, so will the conception of adulthood.

⁴⁷ Borgnon, Liselott, "Conceptions of the Self in Early Childhood: Territorializing Identities," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 39 no. 3 (2007): 264-274.

This is why the concept of childhood, though in the project discussed in terms of schooling and education goes beyond these bounds. In fact, the project points to the need for childhood to be considered beyond schools and the sphere of formal education systems.

The revelations in the project show that childhood makes an ethical claim upon personhood, persons who are always their own ends but yet are always entwined with others. It is the claim that individual growth depends on mutual interactions with other children, other adults, and communities that makes it so necessary to inquire into childhood, for these interactions must be continually re-imagined and begun, over and over again.

Encountering childhood in texts of philosophy and literature

The points of encounter for this project will be four major texts that open up the richness possible in childhood.⁴⁸ When reading, the text is encountered, not as an authority but as something to enter into and take from. Readers must make themselves ready to receive something different. That may challenge and cause growth. Playing with a text is not easy. It means that there is something to solve, perhaps dismantle and put back together. Playing with a text indicates contradiction and ambiguity. Playing means that texts are not static things but require effort to engage sincerely and authentically.

The texts considered are exercises of description and analysis that re-envision childhood. The texts specifically do not engage psychological or social studies of childhood. Each author recognizes childhood as a complex question or problem and offers a way of exploring that

⁴⁸ Buber, Martin, *I and Thou*, Beaverton: Touchtone Press, 1971, 72, "The world is not comprehensible, but it is embraceable: through the embracing of one of its beings." This is to make clear that there is not a privileging of speech in this proposal and project. All those involved in personhood, even those who are without the capacity for verbal and linguistic speech are involved. This engagement could also include visual media, the performing arts, the everyday meetings and encounters of persons in the world, the caress, the holding of a mother and child, and more.

complexity. The purpose of the following chapters is not to distort or simplify this complexity but to magnify the rich possibility held within the texts. Finally, the texts all challenge the field or historical era in which they were written, problematizing the conventional notions of childhood within their time, as well as our own. All the texts highlight the integration between adulthood and childhood that I found resonant in current literature of childhood. And all the texts center this engagement through either imagination or dependency.

The time periods covered in this project begin with writings from the early Romantic period, moving swiftly through the Victorian, Edwardian, and Industrial ages. The texts are not histories of childhood. They entail one author's perspective on childhood. Thus these works do not give us a complete picture of the childhood portrayed in such times. What these works have in common is that, against or in spite of a growing acceptance of what a child was or is, each of these works is not content to rest with one image or one definition of a child. These works challenge their age and ours to consider childhood as a concept that that calls out to us, as authors, as poets, as philosophers, as educators, as persons, to inquire.

Rousseau's exploration of childhood initiates the field of childhood studies. John Dewey challenges traditional schooling and the industrial age. Simone De Beauvoir explores childhood in relation to existential philosophy recognizing the important connection between feminism and childhood. Virginia Woolf challenges conceptions of time, space, and subjectivity in childhood. She also issues forth a way to think about childhood that defies its connection to motherhood and the family. Vivian Paley and Harriet Cuffaro are well known authors of early childhood education but are often ignored by philosophers. Their personal narratives challenge teacher-

educators to consider how descriptions of the classroom and child are an essential aspect of theory and teaching.

Chapter II considers how Rousseau's text of *Emile* marks a historical and philosophical birth for interest in childhood as political, moral, and theoretical construct. Rousseau's description of childhood exemplifies the complex role of imagination in human life. Rousseau explores tempering imaginative desires through compassion and love.

In chapter III, I argue that Dewey considers childhood to be a necessary component within the rhythms of a dynamic and democratic society.⁴⁹ I address Dewey's consideration of experience, including its temporal and aesthetic rhythm. Although this rhythm is not unique to childhood, it is privileged by the imagination that funds childhood. Finally, I consider how Dewey's exploration of childhood fosters an inquiry into what it means to contact others morally. Chapters II and III center on childhood's hold on our imagination.

In Chapter IV, I want to see the play of memory, time and suffering opened up in Dewey's inquiry. Thus, I move from philosophical texts to texts of fiction and autobiography, finding different ways to engage similar concerns. I read Beauvoir's *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, as a text that describes childhood in its inscribed aspects; that it is undergone in situation, in time, in a specific place. While there is not overarching agreement between Beauvoir's philosophy and Dewey's philosophy I believe that Beauvoir's text opens up a conversation about experience and childhood that resonates with Dewey's inquiry.

⁴⁹ Dewey, John, *Art as Experience, The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953, Vol. 10*, ed. J.A. Boydston, Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985, 340 – 356. Dewey sees a rhythmic movement in the social aspect of humanity. That which is communicated in a culture is a response to the environment and to changing needs and interests. Variation in the environment affects the social engagement of a society.

Beauvoir sees a renewed possibility in the playfulness of childhood, recognizing in its capriciousness an essential quality of the good life, namely freedom. Thus it seems apropos that in Chapter V, I consider childhood through an imaginative and playful writing of childhood, as Virginia Woolf does in her experimental novel, *The Waves*. We are given an exercise in description in Chapter V, encouraging a practice of discovering childhood in the present moment.

Woolf proposes that the human person is engaged in every aspect and every stage of a life. First, she asks the reader, how childhood can be conceived in a way that does not compare it to the adult, but rather shows childhood itself as an intrinsic good. Secondly, she asks the reader to consider how this way of thinking about childhood leads us to understand that childhood is ultimately integral to living a good life. Childhood becomes an exceptional way to look at history, society, and most importantly friendship.

While there is not a linear development found in the four core chapters there is a deepening of childhood's complexity and richness. Woolf's project shows just how these descriptions of childhood influence moral considerations of subjectivity. The readings made clear that there was an important connection between childhood and relationship. Woolf and Beauvoir indicate a willingness to take on the complexity of childhood as both intrinsic and ultimately relational.

Beauvoir and Woolf establish a basis for seeing the deep complications that arise when childhood is understood as tethered to adulthood and greater societal movements. Rousseau and Dewey's concern with childhood is sincere and both make concern with childhood valid and valuable; yet, it is the feminist concerns of Woolf and Beauvoir that challenge the complexities of the interaction. Woolf and Beauvoir move considerations of childhood beyond useful participants in democratic life and society. Rather, Beauvoir recognizes that childhood manifests

the ambiguous freedom all persons experience throughout the practice of human life and the fragility of the relationships that can foster or break those freedoms. And Woolf recognizes that childhood cements the way that one will practice insertion and relationship with the world and others throughout a lifetime, thus insertion and relationship become impossible without response and care from others. Woolf situates the paradox of childhood by recognizing that it is best cared for with others, but this does not negate its unique aspects.

It becomes important then to consider how educators, who are intimately engaged with assisting others to insert themselves and engage others with the world practice ways of knowing and considering how their understanding of childhood impacts their teaching.

Thus, Chapter VI seeks to understand how modern texts of early childhood education could be opened up to a similar line of thought. I read two vignettes of early childhood educators concerned with childhood in the classroom. I found that these early childhood educators exercised new ways of including childhood in the classroom.

These revelations show that childhood makes an ethical claim upon personhood. This ethical claim is that individual growth depends on mutual interactions with other children, other adults, and communities. Childhood read as a complex concept helps cement an understanding of human nature focused on exercising growth and development, a human nature that is opened up always to beginning again, trying something new, making the world better.

Reading Rousseau: Imagining childhood

I will be told that I, too, dream. I agree; but I give my dreams as dreams, which others are not careful to do, leaving it to the reader to find out whether they contain something useful for people who are awake.¹

Conventional descriptions of childhood often center on images of childhood as growth. For everyone was once a child. Humans are born with clumsy hands, awkward movements, oversized heads, and the inability to speak. Yet, humans quickly grow into skilled manipulators of the body and develop more sophisticated ways of communicating. It would seem then that this forward movement indicates that the journey for the human child is to grow up: to become adult, leaving childhood behind. Yet, our childhood, whilst it becomes part of our memory, does not leave us entirely. Tastes from childhood can bring one immediately to tears or to smiles. A parent washing a child's first scraped knee is brought to bear on her own first falls. A grandmother running down a hill laughs with her granddaughters in the mirthful voice of her youth. Though childhood and adulthood can seem very distant in time and very different in experience, it is possible that they remain interconnected and indicate certain qualities of each realm.

By acknowledging the intersubjective relationship between adulthood and childhood, this project seeks to uncover some of the ethical considerations of the relationship.² I acknowledge

¹ Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *Emile or On Education*, trans. Alan Bloom New York: Basic Books, 1979, 112.

² Kennedy, David, *The Well of Being*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006, 24. Kennedy establishes the connection between the formation of adult subjectivity and the realm of the child. He argues, "Questioning childhood means questioning adulthood, and questioning adulthood means reconsidering the goals, processes, and fundamental values of the life cycle – which means, in turn, reconsidering our mutual relationships, both individual and collective, whether economic, political, or sexual." Kennedy's concern is to open up a hermeneutics of childhood that challenge conventional practices of schooling. Kennedy's project opens up important avenues of study including what it means to engage educators in questioning both childhood and adulthood.

that inquiry in this vein more often deals with the creation of the subject, the psychological, and the social construction of childhood. However, I am interested in how differing views of childhood uncover the qualities of the relationship between adulthood and childhood that align with the ethical concerns of intersubjectivity. These concerns are varied however they center on questions of responsibility, recognition, acceptance of difference, acknowledgement of power dynamics, and freedom.³

Rousseau is often credited for distancing childhood from the world of the adult. Regarding the child as pure and innocent his educational ideal is seen as a call to protect childhood from the degenerate world of the adult and to foster a will in the child that is not bent on domination. Thus, Rousseau's writing on childhood figures in current literature most heavily in the history of progressive education and its 'progression' within modern educational practices and theories.⁴ In this literature educators and philosophers focus on the child's innocence, closeness to nature, and removal of the child from society, thereby following a specific formula for reading and writing on Rousseau: Because the child is 'x', then we should (or should not) do 'y.'⁵ In this chapter I bracket these readings of Rousseau and offer, an alternative reading of childhood in *Emile*.⁶ For though Rousseau's *Emile* marks a historical and philosophical point in the history of childhood, I

³ Borgerson, Janet, "Feminist ethical ontology: contesting 'the bare givenness of intersubjectivity,'" *Feminist Theory* 2, no. 2 (2001): 173-187.

⁴ Jurgen Oelkers, "Rousseau and the image of 'modern education,'" *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 34, no. 6 (2002): 679-698. Rousseau's actual theories have little in common with the progressive educators that pay homage to him today.

⁵ See also Oelkers, "Rousseau and the image of," 2002. See also Tröhler, Daniel, "Rousseau's *Emile* or the fear of passions," *Studies in Philosophy & Education* 31, 5 (2012): 477-489.

⁶ Kennedy, David, "The Child and Postmodern Subjectivity," *Educational Theory* 52, no. 2 (2002):155-167. Kennedy persuasively argues that Rousseau and Enlightenment philosophy manifest a new way of thinking about childhood, one that reveals a continuity of subjectivity between adult and child. This Romantic concept of childhood offers a new way of knowing about the self. Childhood becomes an "alternative epistemology" - rather than an "incomplete epistemology." I find this resonant with my reading of Rousseau.

make a different emphasis: *Emile* establishes childhood as an immediate concern for everyone in a society. While Rousseau is not the first thinker to see value in childhood, his is the first serious engagement with the child's 'goodness' as that which matters to the moral development of all.

I argue that Rousseau's rich description of childhood in *Emile* is an invitation for the reader to engage childhood imaginatively. I begin with examining Rousseau's description of childhood in his work, *Emile*.⁷ Rousseau's description of childhood exemplifies the complex role of imagination in human life. Rousseau explores the ways one tempers imaginative desires through compassion and love. Rousseau's lasting contribution to childhood studies is the invitation to engage childhood with love.⁸

I first establish that Rousseau's writing is intentionally challenging. He engages the reader's imagination in order to cement an argument that is necessary for engaging childhood and ethical living. His descriptions are rich and complex. They reflect multi-layered interpretations, calling on the reader to engage with a complexity that is the experience of childhood. The text of *Emile* contains a rich description of childhood, engaging both the reader and the author. By challenging the conventional view of childhood in the seventeenth century, Rousseau invites the reader to self-reflect.

⁷ Rousseau has had great influence on childhood studies. None of the other major thinkers in this project (Dewey, Woolf, nor De Beauvoir) could have or would have written on childhood without the writings of Rousseau. In the more specific field of philosophy and education, Rousseau is not an ignored figure.

⁸ Shuffleton, Amy, "Rousseau's Imaginary Friend: Childhood, play, and Suspicion of the Imagination in *Emile*," *Educational Theory*, 62, no. 3 (2012): 305-321. Shuffleton argues forcefully that to simply consider *Emile* a historical or philosophical piece is to make it a text that is not useful for educators or for a wider society. If we read Rousseau beyond historical or even philosophical reference (acknowledging certain factual inaccuracies that do not align with current developmental findings) we might discover that reading Rousseau is topical for modern society. As does Shuffleton, I find imagination and childhood a topic of such resonance.

Rousseau encourages the reader to see the connection between imagination and personhood.⁹ I argue that this reading of Rousseau allows us to see the relationship founded in contradictions and continuations, rather than a stark separation of developmental stages.¹⁰ I support this with specific passages rich in childhood description.

My primary treatment of childhood in Rousseau is directed towards understanding the role of *amour de propre* and *amour-de-soi* - especially as they connect to the tempering of imagination in childhood. I offer a reading on the control of the imagination during childhood and how this ensures the preservation of imagination. In short: the preservation of imagination ensures that the adult citizen is in control of desire; the control of this desire ensures that *amour de proper* is held in check against the more ethical *amour-de soi*; thus balanced, the adult citizen can undertake the necessary societal roles established through moral family units.

Inviting the imagination

Rousseau intentionally engages the reader's imagination to assist in his argument that childhood is a central moral concern. Only with an engaged and educated imagination can a reader see the necessary aspects of Rousseau's new social order. In a sense, Rousseau's proposal is so fantastical that the reader needs assistance in seeing it.

In order to understand the radical nature of Rousseau's works, one must consider the conventional attitudes towards childhood during the mid 1700's. To study the child, and gain

⁹ Shuffelton, Rousseau's Imaginary Friend. Lewis, Tyson. "Rousseau and the Fable: Rethinking the Fabulous Nature of Educational Philosophy." *Educational Theory*, 62, 3 (2012): 322-341. Mintz, Avi. "The Happy and Suffering Students; Rousseau's Emile and the Path not taken in Progressive Educational Thought." *Educational Theory*, 62, no. 3 (2012): 249-265.

¹⁰ *Emile* is certainly a staged story. However, what is less obvious is that this staged story seems relevant throughout a life. That is, it revolves around continuity.

utility from this study, was a radical idea in a society where ‘childhood’ was not ‘known’.¹¹ Rousseau, from the very beginning of *Emile*, portrays a controversial, innovative role for childhood in public life. Rousseau indicates that his motivation is undoing previous notions of childhood; that is, one has to ‘know’ childhood. A secondary, perhaps more important aspect, is that studying childhood will be useful. Studying children and their childhood creates utility for the reader – not for the child. Rousseau writes,

Childhood is unknown. Starting from the false idea one has of it, the farther one goes, the more one loses one’s way . . . Begin, then, by studying your pupils better. For most assuredly you do not know them at all. Now if you read this book with this in view, I believe it will not be without utility for you.¹²

Society’s task is to view the condition of childhood, for surely we don’t see children well now. Rousseau invites his readers to *see better*. It is with this *new view*,¹³ that his text becomes useful.

Rousseau does not write *Emile* in order to give practical advice on raising children. The point of studying childhood is not to advance personal projects involving children; it is to enhance the understanding of what the project of living with children should be. Rousseau assures readers - in fact, promises- only that the usefulness of his writings will be that of being *good*.¹⁴ In a nod to the critiques that will be leveled at him throughout history, he prepares no apology for when

¹¹ Popiel, Jennifer, *Rousseau's Daughters: Domesticity, Education, and Autonomy in Modern France*, New Hampshire: New Hampshire Press, 2008. Popiel argues that Rousseau’s writings helped bring about new attitudes about children in post Revolutionary France. For instance previously children of the 1700’s in France wore very restrictive clothing and were under the authority of the adult male of the household.

¹² Rousseau, *Emile*, 33-34.

¹³ Rousseau, *Emile*, 143, “Since sight is, of all the sense the one from which the mind’s judgments can least be separated, much time is needed to learn how to see.”

¹⁴ Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *Emile ou De l’education*, Établi Charles Wirz Paris: Gallimard, 1969, 79, “Car je ne promets que cela.”

these ideas are viewed as impractical. He writes, “It will be believed that what is being read is less an educational treatise than a visionary’s dreams about education.”¹⁵

Rousseau’s purpose goes beyond the practical. His is a narrative of education. His reader must assess whether or not the sensations of any project aligns the self with the human heart. To be aligned morally (with the heart) is not thinking logically through an argument, but being able to feel that man is aligned with the good. Rousseau assures his readers that his argument will feel ‘natural’ because it will align with the way that man lives.¹⁶ This education of one’s ability to assess sensations and feelings is at the foreground of Rousseau’s proposed education of children.

Emile is, fundamentally, a story.¹⁷ It is the story of Emile, a tutor, and the members of society they meet on his journey. The piece is imagined, fantastic. The reader is to believe that a mother and father would entrust their *only* son to a tutor and send him off to the country to be raised outside society and grow up to marry a farmer’s daughter. The reader is to believe that there is a tutor, who has resisted the urge to become a member of corrupt, civil society of France who wishes to take a small boy under his wing. And the reader is to believe that this small boy will never once question the devices and cunning of his tutor. Recall Rousseau’s preface: “They are always seeking the man in the child without thinking of what he is before being a man. This is

¹⁵ Rousseau, *Emile*, 34.

¹⁶ Rousseau, *Emile*, 34. “In the first respect it suffices that the project be acceptable and practicable in itself, that what is good in it be in the nature of the thing; here, for example, that the proposed education be suitable for man and well adapted to the human heart.”

¹⁷ Rousseau, *The Emile*, 6. Bloom writes in his introduction, “With *Emile* Rousseau confronts this challenge and dares to enter into competition with the greatest of the old poets. He sets out to create a human type whose charms can rival those of the sage or the tragic hero- the natural man- and thereby sows that his thought too can comprehend the beautiful in man. *Emile* consists of a series of stories, and its teaching comes to light only when one has grasped each of these stories in its complex details and artistic unity.”

the study to which I have most applied myself, so that even though my entire method were chimerical and false, my observations could still be of profit.¹⁸

Rousseau's playfulness cannot be denied; for he purports that his method is not false, though it be fanciful. Rousseau gives two reasons why the project is good, even if not true. The first is the topic of the project. The subject of childhood allows Rousseau to access truth within narrative since he is not projecting a future upon the child. Secondly, though he admits his methods are false, since they connect the reader to childhood, the project itself is not false.

With regards to this second point, better understanding may be gained by noting what Rousseau writes in *Reveries of a Solitary Walker*:

Fictions which have a moral end in view are called parables or fables, and since their aim is or should be to present useful truths in a form which is pleasing to the senses, there is hardly any attempt in such cases to conceal the factual untruth, which is merely the disguise of truth, and the person who tells a fable simply as a fable is not in any sense a liar.¹⁹

Rousseau is ambiguous in his statements on parables. At the same time that he admits to telling his own fable he critiques them tremendously in *Emile* (as well in other works). In the same essay on lying and stories in *Reveries* he confesses that he, "should have had the courage and strength to be constantly truthful on all occasions, and never to allow fictions and fables to come from lips and a pen which were specifically dedicated to truth."²⁰

Rousseau tells his readers to restrain their imaginations, particularly as they relate to childhood and children, even as he uses images to captivate and turn our interest to very specific

¹⁸ Rousseau, *Emile*, 34.

¹⁹ Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, trans, Peter France England: Penguin Books, 1979, 69, "I have often made up stories, but very rarely told lies."

²⁰ Rousseau, *Emile*, 80.

concerns. This request is at its heart, inconsistent. Numerous critiques of Rousseau have attempted to articulate the various inconsistencies in his political and educational writings. One of the most glaring of these inconsistencies is the use of imaginative and metaphorical language to tell this story, *Emile*, while at the same time espousing the dangers of imagination, metaphor and fables.²¹

Yet, trying to pin Rousseau down on his inconsistency is not as important as what the inconsistency indicates.²² I believe the inconsistency points out a tense restraint that Rousseau must cultivate in both his readers and the children in *Emile*. In order to see childhood without the trappings of his society he had to re-imagine childhood and he needed his readers to do the same. For Rousseau, telling *Emile* as story was necessary. The danger in imagination is in its creation of desires beyond that which ever be attained. Thus, imagining one's self with more money, as being more beautiful, is wrong. What, then, would be exceptionally dangerous would be engaging in fantasy play, as it might serve to divorce us from our reality (specifically our ethical one). Therefore, to encounter childhood with a reasoned or tempered imagination is a way to truthfully see childhood and its richness.²³ Thus, Rousseau constructs a tale of a child and his development, grounding it in science, restricting the story to what can be observed.

²¹ Shuffleton, "Rousseau's Imaginary Friend," 307, 321. Shuffleton explores this inconsistency writing a compelling argument for Rousseau's restrained imagination as a useful way of articulating the complexity of imaginative play as an educational tool.

²² A view that aligns with Lewis, "Rousseau and the Fable."

²³ Lewis, "Rousseau and the Fable," does not entirely agree with the reformulation Shuffleton, "Rousseau's Imaginary Friend", takes. For Lewis the value of reading Rousseau comes from not removing the inconsistency, rather acknowledging it as an anxiety that resides from any reading of the text. Shuffleton does not collapse the inconsistency rather she shows that Rousseau was very aware of the complexity of the imagination and argues that there is a promise of happiness in the text, a small one, nevertheless, a promise. I tend to argue against Lewis's reading simply because I believe it possible to engage with the inconsistency without reformulating it, without resolving it, in a way that admits more than anxiety.

Reimagining childhood

Here I will discuss Rousseau's re-imagined childhood. Principally, that the child lives in an unbalanced world, feeling tension between *amour-de-soi* and *amour-propre*. I will explore how *amour propre* stems from the natural *amour-de soi* (so revered by Rousseau). In childhood, the struggle between the pull of the self and the pull of the other is amplified. Rousseau recognizes that this pull is actually two points within the same condition. This is why the education of Emile is so important. While it is inevitable that Emile will feel the pull of this human tension, his education will be to learn how to feel it more reliably, more truthfully.²⁴ This education gives the child the ability to access the good.

The descriptions of childhood in *Emile* portray intersections between childhood and an education of the imagination. Rousseau, following the argument of his more political writings, values the natural state of man. He has three major qualities of the child: good,²⁵ weak/dependent,²⁶ and active.²⁷ These qualities are supplemented by a few other descriptors: the child has great powers of sensing and imitation.²⁸ His mind is supple.²⁹

It is important to read here that one should not separate the goodness or innocence or naturalness of the child from the weakness or fragility of the child. The goodness of childhood (which is what is so often emphasized) should not negate the dependency of the child.

²⁴ Rousseau, *Reveries of a*, 47 "Youth is the time to study wisdom, age the time to practice it."

²⁵ Rousseau, *Emile*, 37.

²⁶ Rousseau, *Emile*, 37, 38, 85, 203, 213.

²⁷ Rousseau, *Emile*, 67.

²⁸ Rousseau, *Emile*, 39, 70.

²⁹ Rousseau, *Emile*, 111, 125.

Rousseau first notes: “Everything is good as it leaves the hands of the Author of things;”³⁰ The French reads, “*Tout est bien sortant des mains de l'Auteur des choses*” The word “good”, is misleading for the casual reader, who attributes goodness to the absence of fault or mischief. For Rousseau the child is not without fault - the child does misbehave, cause mischief (i.e., breaking furniture). As Bloom notes, Rousseau’s *goodness* is being free from the constraints of societal relations and true vice. Bloom writes,

When Rousseau says that man is by nature good, he means that man, concerned only with his own well-being, does not naturally have to compete with other men (scarcity is primarily a result of extended desire), nor does he care for their opinions (and, hence, he does not need to try to force them to respect him). Man’s goodness is identical to his natural freedom (of body and soul) and equality.³¹

In other words, man is good because he is free and cares only for himself, his intention, first and foremost, is to care for himself and thus, in all his natural actions, he is good.³²

Rousseau refers to this goodness, writing, “everything degenerates in the hands of man.”³³ In this case, *degenerate* does not indicate absence, it indicates a de-forming or un-making. It is to be un-formed, it is taken apart, it decomposes into something else. The formation is physical, connected to the actual form of man. Degeneration, or generation for that matter, involves the physical, psychical, and emotional aspects of living in society – it is a not a mental aspect.

³⁰ Rousseau, *Emile*, 37.

³¹ Rousseau, *Emile*, 14.

³² Rousseau, *Emile*, 92, “Let us set down as an incontestable maxim that the first movements of nature are always right. There is no original perversity in the human heart. There is not a single vice to be found in it of which it cannot be said how and whence it entered. The sole passion natural to man is *amour de soi* or *amour-propre* taken in an extended sense. This amour-propre in itself relative to us is good and useful; and since it has no necessary relation to others, it is in this respect naturally neutral. It becomes good or bad only by the application made of it and the relations given to it.

³³ Rousseau, *Emile*, 37.

Rousseau connects the loss of goodness with the physical, with deterioration, thereby connecting goodness to formation and being.

The being of degeneration then, is decidedly *in the real*. Being exists materially. Goodness is natural, therefore, because being able to sense the truth of what is in the world is goodness. To generate as a child, is to grow up, to become more. We might put it: *to become full of one's self*. This is why goodness is not tied to knowledge or virtue. Goodness is tied to the fullness of the self. Goodness becomes the self's ability to remain full and connected to the world.

Because of children's physical need for self-preservation (food, warmth, shelter), they possess what Rousseau ascribes to 'natural goodness' as a matter of course. The child's intuition is to protect the fullness of the self. Thus, the child is good because of the impulse of self-preservation: *amour-de-soi* - a love of self that is unmediated by others. *Amour-de-soi* is what the infant seeks from the world in the present moment, in his unqualified need.³⁴

Yet, this is not the entire story. As soon as Rousseau claims that goodness is the first quality of the child, he quickly recounts the second aspect of the child, that of *amour-propre* - the love of self as mediated by others in the social world.³⁵ *Amour-propre* immediately forms from *amour-de-soi*. Rousseau writes, "A child's first sentiment is to love himself; and the second, which derives from the first, is to love those who come near him, for in the state of weakness that he is in, he does not recognize anyone except by the assistance and care he receives."³⁶

³⁴ Rousseau, *Emile*, 64, "At the beginning of life when memory and imagination are still inactive the child is attentive only to what affects his senses at the moment."

³⁵ Here I am grateful to Megan Laverty for pointing out that mediation is a difficult and complex construct in *Emile*.

³⁶ Rousseau, *Emile*, 213.

This will become the tension between *amour-de-soi* and *amour-propre* that will propel the rest of *Emile*. The love of self as *amour-de-soi* is natural and good. As *amour-de-soi* is deformed it becomes preservation of love of self through others. It is not love of self; rather, it is love of self as mediated by the love of others. Hence, the natural goodness of children, unmediated by a society is a fragile and temporal condition, does not last, and quickly degenerates.

Numerous commentators on Rousseau have recognized the inconsistencies of his argument. How can it be that mediated, unnatural love of self is derived from the child's goodness and power *qua amour-de soi*? Rousseau offers one answer in the concept of 'degeneration'. Degeneration is the severing of connection between the world and the self, to become less full of one's self and to be more connected through others rather than through the self, as self.

At the moment the child touches an object, he experiences movement towards the world. Rousseau writes, "He wants to touch everything."³⁷ In his touch the child begins to comprehend how separated he is from the world. As Rousseau notes, "It is only by movement that we learn that there are things which are not us, and it is only by our own movement that we acquire the idea of extension." Rousseau says that there is nothing wrong with this, only that we must "be carried as you please and not as he pleases."³⁸ Rousseau notes:

Before prejudices and human institutions have corrupted our natural inclinations, the happiness of children, like that of men, consists in the use of their freedom. But in the case of children this freedom is limited by their weakness. Whoever does what he wants is happy if he is self-sufficient; this is the case of the man living in the state of nature. Whoever does what he wants is not happy if his needs surpass his strength; this is the case of the child in the same state. Children, even in the state of nature, enjoy only an imperfect

³⁷ Rousseau, *Emile*, 64.

³⁸ Rousseau, *Emile*, 64.

freedom, similar to that enjoyed by men in the civil state. No longer able to do without others, each of us becomes in this respect weak and miserable again....³⁹

As the child develops and grows the movement from *amour-soi* to *amour-propre* continues to manifest. The child quickly learns to cry for his food, to speak pretty poems, and to lavish praise to get what he wants from others. The child seeks the company of others to make him feel better, to absolve him from pains and displeasure. The child begins to bask in the compliments showered on him by those who purport to teach him. Soon, most children can only love themselves when the love is mediated through others.

The tutor must assist Emile in limiting the development of *amour-propre* for as long as possible. Rousseau argues that childhood is a double-edged sword of power and weakness. The child's power and desire to take things necessitates reliance on others' assistance in the world. The others are much loved. Moreover, to get what he wants, the child must increase his dependence on those he loves ever more!

This contrary space between the self and others is a strong motivation for Rousseau's inquiry into the concept of childhood. In this reading, childhood marks the elusive space where *amour-propre* can so easily (and so often does) take over *amour-de-soi*. For Rousseau neither *amour-propre* nor *amour-de-soi* can win out in the end. If *amour-de-soi* wins out *Emile* will remain isolated from society. Yet, if *amour-propre* wins out *Emile* will be an empty man, one of the non-citizens that Rousseau describes of his modern French society. If Emile were to develop a strong sense of *amour-propre* he will desire control over others and would be tempted to engage society through modes of control and selfish desire. Rousseau's hope is that resisting the development of

³⁹ Rousseau, *Emile*, 85.

amour-propre for as long as possible allows the possibility for Emile to act as a free citizen who values freedom from control and base desires.

This is the move from *amour-de soi* to *amour-propre*. Rousseau writes, “*amour de soi* is directed at self-preservation, whereas *amour-propre* is concerned with judgments of merit and honor, with how highly one is ‘regarded.’⁴⁰ If men are to live in community rather than like savage animals (according to Rousseau) there is a need for men to mediate between themselves. *Amour-propre* is necessary for men to be able to make proper judgment, to assess value and need, and to interact with concern for others. *Amour-propre* is a highly indeterminate space because it depends on the relationship one has with others.⁴¹ Moreover, *amour-propre* forces one to see oneself from the perspective of another. Yet, *amour-propre*, precisely because it is the world mediated or understood through others, also provides ample opportunity for man to impose his will on others and to manifest as uncontrolled desire, all things that destroy the growth of a moral society.⁴²

Since children can feel powerful and weak at the same time, childhood is a time where it is possible for *amour-propre* and *amour-de-soi* to reside together without tension. Rousseau indicates that the tension between *amour-de-soi* and *amour propre* is an important one. It is so important that the time of their meeting should be held apart. If one attends to this time carefully,

⁴⁰ Rousseau, *Emile*, 30

⁴¹ Neuhouser, Frederick, *Rousseau's Theodicy of Self-Love, Evil Rationality, and the Drive for Recognition*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, 40. “Amour-propre is just as dependent on human doings as the social institutions that shape it. The extreme malleability of amour-propre, as well as its susceptibility to being formed and re-formed through human interaction, are theses of crucial importance to Rousseau’s thought.” Neuhouser’s explanation of Rousseau’s *amour-propre* is integral to any study of Rousseau’s *Emile*.

⁴² Winch, Christopher, "Rousseau on Learning: A Re-evaluation." *Educational Theory*, 46, no. 4: 1996, 41-428. Winch expands this point in an essay on Rousseau, where he considers learning as a task of developing a healthy amour-propre.

the child can grow to be a man in which the apparent contrariness of these passions will not be felt in tension. Instead the contrariness will exist together in the citizen-man. The child, if given the proper environment will be able to become dependent on things rather than persons. His fragility will serve to connect him better to the material world around him rather than to the society that, too young, will foster dependence and the empty vanities of *amour-propre*. It will be impossible to completely limit *amour-propre*; retraining and restraining it until its proper time is Rousseau's task.⁴³ This is possible because at the same time that the self struggles with goodness (the love for ones self) and weakness (the need for others) it is the time of extreme activity –we might understand it best through the world power. The power of the child is to have the ability to be dependent (the power of *amour-propre*) tied with the power of goodness (the uncanny nature of children to love themselves fiercely without mediation).

Educating the imagination

Here I will examine Rousseau's description of childhood and how it challenges his readers to see the importance of the time where *amour-propre* and *amour-de soi* become connected. This engagement will necessitate an education in the imagination. Limiting our imagination, through education, allows the development of *amour-propre* to be delayed.

To locate just how the imagination is restrained during the time of childhood I look at two passages from *Emile*. The first exemplifies the move to educate Emile in the senses through the

⁴³ Neuhouser, *Rousseau's Theodicy*, and Kolodny, Niko, "The Explanation of Amour-Propre," *Philosophical Review*, 119, no. 2 (2010): 170. These readings of Rousseau point out that there can be a healthy *amour-propre*. Kolodny points out, "A desire to have, and to be evaluated by all others as having, a certain value in comparison with all others, including at least moral equality."

sensible. The second shows how imagination is not only an intellectual enterprise but also one of moral import.⁴⁴

The capacity to truly reason is necessary because the child, at some point, will have to discover the felt tension of *amour-de soi* and *amour-propre*. He will have to compare reasonably. This will involve the imagination and thus it needs to be an imagination that has been trained to feel pity and care rather than wanton desire.⁴⁵

Rousseau is suspicious of a world that has been mediated. When men see themselves as bonded to others for self-love their desires will not cease. They will either try to become all-powerful or submit wholly to any one more powerful. This would be the mark of a corrupt and evil society.⁴⁶

Here, I inspect Rousseau's theory of imagination.⁴⁷ For Rousseau the passive imagination is the human faculty that allows man to compare himself to other men and other conditions.

⁴⁴ Lyons, John, *Before Imagination: Embodied Thought from Montaigne to Rousseau*, Stanford University Press, CA: 2005, 202. "Whenever the child seems on the verge of acquiring an alternative inner realm of ideas that could turn away from sensations, Rousseau's pedagogue has stepped in" (201). Lyons considers that Emile's education is that of the 'sensible imagination.'

⁴⁵ See also Patrice Cavinez. "Jean Jacques Rousseau's Concept of People." *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 30, no 4 (2004): 393-412, 400. "It is an ability to put oneself in the place of another human being, of imagining what he feels. It is a kind of sympathy in the literal sense of the word. What makes Emile feel compassion for another man is not only the extent of the other man's problems or miseries. He can imagine how the other perceives his own situation, how he remembers the past and anticipates the future."

⁴⁶ Neuhouser, *Rousseau's Theodicy*, 270, argues that Rousseau fails to show that a both a satisfying and harmonious system of recognition is in principle achievable for human subjects and that the remedy for human evils in general depends alone on bringing such a system into being. However, even admitting that a perfect educational or societal system may not cure human evil, we can assess this interpretation of *amour-propre*, as one that gives credence that human recognition can lead to reasonable activity and community, if tempered by a proper use of the imagination.

⁴⁷ Lyons, *Before Imagination*, 194, discusses Rousseau's writing on the imagination. Rousseau's thinking was complex, for he was writing in the midst of a great change in thinking about imagination during the Romantic period. Lyons discusses the historical movement of the concept of imagination. For Lyons the key aspect of the move is the move from the ancient imagination of the inner world to that of the modern imagination that includes the outer world. In ancient times the imagination is not mere sensation but is the connection between sensation and perception (p. 3-5). However, while yet a human faculty, for the ancients the imagination is a passive activity, it is difficult to control.

Rousseau was tremendously suspicious of the passivity of imagination because imagination was the human faculty most connected to comparison and judgment.⁴⁸ If this imagination remains unchecked, man himself lives without control over his desires and his fantasies.

Rousseau is suspicious of comparison and the role it plays in misaligning society, the key is to make the imagination turn away from comparison and judgment (the inner realm), instead turning it towards the senses.⁴⁹ Rousseau writes of his method: “I know only that truth is in things and not in the mind which judges them, and that the less of myself I put in the judgments I make, the more sure I am of approaching the truth. Thus my rule of yielding to sentiment more than to reason is confirmed by reason itself.”⁵⁰

As Rousseau notes, “the real world has its limits; the imaginary world is infinite.”⁵¹ Rousseau’s task is to make the real world and its limits part of the imagination. In the passage describing the kind of geometry that Emile must engage with, Emile should do more geometry, he should engage in more math but it should be math that moves from “observation to observation”. When the tutor teaches Emile geometry he does so by distancing Emile from the abstract thinking that might limit Emile’s actual seeing of the world.⁵²

⁴⁸ Lyons, *Before Imagination*, 194.

⁴⁹ Which later will be the modern and Romantic concept of imagination championed by the Arts.

⁵⁰ Rousseau, *Emile*, 272.

⁵¹ Rousseau, *Emile*, 81

⁵² *Deborah Haimo*, “Are the NCTM Standards Suitable for Systematic Adoption?” *Teachers College Record*, 100, no. 1 (1998): 45-64. <http://www.tcrecord.org> ID Number: 10298. In recent mathematics circles Rousseau’s pedagogy has made much headway. Certain mathematics textbooks no longer include proofs as the entry into understanding geometry. In recent years however, proofs have made a return. This is the flux of educational practice in the United States. It must be stated here though that I do not turn to this geometric passage in order to understand either the move to include or ban proofs from the geometric curriculum. I include Rousseau’s discussion of geometry because it allow for further construction of Rousseau’s call to restrain the impulse to imagine in childhood.

Make exact figures, combine them, place them on one another, and examine their relations. You will find the whole of elementary geometry in moving from observation to observation, without there being any question of definitions or problems or any form of demonstration other than simple superimposition.⁵³

To imagine geometry is harmful since it destroys a child's ability to see the world around him. If geometry is not the study of the world around, rather than what we typically assume as about imagined circles, the child does not develop a capacity for judgment and comparison.

Emile's pedagogy is based on lessons of sense rather than of thought. Emile is being taught to feel and he is being taught to see. Rousseau retrains Emile's imagination by developing his acuity of observation. Here again Rousseau does not place imagination and faculties of reasoning as opposites. As in the case of *amour-de soi* and *amour-propre* they are two sides of the same coin. The love of oneself and the use of ones own powers are necessary in order to act. Rousseau writes:

Only in this original state are power and desire in equilibrium and man is not unhappy. As soon as his potential faculties are put in action, imagination, the most active of all, is awakened and outstrips them. It is imagination which extends for us the measure of the possible, whether for good or bad, and which consequently excites and nourishes the desires by the hope of satisfying them....On the contrary, the closer to his natural condition man has stayed, the smaller is the difference between his faculties and his desires, and consequently the less removed he is from being happy. He is never less unhappy than when he appears entirely destitute, for unhappiness consists not in the privation of things but in the need that is felt for them.⁵⁴

Likewise, when Rousseau describes teaching a lazy child to run we see the tutor showing the child the proper way to compare himself to others and measure himself in the world.

⁵³ Rousseau, *Emile*, 145.

⁵⁴ Rousseau, *Emile*, 80-81.

For Rousseau, these methods of education are ways of cultivating capacities and characteristics. Rousseau employs the metaphor of the garden to attend to what it means to dutifully restrict the imagination of childhood. Gardens are tended closely. Things are weeded out, things are watered, and some plants need to be pruned while they grow. Emile is engaged in a kind of growing that seems purely natural but actually requires great care in order to nurture.

In one infamous passage, while Emile is learning to garden, he becomes excited about the prospect of growth. He digs around in the dirt, he waters his seeds, and he tends to the weeds. He learns to care for things. Moreover, he attends to the beans on a plot of land and feels what it means to tend the land –to feel connected to a bit of earth and soil. He learns about property. Importantly, he is not given this property; instead, he feels ownership because he has toiled over it. “We come every day to water the beans; with transports of joy we see them sprout.”⁵⁵

Here, the child’s desire is acutely tempered by the material conditions of the garden and Emile’s extension of activity therein. It is his activity that creates the conditions for the beans to grow. Allowing Emile to work in the garden is similar to allowing the infant to grab and reach for the world himself. Moreover, the activity of gardening is the child’s own desire. Just like the infant who desires food, Emile desires to work with the garden having had “not take two experiencing of seeing a garden plowed”. In the garden the child is happy because the actual object meets his desires, he has no need to forecast or wish for anything. It grows before him under his own powers. “It belongs to every age, especially his, to want to create, imitate, produce, give signs of power and activity.”⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Rousseau, *Emile*, 98.

⁵⁶ Rousseau, *Emile*, 98.

Clearly, the tutor's mission is not to grow beans; it is to nurture Emile's power of perception and feeling. Emile must acutely feel the power that stems from property, as well as the loss of power when that property is no longer his (just as his beans are beginning to sprout a local farmer mows them over and Emile is heartbroken and mystified at the man's actions). The property is not taken by force - the child believes it is himself that has created the condition that has made him lose his property. The child has no need to imagine justice or the ideals of justice because the actions of justice are acted out before him.

Emile must struggle with actions of justice in the present moment. He must consider his own feelings of losing his property. He must consider how he will not get to eat the melons the gardener was planning on planting. "You have done me an irreparable wrong, and you have deprived yourselves of the pleasure of eating exquisite melons."⁵⁷ And he must consider the gardener's feelings of disappointment. The farmer, Emile, and the tutor finally come to an agreement whereby Emile can share a plot of land with the farmer for his beans provided he leaves the farmer's melons alone.

All these activities were imaginative. Emile certainly was engaged with thinking about his beans that he was growing. Each day, coming to the field to water them, he expressed joy at seeing how much they had grown and probably was thinking of how much they would grow the next day. And, in talking with the gardener Emile started to feel the pangs of a desire that would go unmet. Emile feels some empathy for poor Robert. But Emile is not thinking about how much land he might have one day as a rich man. Emile is not thinking beyond fall when the melons and beans shall be harvested. Rather, Emile, under the guidance of his tutor is engaged with thinking

⁵⁷ Rousseau, *Emile*, 99.

about a gardener, a plot of land, and how to share mastery of land. It is a matter of imagining the world of the real. The tutor has not squashed Emile's powers to imagine nor to think. He has created a condition in which Emile's imagination is very restrained. Rousseau has limited imagination's inner desire and focused it on actual observations.

Prolonging childhood, preserving the imagination

By looking at childhood in *Emile*, we learn the power of the imagination – of looking towards the future –within the present. Rousseau prolongs the time of childhood by seeing it well. Hence childhood itself is something that must be prolonged. Rousseau writes: “There are periods in human life which are made never to be forgotten. The period of the instruction about which I am speaking is such a time for Emile. It ought to influence the rest of his days. Let us try therefore to engrave it in his memory in such a way that it will never be effaced.”⁵⁸

Rousseau entreats adults to love this time of goodness and fragility in the human lifespan. Rather than rush them through the age of childhood, adults are responsible for loving, caring for, attending to childhood. What does this love entail? How is one to care for this time? Rousseau is careful to note that childhood calls for a different kind of love than that of the adult person. He states: “men, be humane. This is your first duty. Be humane with every station, every age, everything which is not alien to man. What wisdom is there for you save humanity? Love childhood; promote its games, its pleasures, its amiable instinct.”⁵⁹

As previously discussed, Rousseau is telling a story about a young boy and his tutor. But what is happening in the reading of this fiction is important. The reader is given a very rich

⁵⁸ Rousseau, *Emile*, 321.

⁵⁹ Rousseau, *Emile*, 79.

description of Emile. The reader is invited to see Emile over the span of a life. Rousseau does not ask for introspection. He asks the reader to feel for Emile, just as Emile must learn to feel for the world around him. The reader knows that Emile only reads *Robinson Crusoe* and lives on a large estate with tenants and places to run, hide. There is a community outside his door that he doesn't seem to do much with, although he does seem to have some interaction with farmers and other workers in the neighborhood. The reader is privy to Emile's first stirrings of puberty and even of his crisis of faith.

Rousseau calls out to the imaginations of his readers to understand the time of childhood. He employs metaphors and idealistic language so that they understand what it means to love childhood. But he also recognizes that one must engage the imagination reasonably. Rousseau knows that without imagination society would lack hope and promise so he restrains imagination unless it is called forth from compassion and love. A tempered imagination allows one to see through compassion and love. Imagination must be turned towards childhood.

Although there are numerous passages in *Emile* that highlight this reading of what it means to engage the imagination differently by prolonging childhood, I do so with the following passage.

One morning a few months later Emile enters my room and embraces me, saying, My teacher, congratulate your child; he hopes soon to have the honor of being a father. What a responsibility we will have, how much we will need you! Yet God forbid that I should let you educate the son after having educated the father. God forbid that so sweet and holy a task should be fulfilled by any but myself, even if I were able to make as good a choice for my child as was made for me! But continue to be the teacher of the young teachers. Counsel us, govern us. We will be easily led; as long as I live I will need you. I need you more than ever now that my functions as a man begin. You have fulfilled your own

function; help me to follow your example. And now it is time for you to take a rest."⁶⁰

I wish to note here that Bloom translates the French *soins* as responsibility. It is a care that is about attention and heedfulness, it is a care that is full of responsibility. But the sentence can also read as, “what care is to be imposed on our zeal.” Childhood is calling forth to be cared for by Emile and Sophie. Their *amour-de-soi*, the preservation of their own life is to be imposed on by care. It is not going to be a burden nor is it a smothering. But, as Bloom notes, they are to be responsible now, their zeal is to be tempered by care. It is as if their zeal, the zest for life is to be attended to itself. Childhood cares for life –in as much as the parents are now called to be responsible for their child.

How can zeal be tended through care so that it is not a burden? Emile speaks to his tutor in this last sentence. As before when his tutor hears Emile, he responds so that the relationship and the feeling are prioritized. It is this that I read in the care of zeal. I hear childhood calling out. I hear it as a call towards the other. To be tempered by care is not being burdened, but slowing down and paying attention. In short, it is to have to think childhood. Perhaps it is a kind of imaginative listening.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Rousseau, *The Emile ou De l'éducation*, 703-704, “Au bout de quelques mois, *Emile* entre un matin dans ma chambre, et me dit en m’embrassant: Mon maître, félicitez votre enfant; il espère avoir bientôt l’honneur d’être père. Oh! quels soins vont être imposés à notre zèle, et que nous allons avoir besoin de vous! A Dieu ne plaise que je vous laisse encore élever le fils après avoir élevé le père. A Dieu ne plaise qu’un devoir si saint et si doux soit jamais rempli par un autre que moi, dussé-je aussi bien choisir pour lui qu’on a choisi pour moi-même! Mais restez le maître des jeunes maîtres. Conseillez-nous, gouvernez-nous, nous serons dociles: tant que je vivrai, j’aurai besoin de vous. J’en ai plus besoin que jamais, maintenant que mes fonctions d’homme commencent. Vous avez rempli les vôtres; guidez-moi pour vous imiter; et reposez-vous, il en est temps.”

⁶¹ The tutor, of course, has the child with him always. The tutor does not desire the child in the same way. Imagination is not turned on because the tutor remains absent from the child. But when the tutor must teach the child, he is engaged in imagining the child, seeing how the child will become, how the child and the tutor will engage each other in the lesson. In choosing to make us ignore the usual games of imagination –forcing us into one game, where we see what a child can make a tutor think, tutors/teachers/parents also engage in a kind of imaginary play, a consideration of what it would mean to let childhood call for our own care of self.

Contradictions and contributions

The purpose of this chapter is to explore Rousseau's description of childhood. I must point out that this is predominantly a description of the male child. Comparing Emile's childhood with Sophie's is to admit vast differences.⁶² Sophie shadows her mother, is placated with dolls, and learns manners and flirtations quickly. Rousseau can be and has been resoundingly critiqued by feminist philosophers and educators alike.⁶³ To consider Rousseau's treatment of Sophie is a project within itself. My task here will be limited to consider how the sex differences expressed by Rousseau affect ways of reading our understanding of imagination and childhood.

Rousseau's preface to the *Emile* directs his treatise to a mother (who can think) to a more general public. While many commentators skip this introductory remark it is important that Rousseau takes care to introduce us to his work through the mother figure. He does so in gratification - in thanks - for in addressing her, she has 'encouraged' him to address the public.

After vain efforts to do better, I believe I ought to present it as it is, judging that it is important to turn public attention in this direction; and that although my ideas may be bad, if I cause others to give birth to good ones, I shall not entirely have wasted my time. A man, who from his retirement casts his pages out among the public, without boosters, without a party that defends them, without even knowing what is thought or said about them, need not fear that, if he is mistaken, his errors will be accepted without examination.⁶⁴

Rousseau, having been invited to address a mother, then invites the public to redress him.

The mother figure takes central prominence in the work. Although the mother will be conspicuously absent throughout much of the opus (the child is taken away from his parents at an

⁶² This is not to discount that the description of the feminine childhood in *Emile* does not deserve attention. It deserves its own project!

⁶³ Weiss, Penny and Harper, Anne. "Rousseau's Political Defense of the Sex-Role Family." *Hypatia* 5, no. 3, (1990): 90-92. See overview of the feminist literature.

⁶⁴ Rousseau, *Emile*, 33.

early age and given to a foster nurse for nutrient rich breast milk) and Emile is taught by a male tutor, it will be the turning of his self to Sophie, *raised by her mother*, that will end his education and turn him from boy to citizen. Without Sophie, Emile has little chance of entering society.

My earlier treatment highlighted the event of raising a child, completing a circle as it were; paying attention to the child is the pinnacle of Emile's education. Yet, to forget that this circle does not occur without the creation of a family unit between Emile and Sophie would be to misunderstand the focus on the child. There is a sexual determination in Rousseau, the female biologically both carries the child and provides the milk from her breast. For Rousseau, the task is to make what is admittedly a short time of necessary relation between women and children become something that is an enduring relationship. The task then is to connect Sophie and Emile towards each through love and compassion and then to connect them with their child through love and compassion.

A mother who has nursed her child, is a mother, raised like Sophie, who will want to nurse her child. This mother will have no need to imagine childhood. Rousseau notes of the mother, she already 'thinks'. That is, she already sees childhood. She is already a being who imagines children. It is the woman, and specifically, the mother—one who births the child, that calls out for *Emile* to be written. This is why Emile's education is so specific. Sophie simply needs to be turned to embrace her biological role of motherhood in order to be ready to love Emile and her child. But Emile needs to have a trained imagination; he needs to be taught to sense. Emile must turn to Sophie in love and then to his child in care.

Rousseau is resoundingly more critical of the father in the typical bourgeois family. This father, seemingly, has nothing to do with the child. But if the father is to be a citizen, rather than

selfish individual, the father will have to be trained to care for his children, to stay with the family unit despite the broader pulls of society.

It is true that Sophie and Emile have very distinct roles in their care of the child and family unit, a fact that feminist critiques of Rousseau do not miss. However, as noted by Penny Weiss and Anne Harper the roles played by the different sexes in the family unit serve to dismantle the aristocratic family unit of his society.⁶⁵ Weiss and Harper note

Rousseau first notes the simple fact that with a child under the charge of one other than her or his parents, the family spends less time together. He finds the consequences of this worrisome, for habit is not then allowed the opportunity to strengthen the ties of blood. . . . The habit of caring for another is vital to the strengthening of blood ties, which alone are easily broken.⁶⁶

For Rousseau it is the child raised by both a mother and father that solidify the movement of a good and just society. Rousseau is worried about family units that do not have children to cement the bonds of the unit. Weiss and Harper focus on the selfishness that this corrects in the individual.

To forge a community that is just, both men and women have to be tutored properly in their imaginations. Both female and male children are at risk if their education does not focus on making them sensible. That is, they have to be capable of sensing the world around them in a proper manner. I think this is a good example of what I have shown occurs in the *Emile*: in an essay guarding against fantastical imagination, desire is tempered by love and care.

Rousseau's path to make a society bonded by children in the two-sexed family is an ethically limited solution for modern society. Rousseau's sexed education and society is not one that

⁶⁵ Weiss, Penny and Harper, Anne. "Rousseau's Political Defense," 91.

⁶⁶ Weiss, Penny and Harper, Anne. "Rousseau's Political Defense," 98.

would be recommended by today's understanding of the capability, ability, and respect for both men and women to choose their own life. However, Rousseau's first premise is that by knowing childhood and caring for children, men and women both interact as citizens, as concerned members of society. Thus, Rousseau invites us to consider what it means to call citizens towards one another.

Rousseau invites us, again and again, to sensibly imagine the world's children. This is, despite his many inconsistencies and contradictions, Rousseau's lasting contribution to childhood studies. Rather than stating that children are 'x', and thus education should be 'y'. Rousseau portrays childhood as that which connects possibilities already within the world. Put another way, childhood is not a kind of state or a sort of 'being'; instead childhood forges concerned connections between things present in the world.

Take for instance the lively story of a three-year-old who attends the local Early Childhood Education Center. She giggles out the following story, "I am joking [*sic*] my teacher. She always asks me every day; did you wash your hands? And I always tell her yes but I never do!"⁶⁷

There are many ways to respond to this bit of play from the child. The obvious one is that she is not telling a joke on her teacher, she is actually lying. But those engaged in sensibly re-imagining childhood might reflect on the child's predilection to play just such a joke on her teacher. For the child is giggling as she tells this story, she is playing and does not seem as if she is covering up mischief, in fact she is revealing it. She does not view her story as a 'lie'. One might find in her a bit of Rousseau's ploy to engage his readers! What is the point of her fable?

⁶⁷ Private Conversation, Oct. 2013.

I refer to the descriptions in this chapter of childhood that is both dependent and powerful. She has true development needs for which the teacher is responsible. One of these is her health. However, the child is also powerful. She is good for she is full of her self. She loves her self. This love of self is only as strong, however, as the relationships through which the child must mediate. If she has grasped that her behavior is controlled by the teacher and not through her own self, then her grasp of self-worth has been mediated by the appreciation or acceptance of the teacher.

Here the child relates something of great interest to the parent, the child says that she is 'asked' whether or not her hands have been washed. The child perceives that for her teacher it is not the washing of hands that is of importance but of the need to appear that one is doing so.⁶⁸ The child does not see washing of hands as the proper behavior; rather it is the telling someone that one has washed one's hands. The appropriate behavior is the communication that one has done so, not that one has taken care of one's self.

The child's joke then is a joke on the teacher but it is also a play with her self. She is contrasting her felt self worth and her expected independence (for she is obviously asked to wash herself and take care of her self) with a contradictory message that she is required to tell someone when she is clean. Moreover, the one that she must tell that she is clean, does not check whether or not she is actually cleaned or has washed. They rely on her to mediate their own observation.

⁶⁸ In fact washing hands and general bathroom habits take precedent in most standardized observations in public preschools controlled or managed by the state.

The task of an early childhood educator is not an easy one. The care and safety of a classroom of three and four year olds is awesome. I do not doubt that the teacher in this case has the child's best interest at heart. However, in reading the *Emile*, I am charged to ask whether or not the washing of hands, as practiced in early childhood classrooms state-wide, is a concern that has more to do with regulation than development of the child's self? Here, the child calls out for the teacher to reconsider the ethical concerns of the teacher/child relationship.

In this instance I would ask the teacher to consider what it means to 'ask' whether or not a child has washed her hands. In doing so the educator situates herself as an adult far removed from the life of lively three year olds. She retains a view that children must be asked to take care of their selves. It could be that this child might be asking the adult persons in her life to play a bit, to re-imagine a world in which three year olds most certainly can care for themselves and can even engage in play surrounding the behavior. Might this child actually be implying, in her 'joking' that she wants to forge a relationship based on responsibility and love, cultured through a reasonable imagination that goes beyond regulation and control?

When childhood is loved and engaged through imaginative play possibilities and freedom are created. Loving childhood is to allow it space to grow. It is to learn to appreciate beauty and love. It is to promote pleasure and minimize pain. Loving childhood means allowing the child to live fully in the present as affective and affected beings, so that in the future they may both love and contribute to society. Rousseau invites us to consider what it means to call citizens towards one another as a goal or end of education. Here Rousseau has imagined childhood as an end in itself and something that education could align itself, rather than an educational program that focused on selfish valorization of one's self.

This conclusion is argued within the chapter by an argument that shows that Rousseau's *Emile* is a complex view of childhood that goes well beyond educational prescription. The *Emile* establishes childhood as an immediate concern for everyone in a society. I offer a reading on the control of the imagination during childhood and how this forges the preservation of imagination that allows the adult citizen, to love childhood.

Struggling with Rousseau

The struggle to see education as an end in itself is precisely the invitation that John Dewey takes on a reading of Rousseau. Dewey, who perhaps undeservedly has become the “father” of progressive education, does so under the mantle of his reading of Rousseau, particularly in his agreement that education comes from within and with the child, not from a force without. In his *Schools of Tomorrow*, he refers to Rousseau's first notes in the *Emile*, “We know nothing of childhood, and with our mistaken notions of it, the further we go in education the more we go astray. The wisest writers devote themselves to what a man ought to know, without asking what a child is capable of learning.”⁶⁹

Authors who seek to find Dewey and Rousseau in either agreement or disagreement miss the connection most important between these two thinkers. Dewey does seem, in a variety of writings to ‘get’ Rousseau, to agree with him on various points connected to the understanding both of childhood and of education to a society. Yet, just as often Dewey seems to misunderstand Rousseau.⁷⁰ I argue that the most important connection is Dewey's reading of Rousseau's works

⁶⁹ Rousseau, *Emile*, 17.

⁷⁰ Fennell, J. “Dewey on Rousseau: Natural Development as the Aim of Education,” *Journal of Educational Thought* 13, no. 2 (1979): 109-120.

as an invitation to struggle with the question of childhood and its import to society. It is, despite his many inconsistencies and contradictions, Rousseau's lasting contribution to childhood studies. Rousseau invites the world, again and again, to sensibly imagine the world's children.

For Dewey, Rousseau is not simply historically significant, nor for that matter is he only philosophically significant. For Dewey, Rousseau's significant contradiction lies in solidifying the role of private home and family unit to establish a moral society. While addressing the public to care for childhood Rousseau, forgets the education of the public. He turns education over to the private citizens, within the home. Perhaps suspicious of such privatized and tempered education, Dewey takes up the project of childhood again, and considers what it means for childhood to be a concern across a society. Dewey is less concerned with reconciling the intrinsic value of childhood so integral to Rousseau's consideration. Rather, for Dewey, the important consideration is to understand how childhood impacts a society.

Thus, unlike Rousseau, Dewey is not afraid of what interaction with childhood may affect. Dewey embraces the power of childhood's capacity to engage with the new and different. For Dewey, it is this newness that engages progress in a society. Thus, while Rousseau is engaged with tempering the imagination of the child and those who must then engage childhood Dewey is more concerned with bringing childhood's nascent power of imagination into the play of society. Dewey challenges Rousseau's children to come out of the private home and enter the public world imaginatively and powerfully.

Reading Dewey: The necessary participation of childhood in democracy

I think, a first-rate test of the value of any philosophy which is offered us: Does it end in conclusions which, when they are referred back to ordinary life-experiences and their predicaments, render them more significant, more luminous to us, and make our dealings with them more fruitful? Or does it terminate in rendering the things of ordinary experience more opaque than they were before, and in depriving them of having in "reality" even the significance they had previously seemed to have?¹

The question then for John Dewey is how best to take the child from the confines of the sensible home and turn him towards the world? For Dewey, the connection is to underscore the significance present in Rousseau's formulation, it is the home, the ordinary, the normal. But for Dewey, this ordinariness is not only found in the home, it is found in the common routine of society. Dewey considers childhood a necessary component within the rhythms of a dynamic and democratic society.²

I explore in this chapter how childhood resonates with Dewey's consideration of interaction in experience, including its temporal and aesthetic rhythms. For Dewey childhood is a rhythm moving between passivity (a going-under and deeper) and action (moving towards the future and new). Although this rhythm is not unique to childhood, it is privileged by the imagination that funds childhood. These rhythms essential to childhood's development and growth are also the

¹ Dewey, John, *Experience and Nature, The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953, Vol. 1*, ed. J.A. Boydston, Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985, 7.

² Dewey, John, *Art as Experience, The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953, Vol. 10*, ed. J.A. Boydston, Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985, 340 – 356. Dewey sees a rhythmic movement in the social aspect of humanity. That which is communicated in a culture is a response to the environment and to changing needs and interests. Variation in the environment affects the social engagement of a society.

rhythms of a progressive society. I consider how Dewey's exploration of childhood fosters an inquiry into what it means to contact others morally. Here in a reading of Dewey's works, childhood is reframed as a concept that includes others. Childhood cultivates an interest in growth with others. Dewey then recognizes that there is a relative intrinsic value in childhood, it is good as a society sees it as a good. Thus it is the interactions with childhood that are most important.

A note on my approach in this chapter: Dewey examines children and their childhood using many characteristics within his writings (ex: growth, play, plasticity, dependence, inquiry, construction, expression).³ Together they can be viewed as sketches of childhood experience.⁴ My concern is not to consider every passage where Dewey mentions childhood but to analyze how Dewey situates childhood as an experience that deepens and changes the self within a community.

Rhythms of experience

In this section I will sketch Dewey's theory of experience as expressed through rhythms of *passivity* and *activity*. I incorporate Dewey's consideration of rhythm in experience because later in the chapter I will refer to the rhythmic expression that is childhood. For Dewey, childhood

³ Cuffaro, Harriet, *Experimenting with the World: John Dewey and the Early Childhood Classroom*, New York: Teachers Colleges Press, 1995. Cuffaro perhaps does the most justice to Dewey's understanding of the child and childhood. Her foundational text *Experimenting with the World: John Dewey and the Early Childhood Classroom* is a sustained inquiry into the work of Dewey and specifically how his work lends insight into early childhood classroom. Yet, even in this child-focused reading of Dewey, Dewey's "child" is difficult to pin down. This is not due to Cuffaro's lack of analysis; it is due to Dewey's effort to not describe the child through one simple word, expression, or observation.

⁴ See Burdick-Shepherd, Stephanie, "Dewey's Sketches of Childhood: An Invitation to Draw Again the Project of Education," Vancouver: Paper Session: AERA, 2012. I argue that Dewey's many different images of the child are an invitation for educators and educational theory to revisit the experience of childhood as an always moving and engaging image.

exerts a power on human society because it is both passive and active, it contains the totality of an experience and hence can provide spaces for growth.

Dewey recognizes that all experience is not the same. There are some experiences that are best described as *an* experience. An experience must go beyond interaction to promote meaning and definiteness.⁵ One might consider the way one perceives art. One may go into a museum and simply see the colors of the painting. Alternatively, one can undergo an aesthetic experience, finding meaning and connection between the painting and oneself as viewer.

An experience has three main aspects: a unity, a flow, and a consummation.⁶ All three aspects demonstrate the temporal nature of an experience.⁷ The constant change of the earth over eons, the movement of oceans, the growth of a tree, and the progress of human technology are all life experiences.

Dewey re-articulates the concept of “an” experience through rhythm. Conventionally, rhythm is understood as the ordered repetition of structure or sound, for instance, the repeating shape on a quilt. While Dewey takes note of this aspect of rhythm, he argues that it also functions as a relationship of interaction – a pattern occurring only as it is manifest between the pieces of the pattern. Rhythm is the ordered variation between objects, subjects, and materials.

⁵ Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 37.

⁶ See Hohr, Hansjorg, “The Concept of Experience by John Dewey Revisited: Conceiving, Feeling and Living,” *Studies in Philosophy of Education* 32, no. 1, (2013): 25-38, 2013, 26. Hohr points out that Dewey’s semantics sometimes hide the connection between aspects of experience. He writes, “One problem with Dewey’s theory of experience is that his “concern with continuity results in a lack of conceptual differentiation.... It is the integration of these aspects that define experience. Roughly speaking, the modes may be distinguished by the degree of integration of the main aspects of experience, of action, emotion, cognition, and communication.”

⁷ This temporal quality will allow us to think much on childhood in its quick blur of temporalities of past, present, and future.

Dewey notes that the artist “selects, intensifies, and concentrates by means of form: rhythm and symmetry being of necessity the form that material takes when it undergoes the clarifying and ordering operations of art.”⁸ The creative artist does more than manipulate shape and pattern. He or she perceives rhythms of rest and activity and articulates them through material.

Another example central to Dewey’s thesis is that these rhythms also apply to the experience of thinking. Thinking as an experience contains a unity that is different from scattered thoughts.⁹ My thinking while writing this chapter has moved in and out of thoughts on relationship and transaction. The written ideas have a specific quality that is more, in sum, than each singular thought. Dewey reminds us that an experience retains a flow. Therefore, each idea in the course of this project has not been a separate moment, but a flow that rearticulates the quality of the whole.

Dewey takes the concept of rhythm even further, writing that rhythm functions as a relationship between rest/activity or satisfaction/curiosity between the subject and the art object.

Dewey argues,

In satisfying an aroused expectancy, it also institutes a new longing, incites a fresh curiosity, and establishes a changed suspense. The completeness of the integration of these two offices, opposed as they are in abstract conception, by the same means instead of by using one device to arouse energy and another to bring it to rest, measures artistry of production and perception ... Every closure is an awakening, and every awakening settles something. This state of affairs defines organization of energy.¹⁰

⁸ Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 190.

⁹ Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 39. Dewey writes, “Thinking goes on in trains of ideas, but the ideas form a train only because they are much more than what an analytic psychology calls ideas....but are subtle shadings of a pervading and developing hue.”

¹⁰ Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 174.

Both the artist and the subject who engage with an art object perceive rhythm in this way. The perceiver undergoes a process of selecting and articulating rhythms in the object, as does the creator of the art object (although these rhythms can be very different than those the artist chose). This movement between subjects and objects occurs not singularly but within a relationship. This implies an interaction that cannot be reduced down to random variation. There is a rhythmic interaction between subject and object, or subject and world. If experiences are relational, they involve others. They must involve communication.

This communication occurs between subject and object, subject and subject, and subjects within environments. Experiences are fluid, moving between environments, subjects, and objects. Rhythm is both temporal and metaphysical. The relationship occurs throughout the temporal and relative aspects of the experience.

Because the experience involves the passing of time as well as the connection between self and world, there is a relationship between activity and passivity. Dewey notes: “When we experience something we act upon it, we do something with it; then we suffer or undergo the consequences. We do something to the thing and then it does something to us in return: such is the peculiar combination.”¹¹

It is the relationship between activity and passivity that constitutes the entirety of an experience. For Dewey, the passive is simply the other side of the experience coin; activity implies passivity. Experience implies relationships between world and self, world and object,

¹¹ Dewey, John, *The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899-1924, Vol. 9 Democracy and Education*, ed. J.A. Boydston Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978, 180.

subject and object. The passive aspect of experience is a form of suffering or undergoing. The subject has something done to it.

If we sum up then what Dewey tells us about the rhythms of experience, we might say that it is relational, that it is immersive or situated, and that it inspires change of self across time.

Consider Dewey's description of childhood memory as an experience.

A return to a scene of childhood that was left long years before floods the spot with a release of pent-up memories and hopes. To meet in a strange country one who is a casual acquaintance at home may arouse a satisfaction so acute as to bring a thrill. Mere recognitions occur only when we are occupied with something else than the object or person recognized. It marks either an interruption or else intent to use what is recognized as a means for something else. To see, to perceive, is more than to recognize. It does not identify something present in terms of a past disconnected from it. The past is carried into the present so as to expand and deepen the content of the latter.¹²

The qualities of deepening are apparent in the quote. To be flooded is to be overwhelmed or overcome. One may be pulled down and swept away. Yet, what allows for this deepening to be transforming or to "expand" the present experience? Dewey does not say *develop*, nor does he say *progress*. He refers to the concept of deepening. He pairs this deepening with expansion.¹³ Another way to put this is that it is possible to both undergo and act more in experience.¹⁴

One can undergo within a memory of childhood, one can be pulled into a sight or a faint hint of a long-ago smell but if one then also acts and is pulled forward into the present something more than nostalgia or recognition of the past has occurred. For Dewey, the memory is an

¹² Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 23.

¹³ My thanks to David Hansen for recognizing that the loss of self and finding oneself for Dewey gives continuity to an experience and allows for the work of expansion of both self and inquiry.

¹⁴ See Barnacle, Robyn, "Reflection on Lived Experience in Educational Research," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 36, no. 1(2004): 57-67, 65.

experience when the suffering or the pulling back into memory carries one forward into a new understanding or meaning within one's present. Thus, what must be practiced, according to Dewey is this kind of seeing: perception that goes beyond recognition to find growth and newness.

Cultivating an interest in childhood

Dewey recognizes that this way of seeing is not a skill that most persons can engage in without cultivating it as a practice. He offers a way to think about cultivating interest in the ordinary and the everyday in order to see better and act accordingly. Here, I choose to concentrate on what it would mean to cultivate an interest in childhood, something that I read Dewey as intimately engaged with in his opus.

According to Dewey, life and history are wedded together in such a way as to make them inseparable. This complements our understanding of childhood as a lens for understanding other aspects of our lives. The strength of inquiry into ordinary experience is that it does not merely end – it consummates, sending us back to our ordinary lives, having been changed.¹⁵

For example: in the early childhood classroom, the young child is concerned with bodily functions, self-care, and grooming. The early childhood classroom then dedicates much classroom time to these concerns. Snack, washing of hands, bathroom visits, and cleanup are all set in a rhythm that assists the child in gaining self-control over these concerns. In the established classroom, this schedule often moves of its own accord, just as the sun rises and sets. Yet, an early childhood educator should not be so concerned with the daily schedule that she or he might miss developing the full aspects of her or his classroom. The challenge of balancing

¹⁵ Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 7.

scheduling with free play can be overwhelming. How is one not to be overwhelmed by considering every ordinary moment of daily life, and how does one inquire into everyday experience if engrossment so overshadows the ability to do so?¹⁶

For Dewey, both questions can be answered by challenging what it means to be interested in ordinary experience. One can have interests (dancing, writing, and gardening) and one can be interested (reading an article on earthworm composting), but this is not what it means to *have an interest*. To have an interest is to be concerned with the engagement between things of experience. To put it another way, it is to inquire into the relationship, the movements, the beginning, and the end of the experience.¹⁷ To have an interest is to inquire into the interactions of experience. Dewey is asking us to see what nature, the very material of being, looks like as it is engaged.¹⁸ To engage the interactive and transactional space is to engage in an inquiry of life experience.¹⁹ It is to see the rhythms between activity and passivity.

Harriet Cuffaro, noted early childhood educator and scholar of Dewey, might respond to the early educator questioning the ability to be interested in the daily schedule of her classroom with a similar concern. For Cuffaro what the educator is concerned with is actually time. She points out, “A question frequently asked of children is, “Are you finished?” Sometimes, that question is

¹⁶ See Semetsky, Ina, “The Folds of Experience, or: Constructing the pedagogy of values.” *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 42, no. 4 (2010): 476-488, 477. “Experience is not an individual property; rather subjects are constituted in relations within experience itself. Experience is qualitative, multidimensional, and inclusive; it includes ‘a draft, a wind, a day, a time of day, a stream, a place, a battle, an illness.’”

¹⁷ See Hansen, D., S. Burdick-Shepherd, C. Cammarano, and G. Obelleiro, “Education, Values, and Valuing in a Cosmopolitan Perspective,” *Curriculum Inquiry* 39, no. 5 (2009): 587-612, 600. Hansen et al. explains that interest is “a term that denotes movement and process between the inception of an activity and its completion (thus interest differs from ‘interests’ in the plural, which denote specific desires, concerns, wants, and the like.”

¹⁸ Bernstein, Richard, *Dewey*. New York: Washington Square Press, 1966, 83.

¹⁹ Dewey, *Experience and Nature*.

asked as an indirect prompt to children to finish what they are doing.”²⁰ But it can also be a question of whether or not the play or artwork is complete. Teaching children to ask whether or not *they* are ‘complete’ assists children in bringing experiences to a consummation.

Thus, snack is finished when all the plates are cleared, painting is finished when the artwork is hung to dry, blocks are finished when the teacher has taken a measure of the tower’s height; these activities are not finished when the bell rings or the clock strikes two but when the experiences are complete. Assisting children in recognizing these consummate moments will also assist the classroom in noticing the rhythms of the daily schedules and classroom needs.

For without the hard work of thinking through ordinary experience, new experience is arrested. A consequence of over engagement within experience is that reflection stops and the experience can fund no other experience. Thus, the rhythms of passivity and activity cease.

Dewey writes,

The things of primary experience are so arresting and engrossing that we tend to accept them just as they are – the flat earth, the march of the sun from east to west and its sinking under the earth. Current beliefs in morals, religion and politics similarly reflect the social conditions which present themselves. Only analysis shows that the ways in which we believe and expect have a tremendous affect upon what we believe and expect. We have discovered at last that these ways are set, almost abjectly so, by social factors, by traditions and the influence of education. Thus we discover that we believe many things not because the things are so, but because we have become habituated through the weight of authority, by imitation, prestige, instruction, the unconscious effect of language, etc.²¹

There is a tension raised in Dewey’s explanation of inquiry due to the nature of interaction and immersion. Knowledge would have to have some sort of removed nature from the

²⁰ Cuffaro, *Experimenting with the World*, 77.

²¹ Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 14.

experience; otherwise, knowledge would tend to the solipsistic and singular. The problem is to resist the notion that one can remove oneself from interaction and to focus on the transactional quality of all ordinary experience. In a sense, because all experience is the interaction between things, there is no singular interaction of any experience. It is possible to know something (though not everything) from each point of entry into the interaction.²²

Dewey recognizes the difficulty in attaining such platforms. How can humans possibly look at the world differently when human beings are so very much engaged in the world? He argues instead for adapting a cultivated naïveté regarding the inquiry. This is not so much a suspension of belief as an acknowledgement that one is considering the pieces of ordinary life from different platforms in order to see what truths they might hold. He writes,

An empirical philosophy in any case is a kind of intellectual disrobing. We cannot permanently divest ourselves of the intellectual habits we take on and wear when we assimilate the culture of our own time and place. But intelligent furthering of culture demands that we take some of them off, that we inspect them critically to see what they are made of and what wearing them does to us. We cannot achieve recovery of primitive naïveté. But there is attainable a cultivated naïveté of eye, ear, and thought, one that can be acquired only through the discipline of severe thought.²³

Concerning ourselves with childhood means inquiring into childhood as experience. For Dewey, this will certainly include the subjective, felt experience of one's childhood.²⁴ But it will also include more general considerations of childhood. I find from this reading that an inquiry

²² Garrison, John, "John Dewey's philosophy as education," In *Reading Dewey: interpretations for a postmodern generation*, ed. Larry Hickman Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998.

²³ Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 36-37.

²⁴ Pappas, Gregory, "Dewey's ethics: Morality as experience," In *Reading Dewey: interpretations for a postmodern generation*, ed. Larry Hickman Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998, 103. See Semetsky, "The Folds of Experience," 476.

into childhood offers possibilities for engaging cultivated naïveté. First, it offers a chance for what Dewey calls “a disrobing” of one’s life. That is, to take childhood into one’s own hand is to uncover and illuminate ordinary experience. Second, childhood’s chronological aspects allow us to bring a bit of distance, and so we are forced to recollect and think back on childhood. This chronological distance will not negate discovery in the present; rather, it may invite a kind of thinking that we do not take much time for in present daily life.²⁵ Last, this cultivated naïveté is no easy task. Dewey categorizes it as a work of discipline, of severity.

There is a kind of thinking or reflection that occurs, even in the most humble of experiences.²⁶ Dewey notes that this thinking is both all encompassing and can take any number of expressions. This thinking is risky, as it involves the self, taking “an adventure.”²⁷ This risk may even entail a loss of self.²⁸ This risk does not risk personhood; rather it is a loss of the self of the past directed towards finding newness and change within the individual.²⁹

²⁵ Boisvert, Raymond, *John Dewey: Rethinking Our Time*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1998.

²⁶ Dewey, John, *Democracy and Education, The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899-1924, Vol. 9*, ed. J.A. Boydston Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978, 144. Dewey writes: “An ounce of experience is better than a ton of theory simply because it is only in experience that any theory has vital and verifiable significance. An experience, a very humble experience, is capable of generating and carrying any amount of theory (or intellectual content), but a theory apart from an experience cannot be definitely grasped even as theory.”

²⁷ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 174.

²⁸ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, Chapter 10 and Chapter 26.

²⁹ Berstein, *Dewey*, 177. Berstein explores the depth apparent in Dewey’s recognition of humanity’s task: “Dewey was certainly aware of the limitedness and finitude of man. There are no ultimate values that are given to man, and there is no ultimate purpose to the universe. Value comes into existence only when man appears on the scene, and it is up to him to make his life meaningful and valuable. Failure and frustration are inevitable parts of human life. To wish them away is to engage in fantasy.... Let us grant all that the existentialists have told us about the irreducible absurdity of the world in which we live. Still, we cannot escape making decisions and choices. The question then becomes, how is this to be done? Dewey’s entire philosophy is an argument that the method of intelligence is our best resource and guide for living. In the end, the labels of ‘optimism’ and ‘pessimism’ are irrelevant to assessing Dewey’s outlook. The greater our awareness of the alienation that affects so much of man’s life, the greater the challenge to make the intelligence effective.”

Rhythms of childhood: suffering and imagination

The movement between children's suffering and children's active social engagement with the world makes contact with childhood experience necessary. By situating these descriptions with a reading of Dewey's analysis of the rhythm within experience I will show that childhood inhabits two states: an undergoing or a suffering of experience and a fully active, forward movement of imagination.

Dewey considers childhood through the lens of transaction. Children are beings that suffer much; they are biologically and culturally dependent on adults. But this extreme dependency also lends itself to a great power since children's dependency necessitates active communication.

Dewey describes four major interests of the child: communicating, inquiring, constructing, and expressing. These interests are not simply cares of children – they are the points at which children are active within a relationship between the world and society.

Now, keeping in mind these fourfold interests – the interest in conversation or communication; in inquiry, or finding out things; in making things, or construction; and in artistic expression – we may say they are the natural resources, the uninvested capital, upon the exercise of which depends the active growth of the child.³⁰

By characterizing the interests of the child as “uninvested capital,” Dewey indicates communicating, inquiring, constructing, and expressing are not tied to any one aspect of childhood or to a specific demographic. These interests take root in a myriad of ways depending on the environment and relationship in which they are practiced. These interests are inherently social. They are tied to the child's need to make meaning in the world *with others and things*.

³⁰ Dewey, John, *The Child and the Curriculum, The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899-1924, Vol. 2*, ed. J.A. Boydston. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978, 30.

According to Dewey, the interests of construction and artistic expression are about interaction and making meaning. Construction is tied to the child's capacity for playing with the real. Activities of construction are closely tied to activities of the industrial society – woodworking, small-machine building, mechanics, and architecture – and are tied to the child's attempt to contribute to the physical structures of a society. These activities allow the child to work in the world and make things that make sense. This is also why construction is so intimately tied to the artistic impulse.³¹ The child has the natural instinct to create and express with a medium other than speech. The artistic impulse is more than playing with crude objects and raw materials. Construction is just block play until the child shares meaning.³² Artistic expression moves from construction when the construction action involves the full self, sincerely attempting to convey a consummate and specific meaning.

The capacities so far analyzed by Dewey describe a childhood that is very active that is situated toward doing, towards making meaning in the world. However, these are not the only capacities of childhood. The other capacity of childhood is the call of dependency that childhood makes on others in the community.

For Dewey, children are not fully grown adults. Childhood is not the experience of being an already developed human. The child, as Dewey readily admits, is not a “little man” with weaker arms and legs than an adult.³³ Children are decidedly ‘weaker’ in terms of logical analysis, of being able to take care of daily activities, of being able to provide all the components necessary

³¹ Dewey, John, *The Child and the Curriculum*, 34.

³² Dewey, John, *The Child and the Curriculum*, 290.

³³ Dewey, John, *School and Society, The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899-1924, Vol. 1*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978, 40.

to their schooling. Teachers and parents are directed to care for children and their childhood throughout the works.

This dependency is a capacity, rather than a deficit because it is connected to the capacities to communicate analyzed by Dewey. In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey associates the child's natural inclinations to communicate with the power of immaturity.³⁴ The link between immaturity and the child's capacity for communication is the power of childhood.

This is a jarring juxtaposition. Rather than seeing immaturity as a weakness or deficiency, Dewey applauds the child's dependence, which calls on parents, teachers, and adults to respond. The child's weakness, his dependency, becomes as much a capacity as his power to make meaning from block play.

The adult/child relationship then is one based on mutual interaction. In respect to the child's development, a child communicates because she or he must be cared for. The adult's duty to the child is, first, to care for the child, growing the capacity of the child to make the child's needs known and, second, to teach the child to attain needs in the world – to further interaction with the things of the world. This necessitates that adults help children understand the experiences of the world by communicating with them. In this context, communicating is not merely meeting another person, but creating meaning with another. Meaning is forged within relationship, the mode of interaction between – a mutual interaction that directs growth and development in each.³⁵ Since children are part of the “us” who forge meaning, the child instigates a powerful social responsiveness in the world.

³⁴ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 49.

³⁵ There is to be sure a power dynamic for the adult can easily overwhelm the child.

I think it no coincidence then that Dewey ascribes the instinct of inquiry to the child in the same passages in which he concentrates on the child's communicative capacities.³⁶ Inquiry is inherently social in nature. The child inquires into the things that others use. The child is interested in the way her society comes together. She is not content to rest and must continue to share her understandings. The child is his own being dedicated to growing within the social world. He does not yet know many things. He is a seeker, an explorer, and a discoverer. His interest to find out is deeper than desire – it is a need to find out. He must figure out his world if he is to survive. Children are interested in finding out how things work, move, and are used. They want to touch materials, move around their spaces, take things apart, and put them together.

The child's interest in the new is impacted by the child's capacity to engage the new. Children are not bound by responsibility or tradition; children are plastic, inherently mobile. Dewey notes, “[Plasticity] is essentially the ability to learn from experience; the power to retain from one experience something which is of avail in coping with the difficulties of a later situation.”³⁷ The capacity to learn, for Dewey, is grounded within the interaction of self and world and, as such, this cements what it means to consider the imagination. What seems to be merely fantasy play of the child is actually a fertile soil where child and world fund further experience.³⁸ Consider one passage in Dewey's *Democracy and Education*:

³⁶ Dewey, *The Child and the Curriculum*, 71.

³⁷ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 49.

³⁸ Dewey, *School and Society*, 82. “Play is not to be identified with anything which the child externally does. It rather designates his mental attitude in its entirety and in its unity. It is the free play, the interplay of all the child's powers, thoughts and physical movements, in embodying, in a satisfying form, his own images and interests. Negatively, it is freedom from economic pressure – the necessities of getting a living and supporting others – and from the fixed responsibilities attaching to the special callings of the adult. Positively, it means that the supreme end of the child is fullness of growth – fullness of realization of his budding powers, a realization which continually carries him on from one plane to another.”

Consequently play is free, plastic. Where some definite external outcome is wanted, the end has to be held to with some persistence, which increases as the contemplated result is complex and requires a fairly long series of intermediate adaptations. When the intended act is another activity, it is not necessary to look far ahead and it is possible to alter it easily and frequently. If a child is making a toy boat, he must hold on to a single end and direct a considerable number of acts by that one idea. If he is just “playing boat” he may change the material that serves as a boat almost at will, and introduce new factors as fancy suggests. The imagination makes what it will of chairs, blocks, leaves, chips, if they serve the purpose of carrying activity forward.³⁹

Play – not having the constraints of an end or a consummative activity – can move easily between mediums, ideas, and activities. For Dewey, play is freer than work. This is not because work is full of drudgery. Work is expressed in the consummation of a single end or purpose, often becoming more and more complex as the process continues.

Consider for a moment the different movements as a child “plays boat.” She may be rowing at one moment in a calm sea but then may be caught up in the swells of a sudden storm. She may throw the blankets and pillows about in the room as she is tossed and turned. And then, miraculously, a landmass, perhaps say, a couch appears on the horizon and she is tossed up on the shore. She leaps from the rowboat chairs to the couch and dramatically throws up her arms.

However, if she is engaged in making a boat, she may be sitting calmly in those chairs. She may look to the chairs for inspiration; perhaps she may choose to make some chairs to place in her boat. She may get up from her seat to place her crafted object (perhaps made of cardboard from a shoebox) in a small tub of water. She may push the object along and decide that a sail might assist the boat’s ability to move as she pushes and blows at it. She returns to her seat, picking up some scissors.

³⁹ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 211.

In one case, the child moves between fantasy and reality. She plays at playing boat. The chairs in the living room are not chairs but handles for rudders and masts for sails. In the other case, where the child works to craft a floatable boat, the chairs are seen as chairs that must be copied in order to make sense in the model toy. In either case, the activity moves forward imaginatively. Both work and play are made possible and, in fact, retain possibility through imagination.

According to Dewey, imagination connects the child to the world, as a child must be connected to the world. Thus, I read that the child's main activity is to interact with the world. Whether the child is involved at playing boats or working on a boat, what allows the child to make meaning in the world is the active function of this imagination. Dewey writes of the child,

The real child, it hardly need be said, lives in the world of imaginative values and ideas which find only imperfect outward embodiment. We hear much nowadays about the cultivation of the child's "imagination." Then we undo much of our own talk and work by a belief that the imagination is some special part of the child that finds its satisfaction in some one particular direction – generally speaking, that of the unreal and make-believe, of the myth and made-up story. Why are we so hard of heart and so slow to believe? The imagination is the medium in which the child lives. ⁴⁰

This is a difficult quote from Dewey. What is a medium? I interpret this passage as saying that the medium is the stuff on which things are not simply constructed (we might say that is the canvas) but the stuff from which a painting is created – the paint. Imagination supplies the color, the palette, and the possibility of childhood. A medium is the continuous activity of the inward/outward motion between world and self.

⁴⁰ Dewey, *The Child and the Curriculum*, 55.

Thus Dewey has implied that the imagination is the connection between the self and the world. The imagination is not only fantasy, nor is it the sensing of the world. It is the sensations of the world and self, interacting in a new space.⁴¹ As Cuffaro notes,

Imagination is the means by which past and present become meaningfully connected and the unknown future becomes related to the here and now. The world as given does not exist in any meaningful way, the imagination makes meaning in that it changes to the given, it transforms.⁴²

Here Cuffaro indicates that transformation implies that something different has occurred. This change is not restricted to one object or being. In the moment of transformation, any interaction with such object or being will mean that the interaction itself has changed.

Childhood is a physical reminder of such transformation; each age of the child becomes an expression of quick growth impacted by the interaction of the environment with which the child surrounds himself. Not only is this natural and physical expression of transformation found in the time of childhood. The child immediately interacts with others; his need for others and for the things of the world means that they insert themselves as new interactions and thus new possibilities.

Dewey writes that the imagination makes things come together as a whole, that it makes newness out of the past.⁴³ To undergo or suffer in childhood may be to magnify the pain of contacting the world, but childhood is also a way to embark upon an adventure, developing a life

⁴¹ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 244. Dewey writes: “The engagement of the imagination is the only thing that makes any activity more than mechanical.”

⁴² Cuffaro, *Experimenting with the World*, 96.

⁴³ Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 271-272. Dewey writes: “Imagination designates a quality that animates and pervades all processes of making and observation. It is a way of seeing and feeling things as they compose an integral whole. It is the large and generous blending of interests at the point where the mind comes in contact with the world. When the old and familiar things are made new in experience, there is imagination. When the new is created, the far and strange become the most natural inevitable things in the world. There is always some measure of adventure in the meeting of mind and universe, and this adventure is, in its measure, imagination.”

further. The imagination of childhood is active, it completes the experience of childhood, and it reinitiates the rhythm so integral to an experience, both active and passive. Dewey writes, “Under such conditions, doing becomes a trying; an experiment with the world to find out what it is like; the undergoing becomes an instruction – the discovery of the connectedness of things.”⁴⁴

What Dewey conceptualizes is that childhood, as ordinary experience, is a time of deep communication with others through an engagement of the imagination. Even though the dual qualities of childhood (dependency and meaning-making) are displayed throughout life, they are so richly manifested in childhood because of the privileged space of the imagination in childhood. The real child (that is, not the children of development manuals or tracts) lives in a world of imaginative values and ideas.⁴⁵ This is an important reminder showing that Dewey’s concern is to explore how inquiry into the ordinary spaces of life where suffering and activity lie so close, such as childhood, lends great meaning to a society.

The necessary participation of childhood in democracy

What does it mean to view life through this imaginative lens of childhood? I note the “unrest” of the child and the inquiring person, so often present in Dewey’s work.

For Dewey, engaging in an experience is about constantly being turned toward new understanding. While at times, one might express consummation; this stopping point is simply a

⁴⁴ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 140.

⁴⁵ Russell, Dee, “Cultivating the Imagination in Music Education: John Dewey’s Theory of Imagination and Its Relation to the Chicago Laboratory School,” *Educational Theory* 48, no. 2 (1998): 193. Russell explores this relational quality of imagination within Dewey’s work.

temporary rest.⁴⁶ This constant movement is imaginative in nature. It is about possibility, hope, and the future bound in the experiences of the past and present. Considering life through the lens of childhood means putting aside fears and considering the possibilities for a society to grow and develop.⁴⁷

The imaginative ground of childhood ensures that the child who is inquiring uncovers possibility and newness. The social capacities of the child ensure that this imaginative ground is shared. Thus childhood engages the unrest necessary for movement in a democratic society.

As Dewey notes in his address in the *New Republic*, rather than be overwhelmed by the complexities of an industrialized and democratic society, children are best served by an education that enables full participation. In order to secure this movement those in education must be willing to reengage new descriptions and analysis of childhood.⁴⁸

According to Dewey a democracy must not rest. Democracy and democratic experience must always fund further experience. This direction grows the moral good of society and the individual. Dewey writes,

Government, business, art, religion, all social institutions have a meaning, a purpose. That purpose is to set free and to develop the capacities of human individuals without respect to race, sex, class, or economic status. And this is all one with saying that the test of their value is the extent to which they educate

⁴⁶ Dewey, *Art as Experience*.

⁴⁷ Dewey, John, "Reconstruction in Philosophy," *In The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899-1924, Vol.12, ed. Jo Ann Boydston*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978, 51. Fearing that a society resting in its traditions would stagnate, Dewey writes, "The instinctively mobile and eagerly varying action of childhood, the love of new stimuli and new developments, too easily passes into a 'settling down,' which means aversion to change and a resting on past achievements.... Routine habit, and habits that possess us instead of our possessing them, are habits, which put an end to plasticity."

⁴⁸ Dewey, John, "Events and Meanings," in *Essays on Philosophy, Education, and the Orient 1921-1922, The Middle Works of John Dwey 1899-1924, Vol. 13, ed. Jo Ann Boydson*, Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University press, 1998.

every individual into the full stature of his [or her] possibility. Democracy has many meanings, but if it has a moral meaning, it is found in resolving that the supreme test of all political institutions and industrial arrangements shall be the contribution they make to the all around growth of every member of society.⁴⁹

For Dewey, it is within this interaction of democratic participation that full democratic realization is developed. Judith Green, reading Dewey and connections between feminist philosophies recognizes that he struggles throughout his works to see a democracy realized in deep practice – a democracy funded by inquiry, by exercises that force reconstruction of habit, law, and interactions. She makes the case that women continually challenge our democracy when not recognized as fully participatory. Green argues that the transformation of society to a deeper democracy occurs when individuals, recognized as not yet fully participatory in that society, perceive themselves as fundamentally integral to that society's growth.⁵⁰

I think that Dewey's robust analysis of childhood experience compels a similar case. Children, even as not yet fully recognized participatory members of our democracy, when seen as powerful both in their imaginative unrest and their dependency, have the potential to assist in the development of a more fully participatory democracy. Thus, if children are to live within democracy, their participation in it is necessary.

As Naoko Saito relates, Dewey retains a pursuit of perfection where habits can be changed and “reconstructed in the middle realm between the lives of adults and the young, through the

⁴⁹ Dewey, “Reconstruction in Philosophy,” 186.

⁵⁰ Green, Judith, “Deepening Democratic Transformation: Deweyan Individuation and Pragmatist Feminism.” In *Feminist Interpretations of John Dewey*, ed. Charlene Haddock Seigfried University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002, 260-277. “Instead of being equal, autonomous centers and choosers of value from their moments of birth or their attainment of social adulthood, Dewey argues, fully formed individuals are the goal and the continuing outcome of a process of ongoing growth that allows them interactively to develop and to deploy many of their diverse potentials within a democratic social context that supports or at least allows such a multifaceted actualization to occur – unlike the social contexts in which most people have lived historically and most people, including most women, still live.”

flexible interaction of their perspectives.”⁵¹ The rhythms between adults and children, between society and its children, are interconnected. At times there may be pauses but always there is emergence. There is selection, valuing, and judgment. There is activity and cessation. Ignoring the patterns of these relationships risks shutting down democratic movement and development.

Yet, though Saito is sympathetic in her reading of Dewey, she is also critical.⁵² For Saito, Dewey’s belief in the ability of children and adults to participate in democratic life together might be overly optimistic. Children are quite often surprised as they interact with the world. This is what makes jokes, puns, and playing hide and seek such fun. But being surprised also means admitting fears, nonsense, and confusion into the world. Dewey’s portrayals of experience do not leave much room for these more chaotic (yet still rhythmic) parts of experience. Even as he admits of suffering and deepening, he still focuses heavily on growth towards development that seems whole and complete and natural.

I sympathize with Saito’s critique. It is justified to be wary of Dewey’s reliance on reasonable inquiry into ordinary experience. It is just so very difficult to reach naive platforms, to engage the painful contacts of everyday life within the strong confines of society’s traditions and expectations – particularly in the case with children and their childhood. Children’s nonsense and

⁵¹ Saito, Naiko, *The Gleam of Light: Dewey, Emerson, and the Pursuit of Perfection*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2005, 83.

⁵² Saito, Naiko, 83. “Though it could never have been his intention, in comparison to Cavell, the way Dewey describes the guidance of youthful impulse by adults suggests a tendency toward fixity of growth.... We might wonder if criteria such as Dewey describes will eventually mold the life of children into social conventions. Further, Dewey does not seem to be speaking from the perspective of the child. Cavell and Emerson suggest to Dewey that some invisible, unstable (and perhaps threatening), yet undeniable inner life of the recalcitrant child, and the sense of the infinite, the imperfect, and the unknowable that an adult might experience in the face of the child, disappear in these situations; and that the child and an adult are deprived of a chance of mutual perfection, to open themselves to the surprise that may be bequeathed by life.”

confusion are quite often squashed very quickly. One only needs visit a school during a core standards testing week to see how confined are the interactions between children and adults.

I think that Dewey did recognize the challenges that his pragmatic philosophy issued to the democratic world. To be sure, living in close contact is not an easy task – the world is not an easy place to live within. Recent school shootings in the United States, chemical weapons attacks on children and women in Syria, and a recent embargo on adoptions between Russia and the United States are only three examples in a host of many that show the deep conflicts that arise when children and adults interact in communities, societies, and the geo-political world.

David Hansen, commenting on Dewey’s closing words in *Democracy and Education*, rightly concludes that living in such a manner is no short order and asks whether or not it is even possible to live up to the ideal Dewey presents to his readers. He ends his own analysis of Dewey’s work in *Democracy and Education* stating, “For me, Dewey’s achievement, as indirect as it is straightforward, is to press these questions to their limit.”⁵³

This is what Dewey’s analysis of childhood and its experience does for democracy as well. Dewey does not shy away from the suffering nature that is part and parcel of experience. It is not an easy thing to go-under, to experience deeply. Nor is it easy to actively pursue the imagined future. Yet is this what children of the world do in their childhood experience of it every day. They call out to the world to act with and on them.

An instructive example, worth considering at some length, is Malala Yousafzai. On October 9 2012, 15-year-old Malala was shot in the head by a Taliban extremist on the way home from

⁵³ Hansen, David, “Dewey’s Book of the Moral Self.” In *John Dewey and Our Educational Prospect: A Critical Engagement with Dewey’s Democracy and Education*, ed. David Hansen, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006, 186.

school. In the year following her rehabilitation she became a worldwide figure of hope for all girls to have access to education. On July of 2013 she spoke to the UN assembly where she said,

The terrorists thought they would change my aims and stop my ambitions, but nothing changed in my life except this: weakness, fear and hopelessness died. Strength, power and courage was born ... I am not against anyone, neither am I here to speak in terms of personal revenge against the Taliban or any other terrorist group. I'm here to speak up for the right of education for every child. I want education for the sons and daughters of the Taliban and all terrorists and extremists.⁵⁴

Malala is now quite famous in the United States and the West. Her courage and resistance to the Taliban extremists after her almost fatal injuries symbolize hope for many child-rights and human rights activists.⁵⁵ Yet, it is Malala's past resistance and less celebrated past as a child activist that I find the most awe-inspiring. Malala was a schoolgirl on her way home from an exam on that fated day in October; she was also a celebrated blogger reporting on the life of children underneath Taliban control. She was already a human rights activist at the age of eleven, speaking on national and public radio and television about the rights for all girls to access education. Even after the BBC terminated her blogging contract, she continued to work within her community to promote access to education for girls.

Malala issues a call to the world she lives in as well as the Western world to consider her both as a child and as a powerful activist. She embodies Dewey's description of a child who both must submit and be cared for; yet she is also the child who engages, communicates, and makes

⁵⁴ Michelle Nichols, "Pakistan's Malala, shot by Taliban, takes education plea to U.N.," Reuters, Jul. 12, 2013. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/07/12/us-malala-un-idUSBRE96B0IC20130712>.

⁵⁵ Erin Smallwood, "10 people who looked a lot like Jesus in 2013," Irreverin (blog) patheos.com/blogs/irreverin/2013/12/10-people-who-looked-a-lot-like-jesus-in-2013/ Accessed Dec. 31, 2013. Many in the blogosphere who write on spirituality and human rights in the modern age have seen her as a heroine.

meaning. The diary she writes shows that she is a child.⁵⁶ She reports feeling bored, having to make breakfast, laughing at being out of uniform at school. These are the aspects of childhood experience that make her reports on schooling under the Taliban surprising and important.⁵⁷

The task for those interested in childhood is to follow Malala's lead and Dewey's inquiry. This is an impossible task if we do not recognize that childhood can contain both weakness and power. To recognize childhood as an experience necessary to democracy, but not to rest easy in this answer, is to recognize that childhood experience is best seen in an imaginative light. Any inquiry into childhood suffers somewhere between playful, creative expression and the hard work of what it means to accept that humans and children must inter *act* with one another.

I began this chapter with an analysis on Dewey on the rhythms of experience. The purpose was to elucidate how childhood is an experience of central importance to human life and to human society. I explored Dewey's concept of childhood experience, explaining the dual rhythm of childhood experience (passivity and activity), showing how imagination in childhood grounds these rhythms. I argued that this imagination is central to a democracy's growth. I have discovered that childhood's participation in democracy is essential to a democracy's future. However, relying only on children's experience within that democracy is not enough. Democratic societies must continue to seek ways to nurture children and adult engagement between one another, positively. Childhood's ground – the imagination from whence it springs,

⁵⁶ "Swat: Diary of a Pakistani schoolgirl (Malala Yousafzai) – BBC" <http://lubpak.com/archives/771> Accessed: Jan. 11, 2014.

⁵⁷ Malala's activism is not easy to watch. One wonders at her influences and how she will continue to develop as a young activist. To be a worldwide player at such a young age is a risky endeavor. It is, I think, an imaginative spirit that lets her see her homeland re-imagined as a place where a young girl might walk to a school and succeed.

must be well funded. We must use the democratic experience - suffering through imaginative transformation - to see childhood anew.

Struggling with Dewey

Malala is not an example without conflict. Malala was brought forth by her father and a BBC editor to become an international activist. She was chosen, she did not simply arise without cause. The editors who filmed her speak often of their guilt and their role in her shooting. Simply stating that children can be activist is not the message of this project.

Rather, Malala's experience indicates that childhood is more robust and more necessary to a society than conventionally realized. Childhood can be a time of suffering and childhood takes place during war times as well as peace. Western society often ignores this. It is not only this aspect of Malala that is important, rather it is also that she is powerful as a child despite influences of the media and the construction of war on her childhood experience. In this she expresses the paradoxical aspect of what it means to consider childhood's complexity.

For example: Malala was given money by the BBC for her work. She spent the money on a school bus and there is no record that her choice here was coerced, rather, she wanted a way for girls to get to school in her town. At the same time it also seems a rather childlike dream, to own one's own school bus! The acknowledgement that Malala needed adults to engage her advocacy is at once an acknowledgment that adults needed Malala. This is a difficult tension and it is one that Dewey does not explore well. For in recognizing the instrumental value of childhood for society Dewey's works elicit questions about participation that is deep but may also be horribly painful, a suffering that is both passive and painful. One wonders at just how free Malala was to choose her role as activist and also her role as a child. Participation was obviously not without

cost for Malala thus the question of her freedom to choose her life actions is integral to understanding childhood as an active participant in society. It is another way of posing the deep complexity of childhood, for if childhood is its own in-itself, society's use of childhood is deeply problematic. we are at risk of using children and their childhoods as a means to another end.

Simone de Beauvoir provides one response to this complexity by affirming all human's embodiment of imperfect and ambiguous freedom. For Beauvoir, the project of the free-life will not be, finally, at the end, to choose one life or one way of life over another. Rather, it will be to engage the ambiguity of freedom in each moment, it will be to disclose freedom while at the same time acknowledging the disclosure of self and being that that entails. Her inquiry into childhood serves to make her more aware of the present's ambiguity.

If we are to take Dewey seriously that lived experience matters so much, and that childhood must be an active participant in society, we have need to read the feminist concern with freedom that Beauvoir considers, seriously. For she will bring us to realized that that lived childhood experience matters so much because it discloses the suffering or the undergoing nature of the ambiguous freedom that is the human condition for both adults and children.

Reading Beauvoir: A not-so-serious childhood

“We are therefore surrounded by forbidden wealth, and we often get irritated with these limits. We would like the entire world to become ours; we covet the goods of others. I knew, among others, one young student who wanted first to make the world of the athlete hers, then that of the gambler; the flirt, the adventurer; the politician, one after another. She tried her hand in each of these domains, without understanding that she remained a student hungry for experience.”¹

In Beauvoir’s philosophy there is an immersive quality into the things (or doings) of lived experience that are both a consequence of having inquired into lived experience and also fundamentally shape what it means to have inquired into lived experience. This aspect of inquiry and of experience, that is, suffering, shapes my reading of Beauvoir’s inquiry into childhood and concerns of freedom. For Beauvoir childhood centers on the suffering or the undergoing of experience. The child, even in her experience of joy and happiness does so in extreme passivity, for it is freedom that is not created by her. Reading Beauvoir provides a way to deepen the questions that Dewey’s participatory democracy raises for advocates of childhood and its children.

It is in the move to see the problematics of participation with childhood that make the feminist work of Beauvoir integral in this project. For I view the inquiries in this project as a preparation for sustaining positive engagement with the real conditions of women and children. For myself, inquiry on childhood is necessary for any advocacy work. While the point may be

¹ Beauvoir, Simone, “Pyrrhus and Cineas,” In *Simone de Beauvoir; Philosophical Writings*, ed. Margaret A. Simons, trans. Veronique Zaytzeff and Frederick M. Morrison, 77-151, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004.

debated, one place that inquiry on childhood resonates with advocacy work is throughout the various texts of Simone De Beauvoir.

Countless projects have already detailed the rich and storied relationship of Beauvoir to the modern feminist project.² What is important, I think, for a project seeking to reframe the concept of childhood, is to note that Beauvoir was deeply concerned with children, and this project paralleled her concern for the situation of women. One is not born a woman, yes. But we *are* born as children of those women, immediately bound within embodied relation and dependent experience. The question of freedom is paramount to all human life.

In this chapter I read Simone De Beauvoir's *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* as a text that inspires adults to view childhood as an invitation to encourage freedom both in one's self and in children. Through an education of freedom children can uncover the transcendent freedom that is present in childhood. Beauvoir grapples with the contradictory experience of childhood; that it is both oppressive and transcendent. By disclosing her childhood through a creative project of writing she makes herself her own life project and encourages others to recognize projects of freedom. Adults need to be encouraged to help children recognize themselves as free subjects who live within freedom's ambiguity

Ethical considerations

Given Beauvoir's post-Freudian knowledge of the child's social and psychological development, her predication to take on autobiography through memory is not a large leap.

² Bauer, Nancy, *Simone de Beauvoir, Philosophy, & Feminism*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2001; Holveck, Elaine. *Simone de Beauvoir's Philosophy of Lived Experience: Literature and Metaphysics*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002; Pilardi, Jo Ann. *Simone de Beauvoir Writing the Self: Philosophy Becomes Autobiography*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999. This is some of the most exemplary scholarship.

Freud's conclusions, however, do not rest easy with Beauvoir - specifically his final presumptions about the feminine psyche.³ Freud's conclusions are an important connection to consider in this project. They allow that there are multiple ways of viewing childhood, psychology being only one of those ways. Here, Beauvoir uses a tool of psychology, memory, to resist the restricted view of subjectivity formed from psychological inquiries to make broader ethical claims about freedom and oppression.

For Beauvoir, psychoanalysis forgets about the subject's connection to the social and physical world around her. *The Second Sex* is her repudiation of Freud's psychoanalytic project, specifically his treatment of the female child.⁴ Psychoanalysis fails to describe the young child, who, like Beauvoir, can develop toward freedom despite the deep patriarchy of war-torn France. Beauvoir writes,

The psychoanalyst describes the female child, the young girl, as incited to identification with the mother and the father, torn between "viriloid" and "feminine" tendencies; whereas I conceive her as hesitating between the role of *object*, *Other* which is offered her, and the assertion of her liberty.⁵

Beauvoir argues that finding and supporting others' freedoms is as essential as finding one's own freedoms. Thus she is taking on a project of ethics and not psychoanalysis. Rather than

³ Beauvoir, Simone, *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley, New York: Vintage Books, 1989, 45. Beauvoir writes in *The Second Sex*, "All psychoanalysts systematically reject the idea of choice and the correlated concept of value, and therein lies the intrinsic weakness of the system. Having dissociated compulsions and prohibitions from the free choice of the existent, Freud fails to give us an explanation of their origin—he takes them for granted."

⁴ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 49. "Woman can be defined by her consciousness of her own femininity no more satisfactorily than by saying that she is a female, for she acquires this consciousness under circumstances dependent upon the society of which she is a member. Interiorizing the unconscious and the whole psychic life, the very language of psychoanalysis suggests that the drama of the individual unfolds within him—such words as *complex*, *tendency*, and so on make that implication. But a life is a relation to the world, and the individual defines himself by making his own choices through the world about him. We must therefore turn towards the world to find answers for the questions we are concerned with. In particular psychoanalysis fails to explain why woman is the *Other*. For Freud himself admits that the prestige of the penis is explained by the sovereignty of the father, and, as we have seen, he confesses that he is ignorant regarding the origin of male supremacy."

⁵ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 51-52.

childhood telling us something about subjectivity, childhood tells us something about the way we ought to live.

A society engaged in liberating women from their immanence is a society that should be also concerned with freeing children. Beauvoir might argue that finding the project of freedom in our own lives means relating to children and their childhood in a way that secures more of their freedom. For me, this is the feminist challenge that Simone De Beauvoir asks us to consider.

Beauvoir's first volume in her autobiography, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, describes the lived experience of developing this ethics of freedom. Beauvoir positions childhood as a time of development either toward freedom or seriousness.⁶ One may learn to become free by willing one's self, as well as others, to be free (freedom). Alternatively, one may become a slave to values and choices understood as absolute and outside the self as subject (seriousness). For Beauvoir, one's own freedom is contingent upon one's ability to foster freedom in others. Susan Bredlau puts it this way:

A subject's fully realized freedom, then, is an accomplishment that she has not achieved on her own. A subject does not and indeed cannot become free independently of others. In order to give herself projects that transform the world, a subject must first be given specific kinds of projects by others; she must participate in an apprenticeship of freedom.⁷

This is a reading of Beauvoir that challenges traditional existential philosophy, for it expresses a freedom that is not an ontological condition. This freedom is an ethical enterprise expressed with others. This alternative reading of Beauvoir makes necessary a different kind of

⁶ Bredlau, "Simone de Beauvoir," and also Scholz, Sally, "That All Children Should Be Free: Beauvoir, Rousseau, and Childhood," *Hypatia* 25 no. 2, (2010): 394-411. Both Bredlau and Schultz have critical readings of the concept of apprenticeship argued by Beauvoir.

⁷ Bredlau, Susan, "Simone De Beauvoir's Apprenticeship of Freedom," *PhaenEx* 6, no.1 (2011): 51.

inquiry. Rather than a philosophical treatise, Beauvoir's account of childhood necessitates inquiry into lived experience using autobiography.⁸

Beauvoir on lived experience: Disclosure as philosophical practice

In this section I look at the importance of situating philosophical inquiry within lived experience. Situating philosophical inquiry is essential in considering concepts like childhood since they represent either a temporal experience or an experience that can be accessed through memory and dialogue.⁹ Here, I find that Beauvoir's practice of inquiry through lived experience opens up questions that center on relationship.

For Beauvoir, lived experience situates philosophical inquiry within a time and place. Inquiry is undertaken within the facticity of the subject at hand. The individual is not an abstract idea, the individual exists within a time, a place, a history, and a context. The view is always from somewhere, with some thing or being. In this context experience gives rise to the individual's ability to create, to do, to think, to be. Moreover, this context is understood only in the immediate. This immediacy is like a moving target within the inquiry. The subject is never truly caught, for in the moment of description or writing, the particularity of the subject at hand has already moved into the future. Shifting vantage points change aspects of the inquiry.

⁸ Scholz, Sally and Mussett, Shannon, eds., *The Contradictions of Freedom*. New York: State University of New York Press, 2005, 28-29. "Yet there are some very old bonds in my life that have never been broken. Its essential unity is provided by two factors: the place that Sartre has always had in it, and my faithfulness to my original design—that of knowing and of writing. What did I aim at in this project? Like all living individuals, I sought to overtake my being, to rejoin and merge with it; and in order to do so I based myself upon those experiences in which I had the illusion of having achieved this. Knowing meant directing my awareness toward the world, as did the meditation of my childhood, withdrawing the world from the voids of the past and from the darkness of absences: when I lost myself in the object upon which I gazed or in moments of physical or emotional ecstasy, or in the delight of memory, or in the heart-raising anticipation of what was to come, it seemed to me that I brought about the impossible junction between the in-itself and the for-itself. And I also wanted to realize myself in books that, like those I had loved, would be existing objects for others, but objects haunted by a presence—my presence."

⁹ Baggini, Julian, "Philosophical Autobiography," *Inquiry* 45 (2002): 295-312. See Baggini's insightful work on the scope and intersections between autobiographical writing, memory, and philosophy.

This indicates that philosophical inquiry, as lived experience, is essentially relational. There is always a connection between the world of subjects and objects. These relationships cannot be removed. They affect the inquiry at hand. Changing relationships change aspects of the inquiry.

Philosophy as a lived experience is an embodied inquiry. There can be no abstraction away from the body into mere consciousness or spirit. The two realms are not dueling spaces of human existence. They are always within one another.

To undertake philosophical inquiry, then, is to uncover embodiment, relationship, and context. Beauvoir is deeply engaged in challenging ontological positions of freedom with ethical positions of freedom hinging on establishing values that are relative aspects of lived experience. This indicates a significant move away from traditional existential philosophy. Although Beauvoir shows her predilection, considering philosophical points at which choice, freedom, and the individual collide within experience, she challenges the individualized, amoral perspectives on which living authentically is conditioned.

For the most part, Beauvoir recognizes the existential position of ‘bad faith’ in which most humans find themselves. Yet in the time of her writing *The Second Sex* her position is quite different from those traditional existentialist positions.¹⁰ She challenges the condition of authenticity by emphasizing that the body, interpersonal relationships, and the constrictions of social orders act on possible freedom. She argues that one’s situation and lived experience are central to the ability to practice a project of freedom. She quite rightly slices through the tension

¹⁰ Kruks, Sonia, “Simone de Beauvoir: Teaching Sartre About Freedom,” In *Feminist Interpretations of Simone de Beauvoir*, ed. Margaret A. Simons, 79-95. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995. Though she resisted efforts to call herself a philosopher, most Beauvoir scholars consider her a philosopher *par excellence*, someone to whom Sartre was seriously indebted.

found between being and freedom.¹¹ For Beauvoir, freedom is the activity of living itself, it is never completed.

What Beauvoir realizes is that existential practices of ‘freedom of choice’ lead to anguish. Because one has separated material being from conscious being, the individual will recognize that he is alone in the world. Thus, one is living without or beyond ethics and values. More importantly, others are not seen as free selves. Thus no real relationship of freedom is created. Most men in this situation become serious and try to recover this void or gap by grasping at things *pour-soi* (for itself).¹² In a sense, he has forgotten that one lives within situation, within relation, and with others. His seriousness is not a tone nor is it a measure of intellect or gravitas. Man’s seriousness becomes the articulation of being without possibility. He does not live free for he lives only as measured by the value of others.

Beauvoir argues that there is no real freedom in this serious choice. Freedom can only come from disclosure of self-as-free: describing and inquiring into ones’ lived experience. To engage in a project of freedom is not to choose one way of life over another; it is to find possibility within one’s life as situated. It is to practice freedom in an impossibly un-free space of a particular time, history, and context. It is to practice freedom in relation.¹³

¹¹ Bauer, Nancy, *Simone de Beauvoir, Philosophy, & Feminism*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2001. Bauer discusses some of the Hegelian background to *The Second Sex* and argues masterfully that this reflects Beauvoir’s philosophical project to understand the woman/man relationship as something different than the master/slave dialectic, problematizing what it means to see Woman as Other rather than other, and to see another as other is to recognize that she or he is also a life project of freedom.

¹² Beauvoir, Simone, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Webster University Philosophy Department, ed. Dawn Gaitis. 2006. <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/ethics/de-beauvoir/ambiguity/>

¹³ Holveck, Elaine, *Simone de Beauvoir’s Philosophy of Lived Experience: Literature and Metaphysics*, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002, 92. “Freedom arises in human action; hence, freedom is always situated, placed, embodied. Beauvoir develops this position as a criticism of [Immanuel] Kant, whose ethics ‘is at the origin of all ethics of autonomy.’”

This disclosure of freedom is possible because human life encapsulates facts as well as transcendence. Facticity is the stuff of human existence: race, class, geographical location, and familial relationships. Transcendence goes beyond facticity, for it is the engagement of self to the world –the self who finds meaning. Beauvoir does not see a contradiction in recognizing that there is both facticity and transcendence, instead she understands this as a felt ambiguity of human existence. Instead of ignoring one aspect of humanness over another, Beauvoir situates herself to embrace both the body and the spirit within human experience. Recognizing this in others provides a rich ethical and moral foundation.

Beauvoir is arguing that lived experience is not simply a matter of an individual living, it shows the bounds and confines of the free subject.¹⁴ To inquire into an experience as lived experience is to embrace the ambiguity. Ambiguity does not imply an inability to act in the world. Ambiguity implies that there are multiplicities and complexities at play in every possibility.¹⁵

To practice disclosure as a practice of freedom is to make one's life a project of freedom. Importantly, this practice fosters disclosure in others. The argument could be stated as such: If I desire to be disclosed, I am anxious and nauseous, but if I disclose freedom and freedom in

¹⁴ Simons, Margaret. *Feminist Interpretations of Simone de Beauvoir*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995, 84. Simons scholarship supports this claim.

¹⁵ Langer, Margaret, "Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty on Ambiguity," In *The Cambridge Companion to Simone de Beauvoir*, ed. Claudia Card, 87-106, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 94-95. Langer points out that Beauvoir does not successfully make disclosure a positive aspect of lived ambiguity, as she cannot divorce herself from a Sartrean mode of thinking, which places disclosure as an uprooting rather than as a rooting of positive.

others, then I live ethically well.¹⁶ Philosophical inquiry of freedom is best understood as inquiry into actual lived experience *with others*.

Moral choices then must advance freedom in others and see others as transcendent, for-themselves. To think as subjects related to the world, caught in the ambiguity of relations with others, persons must risk the self with others.¹⁷ In seeing this one can disclose, or reveal, value in human beings and actions. To experience is to live within this ambiguity of disclosure even while finding joy in the activity, which involves complete immersion and embodiment.¹⁸

Not only is one committed to living out the project of freedom but also one commits to inquire within the experience. This suffering or undergoing is essential to understanding Beauvoir's concept of philosophy as lived experience.¹⁹ Here, I am not juxtaposing suffering with an experience devoid of pain; rather, it is juxtaposed to an incomplete experience. Thus, inquiry into the experience of childhood is not necessarily painful (nor must experience *qua* experience be painful), but, as we shall see with Beauvoir's writing, there is an immersive quality into the things (or doings) of lived experience.

For Beauvoir, a way to live well despite this anguish and suffering is to feel the ambiguity, the multiplicity, the overwhelming number of possibilities, and infinite relations at each moment.

¹⁶ Bergoffen, Deborah, *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Gendered Phenomenologies, Erotic Generosities*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997, 99.

¹⁷ Bauer, Simone de Beauvoir, 236.

¹⁸ Pamerleau, William C, "Making a Meaningful Life: Rereading Beauvoir," *Philosophy in the Contemporary World* 6, no. 3/4 (1999): 79-83.

¹⁹ Benoist, Jocelyn. "A Phenomenology or Pragmatism?" in *Pragmatism: Critical Concepts in Philosophy, Vol. 2*, edited by Russell B. Goodman, 89–112. London and New York: Routledge, 2005. Like John Dewey, lived experience, for Beauvoir, tells us something about the relational, embodied, and temporal aspects of what it means to be a living, thinking being. In particular, the undergoing aspect—the part that feels passive—can be seen in the disclosure of the lived experience of childhood. Research connecting Beauvoir to Dewey is so rare as to be nonexistent in the educational field; the theoretical connections lie in readings of pragmatism and phenomenology.

One way to do so is to disclose oneself through erotic love.²⁰ Another way is writing in modes other than the philosophical essay—the novel, the memoir, and the autobiography. Each of these modes of writing becomes a way to live philosophy or to inquire into a philosophy of lived experience.

To disclose lived experience is both necessary and impossible. Lived experience is always caught between self as being (the material body and time) and the conscious self that is moving beyond the experience at hand. For Beauvoir, writing assists in disclosing one's transcendence as well as one's facticity.²¹ These descriptions evoke the truth of what it means to be alive. Thus, even though there is such a thing as primary experience, the subject who undergoes such experience is only conscious of this truth in the unveiling of that experience in the future.²² As Scholz and Musset find:

Thus, in both *The Second Sex* and *The Mandarins*, Beauvoir moves away from what she later critically characterized as the abstractness of her early moral period. She puts into question her earlier characterization of the self as always free to make its own choices within its situation. Instead, she develops an account in which selves make their choices not only as free affirmations of a future but also as expressions of their specific present situations—situations which are freighted by their past.²³

Scholz and others find evidence of inquiry in lived experience through two of Beauvoir's metaphysical novels, *She Came to Stay* and *The Mandarins*. Both are efforts to disclose or to

²⁰ Bauer, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 227. "Beauvoir's answer is that the erotic experience is one of those that discloses to human beings in the most poignant way the ambiguity of their condition."

²¹ Holveck, *Simone De Beauvoir*; Pilardi, *Simone De Beauvoir*; and Ursula, Tidd, *Simone de Beauvoir*. London: Reaktion Books, 2009. These scholars' numerous readings of Beauvoir's transcripts, diaries, and personal correspondence show that Beauvoir saw philosophy and literature as necessary components of one another.

²² Holveck, *Simone De Beauvoir*, 67

²³ Scholz and Musset, *The Contradictions*, 69.

practice freedom. Scholz writes, “Beauvoir’s proposal explicitly links the project of writing with freedom both for the individual writer and for others as the writer’s project discloses the world and opens up the future.”²⁴

Disclosure is a form of inquiry into experience. It is thus a reflection of experience. It is not the experience itself. For Beauvoir, the practice of disclosure is best described as a way of viewing the situated or the lived life. However, to disclose within the creative project is also an experience. The experience of being disclosed and the act of disclosing are practices of freedom. Beauvoir sets the argument with the premise that all beings desire to make meaning from their lives and also to be meaning-makers. All persons want, in a sense, to be both author and reader.

The distinction in this project is important. Reading Beauvoir on childhood, one sees that children are well suited to the practice of freedom, even in the midst of their developing selves. However, it is the adult that is best suited to the creative project of disclosure *qua* inquiry. To disclose freedom is to take a risk, to seek an adventure on which only the adult may embark. We see that in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* particularly, Beauvoir valorizes the adult adventurer as well as the author.²⁵ However, it is within childhood experience that this adventure is first felt.

²⁴ Scholz, Sally, *On De Beauvoir*. Belmont: Wadsworth Philosophers Series, 2000, 335.

²⁵ Beauvoir, *The Ethics of*, “The artist and the writer force themselves to surmount existence in another way. They attempt to realize it as an absolute. What makes their effort genuine is that they do not propose to attain being. They distinguish themselves thereby from an engineer or a maniac. It is existence, which they are trying to pin down and make eternal. The word, the stroke, the very marble indicate the object insofar as it is an absence. Only, in the world of art the lack of being returns to the positive. Time is stopped; clear forms and finished meanings rise up.”

Beauvoir on childhood

Beauvoir's clearest inquiries of childhood are in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, *The Second Sex*, and *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*.²⁶ Each work allows Beauvoir to express certain things about childhood experience—hers personally and childhood in general. Her inquiry into childhood through lived experience makes the tension between ontological freedom and situated freedom tenable. Freedom is something developed within life. Inquiry into childhood plays a specific role in describing and inquiring into freedom developed. For Beauvoir, childhood is embodied and full of life. It is a time of color, a time when the senses rule above all else.

In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir notes that childhood is the time in which the child feels the freedom of what it means to live but lacks the responsibility to create her or his lived freedom of experience. Beauvoir situates childhood as both immanent freedom and abject seriousness. It is difficult to tell from her description whether or not children are more immanent than others, or if childhood differs from slavery, or if there is a specific stage at which childhood turns from a lack of freedom to a positive creation of freedom.

Following this reading of *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, many Beauvoir scholars argue that childhood is a time of false freedom.²⁷ This implies an impossible situation, though, for it makes it impossible for any child to recover from the apparent lack of responsibility and freedom in her or his life. At some moment in the future, these irresponsible, completely serious, and un-free

²⁶ Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, trans James Kirkup, Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1959. Beauvoir's first experience with death as a child is an experience where her childhood nurse, Louise, lost a young boy, and Beauvoir was deeply affected by the experience.

²⁷ Bergoffen, Deborah, "Simone de Beauvoir," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2010 Edition)*, last modified August 16, 2010. <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2010/entries/beauvoir/>; And Tidd, Ursula. *Simone de Beauvoir: Gender and Testimony*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. Tidd and Bergoffen make insightful points; however, they miss the complexity that Beauvoir's accomplishes within her autobiography and in the *Second Sex*.

children will have a crisis in adolescence, recognizing that they have been living a life of false freedom. How are these adolescents to recognize something that, as of yet, has not yet existed in life experience?

Scholz argues that there are two readings of childhood that appear in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*: one, that childhood is a time of false freedom, and two, that the child is also “inherent transcendence.”²⁸ Beauvoir does not only describe childhood by way of responsibility amidst a false freedom. She also describes childhood as a time of actual freedom. The child is utter joy.²⁹ In Scholz’s reading, childhood is both a situation of false freedom and also an ontologically free space. Children are embodied and situated. Moreover, the child lacks knowledge and depends completely upon the authority figures that surround, nurture, and cherish him or her. Yet, within this facticity, the child is also a person in him- or herself; he or she is transcendent as only beings with free will and consciousness can be.

Beauvoir is not afraid of the contradictions that might appear between a developing being and the necessary need for authority or guidance. She sets forth a challenge: to see that the child, even in a contradictory or ambiguous space, can move toward freedom. One might read this as an educative argument for teaching children how to pursue freedom within childhood. Beauvoir writes,

To treat him as a child is not to bar him from the future but to open it to him; he needs to be taken in hand, he invites authority, it is the form which the resistance of activity, through which all liberation is brought about, takes for

²⁸ Scholz, Sally, “That All Children Should Be Free: Beauvoir, Rousseau, and Childhood,” *Hypatia* 25 no. 2, (2010): 401-402.

²⁹ Beauvoir, *The Ethics*.

him. And on the other hand, even in this situation the child has a right to his freedom and must be respected as a human person.³⁰

Scholz argues that Beauvoir believes childhood is the time of apprenticeship to either freedom *or* oppression. Children see and feel freedom. They can disclose the world around them, though this is a difficult task that they are often denied time or space to attempt.³¹ As Scholz sees Beauvoir arguing,

Transcendence, on the other hand, is disclosure of the world, i.e., meaning does not impose itself on the consciousness of a passive subject, a free subject effects the disclosure of meaning in his or her project. The wish for the disclosure of the world is the same as asserting oneself as freedom.³²

For Scholz, what other readers miss in Beauvoir's argument is that the child is free *qua* existence and as a person. That is, it is possible for others to recognize the child's ontological freedom. In the recognition of this freedom, others can disclose the child's development towards freedom. Scholz writes,

When a child is able to unfold his or her freedom in freedom, accompanied by rather than limited by an adult who discloses freedom to the child, then that child will exercise the capacity for transcendence. But if a child is tutored instead in being and encouraged to fold himself or herself into the serious, then he or she is inhibited from achieving subjectivity.³³

Beauvoir's apprenticeship to freedom draws on a reading of child development that reflects an inheritance from Rousseau's romantic image of the child. Beauvoir sees that freedom to

³⁰ Beauvoir, *The Ethics*.

³¹ By authoring her own childhood Beauvoir is disclosing being as the disclosure of being in the world, to the world. Writing an autobiography does not abstractly describe childhood; rather, it entails that childhood is again experienced with others, the readers. This is why, perhaps, the autobiography, though less detailed than the diary, offers the best instance of Beauvoir on an inquiry of childhood. The intention of it having to be read by others ensures that it is directed toward disclosing being in its ambiguity rather than pure desire. It is disclosure in action.

³² Scholz, "That all children should," 336.

³³ Scholz, "That all children should," 406.

choose and to make decisions develops throughout one's life, culminating (as for Rousseau) in the age of adolescence. Thus, for Beauvoir, childhood (the experience of it) is the education that either prepares him or her to desire "freedom or to desire being."³⁴ Beauvoir resolves the dilemma of development by recognizing that children are inherently transcendent and thus have ontological freedom even within their immanence. The situation of freedom is already present for the child; it is something that the child learns to recognize. This is why, as an adolescent, it is possible to choose freedom, for it is always present to the child as possibility.³⁵

Scholz's essay is elucidatory. It allows the multiple accounts of childhood seen in Beauvoir's theoretical work, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. Her work on *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, as well as Beauvoir's developmental concept of childhood, shows that the project of freedom is grounded in the lived experience of childhood.³⁶ Therefore, if we do not consider freedom within the entirety of life—if we only focus on freeing adults from oppression—we may miss opportunities to teach how to recognize freedom.

Rather than overcoming social structures, it is within education that we should focus. Scholtz suggests we "cultivate new relations to children that encourage them to embrace their possibilities rather than solidify an oppressed identity."³⁷ What would it mean to apprentice children to freedom rather than to the life of the serious?

³⁴ Scholz, "That all children should," 404.

³⁵ This is why the child is different than either slave or a woman. A child retains possibility and is dependent naturally, whereas the slave and the woman (particularly in a patriarchic) are within an unnatural situation.

³⁶ Langer, "Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty on Ambiguity, Langer makes a similar point.

³⁷ Scholz, "That all children should," 406.

To consider that question, I turn to Beauvoir's response in her autobiography, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*. Beauvoir's work in *Memoirs* is her inquiry with childhood, a time where, as Scholz maintains, one's relationship to freedom implies one's ability to live a free life later. This inquiry takes two tracks, each dependant on the other. First, Beauvoir is engaged in describing her own apprenticeship to freedom against the failure of her best friend (Zaza) to realize this freedom. Secondly, Beauvoir is setting out a relationship to childhood that is based on freedom. She answers the question that Scholz lays out ("what are these new relations to the child?") by forging a relationship with herself as child, as author. Beauvoir inquires into a childhood to show how great an effort it is to develop freely in the world.³⁸ It is a practice of disclosure. Beauvoir's memoir portrays the great work that is the time of childhood of practicing, apprenticing, and experiencing freedom in the world.³⁹

By telling the story of her apprenticeship, Beauvoir discloses the transcendent and embodied freedom of childhood. She outlines ways of seeing and describing freedom in childhood. Here

³⁸ Fricker, Miranda. "Life-story in Beauvoir's memoirs." In *The Cambridge Companion to Simone de Beauvoir*, edited by Claudia Card, 208-227. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 225, "To appreciate this multifaceted ambiguity, we must abandon an 'objective' thinking, which is an ethical attitude toward others—the possibility of solidarity with them—is intimately connected with the disintegration of the self. This, for instance, is how she describes the transformation that a sudden awareness of history caused her to undergo. . . . That the establishment of solidarity with past selves through the publicity of memoir is a fundamental motivation for Beauvoir's story is perhaps most obvious in her attitude toward the child she once was. . . . *Memoirs* is in this way premised upon the sort of trust that ideally attends all kind of personal disclosure, and this trust facilitates the author's solidarity with her past selves via the reader who joins the author in bearing witness."

³⁹ Fricker, "Life-Story in, 276," "Beauvoir was very careful to write her memoirs in chronological order and gives the reason in a later volume, *Force of Circumstance*. "Why have I subjected myself to chronological order instead of choosing some other construction? I have pondered this matter, and I have hesitated. But what counts above all in my life is that time goes by; I grow older, the world changes, my relation with it varies; to show the transformations, the ripenings, the irreversible deteriorations of others and of myself—nothing is more important to me than that. And that obliges me to follow obediently the thread the years have unwound."

she finds that the project of freedom is embodied or situated, ambiguous, and relational.⁴⁰

Moreover, to take, as the title of this chapter says, childhood not so seriously, is to find the real joy in the suffering necessary for this freedom. It is to challenge the serious man (or woman) to find the anguish in his (or her) joyful childhood, thus revealing the project of joyful and unserious freedom in his (or her) adult life.

Beauvoir writes that those who most often feel what it means to be in the world are children. The model of freedom that Beauvoir apprentices herself to as a child is not unanchored freedom; it is an astonished freedom at finding oneself able to be free and joyful while at the same time recognizing that one is, yes, a being, who is caught up in the world:

Every human being possesses a metaphysical signification beyond its psychological and social elements since through each event, man is always entirely engaged in the entire world; and surely through each event, man is always entirely engaged in the entire world; and surely there is no one to whom this meaning has not been disclosed at some time in his life. In particular, it often happens that children, who are not yet anchored in their little corner of the universe, experience with astonishment their “Being-in-the-world” as they experience their bodies.⁴¹

Here Beauvoir notes the aspects of lived experience that she values as indicators of seeking and seeing freedom. Childhood is astonished, it is joyful, and it is surprised at seeing itself so unmoored from adult life. In particular, we find that childhood is an experience that is free, ambiguous, embodied, and particular. Beauvoir writes in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*,

⁴⁰ Scholz, “That all children should,” and Simons, *Feminist Interpretations of*.” Scholz looks at Simon’s interviews with Beauvoir. For Beauvoir, it would seem that childhood is so significant as to point to the fact that if one’s childhood is not itself a project of freedom, there might not be hope for an adult project of freedom that is ethical. This is doubly significant for those enmeshed in the educational question.

⁴¹ Beauvoir, Simone, “Literature and Metaphysics.” In *Simone de Beauvoir, Philosophical Writings*, ed. Margaret A. Simons. Trans. Veronique Zaytzeff and Frederick M. Morrison Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004, 273.

Normally the child escapes the anguish of freedom. He can, if he likes, be recalcitrant, lazy; his whims and his faults concern only him. They do not weigh upon the earth. They cannot make a dent in the serene order of a world which existed before him, without him, where he is in a state of security by virtue of his very insignificance. He can do with impunity whatever he likes. He knows that nothing can ever happen through him; everything is already given; his acts engage nothing, not even himself.⁴²

Freedom from responsibility is a kind of false freedom, for it implies that children have no activity in the world and cannot affect the world. This is a kind of freedom that follows conventional descriptions and treatment of children. A freedom whereby children are not granted rights, etc. Children are given the values and the boundaries of their world. For the most part they exist happily within those boundaries. This, as previously noted, seems to indicate that children have no notion of the life project of freedom—that they, in fact, are not free.

Yet, Beauvoir challenges conventional thinking by recognizing also in childhood a transcendent or ontological freedom. Ontological freedom is the freedom to be active and intentional. Beauvoir accords these modes of freedom to childhood in two ways. First, in the theme of childhood displeasure or unhappiness in childhood that resonates throughout the memoir. The child feels the inconsistency between her supposed freedom and lack of responsibility. Second, in the actions of the child reconciling this unhappiness by acting towards the future. Both show moments where the dual nature of childhood freedom is apparent. When Beauvoir describes these scenes, she secures a child's ontological freedom—that is, a child that both thinks and feels as conscious being.⁴³

⁴² Beauvoir, *Ethics*.

⁴³ I have chosen throughout this section to refer to the child as female. This is Beauvoir's autobiography and I think this aligns the text with the argument.

I have chosen two passages from the memoirs to help elucidate these modes of freedom in childhood. The first puts Beauvoir around the age of three or four and describes horrible temper tantrums that seemed to wreak havoc in the household. The second provides a way to understand how even a young child may act towards the future to recover her ontological freedom. In this first passage she tries to give a motivation for having horrible rages.

Why must I stop playing just at that particular moment? I seemed to be confronted everywhere by force, never by necessity. At the root of these implacable laws, that lay as heavily as lead upon my spirit, I glimpsed a sickening void: this was the pit I used to plunge into, my whole being racked with screams of rage.⁴⁴

Beauvoir recognizes the arbitrary nature of laws over persons, particularly children. She experiences a lack of choice and freedom, accepting values other than freedom as a young child. Tellingly, at every turn, external forces confront her body as well as her spirit. Were children mere immanent beings, material objects, only facticity, then force would be ample motivation to do anything. The rage felt by Beauvoir within her childhood indicates a spirit that can be weighed heavily upon. Conscious beings act due to internal necessity; they are propelled forward to act, not pulled down upon by external force. This acknowledgement discloses that childhood is actually an experience that persons—wholly ontologically free persons—experience.

Yet, this felt experience is not enough to ensure that a child can be free. She continues,

On the whole, my rages were adequate compensation for the arbitrary nature of the laws that bound me; they saved me from brooding in silent rancor. And I never seriously called authority in question. The conduct of adults only seemed to me to be suspect in so far as it took advantage of my youthful state: this is

⁴⁴ Beauvoir, *Memoirs*, 14.

what I was really revolting against. But I accepted without question the values and the principles of those around me.⁴⁵

In these moments of childhood, she is locating the child's ability, even at a young age, to see the lack of real responsibility of any choice; thus, childhood will always remain an experience of freedom's lack. Still, the rage she described indicates that children are subjects.

One of the reasons Beauvoir is interested in an ethics of freedom is that she is arguing for a way to heal the gaping wound of being—the acknowledgement that from birth on, one moves further and further from being one with the world and having to exist in relation. Children feel this in their relationship with the world, within situation: “The child concretely discovers his presence in the world, his abandonment [*délaissement*], his freedom, the opacity of things, and the resistance of foreign consciousnesses.”⁴⁶

The child first feels the suffering of embodiment and attempts to heal it. Beauvoir acknowledges her first attempts to heal early on in the memoir. She writes on her childhood desire to become a teacher: “This was the meaning behind my vocation: when I was grown up, I would take my own childhood in hand again and make of it a faultless work of art. I saw myself as the basis of my own apotheosis.”⁴⁷ She is compelled to dream of a faultless future. She compares this faultless existence to a work of art, something created, forged, molded. And this work of art will not be a mere painting but something of the divine. In her memoir she

⁴⁵ Beauvoir, *Memoirs*, 17.

⁴⁶ Beauvoir, “Literature,” 273.

⁴⁷ Beauvoir, *Memoirs*, 61.

acknowledges it is not others she will mold but herself: “And so, in the present as well as in the future, I proudly imagined myself reigning alone over my life.”⁴⁸

She then considers her and her sister’s imaginative play as they portrayed themselves as the Christian heroines “Saint Blandine, Joan of Arc, Griselda, Genevieve de Brabant”—all tragic figures who found themselves victims of males.⁴⁹ Although the move from teacher to martyr seems arbitrary, it is not. The two are obviously connected in Beauvoir’s exploration of the family’s Catholic practice. The two are also both memories about becoming perfect. In one, Beauvoir retains full perfection by perfecting others (children). In the other, Beauvoir becomes a tragic victim forced to die for the perfect values to which she holds.

If we return to the passage above, note how she writes, “proudly imagined.” This seems to indicate a false imagining. Rather than a child choosing freedom, she is a child playing a game of fantasy directed towards the future. In each becoming Beauvoir is alone in the world—perfect, beyond fault, but alone. Far from imagining herself as a free subject in the world, she plays at being a god or a godlike human.⁵⁰

This pursuit toward perfection is also an imagined necessity, for teachers and martyrs are both necessary in order to retain morals and order in a tumultuous society recovering from war. At the same time she projects toward freedom, she chooses vocations that are valued by her society—teachers and martyrs. Her childhood moments direct her toward serious projects, projects that she herself may not actually value in the future but toward which society values.

⁴⁸ Beauvoir, *Memoirs*, 61.

⁴⁹ Fricker, *Life-Story*, 214.

⁵⁰ Hewitt, Leah D. *Autobiographical Tightropes: Simone de Beauvoir, Nathalie Sarraute, Marguerite Duras, Monique Wittig, and Maryse Conde*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990. For more on these passages see Hewitt’s interpretation.

The child cannot truly understand desire toward the future as anything other than a desire toward perfection. The child has no knowledge of what to desire other than those pursuits already embraced by those in authority.

The two modes of play that we see Beauvoir embracing here (projection toward the future and projection to be “other” who is not in anguish, or caught between freedoms) are fundamentally important. She has an idea of herself as a child that is not actually free. She has to submit to the whims and the caprices of her parents, her grandparents, the schoolteachers, as well as the Catholic Church. At the same time she questions the arbitrariness of living within situation. Beauvoir is inquiring into the meaning of freedom, certainly in the child’s life but also in her own, the future self now remembering. Rather than the pursuit of the individual to become perfect—like a god—the desire now, as free adult, is to become free within the activities of life itself. In a telling sentence after these passages, Beauvoir writes,

The truth was that, separated from my family, deprived of those affections which assured me of my personal worth, cut off from the familiar routine which defined my place in the world, I no longer knew where I was, nor what my purpose was here on earth. I needed to be confined within a framework whose rigidity would justify my existence.”

She continues, “But I suffered neither bereavement nor uprooting, and that is one of the reasons why I was able to persist so long in my childish pretensions.”⁵¹ This exaggerated fantasy of freedom and necessity indicates just how devoid of transcendence childhood is for the child. She indicates through her imaginative play that freedom in her childhood does not yet exist. She is a serious child.

⁵¹ Beauvoir, *Memoirs*, 66.

The tone here in the memoir is rather difficult, for, at times, Beauvoir seems to celebrate her precociousness or to enjoy the differences that made her atypical compared to other children, but while she celebrates her individuality, it is finally evident that at this time in her life (childhood), she has little idea of what it means to actually be free. This is in part due to the fact that she is not granted much freedom. There remains the possibility through others to pursue a free project; as a child, however, others do not grant her this freedom. She feels the ambiguous freedom that is the human situation. This feeling of lived experience seems just enough to ensure that the project of freedom in adulthood remains possible. Childhood, as Beauvoir describes her experience, is an experience undergone in a dual situation of freedom. It is thus an experience of ambiguity.⁵² This is Beauvoir's response to the paradox of childhood, it holds intrinsic value at the same time that it admits control by and construction with others.

In *The Second Sex*, she notes the child's perceptions of adults: "Adults seem to him like gods, for they have the power to confer existence upon him. He feels the magic of the gaze that makes of him now a delightful little angel, now a monster."⁵³ Beauvoir writes of this gaze in the autobiography, seeking as a small girl to satisfy it in the adults around her. Her values of good and bad are seen to be absolute, for the power of the adults around her seems absolute. To be free, as a child, is to be one who has no need of the others' presence. In this way one finds meaning in what must be done or how one is to be. She writes (of her memory at age five and a half),

⁵² This does not imply relativism or subjectivism. Beauvoir remarkably holds true to an understanding that there is a universal moral imperative of freedom by which all beings are bound.

⁵³ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 269.

Until now I had been growing up on the fringe of adult life, as it were; from now on I should have my satchel, my textbooks, my exercise books, and my homework: my days and weeks would be arranged according to my own timetable; I had glimpses of a future which, instead of separating me from myself, would leave its cumulative deposits in my memory: year after year I would enrich my mind, at the same time remaining faithfully the schoolgirl whose birth I was as celebrating at this very moment.⁵⁴

At the moment of entry into the world of knowledge, she grasps at the objects of adult life (a satchel, books, homework), but she also sees that holding these objects allows her to arrange her own schedule—to choose. She continues writing that she sees more of herself in the acts of memorizing and storing knowledge, yet she ends the passage, “remaining faithfully the schoolgirl.” This is a difficult passage. Here we see Beauvoir portraying the ambiguous freedom of childhood.

There is a developmental difference between the complacent five-year-old in the passages above and the raging three-year-old who was previously examined.⁵⁵ However, I consider both passages to be about childhood that should be read together. The gaze of the adult marks both, and Beauvoir’s experience of this gaze upon the childhood body is integral to her inquiry. The gaze solidifies the reading that the child has a lack of choice both in schedules and possibilities.

Through the language of adult society and the knowledge adults share with children, children become locked into a world where becoming adult is the pursuit that children chase. And yet, Beauvoir, as a schoolgirl, takes on this language to create; she begins to use language to affect her world, to become active in her life project.

⁵⁴ Beauvoir, *Memoirs*, 44.

⁵⁵ There is a decidedly strong developmental aspect to Beauvoir’s writing. She is clear that adolescent life is marked very clearly by the ability to choose the adult project of freedom. Moreover, she is well versed in post-Freudian psychology and does not argue that adolescence is the developmental stage both for sexual and gender identity formation.

In compensation, I knew how to use language, and as it expressed the essence of things, it illuminated them for me. I had a spontaneous urge to turn everything that happened to me into a story: I used to talk freely, and loved to write. If I was describing an episode in my life in words, I felt that it was being rescued from oblivion, that it would interest others, and so be saved from extinction. I loved to make up stories, too: when they were inspired by my own experience, they seemed to justify it; in one sense they were of no use at all, but they were unique and irreplaceable, they existed, and I was proud of having snatched them out of nothingness.⁵⁶

She grapples within the seemingly oppressive and un-free situation that the child finds herself and the happiness and unhappiness this brings her. Within that same situation lies the freedom of what it will mean to make her own life project. This is the freedom of childhood. It will be the freedom of life itself; freedom that, within situation, within relationship, lies the possibility of disclosure.

When Beauvoir portrays herself as a project in certain passages she is describing herself as something that must suffer, that must undergo.⁵⁷ She is embodied—that is, she actually takes up space, she exists in a space, she can be broken in her being and reshuffled, reconsidered. But this enclosure of body and being is also what allows for freedom to exist - not in paradox but in connection. The embodiment gives rise to understanding oneself as someone who can develop freedom.

For Beauvoir, this encapsulates the deep immanence that is childhood. Children feel at home in the world (for the most part) because they are deeply connected to it. The world makes sense because they understand themselves as wholly within situation. And, if they do feel the anguish of freedom (of being at once related to the world and a subject apart from the world), this is

⁵⁶ Beauvoir, *Memoirs*, 74.

⁵⁷ Such as “a piece of art” that she can mold or of “her future students” whom she will mold.

quickly rectified by the seemingly absoluteness of values held by esteemed parents and teachers over them.

For Beauvoir, the situation of childhood is expressly embodied—it takes up space, in a time, in a place. A child is her body.⁵⁸ Much of her recounting of childhood centers on the observations gained by her intimate sensing of the world. Her world is essentially real. As a child, she touches, she smells, she sees, she tastes the world. Beauvoir has no trouble recounting a childhood that is embodied and present.

In the following passage Beauvoir expresses how food was a central concern in her life. She suffered in terms of the food that had to pass through her lips as a young child.⁵⁹ The passage begins after a short recounting of how repugnant she found most food.

On the other hand, I eagerly took advantage of that special right granted to children which permits them to think of beauty, luxury, and happiness as things that can be eaten: in the Rue Vavin, I would stand transfixed before the windows of confectioners' shops, fascinated by the luminous sparkle of candied fruits, the cloudy luster of jellies, the multicolored clusters of sour fruit drops—green, red, orange, violet: I coveted the colors themselves as much as the pleasures they promised me. Mama used to pound sugared almonds for me in a mortar and mix the crunchy powder with a yellow cream; the pink of the sweets used to shade off into exquisite nuances of color, and I would dip an eager spoon into their brilliant sunset.⁶⁰

Let me grant that, for Beauvoir, children are not simply silly fools who believe beauty can be eaten. At first one might think that Beauvoir agrees with the widely held assumption that children

⁵⁸ Readers of *The Second Sex* who sense Beauvoir's recoil against the woman's body will notice that in *Memoirs*, this recoil does not seem to be present and, in fact, she seems to celebrate child's embodiment.

⁵⁹ Tidd, Ursula. *Simone de Beauvoir: Gender and Testimony*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, 21. Beauvoir relates early on to the world through her mouth. There are numerous psychoanalytic readings of this part of the memory. Children's mouths developmentally are a complex way for children to experience the world. It is through the mouth that children are fed the life-sustaining milk that allows them to become, whether through the mother's breast or a hand holding a bottle. For more see Tidd's analysis.

⁶⁰ Beauvoir, *Memoirs*, 9.

are ignorant fools, that their lived experience is such that any wisdom they might have is to be gained in their development. But Beauvoir is sincere in her appreciation for childhood (and, I think, its wisdom).⁶¹

Beauvoir is describing here, very closely, her description of childhood that appears in *The Second Sex*:

It is in this perspective that the behavior of the child must be interpreted; in carnal form he discovers finiteness, solitude, forlorn desertion in a strange world. He endeavors to compensate for this catastrophe by projecting his existence into an image, the reality and value of which others will establish.⁶²

In her lived experience she points out how children are pushed to relate to the world through the world of objects rather than relationships. Children, in a sense, are mediated through their bodies to experience the world, and these bodies are mediated through other things. Children recognize their world through tastes, through smells, through sensations. Children are happy because they can relate through things and do not have to create free lives against the wishes of others.

Beauvoir is, in fact, asserting how a child moves through her first lived experiences. She tastes and feels them. The values of the world exist through the sensing body. As Beauvoir writes it this is a necessary aspect of a child's time. Beauvoir discloses more than the oral fixation of the infant. For Beauvoir, capturing the multiple perceptions of lived experience is essential for its

⁶¹ Moreover, I believe that she was unwavering in her conviction that childhood afforded actual rights as persons, yet she also felt there was much more choice and rationality in the adolescent than the child.

⁶² Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 269.

disclosure—for the understanding of the relationships within that experience.⁶³ Describing one's life is not merely an exercise in aesthetics.

These things are necessary because they allow a child to experience freedom within situation. This is a complicated freedom, as it is a freedom that comes within facticity. It is an important component in understanding freedom as an adult. I continue below with the rest of the paragraph.

On the evenings when my parents held parties, the drawing-room mirrors multiplied to infinity the sparklings [sic] of a crystal chandelier. Mama would take her seat at the grand piano to accompany a lady dressed in a cloud of tulle who played the violin and a cousin who performed on the cello. I would crack between my teeth the candied shell of an artificial fruit, and a burst of light would illuminate my palate with a taste of black-currant or pineapple: all the colors, all the lights were mine, the gauzy scarves, the diamonds, the laces; I held the whole party in my mouth. I was never attracted to paradises flowing with milk and honey, but I envied Hansel and Gretel their gingerbread house: if only the universe we inhabit were completely edible, I used to think, what power we would have over it! When I was grown up I wanted to crunch flowering almond trees, and take bites out of the rainbow nougat of the sunset. Against the night sky of New York, the neon signs appeared to me like giant sweetmeats and made me feel frustrated.⁶⁴

The writing in this passage highlights Beauvoir's gifts as a writer. Readers are immediately transported to a staircase balcony where a slender girl sits, watching a gay party unfold in the large parlor of her parents' house. She writes, "I held the whole party in my mouth." More precisely, the candied nut is her access to the world of the party itself. She begins to describe the party and she takes immediate possession of it. The gauzy scarves are hers. She owns the laces. When she bites down, her self "holds the whole party." Sheltered from the gaze of adults, she is

⁶³ Langer, "Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty on Ambiguity," Merleau-Ponty was an important friend and colleague.

⁶⁴ Beauvoir, *Memoirs*, 9.

free to imagine herself twirling in a dress, being greeted by guests, and joyfully swaying to parlor music. Rather than feel lonely, she is invited to the party by the crack of a shell.

When the child sees the candy as being able to hold beauty and happiness, the child incorrectly sees a relationship between self and things, whereas the more free relationship is between self and other. One cannot, as Beauvoir does as a child, sit and hold the entire party in her mouth. She cannot be merely an individual. As an adult inquiring into her childhood, with the intention of disclosing her world, she has to admit the anguish of having to contend with a world that is each and every moment an entanglement of relationships. For Beauvoir, freedom is embodied and interpersonal, and this marks its anguish, an anguish perhaps best described by a child needing to crush a candy with her teeth. If disclosure is the moment of experience as understood through freedom, then, for Beauvoir, the disclosure has to move through the relations and the relationships that compel and also arrest freedom.

In writing her autobiography she recalls her gobbling up the pretty things as a child and recognizes that her desire to do so as an adult is best served by relating to others—fostering freedom by disclosing freedom in her own lived experience, as written.

Writing and reading: Exercising a not-so-serious childhood

The conundrum explored in the beginning of this chapter, where it seems as if Beauvoir's children in her *Ethics of Ambiguity* simply wake up to pursue freedom one day, is resolved through Beauvoir's recognition that education of the world and others leads young women and young men to develop toward freedom. Beauvoir's autobiography uncovers one possible "story" of how this occurs.

In a lengthy passage in *The Second Sex* on the extreme passivity that is woman,⁶⁵ Beauvoir notes that this is a trait established early on from her childhood. She also notes that it is a circle that makes the female child unable to affirm herself as subject. She compares this with the male child and his eventual entry into a society that expects him to be a concrete project. The female child and the male child are one and the same until conflict arises between what the female child is expected to be and what the male child already is. She writes in *The Second Sex*,

Up to this time she has been an autonomous individual: now she must renounce her sovereignty. Now only is she torn, like her brothers, though more painfully, between the past and the future, but in addition a conflict breaks out between her original claim to be subject, active, free, and, on the other hand, her erotic urges and the social pressure to accept herself as passive object.⁶⁶

At a certain point in the memoirs, Beauvoir writes that she does not feel she was treated differently as a girl.

These brief impulses didn't prevent me from feeling firmly rooted in my own environment. Curious about others, I never dreamed that my fate might be different from what it was. . . . I had no brother; there were no comparisons to make which would have revealed to me that certain things were not permitted me on the grounds of my sex; I attributed the restraints that were put upon me to my age; being a child filled me with passionate resentment; my feminine gender, never.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 280. "Thus the passivity that is the essential characteristic of the 'feminine' woman is a trait that develops in her from the earliest years. But it is wrong to assert that a biological datum is concerned; it is in fact a destiny imposed upon her by her teachers and by society. . . . But what is very important is that there is no fundamental opposition between his concern for that objective figure which is his, and his will to self-realization in concrete projects. It is by doing that he creates his existence, both in one and the same action. . . . In woman, on the contrary, there is from the beginning a conflict between her autonomous existence and her objective self, her 'being the other'; she is taught that to please she must try to please, she must make herself object; she should therefore renounce her autonomy. She is treated like a live doll and is refused liberty. Thus a vicious circle is formed; for the less she exercises her freedom to understand, to grasp and discover the world about her, the less resources will she find within herself, the less will she dare to affirm herself as subject."

⁶⁶ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 336.

⁶⁷ Beauvoir, *Memoirs*, 59.

The memoirs portray that she did not feel any resentment toward being a girl-child. Her rage was directed toward force and arbitrariness, rather than gender. Beauvoir makes herself a unique female child in her memoirs, writing that the women seemed to have more power. But she is careful to reflect that the women in her life did have more power at the time of her childhood—over herself as child.

Beauvoir's treatment of the female child and male child and the adolescent in *The Second Sex* are significant. I do not find this contradictory in either work. What she lays out in *The Second Sex* is that girls and boys both are formed through their situations and their society. For the most part, boys establish in their growing up a relationship toward freedom and self-creation. Rarely do they succeed in mastering this. As Beauvoir shows in the memoirs, her father and grandfather, though grand in her eyes as a child, become serious men, loyal to France and to values not self-made but that come from society.

She writes,

With regards to the grown-ups, my experience was rather ambiguous. In certain respects Pap, Grandpapa, and my uncles appeared to me to be superior to their wives. But in my everyday life, it was Louis, mama, Grandmama, and my aunts who played the leading roles. . . . As for myself, I thought of grown-ups essentially in their relationships to childhood: from this point of view, my sex assured my pre-eminence.⁶⁸

She had no rage against being a woman because, for the child, the women held all the power that motivated the child: force. Retaining no real responsibility, the girl-child Beauvoir directed future desires toward becoming a powerful woman, because this is all she can imagine.

Moreover, her key relationships, those things that establish her place in the world, are through

⁶⁸ Beauvoir, *Memoirs*, 59.

relationships with women. Later on, though, the ambiguity that she describes as a young child is realized. She states that she would rather be a teacher than saddled with the responsibility of the mother or lady of the house. So, though she desires to be a woman, she desires to be a woman without children. This is significant. In fact, the last pages of the memoirs clearly state that she escaped the fate that was meant for her.

Beauvoir does not give us the values or the criteria for having known when one is free, or, for that matter, when one has lived the free life. It speaks to the utter impossibility of the task. Beauvoir wrote and spoke of the situated and experienced life to the end of her life. The task is actually uncovering always, disclosing the free project. Beauvoir's children are embodied, relational, and live (as we all do) complicated, complex lives. In the memoirs she writes that she is breaking free. The action of writing is the critical point here: Beauvoir *writes* herself free—she discloses the very questions readers must ask of her.

Beauvoir's memoirs were not complete until she had written about the death of her childhood friend, Zaza.⁶⁹ For as children, Beauvoir and Zaza, despite their caprices were very much enmeshed in a situated life. They lived in the situation of upper middle class (and for Beauvoir, working middle class) white, French, female children. Much was expected of them that they could not understand as children. They lived through a war and extreme changes in their country's global positioning and economy.

⁶⁹ Beauvoir, *Memoirs of*, 382. Unable to see her boyfriend and seen as an outcast in her family, Zaza (Simone de Beauvoir's good friend, confidant, and perhaps experimental lover) falls ill. Beauvoir had not spent much time with Zaza but had only recently connected with her. Within four days of illness, Zaza dies. Beauvoir writes, "The doctors called it meningitis or encephalitis; no one was quite sure. Had it been a contagious disease, or an accident? Or had Zaza succumbed to exhaustion and anxiety?"

By closing the memoir with the story of this death Beauvoir moves away from a chronological story of her life, instead embarking on a successful ethical project. Her ability to find meaning in life despite the tragedy of her young friend's death indicates a willingness to see ambiguous freedom at play in her situation as a female child in early twentieth century France.

Zaza's death serves as the impetus to continuously inquire into how one grows toward or against freedom. Fricker argues that Zaza's death is less abstract, that it truly is a simple account of the situation that Simone and Zaza underwent "in solidarity." Fricker's emphasis is correct, for Beauvoir wants to remove herself from grand abstraction in the memoirs; she is describing lived experience, and in this case, a very personal experience.⁷⁰

Yet, Beauvoir ends her memoirs with this section, so I think it is not difficult to, at the very least, make some claims. Foremost that Beauvoir wants her reader to think long and hard about the nature of situations, responsibility, and its relationship to a life lived in freedom.

Zaza's death is not to be taken lightly, When Beauvoir writes, "and for a long time I believe that I had paid for my own freedom with her death," the reader glimpses the guilt evident in Beauvoir's feelings from Zaza's "reproachful" eyes.⁷¹ Yet, this is written in the past tense. Beauvoir has let go of this guilt because she is no longer a child devoid of responsibility. She is, rather, an adult inquiring into what it means to be responsible for freedom in a life. As a young teenage girl, Beauvoir was not responsible for Zaza's freedom. The memoirs have disclosed that both Beauvoir and Zaza existed within situation, that both had to fight "together against the revolting fate that had lain ahead of us."

⁷⁰ Fricker, "Life-Story", 213

⁷¹ Beauvoir, *Memoirs*, 382. Beauvoir writes that [Zaza has] "often appeared to me at night, her face all yellow under a pink sunbonnet, and seeming to gaze reproachfully at me."

Beauvoir's end to the memoir is neither joyful nor mournful. It is reflective.⁷² She discloses how much overcoming and suffering was experienced in her childhood. She discloses the embodiment of her childhood freedom, her lack of ability to go beyond family judgment and values, and the very real experience of existing in relation with others—with mothers, grandmothers, patronizing boyfriends, and exasperating cousins. Beauvoir is no longer responsible for the death of Zaza. Instead she is responsible for describing Zaza's death in terms of becoming and being. She is responsible for describing her relationship with Zaza and how this relationship both forged and denied aspects of the creative free life, for each.⁷³

How did Beauvoir escape Zaza's fate? Beauvoir credits much to a lucky escape of contingency. Born of wealthy parents the family became the victim of poor management of funds and stock investments and became working class. Her father encouraged reading since his daughters were going to have to support themselves. Although Beauvoir sees much in common with Zaza's childhood experience, the careful reader must note that Zaza was never forced either by teacher or circumstance to forge a resistance against the contradictions- contradictions that Beauvoir found throughout her childhood experience. Beauvoir's circumstance made escape through education and particularly reading necessary - this was a contingency that Zaza would not experience. Zaza was a reader and writer. Much of her friendship with Beauvoir was spent playing tricks and making up exquisite arguments based on ideas and books that were forbidden

⁷² Beauvoir, *The Ethics*, Beauvoir writes in her introduction to *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, "My contemplation is a rendering only because it is also a joy. I cannot appropriate the field of snow where I slide; it remains foreign, forbidden, but I delight in this very effort toward an impossible possession. I experience it as a triumph, not as a defeat."

⁷³ Pilardi, *Simone De Beauvoir*, 76. Pilardi has a similar reading: "Zaza's corpse is the foundation on which *Memoirs* was written; the corpse underwrites the autobiography, as Beauvoir's self-life-writing becomes connected to the death of the other, as all selves are radically connected to others in life, according to Beauvoirian existentialism."

to women of their class. But reading and writing were not necessary for Zaza and they were for Beauvoir. This necessity, this force made all the difference.

This chapter has argued that Beauvoir reframes the concept of childhood by including within it a complicated experience of freedom. It is a freedom that is experienced in childhood and is the freedom that all humans can have. But it is not a guaranteed freedom. Without proper education towards the freedom the child-as-adult may be unable to practice her freedom as a life project.

Struggling with Beauvoir

I conclude by asking whether or not it is possible for educators and students to develop ways to disclose freedom within the educational relationship? When childhood can be seen to be both a time of learning and development as well as possibility and transcendent freedom, the educational relationship exists not to transmit knowledge from master to pupil but to engage one another in growth and possibility. It situates the relationship to foster meaning. Furthermore, it relies on both teacher and student fostering self-expression as well as relational expression. It is perhaps to see that both educator and student are required to be less serious, engaging with one another rather than abstracted values. It is also to recognize that education is about freeing, it is concerned with oppression. It is to recognize education is itself a form and a possibility for advocacy work. And, in this reading of childhood in Beauvoir's memoir, it is a most necessary aspect of the educational relationship that includes adults and children.

Taking childhood not so seriously is to recognize that childhood is an impossible space. It is perhaps devoid of much of adult responsibility, but this does not sever it from its own ontological freedom. To take childhood not so seriously is to let go of the anxiety that surrounds this

impossibility. It is a time of learning to become free while being situated within boundaries and context. If the child truly is to become, to grow, the desire for freedom that manifests in childhood cannot be suppressed; rather, that which must be suppressed is the desire for the given, for the already chosen. Adults need to be encouraged to help children recognize themselves as free subjects who live within freedom's ambiguity, and in doing so the adult discloses their own ambiguous freedom. This is the miracle that is not perfect but it is true.⁷⁴

Beauvoir considers the escape of her fate a miracle. Somehow she change course through her education and the forces of her circumstance. Beauvoir questions the possibility of ever really cultivating freedom in human life, placing much of the emphasis on luck and circumstance. Yet, Virginia Woolf, recognizing a similar concern with freedom as well as resignation to fate see great import in understanding the unusual value of friendship to and in childhood. For Woolf, there is a freedom that comes from being with others. As with Beauvoir, it is an unusual kind of freedom; certainly both childhood and friendship come with obligations that make unlimited freedom-from, impossible. But both childhood and friendship allow for a freedom-to that becomes increasingly important to living in an impossibly difficult world. Moreover, like Beauvoir, Woolf indicates that writing and reading are best practices to considering the complexities of childhood.

⁷⁴ Beauvoir, Simone. *Diary of a Philosophy Student: Volume 1, 1926-27*. Edited by Barbara Klaw, Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir, Margaret A. Simons, and Marybeth Timmermann. Translated by Barbara Klaw. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006, 188. "During one brief half-hour, I sobbed with such immense happiness that one life would not suffice to exclaim it. At the end, I did not know if it was truly joy or nerves or sorrow. That's how happiness is: tears that flow indefinitely, closed eyes that see all of life, and an ineffable blossoming as I knelt in the church. And tell oneself afterwards, this is my life and mine alone, this is really happening to me, it so very wonderful! And yet it's true. Oh, it's marvelous to be eighteen and to have such capacity for joy and to anticipate as possible, as certain a future whose splendor makes me feel faint. Miracle of living!"

Reading Woolf's *The Waves*: Finding drops of childhood

Perhaps the quickest way to understand the elements of what a novelist is doing is not to read, but to write; to make your own experiment with the dangers and difficulties of words. Recall, then, some event that has left a distinct impression on you –how at the corner of the street, perhaps, you passed two people talking. A tree shook; an electric light danced; the tone of the talk was comic, but also tragic; a whole vision, an entire conception seemed contained in that moment.¹

Nearly a century ago Virginia Woolf lived in a society that was inundated with children. Children and their ‘things’ seemed to be everywhere.² Ideals of the romantic age had begun to shape childhood as a time of innocence and pleasure.³ This was the “age of the child” –the moment in history where childhood was seen as an integral aspect of development deserving its own focus.⁴ Though Woolf wrote during this ‘age of the child’ research on Woolf’s concern with childhood has not been well documented (quite the contrary to Woolf’s writing on the place of ‘woman’ within society, widely addressed in Woolf studies as well as the field of philosophy and

¹ Woolf, Virginia, *The Common Reader*, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company: 1925, 283.

² Frost, Ginger, *Victorian Childhoods*, Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2009.

³ Jordan, Thomas E, *Victorian Childhood Themes and Variations*, Albany: State University of New York Press. 1987. Horn, P, *The Victorian Town Child*, Phoenix Mill: Sutton Publishing. 1997. Children’s literature, toys, and games gained a foothold in the new middle class economies. Child reformers were successful in passing several statutes on child labor and education. However, steeped in the midst of the Industrial Revolution these reforms were often inadequate and not well considered by the general public. Children often had to work to support large families and movement towards urban settings gave rise to higher infant and child mortality rates.

⁴ Macleod, David, *The Age of the Child: Children in America, 1890-1920*, New York: Twayne Publishers. 1998. The movements during this time of history would help forge the field of developmental psychology, early childhood pedagogy, the formation of kindergartens, and move reformers to create child-labor laws.

education.)⁵⁶ Yet, the 'age of the child' certainly influenced Woolf. It is apparent in her writings - Woolf's later novels, *The Years*, *To the Lighthouse*, *Orlando*, and *The Waves*, stand out since they are filled with children, their childhood, and the relationship of each to society. This chapter concentrates on a reading of *The Waves* in order to highlight the complexity of childhood in Woolf's works. The descriptions challenge conventional ideas, prevalent in her time and continuing through the modern era.

In modern Western society childhood is often considered outside of time, outside of a place. It is a time of innocence. Childhood is asexual. It is a place of pleasure, without pain. Children are considered circular and emotional thinkers; they cannot consider logic, time, or causality.

Against these readings Woolf locates a childhood that is intimately social and filled with interaction. While Woolf does recognize childhood's developmental aspects and its physical and mental differences from adulthood, she challenges linear development, using the novel to move her readers through strategies of memory and repetition.⁷ She portrays children as having a rich

⁵ Fernald, Anne E, *Virginia Woolf: Feminism and The Reader*, Gordonsville: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. Victorian life as experienced by Virginia Woolf was not an easy time. She experienced the trauma of living within a nation at war. And she saw how the public world influences the experiences and possibilities of the private world. Although women gathered in salons and (if upper class) received education, public participation in public life was a succession of barriers.

⁶ Applebaum, Barbara, "On Good Authority or is Feminist Authority an Oxymoron?" *PES Yearbook*, (1999). <http://ojs.ed.uiuc.edu/index.php/pes/issue/view/19>

Sichel, Betty, "Education and Thought in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*," *PES Yearbook*. (1992). http://web.archive.org/web/20060504112443/http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/EPS/PES-Yearbook/92_docs/92contents.html.

Haroutunioan-Gordan, Sophie, "Men and Women: Ball-in-Socket Story?" *PES Yearbook*. (1992). http://web.archive.org/web/20060504112443/http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/EPS/PES-Yearbook/92_docs/92contents.html.

Gregoriou, Zelia. "Reading Phaedrus Like a Girl: Misfires and Rhizomes in Reading Performance," *PES Yearbook*, (1996). http://web.archive.org/web/20060504113243/http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/EPS/PES-Yearbook/96_docs/96contents.html.

The field has long read the novels and works of Virginia Woolf in order to uncover new understandings of education particularly in regards to gender and education. Much of this work has focused on Woolf's well-known works: *To the Light House*, *Orlando*, *Three Guineas*, and *A Room of One's Own*.

⁷ Dick, Susan, "Literary Realism in Mrs. Dalloway, *To the Lighthouse*, *Orlando* and *The Waves*." In *Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*, ed. Susan Roe and Susan Sellars, 50-71. Cambridge, London, 2010, 66, "Memory again plays a large part in the narrative, for the speakers frequently recall events in their lives, but the narration itself moves forward in a continuous present."

and complex aspect of personhood. In her narrative, Woolf paints then a childhood as a time of deep feelings and great knowledge. Children are engaged in figuring out its place in society. Childhood involves critique and logic. It involves loss and trauma. Childhood is gendered and sexual. It is filled with love, desire, and friendship.

In this chapter I will reconsider the marked separation of childhood from adult society, directly engaging the challenge that Woolf's descriptions of childhood make to the twenty-first century. For Woolf, childhood is always caught up, being inserted into the world, time, and history. Woolf reconnects childhood to wider society. The small droplets of affect made by individual childhoods in a community manifest connections between persons. As such, she dismantles the separation so often caused by conventional views of childhood. It is these connections that offer Woolf and her readers hope for marginalized subjects of Western civilization, such as women and the children they bear.⁸

Making sense of a play-poem ⁹

The Waves was first published in 1931. In her diaries Woolf refers to it as a 'play-poem'.¹⁰

The novel consists of narrative sections, segmented by interludes, each describing a shoreline passing from sunrise to sunset. There are seven main characters (Louis, Neville, Bernard, Susan, Jinny, Rhoda and Percival). The novel begins with the characters as children and follows them

⁸ Warner, Eric, *Virginia Woolf: The Waves*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, 110. "Virginia Woolf" novels deal with a 'limited social milieu, and betray a lack of imaginative reach over the classes outside her own experience.'" Critique is leveled against Woolf's lack of insight into how race and class separated the experience of both genders.

⁹ Warner, Virginia Woolf's, 108. My goal in reading *The Waves* on childhood is not to formulate a complete reading or interpretation of the novel but to highlight the inquiry of childhood exercised in the novel.

¹⁰ Warner, "Virginia Woolfs." See also Briggs, Julia. The novels of the 1930's and the impact of history pp. 72-90 In *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*. Ed. Sue Roe and Susan Sellers, Cambridge University Press. London. 2010.

through old age. Six characters speak in monologues, often about each other and their environment. Each character speaks in a distinct voice, with a distinct personality.¹¹ Percival, the seventh character, never speaks and is only spoken about.

Although Woolf addresses the inner life of her characters (and much of the work indicates autobiographical influence), *The Waves* is not a work of general or personal psychology.¹² It is not a recovery of Woolf's childhood or an address to the wounds created therein. In fact, Woolf was decidedly against using Freudian psychology in her work.¹³ The novel is a description of the existential aspects of childhood and the continued influence on stages within human life.

At its heart *The Waves* is a story about growing up – in personal life and society -amidst the harsh effects of war. Woolf connects seven friends and explores the interactions between them, particularly those founded in the complexities of childhood.

To be sure, making sense of the world or of life does not seem to be the mission of *The Waves*. It becomes apparent, unlike a typical coming of age story, that these characters will not or cannot make sense of the war's effects on the world. Briggs' comment on the children of Woolf's *The Years*, reflects similarly on the children of *The Waves*:

These are the voices of the next generation, the children who, in a world of social justice, should inherit the earth. Though their upper-middle-class audience listens attentively –and we as readers mentally listen to the syllables as

¹¹ Warner, "Virginia Woolf's." And Briggs, Julia, "The Novels of." And McConnell, Frank. (53-65). "Death Among the Apple Tree, *The Waves*, and the World of Things." 53-65. Ed. Bloom, Harold. *Virginia Woolf*. Chelsea House Publishers, New York. 1986. There is great debate in the field of literary criticism about just what or whom the distinct characters stand for in the novel.

¹² Briggs, Julia, *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life*, Harcourt Press. 2005.

¹³ Nicolson, Nigel and Trautmann, JoAnn, eds. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*. London: Hogarth Press. 1975, 36. "I have not studied Dr Freud or any psychoanalyst – indeed I think I have never read any of their books: my knowledge is merely from superficial talk. Therefore any use of their methods must be instinctive."

they are written on the page- they can make no more sense than we can of what they hear.¹⁴

The reader of *The Waves* must remain vigilant, like children, to see the world for those things that can be sensed, or seen. There is no way that any person, adult or child, can make sense of Percival dying in war, why Rhoda commits suicide, why Susan both hates and loves her life and why a man might be found dead among beautiful apple trees.¹⁵

Life's particular, peculiar, and ordinary occurrences are an important part of Woolf's method. In *The Waves*, the seven children go to elementary school. They find themselves separated by sex and class. Marriage and careers play a central role as do creation of families, old age and death. The simplicity of the voices and the present verb tense of their monologues helps the reader pay attention to the particular moments of each character.¹⁶ Lorraine Sim writes on Woolf's method:

Woolf's preoccupation with the ordinary signals her keen interest in things (material objects both natural and human-made), in addition to daily experiences and behaviors. Also the everyday implies a degree of repetition and, potential, monotony which is not an implicitly aspect of the ordinary. Something can be ordinary without being everyday.¹⁷

Noting how Woolf crafts the ordinary to make the reader pay attention to the complexity of human life, Maxine Greene writes that Woolf's method contains a 'shock of awareness'¹⁸ To shock the reader with the ordinary means to see and write so that the book's scenes - wallpaper

¹⁴ Briggs, "Virginia Woolf, the novels," 84.

¹⁵ Woolf, *The Waves*, 211, 288, 15, 24.

¹⁶ Briggs, Julia, *Reading Virginia Woolf*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2006.

¹⁷ Sim, Lorraine, *Virginia Woolf and the Patterns of Ordinary Experience*, Ashgate Publishing Group, Farnham, 2010, 2.

¹⁸ Greene, Maxine, "The Arches of Experience," in *International Handbook of Research in Arts Education*, ed. L. Bresler, 657-662, 2007, 657.

hung on wall, tables set with flowers, or the way people move across a street in a busy town - give meaning to human existence.

Woolf's descriptions of the ordinary make the reader pay greater attention to the bureaucratic forces, overarchingly male, threatening to consume society. She invites reflection on the small, the particular things of a life, foremost childhood, which is particular to all.

The act of description is a critical component in Woolf's narrative. Description bolsters the social world rather than the historical world, allowing those persons without great value in history to become valuable.

Descriptions of childhood in *The Waves*

In this section I read passages from Woolf's *Waves* to highlight her unconventional descriptions of childhood. I begin by highlighting the embodied and sensual experience of childhood. This experience allows childhood to retain a robust knowledge. It means that children are always engaged in figuring out their place in the world, even as they play. I move to explore how Woolf crafts a childhood that is not natural but is intimately connected with the social world. For Woolf, childhood is deeply affected by social constructs such as gender and education. Finally, I highlight that childhood is an experience of human ambiguity. Thus, childhood is filled with the complexity and chaos that is felt across human life.

The Waves begins by describing sunlight, slowly revealing the world piece by piece in the early morning.¹⁹ Woolf parallels this movement with the first phrases from her characters. Woolf's small, short, sentences reveal the children's environment. The children speak: "I see a

¹⁹ Woolf uses the rising and setting of the sun at each chapter's beginning to metaphorically allude to the stages of the character's lives. The novel ends, as do all days and lives, in darkness.

ring...I hear a sound...I hear something stamping...A caterpillar is curled...Stones are cold to my feet...The back of my hand burns.”²⁰ This language is poetic in its rhythm and reflective in its tone. It is descriptive language.²¹ While the children describe the world, they do more than simply notice it, their language reveals them as actors inserted in their world. One might say that they read the world upon themselves. Each new sentence opens the children up to the world. By seeing the world they then make meaning and act.

In these first passages the children articulate the complexity of bodies moving in the world. “Now we lie under the currant bushes and every time the breeze stirs we are mottled all over. My hand is like a snake’s skin. My knees are pink floating islands. Your face is like an apple tree netted under.”²² Here the children have described their emotion (lonely) their bodies (changing, deformed) and connection with one another (mysterious, they cannot read each other’s faces, they are shadows). The children notice how they are related to one another and the world around them.

As the children move around their gardens, at home and school, they learn to place themselves. There is a world where to be a child is not to engage in carefree play, but to work on being.

Even though these children are doing childish things (running through the woods, imagining themselves in an “Elven” kingdom, and floating flower petals in a puddle), they do not speak in

²⁰ Woolf, *The Waves*, 4.

²¹ It is also self-referential language; it is extreme in its self-consciousness. Here, Woolf is not saying that real children actually speak in such terms, rather the time of childhood, does not lack self-reflection or consciousness. Woolf explores the knowledge of childhood through a language that is reserved for the adult character, hence her challenge to reconsider childhood.

²² Woolf, *The Waves*, 15.

the sounds of childhood. They speak as individuals that we would conventionally label as 'adult'. To be sure, these are not children speaking - they represent Woolf speaking to us of a childhood that challenged Romantic ideals. The children are articulate and exceptionally reflective, their vocabulary robust.

Being nestled under currant bushes is to change kinds of embodiment. The children are able to move in and out of place and scene as they sense their environment. They become like an apple tree; the skin of their hands looks different, feels different, they become different as they are placed. Here childhood is intimately situated through the body.²³

One passage illuminates just how integral embodiment is in understanding Woolf's description of childhood. In a masterful stroke of writing, Woolf makes the readers view a private moment of boyhood while Louis attempts to hide from the reader and the other children.²⁴ Louis does not want to be seen, he wants to melt into the leaves and also his desires. In this passage Woolf makes the child sexual by connecting the child's body to the natural/reproductive world.

My roots go down to the depths of the world, through earth dry with brick, and damp earth, through veins of lead and silver. I am all fiber . . . Oh, Lord, let them pass. Lord, let them lay their butterflies on a pocket-handkerchief on the gravel. Let them count out their tortoise-shells, their red admirals and cabbage whites. But let me be unseen.²⁵

²³ Hussey, Mark, *The Singing of the Real World. The Philosophy of Virginia Woolf's fiction*, Ohio State University Press, Columbus. 1986, 12-20.

²⁴ Van Manen, Max, *Childhood's Secrets: Intimacy, Privacy, and the Self Reconsidered*, New York: Teachers College Press. 1996.

²⁵ Woolf, *The Waves*, 6

Woolf's desire is not for Louis to 'master' his sexuality; it is for him to *feel* solid. It is to retain a connection to the world, one to which Louis often feels he is denied access. Here the exploration of his body allows him to know connection to the world. It is to the world itself that he wishes to be known, not with others. Veins of lead and silver are used to buy the pocket-handkerchiefs and tortoise-shell combs that the girls will use on their bodies to make Louis desire them. And all of this is what Louis does want. Yet, Louis is afraid of taking hold of this desire through mastery, rather his fantasy here is of connection—he is a fiber.

The passage is quite complex. It admits both embodiment and allows me to move to discuss the connection childhood maintains with the social world. For this 'natural' world is at the same time the world of civilization. Thus, Louis' experience of his body immediately allows him to be concerned with the social world.

Louis recognizes in the moment of hiding that he exists in the world with others, and removing oneself from this society is complicated and perhaps unwise, although not something from which he will try again and again to attempt. Louis quite quickly recognizes the full impossibility of hiding from his society. In the moment that Louis removes himself Jinny spies him. Louis experiences trauma while expressing his sexuality through his reproductive body. Jinny's gaze, as female, challenges Louis' ability to remain within his private world. In a gendered turn Woolf has placed Jinny (female) as the public eye to which Louis (male) must adhere. To be unseen and connected is impossible. Woolf writes his moment down and shares it with her readers.

I think it is also possible to read here that Louis' exposure of his male body is an expression of protest against the Great War. This is a theme that the novel will continue around through the, as yet untold, death of Percival.

Woolf does not mince words over the separation that children feel from the natural world - they are already a part of society. They see themselves as human -as those who always move between the natural and the social world. Susan agonizes as she compares herself to Jinny's beauty: "I am squat, Bernard, I am short. I have eyes that look close to the ground and see insects in the grass."²⁶ In her observation of this world she is already separated from the natural world. She is not the insect in the grass, she can only hide among the grasses and watch the insects pursue their bug lives.

Throughout the novel all the characters are concerned with the connections between private life and the wider public life. Thus, both as children and adults, the characters often critique society and societal forces.

For an example of how this is reflected in the novel I turn to the characters of Susan and Rhoda who both feel the agony of living in the social world, but both struggle with it in different ways. In the novel we see Susan and Rhoda living very different lives, and this difference is marked early in their young childhoods.

Susan finds respite from the trauma of inserting oneself into the world by locating herself within the earth itself; she must feel the ground beneath her. She becomes a part of the natural world for a time. In one passage, she has seen Louis and Jinny exchange a kiss, and attempts to hide her hurt feelings.

²⁶ Woolf, *The Waves*, 8.

I will take my anguish and lay it upon the roots under the beech trees. I will examine it and take it between my fingers. They will not find me. I shall eat nuts and peer for eggs through the brambles and my hair will be matted and I shall sleep under hedges and drink water from ditches and die there.”²⁷

She recovers by removing herself from society, its pressures and agony, and returns to the wild. There is a challenge here to those who remark on the naturalness of children. These children are already removed from the natural world. They are distinct from the natural world. They try, as do adults, to recover themselves by placing themselves into the natural world.²⁸

Susan as a child is the most tied to a social identity than the others. She feels that she already has her path laid out for. She will become the good wife and mother. Susan will marry a strong farmer, a good man who provides her a home. She will live connected to the earth –its seasons, its nourishment. She will also live apart from the bustle of Victorian society, traveling only to the city when it is necessary. As an adult, Susan is the archetype ‘mother-figure’. She nurtures and cares for all children. She is, however, increasingly unsatisfied with her ‘chosen’ life. By the end of the novel the overwhelming emotion from Susan is not happiness but anger.

Susan voices the concern that the path of identity is already set, already forecasted. “Yours grow full and brim and never break. But I am already set on my pursuit.”²⁹ While it is commonly thought that childhood is without care or worry about the future, Woolf situates childhood as already having been thrown into life. Choices are made in childhood that affect one’s life path.

²⁷ Woolf, *The Waves*, 7.

²⁸ Warner, *Virginia Woolf*, 108, “The mixture of analogy and opposition between nature and man is found particularly in the treatment of *The Waves* themselves, where there is an unresolved ambiguity. Are *The Waves* meant to suggest the human lives, or are they the detached, impersonal forces of fatality?”

²⁹ Woolf, *The Waves*, 9.

As the opposing force to Susan, Rhoda is not grounded in the novel. She admits no connection to either the natural or social world.³⁰ She does not even seem to live between; she lives no-where.

The reader's introduction to Rhoda is worth noting, for it does not come through Rhoda. Louis introduces Rhoda when he sees that she is not running around catching butterflies like the other children. Later on in the same segment he will state, "There sits Rhoda staring at the blackboard... They have no meaning for her. She has no answer for them. She has no body as the others have."³¹

Schooling is a challenge that freezes Rhoda from doing anything. Rhoda gets caught up in her mind and cannot get out of the trauma of having to perform academically. Rhoda does not get figures or letters. Later on other socially constructed situations will cause her similar terror:

Now the terror is beginning. Now taking her lump of chalk she draws figures, six, seven, eight, and then a cross and then a line on the blackboard. What is the answer? But I cannot write. I see only figures.... But I have no answer.... I am left alone to find the answer... Look, the loop of the figure is beginning to fill with time; it holds the world in it. I begin to draw a figure and the world is looped in it, and I myself am outside the loop; which I now join – so- and seal up, and make entire. The world is entire, and I am forever outside of it, crying, 'Oh, save me, from being blown for ever outside the loop of time!'³²

Unlike the others she struggles with inserting herself into the world at all. Language is a challenge for her, so is math, so is sensing the world. She lives trapped within her mind. Her only solace then is to go more deeply into her mind, to re-imagine the world without the trappings of

³⁰ Hussey, *Singing*, 18, "The ambivalence in Rhoda's way of living her body is seen in her attitude to night and sleep."

³¹ Woolf, *The Waves*, 22.

³² Woolf, *The Waves*, 22.

the body. Unlike Susan then, who already sees identity as fixed, Rhoda has no identity, she has no place, no time, no being to come into.

She is not successful at either childhood or adulthood. Because Rhoda cannot learn to insert herself in the world she eventually cannot exist. Rhoda has committed suicide by the end of the novel. Unable to 'fit' herself into society she has no recourse after Percival's death but to choose death herself. She struggles with school as a young child and the narrative hints that she has no father. She is unable to find a partner, even though she explores erotic love with several partners of both sexes. She has a brief affair with Louis. She is the mystical figure in the novel, the one often fading from existence before each chapter is complete.

Woolf challenges her readers by showing, unlike the romantic image of children who are free and timeless, that childhood is just as marked by rules and societal mores as adulthood (perhaps even more so). Conventionally, childhood is considered 'out of time.' Children live in the "moment" that they are incapable of considering the consequences of the future or the relevance of the past. Woolf challenges this by having the children recognizing the limits of time to their world. Jinny says:

This is here," said Jinny, "This is now. But soon we shall go. Soon Miss Curry will blow her whistle. We shall walk. We shall part. You will go to school. You will have masters wearing crosses with white ties. I shall have a mistress in a school on the East Coast who sits under a portrait of Queen Alexandra. That is where I am going, and Susan and Rhoda. This is only here; this is only now.³³

Jinny is describing how these children feel time. She knows that the time of the orchard and nursery will quickly pass. She sees that soon the boys will be in one school and the girls in another. Moreover, as time will pass so will those who control the children. These are not

³³ Woolf, *The Waves*, 15.

children outside of time or of societal control. These are children experiencing the mastery of time. The boys will 'sit under a Queen'.³⁴ The Queen is master of their childhood, even as they play within an orchard under bright light.

Childhood is marked by rules and societal mores. Childhood is marked by routines of sleep and eating. Although there is a kind of freedom expressed by the children as they play, it is found between the spaces of the everyday world. Rhoda remarks as she sails her petal boats, "I have a short space of freedom."³⁵ What does it mean to have a short space of freedom? Can freedom be expressed in terms of geography and time? Rhoda's qualifier of short time against space indicates that in childhood freedom and time is always about limit. A child is not always free to or free from. A child is not always out of time. Children are caught up in the movement of time and so are adults.

The time of childhood matters for Woolf. Childhood is not pure, free, natural, or different than adulthood. Rather childhood is the first of many times in life that one's place in time and history can be questioned - choices can be made. When a child fixes herself in a moment -locks herself in time, she places herself in the world. This of course is not to destroy the connection that she sees between the time she awoke and the time she goes to bed, she sees the sun moving across the house, the shadows disappearing even as she places herself squarely within a moment. But it is in this placing that the child enforces a self in the world. These children in the novel are engaged in fixing themselves in moments, making themselves last in the moments that even now they recognize as mostly fleeting.

³⁴ Queen Victoria

³⁵ Woolf, *The Waves*, 11.

This is the integral aspect of all of Woolf's descriptions of childhood; each moment, each drop of childhood can lend meaning to a life. It is through one's engagement with the world that one is challenged to insert oneself despite the lack of freedom, time, and difficulty of moving between solid social constructs.

For an example, Woolf's narrative exposes the gendering of the children. Jinny sees herself through her body; Susan already is a 'mother'. Louis and Bernard know that they will go off to the boys' school and be separated from the girls of the nursery. Yet, in these same descriptions we find a challenge to typified gender roles in Victorian society. Louis hides and finds himself ground in the natural world. Jinny is conscious of how her body is seen by the society she lives. These descriptions point to a reconfigured concept of gender and childhood in Woolf's writing.

Woolf sees the similar concerns between childhood and adulthood, finding ways and moments of inserting oneself and making meaning in an often-tumultuous world. Each moment offers a new chance of seeing the world and one's place in it. Childhood is privileged because it has less history and time behind it. Although childhood has a robust knowledge it is as yet a hopeful one for although it shadows childhood an overarching life narrative has not yet managed to take a firm hold.³⁶

This is why I conclude these descriptions of childhood with Bernard's reflections as an older adult. Bernard notes, as he describes a young girl looking at himself as an old man:

'He is old.' But she is wrong. It is not age; it is that a drop has fallen; another drop. Time has given the arrangement another shake. Out we creep from the

³⁶ Levinson, Natasha, "A More General Crisis: Hannah Arendt, World Alienation and the Challenges of Teaching for the World As It is," *Teachers College Record* 112, no. 2 (2010): 464-487. An analysis of Arendt's natality and presence could frame this reading. Arendt complicates just how adults can assist children in inserting themselves within the world. Levinson comments on this in relation to questions of teaching and education.

arch of the currant leaves, out into a wider world. The true order of things-this is our perpetual illusion -is now apparent. Thus in a moment, in a drawing-room, our life adjusts itself to the majestic march of day across the sky.³⁷

Common time is the grand illusion to which all submit. The young girl looking at the old man can just as easily be reversed, turning the old men of history and society to view children within their childhood. The drops of time to which Bernard alludes are to all the times in a life, but refer strongly to the time of childhood that Bernard remembers through small moments -the prattle of schoolboys, memories of a school lesson, a romp through the woods. Bernard has recognized that these moments that seemed so ordinary and unimportant actually challenge the grander narrative of history and the social world; these moments are the real interactions with others.

Even as the characters of *The Waves* attempt to disrupt or see beyond the illusion of history they move in-between the history of the world and the history of their selves. As a child Bernard experiences himself as an active piece of time and history, as an adult (out in the wider world) he sees that his perception of self in time is always in the midst of change or re-arrangement as experience by the other's perception and experience of him within their time.

Childhood as a lens on history

Thus, the juxtaposition between the children obviously within time and that of the interiority of childhood that seems outside of time distorts both reader and character. Woolf allows the reader to question the placement of childhood within human history.³⁸ The movement of the

³⁷ Woolf, *The Waves*, 199.

³⁸ Sherman, David, "A Plot Unraveling into Ethics: Woolf, Levinas, and 'Time Passes,'" *Woolf Studies Annual* 13. (2007): 162.

subject through history becomes ethical rather than merely ontological. That is, figuring out *when* one is and *how* one places oneself within the when, matters.

Looking at an ordinary moment from the vantage of the “eyeless”³⁹ is, for Woolf, to see the moment without identity, from without subjectivity. She challenges what it means to see oneself without a history. Yet, this is ambiguous, for any individual asserts him or her in the world through time. When Woolf begins the novel with an interlude on the first glimpses of the sunrise, we are to imagine newness, birth, and the breaking dawn. It should come as no surprise that the opening chapter breaks upon children playing freely in the English countryside in soft morning light. There is a tension, however, as the children play. Briggs writes: “The structure of *The Waves* enacts the complex interplay between the natural and the human world as we celebrate and mourn the relentless numbers of time. The sun’s hourly progress across the sky, the earth’s yearly orbit, the monthly cycles of moon and tides constitute the primal rhymes of life on earth.”⁴⁰

Although I have concentrated on the passages in the novel where Woolf directly describes childhood, no reading of childhood in the novel can go without mentioning Bernard’s last thoughts in the final chapter. This is where Bernard clearly portrays the ethical current that runs through the book. The last passage can only be understood when read against the opening description of the beginning of a life, of childhood. Though it is a novel about time and a narrative about the passing of time, it is primarily a question of what gives meaning throughout the passing, that for better or worse, simply is a matter of fate, not decision. Time unravels

³⁹ Briggs, “The Novels,” 75, “Woolf used the word ‘eyeless’ as a kind of shorthand to herself, holding together a number of related senses: it partly stood for the kind of inexplicable and pitiless fatality that is manifested in Percival’s death. Within the novel Bernard recognizes this, challenging it as whatever ‘is abstract, facing me eyeless at the end of the avenue, in the sky’. A further sense, derived from its homonym, ‘I-less’, was of the absence of our detachment from the self (itself one possible consequence of deep shock or grief).

⁴⁰ Briggs, “Reading Virginia,” 110.

mercilessly for all characters, all persons, all genders, writers, children and adults alike. History becomes the retelling of that time. This is not an existential experience of history. What runs underneath existence is that re-telling is an ethical exercise bent on seeing what has been hidden.

In the final chapter Bernard finds a recognition that childhood knowledge is as robust, perhaps even more robust, than the maturity that we often give adult. Yet, even as Bernard has this realization, he admits that neither the child nor the adult lack a sense, only that the child has the time left to explore the world in its ambiguity and the adult's single response is to fight against it.

In the last passage Bernard feels the passing of time as he waits for his train. Natural time, the progression of the sun against the sky, the moon waxing and waning, these are, like the train, things to wait through: moments in which we can only sit and observe the passage of linear time. And this force is difficult to fight against -it is only natural to grow old, to die, to pass from one stage to another. Bernard states,

Sitting down on a bank to wait for my train, I thought then how we surrender, how we submit to the stupidity of nature. Woods covered in thick green leafage lay in front of me. And by some flick of a scent or a sound on a nerve, the old image -the gardeners sweeping, the lady writing -returned. I saw the figures beneath the beech trees at Elvedon. The Gardeners swept; the lady at the table sat writing. But I now made the contribution of maturity to childhood's intuitions -satiety and doom; the sense of what is inescapable in our lot; death; the knowledge of limitations; how life is more obdurate than one had thought it. Then, when I was a child, the presence of an enemy had asserted itself; the need for opposition had stung me. I had jumped up and cried, "let's explore." The horror of the situation was ended.I took my mind, my being, the old dejected, almost inanimate object, and lashed it about among these odds and ends, sticks and straws, detestable little bits of wreckage, flotsam and jetsam, floating on the oily surface. I jumped up. I said, 'Fight! Fight!' I repeated. It is the effort and the struggle, it is the perpetual warfare, it is the shattering and

piecing together -this is the daily battle, defeat or victory, the absorbing pursuit.⁴¹

Bernard is being a passive, willing participant to the passing of time. At the recognition of his passivity, he is reminded that it admits a submission. The submission is not to society but to time itself – to the natural world. He is brought back to the orchard of his nursery days.

There in the nursery, Bernard told stories about having to find an unexplored 'Elvedon' a place untouched by ladies writing or gardeners cultivating. As a child his intuition was to cultivate stories that allowed him new understanding of the world that was confusing. As an adult he recognizes that a similar mind game is useless, that nature herself – that which has been untouched - is even more a master. Time and death marches towards all beings.

At this point in the passage it would seem as if maturity has brought new understanding to Bernard. One way to read Woolf's narrative is to say that there is something about adulthood necessary in understanding life. But Woolf is making a statement that is a bit more complicated. The important distinction is one of maturity not difference in age. The child and the adult feel and have similar experiences but the child acts within the experience in his limited scope. The adult has a greater number of actions to choose from.

What he recognized in childhood was correct –telling stories is necessary but the stories are not the fantasies and fables of childhood –they become the stories of ones life itself. They are a retelling of history. Rather than craft a story Bernard must face it head on. Recalling one's intuition by retelling ones' social history becomes a way of holding this true, living, despite the ever-encroaching fall towards death.

⁴¹ Woolf, *The Waves*, 268-269.

Bernard's clarifying vision here, to act, to fight, is juxtaposed against passively waiting for a train. In the very moment that he needs to rise up, to jump, he is being forced to attend to the schedule of a mechanical engine. And yet, Bernard's impetus is not, as we would commonly understand, to fight against the mechanical engine –that cold destroyer of society. Rather, he contends against the 'stupidity of nature'. Bernard understands nature; the greenness characterized by its singular 'goodness', to be a force. This force hides us from one another –that forces us away from morality and relationships. Nature alone might imply an absence of evil, but it is vapid and un-tethered. Woolf knows that even children do not see themselves as natural – they intuit a difference between a bird singing notes from a log and a game of 'Elvedon' in the forest.

Woolf's novel moves six speaking characters in response to a war that has taken one a dear friend. But rather than a novel about the importance of war in a society, or war's greater impact on history, the death of Percival allows the reader to explore the social impact one death makes on a history. Trajectories are undertaken that might not otherwise have been taken, realizations are made as the friends experience death. There is a sense at which there might be something more than history to explore within a society's development.⁴² Briggs notes:

Since she had begun writing, Woolf had shown her impatience with a particular kind of history, history as the 'lives of great men', of heroes and hero-worship: it was part of the imaginary quarrel that she had with her father about the Dictionary of National Biography, with its emphasis on the lives of men of action, and its indifference to the lives of the obscure and of women; part of a large argument on behalf of social rather than political history.⁴³

⁴² Briggs, "The novels," 74.

⁴³ Briggs, "The novels," 78.

In *The Waves*, Bernard and Jenny and all their friends insert themselves into the world through language, through play, and through imagination. Most importantly, though it is through each other that they become humans acting and creating in the world. Although the friends are rarely with each other after they are separated (both by gender and class), it is when the group comes together as friends that Woolf's insight into the moral movements of society become apparent.⁴⁴ Woolf's ability to recount the ordinary is a recovery of social history rather than political or geo-political history. The narrative of close friends lends meaning to the otherwise disembodied, un-sensed, and disempowered body that is Percival.

Childhood and communion: Recovering community

Insertion in the world is only possible with others. Percival is the mirror that challenges the other persons to remain in the world –to remain inserted - but also that allows the characters to slip out of history and come together as persons. Friendship moves them forward in a new time. As Bernard notes, it is with his friends that he grasps the world.

Some people go to priests; others to poetry; I to my friends, I to my own heart, I to seek among phrases and fragments something unbroken –I to whom there is not beauty enough in moon or tree; to whom the touch of one person with another is all, yet who cannot grasp even that, who am so imperfect, so weak, so unspeakably lonely. There I sat.⁴⁵

Two passages are key in understanding the friendship and connection that began in childhood. The passages are almost identical; actions are simply reversed. I begin with the latter,

⁴⁴ Hussey, "Singing," 65, "Indeed, their relation to each other, the animating awareness of themselves as a group, resolves into a wave-like movement of its own, a constant pattern of breaking and regrouping, of unity and dispersion throughout the book."

⁴⁵ Woolf, *The Waves*, 267.

a point in the novel where the six friends as adults have joined together to mourn Percival at a dinner,

While we advance down this avenue," said Louis, "I leaning slightly upon Jinny, Bernard arm-in-arm with Neville, and Susan with her hand in mine, it is difficult not to weep, calling ourselves little children, praying that God may keep us safe while we sleep. It is sweet to sing together, clasping hands; afraid of the dark, while Miss Curry plays the harmonium.⁴⁶

As the passage continues, each character remarks that time, anxiety, and space has all been frozen in their meeting. What has not been frozen is the pull for the friends to connect with one another. Within the moment at dinner the friends intuit that coming together - being together - is something extra-ordinary, a moment rare and important.⁴⁷

This connection is fragile. In a matter of instants it will be severed by what appears to be a sexual coupling within the group.

The passage described above is beautiful and unique. It reflects Woolf's concern with relationships with others that are impossible, yet necessary. The passage becomes extraordinary once the reader recognizes that it is a passage that has already been seen in the first chapter. There, the actions were reversed. In this passage a song becomes the movement that brings the children together as friends.

Now, said Louis, 'we all rise; we all stand up. Miss Curry spreads wide the black book on the harmonium. It is difficult not to weep as we sing, as we pray that God may keep us safe while we sleep, calling ourselves little children.

⁴⁶ Woolf, *The Waves*, 228- 235.

⁴⁷ McConnell, Frank, "Death Among the Apple Tree, *The Waves*, and the World of Things." 53-65, ed. Bloom, Harold, In *Virginia Woolf*. Chelsea House Publishers, New York. 1986, 59, "Much in the manner of the window-turned-mirror in the first chapter of *To the Lighthouse*, Percival by his presence organizes the other six into a 'party' in the forth section of *The Waves*, and again organizes them- this time by his absence -in the final gathering in section eight. For the unity he represents, the impossible -for the six and for the book itself- full transaction between subject and object, is a unity no less primary in its negation than in its assertion."

When we are sad and trembling with apprehension it is sweet to sing together, leaning slightly, I towards Susan, Susan toward Bernard, clasping hands, afraid of much, I of my accent, Rhoda of figures, yet resolute to conquer.⁴⁸

Here, in childhood, the friends hold each other in fear, because living alone would be too difficult. Rhoda is as petrified as she is in adulthood. Louis is trying to understand a self, marked by another culture. Yet in this passage the children hold each other in song, a song that is silenced by the disconnection experienced as adults.

As in hearing the chorus of a song, the repetition of the passage of the friends holding each other makes us pay attention to the lyrics in each passage.⁴⁹ The chorus indicates friendship as well as the moral importance of such friendship in life. It is not simply pleasure that friendship can give. Friendship makes moments in a life mean something - a form of recognizing moral import. Throughout Woolf's work the power of connection and community ring eventually stronger than the crashing waves of society and its trappings.⁵⁰

Although the book seems to indicate that we are all eventually alone, Woolf gives the most hope in the passages where six friends come together. The characters have nothing but connection to each other.⁵¹

There is a wary hope held by Woolf's writing, as if the connection between others may not just be enough after all to assist society in understanding its eventual decline into violence and

⁴⁸ Woolf, *The Waves*, 26.

⁴⁹ Hinnov, Elaine. From Fragment to Choran community in the Late Work of Virginia Woolf. *Woolf Studies Annual*, 13, (2002): 1-23. Hinnov's thesis was influential in my reading of community in Woolf's *The Waves*.

⁵⁰ Woolf, *The Waves*, 73.

⁵¹ Warner, *Virginia Woolf*, 65, "While it is true that they are not always occupied in their relations with each other (thankfully the book cannot be read as a transcription of the Bloomsbury letters) the awareness of the others is never far away from the consciousness of any speaker; and the fact of the group is the one stable centre to where they invariably return."

misery.⁵² The shadows are sharp, the edges are sharpened, the light increased. Illumination does not seem to make the world clearer and better understood only sharper and increasingly difficult understood to be complex. After all Bernard's final words will be to fight, not to sing.

Woolf's children come together as friends, not because it is easy, but because in the moment of connection and insertion something else becomes possible. This possibility is what happens when persons recognize value in what has become de-valued. Thus in *The Waves* women become writers and children become thinkers and soldiers become more than numbers to send into battle.

What resonates through my reading is that communities are formed in childhood. I would also argue that just as Hinnov views resistance through community as a way to combat fascism.⁵³ Woolf's communities combat a strict ageism in society. Moreover they provide a way to reconstruct history that takes childhood into account and sees childhood and child life as integral to a society. What is important here is that the community forms through a renewed interest and connection of childhood experience and not that the already formed community attempts to reform childhood. Thus, children become a central component of the connection between persons.⁵⁴

⁵² Woolf, *The Waves*, 29.

⁵³ Hinnov, Elaine, "From Fragment to Chorán community," Emily Hinnov writes that the communities that form in Woolf's works are a response to fascism.

⁵⁴ Sichel, "Education and Thought," and Haroutunian-Gordan, "Men and Women" For readings that admit a similar conclusion from reading Woolf, see Sichel and Haroutunian-Gordan. Sichel makes this connection between communal life and memories as a possible way to re-think early childhood care. Families and early friendships are ways of passing down values that otherwise might not be seen as valuable within larger society. And, it is through engagement with these values that we might learn to best nourish childhood. Sophie Haroutunian-Gordan's response to Sichel's reading of Woolf is important; she asks us to think what this would mean for thinking about education. And her phrasing is important for she considers what it would mean not to simply educate a society but to educate a society *well*.

In my reading, communities survive not because individuals are heroic and win battles. Much like Percival, individual heroes might be doomed against larger historical and violent forces. Communities that can describe new visions of value and the valued together might prove eventually more persistent against the breaking dawn and shadows of dusk that is daily life. Education of the young remains a key aspect of learning to shape this vision. In a remarkable similar and hopeful vein Bernard remarks in *The Waves*,

It is, however, true that I cannot deny a sense that life for me is now mysteriously prolonged. Is it that I may have children, may cast a fling of seed wider, beyond this generation, this doom-encircled population, shuffling each other in endless competition along the street? My daughter shall come here, in other summers; my sons shall turn new fields.⁵⁵

In doing this Woolf forces the reader to place within the present, within our present, as adults, a present that must include childhood, even if it is not a concept that we readily agree with or normally find present in our lives. This takes real work and effort, it is not something that will come easy.⁵⁶

By describing childhood as a concept that can both provoke and provide society with a way to resist oppression and violence I think Woolf asks a question to adults seeking to affect social change. How can we bring children and the complexity of those childhoods to matter in such a way? Like Dewey, also writing during the age of the child, Woolf is supposing that there are 'times' that call for childhood.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Woolf, *The Waves*, 114.

⁵⁶ Warner, *Virginia Woolf*, 117.

⁵⁷ Dewey, John. *Democracy and Education, The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899-1924, Vol. 9*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978, 48-49.

For one example: although it seems intuitive, the connection between childhood and mother is certainly one of those cases.⁵⁸ The connection between motherhood and childhood is also something that Virginia Woolf would have recognized during the late 1800's and early 1900's.⁵⁹ However it is not apparent in either the research on feminism or the research on child study that either field has made great strides in connecting these two aspects of modern life.⁶⁰

The communities in which children reside with others can become places of education and resistance, rather than places of continual oppression.⁶¹ Rather than motherhood and childhood seen as figurations of the same oppressed coin, we can look at how conceptual descriptions of childhood assist in re-figuring motherhood and role of mothering in modern society.⁶² Upon reading Woolf's *The Waves*, this must be considered a moral concern and not only a political one.⁶³

Following this means pursuing inquiry opened up within communities already connected through childhood and motherhood. While I can see many avenues of research that this line of study invites, there is one vein that I feel may include further discovery with respect Woolf's other novels and writings. And that is the recognition of the importance that friendship plays in

⁵⁸ Thorne, Barrie, Re-Visioning Women and Social Change: Where are the Children? *Gender and Society*, 1, no. 85: (1987), 97.

⁵⁹ Frost, Ginger, *Victorian Childhoods*, Westport: Praeger Publishers: 2009, 11.

⁶⁰ Castañeda, Claudia. "The child as a feminist figuration." *Feminist Theory* 2, no. 1 (2001): 29-53. Purdy, Laura. "Does Women's Liberation Imply Children's Liberation?" *Hypatia* 3, no. 2 (1988). 49-62. Thorne, "Re-Visioning Women," 85-108.

⁶¹ Butterfield, Elizabeth, "Days and Nights of A New Mother," In *Motherhood: Philosophy for Everyone, the Birth of Wisdom*, ed. Shelia Lintott, 65-76, Wiley, 2011. PDF, ebook.

⁶² Firestone, Shulamith, *The Dialectics of Sex*, New York: Bantam Books. 1970, 86-91. Firestone suggests that images of mother and child figure oppress both.

⁶³ And of course, I admit that any ethical considerations will have social and political implications but the task is to admit the ethical consideration before taking the political action.

making motherhood and childhood connect in ways that promote resistance and strength.

Friendship between women, those who are mothers and those who are not can be integral spaces in women's lives. Understanding the role of friendship in a life, why and where friendship has value, how the value of friendship changes throughout a life, why the memory of childhood friendship plays so heavily throughout a life. All these are questions that can outline possible connections between motherhood and childhood

Woolf makes us pay attention to the beginning of entwined lives as she re-considers childhood. Childhood is not free, not care-free, not full of only happiness. Childhood is full of secrets and pain, and yes, trauma and violence. Childhood is not that which is natural. Childhood is full of society and commerce and government and laws. And yet, childhood is also a place of beauty and serenity and friendship. It is, as all the moments of the human life are, rich, full, and complex.

Woolf's writing on childhood opens up moments of life, revealing their ordinary nature. In this revelation they become extra-ordinary. Childhood, in turn, becomes an exceptional way to look at history, society, and, most importantly, friendship. Woolf shows us that the drops of childhood, seen within already arranged reality, formats a new way of seeing and being. Childhood is not a strange part of life; rather, it is a lens magnifying one's own insertion into the strange world with others.

Struggling with Woolf

Woolf's descriptions of childhood are painfully paradoxical and challenging. Often in passages she seems to want to hold to an image of childhood that is only an in-itself, a way of knowing and being that is foreign and unknown to the adult. At other times she seems to mock

the child's immaturity and knowledge of the how difficult the world will be. Despite these passages however, overwhelmingly Woolf seems to champion the need for one's own childhood to be a part of the always present conversation, both in greater society and in the small moments that make up the whole of a person's life.

Here she presents the real challenge to conventional descriptions of childhood that are not concerned with its complexity. For it is in promoting and caring for others, particularly children that we then recognize that all aspects of life are valuable in an of themselves and it is this moral development that is most essential aspect of being human. For Woolf it is not enough to see childhood as intrinsically good, but that we are then to act in a way that cares for its future. This means participating with it, not only asking for its participation. This is her challenge to Dewey and Rousseau. It is also her response to Beauvoir's question of how to cultivate freedom in the child, for Woolf implies that freedom is fostered by those who care for the child.

Childhood's participation in democracy is essential to a democracy's future but relying only on children's experience within that democracy is not enough. We must continue to seek ways to nurture children's' engagement in our society, but we must also continue to fund childhood's own ground –the imagination from whence it springs.

Conclusion: Reading for childhood with educators

It is natural enough, from one standpoint, to think of childhood as an imperfect state, looking for its completeness and getting its value because of its rich promise. But the biologist tells us that the child is nearer the line of progress than the more developed, but also more rigidly set, man. And the lover of children is confident that if any age of humanity exists by its own right and 'pays as its goes,' it is childhood.¹

Here I review the project, concluding that reading for childhood in philosophy and literature assists in forming rich and complex conceptual understandings of childhood. In these texts childhood is not a 'state' or 'a kind of being', rather, childhood functions as a lens to see renewed interest in the ethical possibilities within human relationships. These texts particularly engage the growth evident in childhood as a relational or intersubjective relationship rather than an individualized experience. Another way of understanding this: While childhood is a magnified time of growth and development, a unique and intrinsic aspect of human life, it is thus, also that which cultivates an interest in and with others.

One route to recognizing childhood an integral aspect in society is to develop ways of reading and seeing childhood in terms of interaction or engagement with others.² The texts of the project of philosophy and literature challenges readers to consider childhood as intrinsically valuable to society as well as constructed by and with the developing person and a developing

¹ Dewey, John, *Ethics, The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953 Vol.7*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978, 520.

² Fass, Paula and Mason, Mary Ann, "Introduction" In *Childhood in America*, ed. Paula Fass and Mary Ann Mason, New York: New York University Press, 2000, 6. Fass and Mason pose a similar concern for historians of education: "We hope to make clear that children's impact on institutions, politics, and social thought is much greater than we usually realize. The means we devise to teach, socialize, and protect children define who we think we are as human beings and as a society."

society. The analyses of two descriptions of childhood from contemporary early childhood in this chapter classrooms reveal similar concerns. Those in higher education should encourage future educators to cultivate these habits of reading in order to engage more fully their practice as educator and as persons.

Educators must make room for rich and complex views of childhood. These views invite educators to uncover such ethical aspects of the educational relationship as responsibility, recognition, acceptance of difference, acknowledgement of power dynamics, freedom, and growth. In this context childhood functions as an ethical construct - a guiding value - in education. Multiple ways of viewing and reflecting on the concept of childhood illuminate possibilities for renewing and reengaging these ethical aspects within an educational context.

Review of the project: Childhood in relation

Each text in the project reveals the necessary and complex connection to others that childhood commits. These revelations show that childhood is a robust concept making an ethical claim upon personhood, the claim that individual growth depends on mutual interactions with other children, other adults, and communities. These interactions must be continually re-imagined and begun, over and over again. Childhood cultivates an interest in and with others. Childhood is to be conceived of as an invitation to others and their growth.

The texts read in the project move very quickly from statements about ‘what a child is’, or an ontological position, to questions about living well with the concerns of childhood, an ethical position. Perhaps no author and text does this as well as Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Emile*. To consider how this project, concerned with description, becomes a question of ethics, I explore one passage in the *Emile*.

There is a famous passage in the *Emile* where the tutor teaches Emile to run by inducing contests where the prizes are small cakes that all the boys in the neighborhood desire. The point of the lesson is to retrain Emile's desire. Emile learns quickly to practice running and can soon best all the boys "however long the course."³ Without delving into the merits of such strategy, the more important lesson at this point in the *Emile* seems to have been learned by the tutor.

Rousseau writes,

This accomplishment produced another of which I had not dreamed. When he had rarely carried off the prize, he almost always ate it alone, as did his competitors. But, in accustoming himself to victory, he became generous and often shared with the vanquished. That provided a moral observation for me, and I learned thereby what the true principle of generosity is.⁴

Childhood serves as a point at which the reader sees interaction between others that fosters growth through relationship rather than mastery. The tutor makes a 'moral observation', one that is surprising and unexpected. It is doubly unexpected for the reader learns that the tutor himself has never practiced 'true' generosity.

Here Emile teaches the tutor! For generosity is not sharing. Rather, generosity is giving to others because one feels for them. One does not give because one should, rather because it feels right in the moment. This feeling is directed by recognition of the other as a self who should not suffer. Thus, the child who wins the cake by being the best has the most to give.⁵ His self is intact and is less deformed by social influence.

³ Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *Emile or On Education*, trans. Alan Bloom New York: Basic Books, 1979, 142.

⁴ Rousseau, *Emile*, 142.

⁵ The issue of pity is complex in the *Emile*. Suffice it to say for this conclusion that here the person who has the most intact or least deformed 'self' the self that is closest to nature will have the most pity. He shall feel the most and he shall be able to give without mediation or a need to give because others require it of him.

I am reminded here of Dewey's argument that there are times that call for childhood.⁶ These times are not always what is conventionally thought of as times that involve children. They are not always times that center on play, toys, or immaturity. Rather, they are often times that concern what it means to live well with others, whether adults or children. As the tutor learns, childhood is a time of engagement with others. This passage reflects the overarching concern of the project. The concern has not been what does it mean to teach children well but what does it mean to live well with others who are children?

Reading Rousseau's *Emile* was a logical choice in a project that took living well with others as a foundational concern. For it is in the *Emile* where childhood is first considered an essential component to the moral development of the human. Rousseau is not the first thinker or writer to consider the child 'good', but he is the first to recognize that the child's goodness lends insight on moral development.

I challenge progressive readings of Rousseau that see in his texts only a missive to protect or distance the child from society. Rather, while much of the educational project for Rousseau does consist of restricting the child's access to society, it is also a matter of careful introducing the child to specific objects, feelings, and ideas.

This is particularly true in regards to the cultivating of goodness, or the moral quality of childhood. The child's goodness is intimately connected to the child's weakness. The child has a natural love of self, *amour-de-soi*, which is not pride: it is instead what is essentially good in the child. It grounds the child in the world in a way that makes the child able to grow and develop.

⁶ Dewey, John, *Democracy and Education, The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899-1924, Vol. 9, ed. Jo Ann Boydston*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 48-49.

However, the child's dependency, his need to be taken care of, is his weakness, he must be cared for by others and he quickly learns that his self is loved through others. This is mediated love, or *amour-propre*.

In this reading, childhood marks the elusive space where *amour-propre* can so easily (and so often does) take over *amour-de-soi*. Rousseau's hope is that resisting the development of *amour-propre* for as long as possible allows the possibility for Emile to act as a free citizen who values freedom from control and base desires. For Rousseau, this pull between self and other is a marked aspect of the human condition. The key is to educate the child to feel this tension, not as an acute pain but that guides moral and political decision-making.

Should this nurturing education occur, that child will reach manhood with a full sense of self, *amour-de-soi* but also a checked and tempered *amour-propre*. He will still feel the tension that is the fate of all humans but will not be deformed and unable to act. He will be propelled to care for others, rather than be pulled down by them. This will be the final lesson of childhood and it will be complete when the man, Emile, has begun to educate his own child.

For Rousseau childhood is the connection that cultivates interest in and with others. The good child is the moral base for a virtuous society. And it is the individual family unit that secures this progress.

Though I read an alternative description of childhood in Rousseau's text, Rousseau's description fosters a belief in the childhood's ultimate innocence and special privilege that serves to distance childhood from others, particularly adults. Moreover Rousseau's gendered consideration of childhood remains problematic. Rousseau invites readers to reconsider the value of childhood and its place in society. Perhaps his invitation extends to embark on a continued

inquiry in this vein. Thus, though the reading of Rousseau grounds this project, it does not rest with Rousseau's description of childhood.

John Dewey had also read Rousseau's *Emile* as an invitation to continue struggling with the moral question that childhood makes on society. Thus, I move in Chapter III to see how John Dewey, a careful reader of Rousseau, also engaged with the question of childhood as a connection to and with others. For Dewey, Rousseau's significant contribution is the acknowledgement that childhood contains within it a great power to connect persons to one another. In an important turn away from Rousseau, Dewey moves the concerns of childhood from the individual family unit to the concern of greater society.

Dewey argues that childhood is a necessary component to understanding just how democracies both develop and develop the individuals within them. For him, childhood is immediately situated within the necessary rhythms of a dynamic and democratic society.

Dewey describes a childhood that is very active. Dewey's children are always making meaning in the world. Children are natural communicators. They have natural capacities to connect with others and with objects in the world. They are builders, makers, and creators. A child might make a boat from a piece of wood and glide it across a puddle of water. As she does so she is considering water's surface tension, how a boat works, and whether or not she might one day take a boat trip. These concerns connect her to the world and others. A child playing with blocks in his classroom might start stacking them high over his head. He reaches a point where he can no longer do so without assistance. His project is dynamic and other children come over to see the problem, they move a chair over and start to add pieces to his tower. Together they construct the tallest tower in their classroom. Dewey's childhood is a time of

resourcefulness, imagination, and capability. This time of childhood is a magnified time of interest in the world and others. The child does not yet know many things. He is a seeker, an explorer, and a discoverer. His interest to find out is deeper than desire -it is a need to find out. He must figure out his world if he is to survive.

Yet, Dewey fully recognizes, much like Rousseau, that children are not fully grown adults. Children are extremely dependent and the dependency of childhood is often considered a weakness. Children cannot care for themselves. Children require teachers and parents and components of a social state system. Instead of seeing this as a weakness, Dewey reads this as a powerful capacity of childhood. Dewey applauds childhood's dependence, which calls on parents, teachers, and all adults to respond to it.

Dewey's childhood is thus both a time of deep communication and engagement of capacity and imagination. Dewey embraces childhood's capacity to engage with the new and different. For Dewey, it is this newness that engages movement in a society in a positive direction. Dewey very much saw imagination as a necessary part of society and one that childhood had special claim to. Instead of tamping down on the child's imagination, or being afraid of what the interaction with childhood may affect, Dewey sees that this imaginative power enhances the time of childhood to create and engage the world. Unlike Rousseau's imagination, which is a lens to *seeing* the world, for Dewey the imagination is an active faculty that directs the child to actually *do* something new.

Childhood becomes a center of unrest necessary for movement in a democratic society. In order to secure this movement, those in education must be willing to reengage new descriptions and analysis of childhood as concept. Children are best served by an education that enables full

participation, but that means considering that children can fully participate. This means reengaging the conceptual understanding of childhood.

For Dewey this meant making room in society for the arts and poetry. He realized that art and poetry were necessary in funding democracies; they fertilized the ground of imagination, despite or perhaps against the heavy constraints of social life. He writes, “Poetry is critical and moral because its function is to remove prejudice, do away with the scales that keep the eye from seeing, tear away the veils due to want and custom, perfect the power to perceive.”⁷

Taking Dewey’s cue I saw it necessary in the project to include works that had aesthetic dimensions. This is why in Chapter IV I moved to consider a work of literature, an autobiography, written by a philosopher who was very much concerned with childhood. In Beauvoir’s *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, I found a complex description of childhood that continues to ask what it meant to see childhood as an engagement with others. Moreover, the feminist concerns of Beauvoir highlighted the problematic aspects of asking children to participate in society ignored in Dewey’s description of childhood.

Beauvoir was very much concerned with authentic inquiry that served to disclose the subject well. Her recognition of childhood as inscribed or undergone in situation, in time, in a specific place, serve to close the distance between childhood and those studying it. For, in remarking on these aspects, one uncovers possible assumptions and breaks down generalizations.

By telling the story of her childhood, Beauvoir discloses the transcendent and embodied freedom of childhood. She outlines ways of seeing and describing freedom in childhood.

⁷ Dewey, John, *Art as Experience, The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953, Vol. 10*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978, 328.

Freedom is thus something developed within life. Inquiry into childhood plays a specific role in describing and inquiring into freedom developed. Her inquiry into childhood through lived experience allows the tension between ontological freedom and situated freedom to become tenable.

For Beauvoir, one's own freedom is contingent upon the ability of one to foster freedom in others. Beauvoir positions childhood as a time of development either toward freedom or seriousness. Either one learns to become free by willing one's self and also others free (freedom), or one becomes a slave to values and choices seen as absolute and outside the self as subject (seriousness). Beauvoir recognizes childhood as the possibility in learning to live a free and disclosed life. She grapples with the contradictory experience of childhood: that is both oppressive and transcendent. This contradictory experience highlights the complexity of thinking about childhood that is both intrinsically itself and also completely reliant and constructed by the tenor of the adult/child relationship. Yet, it through an education of freedom with adults that children can uncover their transcendent freedom present in childhood that continues through adulthood.

Freedom from responsibility is a kind of false freedom, for it implies that children have no activity in the world and cannot affect the world. This is a kind of freedom that follows conventional descriptions and treatment of children whereby children are not granted rights, etc. Children are given the values and the boundaries of their world and for the most part happily exist within those boundaries. This, as previously noted, seems to indicate that children have no notion of the life project of freedom—that they, in fact, are not free. Yet, Beauvoir challenges

conventional thinking by recognizing also in childhood a transcendent or ontological freedom.

Ontological freedom is the freedom to be active and intentional.

Beauvoir's children are embodied, relational, and live (as we all do) complicated, complex lives. The task for Beauvoir seems to be always embarking on uncovering and disclosing the free project throughout life.

To conclude the readings of childhood in philosophy and literature I searched for a text that would take childhood-not-so-seriously, as indicated by Beauvoir. I wanted very much to recognize a text that saw childhood as an ambiguous space. Chapter V presents a reading of Woolf's much less widely known *The Waves*. While Woolf does recognize childhood's developmental aspects and its physical and mental differences from adulthood, she challenges conventional ways of seeing childhood prevalent in her time that continue through the modern era. Woolf's projects deepens the views of childhood to plum complexity and richness. Woolf shows just how these descriptions of childhood influence moral considerations of relationships and society.

In modern Western society childhood is often considered a time outside of time, a place outside of the world. It is often considered a time of innocence and is asexual. It is a place of pleasure and not pain. Children are circular and emotional thinkers; they cannot consider logic, time, or causality. Against these readings Woolf locates a childhood that is intimately social. Woolf's children are always trying to figure out where their place in society is. Woolf's children are also critical and logical thinkers. They feel deeply and sincerely. They recognize loss and feel trauma. They are as well capable of love and friendship. They are not only gendered but also sexual. They feel desire. They see and seek causality. They recognize the passing of time.

The time of childhood matters for Woolf, not because it is pure, or free, or natural, or different than adulthood; but rather because it is the first in many times in a life that one's place in time and history can be questioned. This unique time then becomes a moment that asserts itself throughout human experience.

Just as Beauvoir recognizes freedom in the playfulness of childhood, Woolf is recognizes a freedom that comes from being with others. As with Beauvoir, it is an unusual kind of freedom; certainly both childhood and friendship come with obligations that make unlimited freedom-from impossibility. But both childhood and friendship allow for a freedom-to that becomes increasingly important to living in an impossibly difficult world. Woolf's children come together as friends, not because it is easy, but because in the moment of connection and insertion something else becomes possible. Moral development is possible but only in as much as one can see it within the patterns of the ordinary with others.

Reading for Childhood with Educators

I have found that childhood read for its complexity in these texts cultivates an interest in and with others. This is why I move from a review of the project to argue for a renewed engagement with childhood for educators. In her work, *Experimenting with the World*, Cuffaro recounts an anecdote from her observations of an early childhood classroom:

At one point, with a touch of humor, Lee asked the children, "Is there anyone who doesn't have a birthday?" The response was surprising and poignant and an example of children's thinking about their encounters in the world. A child answered, "Homeless people don't have birthdays. They have no place to have the cake." Lee could have dropped this topic with some surface response or decided that it was too complicated for the children to understand.... Lee chose

to explore the children's understanding of the world and asked them to talk about what they knew of homelessness.⁸

For Cuffaro, the conversation and subsequent additions to the curriculum, including a visit from a soup kitchen manager, was a partnership of rich moral learning between children and teacher.

Early childhood educators are often vexed by moral considerations in their classroom.⁹ Often they feel as if they cannot respond, for the topic is too complicated, the child too immature, or the topic not relevant. But Lee (the teacher in the passage) understood that homelessness was an appropriate concern for everyone, children and adults, present in the classroom. What made it possible for Lee to view the child's statement as a worthwhile addition to the classroom?

In this project I asked whether or not such complex understanding of childhood's possibility is found by cultivating habits of reading philosophy and literature – examining texts for rich and complex descriptions of childhood. This kind of reading would assist educators in seeing childhood beyond conventional conceptions that connote innocence and immaturity.

As the works read in this project have shown, children and their childhoods go beyond the world that is already, forcing open the world that might be, and they do so with others. In this final concluding section I show that reading and writing rich descriptions of childhood assist educators to re-think growth and development as aspects of education that entail others ethically. I posit that multiple ways of viewing childhood illuminate possibilities for inclusive practices between educators and their students. Childhood invites educators to an immersed and ethical

⁸ Cuffaro, Harriet, *Experimenting with the World*, New York: Teachers College Press, 1995.

⁹ Gregory, Maughn, "Ethics Education and the Practice of Wisdom," *Teaching Ethics* 9, no. 2 (2009): 105-130. Gregory's scholarship focuses on bringing ethical and moral questions into the classroom by working with children inclusively and as critical thinkers.

relationship, focused on beginning again, centered in developing plasticity and fertile imaginations. In this context childhood functions as an ethical construct - a guiding value - in education. Differing views of childhood might uncover aspects of responsibility, recognition, acceptance of difference, acknowledgement of power dynamics, freedom, and development in educational relationships.

I offer as an example an analysis of two educators considering the concept and construction of childhood in their early childhood classrooms. Both educators see the condition of the children in their classroom and they also have a vivid understanding of what we might philosophically consider the intrinsic nature of childhood. However, both recognize that this intrinsic quality does not negate the rich possibility of what it means to see childhood as a means to change others and to affect change with others in the educational context. Paley's *The Boy Who Wanted to Be a Helicopter*, and Cuffaro's *Experimenting with the World* ask: What does it mean to recognize the concept of childhood as active and relational participant in the early childhood classroom?

There is a burgeoning field of teacher descriptions written by and for educators. Often they are studied in classes that look at the social and historical foundations of education. These kinds of personal narratives focused on descriptions of the young child in the early childhood classroom can be used to assist future educators in developing a moral lens to teaching and education, specifically as it relates to development. By cultivating habits of reading and writing on childhood educators are moved to discover how the concept of childhood includes the development of the self as well as the other.

In what follows, I show that Paley and Cuffaro are concerned with growth and development in their classrooms. Each educator challenges the conventional way of seeing children and children's development in the educational setting.

I began by looking at Cuffaro's first chapter in her work on *John Dewey and the Early Childhood Classroom*. Throughout the entire work she weaves descriptions of children and Dewey's philosophical writings into a beautiful portrait of early childhood education. The author is developmentally appropriate and well studied in childhood development (her earlier publications deal with stage theory in block play).¹⁰ Here however, she seeks to see past stage theories and curriculum and looks to uncover the philosophical practices at play in her classroom.

In the first chapter she begins to tell the story of her development as a teacher. Just as she weaves a narrative of philosophy and practice in the later half of the work, in this earlier section she weaves a story of her professional development as a teacher with Dewey's philosophy.

In terms of this project Cuffaro's text is important because she sees that her perspective as teacher is connected to the voices of the children that she has interacted with. She ends her preface (that I quote at length), rightfully titled "A Teacher's Perspective," with this statement:

It was when I understood that the process of unfolding and connecting Dewey's thought was made up of conversations – between Dewey and myself and also with other teachers – that I found the voice I sought, the rhythm that is present in teacher talk. My voice includes the voices of the teachers with whom I have worked and the students in courses I have taught. Dewey's voice is heard in the quotes from his writings. The children are present consistently as the focus of

¹⁰ Cuffaro, Harriet, "Block-Learning, Opportunities for Block Play," Feb. 5. 2005, Accessed Jan. 17, 2014. <http://www.communityplaythings.com/resources/articles/2005/block-building-opportunities-for-learning>. A reprint from: Child Care Information Exchange (1995). Block Play: Beginnings Workshop. May/June 36-38.

our conversations –conversations that proceed without the presence of many other voices referring to other sources or citing comparisons to similar ideas.¹¹

Cuffaro wanted to allow her interlocutors to show up in this work, even as a work that would show her personal development. She is reframing herself from ‘master’ teacher to someone engaged intimately with others, in learning. And though she includes adults in the narrative of this development as well as John Dewey, she hears the children’s voices as the focal point of each conversation and chapter. Therefore, it is the children who direct the movement of her work and likewise direct the movement of her self as educator.

Cuffaro is undermining years of traditional schooling when she does this. Not only is she unashamed at not quoting other sources at length, she does so because she recognizes that it is the children (those who have never written nor published a word) that will lend the most authority to the ideas expressed in Dewey’s philosophy. Moreover in here view these individual voices of children will lend to the general reader value to engaging in Cuffaro’s work. In this I see the implications of both Beauvoir’s and Woolf’s texts, recognizing that is in the ordinary that knowledge of reality and human experience can be understood.

Cuffaro only comes to these realizations after many years of teaching. She goes back to her early teaching days and discusses how she very quickly came to recognize how little her coursework had prepared her to see the experiences she was having as an educator.¹²

Recognizing that others, with whom she is interacting, have more to teach her about the structure of what she will teach, she notes that she begins to listen to the children in her classroom. She

¹¹ Cuffaro, Harriet, *Experimenting with the World: John Dewey and the Early Childhood Classroom*. New York: Teachers Colleges Press, 1995.

¹² Cuffaro, Harriet, *Experimenting with the World*, 3. “It was in that first year of teaching at the school, in conversations with other teachers and our staff meetings, that I began to realize that the development of curriculum was more than what was learned in courses.”

states that she starts to question how the means of her teaching (the methods, the lessons, the processes) may lead to very specific ends. She writes,

While child development was still an essential factor in my planning, I thought less in terms of stages and characteristics. Constructs about children began to give way to named children who were alive and present in the room and I began to give more attention to what I wanted them to learn.¹³

I think it noticeable that her questions are first aimed at the place of developmental theory in her classroom. As she starts to see children as individuals, her concept of the child begins to change. She sees in them inhabiting constructs beyond development. She ends this paragraph by seeing that she begins to pay attention to them.

Cuffaro tells many stories of children stacking and re-stacking blocks in her classrooms. Block play is a typical aspect in the early childhood classroom and Cuffaro looks at this ordinary play in the preschool classroom format from a philosophy of teaching and learning. The stories she tells of what happens with those blocks are stories of selves constructing, changing, and developing. Children learn to reason. An entire group of children learn to confront issues of power and desire. And a teacher begins to understand imagination in a new way. Cuffaro also tackles the question of development through block play. She presents a narrative of learning to engage with the blocks that is not easy and certainly not linear.

Just as the children whose voices direct the narrative, she has a unique history and a childhood filled with many moments -some painful, some joyful always in an all-Greek neighborhood filled with a culture and family history. She concludes by reminding her readers that this is not a linear story of development. She writes, “In highlighting some of my

¹³ Cuffaro, *Experimenting with the World*, 3.

experiences as a classroom teacher, I may appear to be describing a journey of questioning and trying that is linear, with one step leading to another, a progression of growth. That was not how it happened nor did it occur in the order presented.”¹⁴

Her narrative looks as if it moves through stages but she knows that her interactions with the children and the world of education were not that easy. She implores her readers to recognize the complex journey undergone to become a teacher comfortable with incorporating Dewey’s philosophy in the early childhood classroom.

Cuffaro makes her readers engage with two concerns. One, how childhood might represent itself within the classroom experience and how a new educator might engage with this presentation. And two, the significant time and growth educators take on their journey that is teaching.

While Cuffaro concentrates on describing how her growth as a teacher is challenged by reconsidering childhood in the classroom, Paley engages the question of growth and development with an emphasis on atypical development in her work *The Boy Who Would be Helicopter*.

Paley, University of Chicago Laboratory educator, has written many books that are beloved by early childhood educators everywhere. In these works she illuminates the world of early childhood through the conversations, plays and stories that she has recorded through her years as a teacher. In one such work, she tells a story about development that may challenge those working in the educational sphere known as ‘special ed’. Paley challenges herself to see

¹⁴ Cuffaro, *Experimenting With the World*, 5.

children's development differently and thus she opens up a new way to think about children with special needs and the call to individualize all instruction for all children.

In the *Boy Who Would be a Helicopter*, Paley tells the story of a year spent telling fairy tales with her classroom of children. She sets out to uncover the importance of play and storytelling in include all children to participate openly and freely in the classroom, thus setting them up for a learning and revelation. She writes, "Play and its necessary core of storytelling are the primary realities in the preschool and kindergarten, and they may well be the prototypes for imaginative endeavors throughout our lives."¹⁵

Paley confronts the conventional view of childhood head on in her writing. She is not content to see play as an aspect of childhood. Rather, she sees herself constructing an environment that will engage childhood capacities for continued development throughout life. She does not view this development as guaranteed. Moreover she views the development of these capacities as the necessary reality of the classroom. Thus play constructs the classroom as well as the interactions between Paley and her students and the students and students.

One particular child, Jason, who is an isolated child in the classroom, challenges Paley. He rarely ventures out of one corner of the room where he plays helicopter always and forever talking about fixing broken blades and flying away. Jason does not make eye contact, he is fixated on a singular object and task, he does not speak to his classmates, and when upset begins to wail. Paley purposely does not label Jason, though she recognizes that most educators would recognize signs of autism spectrum disorder in her description. But Paley does not label him. She writes, "For me, such labels are useless. A child is always at a certain complex point of

¹⁵ Paley, Vivian, *The Boy Who Would be Helicopter*, Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1991, 6.

development; like Jason, everyone in every endeavor, will continue to use techniques from the past in order to understand and work out ways to live securely in the present.”¹⁶

Paley sees Jason as the person he is in the present, who carries with him his past experiences. Rather than struggle to capture Jason in a specific diagnosis, she challenges herself to use her knowledge of narrative and play to include Jason as a willing and able participant in her classroom. For Paley, Jason will develop: her purpose is to engage his present self and assist him to develop towards a future that does not destroy the self but deepens Jason’s ability to engage the others within the class. It will be the interactions with her self and the other students that will direct Jason’s development in a positive way.

I read in her text much of Rousseau’s recognition that childhood is both strong and weak. For Rousseau and Paley, the connection with others can either build up the strength and the moral goodness of both the self and others in the interactions, or destroy any hope of growth.

Paley is not anti-developmental, she quite clearly grasps that children learn things differently, that they must come to the task as individuals, that there are steps to learning to tell a story that each child grasps at different times and manners. And yet, as Paley has learned to listen to children, one can tell that she has learned to question tenants of developmental theory. She notes: “We can never fully discover the essential issues for each child or set up the perfectly safe environment. What we do is continually demonstrate the process of searching for solutions. This is the point at which studying becomes teaching.”¹⁷

¹⁶ Paley, *The Boy Who Would*, 142.

¹⁷ Paley, *The Boy Who Would*, 57.

Paley sees herself as a teacher because she is not content to simply tell children how to solve their problems but is involved in searching for the problems and the solutions with them. Much like Jason's own story, Paley's story is a parallel story of learning to move from realms of pure fantasy and illusion and into the world of participation and dialogue. She writes, "Fantasy, of course, is the first line of defense against every sort of fear, and, in fantasy play, the children liaison the value of peer support. Gradually their private protective symbols blend with common rituals."¹⁸

Like Jason, Paley is not finished learning this, she retells moments of frustration and mistake. She shows us that Jason one day will start to talk to a young member of the class and the next day set upon destroying blocks and wailing. But Jason and Paley continue on their journey day after day. She writes, "I end the year with Joseph's enigma and Jason's determined ambivalence. What they recognize intuitively, I must subject to further scrutiny with my tape recorder and in my journals."¹⁹

Over the course of her story Paley develops a new way to think about Jason's isolation that goes beyond his deficits and possibilities diagnosis to thinking about his strengths and capabilities. She is amazed at the other children in the class's ability to incorporate Jason's different play into their stories. Although as an adult she sees Jason's stories as less complex than the other children's, she also begins to see that his stories have meaning far beyond what they first seem.

¹⁸ Paley, *The Boy Who Would*, 162.

¹⁹ Paley, *The Boy Who Would*, 173.

She starts to see patterns that revolve around abandonment and loss of control and recognizes that school is not a comfortable place for Jason. It is no wonder that his helicopter blades are always getting broken and having to be fixed. But Paley sees that Jason has no need for her to fix his helicopter blades or even for that matter him. Paley's role is to help him develop new ways of seeing his self within the classroom and making a space in the classroom for a boy who would be a helicopter.

Paley believes that fairy tales and classroom social stories can help her get to that space with Jason, even though she struggles with the violence and power present in her and the children's tales. She is comfortable, if not comforted, that as teacher she still has doubts about her curriculum and content. Paley does not stop using fairy tales, despite their complexity because she knows that she has developed as a teacher to include the complex and the discomfort of working with the complexity of childhood.

This was not always the case in her teaching. She tells of her first years of teaching, "I was in the wrong forest. I paid scant attention to the play and not hear stories."²⁰ While Paley tells Jason's story of developing the capacity to participate, she is at the same time telling the story of her own development of a teacher. Paley's story is one of learning to listen and to hear the children around her. She puts it this way, "There was a time when I believe it was my task to show the children how to solve their problems.... And the fantasy of being able to explain how it truly is with children made me finally try to separate the distractions from the real things and stop to listen to children."²¹

²⁰ Paley, *The Boy Who Would*, 5.

²¹ Paley, *The Boy Who Would*, 19-20.

These vignettes show master teachers describing childhood in order to understand themselves as developing beings as much as what it means to teach beings engaged in developing. In this way they reflect a similar vein of thought found in the previous chapters. Childhood calls out for everyone, adults and children alike, to reconsider and imagine interaction, always beginning again. Reading and writing on childhood assists educators in cultivating these understandings. Cuffaro sums up this conclusion nicely: “With our anecdotes, we tell as much about ourselves, the storytellers, as we do about the children we describe.”²²

Including readings of childhood in teacher education programs

I continue then with a premise that guides this project, that there is always interaction between adulthood and childhood. Though there are ‘adult things’ and ‘children things’ and though there are events that occur within ‘childhood’ and within ‘adulthood’, adults and children, as well as adulthood and childhood, are not separated in society. They are always connected. What tends to happen is that society splits the conversation into one of two extremes –adulthood or childhood.

In this project I consider multiple ways of viewing and seeing childhood. I posit that childhood could include others through love and empathy in a way that challenged conventions. But mostly I read descriptions that, time and again, show that childhood is above all else a time of growing and becoming, of learning and experiencing with others. It is the new and challenging infused with lessons from the old and mastered. As children we accomplish these

²² Cuffaro, *Experimenting with the World*, 15.

tasks through patience and watching, through trials and experiments. Childhood then may be called (among many things) an exploration of becoming with others.²³

This exploration of becoming is not completely alien to us as adults. Some, such as teachers and parents, delve into this situation regularly. However, even the exploration is often a secondary practice. How often as adults can we *genuinely* say that we are paying attention to our own becoming and development? Ironically, this is a skill at which most children may be said to best most adults.

For childhood is always ripe with change. Every moment seems to flux with growth and movement. Like asparagus in the spring, teeth push up from roots that yesterday seemed not to exist. Children's feet grow out of shoes before they are worn; a child takes a step and suddenly becomes bi-pedal. Interacting with childhood means interacting with this growth and movement, with development, that is change over time.

In traditional views of education the dominant take on development has been that of growth from immature to mature. According to this view, each stage becomes the ground for another, higher form of the living being.²⁴ But development can look like many things:²⁵ the discourse of how we talk about children, how we treat children, how we form theories of educational

²³ Levinson, Natasha, "Beginning Again: Teaching, Natality and Social Transformation," *Philosophy of Education Yearbook*, 1996. Arendt's natality and her concern with the gap between past and future should be seriously considered when engaging the question of how best to include children and adults in learning relationships. Arendt's work poses a critique to this definition of children as becoming though one that I think can be resolved by engaging Arendt's concern with relation and insertion within the world, a reading found in Levinson.

²⁴ Egan, Kieran, "Conceptions of Development in Education," *Philosophy of Education Yearbook*, 1998.

²⁵ Lee, Ok-Hee, "Childhood Images in Developmentally Appropriate Practice," *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy*, 3 no. 2 (2006):107-124.

programs for children, all these are circumscribed by how we think and talk, or fail to think, about the concept or figure of the child.^{26 27}

College-age pre-service teachers are not a group of students who as of yet, necessarily have engagement with children. Many college education courses are structured so that students have built in observation hours in order to see children, to begin to understand the child and the subject whom they are choosing to engage with, in their life's work. As my project comes to its conclusion, it is worthwhile asking, what kind of work is being done to assist these students in understanding the construct they are about to observe and with whom they will interact?²⁸

There is a need to understand what it means to *think with children* and their childhoods. This, I believe, can be accomplished when pre-service and new educators explore multiple views and dynamic texts that are read for rich and complex descriptions of childhood. Texts like those of this project offer future educators the possibility to reflect and critique deeply entrenched conventions in schooling and education. These texts, in particular challenge educators to reconsider the role of development and growth in the educational relationship.

²⁶ Austin, Helena, and Peter Freebody. "Assembling and Assessing the 'Child-Student': The 'Child' as a Criterion of Assessment." *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 33, no. 5 (2001): 535-50. Austin and Freebody show that the concept of the child portrayed in the classroom becomes that which children use to inform their own picture of what a 'child' is or can 'become' in the classroom. Austin and Freebody discuss how the child view assessment through the concept of child portrayed in the classroom. According to the research, the teacher's assessment of the children's narrative writing was based on the teacher's understanding of a child's development. The teacher assesses the child according to her understanding of where the child 'should be' in the development stages of life. Secondly, the children understand themselves through these assessments. The researchers conclude that in writing and reading classes students and teachers must explore the concept of child and childhood to fully engage and truly assess the students.

²⁷ Matusov, Eugene, Renee Depalma, and Stephanie Drye. "Whose Development? Salvaging the Concept of Development within a Sociocultural Approach to Education." *Educational Theory* 57, no. 4 (2007): 403-21. In a well constructed paper Matusov, De Palma and Drye argue not only does it matter how we think of children and childhood to consider development they point out the development occurs between the subject developing and one who is assessing the development. They argue that development is socially constructed.

²⁸ Cook, Paul and Young, Janet, "Face-to-face with children" *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 36 no. 3, (2004): 341-360. Cook and Young research pre-service teacher's belief and structures of changing those beliefs. They find interactions with children are a powerful force.

Teaching future educators to read childhood from multiple and varied disciplines and fields does not mean that colleges of education must speak from a place of authority on childhood, that there is only one authoritative text or one central author that must be read.

It is more akin to teaching future educators to read the world of philosophy and literature for the bits and pieces that sketch new ways of conceiving the students they will meet along the way. It is much like teaching students to have a ready library at hand for works that give nuance and new meaning to their work as educators.

It means recognizing that educators must engage with art, music, and poetry.

Above all it means allowing educators to receive childhood as something that is never static, that is always changing and morphing. Childhood is not to be held for long. Childhood is dependent on ‘grown-ups’ to care for it but it also wields great power to change those in charge of its care. Accepting this means teaching educators that there is a place for mutual reception and recognition between adults and children. Perhaps it is to view childhood, as a gift, but one that must be engaged with, not cherished on a shelf. It is to encounter childhood in wonder, and to make room for different ways of valuing childhood. It is to be open to childhood’s complexity and strength.

To assist these efforts, I would call on the guiding practice of the Descriptive Review. The Descriptive Review began as a practice from the Prospect School in Vermont.²⁹ In the descriptive review educators are encouraged to describe the individual child in great detail in order to more fully understand what has been learned and how to guide the student towards

²⁹ Himley, Margaret, *Prospect’s Descriptive Process: The Child, The Art of Teaching, and the Classroom and School*, North Bennington, VT: The Prospect Center, 2002. PDF, e-book. <http://cdi.uvm.edu/resources/ProspectDescriptiveProcessesRevEd.pdf>

future learning. In the Descriptive Review educators, particularly pre-service educators are encouraged to overcome bias about students and ways of learning.

Kesson and Traugh find that this practice might be especially important in areas where overwhelming social concerns make it impossible for educators to see past decay, urban blight, and poverty. They state that the descriptive review is a form of inquiry that “is designed to disrupt the habitual thinking patterns of teachers, enabling them to see aspects of their teaching practice more clearly.”³⁰ Although the practice is centered in phenomenological inquiry that differs from the mode of description offered in this project; however, I see that a possible connection exists between learning to see childhood in texts and then learning to see and describe a child with whom one is interacting. I would like to encourage research that combines the practice of the descriptive review and exposure to texts, art, and media that challenge and reframe views of childhood.

Struggling with the Future

I think that most educators would see reading and writing for childhood as a way to engage in challenging prevailing norms of development and growth.

For Dewey growth and development is not only wedded to process or product. Development means change and movement. Dewey offers a more robust concept. We can consider the concept of growth with a simple example: One does not add the habit of keeping one’s temper to a habit of losing one’s temper. Rather, one learns to keep one’s temper over time. The habit is not added: it is reconstructed.

³⁰ Kesson, Kathleen and Traugh Cecelia. “Descriptive Inquiry as Contemplative Practice.” *Teachers College Record* 108, no.9 (2006), 1863.

According to Dewey, growth is unending, one can never be finished growing. Growth is its own end.³¹ In another example: a baby has grown when she takes her first steps, not because of her size or even because walking is better, or more valued. Rather, she has found a new way of moving and being.³²

I highlight that this growth is not simply about newness but about childhood's capacity for plastic thinking, thinking that consists in seeing the problems and issues of society in a completely different light. Dewey recognized that children and their childhood were intimately engaged with the concerns of becoming, of developing. Dewey writes of the child in *Democracy and Education*, "Now when we say that immaturity means the possibility of growth, we are not referring to absence of powers which may exist at a later time; we express a force positively present -- the ability to develop."³³ For Dewey, retaining the plasticity that allows for habits to grow means continually engaging the key capacities of childhood. Fearing that a society resting in its traditions would stagnate, he writes:

The instinctively mobile and eagerly varying action of childhood, the love of new stimuli and new developments, too easily passes into a 'settling down,' which means aversion to change and a resting on past achievements. Routine

³¹ Hansen, David, Dewey's Book of the Moral Self, In *John Dewey and our Educational Prospect: A Critical Engagement with Dewey's Democracy and Education*, ed. David Hansen Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006, 185.

³² Arendt, Hannah, *The Human Condition*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998. Hannah Arendt writes of the natality that is presented within the human condition. This is presented through the child. Although natality is an intriguing subject I have focused on descriptions that are not about newness of being in the world but already within the condition of becoming. Natality is essential to this task as Arendt's conception of thinking aligns much with Dewey's understanding of newness *qua* growth. However, Dewey's reliance on present moments seem to indicate something that is already thrown past the first 'surprise' and hinge instead on the movement of growth beyond birth and newness. Further projects would look at this relationship in terms of both teacher and descriptions of childhood.

³³ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 46.

habit, and habits that possess us instead of our possessing them, are habits, which put an end to plasticity.³⁴

For Dewey this idea of growth underpins what it means to be engaged in the moral life. As Hansen found, “The entire philosophy will pivot around the familiar, provocative, still controversial idea of ‘growth’, which Dewey describes not as having an end or outcome but as itself, the finest end or outcome of education.”³⁵ In *Democracy and Education*, where growth remains a central theme, the child and her childhood explain the conditions of growth in the human journey that Dewey calls education.

Future practices might include not simply making space for educators to inquire into their childhoods or the concept of childhood prevalent in a theory but in forging spaces where philosophy and practice delves deeply into the concept of development that pervades the modern educational space. Childhood as concept opens up concerns and questions about development that do not only belong to the fields of psychology and sociology.

There is a real need for the field of philosophy and education to reengage questions and concerns of development. The field of philosophy has recently taken up questions of development; philosophy of education has much to lend these lines of research.³⁶ This project serves as a precursor to such emphasis.³⁷

³⁴ Dewey, John, *Reconstruction in Philosophy, The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899-1924, Vol. 12*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978, 51.

³⁵ Hansen, David, *John Dewey and our Educational Prospect: A Critical Engagement with Dewey's Democracy and Education*, ed. David Hansen Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006, 1.

³⁶ Haafte, A.W.; Korthals, Michiel; Wren, T.E., (eds), *Reconstructing the Foundations of Human Development and Education*, New York: Springer Press, 1997.

³⁷ One component that philosophy of education can add to philosophy of development is a concerted effort to include the questions that surround current inclusion practices.

I endeavor to understand development as the aim of education through the lens of reading childhood in philosophy and literature. How does the complexity mined in this project assist in drawing new space and complexity within the construction and practice of development and developmentally appropriate practice that overwhelms the discourse of early childhood education. I am concerned with how teachers and parents are schooled to consider ‘typical’ development and how the prevailing discourse situates the differently developmentally child. Looking at childhood from the perspective of philosophy offers a method for reading and observing the complexities of the concept of development, and takes it beyond psychology.

Lawrence Kohlberg, a historical and great figure in moral developmental psychology writes in a seminal article cowritten with Rochelle Mayer, “The most important issue confronting educators and educational theorists is the choice of ends for the educational process.”³⁸ Or in other words, as his title states, “Development as the Aim of Education.” Kohlberg cites the work of John Dewey throughout to anchor a stunning argument for education to be grounded in a universal value-laden theory of development. For Kohlberg progressive education is progressive because it is soundly developmental in scope and it values development as the aim. In other words, after the readings of this project, how might philosophy of education reengage Kohlberg’s concern?

In conclusion, the task as an educator is to continue recognize growth and development as possibility and not allow oneself to become complacent with how things look. We must continue to describe the world to each other in order to see the values, morals, and relationships present.

³⁸ Kohlberg, Lawrence and Mayer, Rochelle, “Development as the Aim of Education,” *Harvard Educational Review* 42, no. 4 (1972): 449.

All the facts in the world cannot make us live well: to live well is to interrogate that part of ourselves that makes us ask, is yet this world good? Is yet this world beautiful? Is yet this world just? These are the questions of philosophy and ethics. These are the questions that childhood gives us all, adults and children. This is the kind of question Lee heard in her classroom.

As in the case of this project, asking these questions is a task of learning to read the world well. The texts of childhood, of which there are far more than this project can uncover, must not be read as a canon, rather as a friendly lending library fostering play, imagination, and friendship with childhood.

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