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wokohan@gmail.com
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Topolski, Anya R.
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Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro
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THE RIGHT TO BE CHILDREN: AN ARENDTIAN EXPLORATION OF THE RESPONSIBILITY TO GROW UP

Anya R. Topolski
University of Leuven

Abstract:
Due to the intersection of world history and biological boundaries Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) sadly never had the opportunity to experience maternity; nonetheless, this did not prevent her from writing, with passion and promise, about the miraculous responsibility of childbirth and childrearing. What may come as a surprise to those unfamiliar with her work is that her views on children are to be found throughout her political writings. It is thus the first task of this piece to articulate the connection, within Arendt's project, between children and the political. After this, I intend to develop two of her political arguments, the first her well known critique of the contemporary discourse on human rights, and the second on education. I will use these to argue that the vision of children's rights, as put forward first by Janusz Korczak in the 1920's and later codified in the 1959 declaration of the UN Rights of the Child, is being destroyed by the refusal of all adult citizens (parents, educators, politicians, etc) to grow up. At the heart of Arendt's political writings, especially those concerning children, is a sincere plea to address the crisis in responsibility in our contemporary society. As citizens we must accept that only by limiting our own childish desires to be free of responsibility and accepting the burden of being an authority is there a chance that children might have the right to be children. All rights are meaningless illusions unless they are founded upon relationality and responsibility. It is this preamble, which is sadly absent from the 1959 declaration, that Arendt would argue is necessary not only for the sake of children but also for that of the shared world.

Key words: Arendt; responsibility; children's rights; community; education

O direito de ser crianças: uma exploração arendtiana sobre a responsabilidade do crescer

Resumo:
Devido à interseção do mundo da história e das fronteiras biológicas, Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) infelizmente nunca teve a oportunidade de experimentar a maternidade, contudo isso não a impediu de escrever, com paixão e promessa, sobre a miraculosa responsabilidade do parto e da criação de filhos. O que pode vir a ser uma surpresa para aqueles que não estão familiarizados com seu trabalho é que sua visão sobre as crianças é encontrada ao longo dos seus escritos políticos. É, assim, a primeira tarefa deste artigo articular uma conexão, dentro do projeto de Arendt, entre criança e o político. Depois disso, eu pretendo desenvolver dois de seus argumentos políticos, o primeiro bem conhecido, sua crítica ao discurso contemporâneo sobre os direitos humanos, e o segundo, à educação. Eu vou usar essa tese para argumentar que a visão dos direitos das crianças, como proposta inicialmente por Janusz Korczak em 1920 e, posteriormente, codificada na declaração de 1959 sobre a Declaração dos Direitos da Criança das Nações Unidas, está sendo destruída pela recusa de todos os cidadãos adultos (pais, educadores, políticos, etc) para crescer. No cerne dos escritos políticos de Arendt, especialmente naqueles concernentes à criança, há um apelo sincero para enfrentar a crise de responsabilidade em nossa sociedade contemporânea. Como cidadãos, devemos aceitar que apenas limitando nossos próprios desejos infantis para sermos livres da responsabilidade e aceitando o fardo de uma autoridade é que há uma possibilidade para que as crianças tenham a chance de serem crianças. Todos os direitos são ilusões sem sentido, ao menos que sejam fundados sobre a relacionalidade e

responsabilidade. É este preâmbulo que, infelizmente, está faltando à declaração de 1959, que Arendt poderia argumentar que é necessário não só para as crianças mas também para o mundo compartilhado.

Palavras-chave: Arendt; responsabilidade; direito das crianças; comunidade; educação

El derecho a ser niños: Una Exploración arendtiano de la responsabilidad de crecer

Resumen:
Debido a la intersección de la historia del mundo y los límites biológicos, lamentablemente Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) nunca tuvo la oportunidad de experimentar la maternidad; sin embargo, esto no le impidió escribir, con pasión y promesa, sobre la milagrosa responsabilidad del parto y crianza de un niño. Lo que puede ser una sorpresa para quienes no están familiarizados con su trabajo es que sus puntos de vista sobre los niños se encuentran a lo largo de sus escritos políticos. Por lo tanto, la primera tarea de este trabajo es articular la conexión, dentro del proyecto de Arendt, entre los niños y lo político. Después de esto, me propongo desarrollar dos de sus argumentos políticos, el primero, su bien conocida crítica del discurso contemporáneo sobre los derechos humanos, y el segundo, sobre la educación. Voy a utilizar estos elementos para argumentar que la visión de los derechos del niño, tal como se presentó por primera vez por Janusz Korczak en la década de 1920 y posteriormente codificada en la Declaración de los Derechos del Niño, de la UNO en 1959, está siendo destruida por la negativa de todos los ciudadanos adultos (padres , educadores, políticos, etc) a crecer. En el corazón de los escritos políticos de Arendt, en especial los concernientes a los niños, hay un alegato sincero para hacer frente a la crisis de responsabilidad en nuestra sociedad contemporánea. Como ciudadanos tenemos que aceptar que sólo limitando nuestros deseos infantiles de estar libres de responsabilidad y aceptando la carga de ser una autoridad existe la posibilidad de que los niños puedan tener derecho a ser niños. Todos los derechos son ilusiones sin sentido a menos que estén fundados en la relacionalidad y la responsabilidad. Es el preámbulo, tristemente ausente de la declaración de 1959, que Arendt consideraría necesario no sólo para el bien de los niños sino también para el del mundo que compartimos.

Palabras clave: Arendt, responsabilidad, derechos de los niños, comunidad, educación

THE RIGHT TO BE CHILDREN: AN ARENDTIAN EXPLORATION OF THE RESPONSIBILITY TO GROW UP

Hannah Arendt, born at the turn of the 20th century into a Europe in turmoil, never dreamed of becoming a political thinker – she had no interest in politics until she realised that she was being attacked – politically – because of being a Jew (1994, 11-12; 2007). Likewise, she never imagined she would spend her child-bearing years as a refugee, fleeing Germany, France, then Europe altogether. Then again, no one could have imagined how many lives were forever altered because of the horrors of the Shoah and WWII. It is due to this unexpected intersection of world history and biological boundaries that Arendt never had the opportunity to experience maternity. Nonetheless, Arendt was able to grasp the miraculous meaning of childbirth, both in terms of the private and the public. While her political writings focus on the *polis*, a space from which children are excluded, her reflections on the political by no means exclude a close consideration of the importance of children. In particular, two of Arendt's political arguments bear directly on childhood; the first is her position on human rights, and the second on education. The goal of this paper is first and foremost to bring together Arendt's political and pedagogical writings, and secondly, to use these arguments to demonstrate that the vision of children's rights, as put forward first by Janusz Korczak in the 1920's[i] and later codified in the 1959 declaration of the UN Rights of the Child, is being destroyed by the refusal of *all* adult citizens (parents, educators, politicians etc) to grow up. At the heart of Arendt's political writings, most visible in her writings on children, is a sincere plea to address the crisis in responsibility in our contemporary society. As citizens we must accept that only by limiting our own childish desires to be free of responsibility and accept the burden of being an authority is there a chance that children might have the right to be children. The same tragic history that prevented Arendt from having children, made it clear that rights are meaningless illusions unless they are founded on relationality and responsibility. It is this preamble, sadly absent from the 1959 UN declaration, that Arendt would argue is necessary for the sake of children and also for that of the shared world.

While it is well known that Arendt saw no space for children in the *polis*, I wish to demonstrate that children are critical to the political in Arendt's writings. While Arendt typically introduces a strict distinction between labour, work and action into her writings, the one phenomenon that ties all three together is the miracle of childbirth. "Labor and work, as well as action, are also rooted in natality in so far as they have the task to provide and preserve the world for, to foresee and reckon with, the constant influx of newcomers who are born into the world as strangers" (1958, 9). Natality is the heart of the political, children – as the adage goes – are the future. While by no means interested in the dogmatic aspects of religion, Arendt was fond of saying that hope for the world found its best expression in the joyous proclamation "a child has been born to us" (1958, 247). Yet for Arendt, like Korczak whose life was not spared during the Shoah, children are more than the future – they are also its present. As adults, responsibility for children is of the utmost importance to the present. Moreover, children must be allowed to be children – a plea found in Korczak's charter for children's rights – which according to Arendt can only happen if adults are willing to grow up. It is in this sense that all of her writings on the political, which never veer far from the current political crisis in responsibility, speak directly to the importance of childhood as a distinctive and protected period of experience. Thus while Arendt's writings on human rights, to be discussed in the following section, does not directly address children's rights, her critique is equally applicable to the rights of children. By contrast, this is not the case for her writings on education – her most clear articulation of the importance of childhood, to be explored in the third section. Building upon these two Arendtian arguments, I conclude by showing how these arguments could justify an addendum, in the form of a new preamble, to the charter of the rights of the child.

The Right to Have Rights

Arendt neither sought to systematically study nor theorize abstractly about the meaning of human rights. The refugee crisis following the Second World War and the failure of human rights to address it were, for Arendt, an existential matter of the greatest magnitude. The painful experience of being a refugee, still fresh in her

mind, served as a constant reminder of the need for a real resolution. Her 'insiders' perspective – which is ironically unique to the refugee or stranger who experiences life as an 'outsider' – is precisely what helped her to critically reflect upon the meaning of human rights. Why was it, she asked, that the rights meant to protect *human* beings proved to be so worthless to those who had nothing but their humanity to appeal to? Why was it that those who had no place to call home and no-one to ask for help were the first to realise that their 'natural and inalienable' rights were illusionary and meaninglessness (1958B, 292)? According to Arendt, the problem was to be found in the fact that:

> From the beginning the paradox involved in the declaration of inalienable human rights was that it reckoned with an 'abstract' human being who seemed to exist nowhere. (1958B, 291)

What became clear to her was that the paradox of human rights was that those who are nothing but *human* could not appeal to these rights. Without a somewhere, without a community, without a space to appear … a human being lost the humanity that was meant to be both natural and inalienable. It was clear to Arendt, as well as the many other victims who quickly realised their inalienable rights were simply an illusion, that the failure arose from the fact that these rights – to have any political meaning – must be entrenched in a community. The suggestion that these rights are natural and inalienable simply served as a reminder, for Arendt, of the danger of philosophical abstraction. , of the ivory tower inhabited by the likes of Heidegger (1994, 176-181; 361-2). The need for roots not only affected one's rights, it also determined one's ability to act politically. Having been denied citizenship and thereby a political community, the Jews also lost a place in which to be seen and heard, a space for political action. Rights without roots, Arendt concluded, were legally, ethically and politically futile.

This is precisely what Arendt meant when she spoke of 'the right to have rights'. The most fundamental right is that of belonging to a community. Without a community to fight for one's rights, no other rights can be enforced. The abstraction of the 'rights of Man' in the seventeenth century from all national and political communities was in fact the source of their failure in the twentieth century. By de-

rooting rights, whether from the natural law tradition, from history or from their roots in a particular society, they became nothing more than a reminder of the dangers of being *homo sacer* (Agamben 1998). "Not the loss of specific rights, then, but, the loss of a community willing and able to guarantee any rights whatsoever, has been the calamity which has befallen ever-increasing numbers of people" (1958B, 297). The only thing self-evident about these rights was that refugees, *human* beings *par excellence,* could be guaranteed a one-way ticket to Auschwitz. The last thing on earth one wanted to be between 1933 and 1945 was a *human* being. The best thing to be was in fact a citizen of a particular nation. Sovereignty, not humanity could save one from the gas chambers. The only possible roots for rights were to be found in the nation-state, the same entity that had expelled so many of these refugees thereby transforming them into *human* beings. It is precisely this tension, between humanity and sovereignty, that Arendt discovered by exposing the fact that human rights are groundless. In light of the tragedy of the Shoah, Arendt dedicated herself to answering the following questions: what community could guarantee these rights to *human* beings? In other words, who – and not what - could ground human rights?

The traditional list of possible guarantors seems to have been exhausted (Lyotard 1979, Marchart 2007). The notion that these rights were to find their ground in nature had proven to be sterile. Equally barren was the possibility of locating a ground from within divine commands. God, certainly after the Shoah, had very little political leverage with any community of survivors. History, which prior to nature, had grounded rights for a particular group had had its ability to guarantee rights to *all* human beings denied because of its inability to recognise the 'natural' equality of all human beings. Sadly, the most obvious guarantor, the nation-state, was also the most fragile of certainties. By denying the legitimacy of one's citizenship, by destroying one's link to this civil community, these rights equally evaporated. Arendt insists that human dignity needs a new guarantee because its old guarantee, the nineteenth-century, Kantian idea of cosmopolis of peaceful republics respecting the natural rights of man, had been destroyed (Isaac 1996, 63). The sole remaining candidate was humanity. It seems clear that only humanity could both ground and guarantee human rights. This meant that "the right to have rights, or the right of every individual to belong to humanity, should be guaranteed by humanity itself"

(1958B, 298). Yet humanity no longer meant what it had for Kant. For Arendt – in this sense much closer to Aristotle – humanity and human rights are conventions, agreements produced by humans, fragile artefacts of living together as social beings. She thus sets out, in her later writings, to seek another ground or 'principle' for humanity.

The inextricable link between rights and community, whether that of society or the nation, brought to light by the tragedy of the refugees fleeing Europe, is a critical insight with both theoretical and practical repercussions brought to light by Hannah Arendt. As Jeffrey Isaac claims:

> Namely, the problem of rightlessness that has plagued our world since 1914 can only be remedied by a reconstitution of political identities and the formation of new forms of community which challenge the hegemony of the nation-state. In her distinctively *political* approach to the problem, Arendt makes a contribution, often overlooked, that remains unsurpassed. (1996, 61-2)

While Isaac, among others, has recognised the political importance of the Arendtian paradox of human rights, too many theorists have stopped there. While it is often difficult to connect *The Origins of Totalitarianism* to her later political essays, as Arendt was by no means a systematic thinker, the search for a new political principle, a new ground, is her unspoken stimulus for thinking. Arendt, trained in the phenomenological tradition, and marked by the political experience of statelessness came to understand the absolute necessity of being at home in the world. For her, to be at home in the world, meant to have the right to a community. Her goal was therefore to seek a new community with which to ground politics and thereby create a world in which all human beings could feel at home. As Parekh writes, Arendt's indirect approach to the question of human rights "coming at it by way of the world and not individual human life" (2008, 5) is part of the reason it has so often been misunderstood. In contrast to most liberal theorists, Arendt, who is as passionate a defender of the individual as any liberal, engages human rights from the perspective of the shared world created between individuals, a world marked by plurality.[ii] Rather than equate plurality with terms such as pluralism, diversity or multiculturalism – all part of liberalism' intellectual vernacular – plurality is a term

that Arendt coins in order to recognise that which was destroyed by totalitarianism and that which is unique to humanity. In addition, it contains within it her critique of the modern Western subject and its claim that reality is a project of fabrication by an autonomous being. Plurality, the fact that every one of us is absolutely irreplaceably distinct and unique, is the intersubjective basis of the world as well as its immense fragility. Lastly, it is a direct challenge to Heidegger's claim that:

> No correlation of 'I' and 'Thou' or of 'we' and 'you', that is, no *community*, can ever reach the level of selfhood; instead, every correlation of this kind misses that level and remains excluded from it – unless it manages to ground itself first of all on *Dasein*. (Heidegger 1936-8, 198)

Plurality, according to Arendt is the condition of the community that 'grounds' the right to have rights, and its pre-political origin, natality, makes clear its close connection to childhood. She contrasts plurality, specifically with relation to ethics and politics, to the Heideggerian notion of *dasein* rooted in singularity (although it clearly has its origins in *mitsein*, it goes much further than simply the sum of *dasein*). Plurality, a radical form of *alteritas*, is the *raison d'etre*, for the community – rather than as often presupposed a common or shared essence. It is these differences between people that 'found', albeit in a contingent sense, the community and it is by means of the miracle of natality, of birth (as opposed to death in Heidegger's project)[iii], that is the origin of plurality.

The Crisis in Education

In a letter to Glenn Gray, a close friend, on June 29th 1964, Arendt offers a description of the activity of education:

> It seems to me that the word education covers two entirely different tasks: (a) the responsibility for the development of the child, physical as well as psychological, and his particular gifts and (b) the child's preparation to enter the world where it is supposed to assume certain responsibilities for it. (*as qtd in*. Schutz 1991, 87)

What tends to happen is that Arendt's pedagogical readers (Gordon 2002) focus solely on the first aspect, while her political readers focus on the latter to argue

that Arendt would be in favour of citizenship education (Calhoun 1997; Hansen 1993). Both seem to miss Arendt's fundamental concern, what she refers to as the crisis in education, which is first and foremost the importance of responsibility in relation to children, present and future, as well as the danger, and irresponsibility, of politicising education (which is precisely what citizenship education does). For Arendt, who speaks as a citizen (rather than as an expert), the activity of educating children is a process that begins in the private domain, moving towards the public domain for which a great deal of preparation is required. Thus while it can be, and needs to be, discussed in public, education itself (which ends with the age of citizenry) is one that is neither public nor political. By reminding her readers of the relationship between education and the private realm, Arendt identifies three basic assumptions which arise from the unquestioned assertion of its public role (Arendt 1963, 184). *First*, the assumption that children do not need authority; *second*, that teachers do not need to be symbols of authority through their expertise; and *third*, that learning can be substituted by doing. These three points, which must be further explored, clarify the consequences of allowing the politics of the public realm to enter the schools and how this adversely affects children.

The private realm has a conservative tone intended to protect and nourish children. Children, new to the world, need to have a safe space within which to discover themselves prior to being challenged and tested through *polemos*. For Arendt, childhood is a sacred time of wonder, dreams, hopes, a miraculous time and it is our responsibility, as adults (not limited to educators or parents), to preserve this unique stage of human life. "Insofar as the child is not yet acquainted with the world, he must be gradually introduced to it; insofar as he is new, care must be taken that this new thing comes to fruition in relation to the world as it is" (1961, 189). Arendt's interpretation is based on the fundamental understanding of the difference between the needs of children and adults, a difference that also underlines the importance of rights specific to children. Education is the process that facilitates the transition from the comfort and safety of the home to the bright light of the public. The classroom is a place and space that introduces children to the world and likewise, the world to children.

> In education they [adults] assume responsibility for both, for the life and development of the child and for the continuance of the world. … They may indeed come into conflict with each other. The child requires special protection and care so that nothing destructive may happen to him from the world. … The world, too, needs protection to keep it from being overrun and destroyed by the onslaught of the new that bursts upon it with each new generation. (Arendt 1963, 186)

Arendt is fully aware of the manifold tension manifest in this transition. It is the paradox of particularity and plurality that defines the human realm. Not only is it an introduction to difference, dissent and plurality, a child's education also has as its somewhat contradictory task to teach children about their society's shared history, its source of stability - the past in order to prepare them for the unpredictability and uncertainty of their future. It is also on this basis that Arendt brings together her analyses of education and totalitarianism.

> Hannah Arendt suggests in her famous study on totalitarianism that there is a connection between totalitarian terror and the destruction of the newness and otherness which is contained in birth. The need for terror stems from the fear that with the birth of every new human being a new beginning makes its voice heard in the world. (Masschelein 2001, 16)

For this reason she refers to the crisis in education as a crisis in the human condition of natality as it centres upon the unique nature of every new life. She recognises that without birth, the human condition of natality, without these same children who are to be protected from the world there would be no shared world. While Arendt managed to maintain hope in humanity, even after living through its lowest and most disgraceful periods, she recognised that the public realm, as well as meeting the needs of the private realm such as food and shelter, was full of obstacles and struggles. While meaningful, these were much too heavy a burden for young children to be forced to bare. While education, which begins at birth and ends at the 'age of citizenship', is clearly a gradual process of slowly introducing children to the world, this process is one that should occur – over almost two decades – and by no means be rushed. Arendt's plea is therefore greatest with regard to young children and decreases gradually as they complete their secondary education. Nonetheless, she emphasises that the distinction between child and adult must be maintained.

While we implicitly acknowledge the importance of preserving this distinction when we condemn childhood labour, child sex slavery and children soldiers, this acknowledgement cannot be empty in content. "Parents and teachers [Arendt would widen this to include all adult citizens] will have no authority and hence will be unable to educate children, to protect both child and world, if they do not take responsibility for the world they helped create" (Jacobitti 1991, 599-600). Thus, while Arendt respected the challenge to authority in the polis, she felt that this same challenge was detrimental within the realm of childhood education. "The problem of education in the modern world lies in the fact that by its very nature it cannot forgo either authority or tradition, and yet must proceed in a world that is neither structured by authority nor held together by tradition" (Arendt 1968, 195). A denial of authority in this realm is equivalent to a denial of responsibility for the shared world. Her appeal to the fundamental role of authority in education is thus consistent with her call for its challenge in the *polis*; it is an appropriate double-standard given the distinct needs of those entering the world and those engaged in the public on a daily basis. Arendt's position is that children are not yet prepared for the chaos and uncertainty of the world nor ought the responsibility of this realm be placed on them before their time. The desire to begin to prepare children for the *polis* as soon as they have stepped into the classroom, while often well motivated, has perhaps not been properly thought through. Perhaps it is worth asking whether children are ready for responsibility? How can we ask this of children if we are unwilling to accept our own responsibility to preserve the uniqueness of childhood? If we, as parents, teachers and citizens, wish to take our responsibility seriously, we must accept that it requires that we teach children to accept our authority, a term that is uneasy to our modern ears. While this is limited to the private realm, education is nevertheless based on authority and an asymmetry between adults and children. Our current political preoccupation with rights and equality has blinded us to the importance of asymmetry and its connected need for authority and responsibility. Education makes this bias evident.

> Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and young, would be inevitable. And

> education, too, is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from a world and leave them to their own devices, nor to strike from their hands their chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world. (Arendt 1968, 196)

Educating children thus includes the responsibility to respect and safeguard their right to be children, to be protected, educated and nourished in a realm free from the chaos of the polis. Furthermore, it means taking responsibility for the shared world they will inherit. It is precisely this inextricable connection between education and children that I will now argue that what is necessary is a new preamble, or more specifically, a new post-foundational grounding, for the rights of the child.

The Responsibility to Act Like Adults

As a preamble to my own argument, I would like to clarify that I am by no means suggesting that the spirit of the declaration of the rights of the child is problematic. Rather, my claim is that while its discourse has immense symbolic power, it fails to recognise the significance of the challenges raised by Arendt. First, that of the importance of community for rights, and second (and closely related), the critical relationship between responsibility and rights. In a nutshell, rights need to be post-foundational rooted in relationality and responsibility. Thus, my claim is that the preamble rather than being replaced needs to be complemented by an important addendum. With this point clarified, I now wish to argue that the vision of children's rights is being destroyed by the refusal of *all* adult citizens (parents, educators, politicians etc) to grow up. As I have shown at the heart of Arendt's writings is a sincere plea to address the crisis in responsibility in our contemporary society. What this entails is that as citizens we must accept that only by limiting our own childish desires to be free of responsibility and accepting the burden of being an authority is there a chance that children might have the right to be children. It is this content that is lacking from the current preamble which is necessary not only for the sake of children but also for that of the shared world.

While Arendt's position on human rights is often understood to be a denunciation of their importance, her claim is much more nuanced. Her notion of the 'right to have rights' illustrates the inherent paradox of human rights. While basic human rights are of the utmost importance for every human being, they were created for those whose rights were threatened or denied, the same people who – tragically – have no means to appeal to these rights. It is precisely because they are excluded from all political communities – which are the only 'ground' for these rights – that human rights remain limited to the realm of discourse. While the latter is not to be underestimated, it does not provide the rightless with what they most need – a place to call home, a sense of belonging to the world, a community. "The fundamental deprivation of human rights takes place first and above all in depriving a person of a place in the world which makes his opinions significant and his actions effective" (Arendt 1949, 29). It is the vital importance of belonging to a community, a community that is "willing and able to guarantee any rights" (*ibid* 30). It is for this reason that Arendt is critical of a notion of human rights disconnected from a notion of polity and stresses the importance of the web-of-relations that constitutes, nourishes and strengths plurality. It is also an awareness that rights, while theoretically possessed by individuals, are in fact meaningless without relationality; as Burke recognised "they depend on our fellow-men and on tacit guarantee that the members of a community give to each other" (*ibid* 34). Fundamentally, rights discourse must recognise that without a 'foundation', albeit a fragile and contingent one, in relationality – the fact that we are born into a shared world which arises from the plurality of natality, it will forever remain a discourse that disappoints those who most need its shelter.

This claim is magnified when it comes to the rights of the child. Not only are children not yet able to be part of a political community, they should not be forced to form a community to defend themselves. Children should not be forced to grow up too quickly, their childhood is precious, both for itself and for the world. It is during this sheltered period of their lives that children must be able to discover themselves without being confronted by the harsh realities of public life. It is also a time to learn about the past, their stories, histories and traditions. If they are forced to defend themselves, this learning is lost as is the innocence that can never be returned.

Arendt's shares a vision of what childhood ought to be (one of the few normative moments in her work) with Janusz Korczak (Henryk Goldszmit 1878-1924), a Polish-Jewish pedagogue, author and creator of orphanages. While neither had children of their own, both understood that children need to be allowed to be children – to be free of fear, to have the space to discover who they are (rather than being told), to have secrets, to make mistakes, and to be childish. Without this time to grow, children lose their ability to develop their own vision of what the world ought to be, to become the type of people that will later introduce new ideas, hopes and dreams to the shared world. This is equally true of Arendt's understanding of natality. "Only the full experience of this capacity can bestow upon human affairs faith and hope, those two essential characteristics of human existence which Greek antiquity ignored altogether" (HC 247). The capacity Arendt is referring to is that of the miracle of natality, the ontological condition of freedom she made known in her reading of Augustine. To be able to renew the world, one must first learn to know oneself, to love oneself, without which one will never learn to love and care for others and the shared world.

While it is clear that we, as a society, seem to agree – in theory – with Arendt's vision of childhood, as several sociologists and psychologists have shown, we are less willing to bring this into practice (Furedi 2003, 2008, 2009). Quite simply, for children to be children, adults must be willing to grow up. Yet adults today are more likely to want to relive their own childhoods, to be free of responsibility, to further explore their own desires and dreams. Take for example the increasing frequency with which couples decide not to have children in order to enjoy their own lives fully,[iv] the obsession with cosmetic surgery – partially rooted in a refusal to accept aging, and the frequency with which we change professions – often return to school as part of a lifelong learning process. While these decisions are not always indicators of infantilism, if prompted by selfishness, which is a turning away from others and the world, they do prevent the type of resopnsiblity and authority needed by children. According to Furedi, our current obsession with soul-searching, a form of therapy-culture, is a desire to return to our infantile stage, a desire that is also promoted in our fear culture – which teaches us to turn inwards for safety (2003). Whether adults feel that their own childhood was cut short or they are simply

looking for experiences that make them 'feel good', the price of these emotional excursions is that of the rights of the child. What this means is that all adults, not just those who are parents, caretakers or educators, must form a community that is willing and able to guarantee the rights of the child. Children are not yet political actors, it is thus up to those of us that have this honour and heavy burden to take it seriously. While this means accepting that our own childhood is over, it does not mean that life is no longer meaningful or pleasurable. Rather, as philosophers and theologians have claimed throughout time, a life devoted to the other is both richer and more enriching than any other (e.g. Buber, Levinas).

Nonetheless, if we are committed to the praxis of ensuring that children have the right to be children, this means taking our responsibility as adults very seriously. While the form this responsibility takes varies on the particular social context, certain aspects are 'generalisable' (but not universalisable). The responsibility of creating a community that is willing and able to guarantee the rights of the child must arise from a principle of plurality and relationality, a form of horizontal solidarity that recognises the richness of diversity – whether visible or invisible. Concretely, this means that one does not take this responsibility as a parent of X, a teacher of Y, a government representative of Z but rather as an adult, and as a citizen of a particular political community (in an ideal world where citizenship is not so often limited to the select). Given that this ideal remains something for our children to make real, this responsibility also includes fighting for the rights of those children who, along with their parents, are denied inclusion to any particular political community as it is these children who are most in need of the strength and support of others. In contrast to this ideal, a common scene in today's schools – certainly those in the developed nations – is a competition between parents, teachers and schools for the child's popularity and a refusal to recognise, and take responsibility, for difficulties faced by these same children. Parents blame teachers, teachers blame the lack of funding or support by the schools or the governments, governments blame universities for failing to create better teachers ... all the while a child sits in the middle of this triangle and learns a lesson – it's always better to make another responsible, to pass the buck.

Yet along with this commitment to prioritise children, responsibility means being willing to act as a model and be an authority. From a child's perspective, an authority sets rules and is unfair. What children have yet to learn is the simple wisdom of difficult freedom. In a Levinasian spirit, one flourishes by means of limitations. Absolute freedom is absolutely meaningless and violent. From an adult's perspective, authority means striking a balance between abusing power, on the one extreme, and desiring to be popular at all cost, at the other extreme. For teachers being an authority often goes hand-in-hand with being an expert in a particular area, being able to transmit certain critical information and traditions to children. While this certainly runs counter to the progressive egalitarianism that is currently political correct, children cannot learn without asymmetry, guidance and direction. The desire to treat children as equals ought not be confused with the importance of respecting children. Treating children as children means treating them differently than equals yet this by no means respecting them any less. The difference between equality and respect seems to have been lost with the blurring of the private and public sphere that Arendt so lamented. Accepting our roles as a source of authority, transmitting the past and shared stories and traditions, requires that we accept that equality is not always the ideal we have been taught to believe it is. This also means that we no longer simply 'pass the buck' to others, whether experts in this or that 'science'. Caring for our shared world and its children is not something for experts, it is something we must all partake in.

Conclusion: A New Preamble For The Rights of The Child

As stated above, I am by no means suggesting that the spirit of the declaration of the rights of the child is problematic. Rather, my claim is that while its discourse has immense symbolic power, it fails to recognise the significance of the challenges raised by Arendt. In a nutshell, rights need to be post-foundational rooted in relationality and responsibility. Thus, my claim is that the current preamble would be well served by an important addendum. As it currently stands:

> Whereas the peoples of the United Nations have, in the Charter, reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights and in the dignity and worth of the human person, and have determined

> to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,
> Whereas the United Nations has, in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, proclaimed that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth therein, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status,
> Whereas the child, by reason of his [and her] physical and mental unicity, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth,
> Whereas the need for such special safeguards has been stated in the *Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child* of 1924, and recognized in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and in the statutes of specialized agencies and international organizations concerned with the welfare of children,
> Whereas humankind owes to the child the best it has to give,

What I would add, in an Arendtian spirit, to this preamble is simply the following:

> Humankind must be willing to accept the weight of responsibility and act as an authority and guarantor of these rights. We must accept that our childhood must come to a definite end so that others have the right to be children.

It is this preamble, that is sadly absent from the 1959 declaration, that Arendt would argue is necessary not only for the sake of children but also for that of the shared world. The rights of the child, as they currently are stated, are at best ideals and at worst meaningless illusions. What these rights need, as do all rights, is to be founded in relationality and shared responsibility.

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[i] **Janusz Korczak's Declaration of Children's Rights (1920)**

The child has the right to love.
(Korczak says: Love the child, not just your own).
The child has the right to respect.
(Korczak says: Let us demand respect for shining eyes, smooth foreheads, youthful effort and confidence. Why should dulled eyes, a wrinkled brow, untidy gray hair, or tired resignation command greater respect?)
The child has the right to optimal conditions in which to grow and develop.
(Korczak says: We demand: do away with hunger, cold, dampness, stench, overcrowding, overpopulation.)
The child has the right to live in the present.
(Korczak says: Children are not people of tomorrow; they are people today.)
The child has the right to be himself or herself.
(Korczak says: A child is not a lottery ticket, marked to win the main prize.)
The child has the right to make mistakes.
(There are no more fools among children than among adults.)
The child has the right to fail.
(Korczak says: We renounce the deceptive longing for perfect children.)
The child has the right to be taken seriously.
(Korczak says: Who asks the child for his opinion and consent?)
The child has the right to be appreciated for what he is.
(Korczak says: The child, being small, has little market value.)
The child has the right to desire, to claim, to ask.
(Korczak says: As the years pass, the gap between adult demands and children's desires becomes progressively wider.)
The child has the right to have secrets.
(Korczak says: Respect their secrets.)
The child has the right to "a lie, a deception, a theft".
(Korczak says: He does not have the right to lie, deceive, steal.)
The child has the right to respect for his possessions and budget.
(Korczak says: Everyone has the right to his property, no matter how insignificant or valueless.)
The child has the right to education.
The child has the right to resist educational influence that conflicts with his or her own beliefs.
(Korczak says: It is fortunate for mankind that we are unable to force children to yield upon assaults upon their common sense and humanity.)
The child has the right to protest an injustice.
(Korczak says: We must end despotism.)
The child has the right to Children's Court where he can judge and be judged by his peers.
(Korczak says: We are the sole judges of the child's actions, movements, thoughts, and plans... I know that a Children's Court is essential, that in fifty years there will not be a single school, not a single institution without one.)
The child has the right to be defended in the juvenile-justice court system.
(Korczak says: The delinquent child is still a child... Unfortunately, suffering bred of poverty spreads like lice: sadism, crime, uncouthness, and brutality are nurtured on it.)
The child has the right to respect for his grief.
(Korczak says: Even though it be for the loss of a pebble.)
The child has the right to commune with God.
The child has the right to die prematurely.
(Korczak says: The mother's profound love for her child must give him the right to premature death, to ending his life cycle in only one or two springs... Not every bush grows into a tree.)

[ii] The notion of plurality is the example *par excellence* of how Arendt's unconventional approach to politic philosophy causes many of her readers to misinterpret her arguments (Canovan 1992).

[iii] Similarly, Arendt, "opposes Heidegger whose *Dasein* is characterized by death or mortality, [whereas] Arendt defines the *initium* of action, which is the foundation of human capacity to create new realities, in terms of the facticity of birth or natality" (Jung 2000, 163).
[iv] By this I do not mean to those couples who cannot, for a variety of reasons, have children. These couples often commit much more to the responsibility of adulthood by means of adoption, becoming role-models etc.

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