

Editorial: Philosophy and Children

Philosophy deals with fundamental questions. Everyone, even a child, will at some time or another be puzzled by such questions. Children especially may come to them with a freshness undulled by habit or by that steady often unthinking acceptance of custom involved in growing up. Children, then, are potential philosophers. But does it follow from that they are potentially good at philosophy?

Many of us from time to time think of writing a book which lays out the fundamental questions of philosophy in a simple, uncluttered way, and presents the issues starkly and directly, without scholarly apparatus or historical reference. Such a book would serve a number of purposes, not least for its author. Would such a book be a model for philosophy, as it might be introduced to children?

According to non-philosophers, the besetting sin of philosophers is the arrogant thought that it might be possible to philosophize about nature without knowing any science, or about history in ignorance of history and the way historians work, or about religion without experience of one religion at least, or about the mind without a grasp of what psychology and neurophysiology can achieve, or about ethics and politics without some experience of human life and the ways of the world, or about aesthetics without a feeling for some beautiful objects. In so far as philosophers do behave in the way their critics allege, there is merit in the complaint.

It is good to awaken and nurture a philosophical spirit in children. What would not be good would be to encourage them, even inadvertently, in the thought that philosophy floats free of its moorings in other more earth-bound forms of knowledge and experience. A childish sense of philosophical wonder is not on its own enough for serious philosophy.