From behaving to being: the possible authenticity of the child as early *Dasein*

Do comportar-se ao ser: a autenticidade possível da criança enquanto *Dasein* inicial

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ABSTRACT

What does it mean to be a child? This basic but no less intriguing question guides the present philosophical exercise. Along the journey, we aim to discuss – in the light of Martin Heidegger's phenomenological-hermeneutic thinking – the difference between the child's *behaviour* – the empirical (ontic) scope and the most immediate phenomenon we can observe about them – and the child's *being* – their ontological constitution as Dasein. It is already known that behaviours show us something about the children. However, they can, at the same time, hide something from us. And what is it that they are often hiding? It is their *being*. Returning to our first and guiding question and paying a little more attention to it, we may realise a very important detail which consists in just two letters: the use of the verb *be*. Most of the times, we ask, 'What does it mean to *be* a child?' and, a moment later, we turn away and forget what we were primarily looking for. Completely avid and without even noticing it, we eagerly begin our saga to *produce* theories and more theories about childhood. But what has become of the children themselves? Now they are nothing more than *objects* of our systematic and merely empirical scientific research. We have been trying to understand their *behaviour* because of general and predictable laws of nature as well as – with the help of some cutting-edge technology – *product* of our manipulation. This way, we abandon who they *are*; we ignore their *being*. To pave the way for their ownmost potentiality-for-being (*eigentliches Seinkönnen*), i.e., their possible authenticity (*Eigentlichkeit*), we launch in this work the challenge of receiving each one of them as the singularity they are. By doing so, he may help them to embrace, little by little and with all bravery, their freedom and responsibility for their own existence.

KEYWORDS

Childhood; authenticity; being-there; Martin Heidegger

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RESUMO

O que significa ser criança? Esta básica mas não menos intrigante questão guia o presente exercício filosófico. Ao longo da jornada, nosso objetivo é discutir – à luz do pensamento fenomenológico-hermenêutico de Martin Heidegger – sobre a diferença entre o *comportamento* da criança – o âmbito empírico (ôntico) e o mais imediato fenômeno que nós podemos observar sobre ela – e o *ser* da criança – sua constituição enquanto *Dasein*. Sabemos que comportamentos nos mostram algo sobre as crianças. Porém, eles podem, ao mesmo tempo, esconder algo de nós. E o que é isso que eles constantemente escondem? É o *ser* delas. Retornando à nossa primeira e orientadora questão e prestando um pouco mais de atenção a ela, podemos perceber um importante detalhe, o qual consiste em apenas três letras: o uso do verbo *ser*. Na maioria das vezes, nós perguntamos "O que significa *ser* criança?" e, no momento seguinte, nos afastamos e esquecemos o que estávamos primariamente procurando. Completamente ávidos e sem nem mesmo nos darmos conta disso, nós ansiosamente começamos nossa saga a fim de *produzir* teorias e mais teorias sobre a infância. Mas o que tem sido das crianças elas mesmas? Agora elas são nada mais que *objetos* de nossas sistemáticas e empíricas pesquisas científicas. Temos tentado compreender seu *comportamento* como resultado de leis gerais e previsíveis da natureza e – com a ajuda da tecnologia de ponta – com *produto* de nossa manipulação. Desta forma, abandonamos quem elas *são*; ignoramos seu *ser*. A fim de abrir caminho para seu poder-ser mais próprio (*eigentliches Seinkönnen*), ou seja, sua possível autenticidade (*Eigentlichkeit*), lançamos neste trabalho o desafio de acolher cada uma delas como a singularidade que elas são. Ao fazer isso, podemos ajudá-las a assumir, pouco a pouco e com toda intrepidez, sua liberdade e responsabilidade por sua própria existência.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Infância; Autenticidade; Dasein; Martin Heidegger

INTRODUCTION

It is undeniable that, since the late nineteenth century, the phenomenon of childhood has been the focus of many scientific investigations, mainly with regard to Biology, Medicine, Psychology, Pedagogy and – most recently – Neuroscience. In fact, there have been all over the globe many relevant discoveries made so far by lots of researchers whose indefatigable and committed dedication we shall value here. Regardless of it, it seems like we are still struggling to get at least a glimpse of the vastly complex sort of existence we name childhood.

Considering the phenomenological approach Heidegger (GA2; 1962) presents in his *magnum opus Sein und Zeit* (*Being and Time*) about the ontological difference concerning our particular mode of being, we should be less presumptuous and more aware that it is utterly incoherent to keep talking about the children without taking into account that, as

any other of us, they are *Dasein*. In other words, we should receive and respect[2] their character of indetermined being-in-the-world (*in-der-Welt-sein*), even though such simple reception shall come with that bewilderment which not even the most expert in the field is able to get rid of.

This is because, usually, in our attempt to *explain* the 'logic' and 'universality' of the children's 'predictable' *behaviour*, we tend to believe that our traditional methods are accurate enough for it; and when we feel like we ought to foresee the children's conduct and manipulate it, we are tacitly inclined to presume that our scientific theories surely enable us to do so.

Against this obstinate technicism and inspired by Heidegger's hermeneutics, Loparic (2008) supports the necessary and urgent task of elaborating a non-objectifying science of human being, which reveals that, for being marked by temporality and historicity, humanity cannot be manufactured, and its constitution takes place in a non-objectifiable happening.

Actually, when it comes to childhood, we still find ourselves immersed in an abyssal mystery. What makes it even more difficult for us to unravel is the fact that the majority of the current researches about children remains based on merely technical, empirical and rational efforts to *define* their behaviour in terms of genetic, evolutional and psychological causality. In all her texts about Daseinsanalysis and childhood, Cytrynowicz (2018; 2000a; 2000b; 2005) insists in stating that the traditional scientific theories of human 'development' are nothing more than deterministic parameters that have been constituted as unconditioned and absolute truths. The most evident example of it is the Behaviourism introduced in the United States of America during the second half of the twentieth century and according to which human actions (including the children's) are simply mechanical responses to environmental stimuli.

And we can see nowadays that including Education has been turned into an instrument for controlling behaviours. Nascimento (2019, p. 110, our translation[3]) clearly denounces it when he writes:

> The imaginary which underlies the educational practices, for the most part, continues to be an imaginary of persuasion and, most of the time, as already expressed, a rational persuasion. As a no less pragmatic and far from surprising consequence, the effectiveness of this perspective of

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[2] The word 'respect' must be comprehended here in its etymological origin from the Latin word *respectus*, which literally means 'see' (*speciō*) 'again' (*re*).

[3] 'O imaginário subjacente às práticas educacionais, em sua grande maioria, continua a ser um imaginário da persuasão e, na maioria das vezes, como já expresso, uma persuasão racional. Como consequência não menos pragmática e nada surpreendente, a eficácia desta perspectiva de concepção educacional, em todas as suas esferas de atuação, se mensura, naturalmente, em mudanças comportamentais, verificáveis através de critérios 'objetivos''.

educational conception, in all its spheres of action, is naturally measured in changes of behaviours, verifiable through 'objective' criteria.

In confrontation with the ordinary naivety of what Heidegger (GA2, §26) characterises as '*das alltägliche Mitsein*' (the everyday being-with), we should be open to question: what is indeed the purpose of those scientific investigations? Exactly like Heidegger (1977) evidences in *The Question Concerning Technology*, they seek *control* over nature through the paths of technicism. That is what they look for, without even noticing it most of the times; they insist upon keeping their eyes on the entities themselves and, by doing so, they make impossible the task of disclosing the *being* of those entities. It means that those theories do not beware that their own understanding on childhood takes place in the oblivion of Being (*Seinsvergessenheit*).

> We keep ourselves constantly in such an understanding of Being. Our behaviour is taken and dominated by this – as we briefly say – comprehension of Being. We are so dominated by it, and so little do we realise it as such, that we do not properly pay attention to it, that we first have to be specifically reminded of what we take for obvious. We have forgotten it, so deeply forgotten that most of the times we have never thought of it. We begin our existence with such an oblivion of the comprehension of Being, and the more we open ourselves to the entities, the deeper becomes for the moment the forgetting of the one thing: that we understand Being in all openness to entities (HEIDEGGER, GA31, p. 42, our translation).[4]

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In the face of that, how can we *explain* the children's *behaviour* if we have not even asked about what *being* a child means? And how can we properly understand the children's *being* if we have not yet understood who *we ourselves are* beyond the limits of the classical definition: "rational animals (*animal rationale*)"? As interesting and practical as they may seem, all those scientific explanations just give us scarce and blurred indications of the children's *being* itself.

It happens due to the fact that our interpretations are still permeated by the traditional metaphysical thought, which according to Heidegger (GA8, p. 50) hardens '*das*

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[4] 'Wir halten uns ständig in einem solchen Verstehen des Seins. Unser Verhalten ist getragen und durchherrscht von diesem – wie wir kurz sagen – Seinsverständnis. So sehr sind wir davon durchherrscht und so wenig fällt es uns auf als solches, daß wir uns daran gar nicht eigens kehren, daß wir an dieses für uns Selbstverständliche erst eigens erinnert werden müssen. Wir haben es vergessen, so tief vergessen, daß wir zumeist noch nie daran gedacht haben. Wir beginnen unsere Existenz mit solcher *Vergessenheit des Seinsverständnisses,* und je mehr wir dem Seienden uns öffnen, umso tiefer wird zunächst das Vergessen des einen, daß wir in aller Offenheit für Seiendes Sein verstehen'.

eigentliche Wesen des Denkens' (the genuine essence of thinking). As 'good' scientists and technicians, we have forgotten our own childhood and started to reduce children to mere objects of our stubborn calculations and categorisations. We have objectified childhood by seeing it as just one more case of pure subsistence (*Vorhandenheit*) which, due to its unchangeable and constant substance (*essentia*), must be theorised and traduced into universal laws.

The supposed 'neutral' and 'disinterested' scientific attitude is, in truth, full of the most ambitious interest, namely: that of becoming masters of the entities, as Descartes (2006) once declared on behalf of Modernity. And even worse than that:

> Indeed, we come to treat ourselves in the very terms which underlie our technological refashioning of the world: no longer as conscious Cartesian subjects taking control of an objective world, but rather as one more resource to be optimized, ordered and enhanced with maximal efficiency – whether cosmetically, psychopharmacologically or *educationally* (THOMSON, 2001, p. 249-250).

At best, our theories of the child 'development' manage to achieve something about the children's *behaviour*, but nothing at all about their singular *being* as Dasein. In turn – and it could not be different by the way –, our children are learning how to *de-velop* in the most original sense of the term: they are not enveloped anymore, not involved; rather than blossoming like trees to their fullest, they become disengaged from their own existence; they become too rational and, therefore, inauthentic.

Is it not true that many of us try to make huge efforts in order to prevent children from facing any kind of frustrating situations as though it were somehow possible in our finite and limited existence? Is it not true that a lot of parents avoid the subject and do not help their children to accept difficulties, disabilities, casualties, conflicts, ambiguities and contradictions as though these should never be? Is it not true that some political organisations enthusiastically fight for the children's *rights* to such an extent that they end up neglecting the kids' freedom, responsibilities and duties? How about the kids who are asked to happily smile and sing a cheery song when experiencing a deeply sad moment? Not to mention those ones who are not allowed to say 'I am angry', 'I am jealous', 'I am afraid' or 'I do not like it'. We expect them to *behave* well all the time instead of *being* well. We are usually caught up in so much normativity the we cannot see 'misbehaving' as just a sign that a child is not *being* well.

After all, what do we mean by the expression 'not *being* well'? Certainly, it has something to do with *being*. The child *is*, but *not well*. What does this '*not well*' indicate here? It points to something that the child is lacking, some privation. What is it that children lack when they are *not being well*? It is their *own* being. And the adjective *own* is not highlighted here just on a whim. It is strictly related to what, in the second section of *Sein und Zeit*, more specifically in the §60, Heidegger (GA2; 1962) defends as '*das eigentliche*

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Seinkönnen' (the *own*most potentiality-for-being), i.e., the most genuine possibilities of Dasein, including the children.

> We see that, currently, the term childishness, which refers to the quality of what is childish, has been used in our society in a negative, pejorative sense, and thereby demarcating the disqualification of this transitory stage of human's life and the appreciation of a given maturity, seen as an ideal to be achieved. We can problematise here the use of this notion of maturity, of being mature or immature commonly used in reference to attitudes of children and teenagers. About a fruit, about the objective fact of its maturation, we can observe, normally by its colour, that it is ripe, but can we observe with the same objectivity the mode of being of a child and say that it is ripe/unripe? Is this not a value judgment constructed from the normative standards created by evolutionary approaches to development? (HALFELD; MATTAR, 2021, p. 07, our translation).[5]

Childhood must be carefully revisited. In this phenomenological work, we propose to do a little of it and show that, as any other Dasein, children who cannot deal with their *own* (unique) being cannot *be* themselves in their authenticity (*Eigentlichkeit*). The opposite is also worth taking into consideration: children who decide for their authentic disclosedness (*eigentliche Erschlossenheit*) are *being well*, i.e., they are being in '*die Wahrheit der Existenz'* (the truth of their existence) (HEIDEGGER, GA2, p. 293). In such a context, *well-being* means much more than its traditional and positive definition as a satisfactory and harmonious state. *Well-being* is a possibility of *being* who somebody authentically is without needing to flee from the limitations of their existence and the finitude of *Being* itself.

1 THE OWNMOST POTENTIALITY-FOR-BEING (*DAS EIGENTLICHE SEINKÖNNEN*) OF THE CHILD COMPREHENDED AS *DASEIN*

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[5] 'Vemos que, atualmente, o termo infantilidade, que se refere a qualidade daquilo que é infantil, vem sendo utilizado em nossa sociedade em um sentido negativo, pejorativo, e demarcando, com isso, a desqualificação desse estágio transitório da vida do homem e a valorização de uma dada maturidade, tida como ideal a ser alcançado. Podemos problematizar aqui a utilização dessa noção de maturidade, do ser maduro ou imaturo comumente utilizados em referência a atitudes de crianças e adolescente. Sobre uma fruta, sobre o fato objetivo de sua maturação, podemos observar, normalmente por sua cor, que ela está madura, mas podemos observar com a mesma objetividade o modo de ser de uma criança e afirmar que ela é madura/imatura? Não seria isso um julgamento de valor construído a partir dos padrões normativos criados pelas abordagens evolucionistas do desenvolvimento?'.

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Originally, the verb *behave* means 'have to be'. And it is important to distinguish here between who someone truly *is* and who someone *has to be*. In our quotidian existence (everydayness/*Alltäglichkeit*), talking about *behaviour* makes much sense. Because, in accordance with what Heidegger (GA2, p. 374) delineates as '*das öffentliche Miteinander*' (the public with-each-other) – or the '*Diktatur*' (dictatorship) of '*das Man*' (the They) (HEIDEGGER, GA2, p. 169) –, the behaviour is generally related to what we *have to be*. Due to its empirical (ontic) character, the behaviour can be objectively observable. For science, it is the most immediate and, hence, easier to reach. Furthermore, it is conditioned, predetermined, predictable and even measurable.

> It is not by chance that the Modern Era, fertilised by the Cartesian thought, becomes the era in which the sciences predominate, based on their methodological procedures, carrying out knowledge as an instrument of domination, manipulation, control and inflection towards previously visualised and stablished 'paths'. (NASCIMENTO, 2019, p. 74, our translation).[6]

Is it not what Watson (1924), one of the most known behaviourists, once said with no hesitation?

> Give me a dozen healthy infants, well-formed, and my own specified world to bring them up in and I'll guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might select - doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant-chief and, yes, even beggar-man and thief, regardless of his talents, penchants, tendencies, abilities, vocations and the race of his ancestors (WATSON, 1924, p. 104).

It discloses that, in pragmatic terms, focusing on the *behaviour* is still rather tempting. The irresistible urge to overtake the children's behaviour is nothing else than the refusal of our Dasein. Whilst genuine freedom and unpredictability are set aside, causality and unquestionable forecasts replace them, leading us to that soothing alienation regarding ourselves and therefore regarding the children as well.

When, years ago, scientific researchers finally tried to understand the children's behaviour by rescuing broader aspects of it, they just reproduced the traditional metaphysical concept of human as *animal rationale*. This was, for instance, the foundation of Constructivism. Since his most important representative, Piaget (1978), wanted to investigate the cognitive (rational) behaviour of children through the biological and evolutionary bias, Dasein (the historical existence as *being-in-the-world*), was once more

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[6] 'Não é à toa que a Época Moderna, fecundada pelo pensamento cartesiano, torna-se a época em que as ciências predominam, fundamentadas em seus procedimentos metodológicos, tomando o conhecimento como instrumento de dominação, manipulação, controle e inflexão para 'rumos' previamente visualizáveis e estabelecidos'.

neglected. The Genetic Epistemology ends up restricting children to stages of a linear intellectual 'development' based on the assimilation of a world separated from themselves.

> Heideggerian hermeneutics reveals that a subject does not assimilate a world, but it happens from a historical horizon, i.e., it is determined from possibilities already-given by the world in which it exists. Thus, there is not firstly a subject and then a world to be assimilated. As long as Dasein exists, it already exists in this historical world. Therefore, there is no way to think about adapting oneself to a world, nor about adaptive-evolution. (GILL, 2015, p. 102-103, our translation).[7]

Even more serious than that, Heidegger (GA9) makes it clear in his *Brief über den Humanismus (Letter on Humanism*) that, although the recent movement called Humanism took a significant step towards the being of *humanitas*, all its theories also presuppose the 'essence' of human as obvious and evident. Rogers (1995), a humanist who dedicated a considerable part of his work to the task of understanding childhood, stated that the child, as any other sort of living organism, has a fixed actualising tendency, a motivational force that keeps always there, no matter the environmental circumstances. By equating children with any other type of living organism, we have already forgotten their own *being* as Dasein.

Unfortunately, Freud (1920) just went with the flow when he presented his theory of the 'psychosexual development'. The behaviour moved by both 'unconscious' sexual and death drives (*Lebenstrieb-Eros/ Todestrieb-Thanatos*) has more to tell us about *Leben* (life) than about *humanitas*, and here we have got another explicit reduction of the child's being. In the second part (fourth chapter) of *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik* (The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics), Heidegger (GA29/30, §49-61) devoted some ontological attention to the danger of confusing our very being with *Organismus* (Organism). As similar as they seem, Dasein in its foundation is not *Leben* (life), the same way as life (animals, plants etc.) in its essence (*Wesen*) has nothing to do with the utility of handiness (*Zuhandenheit*) or the objectivity of subsistence (*Vorhandenheit*).

Given this scenario, questioning the children's mode of being as well as their possible authenticity implies a very new and challenging task. In their survey research,

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[7] 'A hermenêutica heideggeriana revela que um sujeito não assimila um mundo, mas ele acontece a partir de um horizonte histórico, ele se determina a partir de possibilidades já-dadas pelo mundo em que ele existe. Sendo assim, não há primeiro um sujeito e depois um mundo a ser assimilado. O ser-aí quando é, já é a partir deste mundo histórico. Não há, portanto, como pensar em adaptação de um mundo e, tampouco, em evolução-adaptativa.'.

Oliveira, Rosa and Freitas (2017) let us know how little research has been developed in the area of Phenomenology and childhood. However, in spite of the fact that there is no exhaustive discussion on the phenomenon of childhood in Heidegger's writings and lectures, it is possible to find there, based on a detailed reconstruction of his few statements about the child, a quite fruitful perspective to phenomenologically describe the meaning and experience of childhood.

We can find some directions in the §15 of his *Einleitung in die Philosophie* (Introduction to Philosophy), where Heidegger (GA27) refers to the being of children as *frühzeitliches Dasein* (early Dasein). In such intriguing work, he briefly warns us that, when reviewing some scientific researches, we must follow a meticulous *Daseinsanalysis*.

> Based on psychological, psychoanalytical, anthropological and ethnological research, today we have richer possibilities of visualising determined contexts of Dasein. Nevertheless, the facts and phenomena that are adduced from those investigations require a critical and fundamental revision as soon as they plead for essential [*wesentliche*] modes of Dasein. That revision must be guided by the following fundamental thesis: if regarding the Dasein of the child as well as regarding the Dasein of primitive peoples it is all about a human Dasein, an essentially historical character forms the base of this human Dasein, even if we do not recognise it easily (GA27, p. 124, our translation).[8]

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In the happening (*Geschehen*) that we are and which Heidegger (GA2, p. 493) describes as '*die Erstreckung des Daseins zwischen Geburt und Tod*' (the extension of Dasein between birthday and death), we exist as a being-in-the-world (*in-der-Welt-sein*). And forming world is far from *making* history. It is all about *being* historical. Because our historicality (*Geschichtlichkeit*) cannot be a product of our hands, but rather *who* we are. Our childhood is not an amount of good and bad experiences that we must leave behind. Childhood is always *who* we are in the whole extension (*Erstreckung*) of our being. In this sense, understanding the child's being is only possible when we embrace our own historicity and bring it back (*zurücknahmen*) in the authentic movement Heidegger (GA2, p. 408), in *Sein und Zeit*, names *Wiederholung* (reiteration). It denotes that, on the journey to discover the possible authenticity of the early Dasein, we are firstly supposed to find our own possible authenticity.

If we keep following Heidegger (GA27, §15), we can see that the child comprehended as Dasein is that happening (*Geschehen*) as expansion of possibilities. In

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[8] 'Aufgrund der psychologischen, psychoanalytischen, anthropologischen und ethnologischen Forschung haben wie heute reichere Möglichkeiten des Einblicks in bestimmte Zusammenhänge des Daseins. Aber die Tatsachen und Phänomene, die man aus diesen Forschungen beibringt, bedürfen eine grundsätzlichen kritischen Revision, sobald sie für wesentliche Arten von Dasein in Anspruch genommen warden. Diese Revision muß von der Grundthese geleitet sein, daß, wenn es sich beim kindlichen Dasein sowie beim Dasein primitiver Völker um ein menschliches Dasein handelt, ihm ein wesenhaft geschichtlicher Charakter zugrundeligt, auch wenn wir diesen nicht ohne weiteres erkennen'.

their '*Intentionalität*' (intentionality) (HEIDEGGER, GA27, p. 126), the children are already a being-in-the-world (*in-der-Welt-sein*), even though it sometimes looks like the opposite. The newborn babies' state of stillness (*Dämmerzustand*) does not mean that there is no relation to entities (*Verhältnis zum Seienden*). On the contrary, it only indicates that this *being related to…* does not have any particular purpose yet. The being-in-the-world along with other entities is still shrouded in mist. That is why newborn babies cannot make use of any entity alongside which they always find themselves.

However, proceeds Heidegger (GA27, p. 126, our translation.[9]), "…being pulled out of that state of stillness does not mean leaving the subjective sphere. Actually, the being-outside with… dissipates its mist, becomes clear, and the first sight happens in the clarity. The whereby emerges from Dasein. This is a merging of what was already previously there'. The already-there disclosedness of the early Dasein suddenly becomes clear to itself. As a matter of fact, only the being that is-always-already-in-the-world can remain quiet. Stones cannot stay still because they cannot form any world at all; '*der Stein (das Materielle) ist weltlos*' (the stone – the material – is without-world) (HEIDEGGER, GA29/30, p.263).

It is impressive how many researchers who study the children 'development' feel so easily inclined to accept the idea of a natural 'egocentrism' of pre-schoolers so emphasised by Piaget (1995) in his theory about the moral judgement of the child. According to it, smaller children reveal a natural inability to see situations from another person's point of view. At first glance – and in merely empirical and rational terms –, it results quite reasonable. But we shall question: is it fair to declare that children are naturally 'self-centred' when they are so originally *with* the others and 'mixed up' with them to such an extent that they do not even distinguish between themselves and those others? In their *ek-sistence*, children are so 'out' in-the-world that their comprehension must be the others, as well as the others' comprehension must be theirs. Otherwise, it would not be any way possible for very little kids to share a tear when they see someone crying or when something bad happens to their teddy or to a little ant.

When children are allowed to their ownmost potentiality-for-being, it is just a matter of time for them to realise by themselves – not rationally, but intuitively – that *being-with-others* is not the same as *being-the-others*. Nevertheless, this is something that not even some of us adults (late Dasein) are able to admit. Or is it not right that some of us strongly feel that the others must simply be a double of ourselves?

Sadly, we still underestimate childhood. By not seeing further than their *behaviour*, the current thought on children becomes blind to their *being*, and even blinder to their peculiar historicity and possible authenticity. The *being* of a child is not anymore received

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[9] 'Dem Dämmerzustand entrissen zu werden, heißt nicht, aus dem Subjektkreis hinausgehen, sondern das Draußensein bei… entwölkt sich, wird hell und in der Helle geschieht das erste Sehen. Das Wobei geht dem Dasein auf. Dies ist ein Aufgehen des zuvor schon Habens'.

as *παιδι*, which the ancient Greek understood as *passage*. But we must ask what kind of passage were they speaking of? Movement from childhood to adulthood? Movement from an incomplete human being to a complete one? Probably not. They were talking about the open and fluent movement from not-being to *being*, movement towards possibilities of *being*. And we dare to say here that authentic children are the purest disclosedness of the early Dasein – until they get most of the times too much absorbed by the They (*das Man*). Not to mention that, for Heidegger (GA2, p. 393), '*die Entschlossenheit ist ein ausgezeichneter Modus der Erschlossenheit des Daseins*' (the decision – proper to authenticity – is an excellent mode of the disclosedness of Dasein).

Based on this phenomenological approach, we are able to defend that, as any other Dasein, authentic children reveal such pure disclosedness. They show us their interests, feelings and imagination. They dream their *own* dream and play their *own* way. They laugh when happy and cry when sad. They talk about breath and also about death. They allow others to talk too. They ask many questions and know how to keep silent. They wait for the seed to grow. They are brave enough to listen to their bodies and modest enough to recognise their limits and weaknesses with serenity (*Gelassenheit*). They just move around and then sleep tight. They are questioners willing to learn new things and overcome challenges, even though it requires renounce, suffering, sorrow and some distaste. They spontaneously ignore, refuse or even hate what does not make any sense to them. This way, they are just *being* well. This is exactly what Heidegger (GA9, p. 188) so brilliantly tried to say about the essence of human freedom as *Sein-lassen* (letting be).

Establishing an interesting dialogue between Heidegger and the British paediatrician and psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott, Santos (2006) points out that, according to the latter, in his Theory of Personal Maturity, each one of us (including the children) unavoidably bring both a true and a false self. Extremely similar to what Heidegger (GA2, p. 439) called '*das uneigentliche Selbst*' (the inauthentic self), the false-self deprives us of authentic choices in the face of the threat of not being. On the other hand, impressively close to what Heidegger (GA2, p. 173) called '*das eigentliche Selbstsein*' (the authentic self), the true-self connects us to more spontaneous, creative and free ways of existence.

And when it comes to the early Dasein's freedom, the American philosopher Hatab (2000) reminds us that it is only partially supported by the social milieu. In the existential fight for discovering their most authentic possibilities, children, as any other Dasein, have to face a wide range of alternating elements that are ethically relevant to their happening (*Geschehen*) in a finite world.

> Alternations of pleasure and pain, satisfaction and frustration, gain and loss, success and failure, safety and risk, excitement and boredom, familiarity and strangeness. […] Such things as sharing, cooperating, turn-taking, reciprocity, fairness and respecting property. […] On a more effective level, children are continually exposed to ethical scenarios of

cruelty and kindness, hurting and helping, self-interest and empathy (HATAB, 2000, p. 68).

Inevitably thrown in those circumstances, children have no choice but to make choices. This is what they are doing all the time. If we think that they are like 'puppets' in our hands or completely determined by a biological, evolutional or psychological fate, we are still stuck in their *behaviour* and too far from their *being*; we are still refusing to see their true necessities, feelings, historicity and particularities in each case.

Making choices means that the early Dasein,

> [...] as comprehending, *can* understand *itself* either from the 'world' and the others or from its ownmost potentiality-for-being. The latter possibility says: Dasein reveals itself to itself in and as its ownmost potentiality-for-being. This *authentic* disclosedness shows the phenomenon of the most original truth in the mode of authenticity (GA2, p. 221, our translation).[10]

Here is the glade (*Lichtung*) where we can understand that considering the children as Dasein is in itself '*Destruktion*' (deconstruction) (HEIDEGGER, GA2, §6) of the traditional way we usually think of them. Children are not essentially kind, naïve or sincere. Not even naturally dishonest, cruel or aggressive. Children are pure disclosedness, and if they become kind, naïve or sincere, dishonest, cruel or aggressive, it depends exclusively on their choices as being-in-the-world.

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> [...] *Being able to*, being a *possibility for possibilities* (anguish), the human being can, each time, determine itself in one way or another, no matter if a child or an adult. [...] We initially tend to characterise the child as an angel or innocent. Such positioning already constitutes a specific way of relating to them. In the situation where the child is considered as an angel, completely good and innocent, we tend to consider that when they do not act satisfactorily, they have been corrupted by the environment. Taking the child as corruptible is based on the consideration that they are not freely constituted, and that they necessarily depend on the surrounding environment. In this understanding, the responsibility for the child's behaviour is transferred to the environment, stating, for example, that the environment was bad, the examples were not good, and the child was 'spoilt'. In this position, a quantitative, rational and deterministic

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[10] 'Dasein *kann sich* als verstehendes aus der "Welt" und den Anderen her verstehen oder aus seinem eigensten Seinkönnen. Die letztgenannte Möglichkeit besagt: das Dasein erschließt sich ihm selbst im eigensten und als eigenstes Seinkönnen. Diese *eigentliche* Erschlossenheit zeigt das Phänomen der ursprünglichsten Wahrheit im Modus der Eigentlichkeit'.

> progression is presumed between the environment and the child's existence, in such a way that anguish and freedom are completely abolished. We could think, on the other hand, that the child has always been naughty, i.e., they have got a bad nature and examples would do them no good at all, but only help them acquire strength to mock their parents. In this case, the possibility does not appear either. We could also think that the child was neither good nor bad, but became good or bad depending on the company and, in this case, they did not have the strength to establish their own criteria. (FEIJOO; PROTASIO; GILL, 2015, p. 136-137, our translation).[11]

Thus, we must come up with one more simple but not dispensable question: can children be inauthentic? If we are taking into account the early Dasein's *possibility* of authenticity, it necessarily demonstrates that the possibility of losing itself is also existentially possible. And there is nothing we can do about that. Differently from the children's *behaviour*, their *being* is never something that we can keep under our control. All our attempts to help them realise *their* – not ours or everybody else's – most authentic ways of being will be in vain if they do not come to a decision (*Entschlossenheit*) in favour of their *own* well-being. This is always something they have to choose by themselves.

However, we do not want to affirm here, by any means, that we must not encourage authenticity or even assist our kids in finding their *well-being*. Undoubtedly, the attitude of reckless, troublesome, careless, depressed or disengaged children indicates contexts of either excessive positivity or excessive negativity; contexts which we adults are responsible for. The both extremes of too much success or too much frustration may come along with radical actions that severely restricts the children's existence in the face of the task of discovering and fulfilling their ownmost potentiality-for-being.

Carers who only praise their children and constantly prevent them at all costs from painful experiences lack the honesty, which can help the early Dasein to open up to its most genuine possibilities and singularisation (*Vereinzelung*). The same we should say about physicians, psychologists and educators who categorically diagnose a child

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[11] '[...] *sendo capaz de*, sendo *possibilidade para as possibilidades* (angústia), o homem pode, a cada vez, se determinar de uma ou de outra maneira, sendo criança ou adulto. [...] Tende-se, inicialmente, a caracterizar a criança como anjo ou inocente. Tal posicionamento já se constitui em um modo específico de se relacionar com ela. Na situação em que a criança é considerada um anjo, completamente boa e inocente, tende-se a considerar que quando ela não age a contento, ela foi corrompida pelo meio. Tomar a criança como corruptível é a partir da consideração de que ela não se constitui livremente, e que depende, necessariamente, do meio circundante. Nesta compreensão a responsabilidade pelo comportamento da criança é transferida ao meio, afirmando-se, por exemplo, que o meio era ruim, os exemplos não eram bons, e a criança foi 'estragada'. Neste posicionamento assume-se uma progressão quantitativa, racional e determinística entre o meio e a existência da criança, de tal forma que a angústia e a liberdade ficam completamente abolidas. Poderíamos pensar, por outro lado, que a criança é, desde sempre, malcriada, ou seja, tem uma natureza ruim e de nada lhe adiantariam os exemplos, que só a ajudariam a adquirir força para zombar dos pais. Também neste caso não aparece a possibilidade. Poderíamos pensar, também, que a criança não era nem boa nem má, mas tornou-se boa ou má em função das companhias e, neste caso, não tinha forças para estabelecer seus próprios critérios.'.

according to manuals of 'mental disorders' without trying to see there a unique case of early Dasein. By doing so, they are not thinking about those 'mental' issues as '*das Verfallen des Daseins*' (HEIDEGGER, GA2, §38), the extreme existential decay of Dasein manifested in the inauthentic ways of being-in-the-world (*in-der-Welt-sein*).

That is why Azevedo (2015, p. 67) says that, as carers, we can 'take the child to a more open or authentic existence'.[12] But, as we mentioned in the introduction of this reflection, the children's *being* cannot follow a universal model; not even *Being* itself is universal, but plural. The first great thinkers such as Heclaritus had already had an intimate meeting with *Being* as variety instead of similarity, diverseness instead of sameness, incongruous instead of harmonious, conflicting instead of conforming.

We need to learn that "[...] when faced with a child, it is necessary not to define their degree of development by some signs that would allow them to fit into a certain stage, but to find their individual dynamism, i.e., their singularity and characteristics" (BARRETO, 2014, p. 22, our translation[13]). Sodelli and Glaser (2016, p. 71, our translation[14]) reinforce this idea by exposing that 'it is from these very subtle experiences with the other, especially with the carer, that this human being, in his incipient mode of being-in-the-world, will be favoured to constitute a meaning of time, space – of itself – as well as a meaning of world'. In this sense, we could tell that children are *Ereignis*, that particular manifestation of Being which Heidegger (GA65, p. 92) devotedly tried to apprehend in his late writings about '*die Seinsgeschichte*' (the history of Being).

Before finishing this reflection, we need to clarify that receiving the *Ereignis* of the early Dasein should not be compared to that sort of passive and contemplative attitude some theorists frequently adopt. Actually, in order to reach the revelation of the children's being and promote their authenticity, we must be there with them, guarding their being. Not like people who, as 'mature' adults, forsook their own childhood at some point along the 'linear stages' of human 'development'. Not like 'super-humans' who know more than the little ones. Not like mere observers, whose duty consists of keeping the kids underneath our domain. Just the opposite of it, we must stand there *for* them, involved, engaged, committed. Like another Dasein who still belongs to its childhood and, for that reason, cannot be indifferent towards the kids' experiences. Like warriors whose fight is to protect their being. After all, as Heidegger (GA9, p. 331) once said, each one of us, as Dasein, is nothing more than '*der Hirt des Seins*' (the shepherd of Being).

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[12] '[...] levar a criança a uma existência mais aberta ou autêntica'.

[13] '[...] diante de uma criança é preciso não definir seu grau de desenvolvimento por alguns sinais que permitiriam encaixá-la em algum estádio, mas encontrar seu dinamismo individual, ou seja, sua singularidade e características'.

[14] 'É a partir dessas experiências muito sutis com o outro, principalmente com o cuidador, que esse ser humano, em seu modo incipiente de estar no mundo, será favorecido a constituir um sentido de tempo, de espaço – de si mesmo – e um sentido de mundo.'.

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CONCLUSION

Despite its great efforts to understand childhood, it is more than evident that science (and Ethics as well) could not resist the charms and seductions of traditional metaphysics. The project of using technology and strict methodologies in order to solve all humankind's problems seems to have resulted in even more problems. Where have our children been? Locked in our flats as well as the residential areas and slums of the big cities; hidden behind mobile phones, tablets and computer screens; abandoned on the streets; alone with their dinner plate in front of the television; dissolved in the massive amount of information they are expected to deal with every single day.

Single day? Is that what we have just said? How come if the children's days look more like what Heidegger (GA2, p. 490) indicates as '*das ewig Gestrige*' (the 'everlasting yesterday') of the everyday occupations, whose monotony and repetition bring just the same and the same over again. Where is the adventurous disclosedness of childhood? Is it forgotten? Worse than that, it is forbidden, because, in comparison with the 'superior' and rationally 'civilised' world, childhood is most of the time considered as a bunch of frivolities, idleness and savageness. Being a child has been taken as a synonym for being inferior, fragile, foolish. Childhood has been seen by many of us as something we must feel ashamed of. And as soon as somebody *behaves* in a silly, unreasonable or annoying way, we promptly admonish: do not be so *childish*!

What happens? If not even children want to be children anymore, who will preserve the treasure of childhood? How can we deal with those feelings of inferiority and inadequacy which the great British writer Lewis (1982, p. 02) expressed about childhood in his essay *On Three Ways of Writing for Children*? There he comments that the modern critical world uses 'adult' as a term of approval. This world is hostile to what it calls 'nostalgia'. It disdains what it calls 'Peter Pantheism'. Subsequently, a man who admits that dwarfs, giants, talking creatures and witches are still dear to him in his fifty-third year is less likely to be praised for his perennial youth than scorned and pitied for 'restrained development'.

Does it have any correlation with what the French author Saint-Exupéry so accurately and poetically attested in his classical tale *Le Petit Prince* (The Little Prince) about childhood and its essence (*Wesen*)? While children are showing us a boa constrictor digesting an elephant, we, as grown-up people, insist in seeing just a hat. As though it were not enough, we straightaway persuade them to focus on more important matters such as Geography, History, Mathematics or Grammar.

The point is that, as long as we do not honestly confess that everything we know about childhood has been carried out in a particular historical context in which we are not yet assumed as the Dasein we are, any attempt to comprehend the child's particular ways of *being* will be fruitless. Distant from our ownmost potentiality-for-being, it will become even harder for us to freely think of and fight for the early Dasein's possible authenticity.

Perhaps, it would make much more sense if instead of asking a child 'How are you *doing*?' or 'How is it *going*?' we learnt to ask 'How are you *being*?' with the sincere

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openness, interest and preoccupation they deserve from us when it comes to their well-*being*.

Does it sound too much challenging? Of course, it is. However, it would be a significant and fertile beginning if we spent some more time in spontaneous dialogues with our kids at home. And paying some heed to the clues Machado (2013) gives us, we should recognise that, as adults, it is our responsibility to provide potential spaces for plays and games, rooms of shared beliefs and lots of paper folding craft. For sure, we will place bars on the windows because we know that literally kids do not fly. But, at the same time, we will allow some of the children's ways of flying such as jumps, somersaults and tyre swings on trees. What about singing and dancing with them in our classrooms? What if we listened to them in the parks or paid them a visit in our school playgrounds? Here is just an unpretentious invitation for *being* with them without fearing to discover and concretise the most authentic possibilities that belong to each one of us in our singularity.

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From behaving to being: the possible authenticity of the child as early *Dasein*