

AIÓN, KAIRÓS AND CHRÓNOS: FRAGMENTS OF AN ENDLESS CONVERSATION ON CHILDHOOD,
PHILOSOPHY AND EDUCATION

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Abstract:

In this dialogue between two interlocutors, the ontology of childhood is considered, first from the point of view of temporality, then power, then language, then from the perspective of philosophy, and inquires whether there is a specific philosophical and/or childlike dialectic of questioning and answering. The claim is made that both the philosopher and the artist carry a childlike way of questioning and acting on the world into adulthood. The discussion then moves to education, and considers the possibility of reconstructing the latter beyond the Platonic notions of "formation," reproduction, discipline and subjection, and evaluates the role of philosophical dialogue in a school setting as an agent of transformation.

Key words: childhood; temporality; Socratic education; philosophical questioning; reconstruction of desire.

Resumo:

Neste diálogo entre dois interlocutores, a ontologia da infância é considerada, primeiro desde o ponto de vista da temporalidade, depois do poder, da linguagem e da filosofia. Pergunta-se se existe uma dialética filosófica e/ou infantil específica do perguntar e responder. Afirma-se que tanto o filósofo quanto o artista carregam um modo infantil de perguntar e agir no mundo até a idade adulta. A discussão desloca-se à educação e considera-se a possibilidade de reconstruir esta última para além das noções platônicas de "formação", "reprodução", "disciplina" e "sujeição", e considera-se o papel do diálogo filosófico no ambiente escolar, como agente de transformação.

Palavras-chave: infância; temporalidade; educação socrática; perguntar filosófico; reconstrução do desejo.

Resumen:

En este diálogo entre dos interlocutores, la ontología de la infancia es considerada, primero desde el punto de vista de la temporalidad, luego del poder, del lenguaje y de la filosofía y se pregunta si hay una dialéctica filosófica y/o infantil específica del preguntar y responder. Se afirma que tanto el filósofo como el artista llevan un modo infantil de preguntar y actuar en el mundo hacia la adultez. La discusión se desliza a la educación y considera la posibilidad de reconstruir esta última más allá de las nociones platónicas de "formación", "reproducción", "disciplina" y "sujeción", y considera el rol del diálogo filosófico en un ambiente escolar, como agente de transformación.

Palabras clave: infancia; temporalidad; educación socrática; preguntar filosófico; reconstrucción del deseo.

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David Kennedy and Walter Kohan

This conversation took place in 2006, when *childhood & philosophy* was one year old. It has recently been published in Finnish, as "AION". In: Tuukka Tomperi; Hannu Juuso (eds.). *Sokrates koulussa - Itsenäisen ja yhteisöllisen ajattelun edistäminen opetuksessa*. Tampere: Niin & Näin, 2008, p. 130-155. *Childhood & philosophy* has been growing all through these years, and Volume 4, Number 8 opens a new stage in the life of the journal with its migration to the Platform OJS, and the expansion of its sections and of its advisory board. In celebration of this widening of our boundaries, we offer this conversation, which stands as an open dialogue around and within the issues and challenges that *childhood & philosophy* endeavors to think openly and endlessly.

WALTER:

In his wonderful fragment 52, Heraclitus says, "Time (is) a child chiding; its realm is one of a child." In Greek there are only few words in this fragment: *aión país esti paízon, paídos he basileíe*. *Aión* is a time word, as are *chrónos* and *kairós*. In its more ancient uses, *aión* designates the intensity of time in human life—a destiny, a duration, an unnumbered movement, not successive, but intense.¹ Different from *aión* is *chrónos*, which presides over the continuity of successive time. If *aión* is duration, Plato defines *chrónos* as "the moving image of eternity (*aión*) that moves according to number" (*Timeus*, 37d). For the Athenian, time, as *chrónos*, is only possible in this imperfect world due to one of its most imperfect marks: movement. The perfect world of ideas is *aionic*, ana-chronic, with no chronic time. Some decades later, Aristotle defined *chrónos* as "the number of movement according to the 'before and after'" *Physics* (IV, 220a). The third time-word is *kairós*, which means 'measure', 'proportion' and, in relation to time, 'critical time', 'season', 'opportunity'.²

Let's go back to *aión* and Heraclitus. There is a double relationship affirmed in this fragment: the time of childhood and the power of childhood. The fourth word of the fragment, the verbal form *paízon*, signifies the activity of a child. Some translations say "playing" which makes sense, but if we had one, we could also use a word denoting just the mode of being a child, not necessarily identified with play. The last word, *basileíe*, is a power word, meaning "realm"; Heraclitus also uses a form of this word (*basileús*) in fragment 53, as an attribute of *pólemos*, the eternal war. Finally the previous

¹ LIDDELL, Henry, SCOTT, Robert. *A Greek English Lexicon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966, p. 45.

² *Ibid.*, p. 859.



word, *paídos*, once again related to the child, is a possessive genitive, showing who is in possession of, or more properly *in aión*.

The fragment seems to mean, among other things, that time—life-time—is not only a question of numbered movement, and that there is another way of living time that could be seen as a childlike way of being, one that belongs to a child. If one logic of time— the logic of *chrónos*—moves according to number, another—that of *aión*—moves the numbered into a non-numbered dimension of existence. In others words, the fragment suggest that, in relation to time, a child is very powerful, more powerful than any other being. If in terms of *chrónos*, the child is at the beginning, in a first, undeveloped stage of being, in terms of *aión* there no more being more realized than a child.

I am not reading this fragment of Heraclitus this way in order to support a romantic or idealistic concept of children and childhood, but rather to suggest that the unquestioned assumption that childhood is the first stage of human development which underlies most contemporary pedagogical discourse has had its challengers from ancient times. And in fact the history of human culture, particularly literature and philosophy, is full of such alternatives visions of children and childhood.

What is a child? What is childhood? The two questions might be related, but are not the same question. Keeping to the Heraclitus fragment, if we agree that a child is more powerful in terms of *aión* than of *chrónos*, then a non-chronological, aionic, experience of time emerges and, together with it, a non-chronological concept of childhood: according to this, then childhood might well be not only a period of life but a specific form of experience in life. In other words, childhood seems to be a possibility, a strength, a force, an intensity, rather than a period of time.

What Heraclitus suggests is that childhood is something related to power and time, to power as a form of time and time as a form of power. In the previous paragraph, I introduced some ideas related to the nature of “child-ish” power and time. On this account, childhood is not a period of time but a specific experience of time; and not, as is usually thought, an absence of power but a singular mode of practicing power. Moreover, what about the senses and meanings of these relationships? In other words, childhood is time for what? And power for what? Or is the question of sense and meaning a non-childish question?

I see that in this last paragraph my own discourse has changed, and I find myself having entered the time and power of questioning. And after all, children are usually associated with questions. The link seems to be direct. Is it? Is there a special, intense form of discourse associated with childhood? Is questioning the childhood (*aionic* dimension) of language? Is childhood – etymologically, *in fans*, the lack of language—in fact not a lack, but a specific power of language? Rather than the absence of language, is childhood another form of language? If so, which one?

DAVID

I would say that childhood is the form of language which is the world languaging. It is the language of the Fool, which mimics the language of birds, trees, thunderstorms, and things like that. Like the classic Fool of folktale and drama, he or she who is in the childhood experience lives in a condition of psychological immediacy which is dangerous to the adult construction of time and power because it withholds nothing, which for adults is equivalent to a state of psychosis. The language of birds and trees and thunderstorms is in human terms the language of the unconscious, a multiple, polysemous code, the language of desire, the speech of the Whole, which is non-linear, permanently ana-chronic, which is fully hidden just because it has nothing to hide – the fundamental ontological code of nature in simple expressive manifestation. It is not in the double relationship to signification which starts with adult language. It is and it is not pointing to something else. It is pointing to what it is, which, in the dialectic of existence, is also what it is not.³

Of course the language of childhood is compromised immediately, and we are only able to identify it once it no longer exists, but it returns in *kairoi*. The law of the father, of father time, *chrónos*, eternally crucifies it. Moments of ecstasy – *-ex-stase* – and all forms of deep play raise up a realm or *basileus* which eludes *Chrónos*. The *kairoi* open the world into the transitional space of aesthetic experience: they are moments of chronological fissure, in which the binary of inside-outside, internal-external, self-world, and self-other is “queered,” that is, in which their boundaries become fluid, negotiable, reconstructable, in which we discover how limited is chronological cause and effect. Art teaches us about this psychological space, as does erotic experience and intense relational experience, as can psychotropic drugs and certain experiences of prayer and meditation, as do dreams and wild revel, or experiences of being in the wilderness of all kinds, etc. This form of decentering through transgressive boundary experience breaks up the hegemonic hierarchy of an ego-dominated form of subjectivity, and opens a space for the project of grand intimacy and the reconciliation of mind/body/world.

But I see that I have forgotten your question about questions. Does childhood really question at all? What is a question? Does a child’s question differ from a wondering adult’s? Are there questions in aionic existence at all? Doesn’t a question imply that something could be otherwise than it is, which implies numbered movement, which implies reasoning and the subjunctive, division, distinction, the normative, in short, the excluded middle – while for *aión* it is just one singing, speaking, breathing world, glorious flesh of the world which is my flesh and your flesh as well? But perhaps I have not understood you. Speak again, brother.

QUESTIONS

³ "The child who disguises himself as another expresses his profoundest truth." Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, John B. Thompson trans. and ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 187.



WALTER

What is a question? This is a very nice question, but we should exercise caution here, for it sounds like a question characteristic of the Socratic-Platonic metaphysics that has marked the history of the so called Western tradition. Why are we interested in asking “what”? What are we looking for? The nature? The definition? The essence? The idea? And why aren’t we looking for the “who” and the “what for”? In other words, it might be interesting to focus not only on what is a question, but on who is asking it, and what the questioning process is after. This implies that a question is interesting not so much because of what it is or it might be, but because of the movement that it can generate in the questioner and the questioned.

Let me give an example. Some people try to find philosophy in specific sorts of questions. We can even think of some criteria according to which we identify a question as philosophical – that it is “common, central and contestable” for example, as Lipman and Sharp do. And we can even identify themes that we think philosophical questions should address, like friendship, truth, the good and the other so-called “eternal” themes of philosophy. This strategy for philosophizing might be very interesting, but it is only applied to philosophy as theory, knowledge or a system of thought; it is not appropriate to philosophy as experience. As experience, what matters is a philosophical relationship to questions, no matter how common, central, and contestable they are. A philosophical experience may be triggered by an apparently simple, concrete and naive question, and a non-philosophical experience with an apparently sophisticated question. So we need to think about the purposes for which we ask questions in philosophy as experience, no matter what their content. Philosophy as experience is not a given content or thought in itself, but a relationship to others and to our knowledge and thought. The same could be said of questioning: a question is not philosophical in its content, but through a certain relationship that is established to the question. What kind of relationship? Well, it is not simple to say, because as I have just suggested, questioning is not a content, but something that we allow a question to do with our thinking--the doors we allow it to open, the paths we allow it to take so that a question can do what questions are supposed to do: to question! That means putting in movement something that is fixed, giving life to something that is dead, and so on. As such, there is no such thing as philosophical or non philosophical questions. Rather, there are questions with which philosophical or non-philosophical relationships can be established, such that apparently simple and innocent questions can develop philosophical relationships, while apparently central or important questions can develop nothing. Obviously, there are no certain recipes or methods for engaging in a philosophical relationship with a question, and no one can teach it to anyone, given that experience cannot be taught, but only shared.

This leads us to what you were just saying: “a question implies that something could be otherwise than it is.” In this sense, what could be other than he or she is, is precisely the one who is questioning: in its most interesting dimension, questioning is not an external process, something that one does to another, but a self-questioning (and of course we do not need to assume the ego-centered self you were just criticizing). If we ask a question and do not feel disturbed, touched, moved, decentered by it, it seems that we are losing one of the most interesting and powerful possibilities of questioning: the transformation it provokes. If questioning is philosophical—I am tempted to say child-ish—the questioner will never be the same once the questioning process begins. Questioning is like the midwife of difference.

If this makes sense, childhood might be, not just the activity of questioning, but a specific kind of relationship to questions, one that opens the questioner to a movement that she or he cannot control or anticipate. Childhood might be a kind of experience where questioning opens experience to the not-experienced, thinking to the not-thought, life to the not-lived.

Now that I read my response to you, I wonder why I began to think about philosophy while I was thinking about childhood. In fact, questions are also typically linked to philosophy as much as to childhood. In this sense, I do not really like the usual disregard of answers in philosophy, as if they were of no importance. In fact philosophy has no interest me without them. Again it is not a matter of questions or answers but of the relationship between them: a sort of dialectic—to use a word you like—of questioning and answering, where questioning inaugurates a movement that calls for certain answers, and answering inaugurates a movement that gives new life to questioning. Philosophers and children both question and answer.

Do you think there is a specific philosophical and/or childish dialectic of questioning and answering? If so, how would you characterize it? Is there a common path in the philosophical and child-ish experience of questioning (and answering)? You might be tempted to accuse me of rephrasing your own questions. I will gladly acknowledge my guilt, as long as it does not block your response!

DAVID

No guilt is necessary, brother—or rather, even if you are guilty, you need never pay, for I don’t remember my questions since hearing yours, for yours have changed them. And my immediate response is that the infant, the young child, even some older children, as well as painters, dancers, dramatists and musicians, and probably a good many bankers, carpenters, etc. question with their bodies—or, more precisely, with their embodied-minds/minded-bodies. The infant in the crib reaches for the mobile hanging and swaying above him, not as an appropriation but as a question. This is what is interesting about Piaget’s notion of “sensorimotor” intelligence, and his suggestion that it is this kind of interaction with the world which is the basis for all future logical operations. I like this idea because it grounds logic in the lived body.

Implicit in the question of the infant and the young child is, first, freedom from the mother. For the mother is the place where all questions have already been answered, and even if they haven’t, it doesn’t matter, for they enter the aionic realm of



jouissance, where no meaning is missing. So the toddler's first question must follow his or her dramatic "No!" to the mother, to the maternal. His "No!" to the father will come later, at greater risk. The question follows the moment of separation, and, as you have suggested, assists at the birth of difference.

The question is also the moment of deconstruction, of taking apart, which is related as well to the *fort-da*, the play of presence and absence, and to the otherness or alterity which follows the emergence of difference. The young child builds a tower of blocks, and just as essential to the experience is the moment in which she knocks it down. In the hands of both the child and the philosopher the question is a tool and sometimes a weapon, raised up against the monolithic machine of the law. As such, it is always transgressive and disobedient, but it is loyal the way a simple denial or negation is not—loyal to the possibility of reconstruction of what it questions, and even to collaboration with what it questions in developing an answer rather than a replacement of what it questions. And it is loyal to difference as well, for it opens up the fissure in experience and reveals the radical discrepancy between the world and our maps of the world. It reminds us that not only could the world be different than it is, in fact it *is* different—each cognitive map is different. Once the child or the philosopher has asked a question—a genuine question—it is implicitly understood that there is more than one answer, as there is more than one map of the world.

Rather than attempt to search out how the child and the philosopher are the same, I would prefer to search out how each human person in a certain way of thinking and talking is a philosopher, and to claim that, to the extent that each person is a philosopher, he or she is a child. By going further, he or she has returned to those questions which are asked with the whole body, and which thirst for the interplay of deconstruction and reconstruction, and for whom time is a child chiding, i.e. playfully building and rebuilding the world. And I may as well say "artist" as well as "philosopher," for as much as the philosopher carries a childlike way of questioning into adulthood, the artist carries a childlike way of acting on the world into adulthood, and both of these act to transform the world. But both, we must be reminded by the authorities, are "bad" children: they have broken out of the Garden (of Eden) by asking a question, and they can never go back—there are angels with the swords of custom and law and privilege and hierarchy guarding the gate. For the "good" child there are no questions, or only catechical questions, which are not questions at all. And adults are good children if they follow religion taken in its broadest sense, which means that they forgo questions, they sacrifice them for the sake of order: they "grow up." They struggle to maintain the Same, because they are afraid of the disorder which Difference seems to imply. The problem is that disorder comes anyway, because difference can only be suppressed through mass killing. Of course there has been and continues to be plenty of that.

I'm not – at least I don't think I am – wandering from the topic here; that is, if we want to address, at some point in this dialogue, the issue of the child, the philosopher and the school. For the school – in my country anyway – is where the Same consolidates its deadly somnambulistic grip, where people are taught to avoid, even to crush the question, where the question comes like a drunken guest, or a long-lost unwelcome relative, the one who was quite pointedly not invited to the family celebration, but who inevitably shows up, like the return of the repressed. If this is the case, then what are the prospects for philosophy, childhood and education? But take it where you will, my brother.

EDUCATION

WALTER

I'll take it where the question takes me, toward some unknown destination. It might be that we have to move things forward and find a new beginning for philosophy, childhood and education. We have been thinking about the education of children in the Platonic pattern, inspired by the model of the education of the guardians in *The Republic*: education as the formation of the newcomers to the world by those who already are at the world, in order to change the social order into the Beautiful, the Good, and the Just. Childhood has been subject to myriad political, aesthetic and ethical dreams, from Plato's aristocratic (in its Greek sense) republic to our contemporary democratic societies.

It seems to me that we need a new beginning for the education of childhood. We might look at childhood, not as what should be formed and educated, but as what forms itself, as in the Romantic perspective. But we might go even further and consider education not as formation – no matter whether childhood is formed or forms – but as a space of de-formation, a field which allows for the affirmation of otherness. Education is a field all too easily seduced or bullied by fashions of one kind or another. Words appear which suddenly saturate educational discourse like rapidly proliferating viruses, and eventually they begin to lose their meaning. Such is the case – at least in Latin America – with terms like “creative”, “critical” and the like. They appear in most educational reform manifestoes, together with an image of thinking which is directly linked to “skills,” “abilities” and “competences.” In times like ours, sick as we are of our slavish obedience to the interests of the capital and the market, and to the prevalence of competition, docility, consumerism and efficiency, these educational buzz words become even less interesting than they might be otherwise. Instead, we might well create spaces of incompetence, disobedience, and the inability to think what ought to be thought, to do what ought to be done and to live the way we should all live.

I do not know which affirmative form this kind of education would take; in fact I don't want to know, because in the very anticipation of it we may well be inhibiting something extraordinary in it, the very dimension of its subversive power. And of



course the more mundane question remains whether any form of “other” education – or education of the “other” – is possible at all in the modern school as we know it.

On the one hand, it’s striking how different these two approaches to education look – so opposite, so strange, so foreign, that one seems to affirm what kills the other. And I don’t think we need to consider all the details of contemporary schooling here, given the strong critique already developed from a Foucaultian perspective of educational institutions as instruments of control and discipline. It is not a national problem. I think it was the English sociologist of education Basil Bernstein who pointed out how surprisingly similar schools look across time and space. I would just like to suggest further how well schooling has adapted itself to our globalized neo-capitalistic societies, in and out of its modern buildings, through and across the new technologies and the mass media. On the other hand, a school is a collection of people and we never know what might emerge where human beings think together. Even though nothing promising seems to be emerging from schooling, who knows? How can we be so sure that it’s a path with no way? In other words and to go back to the childhood of this conversation, we could still ask: is an aionic school possible at all? Isn’t it a contradiction in terms? It might look that way, but it also might be interesting to question this apparent contradiction.

If what I have said in the previous paragraphs make sense, instead of looking for a new form of schooling for childhood, we might consider looking for a new childhood of schooling, which might well mean no more schools at all. Or not! We don’t know. Whatever the case, we need to open educational institutions where we work – schools, universities, etc. – to transformative experience without anticipating the point of arrival of this experience. I think we are again back to power.

As you said, childhood is a language of the body. I am still thrilled by the way you phrased it: “mother is the place where all questions have already been answered.” School has chosen the body as a privileged place for its answers, where every question has been answered by the father, the lawgiver, which is a different kind questionlessness. In this sense, school is sick of totalitarianism, and our main challenge as I see it is to give space to non-totalitarian ways to deal with the other, with the body of the other, with the other’s body which is, in an ultimate sense, our body.

JOY - DESIRE

At the same time, we need to consider the issue of fascism. In this context I think the concept of joy in a Spinozian and Deleuzian sense might help inspire us: joy as “everything that consists in fulfilling a force” and its opposite – sadness – which results when someone “is separated from a force of which he or she believed herself or himself to be capable.” If we want to live in a joyful world, if we want joyful experiences and

experiences of joy, if it makes sense to live for joy, then we need to do something about those sad spaces where people are prevented from doing what they can, from effecting or realizing their forces. Unfortunately, schools are predominantly very sad places, even though many people in them might appear to be laughing, precisely in the sense that people seem to be systematically prevented from realizing and expanding their forces. This systematic prevention which creates such a deep sadness in life is not just totalitarian but fascist. As I see it, the main challenge to those who think and work in educational institutions is to expel totalitarianism and fascism from them. Again, I do not know whether this is possible at all.

What do you think, brother? Have I taken you too far from where you were thinking? If so, bring me back to some other place. Do not hesitate to realize the forces of your thinking (smiling joyfully).

DAVID

We might ask, then, just what is the “force” that you speak of in a Deleuzian and Spinozian sense, and, since it’s connected to our purposes, what relationship, if any, does it have to childhood and to education? Your use of the word “joy” raises another question—does it actually have a necessary relationship to the realization of force? Or, put slightly differently, might not the Columbine killers, to use just one among a myriad of examples, have felt “joy” as they realized their plan of mass slaughter? Or how about the “joy” of that Colombian drug lord as he lovingly cares for his lovely family in his huge house?

WALTER

I would not call that joy, since it does not fulfill any force, quite the contrary it separates others from their own forces, it inhibits the other’s realization, the realization of the other. I cannot see any joy in any form of imperialism or colonialism.

DAVID

So this joy of which you speak is actually a collective and intersubjective phenomenon. This is a crucial qualifier, which makes the concept ethical through and through. And in fact education as a positive force is—and here I agree with you absolutely—about the collective realization of desire, about learning to enter into the “permanent revolution” together, and to gather the skills to subvert the hegemonic forms of the social, sexual and economic Same, under which most of us are pinned like half-dead butterflies on a display board. But it is also—and here it may be recognized as *bildung*—about the reconstruction of desire. This is an ongoing reconstruction, and as I see it right now, involves most of all the sublation, sublimation (or both) of aggression, or the death wish, or “anti-production,” or the “dark side,” or whatever you want to call it. I can no longer accept Socrates’ suggestion that evil is simply people making choices based on not enough information, or lured by their immediate desire even though it is in conflict with their long-term desire. This may indeed be true on some level and in many instances, but it is not enough to explain the murder rate of the species, and the levels of cruelty and indifference. And if one claims that the murder



and cruelty and indifference rate has to do with the subjection and closing down and prevention of desire, with the “sadness” you speak of, with totalitarianism and fascism, well, we will not be delivered from fascism by those nursed by its poisoned milk. There has to be a mediating cultural activity which offers the opportunity of a break in the structure of things.

I would suggest that as a practical activity, and especially when conducted collectively, as communal dialogue, philosophy is—among other things, to be sure—exemplary of this mediating activity. To use a crude but vivid metaphor, philosophy is about the dialogue between the three brains of the human species—the “reptilian” or brain stem of instinct, the “mammalian” or limbic region of emotion, and the cerebral cortex, or “reason.” On the Platonic model, whose three parts of the self—*logistikós*, *epithymía*, and *thymós*—match up quite suggestively with the tri-partite brain, dialogue is not a possibility. Without the strict control of “reason” and the ruling class which embodies it, all hell breaks loose. Now we realize that this is the economy of patriarchy and the Oedipus complex, quintessential of a classic Western form of subjection and subjugation, which creates a hell in order to suppress it. A new model of the self, which already has various names—the “nomadic self,” the “subject-in-process,” or what I have called the “intersubject”—deconstructs the Platonic hierarchy and initiates Deleuze’s and Guattari’s “desiring-revolution,” which I understand in a very broad sense as the ongoing reconstruction of desire.

Why is communal, dialogical philosophy—philosophy as event, as collaborative *agón* and deliberative play—so exemplary of the desiring-revolution? Because philosophy is about the normative—the cerebral cortex looking for rules and principles and heuristics—and the normative is about what might be. The normative is the world of the as-if, of the world other-than-what-it-is, which implicitly judges and thereby goes beyond what is. The normative is the world of the distinctively human—of the huge-brained animal, the creature of neoteny, the one who is never done growing up, who is continually remaking herself. But for schooling under patriarchy (and I realize we already have two terms, totalitarianism and fascism, but I want to introduce another, not knowing exactly the semantic relation between the three) the normative is the Serpent in the Garden of Eden, who whispers (to the woman), “does the authority really say this, or mean this? Can’t this be interpreted differently?” For patriarchy, this is the first principle of Satan—to question authority—and this is all philosophy does.

The patriarchal school is interested in reproduction, not transformation, and in quantitative, not qualitative change (e.g. “The economy needs more people with computer skills”). It also is the major institution for the construction of the docile body of the worker—whether with hands or mind—and for the libidinal economy of surplus repression. Like another Serpent in another, parallel Garden, it says to the big-brained animal, “Don’t make trouble, don’t question, don’t propose alternatives, don’t follow your desire, and things will go very well for you. A nice car is waiting for you, and a

home, and plenty of food, drink, travel and entertainment, including as much sensual enjoyment as you can get.”

WALTER

Some time ago, I saw a wonderful photograph in the newspaper which is a perfect example of this struggle. It was taken during one of the demonstrations by protesters at the meeting of the Group of the Eight in Gleneagles, Scotland, and shows a woman kissing the shield of a policeman. She was smiling, he was very serious. She looked very strong, he looked depressed. I see her as a metaphor of the force of resistance, of rebellion against the Empire, a joyful force; and he as an image of this sad neocapitalism, this repressive totalitarian, fascist, power.

SCHOOLING AND PHILOSOPHY

DAVID

Yes, it's an interesting image—especially since the kiss is the language of the body, and it is oddly ambivalent that the woman is kissing the concrete tool of oppression, the shield. On one level it reminds us of a gesture of submission and deep perversion—kissing the jackboots of the conqueror—but here we immediately recognize it as a gesture of power: with her kiss, she dissolves repression, which is gathered as a material force in the shield. But let's imagine that it is this policeman to whom the Serpent is speaking in this parallel Garden of Eden. He continues: “don't be fooled into thinking that the key to human happiness is anything but universal prosperity. All great works of art and all great systems of thought are made possible by economic surplus. And economic surplus will only be attained at the cost of a sacrifice by certain classes and certain individuals in certain periods. It might even be you who has to sacrifice, but I am sure you will accept your fate with dignity and loyalty to the goal of universal prosperity toward which the Market is slowly but surely guiding us, and the universal peace which is the goal of Empire. And just in case you are not persuaded, let me add this: the kind of freedom and indeterminacy you are imagining will release the human dark side. In fact if you will just look around you, you will see that it's already begun.” And unlike the pair in the first Garden, the policeman and his Eve don't leave. They set about making quantitative changes—approved, of course, by the Boss and aided by His angels—in the garden, content with their sacrifice, and vindicated, delighted with each apparent lifting of repression—as sexually explicit films become freely available to the general public for example. “You see?” says the Serpent, “you underwent the regime of surplus repression in order to create abundance for everyone, and now repression is lifted. Now you can have your cake and eat it too. Now do you trust us? But above all, avoid philosophy.”

This is all a rather heavy-handed way of saying that philosophy represents a rupture in a form of schooling which is in the service of Empire. It cannot just be patched in. But I don't mean just philosophy, I mean philosophy as conversation and, even more specifically, as dialogue. We seem to agree that the schools represent the



totalitarian elements of contemporary culture, and totalitarianism hates dialogue the way a cat hates water, because dialogue opens up the normative dimension. I sometimes pick up a faint feeling of scandalization—ever so faint, like a bad smell only just barely perceivable—from some teachers as they watch children doing philosophy. Either that, or they sometimes seem to consider it utterly trivial, just chat, without the slightest substantive implications: that in fact it is just utterly trivial and non-productive if not morally dangerous to sit around and deliberate together about such things as persons and animals and subjectivity and justice and beauty and knowledge and language and mind and body and so forth—not to mention the more practical application of these more general concepts in conversations about lying and conflict and what's fair and friendship and so on.

Children, on the other hand—some, it is true, more than others—and also, it must be added, many teachers, both young and old—see the point immediately: that it's about the reconstruction of desire and that it has immediate implications for the reconstruction of school as well. The two cannot be separated, given that humans are, as you say, oriented to “realizing and expanding their forces,” and the adult-child collective of the school represents an ideal setting for this most fundamental project. But totalitarian education says to the child, “You will not reconstruct us—this would be against God and Nature—but rather we will reconstruct *you*—or, more specifically, we will reproduce you in our image, the image of the Same.” Therefore I can only conclude that philosophy represents the best hope for educational transformation and also the index of the fact that this transformation is impossible—or rather I should say, incalculable.

You have noticed I'm sure that I seem to be stuck in a binary, which all comes down (for me) to the aporia presented by the relationship between quantitative and qualitative change. Does the accumulation of the first eventually lead to the second, as Marx suggested? Or is the second always the incalculable, the unpredictable, the uncontrollable? Given that philosophy is about imagining and reimagining self, other and world, it would appear that it sits squarely in the realm of the qualitative. So speaking optimistically, it would seem that the practice of community of philosophical inquiry in the schools represents the crack in the hegemonic structure, a place where light gets in, where the child's voice is first heard. But you yourself, in fact, have been the first to criticize even the hallowed Lipman approach to community of philosophical inquiry as mere skills-transmission and socialization into a certain class-consciousness—a position with which I don't entirely agree, but which I do see as quite applicable to what can be done to the Lipman approach in schools—ways it can be, so to speak, disarmed, suppressed and bowdlerized with very little effort. All it takes is for people practicing it to do something else—whether “critical thinking”, “values clarification,” “moral education” or even “cooperative learning”—while protesting that they are doing philosophy, or at least as close as they can come to whatever they think

philosophy might be. And perhaps this brings us back around to the question first raised by your categorization of different kinds of temporality. If childhood's affinity with *aíonic* time makes of her something of a "natural" philosopher, *chrónos* makes of the adult quite the opposite, so it is only through reappropriating one's own childhood and its form of temporality that the adult becomes a philosopher. And what educational program for teachers can bring that about, given that it is educational programs of one sort or another which have caused them to forget it? But I've written too much. Back to you, brother.

WALTER

Yes, it really seems we have been preoccupied by the quantitative and the qualitative even from the beginning of the conversation. After all, *chrónos* is quantitative while *aíon* is qualitative; and also force and power, joy and sadness. To go back to Heraclitus, I do not think we ought to get rid of oppositions if they can help us think. You've mentioned Socrates, and I would like to stay a little about this figure. Socrates is an image of a "hero" in the so-called democratic or progressive philosophies of education, a metaphor for non-directive, open, dialogic teaching; someone who, while recognizing that he knew nothing, helped others to give birth to their own knowledge. This image is very romantic and is certainly based on that marvelous portrait of his master drawn by Plato. But if we get close enough to the *Dialogues*, other faces of Socrates emerge. It is true that Socrates is apparently not directive, but it is no less true that, coincidentally, he tortures his opponents untiringly until they arrive at the same place that he has arrived at: the point where they recognize that they do not know what they thought they knew, that is to say, the place where they acknowledge that the most powerful knowledge is philosophical knowledge—in other words, that Socrates is, as the Oracle said, the wisest man in Athens. The so called socratic *dialogues* show this path very clearly: while some people knew something at the beginning of the *dialogue*, nobody knows *anything* in the end. And this "knowing nothing" is Socrates' trick, for it is precisely what he does know, and on every occasion it is the same knowledge, his knowledge of (pseudo-) ignorance, his wisdom. In this apparently negative movement, Socrates takes everyone to *his* house, to *his* place. As a teacher, Socrates knows what everyone should know and schools his students persistently in this knowledge - his knowledge, what he considers *the* knowledge. There is no space for creation, or invention of the other. As a philosopher, and as a metaphor for the relationship between philosophy and politics, Socrates is a certain kind of strange foreigner—the one who wants to persuade all the natives to speak his language rather than their own. Socrates does not learn, nor does he make any effort, to learn the language of the others. The result is tragic: the only life he considers worth living cannot lead him but to his death. And when he expands philosophical life into the life of politics in the *Apology*, it is discovered that the only politics that a philosophical life can offer is opposed to - has no place in -- the politics of the *polis*.

If philosophy is opposed to other forms of knowledge and life - such as politics, poetry and crafts - and can only denounce their poverty, its inner world is in fact not as



joyful as it seems at a first glance. In fact, Socrates was probably one of the first models of the hegemony of the Same, cultivated in the realms of philosophy and education from their birth. Socrates, our father, is a model of a philosophy and an education of the same, which conforms others to the same. As we have just pointed out, everyone who talks to Socrates is expected to arrive at the point at which Socrates – whom everyone knows is the wisest person in Athens – already is. Of course Socrates is not just this, and there are lot's of other interesting directions implicit in what he does. But it is surprising how the so-called history of the philosophy of education in the West has neglected this dimension of Socratic practice. Plato's main move was to institutionalize Socrates, to install him inside thinking and the school. And we must acknowledge his success. With few exceptions, philosophy and education have put their trust in this movement of Plato until this very day. Our schools do. Your schools do.

WHY PHILOSOPHY FOR CHILDREN?

In this sense, I would argue that there is no such a thing as philosophy as such, or education as such. Philosophy is something plural. There are philosophies. Socrates' is just one possibility. And education is also plural. There are educations. Nor am I so sure about the community of inquiry. Isn't it too Socratic, too normative, too sure about where it's going and how to get there and who is in and who is out, etc.? The very idea of a program to do philosophy with children doesn't seem to me very subversive at all. To put it in your terms and in the form of a question, I would ask: where and what is the place for the incalculable, the unpredictable, the uncontrollable in any given philosophical and pedagogical practice? How ready we are to think what we are not supposed to think? How willing we are to *undiscipline* our thinking? Let me put in still other and probably more provocative words: why are we so interested in giving voice to children? Why do we want them to speak? What do we want to hear from them? Do we already *know* what they will say? I am sure, brother, that you would like to take one of these questions.

DAVID

Why are we so interested in giving voice to children? Because childhood is the form of language which is the world languaging. It is the language of the Fool, which mimics the language of birds, trees, thunderstorms, and things like that. But why would we be interested in hearing that? Because it is the moment in the West when the deconstruction of Platonic and Cartesian subjectivity has opened us to the possibility of new versions of self, and especially to a versions of self which do not define themselves according to the extent that they must forget the language of birds and trees and

thunderstorms, and for this reason the voices of children become as interesting to listen to as the voices of poets or scientists or artists or philosophers.

But if oppositions help us to think, we must never allow them to lose sight of each other, because to do so is a form of reification. In fact one cannot think “discipline” apart from “undiscipline,” or quantitative apart from qualitative, or subversion apart from order, or the Same apart from Difference. Nor do I think that there is necessarily a “synthesis” or mediating third of binaries present at any given time—for example a mediation of same and different—nor that one pole of the opposition comes before the other, either psychologically or ontologically. Rather they are co-present to each other, they both emerge in the same moment, and they are part of a much more complex network of multiple concepts and feelings and values—various positions in a system which is in a state of permanent partial contradiction, and which is always on the way to reconstructing itself in order to find some kind of viable balance, and which never quite succeeds in doing so.

I would apply this same analysis to the adult-child relation in three of its forms: 1) the relation between the adult and his or her own “childhood,” i.e. her own *aionic* time, which has to do with a form of adult subjectivity; 2) the relation between the parent and the child; 3) and the relation between the pedagogue and the child. Each of these three forms of relation—which, of course are inter-related themselves—are fraught with oppositions. In the third, the role of the adult is in fact to discipline, to attempt to normalize the child’s voice, to promote the same, to teach the child to talk like an adult; and the role of the child is in fact to protest and subvert and reinvent this process, to remind the adult of the language of the body and the world, and thereby to trigger the outbreak of *aionic* time, and thereby the reconstruction of subjectivity and the humanization of the species. And it is my experience that there is always a tension between these two, even when the adult presumes never to impose, never to discipline, and even when the child presumes to be the “perfect child” (i.e. the little adult). In a humanized pedagogy, it is a creative tension, a tension through which both child and adult are enriched, and which promises to reconstruct the culture such that, as Coleridge said about the ideal education, the “feelings” of childhood are retained into the “powers” of adulthood. And we might add, to make of the “power” of adulthood not the power of the same, but rather what you have referred to as “force,” or “energy,” or “joy,” or even, I would suggest, “jouissance.” Through this tension there is the possibility of new adult voices emerging, ones which handles the opposition between Same and Different in alternative ways.

Thus, what you would criticize in Socrates—and in Philosophy for Children as well—I would accept as an existential necessity. As a pedagogue, it is my role to encourage and cajole children to “give an account,” to give reasons, to think critically. I dare to do this because I believe (perhaps you will think me naïve) that philosophical discourse—and I don’t mean in its apodictic but in its dialogical form, the form for which Socrates at least gave us a few preliminary guidelines—allows for intercourse and even translation between the different forms of temporality which you described at the beginning of this dialogue of ours. Surely it does not reveal *aionic* time the way art



does, and poetic discourse is not constrained by the *elenchus* the way philosophy is, and in any case the translation is never quite worthy of the original, but the major principle of community of philosophical inquiry is *maíusis*, which assumes spontaneity and emergence, and this is the dimension of force and joy and love. Said differently, I am bold to confront children with discipline, order and the same because I know that they – or rather childhood as *aión* – are unconquerable, unsubduable, and confront me with the incalculable, the unpredictable, the uncontrollable, difference, undiscipline and disorder simply in the event of our meeting. It is the dialogue which this confrontation promises which also promises the permanent, desiring-revolution which is the promise of the species. And now, dear brother, that I have revealed my totalitarian side . . . ? What follows?

WALTER

I think our memories of our beginning announce the end of the conversation. Nothing follows after totalitarianism. Or, to be more affirmative and less dramatic, everything follows, if our oppositional thinking is still meaningful. Who knows? I really think that the way you have just drawn the relationship between education, philosophy and childhood is very meaningful. My cautions might be meaningless if, after all, children are, as you nicely said, a form of the unconquerable and unsubduable. But I would still make a case in favor of a childhood of education and to reconsider what you call “existential necessity.” I am still shocked by the idea that children need to talk like adults. Who needs that? Is it too risky – too irresponsible, you might say – to think this childish education in terms of helping the other to speak another language, to think another way thinking, to live another life? Anyway, thanks for such an intense conversation, brother, and please, present us with some final words.

DAVID

Well, children will never be made to talk like adults, but adults don't talk like adults either – they never more than approximate. Only gods talk like adults. And at the same time that adults make the demands of reason in philosophical dialogue, children make theirs: that is, to listen to them speak, to really listen, and not to treat them like cases from a textbook, like “developing organisms,” but as full-fledged persons who know very well how to think if given the chance and if allowed to in their own way. This is dialogue, after all, and in dialogue both sides are considered to be equally worth hearing. And the end result of this kind of dialogue which philosophy with children represents is exactly, as you suggest, speaking another language, thinking in another way, living another life – a language neither of animal or god, the world or the mind, the adult or the child, but of the human, which in its deepest realization is polyvocal and polysemic, multiple, and poised for transformation: a way of life which includes the three experiences of time with which you started this conversation. And philosophy as dialogue – along with many other kinds of human activity – offers again

and again the possibility of the *kairós* which opens a space for an encounter with *aión*. This possibility can be betrayed in multiple ways – through “programming” it, through assimilating it to previous dead or mindless forms, through trivializing it, even just through requiring it. But I don’t think the possibility will ever go away, because it’s part of what Freire called the “ontological vocation” of the human, and as such is ineradicable.

And where are we, dear brother? My feeling is that we have just begun to open up the differences between us, but that this in fact has brought us even closer than we were. Certainly you have taken me quickly and surely to the boundaries of my own thinking, and gently obliged me to look past them. What I see is indistinct – outlines with shifting shapes – but standing at the boundaries is enough, and when the moment arrives, I know I will find myself already in that new territory which you paint for me like a Zen landscape – a line here, a stroke there, a curve, a point. Meanwhile, there is the force, the joy, and the pleasure of our relation. . .

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