The Development of Caring Open-mindedness Is at the Heart of True Critical Thinking in Philosophy for Children

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Abstract: When critical thinking occurs in a collective context such as a Philosophy for Children workshop, it cannot be considered simply as an intellectual exercise, insofar as it depends on social interactions in the philosophical dialogue. This is why, in line with the works of Matthew Lipman, critical thinking should be taught and practiced as an exercise based on the development of caring thinking among children. Furthermore, open-mindedness, defined as the ability of the child to welcome intellectually and ethically divergent ideas, may constitute the very fundamental precondition for critical thinking as it permits the meticulous, analytic and authentic discovery of the idea.

Keywords: philosophical practice, dialogue, open-mindedness, intersubjectivity, critical thinking, ethics

Introduction

Critical thinking suffers from frequent misinterpretation: it is often perceived as a scathing point of view, a negative posture or even a contemptuous way of being. In order to counter this misunderstanding, one can defend the idea that it is, on the contrary, a way of honouring a thought. Indeed, making the effort of considering, analysing, or doubting an idea is a way of taking it into account. In this regard, critical thinking can be seen as a form of intellectual generosity. In accordance with this view, the philosophical education of children can become an opportunity for them to experience this particular vision of critical thinking. In fact, since the founding works of Matthew Lipman, who defined philosophy as a way of thinking which brought together caring, creative, and critical dimensions (Lipman 1988), Philosophy for Children has always promoted
the development of caring thinking alongside the learning of critical thinking. Lipman believed that critical skills can only become fruitful if they are matched with a respectful attitude. Thus, following the Lipmanian typology, I intend to analyse the way in which caring thinking constitutes the very possibility of a promising use of critical thinking in a collective philosophical discussion. More precisely, I would like to defend open-mindedness (being, according to Lipman, one of the six thinking skills required to philosophize), as a particular dimension of caring thinking that can be particularly crucial for the emergence of critical thinking.

In my doctoral thesis, I have described open-mindedness as a posture characterised by two complementary dimensions: on one hand, it is a cognitive disposition of the mind conducive to the welcoming of alternative ideas, and, on the other, it is an ethical posture of the individual conducive to the acceptance of difference and alterity. My research hypothesis is the following: open-mindedness, as a cognitive and ethical attitude, constitutes the basis for the exercise of critical thinking in philosophical workshops with children. In order to substantiate this hypothesis, I will present a detailed analysis of philosophical discussions held with children age 5 to 14 that I have led starting in 2011 during my experimental research as a facilitator of philosophical practices in educational, social, and cultural structures in the French town of Romainville (east of Paris). Throughout this experimentation, I have been concerned with the following question: in what way is open-mindedness an intellectual and ethical posture, a caring way of thinking that is conducive to the development of critical thinking?

1. Critical Thinking and the Opening of the Child’s Mind to the Caring Dissection of Ideas

1.1. The Passion of Doubt and the Logical Screening of Ideas

First, I would like to show how open-mindedness—in a cognitive sense—is a prerequisite for the detailed analysis of the ideas of others. Lipman (Lipman 2003) defined critical thinking as a self-correcting examination of the validity of a hypothesis through the application of logical criteria, and this requires time and effort—especially since these criteria are numerous: (1) meaning, (2) soundness, (3) strength, (4) pertinence, (5) precision, (6) coherence, and (7) consistency. It is a disputed question to establish a list of intellectual standards: Richard Paul (Paul 1968), for instance, defends the following list of standards: significance, clarity, depth, breadth, precision, accuracy, and relevance. The definition of the seven epistemological standards chosen by Lipman will clarify the differences and similarities.

The criterion of meaning (significance) aims to teach children to explain their ideas in order to be understood by others. This requirement
is intensified by the aim for coherence (accuracy in relation to reality) and strength (depth), as they will respectively measure the relation between the idea and the rest of the discussion and the importance it will acquire for others. Consistency builds up progressively during the expansion of a proposed theory, with arguments, examples, developments, explications, and accumulation of nuances. The idea of precision relates to the subtlety that is aimed at in philosophy where the child is not only encouraged to express his vision of the world but also to try to formulate it in the greatest detail. The criterion of pertinence (relevance) is distinct from the aim for precision as it aims to measure the weight of an idea according to the context. In contrast, the idea of soundness (well-founded validity) is related to the universal frame of philosophical thought. Children will try to reason about humanity in general, apart from the contemporary context. Thus, the aim is to encourage children to carefully examine their peers’ ideas through the screen of their minds, based on these criteria, in a process that can be represented as follows:

This figure represents the ideal process, but clearly the community of inquiry is a living assembly governed by improvisation and is unable to perfectly apply this process at all times. But the facilitator, by his/her questioning, can encourage children to explore the different criteria. For instance, meaning, soundness, strength, consistency, coherence, pertinence, and precision can be respectively encouraged by asking questions: “What does that idea mean?” “Do you have an argument that proves the
validity of that idea?” “Can someone justify this idea?” “Is this idea always true?” “Is this idea coherent with what has been said before?” “Is this idea always valid?” and “Can someone develop this idea?” Young thinkers acquire these intellectual practices progressively, and, hopefully, they will come to understand that it is only by opening one’s mind to an assertion or proposition, at least for a moment, that one can truly analyze it.

By studying children’s philosophical discussions (Hawken 2016), it can be observed that, after an initial stage in which children spontaneously tend to reject ideas as a whole, they start to take them into account and to unravel them critically. After a while, they realize that by making the effort to think about the statement, they discover their ability to examine it in detail and to deconstruct it with subtlety. It is at this point that they manifest cognitive open-mindedness, which can be defined, in a few words, as a way of opening up an idea by opening one’s mind to it. Children then understand that an idea cannot be criticized unless it is dissected from the inside. By engaging in philosophical discussions, they can discover and acquire this method of welcoming an idea, of taking the time to reflect on it before rejecting it. In short, critical thinking requires the internal engagement with the hypothesis being examined: in effect, the idea cannot remain exterior to the mind. This is the only way that critical thinking can be applied based on the logical criteria identified by Lipman.

1.2. An Example of Caring Critical Reflection upon the Concept of Possibility

In the following dialogue extract, we can see how 10-year-old children slowly decipher the concept of Possible and Impossible, spontaneously using the critical thinking criteria (in bold) recommended by Lipman to analyse the ideas proposed by the members of the community of inquiry. In their analyses they use meaning, soundness, strength, pertinence, precision, coherence and consistency as their tools:

[Facilitator]: So, what is the possible?
—[Child 1: meaning] It’s something that one is able to do.
—[C2: precision] The possible is also something that can happen.
—[C3: pertinence] But sometimes, it’s possible to do it for someone else, but not everyone is capable of doing it.
—[C4: precision] If someone can’t reach the top of the shelves, but someone else can do so.

OK, so this thing, is it possible or impossible?
—[C5: strength] It’s possible because there is someone else who can do it.

—[C6: coherence] Yes, but if you can climb on a chair to do it, then the impossible becomes possible . . .

—[C7: meaning] Well, sometimes it’s a question of courage . . . there’s always a fear in the background that you will not be able to do it. If someone tells you it’s not possible, it’s up to you to choose whether you agree or disagree.

—[C4: coherence] But no, you can’t just decide that something is possible

—[C8: precision] Except in dreams!

Can we have everything we wish? Is everything possible?

—[C7: consistency] Perhaps if our dreams exist, we can live them. If they don’t exist, we cannot live them.

—[C3: pertinence] Well, that depends on the dreams . . . You can dream about impossible things . . . Like flying . . .

Are there things that are impossible in real life?

—[C1: consistency] There are people who say “Nothing is impossible,” but there are things that are impossible.


—[C2: strength] For example, you eat a cake, and once you have eaten it, it’s impossible to eat it again.

—[C12: strength] Not everything is possible: for example, you cannot bring the dead back to life, they are dead.

—[C3: precision] For the moment it’s impossible.

For the moment it is impossible, but in the future might it be possible? Are there things which seem impossible but which then happen in real life?

—[C2: meaning] Well, yes. There are impossible things that you can do.

But if you can do them, why are they impossible?

—[C7: pertinence] For example, if someone wants to resuscitate someone else, even though they know it is impossible, one day they might decide to invent something that can resuscitate people. If he tries, if he believes, then perhaps he will succeed.
—[C12: **meaning**] Sometimes you believe you have limits, but our limits can also go quite a long way.

—[C14: **precision**] In our minds, anything may be possible, even it’s not yet possible in reality.

*The question of invention is interesting. When you push back the limits of the possible, when you invent, does that mean that with your mind you can make impossible things possible? Is it impossible to become possible?*

—[All: **consistency**] Yes! Inventions! You create something new that no one else has imagined.

—[C15: **coherence**] I don’t agree: what is impossible will always be impossible because that’s what it is, to be impossible.

—[C6: **precision**] No, the impossible can become possible. For the moment, it’s impossible to live on Mars, but perhaps in future years it will be possible. . . .

—[C11: **strength**] Yes, because they can create something, invent a system.

*So, if you invent something to go and live on Mars, does the impossible become possible?*

—[C4: **pertinence**] Yes, but there are some things where you can do nothing, and they will remain impossible for ever. . . .

—[C2: **meaning**] There has to be a limit: if everything were possible, life would be much too simple.

—[C1: **strength**] You couldn’t put off the impossible, and give yourself challenges!

—[C12: **coherence**] We need limits because otherwise it would be a disaster! It’s because of or thanks to Nature that we are alive, so she has made laws to prevent us from doing things.

—[C1: **consistency**] Or otherwise it would be a wonderful life.

—[C8: **soundness**] It’s normal that life is not completely perfect!

—[C1: **meaning**] That’s the role of the impossible: if there was only possible, we couldn’t push back the limits of the impossible, we couldn’t try. And if everything was impossible, we couldn’t do anything.

—[C6: **soundness**] It wouldn’t be fun if it was impossible to die . . . like they said . . . it wouldn’t be fun to have . . . to be . . . immortal, we couldn’t challenge what we would want to challenge. We wouldn’t feel anything and it wouldn’t be amusing. We grow old.
This is an extract from a workshop with the CM2 A class (9–10 years) at the école Fraternité, April 10, 2012. In this dialogue, we can see how the group of children carefully deployed all critical tools to analyse the concepts of “Possible” and “Impossible.” They conducted an exploration of these problematic notions in life and built a constructive and reflective line of thought by opening up every idea in a critical and caring manner. They explored their meaning in life, they acquired precision by finding nuances, subtle counter-ideas, they self-corrected each other continuously, and they put everything in doubt in order to understand and clarify the meaning of the concepts at hand.

1.3. Cognitive Open-mindedness and the Intellectual Manipulation of Ideas: Critical Thinking and the Opening of Understanding

This initial analysis reveals how critical thinking relies upon cognitive open-mindedness, especially because it relies upon the intellectual manipulation of ideas, and the aim of critical thinking in philosophy is to embrace ideas in order to understand them in the most profound way. Furthermore, most of the critical thinking process consists in the uncovering of what lies underneath the idea. When young philosophers conduct a quest for meaning, they search for their significance in life; when they examine the strength or soundness of an idea, they will look at its foundations; when they question the pertinence or consistency of an idea, they analyse the validity of the idea according to all the implicit situations it refers to; when they doubt the coherence of the proposition, they look at its relations to other recognised truths and facts; when they need precision, they look for further justifications. All these cognitive acts consist of an intellectual manipulation of ideas, so much so that delicacy is required so as not to risk destroying the ideas. The critical deconstruction of an idea shouldn’t be equated with its demolition. It demands caution, thoroughness, and, of course, care.

In this sense, the objective of critical thinking in Philosophy for Children is clarity and understanding, which is quite different from the vision defended by certain American leaders of the critical thinking theories of the 1970s and 1980s. For instance, according to Robert Ennis, “critical thinking is reasonable, reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do” (Ennis and Norris 1989). In a similar vein, Harvey Siegel (1988) believes that critical thinking consists in a way of being reasonably “moved by appropriate reasons.” In these theoretical frames, it seems that critical thinking must aim at the resolution of a problem and at the formulation of solutions. In every case, it would appear that the critical exercise should lead to a single designated action, movement, or solution—a kind of efficiency.
But this approach is incompatible with the essence of philosophical practice and education insofar as philosophy should not limit itself to efficiency in decisions, beliefs and actions, nor should it aim for consensus, simplicity, or uniformity. In philosophical inquiry, critical thinking cannot aim for a unique resolution, since philosophy is defined by the pluralism of ideas and the infinite search for deeper comprehension. This aspect was evident in the previous discussion about “The Possible and the Impossible.” The dialogue didn’t end with a univocal resolution but with a collection of fruitful hypotheses, pondered remarks, and enlightened analysis. Because critical thinking in Philosophy for Children is turned towards the unraveling of multiple truths expressed by the members of the community of inquiry, it is far from a solipsistic or navel-gazing practice. In a nutshell, it tends more towards the other than towards the self. That is why it is dependent on open-mindedness. The objective is not to find one’s own idea, but to try and think together with one’s peers.

Through the critical process prescribed by Lipman, children can acquire a tangible experience of what cognitive open-mindedness means. By taking the time to examine an idea intellectually, they have, in reality, opened their minds to otherness. We can see here that cognitive open-mindedness as used in critical thinking has an ethical value, inasmuch as it pushes the young philosophers to entertain each other’s ideas in order to examine them. The intellectual exercise leads to the creation of inter-individual relationships.

2. Caring for and Open Listening to Others Is at the Core of Critical Thinking

However, the road between cognitive and ethical open-mindedness goes both ways. Cognitive open-mindedness leads to ethical open-mindedness, but the intellectual exercise of critical thinking, even though it has an ethical value, depends, at the very start, on an ethical posture. Thus, the participants in the community of philosophical inquiry will have to adopt a certain attitude in relation to their peers. The intellectual process described above cannot be accomplished without a caring atmosphere built upon mutual respect, goodwill, and benevolence. This is especially true in the philosophy workshop, as this context is dedicated to the expression of personal visions of the world and the confrontation between divergent existential conceptions of life. Children already bear such ideas, but it is crucial that they learn to defend them in a pluralistic atmosphere. Here, critical thinking relies upon open-mindedness, in the ethical sense, as the ability to welcome individuality, alterity, and difference.
2.1. Genuine Listening and the Art of Suspension: How to (In)Form Caring Critical Judgment

As critical thinking can promptly generate dispute, I would defend the idea that open-mindedness, as an ethical posture, is a precondition for dialogue, as it permits attentive listening, genuine understanding and the suspension of judgement. This state of épochè (Husserl 1913/2001), associated with the will to understand the other's point of view, allows children to welcome the singularity of their peers and discover what is contained in their minds. Critical thinking is based on genuine listening, which is not just about being attentive in an ordinary manner, but rather being truly attentive implies tending towards what the other is thinking. It is a way of toning down one's own stream of thought in order to try to follow the line of reasoning proposed by a peer. The ethical posture of open-mindedness is a way of orienting one's consciousness towards others, of wanting to reach into the core of their thinking. By analysing extracts from philosophical discussions with my students, I have noticed that phenomena such as the reformulation of the ideas of others, the appropriation the other's idea to nuance one's own, the explanation of what is implicit in others' ideas, are all manifestations of this ethical posture. In fact, ethical open-mindedness is revealed through intellectual acts and discursive markers. Because they reveal a search for the unspoken in the spoken, they indicate the ability to go beyond the explicit statements of their peers to unfold the richness of their ideas.

2.2. An Example of Critical Thinking in the Context of Ethical Open-mindedness

The following abstract transcribes a workshop that took place with a group of 10-year-olds who had already practiced philosophy together for more than a year. This is relevant because their experience in philosophizing explains why they demonstrate ethical open-mindedness. We have pointed out three discursive markers that show how children manage to see beyond the given statement (reformulation, nuancing, explanation), and engage, via this intellectual attitude, in an ethical posture conducive to caring critical thinking.

[Facilitator] So in your opinion, what is the use of living?
—[Child 1: Ingrid] Life serves to spend good times and be happy in your life.
—[C2: Kevin: reformulation] Life is when you are born and you are a baby, and you live good and not so good times. You live.
—[C1: Ingrid: reformulation] Life is times of happiness and times of sadness.
—[C3: Sira: explanation] I think—in my opinion this is what Ingrid and Kevin think too—that life is like a sort of test.

—[C4: Maxence: nuanced appropriation] I agree with Kevin's idea: why are we born and why do we die at the end? Why can our existence not continue forever?

—[C5: Amélia: reformulation] I think the same thing, I think that life is as if we enter the world and then a few years later we die.

So, for you, the definition of life should be “what happens between birth and death”

—[C6: Karim] Life is when you will grow up to have a good career or . . . I don’t know.

—[C7: Kenza: reformulation] I think that life is . . . If you do bad things, you will go to hell, if you do not do bad things, you will go to paradise.

—[C8: Roxane: explanation] that depends on the religion. When you don’t believe in God, you think . . .

—[C10: Mohamed: explanation] Karim, I think he wants to say that life is not just being born and dying, it’s to try and do great things.

Could you try and express this in your way?

—[C105: Amélia: nuanced appropriation] I like Mohamed’s idea: life is being born, living times that may be good or bad, and after that you die.

—[C12: Inès] Life is a bit like a reward, except for wicked people.

—[C6: Karim: reformulation] We have an incredible chance to live, and thanks to life we can have unforgettable times. I agree with Mohamed but it’s mainly the good times that are important; there are bad times but that is not the purpose of life.

—[C14: Nihed: nuanced appropriation] Sometimes, you have incredible experiences that you could not have imagined, and then you say that it’s great to be alive, it’s like a gift.

This is an extract of a workshop with the CM2A class (9–10 years) at the école Fraternité, December 5, 2011. It clearly demonstrates how ideas circulate in the group of children, and how they explicitly try to enrich each other’s ideas by the constructive and critical search for meaning. Thanks to their ethical open-mindedness, they are able to react to each other’s ideas and to go farther in the critical analysis of the question.
2.3. “Critical Mind: En Garde!” A Playful Activity to Encourage Critical Thinking in an Open-minded and Caring Atmosphere

It is not an easy task to install a caring and respectful atmosphere in a class, especially when you are trying to encourage the children to criticize each other’s ideas. The use of critical thinking can be intimidating and frightening, because it constitutes a reassessment and a destabilisation of one another’s ideas: it may appear perilous as it can be perceived as a kind of undermining. In order to de-dramatize the use of critical thinking and encourage children to use this faculty without fear, I have created a game called “Critical mind, en garde!” Every child has two cards, one indicating “I agree because . . .” and the other “I don’t agree because . . .” Given a philosophical question, a first student expresses his/her idea, then the facilitator says: “Critical mind, en garde!” and the other participants raise one of their cards to explain their point of view. The first time the facilitator uses this game, he/she can question every hypothesis or prepare statements that children will have to examine. These are the hypotheses that I prepared for my groups of 8-year-olds:

—“All fruits are yellow”
—“The tooth fairy exists”
—“Girls like pink”
—“The egg came before the hen”
—“It’s kind to kick someone”
—“We can steal grapefruits in shops”
—“We are allowed to not say thank you when we receive a gift”
—“The earth is round”
—“2 + 2 = 4”
—“Adults always tell the truth”
—“Everything we hear on television is true.”

Once the young thinkers have understood the system, it can be used occasionally during crucial moments of the philosophical discussion. Progressively, by playing down the act of criticism, while creating a habit of employing it at the same time, children cease to be intimidated by the act of taking a position and of defending a conviction and begin to become accustomed to submitting every idea to the screen of their own mind. The playful setting builds a caring atmosphere in which criticism isn’t perceived as an aggressive way of being.
3. Intersubjectivity, Social Abilities, and Ethical and Cognitive Open-Mindedness: Three Principal Findings Regarding the Synergy between Critical and Caring Thinking

The analysis of the link between critical thinking and open-mindedness leads us to three larger findings regarding, notably, the potential for caring critical thinking to exist within a child’s mind.

3.1. Intersubjectivity as a Condition for the Emergence of Critical Dialogue

The study of open-mindedness in critical thinking has revealed a certain number of processes by which children demonstrate their ability to open their minds in order to criticize the ideas of their peers: first, through the examination of meaning, pertinence, precision, coherence, consistency, soundness and strength; second, through the acts of reformulation, nuanced appropriation and explanation. When these phenomena occur in all aspects of the inquiry, the group comes closer to philosophizing; indeed, according to Marie-France Daniel (Daniel 2005), an early collaborator of Lipman, philosophical dialogue emerges when children don’t only express their own ideas (in a monological manner) but build their ideas by taking into account what other subjects propose (in a dialogical manner). The aim of philosophical dialogue is not only to exchange ideas but also to transform them and to be transformed by them. Thus, critical thinking can be defined as the transformative interpenetration of minds—the nature of which is, therefore, close to the essence of philosophy.

The realization of critical thinking in a collective philosophical discussion with children is dependent on the presence of caring thinking and open-mindedness. And because critical thinking relies upon the meticulous and thorough examination of one another’s ideas, it requires intersubjectivity, which is precisely exercised and obtained through philosophical dialogue when it is based on mutual open-mindedness among the young thinkers.

3.2. Critical Open-mindedness as the Proof of Social Abilities in Children

This analysis of caring critical thinking in philosophy for children offers a key to understanding the cognitive functioning of the very young. While child psychology, as notably advocated by the Piagetian vision of cognitive development (Piaget and Inhelder 1966), had long considered that childhood thoughts were restricted to a form of egocentrism that places the mind in a situation of introversion, philosophy for children...
is based on a socio-constructivist concept of cognitive development (Mead 1934/2015; Vygotski 1934/2003). It is this facet of children’s intellect—open to exteriority and otherness—that is evidenced by the philosophical discussions with them. We position ourselves in parallel to egocentric confinement, and, starting at the age of five, we gamble on the collective deployment of socialized thought through philosophical dialogue. In fact, when children place themselves in a situation of truly listening, when they are ready to fully welcome the ideas of others, and when they try to embrace the ideas for what they are, one might consider that they are demonstrating intellectual empathy—they have started to think with others.

3.3. Caring Critical Thinking: A Gateway to the Radical Discovery of Otherness

Critical thinking is a result of pluralism; a divergence of conviction, opinion, and belief is the very origin of the human necessity to confront the diversity inherent in philosophy. But this diversity does not lead to a hierarchy of ideas; rather as a consequence of criticism, ideas reveal themselves in a deeper way. The richness of philosophy is that divergent ideas can coexist and stay strong throughout the critical process. Thus, philosophy is a practice of choosing to exercise caring critical thinking because it comprises a domain where every idea can be respected and valued while it is being critically examined.

Furthermore, the framework of philosophical discussion—governed by reason and goodwill—enables a relaxed critical encounter between divergent individualities. Indeed, such discussions often give rise to the emergence of personal, social, religious, or political variations. Differences appear, creating a substrate for philosophical reflection, but they must be defended by rational, sound, and reasonable arguments in a context of benevolent communication. Thus, these distinctive singularities are both revealed and channeled by the philosophical method; above all, they are opened up to all. Dialogue exists through the verbal confrontation of “diverse rationalities” (Pettier 2004), but it survives through the inclusive, open, empathetic, and respectful nature of this confrontation. Without the management of differences, dialogue disappears; it can evolve towards dispute, hatred, silence, and the grasping of power. In short, the actual existence of philosophical discussion is a contributor to the open-mindedness movement and is therefore central to the achievement of open-mindedness.
Conclusion: The Social Significance of the Development of Caring Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is a set of skills intended to be mobilized in the social and civic spheres, because it allows each and every one of us to take a position, to develop and refine ideas, and to find a voice. This social vocation leads us to defend this vision of caring, open-minded critical thinking. Indeed, I believe that if critical thinking is equated with a cynical, hasty, negative method to deconstruct one another’s points of view, children will be hindered in learning to dialogue with their fellow citizens. In contrast, I believe that the definition of critical thinking, defended here as an open-minded process by which one discovers and reflects upon ideas while carefully examining the viewpoints of others, is an essential ingredient to generating pluralistic dialogue among citizens, starting in childhood.

Furthermore, the theoretical and practical model of critical open-mindedness promotes a social model of inter-individual dialogue. Indeed, the aim of learning critical, caring, and philosophical thinking is to encourage children to take hold of the ideas of others, to work through them and to turn them inside out. This is a kind of intellectual intervention. As we have shown, critical thinking is built on the intellectual participation in the ideas of others, whether this participation manifests itself through the analysis of strength and soundness, the examination of consistency and pertinence, the adding of precision, or through the exploration of meaning and ideas by reformulation, explanations, and nuances.

All these collective acts serve to mold the idea which is not left it in its original state. This approach to the openness of a philosophical mind as a social model of intellectual interaction is radically distinct from the promotion of tolerance, and is therefore debatable. Indeed, the ethical model of tolerance seeks more to ensure the remote and distant acceptance of others and is defined by non-intervention; according to Susan Mendus, “it consists in abstaining from intervention in the actions or opinions of others, even if one has the power to do so and even if one disapproves of or does not appreciate the action or opinion in question” (Mendus 2004: 1969). Tolerating others means leaving them free to be what they are, without seeking to discover anything beyond. In contrast, intellectual open-mindedness can break down this relationship of exteriority to allow otherness to enter the mind, thanks to a form of conceptual interventionism. Through philosophical discussion, children experience a true encounter with the intellectual, metaphysical, political, ethical, and aesthetic worlds of their comrades, and by these means their young minds are opened to the pluralistic and diverse wealth of the world of philosophy. This authentic discovery is not prevented by critical thinking; quite the contrary, critical thinking, far from being an offensive faculty, offers a path towards the greater comprehension of otherness.
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