

Philosophising with children as a playful activity: Purposiveness without purpose

Stelios Gadris

University of Crete, Department of Philosophical and Social Studies

sgadris@gmail.com

Abstract

While trying to preserve the autonomy of their playful activity consisting in a game of 'questioning and answering', the Gymnosophists defy Alexander the Great and, more importantly, go against their own chances of survival (since giving a wrong answer to the king's question amounts to losing their life). Thankfully, we do not need to face such dilemmas when philosophising with children. Nevertheless, the Gymnosophists' example helps construct a notion of philosophy for/with children as an autonomous playful activity that albeit (implicitly) purposive it is, however, without (explicit) purpose (something akin to Kant's aesthetic judgement). Alluding to an Aristotelian sense of '*telos*' in its connection with Platonic '*paideia*' I understand philosophy for/with children as an activity that we carry out for its own sake. This does not mean that we are to abolish elements such as antagonism, competition, excellence, etc.—there is no question: the competitive element is there. But what does it mean? We could fix its meaning according to a purpose (we compete to excel or persuade and win) or we might entertain the idea of keeping its meaning rather vague or undetermined, implicit.

Key words

explicit/implicit, *paideia*, philosophising, playing, purposiveness, *telos*

Introduction: You and whose army?

If we understand philosophy for/with children as a playful activity then we ought to preserve its autonomous character, that is an activity that is carried out for its own sake; something akin to a game that children play. This means that the purpose of the game must be delimited from within and not without; delimiting the game from within is tantamount to abolishing any external elements that might jeopardise the game and distort it. In other words, we need not ascribe a specific purpose to the game; in fact, we ought to resist ascribing any purpose to it at all: aligning philosophy

for/with children to some specific purpose we risk transforming a playful activity into a serious one, a means for achieving some end or purpose.

This does not mean that it is purposeless; what we want to suggest, however, is that we refrain from determining what this purpose might be. Being purposive is to acknowledge that we engage playing the game while resisting ascribing an overall purpose that would determine an unambiguous meaning to it. This way we leave the meaning of the game without further qualifications, as something played for its own sake—isn't this what children do, primarily, when playing? Within the limits of their game children are both free and constrained, competitive, striving for excellence, serious etc., with one word: they become absorbed by the game; but it is just this, their game and it doesn't easily welcome intruders.

In any case, this is how I interpret the Gymnosophists' stance defying the authority of Alexander the Great who sets out to distort their game, their witty exchange of riddling and paradoxical statements—something not very far from philosophising both with and without children.

The historical details of Alexander's the Great encounter with the Gymnosophists are irrelevant for our present purposes—I follow Plutarch's version where the Gymnosophists are accused of instigating a revolt against the Macedonians (Bosman 2010). The word *Gymnosophists* means 'naked sophists' (Bowie 2016) or, as Plutarch says, 'naked philosophers' (Perrin 1919). These are Indian sages famous for their wit and concise answers to notoriously difficult and strange questions. Alexander's encounter with the Gymnosophists begins as a demonstration of power on his part. He presents them with a life or death situation: He asks certain questions and whosever answer is the worst will be put to death not by Alexander's decree, but by the verdict of a friend: the oldest of the Gymnosophists is appointed judge; he will decide which of his fellow Gymnosophists' answer is the worst, leading consequently to death.

The questions Alexander asks are awkward, another sign of a rather frivolous temperament (he wishes not only to demonstrate his power but his wits as well); subsequently, the answers are equally odd: 'Which animal is the most cunning?' Alexander asks, and the answer given is: 'The one not yet discovered by man'; or: 'Who are the most, the living or the dead?' only to receive the answer: 'The living for the dead are no more'. After the ordeal is over, Alexander asks the judge to pass his verdict and the judge declares all answers to be equally bad. The king loses his patience and condemns the judge to be the first to be put to death only to meet the old

Gymnosophist's complaint that 'if they have all answered equally bad nobody can be put to death!' (Huizinga 1949, p. 111). Upon hearing this, Alexander reconsiders and spares the Gymnosophists.

I am not sure how one can interpret the above story: We witness the clash of two worlds. These worlds are not, primarily, the Hellenistic world and the world of the Gymnosophists; they are rather a world of power and another, rather unworldly world, that defies power. To defy power is not just an act of contempt towards it; it is rather a stance against something that threatens the Gymnosophist's way of life. This is how I interpret the Gymnosophists' attitude towards Alexander: their commitment to their way of life, above all, their game, 'the riddle – game', as Huizinga (Huizinga 1949, p. 111) calls it, that is, *a propounding of questions impossible to answer conclusively* (ibid.). Of course, this game might be a showoff or a contest, some sort of competition: We may presume that the Gymnosophists seek to prevail and excel or that they draw, at least, some satisfaction when answering unexpectedly shrewdly, thus, out-witting their opponent. But one should ask if the Gymnosophists engage in such a playful activity for the sake of excelling or for some other purpose? Of course, there is the satisfaction of playing and out-witting the opponent but, nevertheless, we should ask if *this* is the purpose of the game.

As Huizinga says, playing similar games retains a sacred aspect (1949, p.104), one that embodies a specific way of life. Perhaps the Gymnosophists' game is akin to a ritual—the concept of a ritual denotes a common practice that retains a self-subsisting meaning pointing to a self-enclosed activity, something rooted within our practices. It is an autonomous practice where meaning is bestowed, primarily, through encounter and participation. Participation, in this case, means both thinking with and against others (Kant 2007), indeed living with and against others, confining thus all possible meaning within the limits of the game and not with reference to some external aim or purpose.

It is one thing to acknowledge the competitive and antagonistic elements at play within philosophy for/with children and another to orientate an inquiry towards competition. The competitive element is interwoven with almost every aspect of our daily conducts; what is problematic, however, is the meaning or, rather, the purpose of this competitive element. One may enjoy *recognition* and *respect* within a community without explicitly dominating. In this case, the community operates from within retaining a rather autonomous character; introducing however some external element and purpose might jeopardise the meaning of the game itself: rather than inquiring

we might choose to train; rather than being perplexed we might choose argumentation. But now, choosing training or argumentation bestows a different, rather determinate meaning to the game, further determining *legitimate* and *illegitimate* moves within the game.

We need to draw a sharp distinction between an activity that is carried out for its own sake and an activity that becomes a means to an end: an activity that is carried out for its own sake is both the means and the end and the limits that separate the two are not, in this case, easily discernible. In other words, we must safeguard this activity, refraining from ascribing to it some specific purpose; there need not be conclusive answers. Put differently: the answer might lay within playing the game where the means (the game) coincides with the end (the game). But now it becomes hard to discern if we are talking just about a game or about something else as well: perhaps a way of living and thinking, the cultivation of our habits and of ourselves. In other words, it is not discernible any more whether we are only talking about a game or something more, something akin to *paideia* perhaps, in the broad ancient Greek sense of an on-going process of self-cultivation.

There is a rich tradition in progressive education and play-based learning that utilize John Dewey's notions of the child's experience as the locus of 'learning'. Learning takes place in what Dewey calls: a *situation* (Dewey 2007, pp. 33-50). Situation refers to something meaningful, i.e., a game, that children become involved in and within which they learn to be free yet, at the same time, to self-regulate promoting thus a way of life or a *symbiosis* of many and uniquely different human beings (and, perhaps, not just human). Nevertheless, I would rather orientate my investigation to a more philosophical notion of play or game remaining skeptical towards Dewey's (pragmatic) orientation of education towards the ability to form and pursue purposes for oneself (Dewey 2007, pp.67-73).

In what follows, I will first describe the notion of a game or a playful activity as an autonomous or, rather, heautonomous practice drawing from both Kant and the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (2000) and Huizinga and his *Homo Ludens* (1949). Being heautonomous, philosophy for/with children sustains all of its different elements in an implicit rather than explicit fashion. This means that rules, meanings, truth, competition etc. retain a rather implicit function, not an explicit one. I will, then, connect philosophy for/with children with the Kantian notion of a purposive activity, an activity that is without a determinate purpose, concluding that all the above suggest an activity that is carried out for its own sake—something akin to the

Aristotelian notion of *telos* (as an end in itself, something that is done for its own sake, Aristotle 1999) and the Platonic *paideia* (as the turning of the soul towards the *Agathon*). I will, however, refrain from further determining these notions. *Telos*, *paideia* or even *eudaimonia* (the good life) — a notion intimately connected with both *telos* and *paideia*—reveal perhaps our purposive nature, the fact that we are creatures that are able to ascribe purposes to ourselves and pursue them, as Dewey suggests; however, I would rather leave these notions without any further qualification because what their meaning might be is a question worth raising again and again when philosophising with or without children.

Homo Ludens and the heautonomy of the game

Huizinga (1949) in his *Homo Ludens* understands the notion of play as an element that penetrates every aspect of culture and civilization. He is not so much interested in grounding culture on playing, nevertheless there is a difference between playing as a carefree form of life—in life's various forms—and civilization as a rather serious practice bestowed with ideals, rigid systems of values, laws, work, rewards etc. What characterises play is freedom in the sense of transcending nature and natural processes (Huizinga 1949, p. 7). This freedom is interwoven with *joyfulness* (Huizinga 1949, p. 74); but there is something more profound at work here—something that we can relate to philosophy for/with children:

Summing up the formal characteristics of play we might call it a free activity standing quite consciously outside 'ordinary' life as being 'not serious', but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. (Huizinga 1949, p. 13)

The question is whether philosophy for/with children—conceived thus, that is, as a *game* - can retain its heautonomous character when reoriented towards an explicit purpose, such as excelling or winning, purposes that over-emphasise the competitive element of the game. There are, of course, all sorts of games, as Wittgenstein reminds us in the *Philosophical Investigations*: Games that we play according to explicit rules or games without rules; games that end with winning or games where winning might not be of essence (Wittgenstein 1958, §66). Nevertheless, we can raise the question as to whether orientating philosophy for/with children towards an explicit purpose might not distort its character. This is not saying that there are no competitive elements

within the practice: We do enjoy a good quarrel or we try to excel and articulate arguments, be creative, original etc. What is however in question is the meaning that all these notions acquire: Are we to anoint them as the explicit and overall purpose of the game?

The Gymnosophists' exchange is one that presupposes an exchange of utterances—not necessarily arguments. Even as a competitive exercise or a display of intelligence and wit, still it is an imaginative one that does not just or primarily rest upon arguments or reasons; it seems to capture something more profound than reasons, a way of life. In a similar fashion, even if we refrain from offering some sort of definition of philosophy for/with children, still we can acknowledge that it is not just about arguments and counter-arguments or even the *best* arguments. More than often, reasonableness clashes with arguments presupposing contextualisation or empathy and creativity; sometimes being reasonable means *understanding* or *remaining silent*. One might object that an argument is not, strictly speaking, a logical mechanism, a coherent sequence of logically interrelated propositions with explicit appeal to evidence and reason—yet, what sort of argument does 'silence' establish? What sort of argument does 'bewilderment' entail? What sort of argument does a grumpy face *gesturing* that it might be 'wrong' suggest?

From such a point of view, philosophising with children is not an exercise in securing the best arguments or the best reasons; all notions of 'best' or 'argument', even 'reason' are equally contestable and ambivalent or, at least, entail evaluative claims that are open to questioning. We could of course invite a judge to settle the meanings and pronounce a verdict—but isn't this what the Gymnosophists show to be, if not problematic, of no importance to their game? There is a certain autonomy, or rather heautonomy, that philosophy for/with children enjoys.

If autonomy means, following Kant, prescribing a law to oneself and abiding to it, establishing thus the possibility of a moral judgement (see Kant 1998, AA4:443-6; Wood 2017, p.12), heautonomy, again following Kant, relates to reflection and its constant effort to ascribe meaning to the multiplicity and diversity of phenomena, even (human) life; a striving to understand the world. This way heautonomy becomes a rather evasive yet dynamic concept; a striving to bestow meaning to the world as Kaulbach (1984) and Makkreel (1995) suggest. Reflection (Kant's reflective judgement) relates thus to hermeneutics and the subject's constant striving to find meaning in the world as a human being. Seen this way, philosophy for/with children retains a similar

heautonomy; if, that is, by philosophy with children we are to understand a striving to find, construct or, even—ideally—agree on meanings.

As a way of life, philosophy for/with children orientates itself multifacetedly towards meaning or, rather, a striving to find meaning. Here the game does not presuppose a specific purpose to secure its meaning; the meaning of the game cannot be, in other words, explicitly stated. Meaning emerges as a purposive activity, albeit one without purpose. In absence of specific purposes, philosophy for/with children acquires its meaning from participation, and whatever rewards it might deliver it delivers them rather unexpectedly over the course of time, becoming, hopefully, a way of life, a way of understanding oneself and others. Neglecting this aspect, we run the risk of transforming philosophy for/with children into a competition or—if not a competition—an exercise, something for cultivating language or critical skills. There is no question that all these aspects are present within philosophy for/with children, nevertheless, they provide a rather restricted view of what it might be and, more importantly, what it can become. Nancy Vansielegem (2011), for example, sets out to expand the notion of doing philosophy for/with children, where doing philosophy becomes an experience or rather, some sort of symbiosis where all that is required is a common experience, like walking together—what she calls ‘an experiment’ concerning what philosophy for/with children might be. This is obviously over and above *reasoning*, *critical thinking* or *knowledge*—over and above *articulated language itself*. Raising the objection, ‘But, is *this* philosophy?’ might be enough to entertain the possibility that it actually is!

An example from Huizinga’s *Homo Ludens* might be illuminating at this point: Huizinga, as noted above, investigates human culture through the prism of play. Culture is thus interpreted in terms of a playful activity. He then proceeds to contrast this playful element of culture with modern sport, an activity we can easily associate with the notions of game and playing, competition, etc. He writes:

It might seem at first sight that certain phenomena in modern social life have more than compensated for the loss of play-forms. Sport and athletics, as social functions, have steadily increased in scope and conquered ever fresh fields both nationally and internationally. (p.195)

Now, with the increasing systematization and regimentation of sport, something of the pure play-quality is inevitably lost [...] The spirit of the professional is no longer the true play-spirit; it is lacking in spontaneity and carelessness. [...] Sport has become profane, ‘unholy’ in every way and has

no organic connection whatever with the structure of society, least of all when prescribed by the government. Or, we might add, an institution or an official competition. (pp. 196-198)

The above description illustrates our belief of what philosophy for/with children does as an activity, as a play form (and not as a sport). All these activities—game, sport, philosophising with children, even philosophy itself—can be described as competitive or antagonistic; a ceaseless striving to overthrow the opponent under the name of victory or even truth, to have the final say. Nevertheless, we should distinguish between the satisfaction reached within the limits of the game and the satisfaction reached when winning the game. Sometimes we are satisfied by merely participating; sometimes we choose silence over speech and blubbing over arguments. Does this mean that we have lost the game?

Making it explicit? Leaving everything as it is

It appears, however, that we risk the heautonomous character of the game not only when explicitly stating a purpose, such as victory, but even when we explicitly state any purpose at all. Explicitly stating purposes renders philosophy for/with children a means towards some end or other, jeopardising its nature as an end in itself. These purposes might not simply refer to winning or losing; they might entail the cultivation of skills—say critical thinking, even citizenship; they might entail meta-criteria that determine what counts as reasonableness, what counts as an argument and what does not. Of course, everything is already there and operating within an inquiry and the community: there are good and bad arguments; right and wrong answers, etc. What is at stake, however, is making every implicit or self-evident acknowledgment explicit within the community as part of the investigation—even if this means questioning the very notions of *good* and *bad*; *reasonable* and *unreasonable*; *a good way of thinking* and *a bad one*. A good way of thinking might be reduced to a set of virtues or thinking skills that are or should be considered as exemplary. Still, a *bad* way of thinking might open the possibility of exploring the limits of the very notions of good and bad, even the very notion of thought itself—something that a good way of thinking might not even consider doing or consider necessary to do.

Reinforcing a set of principles as exemplary rather than allowing the investigation to establish such criteria from within implicitly—we reestablish definite criteria ascribing meaning to notions such as ‘good’ or ‘bad’, this time on the meta-level of thinking. We explicitly establish, in other words, a set of criteria exempt from inquiry. But if the inquiry is to acquire meaning, if it is, moreover, to become a form or a way

of life, it should acquire its meaning from within the game, not from without. Meanings should be forged not imposed: If not, then we are risking the game as a *ritual*, as a way of life or as a *paradigm* of what inquiry might mean when we just do things or play games. What is at play here is a distinction between *something being implicit* and *something stated* (or *presupposed*) *explicitly*.¹

We can relate the conceptual distinction between *stating something explicitly* and *something being implicit* with the ‘instrumental’/‘non-instrumental’ distinction David Kennedy explores (2006, p. 167). Instrumental, under the proposed analogy, would be tantamount to the explicit use of concepts, tools or moves to achieve a *specific* purpose or goal, whereas non-instrumental refers to the process of a community coming together to investigate the meaning of concepts allowing, thus, a way of life or some sort of symbiosis to emerge.² This analogy can be, according to my interpretation, traced back to the Aristotelian distinction between something we pursue for the sake of itself and something we pursue for the sake of something else (Aristotle, 1999, 1097a.25). Under this aspect, stating some explicit purpose is tantamount to orientating philosophy for/with children towards something other than itself, thus rendering it an instrument for accomplishing some purpose or other.

These purposes or aims need not be instrumental in a narrow way; sometimes it suffices that they acquire the guise of broader aims, say educational aims. In her very

1 The distinction between explicit and implicit is inspired by Brandom’s (2001) appropriation of the concepts with reference to Wittgenstein’s problem in the *Philosophical Investigations* concerning normativity and rules: Wittgenstein explores the meaning of the notion ‘to follow a rule’ and a number of family concepts related to normativity. Brandom’s use of Wittgenstein serves to ground normativity in a pragmatic context that is largely implicit. This is not the place to take issue with Brandom’s interpretation of Wittgenstein—although I should state that, in my opinion, Wittgenstein is not so much preoccupied with grounding or validating our practices: What he asks is, rather, for what purpose we might need explanations or appeal to rules? And the answer, according to my interpretation, can never be: To ground or validate something—Wittgenstein is notoriously anti-foundationalist. The purpose therefore must be to clear misconceptions or to explain how a game is played; and this is relevant to how I understand the concepts of stating something explicitly and something being implicit. Providing explicit rules can only serve to illustrate how the game is played; providing however an explicit purpose ascribes a particular meaning to the game. This is, of course, a valid move—there are, after all, games that entail ‘winning’, etc. Nevertheless, the question is whether philosophy for/with children needs to be or become such a game. And my answer is no. There are a number of rhetoric or other games that serve explicitly such an orientation while using tools and methods that we can easily identify with philosophy and philosophy for/with children. Still, they are different games.

2 It would be interesting at this point to raise the objection that symbiosis is a purpose relating to ideals that pertain to philosophy for / with children, like citizenship, democracy etc. The answer might be that symbiosis as a concept identifies an ideal but not an explicit way of realising it. It poses, in other words, a problem—not a solution.

useful article, Anastasia Anderson (2020) offers an interesting taxonomy of the aims of philosophy for/with children, drawing conceptual distinctions between ‘aims’ and ‘goals’, ‘intrinsic’ and ‘extrinsic’, ‘aims of education in general’ and ‘educational aims of philosophy for children’, etc. Her taxonomy resembles a sort of map, and her intentions mean well: articulating clear aims might help defend philosophy for/with children as a pedagogy or something worth including in the curriculum, for example. Still, we should remain skeptical of goals and aims as far as philosophy for/with children is concerned. Although Anderson does refer to researchers that refrain from ascribing explicit purposes to philosophy for/with children, she nevertheless fails to link their reluctance with a broader question regarding philosophy for/with children and, subsequently, philosophy itself: the question is ‘what is philosophy?’; and subsequently, ‘What is philosophy for/with children?’

Under the notions of play, game and purposive activity—albeit without purpose—we can identify this question with the activity itself, thus refraining from ascribing educational or other goals to it. This means that next to being an educational practice philosophy for/with children can be identified with philosophy itself, a ‘reoccupation’ of philosophy by children. Blumenberg (2020, p. 91) uses the term ‘reoccupation’, although in a different context, to describe how past concepts, traditions and forms of life that appear now meaningless, that is, ‘vacant’ nevertheless endure, acquiring new meaning and use; one of these forms might be philosophy itself – although Blumenberg nowhere refers to philosophy. Reoccupation thus points, under our view, to a renewal of philosophy as a practice exercised, this time, by children.

Philosophising and philosophising with children might thus be conceived as an ongoing practice of making or trying to make explicit what is implicitly presupposed; stating clearly in language, that is, what is implicitly accepted as self-obvious and unproblematic; subsequently, investigating through and with the help of language our beliefs, opinions, etc. all things that are implicitly already operative in our practices. There is, however, a difference between making explicit the implications that are related to the concepts we investigate—such as ‘truth’ or ‘belief’ or ‘knowledge’, ‘fairness’, ‘beauty’, etc.—and stating explicitly what the purpose (or the outcome, for that matter) of philosophising with children is or ought to be.

So, we need to ask what purpose might ‘making something explicit’ serve. Amongst other things, we offer explanations, analyse concepts and isolate features of concepts, articulate arguments and counter-arguments—all these and much more are moves within the game that demand we explicitly state in language our thoughts. The

purpose is not, however, to establish *the* right answer or a *correct* way of thinking—even as an ideal—by which something counts as sound or unsound: The content of these concepts is not always (or it should not be accepted as) obvious.

By explicitly stating criteria, rules or a purpose to the game, we not only orientate it towards something explicit, prescribing a definite meaning to it, but we furthermore establish criteria that determine the desirable moves in the game - a normative framework within which we are expected to operate. It is as if we establish the priority of the ruler's or the judge's verdict to determine what it is that we do or ought to do within a certain game. But in this way, it becomes a different game with a given a set of rules and criteria to which we are expected to comply. But this proves to be problematic again: What sort of move is 'silence', 'bewilderment' or 'dissonance' - every founding condition of a philosophically-inclined mind?

Purposiveness without purpose

Does the absence of an explicit purpose render philosophy for/with children a purposeless activity? The answer must be no. Following Kant's qualification about something being purposive albeit without (an explicit) purpose, we reaffirm that, while identifying philosophy for/with children as purposive, we consciously allow it to remain without a specific purpose. In this case, we might evoke as regulative or guiding the ideals that pertain to philosophy for children and set a normative framework within which we practice philosophising with children. Following Matthew Lipman, we can evoke the fostering of critical, creative and caring thinking; the cultivation of an inquisitive mind or the embedding of democracy (Lipman 2003). However, I'd rather turn once more to Kant's *Critique of the power of judgment* and his notion that all the above ideas must remain without qualification, if they are to emerge and keep re-emerging as part of a human (and not-only-human) world.

As Kant says, retaining notions such as beauty, truth, justice, etc., and we should add: philosophy for/with children without qualification or a determinate concept means that we are allowed to reflect on them, re-affirming that although we do not *know* what these notions might mean because nothing corresponds to them (Kant 2000, p.173, 5:293. §40), still, we are able, indeed we ought to reflect on their meaning time and again—as if this was a duty bestowed upon us. But now, how are we supposed to retain these notions as legitimate, maintaining that although they are without a determinate content they do make sense after all? Kant's answer is that what makes sense is the possibility to argue about such notions (Ibid. 5:338, §56.). What makes us human, part of humanity, is the possibility of conveying our feelings and participating

with and against others in a common human world—this is Kant’s idea of humanity (Ibid. 5:355-6); surpassing a limited point of view for a pluralistic one.

Being thus purposive beings, that is beings who are not only capable of setting purposes for ourselves but comprehend the world as purposive (although we cannot determine its purpose), we are engaged in an ongoing reflection striving to make sense of notions such as beauty, justice or truth etc. This striving is a collective endeavor, something that is carried out in between humans; something we do *with* but also *against* others (Kant 2007, p.241, 7:130). Critical philosophy –we should add: philosophy itself- thus becomes, according to Felicitas Munzel (2012), a broad pedagogical endeavour of self-cultivation and maturing (pp. 70-81), a striving to become human. Although a purpose in itself, humanity, as an ideal, must remain without further qualifications or determinations; it must remain open to questioning and inquiry. Accordingly, philosophy for/with children—as a purposive activity without however a specific purpose-engages us in the very same striving that we all may experience at some point or other: trying to make sense of what it is to be human.

If it makes sense to argue then it makes sense to offer arguments and counter arguments; to defend a position; to strive for excellence— to be competitive or antagonistic—the word does derive from the Greek *agon* (Hartnoll & Found 2003) meaning ‘game’ or ‘struggle’. But it also makes sense to remain silent, or bewildered, speechless, etc. What remains open is the question: what are we striving for when doing philosophy for/with children? We might have no answer to offer or offer a preliminary one, say ‘truth’ or ‘meaning’; we strive towards the truth or to make sense of things. But what emerges is an ongoing striving *towards* truth or meaning. Philosophy and philosophy for/with children has now become something akin to *paideia* in broad ancient Greek terms, where *paideia* is to be understood as an on-going open-ended striving to make sense of things.

Under this aspect it might make sense to entertain the idea of allowing an open or free space where this striving is made possible—something akin to what Jackson (2017) calls ‘creating a space for “gently Socratic” inquiry’ or, rather, creating space for philosophy for/with children in schools where all notions can be or ought to be contestable; even the very notions of school and education. This way, purposes

interweave with meanings and they emerge as preliminary answers to a never-ending duty, that of reflecting upon their meaning.³

Conclusion

Alexander the Great suspects that there is something powerful in thinking—or, if not powerful, then something worthy of respect—but time and again, he fails to comprehend what: like Diogenes (Ford 2016), the Gymnosophists defy Alexander's power. There is no doubt that what is at stake are two different world views; two almost unreconcilable sets of values: physical or worldly power on one hand and another sort of worldview on the other, one that can discern something beyond power, victory and authority; something that values freedom over power, bewilderment over decisiveness, questioning over definitions or purposes and, perhaps, silence over speaking—something akin to philosophy and philosophy for/with children.

What I have tried to do is to identify this with an activity akin to playing a game. Playing a game thus means something we do for its own sake. Alluding to Aristotle and his notion of *telos*, we acknowledge philosophy for/with children as an end in itself. Before aligning philosophy for/with children with all the high ideals of democracy, citizenship, critical thinking, reasoning and the community of inquiry, we might entertain the idea that it is something more comprehensive, something akin to *paideia*.

The etymology of the Greek word *paideia* refers both to child and game or toy but it also refers to something akin to struggling (*παιδεύω*, pronounced /pe'ðe.vo/): 'struggle' to do or accomplish something or, then again, giving a hard time to someone. Under this aspect, we might further entertain the idea that philosophy for/with children resembles an almost impossible task where we confront not only each other within the community of inquiry but, ultimately, ourselves beyond the antagonism of offering and listening to arguments and securing the best reasons. We struggle when experiencing bewilderment, an intellectual cramp, or dissonance, in our effort to make sense of things and life, we struggle when we try to live together (sometimes we strive when living with ourselves!). This struggle brings to mind Plato's metaphor regarding the movement of the soul (Plato, 1968, p.197. 518b6–

³ At this point I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers of this paper; their useful comments helped me focus my argument enriching its content. All errors or ambiguities burden, obviously, me.

519b5). The turning of the soul captures the purpose of education or rather, *paideia* - turning towards the good or the *Agathon*.

In place of a theory or a purpose we could identify the *Agathon* with *paideia* itself, as an activity. As such the *Agathon* leads us again to the (Aristotelian) concept of *telos* or 'purpose' not as something tangible, such as excellence or victory, but as something that is worth pursuing for its own sake; a constant struggle—not competition—to find meaning. All things strive to perfection—their *telos*; but not all perfections are of equal value: We might want to excel and prevail, and this is perfectly legitimate. Still, there is a perfection that is unattainable, demanding constant struggle; a perfection that is and perhaps ought to remain undetermined: isn't this what we do when philosophising with children? Entertaining a possibility (and a hope)?

References

- Anderson, A (2020) Categories of goals in Philosophy for Children. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 39, pp. 607-623. Available from <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-020-09724-x>
- Aristotle, *Nicomachean ethics* (WD Ross, trans). Batoche Books, Kitchener, Canada, 1999.
- Bloom, A (1968) *The Republic of Plato. Translated with notes and an interpretive essay.* Basic Books, New York, NY.
- Blumenberg, H (2020) *History, metaphors and fables: A Hans Blumenberg reader.* (H Bajohr, F Fuchs & JP Kroll, eds & trans). Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY.
- Bosman, P (2010) The Gymnosophist riddle contest (Berol. P. 13044): A cynic text? *GRBS* 50, pp.175-192. Available from <https://grbs.library.duke.edu/article/view/1451>
- Bowie, E (2016) *Gymnosophists.* Available from https://oxfordre.com/classics/search?btog=chap&f_0=keyword&q_0=gymnosophists
- Brandom, R (2001) *Making it explicit: Reasoning, representing and discursive commitment.* Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.

- Bywater, J (ed) *Aristotle, Nicomachean ethics*. Available from <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0053%3Abekker+page%3D1097a%3Abekker+line%3D25>
- Dewey, J (2007) *Experience and education*. Simon & Schulster, New York, NY.
- Ford, L (2016) An encounter to remember. *The Kosmos Society: An online community for Classical Studies*. Center of Hellenistic Studies, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. Available from <https://kosmosociety.chs.harvard.edu/?p=20099>
- Hartnoll, P & Found, P (eds) (2003) *The concise Oxford companion to the theatre*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK.
- Huizinga, J (1949) *Homo Ludens: A study of the play-element of culture*. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.
- Jackson, TE (2017) *Gently Socratic inquiry*. Available from <http://p4chawaii.org/wp-content/uploads/Gently-Socratic-NEW.pdf>
- Kant, I (1998) *Groundwork of the metaphysics of morals*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK.
- Kant, I (2000) *Critique of the power of judgment*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK.
- Kant, I (2007) *Anthropology, history and education*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK.
- Kaulbach, F (1984) *Ästhetische Welterkenntnis bei Kant*. Köningshausen & Neumann, Würzburg, Germany.
- Kennedy, D (2006) *The well of being: Childhood, subjectivity and education*. State University of New York Press, New York, NY.
- Lipman, M (2003) *Thinking in education*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK.
- Makkreel, RA (1995) *Imagination and interpretation in Kant: The hermeneutic import of the Critique of Judgment*. University of Chicago, Chicago, IL.

Munzel, GF (2017) *Kant's conception of pedagogy: Towards education for freedom*. Northwestern University Press, Evanston, IL.

Perrin, B (ed) *Plutarch, Alexander. 64.1*. Available from:
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0243%3Achapter%3D64%3Asection%3D1>

Vansieleghem, N (2011) Philosophy is (as) an exercise in parrhesia: An example of a philosophical practice outside the school. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 45(2), pp. 321-337.

Wittgenstein, L (1958) *Philosophical investigations*. Basil Blackwell, Oxford, UK.

Wood, A (2017) *Formulas of the moral law*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK.