



Childhood & Philosophy

E-ISSN: 1984-5987

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Kennedy, David; Kohan, Walter Omar
SCHOOL AND THE FUTURE OF SCHOLÉ : A PRELIMINARY DIALOGUE
Childhood & Philosophy, vol. 10, núm. 19, enero-junio, 2014, pp. 199-216
Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro
Maracanã, Brasil

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SCHOOL AND THE FUTURE OF *SCHOLÉ*: A PRELIMINARY DIALOGUE

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Abstract:

This conversation offers a discussion of the meaning, sense and social function of school, both as an institution and as a time-space for the practice of *scholē* (free-time, leisure). It also discusses the different types of Greek time (*aion*, *kairos*, *khronos*): *Scholē* is, as *aion* or childhood, a further emergence, a radicalization of school as an experimental zone of subjectivity and of collectivity. The source of this radicalization is philosophy, to the extent that the philosophical impulse turns us inward upon ourselves in the interest, not of techniques for the enhancement of productive time, but of an emergent new brain: in the interest of new values, new sensibilities, new capacities, new connections, new centers of meaning, new *bodies*. Today we are in a global situation—the situation of late capitalism and late empire—in which school turns upon and ruthlessly suppresses *scholē*, which distorts their relation almost beyond recognition. There is a struggle between school as a more efficient, far-reaching vehicle for the technical transformation of the chore curriculum, and *scholē* as utopia. The paper also examines the place of childhood in educational discourse, and some critiques of the practice of community of philosophical inquiry in schools are considered as well as the role of questions and questioning in both philosophy and schooling. Finally, it problematizes the role of philosophy in school and in *scholē*: if the role of philosophy in *scholē* is an active one, even an *activist* one, then the role of the child in producing *dikaiosyne* in school as *scholē* should be no less active. The conversation ends with some questions: in what way is the philosophical life preferable to the political life? Why are the politics of philosophy worth any more than the politics of the political order?

Keywords: school; *scholē*; community of inquiry; time; childhood

La escuela y el futuro de la *scholē*: un diálogo preliminar

Resumen:

Esta conversación ofrece una discusión sobre el significado, el sentido y la función social de la escuela, tanto como institución cuanto como un tiempo-espacio para la práctica de la *scholē* (tiempo libre, ocio). También se analizan los diferentes tipos de tiempo griegos (*aión*, *kairós*, *khronos*): *scholē* es, como *aión* o la infancia, una aparición más, una radicalización de la escuela como una zona experimental de la subjetividad y de la colectividad. La fuente de esta radicalización es la filosofía, en la medida en que el impulso filosófico nos vuelve hacia adentro de nosotros mismos en el interés, no de técnicas para la mejora del tiempo productivo, sino de un nuevo cerebro emergente: en el interés de nuevos valores, nuevas sensibilidades, nuevas capacidades, nuevas conexiones, nuevos centros de significado, nuevos cuerpos. Hoy en día nos encontramos en una situación a nivel mundial -la situación del capitalismo e imperio tardíos- en el que

la escuela se vuelve contra *scholé* y sin piedad la suprime, lo que distorsiona su relación hasta tornarla casi irreconocible. Hay una lucha entre la escuela como un vehículo de gran alcance más eficiente para la transformación técnica del currículo, y *scholé* como utopía. Este texto también examina el lugar de la infancia en el discurso educativo, y son consideradas algunas críticas a la práctica de la comunidad de investigación filosófica en las escuelas, así como el papel de las preguntas y cuestionamientos, tanto en la filosofía cuanto en la educación. Por último, se problematiza el papel de la filosofía en la escuela y en *scholé*: si el papel de la filosofía en *scholé* es activo, incluso activista, entonces el papel del niño o la niña en la producción de *dikaiosyne* en la escuela como *scholé* no debería ser menos activo. La conversación termina con algunas preguntas: ¿de qué manera es una vida filosófica preferible a una vida política? ¿Por qué son las políticas de la filosofía más valiosas que las políticas de orden político?

Palabras clave: escuela; *scholé*; comunidad de indagación; tiempo; infancia

A escola e o futuro da *scholé*: um diálogo preliminar

Resumo:

Esta conversa oferece uma discussão sobre o significado, o sentido e a função social da escola, tanto como instituição quanto como um tempo-espço para a prática da *scholé* (tempo livre, ócio). Também se analisam os diferentes tipos de tempo gregos (*aión*, *kairós*, *khrónos*): *scholé* é, como *aión* ou a infância, uma aparição a mais, uma radicalização da escola como uma zona experimental da subjetividade e da coletividade. A fonte desta radicalização é a filosofia, na medida em que o impulso filosófico nos faz retornar até dentro de nós mesmos no interesse, não de técnicas para a melhora do tempo produtivo, mas de um novo cérebro emergente: no interesse por novos valores, novas sensibilidades, novas capacidades, novas conexões, novos centros de significado, novos corpos. Hoje em dia nos encontramos em uma situação a nível mundial – a situação do capitalismo e império tardios – em que a escola se volta contra a *scholé* e sem piedade a suprime, o que distorce sua relação até torna-la quase irreconhecível. Há uma luta entre a escola como um veículo de grande alcance mais eficiente para a transformação técnica do currículo, e *scholé* como utopia. Este texto também examina o lugar da infância no discurso educativo, e são consideradas algumas críticas à prática da comunidade de investigação filosófica nas escolas, assim como o papel das perguntas e questionamentos, tanta na filosofia quanto na educação. Por último, se problematiza o papel da filosofia na escola e em *scholé*: se o papel da filosofia em *scholé* é ativo, e até ativista, então o papel da criança na produção de *dikaiosyne* na escola como *scholé* não deveria ser menos ativo. A conversa termina com algumas perguntas: de que maneira uma vida filosófica é preferível a uma vida política? Por que as políticas da filosofia são mais valiosas que as políticas de ordem política?

Palavras-chave: *scholé*; comunidade de investigação; tempo; infância



SCHOOL AND THE FUTURE OF *SCHOLÉ*: A PRELIMINARY DIALOGUE

WOK: We usually think about going to school, for example, to introduce philosophy in order to interfere in what school is doing, like forming critical or creative citizens or to foster a kind of thinking that is not taking place there. We usually consider school as just there--we take its existence for granted, and we postulate some meanings and senses to introduce philosophy at that school. But maybe we can think the relationship between philosophy (or whatever) and school differently. J. Rancière notes in an essay called "School, production, equality" (1988) that in its origin, as in the Greek *schole*, the school was a place of separation of two different uses or experiences of time: inside the school, the experience of those who have free time, time for leisure, for learning, for studying, time to lose or to experience for itself and not for any other thing outside the experience itself; and for those outside school, the experience of productive time, of those who employ their time because of what they can obtain out of it. In this sense, in relation to time, all are equal inside school, they have the same experience of time--the experience of a student, of being a student. It is clear that in our time schools are very far from that. Quite the contrary, nearly everything in school is done because of what can be obtained from it outside of school. Schools prepare us for the labor market, the university, the future and so on... for many things but not so much for school itself... it seems as if there is no more *schole* in schools... in this sense, we can think that philosophy might go to school to restore this school (as *schole*) that does not exist any more. In other words, not assuming that the school is there, but in order that the school that is there could be a school-as-*schole*. What do you think about this idea?

DK: I think that the time of *schole* is in fact the time of childhood itself in the sense of what Winnicott (1971) called “transitional space,” and what you have called, after Heraclitus (2001, fr. 52), “*aion*” as opposed to *chronos* and *kairos*, three Greek terms for different qualities of time. Transitional space is the space in which the subject-object relation and hence the “real” and the “imagined” are not fixed and codified in any one cultural or historical form. As such it is the space of the virtual—of creativity and deep play of various sorts, including the deep play of philosophical inquiry. It is a space in which the child as polymorph thrives. It is the space of the subject-object relation “identity-with,” which Northrup Frye, in his analysis of William Blake’s Songs about childhood, designates as “not merely a creative state . . . but also a moral state corresponding to the older state of innocence, which traditionally has been associated with the child: the sense that the child in particular responds to his surroundings to the point of identifying with them.” Another way of thinking *schole* is to understand it as a “brain-shelter,” invented by the species in the interest of personal and collective transformation. By this I mean that the human brain is characterized by a high level of plasticity, that brain growth continues for the first 22 years of life, and that the neurological pathways that we develop are shaped by the experience we have. The particular wiring that we end up with is a product of the experience of the first 22 years. *Schole*, I would suggest, is the shelter from what you call “productive time,” which tends to shut down transitional space in the interests of survival and therefore of efficiency and what Blake called “single vision,” and shuts down brain growth by pushing intentionality downward to the lower brain--the amygdala--which deals



with perceived threat, and thus governs fight or flight or freeze response, in perceived “life or death” decisions, whether they are actually life or death or not. In the brain shelter of *scholé* we have the “leisure” to allow new patterns, new connections, new values and centers of meaning to develop. But how can philosophy restore this space in a moribund institutional culture, corrupted by surplus repression, commodification and the simulacrum? Sometimes philosophy seems to me to be mainly a destructive force in our time: it takes things apart and cannot put them back together again. How do you understand philosophy anyway?

WOK: That’s an interesting connection between *scholé* and *aion* through childhood. And I agree that philosophy sometimes seems to be placed as an obstacle to *scholé* and *aion*. But philosophy is multiple, diverse . . . and philosophy is also an experience of thinking in *aion*. I mean, philosophy plays the thinking game in aionic time, at least when played as the lived experience of putting one’s own life into question, in a tradition as old as Socrates. I know that philosophy is actually also practiced in very different ways, and the picture I’ve just drawn might sound ridiculous or even dangerous to many professional philosophers of our time, but it also sounded like that in Socrates time, and it will probably will always continue to sound like that to some. In fact it is really challenging to think about the possibilities of any aionic experience of thinking in institutions as overwhelmed by chronological time as ours are. How to initiate it is not a simple question to answer, but in actual fact it’s a matter of practice and exercise. It is true that the context seems completely hostile. But if on the one hand this seems to be

completely negative, on the other hand the less aionic thinking seems possible, the more necessary it becomes. And philosophy also has this dimension of thinking and doing the impossible-- again, at least since Socrates. It might be dangerous or considered stupid and nonsensical, but it is always possible. It is just a matter of practice—of seeing how it goes and what its effects are. But I am not sure I really answered your question. How would you yourself answer your question?

DK: Maybe I can get at a tentative answer to my own question by trying a genealogical approach to the arguments, popular among some, *against* the practice of community of philosophical inquiry in schools. First from the Left: 1) It's socialization into a "white," "western," rationalistic, normalizing discourse, the very discourse of the colonizers, and implicitly ignores or suppresses alternative discourses; 2) It is reduced to a program for "critical thinking," one more skill useful for adjusting to the workplace and the political status quo; 3) It trivializes the very values it seeks to explore by implicitly taking a "values clarification" approach to key philosophical concepts, starting from the assumption that everybody has their own emotionally rooted opinion which they have a perfect right to, etc., thus promoting a false kind of tolerance. And from the Right: 1) It intrudes upon and interferes with the indoctrination-rights of the family; 2) By problematizing deep concepts, it erodes those fundamental beliefs that are the basis for our common morality, and discredits a religious approach to belief, which is based on faith and modest acceptance of an authoritative view, not questioning; 3) To the extent that the school represents the state, CPI amounts to government ideological imposition; 4) It is a waste of productive time to deliberate



about concepts that make no difference to the way the world works, or at best breed discontent: it is, in other words, an offense against The Market; 5) It alienates the youth by systematically practicing a sort of doubt that can cripple motivation and the healthy innocence of the young; 6) It foments potential social and political rebellion.

Now it seems to me that your implicit definition of philosophy as the practice of “thinking in aionic time,” and of “thinking and doing the impossible,” or “unexpected,” might elude all these criticisms, but I am not exactly sure how. Most obvious is the setting up of a wall between “free” and “productive” time—something of an artificial wall, it could be argued (after all, can we really separate *homo faber* and *homo ludens*?). Then, we can say, behind that wall, in that shelter from productive time, who knows what sort of new brain can emerge—or, following Spinoza (1985), “Who knows what a body can do?” Perhaps another clue is the identification of philosophy with art, which is the more traditional location of *aion* and the unexpected. Perhaps the form of philosophy you are contemplating is a form of self-making, which begins as a process of “putting one’s own life into question,” whereby one’s own life becomes a work of art. But what strikes me now is that the image of philosophy that this suggests is different from, not just the traditional one, but even from our notion of philosophy as a communal dialogical practice—that is, CPI. It seems to suggest that we don’t bring philosophy to a school to make it into a *schole*, but rather that *schole* as a form of lived experience is inherently philosophical. This suggests further that *schole* is *already there* in any given community of humans, it is immanent and emergent, it waits below the surface to rise into speech and act.

WOK: Let me consider the critiques, beginning with the ones from the Right. The first assumes a correct understanding of the aims of philosophy: yes, surely philosophical questioning "intrudes upon and interferes with the indoctrination-rights of the family" and not only those of the family. It's difficult to see a more important task than this one, particularly in our time—if, that is, we want to live an examined and not a dogmatic life. The second, which is very close to the first one, also realizes that for philosophy there is no absolute or unquestionable value or belief, either moral or religious. The third one needs to be confronted with some distinctions between state and government, school and philosophy, ideology and politics: philosophy is a political force in a state institution than can put into question all (ideological) impositions, even from governments. The fourth critique from the Right suggests a celebration: yes! Philosophy *is* a waste of productive time and a saving of free or aionic time, affirming another kind of life than a producer-consumer life. Critique number five should be taken seriously in that philosophy is a sort of innocent practice (in the sense that it has no other intention than philosophical questioning itself) that can at the same time deconstruct childish innocence and introduce some kind of lack, or some form of pandemonium. Finally, the Right is right, this is what it is all about: philosophical rebellion which in itself is a political rebellion, most probably not in the sense of the Right but in that after philosophy there is no way to continue living the way we were living in the polis.

The Left's critiques look more interesting. It is true that philosophy has been practiced as a form of domination through "white," "western,"



“rationalistic”, “normalizing” and “colonizing” discourses, but it has also been practiced in the opposite way through the discourse of the “other”, “anti-colonialist”, “anti-hegemonic” and so on. So the question is controversial inside philosophy itself. Secondly, if understood as a program for “critical thinking”-- which in fact is the case in many instances--then I would agree that it is a practice of little interest, which could be useful for the political status quo. Thirdly, the so-called “values clarification” approach seems to me something very different from philosophy, or at most a very small aspect of it. By that I mean that if we just clarify values we might as well not do philosophy. It is clearly not enough. In fact, tolerance, just like any other value, is an object of philosophical genealogical critique and not an aim in itself. Of course, critics may be not satisfied with these answers and other critiques could be put, but then we would still be in the realm of that form of philosophy we have already entered. And yes, I think the form of philosophy I am developing is “a form of self-making, which begins as a process of “putting one’s own life into question,” whereby one’s own life becomes a work of art. You have put it in very nice words! There are many interesting concepts here to think about, like the self-making form, where self can be something very soft and diverse and the “making” process could be a kind of imaginative way of living. But I do not see this form of philosophy as in conflict with communal dialogical practice. It all depends on how we think this self-making or inventing process that could be dialogical and communal. Don’t you think so? And I also love your idea of making a verb out of the noun or an action out of the substance *schöle*. There is nothing more inspiring and inviting to philosophy. But maybe

school does not in fact inherently resist this form of philosophy. Or would it?

What do you think?

DK: Which comes first--school or *schole*? Are the two forms of community and temporality antipathetic? I would like to suggest that school and *schole* emerge from the same evolutionary impulse, which is to establish a zone in the culture which is set apart for purposes of transformation. Before the creation of that separated space, we seem to have what David Lancy, in his magisterial work *The Anthropology of Childhood* (2008), calls the “village” or the “chore” curriculum, characteristic of pre-industrial societies. Here, education is folded seamlessly into the skills and rhythms of daily productive life. Aionic time is practiced in many other ways--typically in collective ritual – but school carves out a new space in the culture, a space for the acquisition of new technologies that interrupt, then transform the existing culture. It replaces local knowledge with abstract and universal knowledge--other ways of talking and thinking and understanding ourselves, including new forms of productive time.

Schole is, as *aion* or childhood, a further emergence, a radicalization of school as an experimental zone of subjectivity and of collectivity. The source of this radicalization is philosophy, to the extent that the philosophical impulse turns us inward upon ourselves in the interest, not of techniques for the enhancement of productive time, but of an emergent *new brain*: in the interest of new values, new sensibilities, new capacities, new connections, new centers of meaning, new *bodies*. Thus, there is a struggle between school as a more efficient, far-reaching vehicle for the technical transformation of the chore curriculum, and *schole* as utopia, in



the sense of utopia as, after Marcuse, something that “is blocked from coming about by the power of established societies” (1969: 4). In school *tout court*, chronos becomes even more intensified because adults impose it on children in this potentially aionic space. In *schole*, as Blake says, “Eternity [aion] is in love with the productions of time.” Here we learn to resist the corrosive dichotomies of play/work, fact/value, self/other, and to live in a virtual space of becoming. Are school and *schole* perennially in struggle? Perhaps they are in dialectical tension; time, after all, is one, whatever its modalities. So perhaps we could say that in school, *schole* is a remainder, and visa versa. But today we are in a global situation—the situation of late capitalism and late empire—in which school turns upon and ruthlessly suppresses *schole*, which distorts their relation almost beyond recognition. How are we to deal with this moment of historical excess—when the philosophical impulse is scorned as weakness of nerve, and the deep play of *schole* considered narcissistic and even self-destructive by “the power of established societies”?

WOK: Your questions are increasingly complex and difficult to answer. I am tempted to write that as this last one is so good and powerful we might leave it as it is, without answer and try to move to another. In fact, this kind of writing dialogue is different from an oral one, in that here a reader might suspect that we are in fact answering each other’s questions, which I think it is not the case. I mean, we are giving a kind of answer, but I would not like them to be taken as ways of closing the questions or as something stable or firm. In relation to this, I would like to add a couple of comments: the first one is that I am now

remembering Plato's critique of writing in the *Phaedrus* (274c ff.) and feel quite apprehensive because, in a sense, our written dialogue will not be able to react to the readers' questions. But we do not need to be so Platonic and rely on the power of writing itself. The second has to do with the relationship between questions and answers. In philosophy, questions prevail over answers. I do not mean that only questions count or that answers do not count at all, but that in this exercise of questioning and answering, questions seem to have a privileged position, they are at the beginning and at the end, they open and close thinking and dialogue; they resist all sort of answers; they renew themselves in new questions; so that whatever answers we are giving to our questions, an interesting way of reading this dialogue might be through its questions, even those that eventually appear in our answers. In any case, let me write something about your question; but before doing this, just another short remark: the kinds of questions beginning with "how..." and "how are we to deal with..." are specially difficult because they are asking for some sort of way, path, method or whatever that supports a given direction, and these kinds of issues seem to me less interesting to try to transfer from one person to another. I mean that the answer to this kind of question is even more difficult than any other and in a sense meaningless, in that nobody can answer it for anyone but herself.

At this point I can imagine a readers' anxiousness with my delay in answering your question, and now I am going to get to it. There is a tendency to consider our time a terrible time, one of the most terrible ones in human history. It might be, but I am not so sure. I am not defending it, but probably the place of philosophy as critical questioning has never been much more comfortable or



strong, and the forces against *schole*, although different in nature, have never been weaker. We live in times where utopia seems to be losing force and the big words have been badly treated or captured by the forces of the market. Philosophy itself, in its most official aspect, has been reduced to a kind of sophisticated game, less worried about the problems of the life than ever; but at the same time we are seeing new forms of philosophical practice, reconnecting philosophy to life and the outside world. To what extent do these practices share an approach to philosophy as a form of an examined life with other lives? To what extent do they really challenge and put into question the dogmatic forces of the present, or do they simply reinforce them? In other words, to what extent is the practice of philosophy a recreation of *schole* or a fiction that plays the games of the dominant forces? Maybe we can go back to childhood, the main issue of our dialogue: how do you think childhood enters this game?

DK: I love your celebration of the question--it is what for me is most deeply satisfying in the practice of philosophical dialogue, although many, it seems, find the persistence of questions irritating, and a waste of productive time. But I do not agree that the "how" questions are purely personal and meaningless. I have long observed that communal philosophical inquiry, as it works its way into a question, tends to converge on its ethical implications, which in turn converge on Kant's and Tolstoy's question, which is the same question put to John the Baptist in the New Testament (Luke 3: 10-15): "What then should we do?" John told his questioners tersely to share their goods, not to cheat, and not to abuse power—in short, matters of *dikaioσύνη* and *dikaion*.

I notice that Kant says “What should I do?” rather than “we do,” but I would like to emphasize the latter, because I assume we are both understanding *scholē* as a “we” situation—a collective—and therefore an ethical situation, because it is about life with others. *Scholē* is also by definition a *philosophical* “we” situation in that philosophy is, as you say, “an experience of thinking in *aion*,” and *aion* is the distinguishing mark of *scholē*. Philosophy as aionic thinking undergoes what you call “the lived experience of putting one’s own life into question,” and that is an ethical experience. Ethical experience, I have suggested, invokes action (“What must we *do*?”). This, for me, is the link between *scholē* and the world of productive time. In that philosophy tends to seek the ethical normative like water seeks its own level, philosophy’s chief product is *dikaiosyne*. I would suggest that the school that has been transformed by *scholē* provides a working bridge between the two kinds of time—*aion* and *chronos*—a space where the creative tension between the two suggests new styles of productive time outside the school walls.

Maybe I can find my way back to childhood through the difficulty you point out in judging the nature of our times. It seems to me that the worse it gets, the more visible is what it could or should or might be. For example, what Žižek (2011) calls the “second nature” of the “totally ‘*mediatized*’ subject, fully immersed in virtual reality,” who while “‘spontaneously’ he thinks that he is in direct contact with reality is in fact sustained by complex digital machinery” as in *The Matrix*—is for childhood simply an opportunity for transcending that form of subjectivity through play—or, as Heraclitus says, “childing” (*paizon*). So in *The Matrix* the child in the Oracle’s waiting room bends the spoon telekinetically and tells Neo, “there is no spoon . . . It is not the spoon that bends, it is only yourself.” Here “child



childing” is seen as the open space of possibility in human evolution. And for this very reason, the death of a child in war is the most heinous instance of the crime against humanity that war is, because that child represents the concrete possibility of a world without war. The child embodies the moral question put to the times, and thus the conscience of the times. So, if philosophy’s role in *scholē* is an active one, even an *activist* one—one that, as you say, models “new forms of philosophical practice, reconnecting philosophy to life and the outside world” and dares “challenge and put into question the dogmatic forces of the present” —what is the role of the child in producing *dikaiosyne* in school as *scholē*? Can children be political actors in the world of productive time—can they take to the streets and denounce the oppressors, the greedy and the warmongers? Or should we be satisfied with school/*scholē* as Dewey’s “embryonic community life,” a sort of think tank for the future of human subjectivity and collective identity, as in today’s democratic schools movement (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democratic_education)? Or—as I strongly suspect you might argue—should we carry no expectations at all?

WOK: I also do not think that the “how questions” are personal or meaningless (if they are, they are so just in a very specific aspect), but simply that it is impossible or inconvenient that someone could respond to them for another. And I do agree that philosophy as the practice of *scholē* is committed to the ethical and political which means with the other, the “we.” In Spanish this is shown by the word for we, “nos-otros”, “we-others.” What kind of commitment we are referring to is more difficult to precise. It seems that it is open to a variety of possibilities. I think

we can always expect the unexpected or, as Heraclitus puts it in Fragment 18, we should expect it if we do not want to leave it with no path or way. I mean, we do not know. We never know. This is the only real philosophical knowledge, and even though the world seems in one of its most closed moments, yes, there are new beings at every moment coming into the world, and human history is never ended. This is also the strength of *chronos*. And of *aion* and *scholé*: there we act as if the impossible was necessary--“as if,” as Kant would say.

We really do not know. Children are political actors just as we are, and what concerns me more is what we can do, through the practice of philosophy as *scholé*, to give them the conditions or the space to live the political life, which is a “we” life—that is, which includes the other; which feels and thinks it is worthwhile to live, and which is ready to accept other forms of collective life than the ones we ourselves would expect to live. Of course in a sense we are part of that political life, at least in the conditions we are offering our children in which to build it, so we should not be afraid about it, but we should care about the political forces involved, and the limits of those conditions. How do we think through these political conditions? How do we practice them? Are they really so different from the oppressive world we so much criticize? In what way is the philosophical life preferable to the political life? Or to put it in other words, why are the politics of philosophy worth any more than the politics of the political order? Maybe children can help us to think about these questions. Maybe they can help us to change our questions. Maybe they will come up with new questions. Maybe they can help us to think what we have not thought, or even the unthinkable. Maybe they can educate us. This is what philosophy for children is about: not the



education of childhood but a childlike education, a philosophical education through the voices of childhood.

Enviado em: 15/07/2014
Aprovado em: 15/07/2014

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