cover: picasso, *las meninas* (1957)

childhood & philosophy

núcleo de estudos de filosofias e infâncias [nefi/uerj]
international council of philosophical inquiry with children [icpic]

e-issn: 1984-5987 | p-issn: 2525-5061

article

a plea for a child-orientated ethics of childhood

author

sarah-jane conrad

bern university of teacher education,
bern, switzerland
e-mail: sarah-jane.conrad@phbern.ch
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1277-9528

doi: 10.12957/childphilo.2025.88327

abstract

What do we owe children from an ethical point of view? What should an ethics of childhood look like? The answers depend on how the child-adult distinction is conceptualised and the normative conclusions drawn from it. This paper critically examines two influential interpretations: the Liberal Standard View (LSV), which uses autonomy and rationality as ethical benchmarks, and the Social Constructivist View (SCV), which sees the child-adult distinction as socially constructed, highlighting inequalities and marginalisation. Both frameworks, however, face significant challenges in justifying their normative claims. To address these limitations, this paper proposes a novel, discourse-ethics–inspired approach grounded in Grice's theory of meaning. This framework not only respects children's autonomy and rationality but provides a non-arbitrary basis for ethical claims from children. By integrating children's perspectives through philosophical dialogue, theapproach challenges traditional power dynamics and recognises children as authoritative voices in ethical debates. The power of the framework is illustrated with an analysis of children's views on privacy, revealing how their unique perspectives enrich ethical discussions.

keywords: ethics of childhood; liberal standard view; social constructivist view; philosophy with children; privacy.

un alegato para una ética de la infancia orientada a partir de niñas y niños

resumen

¿Qué debemos enseñar a los niños desde un punto de vista ético? ¿Cómo debería ser una ética de la infancia? Las respuestas dependen de cómo se conceptualice la distinción niño-adulto y de las conclusiones normativas que se extraigan de ella. Este artículo examina críticamente dos interpretaciones influyentes: la visión liberal estándar (LSV), que utiliza la autonomía y la racionalidad como puntos de referencia éticos, y la visión constructivista social (SCV), que considera la distinción niño-adulto como construida socialmente, poniendo de relieve las desigualdades y la marginación. Sin embargo, ambos marcos se enfrentan a importantes dificultades a la hora de justificar sus pretensiones normativas. Para abordar estas limitaciones, este documento propone un enfoque novedoso, inspirado en la ética del discurso y basado en la teoría del significado de Grice. Este marco no sólo respeta la autonomía y la racionalidad de los niños, sino que también proporcionar una base no arbitraria para sus reivindicaciones éticas. Al integrar las perspectivas de los niños a través del diálogo filosófico, este enfoque desafía la dinámica de poder tradicional y reconoce a los niños como voces autorizadas en los debates éticos. El poder del marco se ilustra con un análisis de las opiniones de los niños sobre la privacidad, que revela cómo sus perspectivas únicas enriquecen los debates éticos.

palabras clave: ética de la infancia; visión liberal estándar; visión social constructivista; filosofía con niños; privacidad.

apelo por uma ética da infância orientada a partir das crianças

resumo

O que nós devemos às crianças de um ponto de vista ético? Como deveria ser uma ética da infância? As respostas dependem de como se conceitualiza a distinção criança-adulto e das conclusões normativas extraídas dela. Esse artigo analisa criticamente duas interpretações influentes: a visão liberal padrão (LSV), que utiliza a autonomia e a racionalidade como pontos de referência éticos, e a visão social construtivista (SCV), que considera a distinção criança-adulto como construída socialmente, destacando as desigualdades e a marginalização. No entanto, ambas enfrentam desafios significativos para justificar suas pretensões normativas. Para tratar dessas limitações, esse trabalho propõe uma abordagem inovadora, inspirada na ética do discurso e baseada na teoria do significado de Grice. Esse referencial não apenas respeita a autonomia e a racionalidade das crianças, como também proporciona uma base não arbitrária para as suas reivindicações éticas. Ao integrar as perspectivas das crianças por meio do diálogo filosófico, essa abordagem desafia a dinâmica de poder tradicional e reconhece as crianças como vozes influentes nos debates éticos. O poder do referencial é ilustrado com uma análise das opiniões das crianças sobre privacidade, que revela como suas perspectivas únicas enriquecem os debates éticos.

palavras-chave: ética da infância; visão liberal padrão; visão social construtivista; filosofia com crianças; privacidade.

children and adults as an ethical important distinction

The following statement reflects a widely shared intuition: Children and adults are different, and this difference matters from an ethical point of view. Yet, this claim can be given two readings. First, it can be said to express that children and adults differ from a descriptive point of view, and based on these descriptive differences, children and adults need to be addressed differently within an ethical theory. This view is defended by proponents of the so-called *Liberal Standard View* (LSV). They claim that children and adults differ in their capacities, especially in relation to their capacity to act rationally and autonomously. With these differences being normatively significant, children and adults have a different standing within an ethical theory. Second, it can be said that 'children' become children and 'adults' become adults because of the way they are addressed. From this perspective, descriptive distinctions arise from the ways in which people interact with individuals. As the categories of children and adults emerge from these interactions and the normative implications that go along with them, the former can no longer account for the latter. This is the leading argument of the *Social Constructionism View* (SCV), an influential approach within the (New) Childhood Studies. It refutes the naturalism invoked by LSV and relates normativity to people's interactions, being therefore first and foremost conventional, though these conventions can be subjected to ethical scrutiny.

These seemingly incompatible readings of the child-adult distinction obviously frame an ethics of childhood in fundamentally different ways, raising the question of whether someone is treated as a child because she is a child, or whether she is a child because she is made into one. What normative implications arise from these two perspectives? An ethics of childhood must provide an answer to these questions, as they determine what societies owe children from an ethical point of view.

The two approaches and their respective normative implications will be presented in more detail, allowing for an understanding of the core claims made by both positions. A closer examination of their respective normativity will show that LSV and SCV both run into principled problems regarding their normative claims. The question of what an ethics of childhood should look like must

therefore be reconsidered. This paper attempts to provide an answer by adhering to Grice's (1957) theory of meaning. Grice's theory not only provides a rationale for considering children as rational and autonomous, but also serves as the basis for establishing an ethics of childhood that allows for the full integration of children's perspectives. Philosophy with Children is then shown to be a suitable approach for realising an ethics of childhood. The role of children's views in ethical debates will be illustrated through their perspectives on issues of children's privacy.

children and adults – a descriptively grounded distinction

LSV maintains that there is a universal and anthropologically significant difference between children and adults, as children "fail to employ procedures that constitute good reasoning" (Schapiro, 2003, p. 581) and possess only an "impaired capacity for practical reasoning, lack of an established practical identity…" (Hannan, 2018, p. 18). Furthermore, children are said to lack relevant capacities for practical rationality that enable them to understand and articulate their interests and needs (Schickhardt, 2016, p. 19; see also Schickhardt, 2019). For this reason, they fail to develop their own conception of a good life, as rationality is considered essential for choosing a life that a person can truly call her own (Nussbaum, 2011).

The number of examples illustrating the differences between children and adults could easily be extended. They all have in common that children are said to differ in their capacities to think and act rationally and autonomously. These differences are believed to have explanatory power in relation to the normative conclusions drawn by LSV: "…it is reasonable to claim not only that children are less autonomous but that there are good reasons to let them make only limited choices for themselves" (Schweiger & Graf, 2015, p. 30) and to address them paternalistically. Paternalism not only seems legitimate but, in fact, necessary given the special nature of children (Giesinger, 2017a). Tamar Schapiro expresses this point concisely when she states: "Some differences ought to count, such as the difference between adults and children" (Schapiro, 1999, p. 738). She also points out that the distinction between children and adults conflicts with the foundational principle that all humans have the same moral standing. Yet, in her

view, this inequality is justified due to the factual differences between children and adults. Consequently, they require different ethical considerations, which explains the need for an ethics of childhood as a distinct field within ethics.

Though other criteria, such as age, have been suggested to explain the distinction between children and adults (e.g., Franklin-Hall, 2013), capacities remain central to this distinction (see Honneth, 2015); with rationality and autonomy considered key, hence the designation "liberal" in LSV. Since children are said to lack rationality and autonomy in the relevant sense, childhood is viewed as a predicament (Schapiro, 1999), a perspective that, as Baggatini (2016) noted, remains predominant in the field of ethics of childhood. This aligns with the idea that children are "becomings" and exist in a transitional phase. This view was already articulated in Aristotle's writings and has shaped Western thought in the philosophy of childhood ever since.

Childhood may possess its own intrinsic value, with children exercising several capacities that are genuinely valuable (Brennan, 2014; Gheaus, 2015), as Rousseau (1762) famously claimed. Yet, given children's limited rational capacities, childhood is necessarily instrumental, as it serves to prepare them for adult life (Tomlin, 2018; see also Drerup & Schweiger, 2024). Only then can a person enjoy the full rights of a moral subject, entitled to recognition and respect as an autonomous being—an idea enshrined in many ethical theories.

LSV aligns with an essentialist, naturalistic, and deficit-based developmental view of children. This perspective necessitates various pedagogical and educational interventions to foster children's development toward greater rationality and autonomy, which are believed to be characteristics of adulthood (Betzler, 2014; Giesinger, 2020; Hannan, 2018). Since children lack the relevant rational capacities, an ethics of childhood must necessarily be formulated by adults. In other words, only adults are considered capable of the rationality required for ethical reflection; therefore, adults alone evaluate children's needs from an ethical standpoint.

children and adults – a normative loaded distinction

SCV offers an alternative interpretation of the adult-child distinction and its normative implications, resulting in a fundamentally different ethical framework.

The distinction between children and adults is understood as capturing how individuals position themselves and are positioned within interactions. This process is referred to as "generationing" (Alanen, 1994, 2001; Mayall, 2002). Individuals assume different roles within a generational order, thereby shaping a social system that emerges from patterns of interaction and constructs the categories of "children" and "adults." This implies a relational understanding of these two concepts, which shape how people make sense of the world. These social structures fundamentally emerge from interaction. To understand them, it is essential to uncover the attributions and expectations ascribed to individuals within the generational order, as these define their respective roles. These structures afford and restrict specific experiences for children and adults, such as the right to vote, the choice to drink alcohol, or the obligation to attend school (e.g., Mayall, 2002). SCV thus reveals "the seemingly natural as contingently constructed" (Alanen, 2015, p. 150), while acknowledging its powerful influence on everyday thought and action. The conventional and contingent nature of these norms becomes apparent, as expectations toward children and adults vary across different contexts and historical periods (see e.g., Alanen, 2011; Winkler, 2019). Norms thus represent possibilities rather than necessities.

Although children and adults occupy different positions within the generational order, both actively contribute to the process of positioning: "Children must be recognised as actively involved in shaping their own social lives, the lives of those around them, and the societies in which they live" (James & Prout, 1997, p. 4; see also Jenks, 1984; Qvortrup, 1994). Children are regarded as social actors who exercise agency in various social encounters, and they should be recognised not as social "becomings," but as social beings with distinctive voices and views of their own (Arneil, 2002; Qvortrup, 2009; Mayall, 2000). This is arguably the most significant insight offered by SCV (Lundy, 2007; Spyrou, 2011).[1] Their status as subjects entails "the recognition of every child as a meaning-maker" (Verhellen, 2015, p. 21), highlighting the importance of listening to their views. They offer a unique and meaningful perspective on the world, challenging adult conceptions of children as deficient beings.

[1] Descriptive differences, basic for LSV, do not have to be denied. What is denied is their pervasive explanatory power for treating children and adults completely differently.

Such an approach to children can extend across all areas, including research (Lundy & McEvoy, 2012; Christensen & Prout, 2002; Kellett, 2010). Many scholars defending SCV therefore advocate for the inclusion of children in research, not as mere objects of study, but as genuine subjects and active research participants. Cheney (2019) expresses this point concisely when she writes: "And we can include children as meaningful participants in the co-production of new forms of 'decolonised' knowledge and hence further enlarge the field's epistemic diversity" (p. 92). This argument, of course, applies equally to ethics. Incorporating children's perspectives on ethical questions challenges the view that "moral reflection… begins from the perspective of adults" (Wall, 2010, p. 39).

These remarks underscore the critical stance SCV adopts, defining its ethical endeavour. SCV encourages us to uncover the structural dimensions of the generational order and examine the roles individuals assume within it. While this is primarily an empirical matter, the process ultimately reveals how certain interests are privileged at the expense of others, affording people differing degrees of opportunities and freedoms. These inequalities are commonly linked to unequal power relations, raising questions of justice (e.g., Alanen, 2015; Young, 2001). They are pervasive in society and deeply affect children, as power generally resides with adults while being withheld from children. Generationing thus provides a lens for broader critiques of social systems, particularly in how they construct child-adult relations (Wall, 2019b, p. 3).

an ethically questionable difference

The overview presented in the two previous sections only partially reflects the broad discussions found in both camps. These shortcomings may invite criticism, suggesting that the presentation is tendentious and even risks creating a false dichotomy. To some extent, this criticism is justified. Yet these simplifications allow us to see how different interpretations of the child-adult distinction lead to different ethics of childhood, making the core argument more explicit: LSV denies children sufficient rationality and autonomy on factual grounds and consequently denies them the status of full moral subjects, whereas SCV considers children as agents who contribute to the social fabric. However, their marginalisation due to

their disempowered status raises questions of justice.[2] These two frameworks imply seemingly incompatible understandings of children and childhood on both a descriptive and normative level (see also Divers, 2014).

Despite their differences, some scholars argue that LSV and SCV both contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of children and childhood. As Schweiger and Graf (2015) note, "the lack of autonomy of children is surely based not only in human biology but also in the social arrangements constructed around childhood" (p. 30). From this perspective, both approaches are seen as offering complementary explanations of the child-adult distinction. Giesinger (2017b), for instance, acknowledges that SCV has deepened our understanding of children as social beings. However, he contends that merely treating someone as rational and autonomous does not necessarily make them so, suggesting that autonomy and rationality are not purely social constructs and resist a fully constructivist interpretation. The version of SCV outlined above would clearly call this assertion into question. The question of whether LSV or SCV is correct therefore remains controversial. However, it can be shown that both theories encounter serious problems regarding their assumptions, which makes an adjustment of the two theories necessary.

a distinction and its descriptive support

LSV claims that predicates such as "being autonomous" or "rational" combine several descriptive features, allowing individuals to be identified as either children or adults. These differences, in turn, explain why children and adults are addressed differently from an ethical point of view. To defend this thesis, LSV is not committed to denying children autonomy altogether. Recent accounts of autonomy propose less stringent conceptions than those previously advocated by scholars such as Schapiro (1999). These accounts open the possibility of viewing children as autonomous, at least to some degree (see e.g. Jaworska, 2007; Mullin, 2007, 2019), by suggesting that autonomy involves, firstly, the ability to reflect on one's own desires and impulses and to use this reflection to guide and motivate one's actions. Secondly, it relates to the ability to care about and value certain things in life, to identify with the things a person calls their own, and being

[2] For a discussion of the various strands, see e.g. Kennedy & Bahler, 2017 or Wall, 2019b.

able to act according to one's desires and values (see also Giesinger, 2020, p. 240). From an early age, children are said to fulfil these minimal conditions of capacity and authenticity. Still, their autonomy is not accorded the same normative status as that of adults, and its impact on ethical reflection remains restrained. Many claim that well-being, rather than children's autonomy, should therefore be the "right currency" (Schweiger & Graf, 2015, p. 15) to address ethical questions around children. But can such a difference in the normative status of autonomy be justified?

The above-mentioned capacity and authenticity conditions related to children's autonomy seem to provide a rather substantial account of autonomy. It is difficult to imagine what further extensions would be required to grant it the full normative weight attributed to adult autonomy. Some authors seem to suggest that the various dimensions do not manifest simultaneously in a child, or that they appear only in specific contexts—such as choosing food, clothing, or friends—but not in decisions regarding medical treatment or the termination of schooling (e.g., Giesinger, 2019, 2020; Mullin, 2013, 2019, 2022; Jaworska et al., 2020). The latter reading would suggest a substantive rather than a procedural account of children's autonomy because the content is relevant for the analysis of autonomy (see Dworkin, 1988). Autonomy, then, no longer describes the ability to make self-determined decisions but is defined via normatively significant areas. Defining these areas carries the risk of arbitrariness and raises the question of whether children are being deliberately excluded. If this substantive reading of children's autonomy is considered viable, a threshold for distinguishing between normatively significant forms of autonomy and those that are not must also be established. The prospect of resolving these questions is fading, as even advocates of the LSV concede that "it is far from clear what characteristics and abilities a person must have in order to be considered an adult" (Giesinger, 2019, p. 43).

The generally binary[3] interpretation of the distinction between children and adults, along with its normative implications, comes under scrutiny due to another widely discussed issue. It seems obvious to assume that individuals

[3] Adolescents have received increased attention in recent years, as they appear to differ from children (see, e.g., Betzler, 2022; Carey, 2017; Hannan, 2020). While respecting the "special nature" of adolescents clearly requires a more nuanced discussion, it does not mark a principled shift in the debate. For this reason, these details will not be considered in the context of this paper.

develop the capacity for autonomy at different points in their lives, and some may never acquire it to a sufficient extent (LaFollette, 1998; see also Giesinger, 2017a). Hence, some individuals may be regarded as children despite possessing all the relevant capacities for autonomy, while others may be granted the normative status of an adult despite lacking the relevant capacities for autonomy. This ultimately means that children and adults differ normatively, although they are sufficiently similar on a descriptive level. Consequently, descriptive features that are considered relevant for explaining the normative dimension of autonomy appear to be neither sufficient nor necessary. They are not sufficient because an individual can be autonomous on a descriptive level without this having any normative weight. They are not necessary because the descriptive abilities relevant to autonomy can be lacking without the individual losing their normative autonomy. The entire approach LSV suggests therefore collapses and loses its explanatory power in justifying different ethical claims regarding children and adults. SCV will readily step in at this point and accuse LSV of making unwarranted normative assumptions that merely reflect social practices and cultural heritage, possibly serving to reinforce adult power interests.

norms beyond conventions

When criticising the current distribution of opportunities as an abuse of power and advocating for greater equality, SCV adopts a normative standpoint that clearly exceeds the conventionalism it regards as foundational to social structures. If SCV characterises the non-recognition of children's experiences as unjust, it introduces normative concepts such as social justice, equality, and others. These alone provide the moral standards by which to evaluate existing structures as morally objectionable. A conventionalised framework is too weak to sustain this criticism. Hence, SCV must clarify the basis on which it makes its moral judgements and justify the moral principles it applies, thereby offering a rationale for its criticism (Archard & Uniacke, 2021). This amounts to realising the normative turn Alanen (2011) has called for:

> Thus, making explicit the normative foundations of childhood research requires that we also address a number of normative issues concerning the practices and arrangements "out there", and specify in what particular respects and for what particular reasons they are problematic. (p. 150)

a normative void space and what communication means

In a nutshell, LSV overburdens the normative theoretical framework due to its descriptively shaky foundations, while SCV's descriptive basis proves unsupportive in light of the normative claims it advances.[4] Consequently, both LSV and SCV operate in a normative void and lack a foundation upon which to establish an ethics of childhood, leaving the discussion at a theoretical impasse. The following sections address this impasse by developing an argument that demonstrates, first, why children must be regarded as rational and autonomous beings, and second, why this forms the basis for an ethics of childhood that can integrate children's perspectives.

the case for children's rationality

Recent discussions on children and childhood do not deny autonomy to children, as mentioned above though they evaluate its normative status with restraint. Mullin (2013, 2019, 2022), for example, defends a gradualist conception of autonomy and argues that as a child's autonomy develops, greater dialogue is required to assess whether paternalistic actions remain justified (see also Godwin, 2020). This challenges a binary view of the child-adult distinction, which would be worth considering. This point will be set aside in this paper, which instead focuses on Mullin's emphasis on communication with children. She thereby offers *prudential reasons* for considering children's perspectives and dialogue is *instrumental* in respecting children's autonomy and well-being. However, her line of thought can be further developed, as the nature of communication offers substantial reasons for recognising children as rational and autonomous beings, given the inherently rational nature of communication.

According to Grice's (1957) highly influential analysis of meaning, communication is inherently rational due to the role of intentions. When an individual means something, she provides the hearer with reasons to react, as communication is not based on coercion or natural forces. Following Grice, to mean something is to intend that the hearer reacts in a particular way based on

[4] The allegation against SCV applies only to those approaches that begin with an empirical investigation and subsequently adopt a critical stance. Philosophers such as Marion Young (1990, 2001) or Honneth (1992, 1997), who are frequently cited in support of SCV's critique, operate within a normative framework that provides an explanation for the criticism, either in terms of justice or recognition. The analysis provided here departs from both accounts.

recognising the speaker's intention. Thus, a speaker not only intends a specific reaction but also intends that the hearer recognises this as her intention. Third, she intends his reaction to be based on his recognition of her intentions. The combination of these three interrelated intentions ensures that the hearer's reaction is guided by the speaker's intentions. This characterises Grice's explanation of meaning as a *rational mechanism* (see, e.g., Kemmerling, 2015). For this mechanism to function, individuals must recognise each other as rational beings. Thus, if communication occurs between children and adults, and if communication is regarded as a rational mechanism due to the role of intentions, then one is conceptually committed to recognising all participants as rational – children and adults alike. This conclusion can only be avoided by either rejecting the rational and intentional model of communication or excluding children from it. Both assumptions seem highly counterintuitive. Describing communication as a rational and purpose-driven activity through which individuals influence each other without coercion offers a highly convincing explanation of communicative phenomena and to this day, Grice's account is widely discussed (see e.g. Cuffari et al., 2025; Petrus, 2010). Even if one disagrees with Grice, his insight that communication involves a rational mechanism remains intact. If children are excluded from this type of communication, this would necessitate a fundamentally different account of communication for children and the question raises of how communication with children should be understood and how they learn communicative skills from adults despite these presumed differences.

the case for children's autonomy

The rational dimension of meaning, as proposed by Grice, is notably robust. His analysis implies that a speaker acknowledges the hearer's rationality and presumes that the hearer will, in turn, conceive of her as rational. From this, it is a small step to claiming that mutually ascribed rationality constitutes autonomy, thus offering a relational account of autonomy. So, individuals who mean something choose and justify their actions while considering the objectives of others. [5] The speaker not only regards the hearer as receptive to her reason-giving

[5] This intimate connection between communication by the means of language and autonomy can be found in Fichte's theory of interpersonality that evolves Kant's ideas. According to Fichte,

actions but also acknowledges that he might find her intentions insufficient to justify the intended response. This would obviously threaten her endeavour, prompting her to take all necessary precautions to prevent him from reaching this conclusion, thereby implying that the speaker regards the hearer as autonomous. Conversely, if the hearer reacts as intended, he implicitly regards the speaker as someone who provides good reasons, thereby acknowledging her as an autonomous being who acts upon considered, motivated, authentic, and controlled reasons. If this were not the case, his reaction would be nonsensical. Successfully meaning something thus implies that individuals recognise each other's rationality and autonomy.[6] Of course, Grice's analysis relates autonomy to successful meaning something. Consequently, only those children who can engage in this type of interaction are considered rational and autonomous. For the time being, this appears to be an acceptable consequence, particularly as it provides the necessary threshold for distinguishing the relevant degree of rationality required to consider someone as autonomous: it must be manifest in meaning something.

Given the rational mechanism of meaning, Grice's analysis allows for an explanation of why other reasons must be at work when a person is denied rationality or autonomy while meaning something in Grice's sense. The reasons are presumably more related to power and wilful marginalisation of a person than to her incapacities, as scholars along the lines of the SCV have convincingly argued. Grice provides an explanation as to why these marginalisations are not simply unjust, but are in fact self-contradictory. In the same instance, the subtle ways in which meaning unfolds provides a tangible view into those mechanisms of marginalzation of a child that take place in and by communication (see also e.g. Kennedy, 2010; Kohan, 2014).

---

language is a necessary condition for acknowledging others as rational and free beings and therefore as selfs (see Imhof, 2019). For a discussion of relational autonomy, see Baumann, 2008.

[6] Grice's account of meaning and the concept of autonomy it implies resonates with Honneth's theory of recognition as the concept of recognition plays a core role in both theories (see e.g. Anderson et al., 2005). And yet, there are some fundamental differences between the two accounts. Grice's framework anchors autonomy in meaning, thereby providing a transcendental argument why a child's rationality and autonomy should be recognised when she means something. Honneth's critical analysis distances from this type of argument. The advantages of Grice's account lie in its explanatory power, since children should be regarded as rational and autonomous for conceptual reasons. I would like to thank the anonymous reviewer for pressing me to make this point explicit.

children's authority

A third conclusion can be drawn from Grice's account of meaning, namely that children's contributions to communication must, at least in some cases, be regarded as authoritative. Following Brighouse (2003), taking someone's view as authoritative amounts to saying that her interests are defining for the purpose of decision-making. In contrast, considering a person's view to have merely consultative status means that her expressions are not considered to provide sufficient grounds for action, even if her interests are at stake. According to Brighouse, communication with a child is possible and yet a child's view has, in principle, a non-authoritative status, as children lack the necessary rationality and maturity.

If communication is analysed along the line of Grice's rational mechanism, then his account implies a performative contraction: meaning something amounts to recognising a person's rationality that is then systematically denied if her views are given merely a non-authoritative status. Mere consultation disrupts the mechanism underlying Grice's model of rational communication, disqualifying children as competent reason-givers. Obviously, meaning something does not automatically imply that the reasons provided by the speaker are conducive. To the contrary, a speaker can mean something and be successful in it or she can fail. However, Brighouse excludes a child in principle from communication. If Grice's analysis becomes the starting point, then it follows that a child is non-rational and non-autonomous because it is merely consulted. Her non-rationality and non-autonomy are therefore not the cause but the consequence of the consultation, contrary to what Brighouse claims. Additionally, if a child is merely consulted without giving her voice authority, it becomes questionable as to why she should be consulted in the first place as continuous consultation disqualifies her as a serious partner in communication.

Ultimately, Grice's analysis provides an explanation for the intuitions defended by LSV and implies the notion of mutual recognition that many accounts in the context of SCV refer to as recognition ultimately keeps communication going and plays a normatively basic role in it. If authors such as Archard (see Archard & Uniacke., 2021; see also Archard & Skivenes, 2009) have indicated that a rationale for considering children's voices as authoritative is

missing due to the complexity of contrasting an adult's normative power of choice with a child's weighted views, Grice's account can fill this important gap.

from meaning to ethics

If this line of argument is correct, then Grice's theory of meaning provides an account of a relationally defined concept of autonomy constituted by mutually recognised rationality, granting the speaker authoritative status when successfully implemented. Grice's analysis thus contains all the necessary elements for realising the normative turn. Meaning in Grice's sense is anything but trivial, as Kemmerling (2015, p. 230) has demonstrated. It implies mutual respect and presupposes that the speaker acts sincerely and reflectively, taking all necessary precautions before meaning something. Since it relies on mutual trust and recognition, meaning operates on a moral premise and the communicative rationality it requires can pinpoint the very normativity that is put into operation in discourse ethics. The first difference being that it includes the child – unlike e.g. a discourse ethics along the line of Habermas (1981). Second, for the time being, we can leave it open to what extent the communicative framed theory considers ethical norms first and foremost as a result of discursive agreement. After all, so far, it has only been shown that children should be recognised as rational and autonomous, thus opening the possibility of including children into the ethical discourse.

When children are rational and autonomous, a revision to the ethics of childhood is needed and their view can, and possibly should, be included as SCV demands using suitable methodologies. These methodologies are presented below, along with an example that illustrates the value of including children in ethics. In what follows, I argue that Philosophy with Children (PwC) and Philosophy for Children (PfC) provide a specific methodology for incorporating children's philosophical and ethical thinking, thus responding to the call for a child-orientated ethics of childhood.[7] The results obtained from philosophical dialogues with children will then be used to illustrate how the insights provided by children can fundamentally transform the discourse in the Philosophy of

[7] For the sake of simplicity and because the approach presented below relates more to PwC than to P4C, we will only refer to Philosophy with Children (PwC) in the following.

Childhood; hence the branch of philosophy that addresses issues around children and childhood (see e.g. Gheaus et. al., 2020; Matthews, 1980).

a child-orientated ethics based on philosophy for children

Since its inception in the 1970s, PwC has sought to reframe the concepts of children and childhood (Lipman, 2007; Lipman et al., 1980; Matthews, 2008). Most notably, PwC challenges the view that children are incapable of rational, independent, or moral thinking. When children engage in philosophical dialogue, they explore conceptual and logical connections and justify their ethical judgments, demonstrating the very skills they are claimed to lack according to the deficit-oriented view (e.g., Matthews, 2008; Murris, 2000). Examining children's engagement in philosophical dialogue thus opens new pathways in our understanding of children, prompting PwC to invite us to reconsider the question, "What is a child?" In this sense, PwC and the branch of Philosophy that addresses issues around childhood, hence Philosophy of Childhood, are closely intertwined (Gregory et al., 2017; Matthews & Mullin, 2014; Mohr Lone, 2021; Conrad, 2018; Conrad et al., 2015) and critically examines the hierarchies between children and adults (see e.g. Kohan, 2014).

PwC is predominantly discussed in pedagogical contexts. Yet, children's philosophical discussions offer unique insights into their meaning-making processes, as they provide explanations and justifications when defending their assertions. The concepts discussed are often embedded in a conceptual network that captures how children make sense of them, whether in relation to justice, the good life, or other philosophically significant themes. This feature positions PwC as a distinctive method for child-oriented research (Cassidy et al., 2019; Conrad & Cassidy, 2023). Moreover, children's conceptual collaborative engineering can be contrasted and compared with adult-oriented thinking, substantially enriching and—crucially—correcting the respective philosophical discourse by overcoming children's disadvantaged epistemic positions (Fricker, 2007; Murris, 2013), including in the field of the ethics of childhood (see also Wall, 2019a; Ott, 2019).

Hence, PwC contributes to the discourse-ethically inspired framework of a child-oriented ethics of childhood.[8]

an example of a child-orientated ethics of childhood

The Community of Philosophical Inquiry (Cassidy, 2007; McCall, 2009) meets many of the requirements for a child-oriented research method and has been utilized in various contexts to clarify key concepts related to children and childhood.[9] More recently, the method has been applied in (Switzerland), where 162 children aged 4 to 12 participated in a philosophical dialogue about children's privacy. All participating children and their caretakers provided informed consent to participate.

A brief insight into the findings of this research elucidates how children conceptualise privacy and the significance they attribute to it in their lives. The findings are informative in several respects. First, children's discussions about privacy assert the view that children and adults share an equal right to privacy. Second, children's perspectives differ from existing accounts of children's privacy. Third, the child-oriented theory of privacy is innovative due to its relational and contractual conceptualisation, as well as the value children attribute to privacy.

children's privacy viewed by children

Without any prompt from the stimulus or the moderator, all the children introduced the concept of privacy into the dialogue of their own accord, irrespective of their age. They situated it at an individual level, claiming that privacy is a right each person has. This is noteworthy, as a child's privacy traditionally has been subsumed under the broader concept of family privacy (see Blecher-Prigat et al., 2011). Regardless of their age, the children consistently defended the view that children have a right to privacy, describing it as something a person possesses or owns. Privacy encompasses several distinct features, as illustrated by the perspective of a 5-year-old child engaged in dialogue with two other children. She chose the pseudonym "Alessia 2" to represent herself.

[8] While sympathetic to many aspects of John Wall's *Childism* resp. *Childisms* (see e.g. Wall, 2019b resp. Biswas et al. 2024), the account presented here departs from his by arguing that adult-centrism can be overcome without abandoning the path of rational thinking. On the contrary, PwC/PfC clearly regards it as a viable approach.
[9] For further details, see Cassidy et al., 2017.

Interacting with the other participants of the dialogue, Alessia 2 describes privacy as a box containing various private items. The participants discuss whether a teacher should be allowed to look inside the box. Alessia 2 says: "I think she should not look into the box, because there are private items in there. After all, you placed these items in the box so that nobody else would see them. Otherwise, you would have the box for nothing. You put the items into the box because they are private." She adds, "Everyone knows that others have boxes containing private items." She then continues, stating that it is only "when people allow one another to disclose things that they remain private," but "it's not desirable to deny people their boxes," and "this requires specific rules among people."

relational privacy

In this line of reasoning, Alessia 2 exemplifies Kant's categorical imperative (Kant, 1788/2011): If everyone were to ignore each other's privacy, it would become meaningless. Therefore, if privacy is valued, individuals should recognise and respect each other's privacy while adhering to the relevant regulations that protect it. Alessia 2 not only demonstrates her capacity to think in Kantian terms and thereby establish herself as a moral subject, but her reflections also reveal that privacy necessitates mutual recognition and regulations that highlight its relational dimension. Given the regulations needed to maintain and protect privacy, Alessia 2 appears to favour a contractualist interpretation to define the extent to which privacy applies.

This relational and contractualist interpretation of privacy is evident in all dialogues, with all children emphasising the value of privacy in their lives. Notably, they make no distinction between their right to privacy and that of adults. According to the children, both are equally entitled to privacy, and they do not perceive themselves as any different from adults in this regard. This is noteworthy as it contrasts sharply with many other findings, which indicate that differences between children and adults typically influence children's thinking (Cassidy et al., 2019; Cassidy & Mohr Lone, 2020; Conrad & Cassidy, 2023).

privacy and well-being

In all dialogues, a controversy arises over whether the right to privacy holds unconditionally. When discussing whether a caretaker is permitted to read a letter addressed to a child, some children argued that the adult has this right if they are concerned about the child's well-being. Regardless of age, some children disagreed, defending the view that a child's right to privacy holds unconditionally. It cannot be overridden by an adult's concerns about the child's well-being, and an adult must seek permission, as the right to privacy implies that "one is not required to share something with others," (Max) whether it be information or an object.

The children added that a person entitled to privacy maintains "full control" over it and "is free to deny permission without providing any explanation." Being entitled to privacy thereby strengthens a person's autonomy, as they can act according to their own will and regard certain things as exclusively their own. The children supporting this argument maintain that it would, in fact, be detrimental to a child's well-being if their privacy were disregarded, thereby underlining the central role privacy plays in their lives. Although the dialogues frequently feature disagreements over whether privacy or well-being is more important, all children agree that, from a certain age onwards, children can take care of their "own well-being" and that their right to privacy holds unconditionally.

The ultimately unconditional value of privacy, combined with its relational and contractualist interpretation, distinguishes this child-oriented theory of privacy from existing theories of children's privacy in the literature. These theories consistently interpret children's privacy as conditional, framing it within a welfare-oriented account (see, e.g., Dimopoulos, 2021; Montague, 1988; Tobin & Field, 2019, p. 555).[10] Children's philosophical thinking thus offers a refreshing conceptualisation of privacy, illustrating how a child-orientated ethics of childhood can substantially enrich the respective theoretical field in Philosophy of Childhood. While this account does not claim to provide the definitive theory for

[10] For further readings on the account suggested, see Conrad 2024.

understanding children's privacy, it underscores the importance of ongoing philosophical collaboration between children and adults.

conclusion

The child-oriented ethics of childhood presented in this paper weaves together the two strands of thinking outlined at the beginning into a cohesive framework. First, it demonstrates that while LSV is correct in considering autonomy as foundational for ethical theory, it errs in denying children autonomy in a normatively relevant sense. Children regard autonomy as central to their lives, influencing their moral thinking and self-understanding, as evidenced by their conceptualisation of privacy. Second, ethical theories benefit from the insights generated by SCV, which argues that integrating children's experiences is essential for achieving a fuller understanding of children and childhood. The rationale for this claim is grounded in the insights of Grice's (1957) theory of meaning, which offers a compelling reason for acknowledging children's authoritative voices in ethical dialogues and thus allowing to realise the normative turn deemed necessary by SCV: children position themselves and need to be positioned as rational and autonomous beings in communication. By highlighting the non-arbitrary basis for children's authoritative voices, Grice's analysis provides a robust foundation for integrating children's perspectives, ultimately reshaping our understanding of autonomy, authority, and moral agency in children and childhood. Children's philosophical reflection on these concepts can be introduced through philosophical dialogues. Philosophy with Children thus aligns with Grice's analysis and provides the basis for an ethics of childhood developed by and in communication. The transformative shift implied by such an ethics of childhood cannot be overstated. Ethics of childhood must be connected to empirical research by integrating children's philosophical thinking on ethical concepts, thereby enriching the corresponding philosophical debates and therein lie the reasons for a plea for a child-friendly ethics of childhood.

references

Alanen, L. (1994). Zur Theorie der Kindheit. *Sozialwissenschaftliche Literatur Rundschau*, *17*(28), 93–112.

Alanen, L. (2001). Childhood as a Generational Condition: Children's Daily Lives in a Central Finland Town. In L. Alanen & B. Mayall (Eds.), *Conceptualizing Child-Adult Relations* (pp. 129–143). Routledge.

Alanen, L. (2011). Moving Towards a Relational Sociology of Childhood. In R. Braches-Chyrek, C. Röhner, A. Schaarschuch, & H. Sünker (Eds.), *Gesellschaften – Interdisziplinäre Zugänge zur Kindheitsforschung* (pp. 21–44). Barbara Budrich.

Alanen, L. (2015). Are We All Constructionist Now? *Childhood*, *22*(2), 149–153.

Anderson, J., & Honneth, A. (2005). Autonomy, Vulnerability, Recognition, and Justice. In: J. Christman (Ed.), *Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism* (pp. 127–149). Cambridge University Press.

Archard, D., & Skivenes, M. (2009). Balancing a Child's Best Interests and a Child's Views. *International Journal of Children's Rights*, *17*, 1–21.

Archard, D., & Uniacke, S. (2021). The Child's Right to a Voice. *Res Publica*, *27*, 521–536.

Arneil, B. (2002). Becoming versus being. A Critical Analysis of the Child in Liberal Theory. In D. Archard & C. Macleod (Eds.), *The Moral and Political Status of Children*. Oxford University Press, 70–94.

Baggatini, A. (2016). Future-Oriented Paternalism and the Intrinsic Goods of Childhood. In J. Drerup, G. Graf, & C. Schickhardt (Eds.), *Justice, Education and the Politics of Childhood: Challenges and Perspectives* (pp. 17–34). Springer.

Baumann, H. (2008). Reconsidering Relational Autonomy. Personal Autonomy for Socially Embedded and Temporally Extended Selves. *Analyse & Kritik*, *30*(2), 445–468.

Betzler, M. (2014). Enhancing the Capacity for Autonomy: What Parents Owe Their Children to Make Their Lives Go Well. In A. Baggatini & C. Macleod (Eds.), *The Nature of Children's Well-Being* (pp. 65–84). Springer.

Betzler, M. (2022). The Moral Significance of Adolescence. *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, *39*(4), 547–561.

Blecher-Prigat, A. & Shmueli, B. (2011). Privacy for children. *Columbia Human Rights Law Review*, 42(3), 759-795.

Brennan, S. (2014). The Goods of Childhood and Children's Rights. In F. Baylis, F. & C. Mcleod (Eds.), *Family Making: Contemporary Ethical Challenges* (pp. 29–45). Oxford University Press.

Biswas, T., Wall, J., Warming, H., Zehavi, O., Kennedy, D., Murris, K., Kohan, W. O., Saal, B., & Rollo, T. (2024). Childism and Philosophy: A Conceptual Co-exploration. *Policy Futures in education*, *22*(5), 741–759.

Brighouse, H. (2003). How Should Children be heard? *Arizona Law Review*, *45*(3), 691–711.

Carey, B. (2017). Children and the Limits of Paternalism. *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, *20*, 581–595.

Cassidy, C. (2007). *Thinking Children*. Continuum.

Cassidy, C., Conrad, S.-J., Daniel, M.-F., Garside, D., Kohan, W., Murris, K., Wu, X., & Zhelyazkova, T. (2017). Being Children: Children's Voices on Childhood. *International Journal of Children's Rights*, 1–25.

Cassidy, C., Conrad, S.-J., & Figueiroa-Rego, M. J. (2019). Research with Children: A Philosophical, Rights-Based Approach. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, *43*(1), 1–15.

Cassidy, C., & Mohr Lone, J. (2020). Thinking about Childhood: Being and Becoming in the World. *Analytic Teaching and Philosophical Praxis*, *40*(1), 16–26.

Cheney, K. (2019). Decolonizing Childhood Studies: Overcoming Patriarchy and Prejudice in Child-Related Research and Practice. In S. Spyrou, R. Rosen, & D. T. Cook (Eds.), *Reimagining Childhood* (pp. 91–104). Bloomsbury.

Christensen, P., & Prout, A. (2002). Working with Ethical Symmetries in Social Research with Children. *Childhood*, *9*(4), 477–479.

Conrad, S.-J. (2024). Philosophisches Forschen: Kinder forschen über Privatsphäre. In C. Bietenhard, C. Brönnimann, & H. Schnüriger (Eds.) *Fachdidaktische Grundlegungen Ethik, Religionskunde, Sozialkunde mit Bildung für Nachhaltige Entwicklung, Heft BNE* (pp. 14–20). HEP Verlag.

Conrad, S.-J., & Cassidy, C. (2023). Philosophieren – eine kinderorientierte Forschungsmethode. In C. Kümin, C. Mathis, & U. Schellenberg (Eds.), *Philosophieren und Ethik* (pp. 155-167). Kopaed.

Conrad, S.-J. (2018). Kinder philosophieren über das Kindsein: In H. De Boer & K. Michalik (Eds.), *Philosophieren mit Kindern – Forschungszugänge und – perspektiven* (pp. 134–145). Barbara Budrich.

Conrad, S.-J., Cassidy, C., Mathis, C. (2015). Encouraging and Supporting Children's Views. In J. Tremmel, A. Mason, P. Godli, I. Dimitrijoski (Eds.), *Youth Quotas and other efficient forms of Youth participation in ageing societies* (pp. 109–124). Springer International Publishing.

Cuffary, E. C., Figureido, N. M. (2025). Intentions in Interactions: An Enactive Reply to Expressive Communication Proposals. *Synthese*, *205*(46), 1–30.

Divers, A. (2014). Children and Developed Agency. *childhood & philosophy*, *9*(18), 225–244.

Dimoupoulos, G. (2021). A Theory of Children's Privacy. *Legal Studies*, *41*(3), 430–453.

Drerup, J., & Schweiger, G. (2024). *Was ist eine gute Kindheit*. Reclam.

Dworkin, G. (1988). *The Theory and Practice of Autonomy*. Cambridge UP.

Franklin-Hall, A. (2013). On Becoming an Adult: Autonomy and the Moral Relevance of Life's Stages. *Philosophical Quarterly*, *63*(251), 223–247.

Fricker, M. (2007). *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford University Press.

Gheaus, A. (2015). Unfinished Adults and Defective Children: On the Nature and Value of Childhood. *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy*, *9*(1), 1–12.

Giesinger, J. (2017). Kinder und Erwachsene. In J. Drerup & C. Schickhardt (Eds.), *Kinderethik – aktuelle Perspektiven* (pp. 21–32). Mentis.

Giesinger, J. (2017). The Special Goods of Childhood: Lessons from Social Constructionism. *Ethics and Education*, *12*(2), 201–217.

Giesinger, J. (2019). Kinder und Erwachsene: Abgrenzungs- und Zuordnungsprobleme. In J. Drerup & G. Schweiger (Eds.), *Handbuch Philosophie der Kindheit* (pp. 43–49). J.B. Metzler.

Giesinger, J. (2020). Autonomie. In G. Weiss & G. Zirfas (Eds.), *Handbuch Bildungs- und Erziehungsphilosophie* (pp. 235–244). Springer.

Godwin, S. (2020). Children's Capacities and Paternalism. *The Journal of Ethics*, *24*(3), 307–331.

Gregory, M. R., Haynes, J., Murris, K. (2017). *The Routledge International Handbook of Philosophy for Children*. Routledge.

Hannan, S. (2018). Why Childhood is Bad for Children. *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, *35*(S1), 11–28.

Hannan, S. (2020). Childhood and Autonomy. In A. Gheaus, G. Calder, & J. De Wispelaere (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Childhood and Children* (pp. 112–122). Routledge.

Habermas, J. (1981). *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*. Suhrkamp.

Honneth, A. (2015). Kindheit. In M. Betzler & B. Bleisch (Eds.), *Familiäre Pflichten* (pp. 147–174). Suhrkamp.

Honneth, A. (1992). *Kampf um Anerkennung. Zur moralischen Grammatik sozialer Konflikte*. Suhrkamp.

Honneth, A. (1997). Anerkennung und moralische Verpflichtung. *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung*, *51*(1), 25–41.

Imhof, S. (2019). Von der Aufforderung zur Sprache in Fichtes Wissenschaftslehre. In J. Karásek, L. Kollert, & T. Matějčková (Eds.), *Übergänge in der klassischen Deutschen Philosophie* (pp. 29–46). Fink.

Kennedy, D. (2010). Philosophical Dialogue with Children: Essays on Theory and Practice. The Edwin Mellen Press.

Kohan, W. O. (2014). *Philosophy and Childhood: Critical Perspectives and Affirmative Practices*. Palgrave Macmillan.

James, A., & Prout, A. (1997). *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*. Routledge.

Jaworska, A. (2007). Caring and Internality. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, *74*(3) 529–568.

Jaworska, A., & Tannenbaum, J. (2020). The Moral Status of Children. In A. Gheaus, G. Calder, & J. De Wispelaere (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Childhood and Children* (pp. 67–78). Routledge.

Jenks, C. (1984). *The Sociology of Childhood*. Batsford.

Kant, I. (2011). *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*. De Gruyter. (Original work published 1788)

Kellett, M. (2010). *Rethinking Children as Researchers: Attitudes in Contemporary Society*. Continuum.

Kemmerling, A. Meinen. (2015). In N. Kompa (Ed.), *Handbuch Sprachphilosophie* (pp. 227–237). J.B. Metzler.

Kennedy, D., & Bahler, B. (2017). *Philosophy of Childhood Today: Exploring the Boundaries*. Lexington Books.

Lafollette, H. (1998). Circumscribed Autonomy: Children, Care and Custody. In U. Narayan, & J. Bartkowiak (Eds.), *Having and Raising Children* (pp. 137–152). Pennsylvania State University Press.

Lipman, M. (2007). *Thinking in Education*. Cambridge University Press.

Lipman, M., Sharp, A. M., & Oscanyan, F. (1980). S. *Philosophy in the Classroom*. Temple University Press.

Lundy, L. (2007). Voice is Not Enough: Conceptualizing Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. *British Educational Research Journal*, *33*(6), 927–942.

Lundy, L., & Mcevoy, L. (2012). Children's Rights and Research Processes: Assisting Children to (In)formed Views. *Childhood*, *19*(1), 129–144.

Matthews, G. B. (1980). *Philosophy and the Young Child*. Harvard University Press.

Matthews, G. B. (2008). Getting Beyond the Deficit Conception of Childhood: Thinking Philosophically with Children. In M. Hand & C. Winstanley (Eds.), *Philosophy in Schools* (pp. 27–40). Continuum.

Matthews, G. B., & Mullin, A. (2014). The Philosophy of Childhood. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Available at: https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2015/entries/childhood.

Mayall, B. (2000). Conversations with Children: Working with Generational Issues. In P. Christensen, & A. James (Eds.), *Research with Children: Perspectives and Practices* (pp. 120–134). Falmer Press.

Mohr Lone, J. (2021). *Seen and Not Heard: Why Children's Voices Matter*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Mayall, B. (2002). *Towards a Sociology of Childhood: Thinking from Children's Lives*. Open University Press.

Mccall, C. (2009). *Transforming Thinking*. Routledge.

Montague, P. (1988). A Child's Right to Privacy. *Public Affairs Quarterly*, *2*(1), 17–32.

Mullin, A. (2007). Children, Autonomy, and Care. J*ournal of Social Philosophy*, *38*(4), 536–553.

Mullin, A. (2013). Children, Paternalism and the Development of Autonomy. *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, *17*(3), 413–426.

Mullin, A. (2019). Children's Hope, Resilience, and Autonomy. *Ethics and Social Welfare*, *13*(1), 230–243.
Mullin, A. (2022). Children and Autonomy. In B. Colburn (Ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Autonomy* (pp. 412–421). Routledge.
Murris, K. (2000). Can Children Do Philosophy? *Journal of the Philosophy of Education*, *34*(2), 261–279.
Murris, K. (2013). The Epistemic Challenge of Hearing a Child's Voice. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, *32*(3), 245–259.
Nussbaum, M. (2011). *Creating Capabilities*. The Belknap Press.
Ott, K. (2019). Taking Children's Moral Lives Seriously: Creativity as Ethical Response Offline and Online. *Religions*, *10*(525).
Petrus, K. (Ed.). (2010). *Meaning and Analysis: New Essays on Grice*. Palgrave Macmillian.
Rousseau, J.-J. (1762). *Emile, or On Education*. Basic Books.
Qvortrup, J. (1994). Childhood as a Social Phenomenon: Lessons From an International Project. *Eurosocial Report*, *47*.
Qvortrup, J. (2009). Are Children Human Beings or Human Becomings? A Critical Assessment of Outcome Thinking. *Rivista Internazionale di Scienze Sociali*, *177*(3-4), 631–653.
Schapiro, T. (1999). What Is a Child? *Ethics*, *109*(4), 715–738.
Schapiro, T. (2003). Childhood and Personhood. *Arizona Law Review*, *45*(3), 575–594.
Schickhardt, C. (2016). *Kinderethik: Der moralische Status und die Rechte der Kinder*. Mentis.
Schickhardt, C. (2019). Der moralische Status von Kindern. In J. Drerup & G. Schweiger (Eds.), *Handbuch Philosophie der Kindheit* (pp. 211–218). J.B. Metzler.
Schweiger, G., & Graf, G. (2015). *A Philosophical Examination of Social Justice and Child Poverty*. Palgrave Macmillan.
Spyrou, S. (2011). The Limits of Children's Voices: From Authenticity to Critical, Reflexive Representation. *Childhood*, *18*(2), 151–165.
Spyrou, S., Rosen, R., & Cook, D. T. (2019). *Reimagining Childhood Studies*. Bloomsbury.
Tobin, J., & Field, S. M. (2019). Article 16: The Right to Protection of Privacy, Family, Home, Correspondence, Honour, and Reputation. In J. Tobin (Ed.), *The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: A Commentary* (pp. 552–599). Oxford University Press.
Tomlin, P. (2018). Saplings or Caterpillars? Trying to Understand Children's Well-Being. *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, *35*(S1), 29–46.
Verhellen, E. (2015). The Convention on the Rights of the Child. In W. Vandenhole, E. Dsmet, & S. Lembrechts (Eds.), *Routledge International Handbook of Children's Rights Studies* (pp. 43–59). Routledge.
Wall, J. (2010). *Ethics in the Light of Childhood*. Georgetown University Press.
Wall, J. (2019a). 'Ain't I a Person?' Reimagining Human Rights in Response to Children. *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics*, *30*(2), 39–57.
Wall, J. (2019b). From Childhood Studies to Childism: Reconstructing the Scholarly and Social Imaginations. *Children's Geographies*, *17*(1), 1–14.
Winkler, M. (2019). Kindheit als Konzept aus historischer Perspektive. In J. Drerup & G. Schweiger (Eds.), *Handbuch Philosophie der Kindheit* (pp. 9–17). J.B. Metzler.
Young, I. M. (2001). Equality of Whom? Social Groups and Judgments of Injustice. *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, *9*(1), 1–18.
Young, I. M. (1990). *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. University Press.

sarah-jane conrad:

Reader at bern university of teacher education. Specialised in the development of practice-oriented, participatory educational and research projects with a focus on

philosophy of childhood in co-research with children, child rights and sustainability.

how to quote this article:

APA:
Conrad, S.-J. (2025). A plea for a child-orientated ethics of childhood. *childhood & philosophy*, *21*, 1–26. doi: 10.12957/childphilo.2025.88327

ABNT:
CONRAD, Sarah-Jane. A plea for a child-orientated ethics of childhood. *childhood & philosophy*, v. 21, p. 1-26, 2025. doi: 10.12957/childphilo.2025.88327

credits

- **Acknowledgements:** Special thanks go to Claire Cassidy, Johannes Giesinger, Silvan Imhof, Corinne Schmid-Giacomini for their critical reviews on this paper as well as the reviewers' comments.
- **Financing:** Not applicable.
- **Conflicts of interest:** The authors certify that they have no commercial or associative interest that represents a conflict of interest in relation to the manuscript.
- **Ethical approval:** Not applicable.
- **Availability of data and material:** Not applicable.
- **Authors' contribution:** Conceptualisation; Writing, revising and editing the text; Formal analysis; Research; Methodology; Resources; Validation: CONRAD, S. J.
- **Image:** Not applicable.
- **Preprint:** Not published in preprint repository.

article submitted to the similarity system Plagius

submitted: *13.12.2024* approved: *27.04.2025* *published: 30.05.2025*

editor: walter omar kohan

reviewers 1: *philip meade and manfred liebel* **reviewer 2:** *itay snir*