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## Introduction

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*“In the past, centuries ago, a man called himself ‘a thinking being’. Was he really a thinking being at that time? Certainly not. Nevertheless, he called himself this way and this word became his name. Why? Because, at that time, he discovered the charm and power of thinking. In that name he found rescue for himself and he saw his ideal (...). He believed that nothing is more dangerous to him than thoughtlessness. Everywhere where unhappiness is, thoughtlessness is also involved. This discovery marked the beginning of philosophy”.*

(Fr J. Tischner 2008: 9)

What is philosophy? If we look for the answer to this question in dictionaries and encyclopaedias, we will find that philosophy is “knowledge aiming to know the essence, structure and principles of being and thinking, and the most general laws governing the man, society and nature” (Kopaliński 1989: 171); or “the most general, fundamental, rational and critical knowledge of everything that exists” (Encyclopaedia published by PWN). However, if we look at the origin of the word itself, we will see that philosophy is simply the love of wisdom (Greek: philéō – “I love”; sophía – “wisdom”). i. e. the continuous pursuit of knowledge and truth; the search for answers to important questions, the critical consideration of important ideas and problems based on the willingness to understand the world and oneself, and one’s place in the world. Therefore, in this approach philosophy can be understood as the art of thinking, inquiring or philosophising. This makes it possible to avoid specialist disputes and considerations such as: Can a child be a philosopher? Isn’t philosophy a bit too difficult for children? And why teach philosophy to children if it is an impractical or even useless science (because who would want to hire a philosopher and what for)? Even in colloquial language the word “philosopher” has unpleasant connotations, as it refers to a big-headed know-all or a person who is awkward and unsuccessful in life.

However, as Maria Szczepska-Pustkowska emphasizes, the children's process of philosophizing is not about studying the biographies and views of particular philosophers or about considering the history of philosophical movements, i. e. about the philosophy we ourselves (fail to) remember and (anti-)experienced during our studies. Instead, such process is "about shaping the skills of critical and creative thinking (which is, after all, very important in the process of learning in general) and supporting children's self-reflexivity and self-development" (2009: 554). It is about introducing the art of thinking and arguing, of asking questions and finding multiple possible answers to them, of searching for knowledge and seeing gaps and uncertainties in it, of doubting and becoming aware of one's own doubts.

Children have a natural tendency to ask philosophical questions. Driven by curiosity and amazement, they explore phenomena that are obvious to adults, surprising their parents and teachers with the depth of their questions and inquisitiveness. The power of those children's amazements comes not from their knowledge or experience, but precisely from their lack of them. Children are not constrained by the knowledge of traditions and conventions, schools and philosophical doctrines, as a result of which they are often more non-standard, open-minded and flexible in their inquiries than many adults. "Activated by curiosity, surprise and doubt, the children's questioning attitude, oriented towards exploring, explaining and making sense of the world, is accompanied by spontaneity, freshness of perception and understanding, and imagination, which are important attributes of a child's way of experiencing the reality" (Szczepska-Pustkowska 2009: 554-555).

Why do children need philosophy? Why is it worth finding time for philosophical considerations with children in addition to or alongside the implementation of important areas of the core curriculum? Here, the answer is much simpler: in a modern, flickering and fast-moving world, in which knowledge is changing faster than education systems, we can no longer even imagine the reality that today's 6- or 7-year-old will have to face. Thus, we are not able to equip him or her with the proper knowledge and skills, but we can teach him or her what is the most important in independent knowledge acquisition and self-improvement: we can teach them to think. As Fr J. Tischner beautifully puts it, thinking "is a kind of spiritual force by which a man frees himself from illusions: the illusion of apparent knowledge and false certainty. Thinking does not foretell the future; it does not tell us about the invisible side of the world; it does not teach a man to control the elements of this earth. It cleans up the mess that everyday life makes of our heads" (2008: 11). And this is precisely why it is necessary to teach children (and ourselves) the art of thinking.

Enjoy reading!

## Bibliography

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