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Chapter 5

Daring a childlike writing: children for philosophy, moral end, and the childhood of conceptions

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Introduction

> There's nothing that hasn't started.
> Isabel

> With mumps and measles, flu and many upset stomachs, the worst of childhood ailments came from ignorance and immorality. We were born stupid and immoral. We had to be punished to sharpen the virtues and not perish in filth and danger. After years, I wished, after being cured of childhood, we would have been taught to normality...
> Valter Hugo Mãe, *Contra Mim* (against me)

> My father, I know that today, could be summed up to one word: fear. All the aversion to the foreign, the unusual, the novelty, the beyond, was just a visceral panic of the world, which he disguised by transforming this tragic fear into conservative ethics, into moral solidity.
> Afonso Cruz, *Princípio de Karenina* (Principle of Karenina)

"To start" is a childlike verb. There seems to be an indomitable boldness, characteristic of the beginnings of life, that leads it to affirm permanent beginnings or to permanently start over. No solemnities. And perhaps that is why, as we move out of chronological childhood, it becomes more and more difficult, frightening, and intimidating to begin anything—or simply to start. Isn't it life itself that starts over with each of these beginnings? Is this the vertigo we experience?

We can wonder if the childish boldness of beginnings is lost because the accumulation of the chronological sequence of age carries a weight that is difficult to discard. But doesn't it also—or above all—have to do with the relationships we establish at that same age? The dominant modes of production and consumption seem to make us more concerned with ends, products, and results than with beginnings. As our desires multiply at a dizzying pace, we let them put the answers in for us, we focus on efficiencies that close paths, and we end up forgetting that childlike verb.

Let us repeat, without repeating: "to begin" is a childlike verb, and childhood is a way of life. A childlike life is a life that (always) begins, which begins each and

every time, because life loves to be reborn and thus is nourished by childhood. Childhood in life and childlike life: that is why starting is a way to keep childhood alive and give it life. Perhaps this is also why we celebrate, with such joy, powerful and exuberant beginnings in the adult world—as when a child is born or a childish idea arises.

A child arrives as a new world because in her and with her we feel that the whole world can start over. But that is not the only reason. A child also arrives as a new world because her arrival tells us what, being so simple, we had almost forgotten: that the world is not just old and unquestionable. The child doesn't let us be indifferent; she breaks with conformity and arrives as hope, reeking of the unpredictable. Of questions.

A similar arrival to that of a child is that of certain childlike ideas, such as the idea offered by Matthew Lipman when he created "philosophy for children." We celebrate his childlike, daring, irreverent, inquiring character, commemorating his birth nearly 50 years ago. With this childlike idea, a new world began—or at least it became possible to start—in worlds which were already a little old and stuck in conformity. When those in institutionalized philosophy and education heard about the audacity of welcoming children among their reputable interlocutors in dialogue and thought, they frowned and turned up their noses. Philosophy for children? How come? Childhood in philosophy?

Even if they enjoyed and studied childhood, the worlds of philosophy and education were (were they?) still reticent toward it. In those worlds, childhood was (was it?) often like "an aberrant and useless time that adults abbreviated at all costs, a decline or even an illness" (Hugo Mãe 2020, pp. 15, 49, 57). Perhaps philosophy and education—very adult—have realized this beginning, with great difficulty and disturbance. But Matthew Lipman, Ann Sharp, and all the collaborators in this endeavor dared to start something different. Nowadays we can celebrate a childlike beginning that opened a space for many other beginnings in worlds inhabited by philosophically educating lives.

We start over, though, whenever we can: in every piece of writing, in every thought, in every encounter with children of all ages. For the reasons mentioned, as adulthood takes over our bodies, it is not so easy to start... to start seriously, to really start. In other words, it is no longer so simple for us to start without pretending, without simulating: to really start, to start by starting something new (even if only for ourselves) in the world. To have a beginning, it is not enough to go back to a routine or to repeat a movement. There must be anomalies, abnormalities, the unforeseen, the unthinking. A dizzying movement. This is all perhaps more symptomatic of that age when we are no longer children. The beginning is there, inviting us, waiting to happen, but it is as if we don't feel the need. Or we start without even realizing that we are starting.

Despite this, we—the adult authors of this text—try to shelter ourselves in what we understand as a childlike movement of beginnings. As if we were in a storm, almost without visibility, we become attentive and sensitive to a writing that does not take childhood as an object of study and analysis, a malady that urgently needs to be cured (or trained or educated, through philosophy or anything else), but which relates itself to childhood as we relate ourselves to the inspiration and power of beginnings, a force that we *pay attention to, take care of, remember*. A shel-

ter that is also a refuge. The undertaking is difficult precisely because it is typical for adult writing to fix and objectify subject matters, instead of installing itself in its own movement of welcoming escapes and retreats.

So here we are, writing before writing, drawing words while we try to start writing—thinking and thinking about ourselves childishly, in search of beginnings. We have already started and at the same time we haven't. Feeling out how and where it might be appropriate to start writing this text. Taking care of the words and being taken care of (and by) them. Going through and inside them.

Not because we haven't started yet, we stop writing and, armed with the force of repetition, we repeat: we are attentive and sensitive, two childlike forces. Childhood, we feel, accompanies us, takes care of us. We also know that stubborn and obsessive pursuits can rule out, or at least weaken, the possibility of some encounters. These are paths that focus on results, which exchange openness to the unpredictable for the security of what is already known and savored, which take refuge in ingenious constructions and comfortably lodge themselves in problems to which they already know the solutions (Bergson 2009b, p. 124).

So we relax and let childhood invade us through the writing itself, which inspires us, writes us and, by writing us, surprises us with a childlike beginning. Or with the childishness of any beginning that deserves the name. Maybe that is what it's up to us to do: to accept and face the storm, to discover that shelter can be a refuge, and that we can settle ourselves in the movement. We become attentive to what comes in it, what can come from it, and what comes to us from it. And also to what might want to run away from it, within us and outside of us.

While we wait to start writing, and without ceasing to write, we think that one way to start is by remembering past beginnings, prior to the beginning: a child's recollection of the words that were part of the title of the book to which our colleagues Dina Mendonça and Florian Franken Figueiredo so generously invited us to contribute. The title of the book reads: "Conceptions of Childhood and Moral Education in Philosophy for Children."

At the provocation of this name, childhood then smiles and whispers in our ear: "you're done." Playful, uptight, messy childhood. It smiles non-stop and runs away. Is that title too adult, safe, and finished? Curiously full of words that mean "childhood" but that don't themselves seem childish? Is it possible that philosophy for children is proving itself to be old? We remember the Mozambican Mia Couto: "Old age is not age: it is tiredness" (Couto 2009, p. 22). Or maybe this is a book that started before it started, a book with a title that becomes an invitation because in it each and every one of us is invited to "freely" meet with these expressions. We were called and our invitation echoed: "look for a shelter that will be a refuge and prepare yourselves for the movement." With care and sensitivity, we pay attention. We look at each other, look at the title once again more calmly, and try to understand the reasons for so much joy and childlike playfulness. We translate the words in the proposed title: "conceptions of childhood," "moral education," "philosophy for children."

Are these words adult ways of capturing childhood and childlike strengths? We look at each other and smile again. We don't know where this question came from, but we feel that childhood, in its provocative hit-and-run, has already given us its message and left a mark on us. Interest (*inter-esse*; among being). Feeling

the childhood among us excites us and gives us strength, even if the challenge seems exaggerated, too big for our smallness. We, the ones who continue to the storm. To the rain. But we do not fear. Do we? We repeat: childhood is within us, among us.

We let time go by for a while. If we're not afraid, we're not in a hurry either. We are already wet. Soaked. Little by little, the childhood that inhabits us decides to jump into puddles of water. Into each and every puddle that it finds. Puddles of water are as irresistible as questions. The questioning loosens up and jumps. Why "moral education"? Why moralize education, if this seems to make it regenerated and normalized, de-educational? If "educating" can be "leading to the outside," are there still exteriorities beyond morals, principles, customs? And why moralize childhood if this moralizing seems to de-infantilize it? If an infant is one whose strength is in non-speech, who is "education as training" *for*?

Why "conceptions of childhood"? What are we affirming when we place childhood as the object of a cognitive conceptual activity? What do we leave aside by not relating to it in other distinct ways, such as in the interiority of sensations and affections?

Why "philosophy for children"? We don't need to simplify the issue on which so much ink has been spilled (Costa Carvalho 2020), but wouldn't it be interesting to explore different ways of interlacing philosophy and childhood?

More generally, why so many nouns? Can they be denominalized? What would happen in a writing experience that transmuted childhood and philosophy into verbs? To infantize? To infantilize? To infant-be? Philosophize, philosophizing, or philosophically-being? Why, always why. Childhood always asks questions and, therefore, it is more a movement than a stopping. We could continue listing "whys." Could we? We could. However, the childlike beginning invites us toward other pranks. The words of a title are not just a juxtaposition of units of meaning; they move towards each other, they happen in-between. If they are also movement, then why understand them as static? What if we surprised them in this movement?

What if… ? Another one of childhood's favorite exercises, one more appeal to attention and sensitivity. All right, here we go. And if we start over? Let's start over. Childhood brings us a backpack. It is not just any backpack, but a backpack full of foreignness which, some children's voices say, has the magical, Babelic power of confusing lines, renaming words, changing their appearance. A backpack that makes words mumble, which makes them no longer able to be pronounced in the same way. A backpack that, let's say, turns childlike everything that goes into it because it removes common speech, subtracts the first language in which the words talked. For aren't foreignness and strangeness childhood-friendly?

We can't resist this provocative boldness any longer. We stop asking; we write words on pieces of paper and put them in our foreign backpack. We put in each of the words which were addressed to us, one after the other:

conceptions
of
childhood
and

moral
education
in
philosophy
for
children

There are ten slips of paper, each one with a word written on it. No words are repeated. There is no punctuation. No words have capital letters. They are all written in the same size, occupying the same space on the paper, as if they are the same: equal wording. Ruy Belo, an infant poet, wrote that in a poem, no word should raise its head in the middle of sentences (Belo, 2009, pp. 18-19). And Valter Hugo Mãe, another thinker of childhoods, wrote several books without capital letters, like al berto or bell hooks, who wrote their names and pseudonyms thus, seeking to abolish the hierarchies of written languages. Childlikely being.

As we put our words in the backpack of foreignness, a few things catch our attention: the first and last words—conceptions, children—are pluralized; the rest are singular or have no plural form. Some are prepositions, forms of nexus or connectivity; some are from the same semantic family; others have had constant historical encounters. We notice an absence: there are no verbs, no movement words. Is it possible to write childhood without them?

We close the foreign backpack with the words inside. We shake it again and again, as magicians do, conjurers of the world. We look at each other and smile. Someone winks. We wonder what could be happening inside that Babel world. Do we imagine? A process of infantilization, creative involution. We wait for a while, just as magicians always test the audience's patience. We continue without haste. We remain attentive and sensitive. The stormy rain does not stop, and we are now in a moving shelter that is also a refuge. Expectant. Curious and restless.

And now? Who will open the backpack? It seems to be an irreverent, bold, childlike gesture. Who will dare to unveil a mystery? Who will dare come face to face with a childlike prank? Neither of us, alone, seems to have the necessary courage. Perhaps, we think, we could share the irreverent act, put our hands in the backpack of foreign affairs at the same time, and wait for the moment when both hands grab the same paper, the same word. Will it be the same? In any case, leaving our own self-worlds gives us courage. We do it. We try, at least.

We open the backpack of foreignness together; we play for a while inside it until we both grasp one of the pieces of paper. As if there is a word there waiting for us. We grip it firmly before taking our hands off the backpack at the same time. One, two, three. Now! One of us closes her eyes in the process. She can't see through her emotion, or maybe because of the rain. We leave the paper on the table. It has turned itself inside out. The written side is hidden from us, of course. Childhood loves to hide itself too.

But it doesn't look like any of the pieces of paper we put in the foreign backpack. It is magical, keen, naughty. Like childhood. At each moment, it requires us to reinvent ourselves and makes us enter the childlike world of questions. We doubt how to proceed: should we take the pieces of paper out one by one and look at them one at a time? Or should we take them all out at once and look at them as

a whole to try to understand the changes we brought about? Or should we look at them in the pairs or trios the words appeared to form before we put them in the backpack? We also doubt whether what we do will affect what happens inside the backpack: that is, if its effects will be different depending on our movements or if it has already planned the whole game that it is playing with us. Perhaps we are exaggerating our power to affect childhood and it would be more interesting to just keep trying to be aware and sensitive to childhood. Feeling childhood in all its strength.

That's what this writing deals with. So, in a way unintentionally, as we write, it seems that a (childlike) wind blows, and the tiny piece of paper taken from the backpack shows itself. It is none of the ones we put in. And it is all of them at the same time. But it is still inside out.

We look back at the writing and read the last three sentences aloud. None of them seems to make sense. How can this piece of paper, which has come to our hands, be all the pieces of paper we had put in the backpack and none of them? And how can it stay inside out if the wind has turned it around?

But laughs and smiles invade the letters, and the paper unfolds:

children for philosophy
moral end
childhood of conceptions

The words are (almost) the same. It seems that some have disappeared, and some have changed greatly. Greatly? But even if almost all the words remain, their order is altered, inverted, opposed. It's a childlike tactic: perceiving the world and the things that inhabit it inside out or upside down. And then it is also a philosophical game: reversing the usual directions of thought (Bergson 2009b).

So let's pay attention to each of the expressions that alchemically appears from the backpack. Now the bias is childlike.

Children for philosophy

> Whilst P4C [Philosophy for Children] sets out to challenge many prejudicial ideas about children and their capacities as thinkers, the western philosophical tradition and methods are often implicit within the materials, methods, forms of training and practice of promoting critical thinking associated with P4C. The 'movement' of P4C embraces both the contradictions and the possibilities of the encounter between philosophy and childhood and these are wonderfully generative flashpoints. (Haynes and Murris 2019)

What comes first? It might seem like a detail. It is not. In some mathematics, the order of factors does not change the product. In philosophy, in education, and in childhood, difference—any difference—can be crucial.

"Philosophy for children," written in that order, marks what comes first. And it is that which comes at the beginning that is considered necessary to be taken to

some recipients: those who appear at the end of the expression. The movement proposed by this expression reflects Lipman and Sharp's infant idea: to break the canons installed in the academy and dare to propose that philosophy can also have a place in the educational path of children. That is why they both committed their lives to bringing philosophy to children, to reconstruct philosophy in a novel and simplified way so that it would become accessible (Sharp and Reed 1996).

However, let's not forget that our backpack has messed up the initial expression. The inversion has changed the starting place and, inevitably, the expression's sense. It is no longer Philosophy—an adult, uppercase word that comes with defined canons and procedures—that is taken to children. It's children who are coming close to philosophy, who surround it in their characteristic childhood eagerness and who, with noise and agitation, desire it, pull it, and challenge it. Like an unusual invention in the middle of the playground. Children first.

Once again, we look at each other, realizing what the childhood experience of writing demands of us now. A movement of bodies. It could only be like that. Neither writing nor childhood is done outside bodies, outside their positions and movements, because it is within them that childhood and writing find the places from which they speak. Therefore, we can no longer stand up. A standing adult takes up too much height. Seen from the ground, it looks as if they never end. An adult body is a tiredness in height. We have to squat as children do when they need to get even closer to the ground. Childhood arrives at the playground and invents something right in the middle of the courtyard. While Philosophy looks at things from above, childhood approaches, lowers itself, enters the same bubble.

Squatting is not an easy movement in an adult body. Problems similar to those we face when starting arise, because age seems to set us apart from certain places, especially from the earth. When a body grows, it gets farther from the ground, even if its feet are still there. We adults, enclosed in our privileges and hierarchies, think that the growth of the body is an evolutionary prize for the eyes, which have a much greater field of vision as a result. We are supposed to be more ready to flee, in case of imminent danger.

But this is only the perspective of the eye's privilege. In reality, the increase in vision also brings about a certain deafness. Deafness to the earth, to the ground, to the smallness of the surface of things. As the Angolan poet Ondjaki says so childishly: "all these were sounds that a child would hear, but it was no use explaining to the elders, sometimes I wonder if they will be deafer than children, or if it's a thing of their age, that of not feeling the smallest noises in the world" (Ondjaki 2020, p. 192).

Adulthood involves looking down from above, talking from above, and being inattentive to anything that comes from other wavelengths. It occurs to us that logocentrism (Derrida 1973, p. 5) may have benefited from this bodily development, convincing us that growing up is the expected abandonment of a confused and uneducated way of understanding. An understanding contaminated by the transgressive undifferentiation of children. Animism and primitivism (Haynes and Murris 2019) so present in childhood, are therefore considered things to avoid, to abandon, to leave behind (on earth) during the growth process. They are things that should remain on the ground, deviations and aberrations, small and shapeless things (curious how language crystallized these places of thought in words like

"low" that even today, in Portuguese, can mean unworthy, ignoble, abominable). In this reading of necessary growth or de-squashing, Philosophy is just one more tool among many invented to form, to take out from the ground, to transmute unconforming sludge into a shaped clay pot, elevating childhood to the only heights capable of understanding the concepts.

Our writing demands proximity to the ground. We become low. Small. Smaller. We squat down and make ourselves "smalls"—a word that, in Portuguese, can also designate children. We make ourselves experience becoming small, becoming childlike, putting our ears, eyes, and skin as close to the ground as possible. We get down very slowly, again holding hands because we cannot keep our balance on our own (childhood calls for a certain companionship). We laugh as we sway, turn under the weight of awkward bodies, and nearly fall. We stop. We resume the effort. We force the exercise of bodies so that we will continue writing and thinking from the place of imaginary children. Now we are ready. We return to our expression, starting over from this new place: children for philosophy.

At first glance, this phrase seems to tell us that it is no longer just a matter of philosophy being understood or practiced by children, but that children need to approach and aid philosophy. They would do good to philosophy, would be philosophy's benefactors. Children rescue philosophy from the middle of the courtyard and take it to the classroom. "Children for philosophy" can mean that children help philosophy itself, offer an opportunity. It isn't children who need philosophy—it's philosophy that needs childhood.

As we write this last statement, it seems to us that we are still not low enough. We may never be able to get low enough once we grow to a certain height. And then we ask if this cannot happen in many school practices, even the best intentioned. That is, can the idea that childhood needs to occupy a place in the life of philosophy remain hostage to the perspective that childhood is an incomplete entity in formation? Whether the philosophy is brought by adults or found by children, does the urgency to bring it into the classroom still speak of childhood as missing? And does thinking that children need to be brought to philosophy also require us to see the latter as a lack? Is it possible to leave this assumption behind and think, on the contrary, that no one is more sophisticated than anyone else, that philosophical encounters can arise between children and non-children as equals?

In the case of the "philosophy for children" project—and many who are still inspired by it today—the meeting of children and philosophy had educational purposes. Children would be the greatest beneficiaries of those who would know how to guide them from above (cf. Lipman 1988)—in this case, through Philosophy. The program they created chose a privileged venue for this meeting: the school institution. Children would become, through contact with philosophy in research communities, more reflective and reasonable adults and ultimately into democratic citizens. The setting for the meeting would be the school. For the meeting to take place, the school institution would have to embrace the subject of "philosophy" (and, wherever possible, Philosophy—with a capital letter to set the tone, the position, the power). Here there is a way to understand philosophy—as a set of critical, creative, and careful thinking skills (Lipman 2003, p. 200)—and a way to understand childhood—above all, as a stage in life. It is true that Lipman briefly rehearses another treatment of childhood as "a legitimate dimension of human be-

havior and experience" (Lipman 1988, pp. 191-198). However, this is only to justify the legitimacy of Philosophy of Childhood as an area of study, and then always within the disciplinary and chronological framework of a phase of human life. Likewise, in our understanding of the proposal, this is the childhood that needs certain changes to be brought about by philosophy, such as critical thinking and reasonableness.

We are standing, descending, becoming small. We ask: what has actually changed due to the inverted expression brought to this writing by our backpack of foreignness? Is this new expression interchangeable with the one we started from? Philosophy for children, children for philosophy. Could we change expressions, and yet have nothing changed in our view of children, childhood, or philosophy? Is exchanging one for the other the equivalent of squatting down? Or do we need something else, other gestures to connect philosophy and childhood? What would these gestures be? Will it also be necessary to take into account different understandings of one, the other, and their connections, so that the possibilities and meanings of the encounter are multiplied?

In a recent text on the relationship between philosophy and childhood, Viktor Johansson (2018) takes up the two expressions which occupy us now: "Philosophy for Children and Children for Philosophy: Possibilities and Problems." The author shows, on the one hand, that the idea of bringing philosophy to children is much more common in the so-called history of Western philosophy than is usually recognized. If philosophy is conceived of as a way of life that confronts and challenges a culture's criteria, following perspectives such as Pierre Hadot's (1995), when this form of philosophy is practiced by children, it retroactively impacts our understanding of philosophy itself. Consequently, a philosophy of children could arise, a childlike philosophy.

Listening to this childlike philosophy requires us to believe that children have something to tell us, that they are capable of thinking philosophically (Johansson, 2018, pp. 1158-60). So "children for philosophy" makes us think of philosophical children, philosopher children, and childlike philosophies. As those who think of a "philosophy for children" think of the good things that philosophy would bring to children, the expression "children for philosophy" evokes the good things that children would bring to philosophy. Children would no longer be like formless slime that awaits modeling, or like anything minor that needs to come of age. They would be the protagonists of a new philosophy and—who knows?—of childlike philosophies.

On the other hand, as we have argued elsewhere (Kohan 2016, 2021), childhood is not just about children. Or, to put it differently, there are children of many ages, if we think that childhood is not just—or above all—to do with a temporality measured by *chronos*, the temporality of stages of life, but with intensive and circular temporalities that can be tried at different ages. So, "children for philosophy" could give way to a philosophy of children of all ages: a popular childlike philosophy. For that to take place, we would need to think that people of all ages have things to say and to philosophize. And that age is something that differentiates, but which does not render unequal.

Moral end (end-ucation; end-ing)

When I was young, it seemed that life was so wonderful
A miracle, oh it was beautiful, magical
And all the birds in the trees, well they'd be singing so happily
Oh joyfully, playfully watching me
But then they send me away to teach me how to be sensible
Logical, oh responsible, practical
And they showed me a world where I could be so dependable
Oh clinical, oh intellectual, cynical
Supertramp, *The Logical Song*

Positions tend to get blurry when we wander between expressions, when thought conveys more contact than vision (Bergson 2009b), more experience than phoneme. Writing provokes us now to continue scrawling with our fingers in the earth. Squatting down, we dirty our nails and fingers, we add a trickle of water to the earth and set little stones apart from worms. Perhaps the writing asks us for other childishness. What is stated between the words when we take them as if they were clods of earth in the hands of a child? Clod-words unmake and remake themselves. Clod-words cease to be such because, with water, the earth also sticks to your hands. Mud-words which become hands and hands that do whatever there is before there are words. Hands that allow themselves to move backward even before words, before language, before any categorical differentiation. Childhood runs through our messed-up bodies again and laughs aloud as it pours its trickle over the clods of words. "Moral education" becomes "moral end." Moral end-ucation? End. Ending.

This metamorphosis of the land in the hands of childhood comes to us when we read Haynes and Murris (2019). We are not wrapped up in our bodies: things leak, spill into the in-between spaces. The movement is of returning to childhood, of bending our knees until there is as little space as possible between us and the earth. Then we bury our hands, until writing forgets the common adult ways of addressing children. Abandon what is crystallized. Stones don't know how to be hands. Haynes and Murris tell us to abandon the petrifying *isms*: universalisms, binarisms, developmentalisms, progressivisms, essentialisms, unilinearisms. Henri Bergson did not ask for them to be executed, but he said that if the *isms* died of natural causes, he would not devote a single tear of regret to them (Bergson 2002). Mogobe Ramose too alerts us to the need of turning the universal into the pluriversal (Ramose 2011).

We pay attention once more to what appears written following our backpack's mischief: moral end. The word "end" is curious: it's an ending that doesn't seem to want to end because, in itself, it can have more than one meaning. It can be an end as an ending, a conclusion. But it can also be an end as a place that is far away, the place that is farthest from the center. And it can also be the tiniest, smallest part, which remains like a leftover, a trace, the small part of something that remains after it has been used or consumed. Or it can be understood as an intention, a goal, a purpose. There are many meanings of the word, and here we are

listening to what childhood may be suggesting that we think, having exchanged "moral education" for "moral ending."

Will childhood want to keep something of each meaning? After all, childhood does not like to give up anything, any pleasure, any meaning (Cixous and Derrida 2019, pp. 151-152). It is full desire. In a way, "moral" is far, far away from our writing. It looks as if childhood is the moral transgressor *par excellence* because it is born ignoring and disrespecting the solemnity of norms. In this sense, childhood is seen as a remoteness: between us and it, there are all the uninformed distances of what is right and what is wrong.

But we can also perceive a moral purpose even beyond morality, in an extra-moral sense, as the mustached Friedrich Nietzsche—who is more and more vividly recalled in this section—wanted. In this line of thought, morality appears as a remainder, a vestige, the last part of a solidified way of thinking and experiencing the education that resists leaving its place. A place of rigid or flexible ends, of sound intentions and well-intentioned purposes. A small remnant of something that is coming to an end, that will end, even with all the efforts to prolong its agony (including certain philosophies), something like a ruin (Barros 2010). However, the most childishly clear sense of ending that appears to us is that of finishing, concluding. Yes, because childhood loves to start, but it likes to finish no less (so that it can start again?).

Even if we are still children of all those *isms* and are used to putting the child at the beginning, there are those who have put it at the end. We remember, for example, "The Three Metamorphoses" in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. A book for everyone and for anyone. Can we introduce it childlikely? The spirit transforms itself in three ways: first it is a camel, then it is a lion, and finally—in the end—it becomes a child. Interesting: the child is at the end and not the beginning. And what is in the beginning? The camel, the one that carries the weight, the morals, the "you must." In the middle there is the lion, the "I want" who says "no!", thus freeing itself from the heavy load and preparing the way so that, in the end, the spirit becomes a child. "The child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a wheel rolling out of itself, a first movement, a sacred yes-saying" (Nietzsche 1996, p. 30).

The child is forgetfulness so that, in the end, she might become a new beginning. We have to finish what we have so we can start again. It is necessary to get rid of the weight that sinks us in order to be able to create. The baby's first kick. The first kick of the ball that starts the match. And, like a spinning wheel, the end and the beginning meet; there is no line, evolution, progress, or development. The child's movement is circular. And just like the rolling wheel she pushes with her wire hook, the end is a new beginning, a pure affirmation, a yes-saying. What comes to an end is the "moral," a heavy load, the burden that humanity has placed on itself. A kind of "bad conscience," a deep illness, a prison of instincts, the suffering of the human being towards itself. The atonement mentioned by Valter Hugo in our epigraph: childhood ailments come from ignorance and immorality. But in Nietzsche, the child appears, at the end of the spirit's transformations, as a new beginning, as the power that allows a childlike re-start to the camel's "you must" and the lion's "I want." Although they are portentous, neither the camel nor the li-

on have, by themselves, the strength of a child to create a new world. What strength will that be?

The child Nietzsche. Philosophy has been full of children of many ages since its beginning. Ignoring this has given rise to several misconceptions, such as when we take philosophy to education as an exercise in offering children what is adult in morals, what is scientific in thought, reconstructing what we do with what is done. Shouldn't there be a different path? A childlike cartography as a path (Almeida and Costa 2021)? A practice of recreating what is childlike in life? And who would be better than philosophers and restless philosophers to tell us about this childishness?

In another passage, this time from *The Genealogy of Morals*, the infant Nietzsche refers to the great child of Heraclitus, the one who rules in *aion* (Kennedy and Kohan 2020) and plays with his unexpected and exciting moves:

> Since then, man has come to be one of the happiest deeds of Heraclitus' "big child," whose name is Zeus or Azar, and awakens in his favor interest, anxious expectation, hopes and almost certainties, as if he were announcing something, as if he prepared something, as if man were not an end, but just an *étape*, an incident, a transition, a promise... (Nietzsche 1992, XVI)

Ending with the moral is to end this game that no longer amuses us and that is why we criticize it. What makes a game childlike? What de-infantilizes it? We usually transform childlike games into sports, change them into exercises in technical performance, subjugate them to the rigidity of rules for competitive purposes (cf. Cabral 1991). That's what happens to the ball in so many games. Professionalized. The game is set apart from the fun, from pleasure, from invention. It is no longer an amateur's game. The practice is regulated, creative differences are erased, and the possibility of successive reinventions dries up. Its time is transformed, from *aion* to *chronos*. The game for the game's sake ends, the game with no purpose. Undoing this adultization of *ludum* leads us to listen to childhood, to listen to its affirmative and creative strength. Because it is not enough to say "no" or "I want," and because we are not a goal but a path, an episode, a transition, a bridge... a hope, a place of waiting for what cannot be expected (Heraclitus, DK 22 B 18; cf. Marcovich 1967). A hope, as Paulo Freire wanted (Freire 2014). That is why childhood ends with "moral" and starts a new (childlike) philosophy.

Inventive childhood. Once again, the Portuguese language makes us wonder how (adult) morality invades discourses: "inventing" is a polysemic verb. Originate, create, discover, imagine. But perhaps the strength of these senses has revealed some risks. Childhood, left to itself, is bold and uncertain. "Inventing" also means lying, falsifying, inventing ideas or stories to deceive others. It was necessary to contain inventiveness as much as it was necessary to subjectify childhood, especially in playing (Almeida 2018). And yet the etymology of "inventing" signals a sense of hospitality which is perhaps the most childlike of all (Kohan 2015).

To escape from this discursive, educational, moralizing continence is perhaps an outrage: to leave *prosthesis* and *orthesis* and receive creation as it arrives. But our childhood backpack played with us, offering us "moral end-ucation." From

this expression, it suggests an end to moral education. The end of a prescriptive way of designing human beings. Earlier we heard Nietzsche saying that the human being was not an end, but "an incident, a transition, a promise... ." We become aware again of the challenges that playful childhood poses to our writing. Play seriously as if there were nothing more than the urgency of the game. The human being as a path, life as a bridge, childhood as a great promise.

The "philosophy for children" as conceived by Lipman, Sharp, and their colleagues seems to have understood this promise as a strict commitment to a certain model of being human. Rationality tempered by judgment (Lipman 2003, p. 111). In other words, reasonableness constitutes one of the bases for understanding the community of inquiry that the authors propose (Costa Carvalho and Mendonça, 2016). At the heart of this project, education is understood as a way to promote reasonableness in children and, therefore, their democratizing socialization. Authors such as Darren Chetty (2018) have shown that this argument can be politically very slippery and even dangerous. The concept of reasonableness in childlike philosophy can hide an epistemologically biased way of thinking. It can assert an epistemological "naivety" based on the "white ignorance" or "whiteness" that thinks of itself as transparent or neutral—colorless and without history or, perhaps, owner of all colors and all stories—and thus reproduce the historical oppression of other colors, the slavery still present. Hiding the contextual, historical, and situated dimension of notions such as reasonableness leads to the assumption of perspectives based on notions of good sense or common sense that are assumed to be impartial and free from context. On the contrary, challenging these concepts, examining them, allows us to escape from a gated community of inquiry and denounce the epistemic injustice that other authors have shown to be present in more educational practices than would be desirable (Haynes and Murris 2011; Fricker 2017).

Again, childhood plays in order to get us thinking seriously. Is it just the concept of reasonableness that has these problems? Couldn't the same be said of the concepts of philosophy, childhood, and so many others that we come across in our philosophical practices with children? Even the concept of concept itself? Is it possible to sit in a circle, listen to the children, and nonetheless reproduce conceptions of reason, philosophy, and even childhood that are built on (consciously and unconsciously) moralizing and oppressive perspectives: not only in terms of race and ethnicity, but also of gender, age, class, and other characteristics? How many of these moralizing and oppressive forces still inhabit even this text of ours that intends to listen to childhood? Is it difficult or even impossible for adults in certain cultures to affirm a world without hegemonies, a world that accepts equality and difference, that puts itself far away from practices based on naturalized characteristics as if they were naive, neutral, or innocent?

Moral end.

It is curious how philosophy for children has shown itself, right from its beginning, to be a privileged place to operationalize the purposes of what is understood by moral education (Sharp and Reed 1996; Pritchard 1996a, 1996b). Something in

this project—as in almost all education—became appealing to approaches concerned with the morality of behavior, with education for values, with prescriptive ethics. The historical exclusion of children was thus reproduced and widened within a movement that, at the beginning, seemed to intend an inversion. Today, ethical concerns continue to form part of the questions that concern philosophers and educators when they consider childhood. But wouldn't it be more interesting to experience the question from the perspective of *ethos* rather than *ethics*? (Haynes and Murris, 2021, p. 11).

Perhaps little has played as our backpack has done in this writing, turning expressions inside out, or like childhood, as it is childhood that likes to do handstands. When we swing our legs to the sky to see the world upside down, what's interesting isn't just seeing the same things in opposite places (as when the backpack changed "philosophy for children" to "children for philosophy"). Perhaps the most stimulating exercise in doing the handstand is everything that falls out of our pockets! What is shown while the movement of the body takes place, everything heard that was mute before, all the lurking invisible presuppositions.

"Ah... no!" exclaim the authors of this writing. They look at each other. Will we be able to do more of this playfulness? Do a handstand?! The laughs of childhood no longer go unnoticed; they are increasingly loud in our writing.

Childhood of conceptions

> It's a matter of returning to childhood, with deconstruction. Not merely through radical doubt, through ultra-problematic questions. It's a matter of undoing the problems. […] It is more childlike than every philosopher who claimed to start over *ab ovo*, from the beginning, no? (Cixous and Derrida 2019)

We are upside down. With this third expression, the childlike backpack performed an inversion just like the first. We went from "childlike conceptions" to "childhood of conceptions." We have read that concepts and problems are at the heart of certain historical, philosophical traditions. That there are no ahistorical or neutral positions in thought. For example, Deleuze and Guattari state that to do philosophy is to trace problems and create concepts (Deleuze and Guattari 1991). But in the tradition of deconstruction it is necessary to de-create before creating. The risk of doing a handstand. It's a matter of undoing the problems, as Hélène Cixous and Jacques Derrida say in the epigraph. Nothing more childlike, they add. We suspect that they were also found by a backpack of foreignness. Seeing inside out, undoing to make others, or to do something else. Before starting, you have to finish. We smile.

We feel as if we are accompanied. Cixous and Derrida propose childhood as a practice of un-functioning the problems, of abandoning the problem itself as a shell and protection, and going back to the formless, to that which does not even allow itself to be captured in the form of inquiry. Exposing yourself without defenses in a shelter that is a refuge. And Nietzsche soon returns to our writing, tell-

ing us of the unprotected unreasonableness of a life that becomes mute in the face of concepts and abstractions. The life of someone who, "When a storm hits him, he curls up in his coat and walks away with a slow step in the downpour" (Nietzsche, No date, p. 102). Again, we feel complicity.

In a more situated and localized way, and on educational ground, Johansson has widely written about the disruption of childhood, using the idea of dissonant voices that interrupt established practices (2013). This dissonance is not to be confused with the asymmetrical power structure that shapes educational relationships between adults and children. The author warns against the risk that we have already addressed of placing the different as inferior, of imposing worlds right at the beginning of our relations with childhood. There is a great adult temptation to take everything they know as the only possibilities in the world (Johansson 2013, p. 202).

Dissonance is in danger of being isolated and reduced to an inferior way of diverging from a supposed pattern (ours). And maybe—we say—it doesn't even make sense to talk about dissonance (in the singular), because there will always be countless ways to dissonate. You tune up in one way, but you go out of tune in infinite ways. And maybe school—life?—is a permanent process of searching for tuned voices with different (un)tunings. And perhaps what may be most interesting is what happens in the acoustic space where different voices meet and produce sounds together—whether they are sounds considered in tune, which assure us of practices in which we feel comfortable, or out of tune, which brings us the discomfort of new, unpredictable, and unheard possibilities.

It is true that philosophy for children has allowed us to broaden the perimeter of what is understood by philosophy and childhood, as well as to traverse the crossing paths between the two. Even so, what we find is little more than the same: the criteria for considering what is philosophical were questioned, destroying certain adult-centric canons, so that children could be included among those who can philosophize. Has this just been a move toward integrating dissonance? To make it sound tuned and presentable?

The word "dissonant" itself seems to be a trap: it is something that clashes, which is out of tune. When we use it, aren't we putting ourselves in a certain perspective, that of tuning, from which we assess what escapes this acoustic? And when we accept that the instrument can also play out of tune, don't we still continue to instrumentalize? Is there a perspective from which certain voices are not noise, but merely sound? Perhaps beyond looking for dissonance, we could look for hesitation, stammering, babbling, experimentation, *groove*? The childhood of writing prepares itself to create a stage under our feet and make us musicians. Who sits at the piano? Who plays the bass? Who smiles when new instruments, other ways of feeling and making music, come in? We accept the new challenge, more enthusiastic than ever. Facilitators make way for improvisers; dissonance makes way for difference; teaching makes way for jazz-ing (Santi 2017; Zorzi and Santi 2020).

Jasinski and Lewis (2016) show that the classic inspiration of philosophy for children kills what could actually be unique in dialogues with and among children: experiencing the power of speech beyond normalizer and disciplinarian ends. The authors add that when philosophy follows the chronological line of learning insti-

tutionalized skills and dispositions, it can completely lose its philosophical dimension (ibid., p. 3). Therefore, they propose a transition from the notion of a "community of philosophical inquiry" (as a paradigm or pedagogical model, with clear and precise rules and purposes) to a "community of infancy" (in which the ends are loose and speech does not know its own *status*, does not obey reasonableness or any pre-defined rule). Inspired by a reading of childhood beyond simple chronology, they propose that, in the community of infancy, you don't even know if you will get anywhere. Of course, standardized measures and norms are refused. Of course, you make ugly faces at things like quantitative criteria for measuring the effectiveness of certain practices in promoting reasoning. You grimace as if you're eating green broccoli soup. The community of infancy preserves the last vestige of freedom within the school: the space and time to babble (ibid., 2016, p. 4).

We go back to listening to childhood. What does the transition from the "conception of childhood" to the "childhood of conceptions" tell us? We do handstands and are made by the music. We seem to be at another end, needing to finish playing a certain game or playing at a certain pitch. We are breaking with a position that places childhood as one of philosophy's favorite concepts, an objectified topic of analysis. Philosophy deals with discussing the meaning of this or that notion. This game, as we have seen, can easily become adultlike and politically dangerous. It's time to play another game—to insist on playfulness for playfulness' sake. It's the moment to listen to childhood, to affirm childhood, and not to objectify it. It's time to fly through the butterflies instead of sticking them with scientists' pins. It's time for a childhood of conceptions and a childlike exercise of (de)conceptualization. Not the games of childhood, but the childhood of another game. Let's not name it—let's *feel* childhood. Let's respect this childlike babble, even with its hiccups.

Daring to a childlike writing

The other usual partner was
the child who writes me.
Manoel de Barros, *Memórias Inventadas*

We have started writing, but it took us a while to start... and when it looked as if we were starting, we already needed to finish. That's what childhood is like: it is in another time, a circular time where the beginning and the end coincide, a time which does not go by, that lasts in an unmeasurable present that is not consecutive. In this time, there is no future waiting to become the past. It is a time when that time is forgotten and another time opens: a time to play, to create, to philosophize, to love, to play, to be an artist, to enjoy.

We have tried to stay close to childhood throughout this writing. Attentive and listening, but also mobilized and physically engaged. The exercise had something

of memory, a childlike memory of the words in the title of the book to which we were invited to contribute: “Conceptions of Childhood and Moral Education in Philosophy for Children.”

And we were almost going in the opposite direction. Or upside down? We have played with a childlike inspiration of pure affirmation, a wheel that turns by itself. Enthusiastic about the invitation, we found a childlike backpack. We have put it on our backs and decided to leave. We have been intercepted by challenges and laughs. The bridge of childhood led us to find a new way of grouping the words that marked the beats of writing: “children for philosophy” and “childhood of conceptions” to the “end of moral.”

Two inversions of children and childhood, making them change places with philosophy and concepts. At the end, an ending appears. Something that childhood no longer wants. The end is also a beginning: that of an extra-moral world. Extra-rational. Extra-linguistic.

But there are other ways to think about what a new title might look like. For example: “End the Moral to Start the Childhood of Children’s Conceptions in Philosophy.” Here the end of morality appears as the condition for beginning the infancy of concepts and children in philosophy. Or perhaps something without so many prepositions, more enigmatic: “End of Morality! Children for Philosophy! Childhood of Conceptions!”

The wheel could keep spinning. Nonstop. Titles and more titles. Time to play and to philosophize. The feeling of ending up playing and philosophizing is beautiful. Proposing ways to start, because those, after all, are the titles. Finish starting. Childhood doesn’t stop smiling: “you're done.” If the reader is reading these words, it is because this playful, uptight, messy childhood was welcomed. And we go back to smiling.

In a conversation with Cixous and psychoanalysts, Derrida looks for what is childlike in deconstruction. He points out three bridges. The first bridge comes precisely from a state of playing with language, from a creative writing between the passivity of invention and the bodily commitment of discovery. A relationship with language itself which is difficult to put into words. Derrida hesitates in silences that the transcriber puts down to reticence: he asks questions, suddenly advances, and retreats to say what happens to us in a profoundly childlike writing—a bodily desire that renounces no pleasure and no meaning and thus expresses a polymorphous perversion. With the author, we take up the movements of our hands in this writing which was also embodiment. We get into the backpack, go down to the ground, splash in the mud, make a handstand, play music. Creative writing would be the expression of an unlimited desire to be able to experience the enjoyment of writing anything. Creative writers, Derrida says, are in a state of infancy (Cixous and Derrida 2019, p. 152). Dreamers too, Cixous replies.

Derrida proposes two further bridges between deconstruction and childhood. The first asserts deconstruction itself as a device for going back until you undo problems. Reversing the direction of travel. Exchanging the play button for the rewind button and returning to the constitution of the problematic field as such would be a path leading to childhood. Childhood would thus be the destiny of deconstruction. Childhood at the end? Or a childlike ending? In our case, what do the problematic fields of “philosophy for children,” “moral education,” or even the

"philosophy of childhood" hide? In what ways can we live with knowledge, perspectives, readings, and concepts from different traditions and become aware of what these knowledges, perspectives, and traditions hide from us? Which polymorphs are made transparent through the gesture of formulating problems in a certain way? What is hidden in this epistemic construction? Which adult constructions force themselves upon us, even in the emancipatory discourses of childhood? What is imposed on us when we do not ask the question? What is censored in the question itself?

There is a third sense in which deconstruction is childlike: in its powerful critique of logocentrism. Because it lives in the polymorph and retreats to formlessness, deconstruction is childish when it affirms non-speech (*in-fans*), the suspension of any and all discourse, a pre- or non-linguistic world: a child without a peep. Deconstruction is a child without origin. Having the possibility of speaking, it still does not belong to speech. A "before" experience. Amid the agitation and the labor of categorizing rationalizations and verbalizations—interruption. As "in a blind language in which all things can have all names," a poet writes (Couto 2011).

Cixous smiles as Derrida speaks. Why does academic writing tend to hide the smiles of those who speak? And why do hesitations become reticence? She smiles and comments on the ambiguities and potencies that the possibility of inventing and creating contains. It is childlike, prior to language; therefore, two contrary things can exist in it at the same time. We can believe and not believe that something is possible or impossible, necessary, or innocuous. Deconstruction is that wild, rich, and dangerous world in which we do not need to renounce contradiction and the impossible. Deconstruction illuminates, Cixous says (Cixous and Derrida 2019, p. 155), illuminates the eternal child that we are. Deconstruction illuminates! Not only that. In the poet's tale too, the child's gaze is what gives light to the river (Couto 2013). Light? Help, childhood...

This has been the childlike wor(l)d—impossible and contradictory—that we are inhabiting in this writing. In this world, just like now, the beginning and the end coincide. In this world, which Heraclitus would call *aion*, it is childhood that rules. A childlike government. So it's time for us to be quiet. To be without so much light and so many words. To sleep and to dream. It's time to finish—or to start. Child readers (don't) have the floor. We have (not) already... (*hiccup*!)[1]

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