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peng, chih-wei
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# primal wonder as a sprout of intellectual virtue

chih-wei peng[1]
university of hawai'i, estados unidos da américa, honolulu
orcid id: 0000-0002-2135-4241

**abstract**
This paper argues that the concept of primal wonder in P4C, proposed by Thomas E. Jackson, can be seen as a "sprout" or seed of intellectual virtue. My understanding of his insight is inspired by Mengzi's view of moral cultivation and Aristotle's *eudaimonist* account of virtue ethics. According to Mengzi, all humans possess four innate sprouts of virtue, and the aim of moral education is to nurture these moral sprouts so that they can grow up into fully ripened virtues. In terms of P4C, Jackson contends that all of us are born already with a special feeling of wonder which he refers to as "primal wonder". Synthesizing his statement with Mengzi's agricultural metaphor of moral sprouts, I shall take one step forward by arguing that the innate sense of wonder within every child can be seen as a sprout of virtue. Additionally, once children's primal wonder has been transformed into a virtue through implementing P4C in the classroom, this admirable character trait, I suggest, should be understood as an intellectual virtue according to Aristotelian virtue ethics. This is because the virtue of wonder can promote children's intellectual flourishing, which is fully endorsed by Aristotle's contention that the happiest kind of life is a philosophical one, and that philosophy begins in wonder. In short, if primal wonder as a sprout of intellectual virtue can lead to the highest good for human beings, then one of the main educational goals of doing philosophy with children, I suggest, is to turn their primal wonder into a virtuous habit so that they can live an examined life.

**key words:** P4C; primal wonder; sprout of virtue; intellectual virtue.

## el asombro primigenio como un retoño de la virtud intelectual

**resumen**
Este trabajo de investigación sostiene que el concepto de asombro primigenio en la FpN, propuesto por Thomas E. Jackson, puede considerarse un retoño de virtud intelectual. Mi interpretación de este concepto se inspira en la visión de Mengzi sobre el cultivo moral y en el planteamiento eudaimonista de Aristóteles sobre la ética de la virtud. Según Mengzi, todos los seres humanos poseen cuatro retoños innatos de virtud, y el objetivo de la educación moral es cultivar estos retoños morales para que puedan crecer hasta convertirse en virtudes plenamente maduras. En términos de FpN, Jackson sostiene que todos nacemos ya con un sentimiento especial de asombro al que se refiere como "asombro primigenio". Sintetizando su afirmación con la metáfora agrícola de los retoños morales de Mengzi, daré un paso más argumentando que el sentimiento innato de asombro dentro de cada niño puede ser visto como un retoño de virtud. Además, una vez que el asombro primigenio de los niños se ha transformado en virtud mediante la aplicación de la FpN en el aula, este admirable rasgo de carácter, sugiero, debería entenderse como una virtud intelectual según la ética aristotélica de la virtud. Esto se debe a que la virtud del asombro puede promover el florecimiento intelectual de los niños, que está plenamente respaldado por las afirmaciones de Aristóteles de que el tipo de vida más feliz es ser filósofo y que la filosofía comienza en el asombro. En resumen, si el asombro primigenio como retoño de virtud intelectual puede conducir al mayor bien para los seres humanos, entonces uno de los principales objetivos educativos de hacer filosofía con niños, sugiero, es convertir su asombro primigenio en un hábito virtuoso para que puedan vivir una vida examinada.

[1] E-mail: cwpeng@hawaii.edu

primal wonder as a sprout of intellectual virtue

**palabras clave:** FpN; asombro primigenio; retoño de virtud; virtud intelectual.

**maravilhamento primeiro como um broto de virtude intelectual**

**resumo**
Este trabalho de investigação defende que o conceito de Maravilhamento Primeiro (*primal wonder*) na FpC, proposto por Thomas E. Jackson, pode ser considerado o desabrochar da virtude intelectual. Minha interpretação desse conceito foi inspirada pela visão de cultivação moral de Mengzi e pelos relatos eudaimonistas de virtudes éticas, de Aristóteles. De acordo com Mengzi, os seres humanos possuem quatro brotos inatos de virtude, e o objetivo da educação moral é nutrir esses brotos de moralidade para que cresçam e se tornem virtudes amadurecidas. Em termos de FpC, Jackson afirma que todos nós nascemos com um sentimento especial de maravilhamento, ao qual ele se refere como "maravilhamento primeiro". Sintetizando essa afirmação à metáfora agrícola de brotos morais de Mengzi, posso dar um passo à frente e argumentar que esse maravilhamento inato a cada criança pode ser visto como o desabrochar da virtude. Além disso, uma vez que o maravilhamento primeiro das crianças tem sido transformado em virtude através da implementação da FpC em sala de aula, esse admirável traço de caráter, eu sugiro, deve ser compreendido como uma virtude intelectual, de acordo com as virtudes éticas aristotélicas. Isso porque a virtude do maravilhamento pode promover o florescimento intelectual das crianças, o que é totalmente endossado pelas afirmações de Aristóteles de que o tipo mais feliz de vida é ser um filósofo e que a filosofia começa no maravilhar-se. Em resumo, se o maravilhamento primeiro como um broto de virtude intelectual pode levar ao bem maior para os seres humanos, então um dos principais objetivos educacionais de fazer filosofia com crianças, eu sugiro, é transformar seu maravilhamento primeiro em um hábito virtuoso para que elas possam viver uma vida examinada.

**palavras-chave:** FpC; maravilhamento primeiro; broto de virtude; virtude intelectual.

primal wonder as a sprout of intellectual virtue

***introduction***

This research paper argues that the concept of primal wonder, proposed by Thomas E. Jackson[2] and grounded in his lifelong commitment to Philosophy for Children (P4C),[3] can be seen as a sprout of intellectual virtue. My understanding of this inborn, pre-cultural, pre-linguistic, and emotional wonder that led humanity to philosophy is inspired by Mengzi's (孟子) agricultural metaphor of moral cultivation and Aristotle's *eudaimonist* account of virtue ethics, even though both thinkers do not think of wonder as a virtue and Jackson's idea is not directly derived from their works.[4] The objective of my interpretation is twofold: first, to extend and enrich the concept of primal wonder; and second, to offer an alternative internal educational goal of P4C, which is to preserve children's primal wonder and nurture its growth into intellectual virtue.[5]

According to Mengzi's work,[6] all humans possess four innate sprouts (端 *duan*) of virtue: a heart of pain and compassion (惻隱 *ce yin*), a heart of shame and aversion (羞惡 *xiu wu*), a heart of declining and yielding (辭讓 *ci rang*) and a heart of approval and disapproval (是非 *shi fei*). From this standpoint, the aim of moral education is to nurture these four inherent moral senses so that they can grow up

[2] Thomas E. Jackson, widely known by his nickname of "Dr J," is the founder of the philosophy for children Hawaii (p4cHI) movement and currently serves as an executive director of the University of Hawaii Uehiro Academy for Philosophy and Ethics in Education.

[3] In this paper, I use the term "Philosophy for Children" and its acronym "P4C" to refer to a general education movement, rather than a specific theory or practice in the field.

[4] Although Jackson has never mentioned Aristotle or Mengzi in his explanation of the concept of primal wonder in his articles or during our personal interactions, it is still plausible that his idea is influenced by them. This is particularly likely given that his entire academic career has been spent in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, which is well-known for its emphasis on comparative philosophy. Regardless, if there are any issues to correct in this paper, I take full responsibility for interpreting primal wonder as a sprout of intellectual virtue.

[5] As per Anastasia Anderson's distinction, there are two types of the educational goals in P4C: internal and external. The internal goals are directly relevant to the practice of philosophy, such as cultivating intellectual virtues and fostering wisdom. The external goals aim to have an impact outside of philosophy, such as improving reading ability and achieving higher test scores in math. Since preserving children's primal wonder and nurturing its growth are directly related to philosophical inquiry, this educational goal of P4C should be classified as internal. For a thorough discussion of the distinction between the internal and external educational goals of P4C and its associated issues, see Anderson's "Categories of Goals in Philosophy for Children," pp. 611-613.

[6] Mengzi (孟子 372-289 BCE), also known by his latinized name, Mencius, was one of the most important early Confucian thinkers. Our primary source of understanding his thoughts is through the eponymous collection of his dialogues, debates, and sayings, the *Mengzi*.

into fully ripened virtues. In terms of P4C, Jackson contends that all of us are born already with the essential prerequisite of doing philosophy: a special feeling of wonder which he refers to as "primal wonder." Synthesizing his statement with Mengzi's agricultural metaphor of moral sprouts, I shall take one step forward by arguing that the innate sense of wonder which is vulnerable to being lost can be seen as a sprout of virtue. If my argument is persuasive, then the primary role of the facilitator (or teacher) when implementing P4C in the classroom is to carefully nurture children's primal wonder, making the virtue of wonder blossom within them.

Additionally, once children's primal wonder has been transformed into a virtue through habitual but spontaneous activities (such as making a community ball, doing Plain Vanilla inquiries, and using the Good Thinkers' Tool Kit in p4c Hawaii sessions), this admirable character trait, I suggest, should be understood as an intellectual virtue according to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.[7] This is because the virtue of wonder, as the cornerstone of theoretical wisdom (*sophia*), can promote children's intellectual flourishing, which is fully endorsed by Aristotle's contentions that the happiest kind of life is to be a philosopher and that philosophy begins in wonder. Although Aristotle recognizes the importance of the feeling of wonder to the philosophical life, he does not seem to be aware that it needs to be nurtured. Empirical evidence suggests that, if education, broadly construed, does not take good care of children's primal wonder, their fragile "sprout" of wonder will gradually wither away, let alone the cultivation of the virtue of wonder.

In short, if primal wonder as a sprout of intellectual virtue can lead to the highest good for human beings, then one of the main educational goals of doing philosophy with children, I suggest, is to turn their primal wonder into a virtuous habit so that their minds can ceaselessly contemplate the world they live in with no restrictions, which is not only essential for original ideas to take shape but also crucial for having a meaningful and joyful human life.

## *primal wonder*

[7] Aristotle (384-322 BCE) was a prominent figure in ancient Greek philosophy. The *Nicomachean Ethics* is his most famous work on ethics.

In *Metaphysics* 982b, Aristotle states that "it was because of wonder that men both now and originally began to philosophize. To begin with, they wondered at those puzzles that were to hand, such as about the affections of the moon and events connected with the sun and the stars and about the origins of the universe."[8] The meaning of this statement is that we humans are amazed but at the same time puzzled by the world we inhabit; therefore, we wonder or start doing philosophy to escape from our ignorance (*Metaphysics* 982b). To put it another way, we human beings, as Martin Heidegger's phenomenological description of *Dasein* (literally, being there), always find ourselves in a unique circumstance, "a having-been-thrown into the world" (Wheeler, 2011, p. 34). It is this thrownness (*Geworfenheit*), the accidental nature of human existence, that causes the Presocratic philosophers to wonder what the most fundamental stuff of the universe is, Siddhartha Gautama (the founder of Buddhism who later became known as the Buddha) to inquire why we suffer, and early Daoist thinkers to ponder how to live a good life according to their understanding of the ultimate reality, *dao* (道). In general, we humans want to know why we came to this world and why the world looks the way it does. Seen from this angle, perhaps we can say that the primary mode of human existence is wondering.

Although Plato, through the character of Socrates, insists that wonder is the feeling of a philosopher (*Theaetetus* 155d), this cognitive feeling is not at all unique to a philosopher. In retrospect, nearly all of us can recall that when we were very young, we asked so many fundamental questions about the world and even ourselves. For those working with children, especially doing philosophy with them, they can undoubtedly confirm that the sense of wonder exists in almost every kid. From my own experience,[9] the children can raise many big questions such as: "What happens after we die?" "Can computers think?" "How do I know the person I met is not a robot? "Is God real? Through recalling our childhood memories and interacting with children, we discover that the feeling of wonder is deeply embedded within

[8] In *Theaetetus* 155d, Plato in the mouth of Socrates says exactly the same thing: "For this is an experience which is characteristic of a philosopher, this wondering: this is where philosophy begins and nowhere else."

[9] As a "philosopher in residence" (a facilitator of philosophical dialogue and inquiry with children), I have closely worked with Staci Fong of Waikiki Elementary School and Thomas Yos (Toby) of the Uehiro Academy for Philosophy and Ethics in Education to do P4C online during the COVID-19 pandemic for more than one year.

human beings.

But when does our emotional wonder emerge for the very first time? Thomas E. Jackson suggests that it arises at birth and calls this inborn, cognitive feeling "primal wonder." His belief is based on his presence at his son's birth in the delivery room; he watched his son open his eyes for the first time and start to look around his surroundings and later came to realize "a *profound sense of wonder* in his gaze: wide open, taking in this, whatever it was, that was presenting itself to him for the first time" (Jackson, 2019, p. 1).

Although Jackson may need some neuroscientific evidence or psychological research to support his interpretation of his son's behavior,[10] his usage of the word "primal" to describe the sense of wonder, I think, correctly expresses the fact that there is a period of childhood, roughly from preschool to grade three, during which the young children are not yet attached to any one view and hence actively wonder about whatever they encounter (Jackson, 2019, p. 1). For this reason, Jackson claims that primal wonder is pre-cultural (2019, p. 8).[11] That is to say, before viewing their own culture as preferable and using it as an authority to interpret the world or even as standard to judge other cultures, the young children embrace "many possible alternative ways of 'making meaning' of the world they have just entered" (Jackson, 2019, p. 9). Phenomenologically, there is no need for the young children to practice the *epoche*, to suspend their beliefs or prejudices, in order to open up their minds since they completely immerse themselves in the feeling of wonder (Jackson, 2019, p. 8).

One of the advantages of adopting Jackson's concept of primal wonder is that it could settle the long-standing debate in P4C about whether young children, roughly those about ten years of age, are capable of doing philosophy. According to Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development, the young children have not reached the formal operational stage, a period between approximately age twelve and adulthood when the adolescents develop the ability to think abstractly and

[10] There is evidence that newborn babies have not yet developed the ability to focus their eyes even though they can see. If wondering at an object requires giving attention to it, as Kevin Patrick Tobia suggests (2015, p. 5-7), newborn babies probably cannot wonder.

[11] Jackson even suggests that primal wonder is pre-linguistic (Jackson, 2019, p. 19), but he does not provide any arguments to support this assertion.

systematically.[12] Since the ability to engage in purely abstract thought, such as to understand Kant's categorical imperative and Hume's constant conjunction and then to critically evaluate them, is a necessary condition for thinking philosophically, young children cannot do philosophy. In Piaget's own words, "It goes without saying that the child does not actually work out any philosophy, properly speaking, seeing that he never seeks to codify his reflections in anything like a system" (p. 377). If Piaget is right about children's mental development, what could be called "children's philosophies" are their unconnected and incoherent spontaneous remarks regarding the origin of the universe, the problem of evil, the meaning of life, etc.

On the other hand, Gareth Matthews and other P4C pioneers insist that Piaget's cognitive developmental psychology is mistaken on empirical ground; he failed to see that philosophical thinking had been demonstrated in the young children he worked with. If we are willing to take the weird-seeming questions the children ask seriously, it is not difficult to find out that they, at their root, are philosophers. Consider the following example of a very young child's philosophical puzzlement recorded by Matthews (1980, p. 2):

> JORDAN (five years), going to bed at eight one evening, asked, "If I go to bed at eight and get up at seven in the morning, how do I really know that the little hand of the clock has gone around only once? Do I have to stay up all night to watch it? If I look away even for a short time, maybe the small hand will go around twice."

For those who are familiar with British empiricism, Jordan's wonder will probably remind them of George Berkeley's famous phrase, "to be is to be perceived" (*esse est percipi*) (Downing, 2021). The above example and numerous others lead P4C educators to disagree with Piaget.

Nevertheless, Richard F. Kitchener argues that P4C enthusiasts often have no clear notion of what doing philosophy is and confuse doing philosophy with thinking critically (1990, p. 416). What he is trying to warn them is that teaching critical thinking skills to the children does not mean that the children are taught to do philosophy. To do philosophy, one must not only be able to think critically but

[12] Piaget's theory of cognitive development suggests that children go through four separate stages of mental development: sensorimotor stage (birth to 2 years), preoperational stage (2-7 years), concrete operational stage (7-11 years) and formal operational stage (12 years and above). And it is said that during the final stage teenagers begin to think more about philosophical issues.

also to think abstractly and to learn a philosophical way of life, that is, to "be engaged in … *critical thinking about a philosophical issue*, e.g., free will-determinism, the existence of God, ethical relativism, the mind-body problem, etc." (Kitchener, 1990, p. 425). It is obvious that young children are not ready to dive deeper into the basic and thorny philosophical issues, not to mention living a philosophical life. In sum, Kitchener thinks that Piaget's position on P4C is fundamentally correct.

Basically, the concept of primal wonder does not contradict Piaget's theory of cognitive development since Jackson does not assert that children can do philosophy. What he merely says is that "[w]e are, each of us, born already with the essential prerequisite for philosophy: a special wonder …] (Jackson, 2019, p. 8). Jackson's emphasis on the importance of primal wonder, I suggest, is better viewed as holding the position that children have the *potential to do* philosophy or to live a philosophical life.

Furthermore, the debate about whether young children are in fact doing philosophy, as Jackson points out, depends on "What is meant by philosophy?" (Jackson, 2019, p. 8). If philosophy connotes the study of the canonical texts written by great thinkers, which Jackson calls "Big P" philosophy, young children are not typically able to do philosophy (and perhaps they should not). In contrast, if philosophy refers to our natural disposition to wonder in order to make sense of the world we live in, which Jackson calls "little p" philosophy, then children are inborn philosophers. Here what Jackson stresses is that young children have inherent capability, primal wonder, to do "little p" philosophy rather than "Big P" philosophy.[13]

Moreover, Jackson's realization of P4C as doing "little p" philosophy with children perhaps can be seen as a *reverse* paradigm shift; it shifts "the center of gravity" of philosophy from established or even dogmatic ideas and theories proposed by academic philosophers to its origin, primal wonder, which is directly related to our own experiences, inquires, thoughts, and reflections (Makaiau & Miller, 2012, p. 10). In short, if philosophy begins in wonder and we humans do possess the feeling of primal wonder, the endless debate about whether young

[13] For a more detailed explanation of the distinction between "little p" philosophy and "Big P" philosophy, see Amber Strong Makaiau and Chad Miller's article, "The Philosopher's Pedagogy" (p. 9-10), and watch the video, "Dr. Thomas Jackson on p/Philosophy," available on youtube.

children are capable of thinking philosophically can be resolved by accepting the proposition that they can do "little p" philosophy.[14]

Based on Jackson's concept of primal wonder, in the rest of the paper I am going to take one step further by arguing that this inborn sense of wonder can be regarded as a sprout of intellectual virtue. The purpose is to tentatively answer another fundamental question in P4C: Why should we do philosophy, or "little p" philosophy, with children?

***primal wonder as a sprout of virtue***

My understanding of primal wonder as a sprout of virtue is inspired by the Confucian philosopher Mengzi's moral psychology. In *Mengzi* 2A6, he mentions that all humans possess the four beginnings or sprouts (端 *duan*) of virtue: a heart of pain and compassion (惻隱 *ce yin*), a heart of shame and aversion (羞惡 *xiu wu*), a heart of declining and yielding (辭讓 *ci rang*) and a heart of approval and disapproval (是非 *shi fei*). All of these moral senses, Mengzi believes, are innate and do not require learning. When triggered in a particular circumstance, the moral agent is motivated to act solely for the sake of morality and not for any other reason. Consider the example of the feeling of pain and compassion illustrated in *Mengzi* 2A6:

> Suppose someone suddenly saw a child about to fall into a well: anyone in such a situation would have a feeling of alarm and compassion—not because one sought to get in good with the child's parents, not because one wanted fame among one's neighbors and friends, and not because one would dislike the sound of the child's cries.[15]
> 今人乍見孺子將入於井，皆有怵惕惻隱之心。非所以內交於孺子之父母也，非所以要譽於鄉黨朋友也，非惡其聲而然也。[16]

According to Mengzi, this spontaneously responsive feeling of not bearing harm to a child, or even other sentient beings,[17] is our natural disposition (性 *xing*). Without this moral sense, say, or any of the others, one is not a human being (*Mengzi* 2A6).[18]

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[14] In fact, Kitchener does not completely deny that the children can think philosophically. By making the distinction between "concrete philosophy" and "abstract philosophy" as what Jackson does, he admits that the children of a certain age can do "concrete philosophy" (1990, p. 430).
[15] I use Bryan W. Van Norden's translation of the *Mengzi* with slight modification in this paper.
[16] For the Chinese texts, I follow the Chinese Text Project.
[17] The ox example in *Mengzi* 1A7 supports this extension.
[18] Here, it is worth noticing that Mengzi does not claim that human nature is good although this belief is deeply ingrained in the classical Confucian tradition. The difficulty with the traditional

But the fact that humans are born with the four sprouts of virtue does not imply that we can automatically become virtuous individuals. Without appropriately nurturing our four moral feelings in order to turn them into the Confucian virtues of benevolence (仁), rightness (義), ritual propriety (禮), and wisdom (智) respectively, they may only arise sporadically and inconsistently. For instance, King Xuan of Qi (齊宣王) is said to have spontaneously showed his compassion for an ox being led to a ritual sacrifice by sparing it, but completely neglected the suffering of his own subjects (*Mengzi* 1A7). Thus, to make our inborn moral senses become genuine virtues, we need moral education.

As for the reason some people seem to be devoid of compassion, shame, or other moral senses, Mengzi's view is well illustrated in his famous metaphor of "Ox Mountain." Here is what he says:

> The trees of Ox Mountain were once beautiful. But because it bordered on a large state, hatchets and axes besieged it. Could it remain verdant? Due to the respite it got during the day or night, and the moisture of rain and dew, it is not the case that there were no sprouts and shoots growing there. But oxen and sheep came and grazed on them. Hence, it was as if it were barren. Seeing it barren, people believed that there had never been any timber there. But could this be the nature of the mountain? When we consider what is present in people, could they truly lack the hearts of benevolence and rightness? The way that they discard their genuine hearts is like the hatchets and axes in relation to the trees. With them besieging it day by day, can it remain beautiful? (*Mengzi* 6A8)
> 牛山之木嘗美矣, 以其郊於大國也, 斧斤伐之, 可以為美乎？是其日夜之所息, 雨露之所潤, 非無萌蘖之生焉, 牛羊又從而牧之, 是以若彼濯濯也。人見其濯濯也, 以為未嘗有材焉, 此豈山之性也哉？雖存乎人者, 豈無仁義之心哉？其所以放其良心者, 亦猶斧斤之於木也, 旦旦而伐之, 可以為美乎？

In this passage, the Ox Mountain is a metaphor for the absolutely immoral person who has never cared about the sufferings of others and felt guilty about doing something morally wrong. But, just as the baldness of the Ox Mountain does not define the nature of the mountain, that a person becomes totally evil does not show that he is inherently bad. His vices and misconduct, from Mengzi's perspective, are due to the unfortunate fact that his sprouts of virtue have been eradicated by some external forces, such as political, economic, and socio-cultural

interpretation is that if humans are inherently good, then Mengzi's emphasis on the importance of moral cultivation and self-improvement does not make any sense. A better interpretation of his position on human nature, I suggest, is that with the inborn four sprouts of virtue, human beings tend toward goodness.

influences, just as the environmental degradation on the Ox Mountain is because of deforestation and overgrazing. If the metaphor here is convincing, the top priority of the moral educator is to create a positive and healthy learning environment so that the moral disciple's sprouts of virtue can grow naturally. It is for this reason that Mengzi's mother, a widow, moved three times before finding the ideal neighborhood next to a school so that her young boy had a good educational environment and got a chance to turn his moral senses into ripened virtues.[19]

By the same token, the metaphor of Ox Mountain, I suggest, can be applied to primal wonder. No one lacks the sense of wonder; nevertheless, just as what happened to the Ox Mountain, when young children are starting school, their special feeling of engaging and being in the world will be ceaselessly uprooted by our current education system, which is built on the Industrial Revolution model and focuses on rote learning and standardized testing. Primal wonder, from this point of view, is just like a sprout of virtue; without creating a healthy learning environment to make it grow, it will be gone.

Regarding how to provide an appropriate environment for the survival and growth of primal wonder, Jackson tirelessly reiterates the importance of "intellectual safety" for doing P4C.[20] He found that in today's education system all of us, including parents, teachers, administrators and even gradually our children, are in a rush to get somewhere—to get kids to do extracurricular activities after school, to cover a large amount of material in just one lecture, to boost kids' test scores, to be sure "No Child is Left Behind," on and on. By the time students go to college, the

[19] According to the *Biographies of Exemplary Women* (列女傳 *lie nu zhuan*) complied by the Han dynasty Confucian scholar Liu Xiang (劉向 77–6 BCE), Mengzi and his mother at the very beginning lived near to a cemetery when he was little. Due to this neighborhood environment, Mengzi enjoyed playing among the graves such as making tombs and performing burials. Mengzi's mother thought that this was not a good place to raise her son. So, they moved away and lived near a market. But when Mengzi's mother found that her little boy started amusing himself by pretending to be a merchant, they moved away again. Eventually, they settled beside a school, and Mengzi started playing at arranging sacrificial vessels and the rituals of bowing, yielding, entering and withdrawing. At this time Mengzi's mother was satisfied and said, "This is the proper place for my son." Although the story of "Mengzi's Mother Moved Three Times" (孟母三遷 *meng mu san qian*) implies occupational discrimination, it clearly demonstrates that having a good environment is crucial to children's moral development according to Mengzi's moral psychology.

[20] As for what counts as "intellectual safety" in p4c Hawaii, I adopt Ashby Butnor's (2012) position: "Intellectual safety … should not be understood as feeling comfortable. Rather, it should be conceived as a feeling of trust in oneself and one's community to honestly and genuinely engage in thinking together" (p. 31). For more details, see her article, "Critical Communities: Intellectual Safety and the Power of Disagreement."

questions they wonder about have tended to be "prosaic and utilitarian," such as "Will this be on the test?" or "How do I get an 'A' in this class?" (Jackson, 2004, p. 4).

The antidote Jackson prescribes to this omnipresence of the rush mindset to get somewhere in our current education system is to build a *pu'uhonua* (a place of refuge)[21] in which our children have no need to pretend they understand something even though they do not, or to pretend they are interested in a subject they actually dislike, or to feel an obligation to actively participate in classroom discussions especially when they are not in a good mood or too shy to speak up, or to be afraid of getting the wrong answer (Jackson, 2004, p. 5). In such a refuge or commonly called an intellectually safe community of inquiry in p4c Hawaii, the only precept the P4C facilitator and practitioner must hold firmly is that: "We're not in a Rush." "If we are not in a rush," Jackson says, "we will soon be in awe of the things children wonder about and the questions that flow from this wonder" (Jackson, 2004, p. 4). To put it another way, once we create an intellectually safe space to let children's primal wonder grow without being in a rush, they naturally overflow with questions and their philosophical inquiries could "scratch beneath the surface." The idea behind this P4C maxim, "Don't be in a Rush," is that "philosophy," as John Campbell well puts, "is thinking in slow motion"; doing philosophy, including "little p" philosophy and "Big P" philosophy, in general really takes our time to think about what is going on in the world instead of rushing through life without questioning what we believe.

Nevertheless, it does not mean that, once an intellectually safe community of inquiry has been established, there is nothing left to do. Children still need an adult to serve as a facilitator or "gardener" to gently nurture their fragile sprout of wonder. As Rachel Carson (1965) says, "If a child is to keep alive his inborn sense of wonder … he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement, and mystery of the world we live in" (p. 45). As for how to exactly help children's primal wonder blossom into a virtue, p4c Hawaii has invented very pragmatic activities, such as making a community ball on

[21] A *pu'uhonua* is a place of refuge where ancient Hawaiians fled for safety after breaking their social norms, *kapu*. These Hawaiian norms were strictly enforced; breaking one often resulted in the death penalty.

the first few days of P4C class,[22] doing Plain Vanilla philosophical inquiries,[23] using the Good Thinker's ToolKit,[24] and doing the evaluation at the end of each P4C session. Through doing these activities repeatedly as rituals, primal wonder will gradually turn into a habitual and firm disposition to think philosophically.

Here we can see that cultivating the virtue of wonder is like learning a new skill. Let's say we all have the capacity to learn to play the ukulele, but only some people put a lot of time and effort into practicing and thereby develop the skill. Similarly, while all children possess primal wonder, only some of them are lucky enough to get a chance to practice and thereby to turn their inborn talent into thinking skills. This understanding of primal wonder leads us to one important answer to the question, "Why should we do 'little p' philosophy with children?" Now we can say that children need an intellectually safe community of inquiry to practice philosophy as a way of life so that their primal wonder can fully develop into an excellent character trait.

***wonder as an intellectual virtue***

But what is the value of preserving children's primal wonder and turning it into the virtue of wonder? In this final section, I argue that once a sprout of wonder has blossomed into a virtue, this habitual disposition plays an important role in human flourishing and should be seen as an intellectual virtue according to Aristotle's notion of *eudaimonia*.

In Book I of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle contends that the highest goal of human life is to achieve *eudaimonia* (commonly translated as happiness, well-being, or flourishing), the only human good we pursue for its own sake rather than for the

[22] The community ball is an instructional tool that is used to mediate turn taking during P4C classroom discussion and inquiry. For a detailed explanation of it, see "Community Ball" at p4chawaii.org/resources/glossary/.

[23] "Plain Vanilla" is a strategy for organizing P4C classroom discussion, dialogue, and inquiry. For a detailed explanation of it, see "Plain Vanilla" at p4chawaii.org/resources/glossary/.

[24] The "Good Thinker's Toolkit" invented by Jackson is composed of seven indicators for critical thinking. They are:
**W**: What do you mean by that?
**R**: What are the reasons?
**A**: What is being assumed? Or what can I assume?
**I**: Can I infer x from y? Or where are there inferences being made?
**T**: Is what is being said true and what does it imply if it is true?
**E**: Are there any examples to prove what is being said?
**C**: Are there any counter-examples to disprove what is being said?

sake of something else (1097a25-36). Compared with many things we choose, such as wealth, health, fame, power, etc., which are said to be incomplete due to the fact that they are sought as a means toward some other end, Aristotle argues that *eudaimonia,* as the ultimate end, must be something complete and self-sufficient since it is the only thing that we pursue not for the sake of something else (1097b21). As for how to achieve *eudaimonia* or obtain the "best, finest, and most pleasant" thing in the world (1099a25), Aristotle's answer is to cultivate virtues since "*eudaimonia* is a certain sort of activity of the soul in accord with complete virtues" (1102a5-6). Additionally, according to his function argument that a thing is good if and only if it demonstrates its function (*ergon*) well,[25] Aristotle believes that the *eudaimon* life as one of virtuous activity must comply with reason well since the unique human function is to reason (1097b22-1098a22).

Based on the above analysis of *eudaimonia*, Aristotle further claims that the happiest kind of life is the philosophical life, a life devoted to *theoria* (contemplative study)[26] (Kraut, 2018, p. 44). In such a life, someone has devoted herself as much as possible to contemplation and has finally come to a full understanding of how the world works. Since doing philosophy "aims at no end apart from itself, and has its own pleasure," Aristotle believes that it is superior to any other activities, such as recreational and political activities (1177b20-24).

Regarding how to live a philosophical life, in Book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle suggests that (1) one must possess the supreme virtue, that is, the intellectual virtue of theoretical wisdom (*sophia*) (1177a13-14), and (2) one must have enough leisure time to contemplate (1177b5). The second requirement here just reminds us of Jackson's emphasis on the importance of building a "not in a rush" community of inquiry; without temporarily removing our children from a busy human world, they may not have an opportunity to do philosophy.

In terms of theoretical wisdom, Aristotle says that it "is both scientific knowledge and understanding about the things that are by nature most honorable"

[25] For example, a knife is considered a good knife if and only if it demonstrates its function of cutting well.

[26] It is worth noticing that what Aristotle means by *theoria* is "not research or [learning], but the contemplation of [certain kinds of] knowledge already possessed (Adkins, 1978, p. 297). It is because the activity of obtaining knowledge is undertaken for the sake of something else and, therefore, it cannot be a candidate for the ultimate human end.

(1141b3-5). What he means by scientific knowledge includes knowledge of necessary truths, the first causal principles that govern the operation of the universe, and propositions that can logically be derived from them (Ryan, 2013, p. 9). For this reason, Aristotle thinks that the Presocratic philosophers, that is, those who attempted to move beyond Greek mythology by offering a more scientific account of the natural world, are wise persons and hence possess theoretical wisdom (1141b5-6). Although Aristotle's idea of scientific knowledge is no longer widely accepted, his contention that the intellectual virtue of theoretical wisdom produces *eudaimonia* correctly points out the fact that living well must involve striving for the truth. It is hard to imagine that someone who lives in a computer simulation of reality like *The Matrix* without even knowing it could have a good life.

Nevertheless, even though in the *Metaphysics* Aristotle does mention that it is wonder that led the first philosophers to do philosophy in order to escape from ignorance, he does not seem to be aware that the sense of wonder is the cornerstone of theoretical wisdom when we pursue a philosophical life. It is because without primal wonder, say, an inborn desire to know our surroundings, none of us will be motivated to cultivate theoretical wisdom, not to mention living the happiest life. Kathleen M. Fisher (2000) also argues that "curiosity" (which I equate with the term "primal wonder" here) "underlies all virtues of thought; it opens the door to wisdom, understanding, and intelligence and makes visible the possibilities for 'living well'" (p. 31). Furthermore, as I discussed earlier, primal wonder as a sprout of virtue needs to be carefully nurtured so that it can develop into the virtue of wonder, otherwise it will slowly disappear. Hence, before cultivating theoretical wisdom, we need to nurture our feeling of wonder until it becomes a habitual tendency to think philosophically.

Here, I want to stress that the virtue of wonder is highly intellectual because primal wonder as its sprout is a desire to know something rather than a desire to do the right thing, e.g., the urge to rescue a child in immediate danger.[27] More precisely, the virtue of wonder is not like a moral virtue—for example, courage, justice, and

[27] Kristján Kristjánsson shares my viewpoint that wonder is an intellectual virtue, but he argues for a different reason. According to him, wonder is intellectual in two distinct but interrelated senses: It stimulates the intellect and directs it towards objects that are intellectually understandable and decipherable. For a detailed discussion of his point, please refer to his explanation of wonder in "Scientific Practice, Wonder, and Awe."

generosity—that enables its possessor to do the right thing, at the right time, toward the right people, for the right end, and in the right way; wonder simply makes its owner become a truth seeker and therefore contributes to her intellectual well-being.[28]

If my contention that the intellectual virtue of wonder is the bedrock of living the happiest life is persuasive, then the reason to do "little p" philosophy with children can be revised as follows: Children need an intellectually safe community of inquiry to allow their primal wonder to fully develop into an intellectual virtue so that they have an opportunity to achieve the highest end, *eudaimonia*, later. From this, the primary goal of P4C educators, as Carson (1965) well puts it (if I may borrow her words), is "to pave the way for the child to want to know than to put him on a diet of facts he is not ready to assimilate" (p. 45).

Although my above suggestion on the connections between human flourishing, wonder, and education heavily relies on the works of Mengzi and Aristotle, which may create an impression of antiquity, it has gained increasing support from contemporary scholars in the field of philosophy of education. Anders Schinkel (2023) and his colleagues, for example, have claimed that human flourishing should be taken as the overarching aim of education,[29] and that fostering a sense of wonder can help education attain this aim for two possible reasons: one direct and the other indirect (p. 143). First, in a direct way, cultivating a sense of wonder through education contributes to flourishing itself primarily due to the fact that wonder fosters reflection on what makes one's life worthwhile (Schinkel et al. , 2023, p. 144). Second, in an indirect way, promoting a sense of wonder in education can increase children's intrinsic interest in what they learn, which in turn increases the probability that education helps them flourish in their lives (Schinkel et al., 2023,

[28] Of course, it does not mean that the intellectual virtue of wonder is completely irrelevant to our moral life; through raising ethical issues and contemplating the ways to address them wonder can render its possessor better morally.

[29] The same position is also held by Kristján Kristjánsson. However, compared to Schinkel and his colleagues, who adopt a hybrid theory of human flourishing in which a person's flourishing entails a combination of objective goods and positive subjective evaluation (2023, p. 152), Kristjánsson endorses objective *eudaimonist* well-being as the ideal aim of education (as I do) but suggests that "it needs to be extended and 'enchanted' in order to do so" (2016, p. 708). For Kristjánsson's reason why Aristotle's account of flourishing should incorporate the human urge for transpersonal or selves-transcending ideals, see his "Flourishing as the aim of education: towards an extended, 'enchanted' Aristotelian account."

p. 144).[30] Based on these two reasons, Schinkel (2023) and his colleagues assert that "education that aims to promote flourishing should therefore also be 'wonder-full' education" (p. 158). That is to say, in their own words:

> If we want our children to live well and to develop capacities, dispositions, and understanding and an outlook on life that support their living well, then…nurturing children's sense of wonder and attempting to evoke wonder are pre-eminent, natural ways to do so… (Schinkel et al., 2023, p. 158).

Such theoretical studies from present-day academics in the realm of philosophy of education provide me with greater legitimacy to argue that preserving children's primal wonder and nurturing its growth into the intellectual virtue should be the primary educational goal of P4C.

***conclusion***

To sum up, in this paper, I have argued that children's primal wonder as a sprout of intellectual virtue needs to be preserved and carefully nurtured. The purpose of this statement is to serve as a premise (premise 3) to support the conclusion of the following argument:

(1) The happiest kind of life (the *eudaimon* life) is a philosophical life.
(2) Philosophy begins in primal wonder.
(3) Primal wonder as a sprout of intellectual virtue needs to be nurtured, otherwise it will gradually wither away.
(4) P4C can preserve children's primal wonder and help it grow into the intellectual virtue of wonder.
(5) Therefore, if we want our children to have the opportunity to live the happiest life, it follows that P4C should be implemented in our current education system or other educational settings whenever feasible.[31]

In this argument, premise 1 is likely to be the most controversial statement, particularly in a liberal-democratic society where individuals believe that they should be free to pursue their own goals in their own way and live the life they want to live. My response to this concern is that I am not proposing that everyone should engage in "Big P" philosophy or that we should raise our children to become academic philosophers. Instead, what I mean by a philosophical life here is engaging

[30] For a detailed discussion of these two reasons why fostering the sense of wonder can contribute to human flourishing through education, see Schinkel et al.'s "Human Flourishing, Wonder, and Education," pp. 157-159.
[31] The discussion of when, how, and even whether P4C should be implemented in our current educational system is beyond the scope of this paper.

in "little p" philosophy, which involves regularly examining our lives and the world we inhabit through the practice of the intellectual virtue of wonder. This is because the unexamined life, or even life in an unexamined world given the present environmental crisis we encounter, is not worth living (Rolston III, 2003, p. 143).

Of course, premise 4 is not entirely immune to criticism since there are multiple forms of P4C, each with a distinct set of educational goals, and not all of them can effectively transform children's primal wonder into the intellectual virtue (some may even be counterproductive). This issue, basically, has been addressed by the second generation of P4C educators, who view P4C as a loose movement rather than a uniform program or a strict method.[32] Compared to the first generation of P4C founders in the 1970s, especially Matthew Lipman, who placed strong emphasis on analytical reasoning to ensure critical thinking, the second generation of P4C educators,[33] as observed by Nancy Vansieleghem and David Kennedy (2011), perceive philosophy not primarily as a provider either of analytical skills or objective answers in terms of truth and value (p. 178). Rather, it is seen "as a site in which students can determine what the important questions for our time are, and where they can seek their own answers through the practice of thinking for themselves and with others in communal deliberation" (Vansieleghem & Kennedy, 2011, p. 178). As such, striving for unity and consistency and conforming to logical categories, which may cause some children to be afraid of thinking, are no longer considered the main educational goal for the second generation of P4C. Instead, building an intellectually safe community of inquiry where children can freely express their opinions and engage in meaningful communication is widely emphasized. It is this emphasis on creating "a feeling of trust in oneself and one's community to honestly and genuinely engage in thinking together" (Butnor, 2012, p. 31) that aligns with my assertion that P4C can preserve children's sprout of wonder and make it bloom.

One simple way to assess the progress toward this internal educational goal of P4C, as has been done by p4c Hawaii and others, is to check whether a given

[32] For an in-depth discussion of characteristics of the second generation of P4C, see Nancy Vansieleghem and David Kennedy's "What is Philosophy *for* Children, What is Philosophy *with* Children—After Matthew Lipman?", pp. 177-179.

[33] The representatives of the second generation of P4C educators, listed by Vansieleghem and Kennedy, are: "Ann Margaret Sharp, David Kennedy, Karin Murris, Walter Kohan, Michel Sasseville, Joanna Haynes, Jen Glaser, Oscar Brenifier, Michel Tozzi, Marina Santi, Barbara Weber, and Philip Cam" (2011, p. 177).

dialogue session is interesting to the children involved. This is because the act of wondering itself produces intellectual pleasure and is intrinsically good.

To end this paper, I would like to share my own story. After learning to do p4c Hawaii style, I attempted to use this inquiry-based pedagogy to make small talk with my beloved nieces, Yang-Yang (泱泱) (third grade) and Qian-Qian (謙謙) (first grade) every time when I return to Taiwan to visit them. At the very beginning, I told them about some well-known thought experiments in philosophy, such as the ship of Theseus, the trolley problem, and the experience machine, to spark their sense of wonder and then allowed them to say whatever they wanted to say even though our discussion often went off topic. But gradually, they started raising their own questions and were eager to make philosophical inquiries with me.

One day, after spending the whole afternoon teaching them how to surf, when their father was driving us home, Yang-Yang and Qian-Qian asked me to play "Plain Vanilla" with them. So, we began our "little p" philosophical conversation as usual. Their father, having witnessed the same thing happening again and again with the difficulty of making sense of it, suddenly interrupted us by saying, "Why do you guys always waste your time to discuss these unanswerable questions?" Qian-Qian replied immediately with her adorable smile, "It is fun!"

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