

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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THE AESTHETICS OF PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTION PARADOXES AMONG CHILDREN

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Abstract:

Children demonstrate an exceptional knack for posing questions, showcasing an even more impressive ability to diversify these inquiries across various domains and directions that often surpass comprehension by the majority. Therefore, many intellectuals advocate for children's right to philosophize, viewing it as a pivotal mode of thinking rooted in inquiry, bolstering cognitive faculties, and exercising reasoning in an era dominated by digitization. Consequently, my research delves into the significance of philosophical questioning among children, exploring its aesthetic subtleties and how these inquiries contribute to shaping their identities during the transition from childhood to adolescence and beyond. This process is influenced by numerous diverse factors that contribute to the formation of philosophical inquiries within the child's mind.

Keywords:

Aesthetics / Paradoxes / Philosophical Question / Children.

Introduction

The child is a realm that beckons us to ponder deeply, considering it a fertile ground - in my view - where much discovery occurs. He serves as a gateway to knowledge. When we mention "the child," we conjure an aesthetic icon, characterized by a blend of intelligence and naivety, innocence and shrewdness, tranquility and recklessness, foolishness and astuteness. He's an icon adorned with extraordinary beauty, pleasure, fertility, and generosity, yet simultaneously marked by glaring ugliness, ingratitude, cunning, miserliness, and reticence. This is how the child appears to us as we interact with them, according to our different situations that force us to adapt to their sometimes peculiar and astonishing paradoxes. These are typically the characteristics of every well-nurtured child. They are mostly natural reactions for we believe that children are inherently obsessed with discovery...Hence, "childhood constitutes a significant focus of scientific inquiry and scholars' attention today, representing a milestone indicating the crystallization of societal scientific consciousness. The study of childhood is integral to both present and future considerations, as children represent a substantial segment of society shaping its forthcoming generation"¹. Therefore, "nurturing

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a child today is cultivating the man they will become tomorrow. Since culture begins with the child, children's literature stands at the forefront of cultural domains aiming to achieve this objective."²

Engaging with the world inhabited by children entails navigating through a realm fraught with risks. Interacting with them requires caution to avoid forcing them to assume personas or inflicting violence upon them, especially concerning modes of communication and striving to elevate ourselves without compromising the aesthetics of discourse in general, and literary discourse in particular. "Childhood, considered one of the most critical and perilous stages of human life, distinguishes itself with unique qualities and characteristics. It lays the groundwork for subsequent life stages, shaping the child's personality and setting them apart from others."³ This aligns with the saying of the most exalted: "Next He brings you forth as a child, then lets you reach maturity."⁴

My study delves into an important issue regarding the philosophical question and its aesthetic dimensions among children. It emphasizes the value of philosophical questions, which children use with us in an insistent and pressing manner. This issue necessitates further attention and should be given the appropriate amount of philosophical aesthetic debate, considering the emotional state through which children interact with us when we engage in intimate dialogue with them. To ensure that we honor their rights, we must engage in a beautiful dialogue that intertwines seriousness and humor. We are referring here to children "who have not reached the age of sixteen and who are allowed by this stage of childhood to play and sing".⁵

The child has the absolute right to question and revel in their questions, as well as to experience wonder, astonishment, doubt, questioning, and unrestricted thinking. elements that frequently catch adults off guard ...This is owing to the child's boundless imagination. "Therefore, a child's imagination requires nourishment to prevent them from veering into the realm of delusions detached from reality"⁶. He has a unique way of thinking, often referred to by philosophers as "innocence in thought". "The child's imagination knows no bounds; this is evidenced by various psychological, sociological, and biological studies, as well as daily experiences throughout time"⁷.

Typically, children possess a distinctive style in asking questions. Often, they plunge us into a world of skepticism, strangeness, and paradox compelling us to approach them with both caution and amazement at the way they ask long questions with constant insistence. They usually add an aesthetic philosophical logic to the structure to their questions, which makes us surprised, laugh, or interact with them spontaneously depending on the situation. This significantly contributes to cultivating aesthetic awareness among children. Consequently, we are tempted to indulge them, feeling that responding to their (mischievous) questions is a natural response, even if it involves some manipulation or trickery to convince them. Hence, the innate instinct that endowed children with this adaptable and capable ability, enabling them to grow, interact, evolve, and discover, weighs heavily on our moral and human responsibility towards our children, so that we extend to them our nurturing, sacred hand to empower them to hone their talents in any ability we see in them from an early age ensuring that we don't redirect their innocent desires or aspirations"⁸ into something contrary to their aspirations.

In this study, I employ a methodology of interpretation, analysis, critique, experimentation, and representation. I endeavor to focus, as much as possible, on practical examples closely related to the realm of childhood, drawing from aesthetic perspectives that have addressed this topic with the aim of stimulating cognitive curiosity to discover the nature of these philosophical practices that emanate from children and are expressed in their questions, with all their attractiveness and paradox. Through critical analytical methodology, I inquire: Do we necessarily require a philosophy of childhood within the Algerian and Arab cultural framework? Specifically, because we inhabit a cultural and educational environment that imposes upon the child a set of values from the early years with parents, which they must adhere to, then through schooling and education, and of course, society: Does this upbringing stifle questioning? Can children learn philosophy during their early years and benefit from their creativity, which is built interactively on wonder, imagination, and passion? This is the intrinsic essence of philosophy in a child's spirit. I do not believe that engaging in philosophy is reserved solely for adults, excluding children. Nor do I believe that children's rights are trivialized within human society in general to such an exaggerated extent, which largely reflects a state of oppression imposed on the child as a manifestation of the broader society.

As scholars acknowledge, “the family serves as the primary educational and cultural incubator wherein a child's personality is shaped, both individually and within the contexts of society and religion. It engages in purposeful educational and cultural activities aimed at fostering the sound growth of the individual. Undoubtedly, the cultural and educational environment of the family significantly influences the upbringing and education of the child”⁹. Therefore, the family constitutes a crucial source of culture for the child, representing the predominant source of their philosophical inquiries. This is, of course, in addition to other cultural sources such as neighbors, school, peer groups, and audio-visual media, primarily television.

All children are philosophers...or so the facts suggest

The philosophical question/ Philosophical practice, or can children engage in philosophical thinking?/ the aesthetic awareness of children.

In fact, my study of this topic and my interest in it stem from every dialogue I have had with my younger brother, “Mohamed Anas”, who often displayed a curiosity to know more than what is known. Sometimes, he posed questions that transcended the supposed axes of his thinking.

Prior to his enrollment in primary school, his curiosity knew no bounds, with each query unveiling philosophical nuances or profound depths. As he embarked on his academic journey, I observed a remarkable evolution in the sophistication and consciousness of his inquiries. Our conversations burgeoned into realms of infinite possibilities, often leaving him astounded by the responses received. Frequently, he would extrapolate further questions from each answer provided. This compelled me to center my study on the philosophical question among children—a subject that has intrigued philosophers and critics alike. It is noteworthy, based on my research, that Western scholarship and investigations in this domain significantly outnumber those conducted in the Arab world.

1-The Philosophical Question:

**How can philosophical questioning create events, which we call intellectual events?
And how can philosophical questioning produce an answer?**

The “main issue in modern philosophy is an epistemological one, which revolves around questioning the possibility and limits of mental knowledge”¹⁰. Philosophy, throughout its development, has opened our thinking to new issues and new analytical methods”¹¹. Therefore, it finds solutions to every issue it raises through questioning.

Philosophy is the ongoing questioning that builds each answer upon a new question. It is the vast expanse of inquiry, indeed the grand arena of questioning that has perpetually captivated people with words like: what? who? how? how much? why? and when? Whenever they are juxtaposed with demonstrative pronouns or existential verbs. This fascination continues to this day, with some suggesting that this questioning is diabolical temptation, attributing its first use to Satan. Some even argue that anyone who employs these questions, particularly in matters of religion, ultimately aligns themselves with this accursed creature”¹².

In Arabic, the term for "question" is "su'al", while in French, it's "la question". A question is, first and foremost, a matter of seeking an answer to something unknown. It is a matter of unknowns, for there is no question in information per se. If a question is asked about information that is necessarily true, such as axioms, then it is either a form of intellectual or mental deficiency, or it is a doubt about the truth of that information¹³.

Moreover, the philosophical question is not a request for a specific piece of information to be added to an individual's memory from other information. Instead, it is a request for the truth that concerns the individual alone¹⁴. According to the American writer Cora Mason, Socrates was the first to use philosophical questioning, the man who dared to question. This questioning did not take on a single or fixed form but manifested in several open forms through dialogue¹⁵. The philosophical question, according to him, is the question that generates ideas. The Question has an important tool for reaching the truth and changing ignorance about it. The philosophical question, therefore, in this conception, aims to reach knowledge that is driven by curiosity and passion when faced with a problem¹⁶. Thus, questioning opens our eyes to the meaning of the world's existence and our own.

In his book “The School of Wisdom”, Abd al-Ghaffar Mekkaoui emphasizes that the first step in awakening the philosophical question is to revert it back to the original state of philosophizing, namely the original astonishment that led the earliest philosophers to ask this simple yet difficult question: What is existence?¹⁷ This prompts us to inquire about the difference between an ordinary question and a philosophical question, or what distinguishes the two? “A Philosophical question differs from an ordinary question in that it has no direct utilitarian purpose. Moreover, the subject of the question often exceeds its boundaries, that is, its definition or embodiment. Furthermore, every individual can ask philosophical questions without being familiar with the history, techniques, ideas, and answers of philosophy. Additionally, Philosophical questions are not exclusive to philosophers alone; anyone can ask their questions that trouble them and seek answers and come up with their own answers and discoveries as they believe and imagine. The philosophical question is not a request for a

specific piece of information to be added to an individual's memory from other information rather, it is a request for the truth that concerns the individual alone".¹⁸

Philosophical practice, or can children engage in philosophical thinking?

The child is 'the quintessential offspring of inquiry' in their existential engagement with the world and events. The child does not perform any action or display any behavior without being accompanied by a torrent of questions that express their burning desire for knowledge. The child possesses no intellectual or cognitive tools beyond the perplexing ability to question. Thus, questions serve as the arsenal of human beings in the early stages and throughout their lives. Childhood is a liberating journey in which the child strives to break free from the constraints and limitations of reality¹⁹. Children often construct these questions through imagination. Scientific consensus suggests that all children, without exception, are born with an innate ability to imagine, and this ability develops in all of them uniformly. However, it is not inevitable that all children will reach the stage of maturity in their development. In other words, while it is scientifically proven that the potential for imagination grows in children, it is also scientifically proven that children do not grow equally in this potential, and individual differences are clear between them in the amount of growth and maturity of their imagination²⁰. The function of imagination seems to be more effective in children, prompting their philosophical questions as they reside in a realm of imagination, grow through it, and possess an active imagination that aids in their sound development.

In their early years, children engage with inanimate objects, animals, and dolls as if they were humans who understand and reciprocate their actions. Young girls handle their dolls, kissing, embracing, and conversing with them, mirroring maternal behavior. They even attempt to feed, scold, and discipline them²¹. Young boys invent stories and narrate tales about themselves that diverge from reality, elaborating on the details with a peculiar sense of emotion, pouring out their dreams, desires, and fantasies.

Psychologists assert that children construct an imaginative world for themselves and unconsciously strive to develop it continuously"²². Therefore, directing a child's imagination properly and aiding in their growth succeeds in fulfilling a fundamental educational function. Through their imagination, children formulate valid questions with a logical approach, grounded in their simplistic perspective and unique life conceptions. "They transition from hypothetical moral imagination to tangible creative imagination, whether written, sensory, or visual."²³

In all my experiences with children, I've consistently observed that the majority of their questions, regardless of their variety, stem from wonder, astonishment, or their personal knowledge of things. Often, it feels as though they possess a mind larger than their own, asking profound questions that may not occur to adults or might even embarrass them. Consequently, such children are frequently repressed or punished, thus extinguishing their inherent love for exploration and discovery, which arises from their philosophical questions. Hence, we can assert that astonishment, according to Aristotle, is "the origin of creativity in both art and science"²⁴.

The wonder that sparks the first glimmer of creativity is invariably wonder at the familiar. The child asks the first question of wonder: "Where is God?" We reply, "God is above

the sky." Then the child asks, "Is He in the sky?" We respond, "He isn't confined to the sky, but rather exists everywhere." Yet, this prompts us to contemplate how God could be present everywhere. Does this intimate connection have to do with the doctrines of unity of existence? Thus, the child's question becomes a marvelously philosophical issue. The origin of this wonder lies in the state of perpetual innocence that distinguishes children, and in the momentary innocence that characterizes adult creativity²⁵.

During the first conference on the topic of new philosophical practices, "les nouvelles pratiques philosophiques," held in April 1002 in Paris, Gaston Berger addressed the right to philosophize, "droit de philosopher," as a right that ensures various generations human rights and promotes the welfare state's guardianship instead of guaranteeing effective authority. He emphasized its significance in shaping the relationship between individuals, society, and the world. This right can be relied upon within the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, which ensures the freedom to express opinions on all matters concerning children (Article 21)²⁶.

Philosophers disagree on the possibility of practicing philosophy with children. For example, "the Sophist Callicles supports the idea that it is not premature to begin philosophy, while Plato, through Socrates, considers that one can philosophize in childhood when they reach the age of thirty"²⁷. Montaigne was more precise in saying, "It was a great mistake to keep it away from children... Philosophy teaches us to live, and childhood is a lesson in itself just like the rest of the stages of life. Why don't we engage with it? A child, guided by his caregiver, is better able to learn to read or write"²⁸. Epicurus opposes this trend, saying, 'In his youth, no one engages in philosophy... because he engages, at a very early or very late age, in an activity that nourishes the soul.

The philosophical activity is imposed on any youth as it does on an adult²⁹. As indicated by the renowned theory of (Jean Piaget 1933), most children before the ages of 21 and 22 are incapable of philosophical thinking. Piaget believes this is due to the fact that children, before this age, are unable to think about thinking³⁰. Piaget is considered one of the foremost contributors to our understanding of children's thinking and their cognitive development. His experiments, studies, and theories represent a significant and substantial portion of the experiments, studies, and theories in the field of cognitive development in general"³¹.

Despite this clear disagreement among philosophers, we are often fascinated by children's questions due to their sensitivity, such as those asked by children ranging in age from 1 to 4 years old. This is confirmed by Cassier, who says, "We often hear from their mouths words that go directly to the depths of philosophy... They often possess a kind of genius that they lose when they become teenagers." Bernard Groethuysen confirms that metaphysics is the answer to children's questions"³²

Philosopher Gareth Matthews made significant progress in this area and extensively discussed Piaget's "failure" to see the apparent philosophical thinking in every child he studied. Matthews provides several excellent examples of very young children's philosophical perplexity, derived from stories he gathered from friends who were interested in children's philosophical thinking. It is not uncommon for adults interested in this field to encounter such examples in their lives. For example:

- Tim, aged six, while engrossed in licking his bowl, asked: “Dad, how can we be sure that everything isn't a dream?”³³
- Jordan, aged five, when going to bed at 8:00 p.m., asked: “If I go to bed at 8:00 p.m. and wake up at 7:00 a.m., how can I really be sure that the small hand of the clock has only gone around once? Do I have to stay up all night to watch it? And if I look away for a moment, maybe the small hand will turn twice”

One day, John Edgar, aged four, took his first flight on an airplane. He had been used to seeing airplanes take off and ascend into the sky, then gradually disappear into space, when the plane stopped ascending and the seat belt sign appeared, turned to his father with a tone of great relief, tinged with bewilderment, and said: “Things don't really get smaller up here”.³⁴

Philosophers have therefore disagreed greatly on the issue of whether a child is capable of practicing philosophy in their life. Some “see the child as a spontaneous philosopher with existential inquiries that never cease, such as Karl Jaspers and Michel Onfray, who consider philosophy as confronting questions and searching for answers. Others, such as René Descartes, believe that philosophizing is an exit from childhood.”³⁵

The Aesthetic Awareness of Children: Do Children Perceive Beauty?

In ancient times, the human goal was to search for everything useful and beneficial, with little regard for distinguishing between the aesthetically pleasing and the unattractive. In fact, studies focused on children's growth and cognitive development, especially in the first year, demonstrate that there are multiple areas through which children are elevated cognitively. These areas include perception, information processing, classification, and memory. Of primary interest to me is the aspect of perception, where the child is capable of perceiving objects and their attributes such as color, hardness, shape. Additionally, children, particularly in their first year, are fond of observing the movement and changes in the size or direction of elements and objects.³⁶

From this perspective, we can assert that “since the moment of their first breath and connection with the world, children rely on aesthetic foundations. Their sense of sight becomes an exploratory tool for understanding their surroundings—color, light, softness, and hardness. Observations, studies, and experiments have shown that the senses of hearing and sight are among the first higher faculties a child employs in engaging with the world (even before they crawl or walk)”³⁷. The aesthetic value in a child is a rich value with a wide scope, multiple characteristics and features. In fact, the child begins to perceive the qualities of what surrounds him from color, sound, and shape, and that is known through beauty or gets to know the world through the impact of beauty on him...Thus, he implicitly appreciates the aesthetic value, without the ability to express it but rather he perceives, classifies, distinguishes, and things are determined for him through their aesthetic value, that is, their vivid colors, or their shimmering shapes, or their stimulating movement or their high voice rather than the harsh one, because the higher voice resonate more profoundly within himself.

Therefore, we are often surprised by the child's fascination with peculiar objects or their intense desire to play with items not intended for play—such as their enjoyment of playing with a television remote control, their keenness to manipulate car keys, or their

interest in playing with cosmetics, especially for girls. And other instances that vary from one child to another depending on the environment they belong to and the personality they begin to shape during these stages that he experiences in his childhood.

Is this aesthetic value among children subjective or objective?

In my view, it's subjective because, at this stage, they are keen on exploration and maximizing knowledge. Consequently, they employ various methods, including philosophical questions, although they might not be aware of their philosophical pursuits, resorting to imitation at times—imitating those older than them—because imitation represents pure adaptation.

Imitation holds significance as, regardless of awareness, it forms the symbolic manifestation of thinking. Prior to genuine imitation, there's a process called pseudoimitation or false imitation. If a specific individual performs an action, the child, having recently done it themselves, imitate this action. Naturally, this isn't genuine imitation; it's mere representation, which takes place in an already existing mental image, of others' behavior as if they were his own behavior patterns. Similarly, the first genuine imitation resembles this pseudoimitation, as it incorporates behavior patterns already existing within the child's repertoire³⁸. Moreover, breaking taboos in asking questions beyond their age, without distinguishing between what's permissible and impermissible, and other methods often received via technology and television, distance them from the demand that contributes to the refinement of his questions. Children exposed to television exhibit decreased reading of children's magazines, diminished interest in stories and novels, and similarly reduced radio listening. Television satiates psychological needs met by other forms of entertainment³⁹.

Additionally, “at this age, they lack the capacity for interactive perception, enabling the identification of objective features in objects”⁴⁰. For instance, they may be drawn to bright colors without comprehending why. Consequently, intense pressures on children hinder their creative will, transforming them into programmed machines. Parents' desire for their child's excellence, or at least success, leads this family/mother or father to meticulously monitor their child's academic progress often resorting to threats of punishment, such as physical discipline, expulsion, or deprivation, if high marks are not attained. This compels children to resort to lying or falsifying test scores to avoid severe punishment.⁴¹

A child's aesthetic awareness is confined to the beautiful, especially in the initial stage, due to their nascent formation. Thus, he connects with the world around him, where if not intimidating, it becomes bewildering; the enormity of the furniture around him, the members of his family leading him, in his prepubescent stage, to fear anything larger than himself, things and people. Therefore, his aesthetic awareness is based on the beautiful and not on the sublime, which requires him to have emotional and mental abilities that absorb the enormity, vast spaces, frightening shapes, and also unfamiliar appearances in terms of size, color, and composition.⁴²

A child's culture is a set of sciences, arts, literature, skills, and behavioral values that they can absorb and represent at every stage of their development. Through these, he can direct his behavior within society in a sound way. A creative elite from the society transfers this knowledge and values, guided by the spiritual and religious principles, intellectual and

artistic achievements of the society, also relying on science in what relates to the characteristics of childhood, its stages of development and its needs.⁴³

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