



Fun and Games or Something Deeper: A New Understanding of Carefreeness

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Abstract

Existing political theory literature portrays children as irrational, non-autonomous beings: at worst, as having rights comparable to animals, and at best, as rights-holders in waiting. My account instead begins from a sociological understanding of childhood as a social condition distinct from biological maturity. In moving away from traditional philosophical accounts of childhood, which assume a fixed endpoint to childhood and impose a binary between adults and children, I question what we owe those in a state of childhood and argue that we owe children well-being, and that children's well-being requires conditions that allow them to be as carefree as possible. My account extends Luara Ferracioli's definition of carefreeness as a "mental life whereby an agent is disposed to experience the world without worry, even though there will be some moments where she will experience an array of negative emotions associated with stress and anxiety" (Ferracioli, 2018; 92). On my view, carefreeness depends on three conditions: 1) opportunities for personal projects or unstructured free time; 2) the goods of intimate relationships; and 3) responsibilities and expectations suited to the child's capabilities. Unlike existing accounts, this view does not require children to be entirely free from responsibility. Rather, I argue that due to the socially constructed nature of childhood, the right to carefreeness is necessary for children to not only have the freedom to build their current identities, but also their future selves and their skills/capacities.

Keywords: autonomy; childhood; social construct; theory; well-being