THE SHAPING OF CONCEPTS AND PHILOSOPHICAL THINKING IN THE CONSCIENCE OF A CHILD

Keywords: the development of a child, philosophy, thinking, behavior, surprise, meaning, metaphysics, logic

Abstract

The study aims at proving that philosophy plays a significant role in the process of development of a child. Thanks to it a child acquires a fuller comprehension of itself and the surrounding world. It also gains the need to express its own concepts, share doubts of existential nature.

A child articulates its amazement from the earliest stage of its development, which is a classical example of philosophical thinking. However, traditional terms seem to be the biggest obstacle in practicing philosophy with children. Therefore, it is avoided since it ought to be performed with the use of terminology which is alien to a child.

Discovering philosophy should become an adventure for a child, enabling it to recognize mental processes in a human being. It also allows the explanation of numerous phenomena associated with human attitudes, behaviors, rules of reasoning and acting, organization of the world and social life. In no way should anyone be forced to precise philosophy. A man must crave for it and miss it on his own. Childhood is the most appropriate period of time enabling to perceive philosophy as the love of wisdom.

Terminology connotations

The term “philosophy” derives from Greek – φιλοσοφία, which consists of two words: φίλα – love, σοφία – wisdom, meaning the love of wisdom, the love of truth. The definition indicates that it is the field of general search over deeper reason, structure or sense of reality of an existence as well as the ultimate conditions of valuable comprehension or the supreme rule of a human behaviour, historically changeable regarding content and methods (Stępień, 2007, p. 20–21). Concepts of philosophy oscillated between interpreting it as a cognitive activity stimulated by personal life and interpretation of it as professional doctrine of a priori or a posteriori character, objective on objective reality, or meta-objective on recognition of this reality. Hence, while determining the nature of philosophy, one indicates the positions taken by its range of varieties in relation to other types of knowledge, to multitude and unity of philosophy, and its functions in culture (Ajdukiewicz, 2003, p. 38).

In this context one ought to consider the term “notion” – Greek λόγος, ἴδεα. In its essence, it is the meaning of a general name, which has both descriptive and
explanatory function as well as assessing and normative one. On the one hand, thanks to “notion” a man learns about the world in its variety, and also non-existing objects and the ones not interpreted empirically. On the other hand, however, it is the source of a rational norm, whose breaking might be perceived as irrational or morally wrong (Piltat, 2007, p. 27).

In ancient times intuition and abstraction were pointed at as two basic methods of forming notions. Therefore, one ought to distinguish the genesis of a notion in psychological sense as creation of particular thoughts, images, representations in a users mind and learning notions from the genesis of a notion in logical sense. In the constant discussion over the genesis of a notion the main standpoints can be reduced to both various forms of empirism, according to which all notions are acquired due to experience, as well as to nativism, which indicates that apart from acquired notions there are also inborn ones. Regardless from that there is also an extreme version based on the assumption that all notions are inborn (Ajdukiwicz, 1985, p. 180).

At this place it is worth answering the question, what is thinking? It is a sort of cognitive activity and at the same time mental processing of information included in observations, images, notions, symbols, judgements, memories, beliefs and intentions. At the same time it is the substitute of acting in which an individual performs a mental stimulation of events and processes existing in the real world (Tischner, 2011, p. 40).

Thinking is of symbolic character as an operation on signs or substitute structures. It is also of fundamental - intentional character, i.e. there are probably unintentional forms of thinking, and also language character since mostly thinking is performed in language, which can be understood that it is based on images, impressions, cognitive representation of events and situations (Pietrasinski, 1969, p. 71). Thinking plays a significant part in creating notions, generating judgements, differentiating features and relations, generalising, abstraction, learning, creation and designing. It helps to overcome temporal limitations and enables reaching beyond the present (Grodzinski, 1986, p. 52).

Understanding terms “notion” and “thinking” in such a way became an impulse for Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz, at the end of his life, to undertake activities leading to creation of a text book which could be an ABC of philosophy for children, Sadly, he did not manage to make his plans real (Pelc, 1976, p. 88).

Thus, one may ask a question of theoretical cognitive character, “Philosophy for children?” – isn’t it a dream of some sort, the creation of educational activities? (Raters, 2010, p. 61). W. Tatarkiewicz knew well that educational reality is exceptionally flexible. Despite cultural habit of treating philosophy as exclusively in terms of academic discipline, he claimed that it ought to be commonly available at the same time preserving its authenticity and integrity (Dambska 1981, p. 6). Functions in a particular society in which philosophy takes marginal position. The society is rich in knowledge but lacks wisdom. These circumstances lead to the situation that philosophy reaches just elites, and additionally it reaches them too late (Weischedel, 2002, p. 49).

Astonishment as the foundation of philosophical thinking

Lasting in his existence a man has got accustomed to problems emerging from a daily experience and accept them as entirely usual. He does not wonder why the thing are the way they are. He understands that some elements of his life are mysterious, embarrassing, and has been like that since the beginning (Krapiec, 2000, p. 17).

This results in the fact that so called adulthood has the feature of not wondering. It thinks that it is limited when it comes to time or reaches the conclusion that there is no point in getting involved in reflection concerning something one is not capable of changing. Therefore, at a particular moment a man ceases to inquire and search the sense of the world through experience. At times he also gives in to passive acceptation which becomes the pattern of behaviour for children (Czezowski, 2009, p. 15).

This is how “the prohibition” to be astonished is passed from generation to generation. No wonder then that children at school behave like their parents. If children could somehow preserve their own inclination for astonishment over why things are the way they are, there is a chance that at least they will not raise their offspring according to the patterns lacking the reflection of accepting the reality (Folkierska, 2015, p. 147).

In a child’s life astonishing and mysterious events are common. Let us look at an example. A girl woken up from a sleep notices that her mother is irritated and does not know what she has done wrongly to deserve it. She is embarrassed and confused. On her way to
school she observes a lot of unclear and incomprehensible things: a flag on the town hall lowered to the half of the pole, rubbish bins scattered in the street, children leaving school and not entering it, the corner of a street covered with water. She also notices a shopkeeper unlocking the door, etc. Maybe if she were accompanied with an adult, who would devote some time to answer her questions concerning her observations, she would acquire a deeper understanding of the world surrounding her (Freese, 2008, p. 145).

A man experiences astonishment which he cannot explain, e.g. a caterpillar transforming into a butterfly, or movement of a virus observed by a microscope. Inexplicability causes that he perceives something as exceptional and extraordinary, and starts to wonder about it (Bogusławski, 2013, p. 225). Therefore, he perceives the wonders of the world through mysteries rather than through issues which can be solved easily. His knowledge on cultural heritage is of little significance when he stands in front of a mirror looking at his own face. It is then that he touches a mystery and asks a question: where did it all come from? Why is it this way and not another? To what degree is he responsible for it? And if he is not who is then? Such questions frequently appear in heads of not only adults but also children who are interested in themselves and the world surrounding them (Pawlak, 1997, p. 132).

Children look at their finger nails and wonder where they came from. They are curious about how something like a nail can grow out of the body. After some time the whole body begins to captivate and astonish them. (Freese, 2008, p. 94). It is the same about a snail, mud or black spots on the moon. With the passing time the mind of a child loses its openness and starts treating various things as obvious ones. The state of permanent admiration and astonishment transforms into the state of the absolute lack of curiosity and astonishment (Postek, 1999, p. II).

**Astonishment and sense**

To make comprehensible something that is mysterious for one’s mind a man must discover circumstances and conditions which will enable him to make explanations. He must learn the context, point of reference which the intriguing object belongs to. It becomes comprehensible when it makes a logical part of a larger entity. (Krąpiec, 1995, p. 236).

It is worth using an example here. John had planned to go to the cinema with his friends, however he came late. He saw just one scene of a film which astonished him. When the film ended John started asking questions, “What does it all mean? What is the sense of it all?” When his friend told him about everything that had happened before he arrived the last scene ceased to be incomprehensible. Its sense became clear since John saw it as a part of some entity (Freese, 2008, p. 121).

On the other hand, one may assume that John was not late for the film. He watched it all. He did not understand it so he asked his friends, “What was this film about? What was its meaning?”. Unfortunately, they were not capable of answering his questions. He could not himself discover any entity in which he was able to place that film. The only thing he can do in this situation is to make an attempt to comprehend the film on the basis of what was shown in it, although he does not know the broader context which would enable him to infiltrate its meaning (Freese, 2008, p. 121–122).

Due to the fact that children do not possess the fully complete point of reference in which they could place their life experience, each of their experiences becomes mysterious and intriguing. No wonder then that the whole world is amazing for them (Lipman, Sharp, Oscanyan, 2008, p. 47).

Children try to deal with what is mysterious and incomprehensible in various ways. They do it by:

- **Scientific approach.** Towards a problem usually fulfills a child’s need for comprehension, yet if suggested explanation is only partial it does not fulfill it entirely. Example being here a question of the type, “Why do we see a rainbow on the surface of a puddle?” “Because there is some oil on the surface,” the answer is. It is probable that a child will not ask any further questions, but the observed phenomenon will remain mysterious. Its mystery is included in the following questions, like, “What does oil have to do with the rainbow?”, “Why is the one the cause of the other?”. The previously pre-
sented answer is not then an appropriate solution for a child, but just delaying it (Burlikowski, 2002, p. 241).

It is worth emphasising that such a behaviour, i.e. the lack of providing an ultimate answer, is nothing inappropriate. It does not destroy in any way a child’s fascination with the world. It may, however, annihilate a child’s curiosity if, when wanting to help it understand the issue, we say more than a child wishes to know at that particular moment (Postek, 1999, p. II).

One may find opinions that children take no interest in scientific explanations, i.e. causal explanations, since they just want to learn merely aims and not reasons. We may, however, witness a conversation, in which a statement, “What a beautiful sky” will be an inspiration for a two - year old to ask a question, “Yes, and who has pained it?” A child frequently sees how pretty objects come into existence and thus it draws a conclusion, by analogy, that the sky has also come to existence as a result of certain activities. Beautiful objects are created by people who are acquainted with artistry. The sky is beautiful, therefore somebody has had to paint it. This is what the child’s reasoning looks like (Pawlak, 1997, p. 132).

It is a mistake to assume that a child asking for clarification wants it to refer to aims rather than reasons. We can presume that the same child will ask, “Why does a pumpkin have indentations?”. We may think that a person answering this question would like to tease a child and will respond, “To make you know how to cut it”. A child may treat this answer literally, in a verbal way. (Raters, 2010, p.61). It makes us think that children are able to reason, but possess but little information and experience. By accepting such an answer they do not mean the clarification referring to the causes of indentations in a pumpkin. It signalises, though, that a child is not capable of differentiating between the explanation by reason and the explanation by aims. Yet, it still may be looking for a cause or scientific answer for its question (Lipman, Sharp, Oscanyan, 2008, p. 36).

Children want to know. When something is happening they will ask, “Why?” However, we ought not to conclude that they ask questions of this type to find a scientific or not explanation of what they are wondering about. They cannot clearly indicate the difference between these two ways of explanation. They would rather look for a clarification in order to fulfill the curiosity of their minds (Freese, 2008, p. 49).

In another situation a child will frequently start laughing when after asking, “What do you have a nose for?”, there comes an answer, “To wear glasses.” One should bear in mind, however, that such an answer remains without a response. (Reuter, 2014, p. 190). It behaves similarly while asking a following question, “Why is the moon following us when we are going along the road?”. The answer it acquires, “Because it likes us,” is nothing but the expression of helplessness on the side of an adult, or an example of neglecting a child. At the same time it is an example of a statement which in no way has fulfilled a child’s curiosity (Freese, 2008, p. 50).

Symbolic interpretation

The observation leads us to conclusion that providing a child with information on fact or explanation referring to reasons or aims fulfills its curiosity of the world but only partially. Sometimes children expect a symbolic clarification. To acquire it they turn to imagination and play, to fairy tales and child folklore, which de fact remain endless sources of artistic creativity as a subculture of a kind. The subsequent generations experience this culture, discovering its taste, yet while entering adolescence and then adulthood they tend to forget it entirely. On the one hand, there is child folklore, on the other child literature written usually for children, but not by children, which is ruled by fairy tales. It is adults who are authors of fairy tales. Each of them is potentially their creator. You can often hear a request of a child, “Please, tell me a story”. Can you resist it? (Weischedel, 2002, p. 115).

Someone who tells stories ought to recognise the task he is responsible for. It is assumed that a story is to enchant and please a listener, delight him from the first words, “Once upon a time...”. A person creating stories for children unleashes his imagination, at the same time taking a risk of filling a child’s imagination with creations of his own. He finds pleasure in creating since it enables him to express himself through tales. However, one may inquire: Does it not deprive a child of the pleasure to create images and shape its own imagination on its own (Raters, 2010, p. 83).

It is extremely important to “deprofessionalise” imagination to encourage children for independent thinking and creating. Thoughts and creations meant for children ought not to derive only from the world of adults, since they frequently try to constitute their own creations by annexing children’s (Zatorska, 2013, p. 342).
Philosophical research

Children search for the meaning which is neither literal, like scientific explanation, nor symbolic, like legends and fairy tales. It can, however, be justly described as philosophical comprehension (Postek, 1999, P. III). A lot of questions asked by them requires philosophical response. Obviously, it is not simple. Most often, philosophical questions formed by children refer one of the three areas: metaphysics, logics or ethics (Bogusławski, 2013, p. 225).

Metaphysical questions

These are the broadest questions, far-fetching and most difficult to grab. Metaphysics is philosophy in its widest meaning. It deals with issues of the highest degree of generalisation (Krąpiec 2000, p. 19). One may doubt whether a child is able to raise a question of such gravity. Surprisingly, it frequently is, as it appears (Burlikowski, 2002, p. 240).

One may ask a child, “What’s the time?”. It is a simple question and may seem that the answer will be as simple. Yet, it turns out that it is necessary to answer a child’s question, “And what is time?”. In this manner the question appears to be extremely complicated. How can you answer such a question? Should a child itself get acquainted with the reasoning of St Augustine or the results of Albert Einstein’s research? Or maybe it is an adult who ought to get acquainted with the works of St Augustine or Einstein, and then pass them to a child? Both possibilities do not bring us closer to the solution of the problem. Most of all we need to make a child aware of the fact that it does not matter what the time is in general, or what the rules of time are. What is important, however, is to acquire the knowledge what time we currently can see on the clock, i.e. what time it is now. It may seem that for a while we have managed to meet a child’s expectations, yet actually we do need to realise that there appeared the depth of philosophical thought in a child’s question (Folkierska, 2015, p. 152–153)

Another example will be useful at this place. A child hears a question, “What is the distance between your home and the grocer’s where you do the shopping?”. It is a question of a concrete character and therefore we may expect an equally concrete response, for instance, “Half a mile”. It is surprising then when a child asks, “What is the distance?”, meaning not a particular, certain distance but the distance in general. It is then a philosophical question of metaphysical character (Lipman, Sharp, Oscanyan, 2008, p. 49).

Such a way of deepening a typical dialogue by entering the level of higher generality is characteristic for metaphysics. The examples of metaphysical questions actually or potentially asked by children are as follows:
– what is a number, matter, space, object?
– what is reality?
– what is a possibility?
– what is mind?
– has everything got its beginning?
– why am I still myself?
– what is life, death?
– what is sense, values, relations?

It is not easy to answer these questions since they include so broad notions that it is hard to classify, not to mention operate, them (Freese, 2008, p. 72).

The definition of a particular notion usually refers to some broader context, which it belongs to. When a child asks for instance for the definition of the notion “a man”, one may respond that a man is a kind of an animal that thinks or an animal that can laugh and cry. It is also reasonable to select another, one out of a number of possible answers, following e.g. the doctrine of St Augustine, for whom a man is a creature possessing an immortal soul, and as such being the dualism of soul and body (Raters, 2010, p. 122).

However, when a child asks, “What is space?”, it makes an adult perform an intense effort in thinking, making an attempt to create or imagine a broader context for this notion. A similar situation takes place in case of the notion of time or number, making these questions confusing. The fact that children ask questions that are difficult to answer does not make them philosophers. Surely, they are unaware of the fact that they ask metaphysical questions (Zatorska 2013, p. 347).

It is vital that children with their need for entity and versatility, accompanied with some subtle naivety or straightforwardness as well as the lack of information, know the way of reaching for holistic answers. They do not ask what the beginning of some, but how everything started. They do not want to know what warmth or cold is, but what temperature is. Neither do they ask what better or worse means, but what it means that something is perfect (Bogusławski, 2013, p. 225).
Logical questions

Logical questions concern reasoning. Children refer to logical matters whenever they ask, “What comes out of it?”, “What’s from it?”, “What can be made out, basing on what we already know?” (Weischedel 2002, p. 215). The example of logical action being a notice, “Closed on Saturdays”, which allows to think that it is open from Monday to Friday (Freese, 2008, p. 112).

The relation between logics and thinking is like the one between grammar and language. Grammar is a set of rules one should apply to speak correctly, whereas logics involves standards which one needs to take into account to think correctly (Tischner, 2011, p. 316). One of the standards refers to coherence – consequence, compatibility and lack of contradiction. If a child states that he has done homework, and in a while says that he has not, it is obvious we can consider his statement as contradictory in itself. Thus, logics focuses to a great extent on the significance of coherence in our thinking, speaking and acting (Bogusławski, 2013, p. 227).

Ethical questions

A child aims at learning the truth concerning what is goodness, virtue and justice. It does not always ask an adult about this. Nor does it inquire its peers. Actually, most often it asks itself. It wants to know what is of significance in life, at the same time learning the gradation of importance of objects and values (Zatorska, 2013, p. 349).

Wanting to learn the norms of behaviour children often observe adults to act accordingly. If they let them know that they value honesty and private property, they will teach them honesty and respecting others’ property, as well as the correlation between their own words and norms of behaviour (Reuter, 2014, p. 199).

If children are to learn to achieve moral integrity they have to understand compatibility between a word and an action. Adults who are treated by children as role models have to put the demand of coherence into practice, and in consequence be consistent in their actions (Postek, 199, p. III).

The nature of coherence is most accurately explained by logics. It makes it possible to understand what the conformity of thought with other thoughts is, as well as conformity of thoughts and actions, and of actions with other ones (Tischner, 2011, p. 328).

Pedagogical assumptions in philosophical education of children

It is obvious that the process of teaching means transferring possessed knowledge to new generations. So called alternative theory of education emphasises that the process of teaching must contribute to shaping and developing mental activities. It assumes that teaching of philosophy leads to shaping children’s philosophical thinking regardless of their age. This approach is based on conviction that philosophical thinking combines understanding notions, system of notions and logical argumentation on the one hand, and efficient use of philosophical terms, on the other (Burlikowski, 2002, p. 243).

Supporters of this theory think that such an approach may encourage philosophical thinking, at the same time shaping intellectual development of a child. They claim that all children possess interest and abilities enabling them to participate actively in philosophizing (Freese, 2008, p. 53).

According to them there are the ways to make children interested in philosophical issues. Early childhood is fascinated with the paradox of what is seeming and real, stable and changeable, the paradox of unity and multitude. The world of philosophy enchants them, even though they are not capable of comprehending, e.g. the doctrine of Heraclitus of Ephesus or St Bernard of Clairvaux (Folkierska 2015, p. 153). Children take interest in Philosophical issues and ideas only when they are the element of stories read by them (Lipman, Sharp, Oscanyan, 2008, p. 31).

We may distinguish two premises a child’s reasoning is based on. The first concerns the existence of differences between a usual thinking about an object, and thinking deeply about this object. Another regards the difference between thinking and independent thinking, however difficult it is to seize (Raters, 2010, p. 96).

Independent thinking, like thinking in general, is assessed according to determined logical criteria. If thinking in its broad meaning comprises drawing conclusions from premises, than independent thinking comprises drawing conclusions from premises that are present in a man’s thinking about the world. By emphasising independent thinking one ought to care for a child’s interests and his own point of view. Such a behaviour enables it to recognise, and then analyse his own convictions and to discover justifications of them. (Bogusławski, 2013, p. 227).
education of children the emphasis is put not only on individual thinking but thinking in general. Its objective is to involve it in achieving and developing abilities connected with reasoning (Weischedel, 2002, p. 198).

Philosophy can surely be the element of education process of a child who openly express their various ways of life and experience. Additionally, philosophy enables to explain the differences of opinion on crucial issues. Children who have trouble with putting their thoughts in order and presenting arguments are treated with the same respect as the ones who verbalise their thoughts efficiently and rapidly. Children drawing conclusions in intuitive and speculative manner are treated like the ones who do it in analytical way. Hence, various ways of thinking, various past of children, may significantly contribute to creation of the community of philosophical quest. Common inquiring encourages independent thinking. The more acceptance of different way to perceive a problem, the less competition there is. And the input of the others in mental search is truly welcomed (Zatorska, 2013, p. 351).

The biggest obstacle in practising philosophical thinking of children is the traditional philosophical terminology. Philosophical terms appearing in works by philosophers are exceptionally complicated to discourage a child who has accidentally started to take interest in a particular one. Professional terms are avoided since philosophizing with children should be performed with the use of terms and notions common in colloquial language - by means of words which children are familiar with, and which do not destroy a child’s sense of security (Folkierska, 2015, p. 160).

Ending conclusions

Thus, since children are able to emerge content and perceive differences between a wicked witch and good dwarfs on the basis of the tales they have read, they are also capable of expressing their thoughts on good and evil while shaping opinions on this issue. When matters of “adult philosophy” are presented intentionally and consciously in a form that is comprehensible for children, and then they are skilfully presented for their reflection, they start functioning in their own thinking, frequently in an awkward way, which does not mean nonsensically (Freese 2008, p. 117).

Children are inspired by issues presented by heroes of tales have opportunity of contact with key questions of human thought leading in consequence to personal reflection. It is a teachers role to support this process by conducting philosophical dialogue with a child. It is not merely an exchange of information, but a process enabling to present a child’s “world of thoughts”. Such recognition of philosophy can be an adventure for a child providing it with opportunity to recognize mind processes undergoing in a human being. It also allows to explain numerous phenomena associated with human attitudes, behaviour, rules of thinking and acting, organisation of world and social life (Lipman, Sharp, Oscanyan, 2008, p. 52).

The independent world of child’s questions and answers rooted in the ground of philosophy, is not only rich, but also surprisingly wise and original reality. Therefore, no one can be forced for it. A man must desire it himself and miss it. Childhood period is the most appropriate one, since it allows to perceive philosophy as the love of wisdom, as was said by ancient inhabitants of Attica or Pelopones (Gołaszewska, 1981, p. 59).

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