

Outline of the Philosophical Concept of the Child and the “Child in us”

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Abstract

In this article, an outline of the philosophical concept of the child is presented, based on the central idea that our childhood and the child we were is not a thing of the past, but is always present within us, at any age. This “Child in us” is not only our longing for love but is the very love that secretly persists within us. In our lives, we long for this love; we are constantly searching for that ancient “child within us”, mostly without knowing that we are always that child – love.

Keywords

child; childhood; love; memories; Child in us

Prolegomena to the philosophical concept of the child

My initial questions and search for answers lie in grasping the concept of philosophy in the contemporary world: I ask whether philosophy is still today, in the words of the ancient philosophers Plato and Aristotle, an astonishment at the incommensurability of the self-evident, whether it is constantly, in the words of M. Heidegger, a responsible response to the being of being, or whether the calculability of nature does not transform human imagination into mere calculating thought, or whether the words of M. Heidegger’s words that philosophy ends and cybernetics begins; whether, in the words of another great, E. Husserl, the *Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* is the result of an errant rationalism; whether it is still possible to perceive philosophy as the art of creation according to Deleuze and Quattari. In my answers, I draw primarily on the conception of J. Patočka and his *Natural World as a philosophical problem*, where the natural world is contrasted with the world of physis, i.e., the world of concepts, understood as a world not acquired by theorising, a world of the pre-conceptual, felt from the moment one is a human being, a world before the discovery of its problematic, where hiddenness is not yet experienced; a natural world where the world is not yet the world of *physis*, i.e., a simplified construction of the natural world. On this basis, I perceive philosophical thinking not only from a positivist, in a way closed point of view which is indeed necessary for grasping concepts, but also from the conviction that philosophy is always also something more; it is an unlimited openness, taking place in the words of J. Patočka in the natural, and not in the mathematically reconstructed world of mathematical natural science... Nor is the concept of the child a given: it is based on Patočka’s conception of the natural world in contrast to the world of *physis* and can help us to understand ourselves – these are the core axioms of my conception of the child and childhood.

The philosophical reflection on the concept of the child also relates to the philosophical-anthropological concept of man in the sense of Kuhn's and Skolimowski's paradigms – the mythical man – *homo irrationalis*, Logos – *animal rationale* (*zoon logon echon* and *politikon*), Theos – *imago Dei* (*homo viator* and *homo poenitens*), Mechanos – *ego cogitans* as a sublime transcendence and a being with deficiencies or computer man. What I bring here is a new conception of man as a fragile being woven from his sorrows and memories. In my conception I draw not only on the ideas and theses of some great philosophers, but also on my own life experience. I am thus gradually discovering a new concept in philosophy – the philosophy of the "child" within ourselves, the child that we are constantly being and that we are constantly seeking and never ceasing to seek, even in adulthood.

In philosophical anthropology, the concept of man has its irreplaceable place. The concept of the child, however, eludes philosophical grasp. In my essay, I present an outline of the "philosophy of the child" based on the ideas of Plato, J. J. Rousseau, M. Scheler, C. G. Jung, J. Patočka, E. Lévinas, G. Marcel, M. Heidegger and others. I start from the premise that the child is good in itself, it is love, and only in human society, which is not perfect, does the child also become a non-perfect being that needs to be educated.

The search for the child

On the basis of the ideas of the philosophers mentioned above, I will conceptualise the concept of the child first from the historical perspective of the approach to the child (how the child has been perceived in society historically – white, black legend), and I will recall here some statements of the great philosophers about the child and childhood. Overall, I approach the concept of the child in terms of philosophy from seven perspectives, which I have established not only by analysing the ideas of the philosophers, but primarily by analysing and linking these ideas to my own insights, also derived from my own extensive research into and analysis of memoirs.

The child is thus a being that is:

- *ens amans*, a loving being filled with trust (inspired by the philosophy of M. Scheler)
- a being of future sorrow and memories (inspired by S. Freud – essay *Erinnern, Wiederholen, Durcharbeiten*, 1914) – to remember, to repeat, to work
- a being at once abandoned and divinely powerful (inspired by C. G. Jung, *The Psychology of the Child Archetype*)
- Being intentional (inspired by the thesis of E. Husserl – the child is born into a pre-known world, but already with a given intention of love and trust)
- wandering being (a newly arriving being, then a being of three movements according to J. Patočka: acceptance, adaptation, transcendence – the movement of self-determination, defence and truth)
- the invasion of love into the totality of being (inspired by M. Heidegger and his concept of man as an invasion into the totality of being)
- the eternal return and longing for love (inspired by F. Nietzsche)

Memories of childhood, the Child in us

The culmination – the completion – of the philosophical concept of the child and then childhood is the theme based on the analysis of the memories of students of different ages (from 2002–2020).

Memories, understood by their utterance as an “object”, can be analysed into several categories – joyful, painful, dirty, shameful, prophetic, anxious, meditative, joyful and painful at the same time (Dostoyevsky, Hříbková).

On the basis of the analysis of these memories, it turned out that our childhood is not primarily beautiful and joyful, but is associated more with anxious (women) and painful (men) memories. Joyful, beautiful memories are associated with the figures of our grandparents. The happy memories are almost identical in some way, the negative memories are different from each other (we all have different ones).

In the analysis of memories, I rely on the ideas of H. Bergson followed by Deleuze’s Bergsonism.

Intuition is an immediate cognition in which we raise a problem, we discover a difference in nature, we perceive real time as duration. It is a method of being problematising (criticising the wrong problems and finding the right ones), differentiating (dividing and re-intersecting), and temporalising (thinking in terms of duration). In his method of intuition, Bergson distinguishes qualitative and continuous multiplicity as opposed to quantitative or numerical multiplicity. Qualitative multiplicity focuses on the subject and subjectivity. This multiplicity is characterised by three properties: continuity, heterogeneity and simplicity. Bergson further speaks of two forms of negativity: the negativity of simple limitation and the negativity of contradiction. For research in pedagogy (or philosophy), it is necessary to note that consciousness, which remembers moments of external things (events), thus actualises a purely temporal, i.e., no longer spatial, dimension. Qualitative multiplicity reveals the subjective (duration) in continuity, heterogeneity and simplicity; it does not lean towards the present, so it refers neither to the psychological experience of duration nor to the physical experience of movement – duration is an extended (transcended) condition of experience.

This method could be used, for example, to process memories which are not understood as something that was in the past, but instead as something that alone (the present cannot be captured) is constantly “present” in us. The “child in us” is thus not a memory of what has already been, even though it cannot be a memory; it is what is always present in us and what is always ongoing.

Man is a very fragile being, woven of his sorrows and memories.

The Child in us as:

– a mystery, like the veil of the mythical dancer Maya. The child is lost in the depths of our interior, only occasionally surfacing, it is an *alétheia* – an uncovering, an immanent plane in the chaos

– abyss of abysses, as a liminal situation, an event, a hypostasis: our self is in the depths of the abysses of eternity and nothingness – encountering the infinite emptiness of our own abysses

somewhere in the far unknowable depths of ourselves, in the deep mysteries surrounding what and who we are

– a being on a journey, through Mythos (*homo irrationalis*), Logos (*animal rationale*), Theos (*homo viator* and *homo poenitens*), Mechanos (*ego cogitans*)

– Love and loneliness, facing the other... our childhood is not created by ourselves, but by other people

– a landscape of memories

In conclusion

Who is the "Child in us"?

The "child in us" is a mystery, an illuminated and unenlightened part of our personality.

It is the abyss of the abyss within ourselves, the nothingness and the eternity, it is our own event. It is not something that once was, it is not a mere past, but is that which is constantly acting and being.

The "child in us" is our presence and our solitude, our love and our illusion. It is what we are constantly seeking within ourselves in the form of our longing for love, and it is also our longing for the intrinsically joyful love of our childhood.

The "child in us" is not only love, but also a return to love. And not only that, it is a return to the beginnings of our life, which will one day be consummated by death and transformed.

The child is all that is within us, our beginning and our end, our past, present and future.

It is the love we encounter in our lives and that we will all meet one day.

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