



The Child's Right To Respect

Indifference and Distrust

We learn very early in life that big is more important than little.

—I'm big, a child rejoices upon being lifted up onto a table. I'm taller than you, another affirms with pride, measuring himself against his peer.

It's unpleasant standing on one's tiptoes and not being able to reach or to keep up with a grown-up with one's little steps. A glass easily slips out of a small hand. It's hard for a child to scramble up onto a chair, or into a vehicle, or up a flight of steps; he can't quite grasp the door knob, see out the window, hang something up or take it down because it's too high.

In a crowd the child can't see anything; he isn't noticed or else he's jostled.

It's inconvenient and unpleasant to be little.

It is size and what takes up more space that elicits respect and admiration. Small is equated with ordinary and uninteresting. Little people mean little wants, little joys and sorrows.

A big city, high mountains, a tall tree—these are impressive. We say:

—A big deed, a great person.

A child is small and doesn't weigh much. There's less of him, too. We have to bend down, lower ourselves to him. Even worse—the child is weak.

We can lift and toss him up with ease, sit him down against his will, restrain him from running, frustrate his effort.

No matter how often he misbehaves, the adult has a reserve of strength to use against him.

I say:

—Don't go, don't move, move away, give it back.

The child knows that he has to obey. How often does he make an effort unsuccessfully before he understands, gives in and, finally, surrenders.

A feeling of powerlessness summons respect for strength; anyone, and not just an adult, but anyone older and stronger can brutally express dissatisfaction, back up demand with strength and exact obedience: anyone can injure with impunity.

We teach indifference toward the weak by our own example. A bad school is a sign of gloomy things ahead.

The features of the world have changed. It is no longer muscle power that gets the work done or serves as a defense against an enemy. No longer does that power wrest command, bounty and security from land, forests, and seas. The machine has become a subjugated slave. Muscles have lost their exclusive status and value. Knowledge and the intellect have increased in respect.

That heretofore sinister hut, the thinker's cell, has given way to the chambers and laboratories of research. Libraries rise higher and higher, their shelves groaning under the weight of books. The temples of proud reason have become filled with worshipers. The man of reason creates and commands. The hieroglyphs of figures and symbols pour forth new discoveries for the masses; they bear witness to man's power. All this has to be grasped by the mind and understood.

The years of tedious study grow longer and longer—more and more schools, examinations, printed words. While the child is small and weak, has lived but a short time, has not read, does not know...

It's a difficult problem, how to share the conquered places, how to assign tasks and to reward, how to husband the inhabited regions of the globe. What kind and how many factories should be established in order to provide work for hungry hands and brains, how to maintain order and discipline in the human

swarm, how to secure protection from an ill will or the madness of a single individual, how to fill the hours of life with activity, rest, and recreation, guard against apathy, satiety, and boredom? How to unite people into a law-abiding community, enhance understanding, when to scatter and divide? Push ahead here, slow down there; here to inflame, there to quell?

Politicians and law-makers make careful attempts. But time and again they err.

And they deliberate and make decisions about the child too; but who asks the child for his opinion and consent; what can he possibly have to say?

Along with reason and knowledge a certain shrewdness helps in the struggle for existence and influence. The one who is alert will pick up the trail and be rewarded handsomely; contrary to reliable judgement, he'll quickly and easily gain his end; he dazzles and awakens envy. It takes cunning to fathom man—no longer the altar but the pigsty of life.

And then there's the child, plodding on clumsily with his schoolbook, ball and doll; he senses that something important and mighty is taking place without his participation, something that spells out fortune and misfortune, something that punishes and rewards. A flower foretells of the future fruit, the chick will become an egg-laying hen, the calf will give milk. In the meantime there is the matter of care, expenses, and worrying: will it survive or not?

The young stir up unrest, anxiety; there is that long period of waiting; maybe he will be a support in old age. But life knows of drought, frosts, and hailstorms which cut down and destroy crops.

We search for signs of the future; we'd like to be able to foretell, to be certain; this anxious anticipation about what the future holds increases our indifference toward what it is.

The market value of the child is small. Only before God and the Law is the apple blossom worth as much as the apple, green shoots as much as a ripe corn-field.

We nurse, shield, feed, and educate. The child gets what he needs without any worrying; what would he be without us to whom he owes everything? Absolutely everything, without exception—only we.

We know the way to success; we give directions, advice. We develop virtues, stamp out faults. We guide, correct, train. The child—nothing. We—everything.

We order about and demand obedience.

Morally and legally responsible, knowing and far-seeing, we are the sole judges of the child's actions, movements, thoughts, and plans.

We give instructions and see that they are carried out; thanks to our reason and will—they are our children, our possessions. So, hands off!

(It's true. Things have changed some. It isn't just the exclusive will and authority of the family anymore. There's social control now, however slight, from a distance, barely perceptible.)

A beggar can dispose of his alms at will. The child has nothing of his own and must account for every object freely received for his own use.

He is forbidden to tear, break, or soil; he is forbidden to give anything away as a present; nor is he allowed to refuse anything with a sign of displeasure. The child has to accept things and be satisfied. Everything must be in the right place at the right time according to his regimen.

(Maybe this is the reason why the child values the worthless little things which arouse in adults a surprised compassion: odds and ends, junk—his sole personal wealth—a ball of string, a little box, some beads.)

In return the child is supposed to submit and behave—let him beg, even cheat, as long as he does not demand. Nothing is due him; we give of our own free will. (A painful analogy presents itself: a rich man's mistress). This relationship between adults and children is demoralized by the child's poverty and material dependency.

We treat the child with indifference because he doesn't know anything, doesn't suspect or sense anything.

The child knows nothing of the difficulties and complications of adult life, the sources of our excitement, disappointments, let-downs; what ruins our peace of mind and sours our humor; he knows nothing of adult reverses and losses. It's easy to deceive the child, keep him in the dark. The child imagines that life is simple and straightforward. There's father and mother; father

works and earns money and mama shops. He knows nothing about shirking responsibilities nor about how a man goes about struggling for his own well-being and that of others.

Free from material worries, from strong temptations and shocks, the child again does not know and cannot judge. We adults can guess what he's up to at a glance, see through him in an instant. Without having to investigate we detect his clumsy cunning.

Or do we deceive ourselves by judging that the child is no more than what we want him to be? Maybe he conceals himself from us, or suffers in secret?

We level mountains, fell trees, tame animals. Settlements keep on increasing where before there were only swamps and forests. We put people all at once in new lands.

We have subdued the world; metal and beasts have become servants. We have enslaved the coloured races, crudely organized the relationship between nations and tamed the masses. Justice is still a distant thing. There's more hurt and misery.

Childish doubts and apprehensions seem unimportant.

The bright democratism of the child knows no hierarchy. Only fleetingly does he take pity over a laborer's sweaty toil or the hunger pangs of a playmate, the fate of an ill-treated horse, a slaughtered hen. A dog and a bird are close to his heart, a butterfly and flower are his equals; he finds a soul-mate in a stone or a sea-shell. With the haughty pride of an upstart, the child possesses a soul. We do not take the child seriously because he still has a lot of hours of living ahead of him.

We feel the effort of our own steps, the burden of selfish movements, the limitations of our perceptions and sensations. The child runs and jumps, sees things without any apparent motive, is puzzled and asks questions; he sheds tears easily and is profusely happy.

A fine fall day when there's less sunshine is highly valued, as is spring when it's green. It doesn't matter, so little is needed to be happy—effort is unnecessary. Hastily, carelessly we dismiss the child. We treat indifferently the multiplicity of his life and the joy which is so easily given.

For us precious quarter-hours and years are lost; he has time though, he'll make it, he can wait.

The child is not a soldier; he does not defend his homeland although he suffers together with it.

Since he has no vote, why go to the trouble to gain his good opinion of you. He doesn't threaten, demand, say anything.

Weak, little, poor, dependent—a citizen-to-be only.

Indulgent, rude, brutal—but always indifferent.

The brat. Only a child, a future person, but not yet, not today. He's just going to be.

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He has to be watched, never to be let out of sight; to be watched and never be left alone; watched at every step.

He may fall, bump himself, get hurt, get dirty, spill, tear, break, misplace, lose, set fire, leave the door open to burglars. He'll hurt himself and us; cripple himself, us, a playmate.

We have to be vigilant, permit no independence of movement, be in full control.

The child does not know how much and what to eat, how much and what to drink, does not know the limits of fatigue. So, you have to supervise his diet, his sleep, his rest.

For how long? As of when? Always. Distrust changes with age; it does not diminish; rather, it even tends to increase.

He does not distinguish the important from the trivial. Order and systematic work are alien to him. He's absent-minded. He'll forget easily, treat lightly, neglect. He doesn't know anything about future responsibilities.

We have to instruct, guide, train, restrain, temper, correct, caution, prevent, impose, and combat.

Combat whim, caprice, and obstinacy.

We have to impose a regimen of caution, foresight, fears and anxieties, presentiments of evil and gloomy forebodings.

We with our experience know how many dangers lie about, obstacles, fatal adventures and calamities.

We know that the greatest precaution doesn't give an absolute guarantee; and this makes us all the more suspicious: in order to have a clear conscience, not to have anything to reproach ourselves for in case of misfortune.

The child delights in the gamble of mischief-making, is curiously drawn to trouble.

He's easily spoiled and hard to correct.

We wish him well, want to make it easy for him; we share all our experience with him without reservation: all he has to do is to reach out—it's all ready for him. We know what is harmful to children; we remember what harmed us. Let him avoid it, be spared; let him not know it.

—Remember, know, understand.

—You will discover, see for yourself.

The child doesn't listen. As if deliberately, out of spite. One has to see to it that he obeys, does what he's supposed to do. Left alone, he avowedly seeks out trouble, chooses the worst path, the most dangerous one.

How can one tolerate senseless mischief, foolish escapades, crazy outbursts?

This to-be is suspect. He appears docile, innocent but, in fact, he's shrewd, cunning.

He manages to slip out from under control, lull vigilance, deceive. He always has an excuse in readiness, an alibi; he conceals or lies outright.

Indifference and distrust, suspicions and accusations. A painful analogy: so he's a trouble-maker, a drunk; he's rebellious, confused. How can one live under the same roof with the likes of him?

Resentment.

It's nothing. We love children. In spite of everything, they are our solace, our delight and hope, our joy and relaxation, the bright sunshine of our life. If we don't frighten, burden, or annoy they feel free and happy...

Why is it though, that there's a sense of a heavy load with them, as if they were an obstruction, an inconvenient addition? Where has this unfavorable opinion toward the beloved child come from?

Even before he greeted the inhospitable world, confusion and limits made their way into the domestic scene. Those brief, irretrievable months of that long-awaited joy seem to break down.

The long period of persistent discomfort ends in illness and pain, sleepless nights and an unexpected expense. Peace at

home is disturbed; there is disorder; the budget is thrown out of whack.

To the sharp smell of diapers and the piercing cry of the new-born rattles the chain of marital slavery.

The burden of being unable to communicate, having to imagine, to guess. We wait, even patiently.

When at long last he finally begins to walk and talk—he gets in the way, touches everything, looks into every corner. He is equally obstructive and upsetting, the little sloven, the brat.

He causes damage, opposes our reasonable will. He demands and understands only what satisfies him.

Trifles aren't to be treated lightly: our resentment toward children is cumulative—their waking at wee hours, the crumpled newspaper, a spot on the dress, a smudge on the wallpaper, a wet carpet, broken eyeglasses or a treasured vase and, yes, the doctor's bills.

He doesn't sleep or eat when we'd like him to, when we'd like him not to; here we thought we'd make him laugh and instead he bursts out walling in fright. And delicate: the slightest neglect and there's the threat of his falling ill, of trouble ahead. If one of the parents forgives, the other blames and nags all the more. In addition to the mother's, there's the opinion formed of the child by the father, the nurse, the maid, the woman next door; against the mother's wishes, and even secretly, each one may mete out punishment.

The little schemer is often the cause of friction and discord among adults; someone is always nasty and getting hurt. For the indulgence of one, the child answers to the other. Often seeming kindness is simply foolish negligence; the responsibility for someone's faults falls on the child.

(Boys and girls don't like to be called children. Sharing that word with the youngest among them burdens the older ones with the responsibility for the past, with the bad reputation of the smaller ones, while, at the same time, suffering the numerous charges hurled at their own group.)

How rarely is the child like we'd like him to be; how often is his growth accompanied by feelings of disappointment.

—By now he ought to ...

The child should reciprocate our good will by trying to repay in kind; he should understand, and give in, control his

wants. But above all he should be grateful. Responsibilities and demands increase with age and, as it happens, they are more apt to be different and less than what we should hope for.

A part of the time we relinquish the demands and authority of upbringing to the school. Care is doubled, responsibility increased; divergent authorities collide. Shortcomings begin to surface.

Parents forgive heartily, their indulgence stemming clearly from a feeling of guilt for having given life, for having committed a wrong in the case of a deformed child. It happens that a mother of a supposedly sick child seeks to defend herself against the accusation of others and of her own doubts.

As a rule, the mother's opinion is not to be trusted. It is felt to be biased, incompetent. We rely, rather, on the opinion of teachers, experts, and experienced professionals as to whether the child is deserving of kindness.

A tutor in a private home doesn't often find suitable conditions for coexisting with the children.

Confined by a distrustful discipline, the tutor is forced to vacillate between another's requirements and his own peace and convenience. While bearing the responsibility for the child, he also bears the consequences of dubious decisions of the legitimate guardians—his employers.

Being forced to conceal and to avoid difficulties, he may easily become corrupted by hypocrisy; he becomes disenchanted, apathetic. As the years of work progress, the gap between the adult's demands and the child's desires widens; familiarity with the abject ways of disciplining increases.

Complaints about a thankless job appear; whomever the Almighty wants to punish is called a teacher.

We grow weary of the active, bustling, fascinating life and its mysteries; we tire of questions and expressions of wonder; discoveries and experiments that frequently end with unfortunate results lose their appeal.

Rarely are we advisors and comforters; more frequently we serve as stern judges. A summary sentence and punishment yield the same result: less frequent but, at the same time, stronger and more contrary are the outbursts of boredom and rebellion. As a result, vigilance has to be strengthened, and resistance broken, while measures have to be taken to insure against surprises.

This is the course of the teacher's downfall: he's indifferent, distrustful, and suspicious; he spies on his charges, seizes them unexpectedly, scolds, accuses and punishes them; he looks for opportune ways of prevention; more and more frequently does he impose restrictions, practices tyrannical compulsion; he does not perceive the child's efforts to write neatly a page or simply to live one hour of the day; he declares dryly that it's just hopeless.

Infrequent is that bright blue patch of pardons; more frequent is it the scarlet of anger and indignation.

How much more understanding does educational work with the group require; how much easier is it to fall into the error of accusations and offense.

A single child, small and weak, is wearying. His individual misdeeds enrage. But how annoying, demanding, and limitless in impulse is the behavior of the group.

How difficult it is for a new teacher to take charge of a class or school where the children were kept in the grip of a fierce discipline, where, riotous and alienated, they have organized themselves along the lines of criminal compulsion. How powerful and menacing they are when they oppose your will with collective force, trying to break your grip; they aren't children anymore but a primitive force.

How many aborted revolutions occur about which the teacher says nothing, ashamed to admit that he is weaker than the child.

Once taught a lesson, the teacher will seize upon any means to be able to overcome and prevail. No familiarity, no harmless joking; no mumbling in answering questions, no shrugging of shoulders or gestures of unwillingness; no stubborn silence or angry glances. He will get rid of the problem at the roots, stamp it out vindictively: by indifference and an angry restiveness. He'll buy out the ringleaders with privileges, recruit informers; he doesn't care about just punishment so long as it is severe, to set an example, in order to squelch the first sign of rebellion, so that the group, that force, isn't tempted, not even in thought, to dictate demands or run amok. The child's weakness may evoke tenderness. The power of the group shocks and offends.

There is that false reproach that says that kindness spoils the child and that the response to gentleness is impunity and disorder.

But let's be careful not to label sloppiness, indolence, and silliness as kindness. We find among teachers not only cunning brutes and misanthropes but also rejects from every kind of occupation, persons incapable of maintaining any responsible position.

It happens that the teacher wants to gain the child's favor quickly, easily, and without effort, to worm his way into the child's confidence. He'll choose to banter and joke with the child when he's in good humor, rather than make a real effort to organize community life. At times his lordly indulgence is pierced by sudden outbursts of distemper. He makes himself look ridiculous in the child's eyes.

Sometimes it happens that someone who is ambitious believes that it is easy to reform a person by persuasion and kindly moral teaching, that it suffices to stir and coax a promise of improvement. This is offensive and boring.

It happens that teachers who, on the surface, appear to be friendly with their insincere phrases really turn out to be the child's worst enemies and offenders. These kind arouse aversion.

The response to humiliation will be indifference—to kindness resentment and rebellion, to distrust conspiracy.

Years of work have confirmed for me more and more clearly that children deserve respect, trust, and kindness, that it is pleasant to be with them in a cheerful atmosphere of gentle feelings, merry laughter, an atmosphere of strenuous first efforts and surprises, of pure, clear, and heart-warming joys, that working with children in such an atmosphere is exhilarating, fruitful, and attractive.

One thing, however, has caused me doubt and anxiety: How was it that occasionally the most trustworthy child would let me down? How was it that, though admittedly rarely, there would be a sudden eruption of unruly behavior by a given group? Maybe adults are no better, only more self-controlled, more certain, more reliable and dependable.

Persistently I sought answers to these questions and gradually the following began to dawn on me:

1. If a teacher is intent on seeking out traits and values which seem to him to be especially valuable, if it is his desire to force everyone into a single mold—he will be making a big mistake; some will pretend to follow his tenets while others will genuinely heed his suggestions—for a time. When the real face of the child shows itself, not only the teacher but the child as well will be surely hurt. The greater the effort in pretending to yield to influence—the stormier will be the reaction. Once the child has revealed his real intentions, he has little more to lose. What an important lesson is there in this.

2. The teacher uses one measure of evaluating while the group uses another: both he and the group sense the richness of the spirit; he waits for them to develop, while they wait to see what immediate good will come of those riches, whether he will share what he has, or keep it all to himself as an exclusive privilege—the conceited, jealous, and self-centered miser. He won't tell any stories, won't play games, won't draw or help out, won't be obliging—"he's doing a big favor", "you have to beg him". Alone and isolated, the child makes a strong effort to win the good graces of his own peer community which eagerly accepts his conversion. He did not become spoiled suddenly; on the contrary, he understood perfectly and reformed.

3. I found the following explanation in a book on the training of animals. I don't conceal the source. A lion isn't dangerous when angry, but when playful and eager to frolic; the group is as strong as the lion...

Solutions are to be sought not only in psychology, but even more so in medical books, in sociology, ethnology, history, poetry, criminology, in the prayer book, and in handbooks on animal training. *Ars longa*.

4. The best but by far not the final explanation dawned on me. A child can become intoxicated with the oxygen of the air as an adult can with alcohol. Excitement, loss of control, recklessness, giddiness; as a reaction, embarrassment, a lump in the throat, a feeling of disgust, and guilt. My own observation is accurate—it is clinical. The most stable person can get tipsy.

Don't scold: this obvious childish intoxication arouses respect and emotion; it does not estrange and set apart, but draws us closer and binds us.

We hide our own faults and guilty actions. Children aren't supposed to criticize; they aren't supposed to notice our bad habits, addictions, and peculiarities. We pose as being perfect. Under the threat of the greatest offense, we defend the secrets of the ruling clan, the caste of the initiated, dedicated to a higher calling. Only the child may be shamelessly degraded and placed in a pillory.

We play with children using marked cards; we pierce the child's weaknesses with the trump cards of adult virtues. As card-sharks we so shuffle the deck as to juxtapose the worst of their hands with the best of ours.

What about our own careless and frivolous grown-ups, selfish gluttons, fools, idlers, rogues, brawlers, cheats, drunkards, and thieves? How about our own violations and crimes—public and private? How much discord, cunning, envy, slander, and blackmail is there among us? Words which wound, deeds which shame? How many quiet family tragedies where children suffer—the first martyrs?

And we dare to blame and accuse?!

To be sure, adult society has been carefully sifted and filtered. How many have been claimed by the grave, by prisons, and insane asylums? How much scum has gone down the gutters?

We urge respect for the elders and the experienced; we caution not to argue with or question them. Children have their own experienced elders among them, close at hand—adolescents with their insistent persuasion and pressure.

Criminal and deranged adults wander about at large; they shove, disrupt, do harm—and they infect. And children on the whole bear joint responsibility for them (because they even give us signals, however faintly, at times). Those few shock public opinion, smudge with conspicuous stains the surface of the child's life. It is they who dictate the routine methods of treatment: keep a tight reign even though it oppresses; be rough even though it hurts, and stern, i.e. brutal.

We do not allow children to organize; disdainful, distrustful, unwilling, we simply do not care. Yet, without the participation of experts we won't be successful. And the expert is the child.

Are we so uncritical as to regard the caresses which we shower upon children as kindness? Don't we understand that on hugging the child it is we who are actually doing the clinging; that we are hiding, helpless, in that child's embrace, seeking in it help and escape in our hours of pain and loneliness? We burden the child with our own sufferings and longings.

Every other kind of endearment which is not an escape into the child or a plea of hope is a crass search for and an awakening of sensuous feelings in him.

—I hug you because I'm sad. Give me a kiss and I'll give you anything you want.

This is egotism, not kindness.

The Right To Respect

There appear to be two lives, one serious and respectable, the other indulgently tolerated, less valuable. We say: a future person, a future worker, a future citizen. That children will be, that they will really begin to be serious only in the future. We kindly let them plod along beside us but, in truth, it would be more convenient without them.

No, not at all. They were and they will be. They did not appear suddenly by surprise, and not just for a brief period either. Children are not a casual encounter who can be passed by hurriedly or dismissed rapidly with a smile and a "Hello".

Children account for a large proportion of mankind, a sizeable portion of the population, of the nation, residents, citizens—constant companions.

Children have been, are, and they will be.

Is there a life that exists as some joke? No, childhood years are long and important ones in the life of man.

A cruel though legitimate law of Greece and Rome allowed for the killing of children. In the Middle Ages fishermen used to catch in their nets the bodies of drowned infants from rivers. In

18th century Paris, older children were sold to beggars, younger ones given away free in front of Notre Dame. Not so very long ago. And to this day they put the screws on children if they happen to get in the way.

The number of illegitimate, abandoned, neglected, exploited, and maltreated children is on the rise. The law protects them, but does it do so sufficiently? Much has changed; old laws need to be revised.

We've grown affluent. We don't get rich solely from the fruits of our own labor. We are heirs to an enormous fortune, share-holders, co-owners. What a lot of cities, buildings, factories, mines, hotels, and theaters we have; what an abundance of goods there is in the markets, how many ships transport them to and fro—the merchants assault the consumers to buy their goods.

Let us tally it all up. Let us calculate how much of the total sum belongs to children, determine the child's share of the profits, not as a favor nor as a charity either. Let us honestly check the amount we allocate for use by the children's portion of the population, how much by the under-age group, and by the working class. What does the inheritance amount to; how should it be divided; have we, dishonest guardians, not disinherited, expropriated?

They are cramped, stifled, poor, and bored.

We have, it's true, introduced universal education, compulsory mental work; we have registration and school taxes. We have also burdened the child with the weight of reconciling the opposing interests of two parallel authorities.

The school makes demands while parents are reluctant to give in. Conflicts between family and school weigh the child down. The parents support charges made against the child that are not always just, defending themselves against the care imposed by the school.

The exertion and effort of an army recruit is also preparation for the day when he might be called up into action; and the state supplies him with all his needs. It supplies him with room and board, a uniform, a weapon, and pay. These are his due; they are not charity.

The child, on the other hand, although subject to compulsory schooling, has to beg from his parents or the authorities.

The Geneva law-makers confused duties with rights; the tone of the declaration* is one of persuasion not insistence: an appeal to goodwill, a plea for kindness.

School creates for the child the rhythm of hours, days and years. School officials are supposed to provide for the needs of today's young citizens. The child is a rational being. He knows full well what his needs, difficulties, and obstacles in life are. Needed is not a despotic order, imposed discipline, or distrustful control, but tactful understanding; faith in experience, co-operation and co-existence is the real basis of child-care.

The child is not dumb; there are as many fools among children as there are among adults. Dressed in the clothing of age, how often do we impose thoughtless, uncritical, and impractical regulations. Sometimes a wise child is shocked by a malicious, senile, and abusive ignorance.

The child has a future and a past as well, full of memorable events, memories, and many hours of the most significant solitary reflections. No less than we, he remembers and forgets, appreciates and rejects, reasons logically—and errs when he doesn't know. Thoughtfully he trusts and doubts.

The child is a foreigner who doesn't know the language, isn't familiar with the street plan, is ignorant of the laws and customs of the land. At times he likes to go exploring on his own; when things get rough, he asks for directions and help. What he needs is a guide who will politely answer his questions.

Respect for his lack of knowledge!

A swindler and crook will take advantage of a foreigner's ignorance; he'll give a false answer or mislead deliberately. A boor will mutter something unwillingly. We're always yelling at and quarrelling with children; we nag, reproach, punish. We don't let the child know in a kind way.

How impoverished would be the child's knowledge were it not for his peers, for his eavesdropping; if he didn't pick up information from the words and conversations of adults.

Respect for the effort of learning!

Respect for the setbacks and tears!

*Korczak refers here to the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, 1923.

Not only a torn stocking, but a scratched knee; not only a broken glass, but a cut on the finger and a black-and-blue and a bump that's painful.

An ink-blot in his notebook is an accident, an unpleasantness and a misfortune.

—When Daddy spills some tea, Mama says: "It's nothing." But when I do it she gets angry.

Children suffer acutely because they are unaccustomed to pain, wrong-doing, and injustice. More frequently they cry; even a child's tears are treated as a joke, made to seem less important. They make adults angry.

—He whines, bawls, squeals, sobs.

(A chain of words which the adult's dictionary invented for use against children.)

Tears of obstinacy and capriciousness—these are tears of powerlessness and rebellion, a despairing effort of protest, a cry for help, a complaint against indifferent care, evidence that adults restrain unreasonably, coerce, a symptom of a bad frame of mind, but always a sign of suffering.

Respect for the child's belongings and for his budget! The child painfully shares the material worries of the family, feels shortages, compares his own poverty with a friend's affluence. The few pennies that he does possess and that speak of his poverty hurt bitterly. He doesn't want to be a burden.

But what can one do if a new cap is needed, or a movie ticket, or a replacement for a pad or a pencil which was lost or stolen; or if you'd like to buy someone you like a present, or treat yourself to a cake or lend your friend some money? There are so many essential needs, desires, and temptations but no means to satisfy them.

Doesn't it mean anything that in juvenile courts thefts account for the major offense? This is the consequence of treating indifferently the matter of the child's budget, something no amount of punishment will change.

A child's possessions—not junk but a beggar's tools of the trade, hope and mementos. Today's cares and anxieties, the bitterness of the years of youth together with disappointments—these are not illusions but realities.

The child grows. He lives more strenuously. The breathing's faster, the pulse livelier; he's getting bigger—there's more of him all the time; growing deeper into life. He grows day and night, when asleep and awake, happy and sad, when he's afraid, and when he stands cowed before you.

There are spring bursts of double growth and slow-downs of autumn. At one time the bones grow while the heart barely keeps up; at another time there's a slow-down or an excess, a changing chemistry of diminishing and activated glands, a different anxiety and surprise.

At one time he has the urge to run and, like breathing itself, he wants to fight, exert himself, overcome; at another time he feels like hiding, daydreaming, spinning a web of wistful memories. For a change of pace there's a need for peace and quiet, for tenderness and protection. Or else there are strong and passionate desires alternating with fits of depression.

Fatigue, the discomfort of pain, a cold; it's too hot, too cold; drowsiness, hunger, thirst, deprivation, discomfort; or a feeling of having enough—this is not a whim or a school excuse.

Respect for the mysteries and the ups and downs of that difficult task of growing!

Respect for the present moment, for today!

How will he know tomorrow unless we allow him a conscious, responsible life today?

Not to step on, abuse, enslave for tomorrow; not to repress, hurry, drive on.

Respect for every separate moment because each will pass and never return, and always to be treated seriously; injure it and it will bleed, kill it and it will haunt with awful memories.

Let the child drink in the joy of the morning and let him be hopeful. This is how the child wishes it to be. Don't grudge him the time for a story, for a chat with his dog, for catching ball, for the careful study of a picture, or for copying letters. Allow time for this with kindness. The child is really right in this.

Naively we fear death, not realizing that life is but a cycle of dying and reborn moments. A year is but an attempt at understanding eternity for everyday use. A moment lasts as long as a smile or sigh. A mother yearns to bring up her child. She doesn't

see this take place because each day it is a different woman who greets the day and bids good night to a different person.

We ineffectively divide the years into more or less mature ones; there is no immature present, no hierarchy of age, no higher or lower grades of pain or joy, hopes or disappointments.

When I play or talk with a child two equally mature moments—mine and the child's—intertwine; when I'm with a group of children, I always say hello or good-bye on the run with a single glance and a smile. When I'm angry, again the feeling is mutual—only that my angry, vindictive moment oppresses and poisons the child's mature and vital moment in life.

Renounce oneself in the name of tomorrow? What attractions are there in this? We paint with excessively dark colors. The prediction is fulfilled: the roof caves in because of a flimsy foundation.

The Child's Right to be Oneself

—What will he be when he grows up?, we ask anxiously.

We want our children to be better than us. We dream about a perfect person of the future.

We have to diligently catch ourselves in lies, pin down our egotism disguised in phony elegance. Seemingly a generous resignation but, in truth, an ordinary swindle.

We have reached an understanding with ourselves, made amends; we have forgiven and freed ourselves from the responsibility of improving. We were badly brought up. It's too late to start now. Our defects and faults have rooted too deeply. We don't let children criticize us, nor do we watch ourselves.

Feeling absolved, we have resigned from the struggle, shifting its burden onto children.

A teacher eagerly adopts the adult's privilege: to keep an eye on the child, not on oneself; to register the child's faults, not one's own.

A child will be blamed for whatever upsets our peace and quiet, our ambition and comfort, for whatever offends and angers us, for whatever runs counter to our own ways, for whatever takes up our time and thought. We don't recognize transgressions without evil intent.

The child doesn't know, didn't quite hear or understand, or else misheard, was misled—it's his fault and ill will.

Not fast enough or a bit too fast, or a task not performed well enough—this is blamed on laziness, sloppiness, absent-mindedness, unwillingness.

Unfulfillment of a harmful, impossible demand—blame. A clumsy, angry suspicion—guilty too. Our anxieties and suspicions are the child's fault as well; he's even blamed for making an extra effort. —You see, if you want to, you can. We always manage to find something to reproach the child for; greedily we demand more.

Do we ever concede to the child tactfully, avoid unnecessary grievances, make living together easier? Aren't we rather the stubborn ones, fussy, offensive, capricious?

The child attracts our attention when he disturbs and causes trouble; we notice and remember only these moments. We take no notice when he's quiet, or thoughtful. We treat lightly those sacred moments of his conversing with himself, the world, and God. The child is forced to conceal his longings and impulses in the face of scorn and brusque attention; he hides his willingness to understand, will not acknowledge his desire to improve.

He dutifully conceals expressions of wonder, anxieties, grievances—and his anger and rebelliousness. We want him to jump and clap his hands, and that's why he shows us the smiling face of a joker.

Bad deeds and bad children make loud noises; they drown out the soft whisper of good. And yet there is a thousand times more good than bad. Good is strong and durable. It's not so that it's easier to spoil than to correct.

We train our attention and ingenuity to prying into wrongdoing, searching, sniffing, stalking, seizing red-handed in the act, full of suspicions of mischief.

(Do we keep old-timers from playing football? How awful is that incessant sniffing about for signs of masturbation in children?)

One banged the door, another didn't make his bed properly, another mislaid his coat, still another ruined his note-book. We scold and nag instead of being glad that these are mishaps that happen only singly.

We hear a lot of complaints and quarrels; but how much more forgiveness there is, giving in, helping, how much more

concern and good-will, instruction and positive influence, deep and beautiful.

We want them to be docile, that not a single one of the ten thousand seconds of the school hour (count them) should be troublesome.

Why is one child, for example, seen as bad by one teacher and good by another? We demand uniformity of virtues and moments and, what's more, that children conform to tastes and habits.

Can we find in all of history a similar case of such tyranny? Generations of Negroes have proliferated.

Side by side with health stands illness, alongside virtues and worth there are vices and shortcomings.

For a few children for whom joys and parties are the norm, for whom life is a fable and an inspiring legend full of trust and kindness, there is a mass of children for whom from the earliest days, the world speaks by way of crude words and harsh, sinister truths. They are corrupted by the contemptuous scorn of vulgarity and poverty, or spoiled by the sensual, caressing indifference of surfeit and refinement.

Dirty, distrustful, alienated from people—but not bad.

Not only the home, but the hallway, the corridor, courtyard and street serve the child as models. The child talks in the language of his surroundings, expresses views, imitates gestures, follows examples. There is no such thing as a pure child—every one is tainted to a greater or lesser degree.

Oh, but how quickly does the child free and cleanse himself. There is no medicine for this, just a good wash. And the child willingly helps in this, happy at the chance to rediscover himself. He had been longing for a bath and now he smiles to you and himself.

Such simple victories from stories about orphan children are celebrated by every teacher: these illustrations deceive uncritical moralists into believing that it all comes easily. A fool delights in them, a careerist attributes success to himself, while a tyrant is angry because it isn't the rule; some want to achieve similar results in all areas by increasing the dose of persuasion, others by increasing pressure.

Together with children who are merely sullied, we also meet children who are crippled and injured; there are those kinds

of wounds that leave no scars, that heal themselves under a clean dressing. The healing of lacerated wounds however, takes longer; they leave painful scars; they shouldn't be irritated. Sores and ulcers require greater attention and patience.

That folk adage says: "A healing body." One would like to add: "and soul".

How many scratches and contagions are there in schools and nurseries, how many temptations and troublesome whispers; and what a lot of fleeting and innocent activity. We need not have fear of dangerous epidemics where the atmosphere of the school is healthy, where there is plenty of fresh air and sunlight.

How wisely, gradually, and wonderfully does the process of recovery take place! How many wondrous secrets are concealed in the blood, in body secretions and tissues! How every disturbed function and damaged organ strives to regain normalcy, to be back on track! How many marvels are there in the growth of plants and in man, in the heart and brain, in the breathing mechanism! At the faintest emotion or exertion and the heart beats faster, the pulse quickens.

The child's spirit has this same power and endurance. There exist both a moral balance as well as an alertness of the conscience. It isn't true that children are easily infected.

Correctly, though late unfortunately, pedagogy found its way into school programs. Without understanding the harmony of the body, it's impossible to acquire respect for the mysteries of healing.

A botched diagnosis lumps together all kinds of children—the agile, ambitious, critical—all awkward but clean and healthy—with the resentful, sullen, and distrustful—debased, tempted, frivolous, meekly following bad examples. An inexperienced, careless, and shallow observation mixes them all together and equates them erroneously with the fewer criminal and bad types.

(Not only do we adults know how to hurt the orphans of fate but we cleverly benefit from the work of the disinherited.)

Healthy children compelled to mix with such a bad lot suffer doubly: they get hurt and are drawn into delinquency.

While we, do we not accuse indifferently one and all, do we not impose collective responsibility?

—That's what they're like. That's all they can do.

The worst of wrongs.

They are the offspring of drunkenness, rape, and insanity. The misdeeds are but an echo of commands not of an external but an internal voice. A gloomy moment indeed when the child realized that he was different, difficult, a cripple, that he would be ostracized, picked on. The very first decisions are to fight the force dictating bad deeds. What others have gotten so freely and easily, what in others is ordinary and trivial, he receives as the reward of a bloody struggle. He seeks help; if he is trusting, he will come forward, beg and demand: "help me!". He has revealed his secret; he wants to improve, once and for all, all at once, in a single effort.

Instead of thoughtfully slowing down that rash impulse, delaying the decision to improve, we clumsily encourage and urge him on. He wants to free himself while we set a trap for him; he wants to break out while we, in turn, deceitfully prepare a snare. When he expresses a desire to be frank and sincere, we only teach him to conceal.

He offers us a whole day without a flaw, whereas we repel him because of a single bad moment. Is it worth it?

He used to wet his bed every day but now does so less frequently. It was better, then it got worse—no harm. Longer periods between the seizures of an epileptic. The fever of a tubercular has gone down; there's less coughing now. It's not an improvement, but at least it isn't getting any worse. The doctor counts even this as a plus in the treatment. There is no cheating or coercing here.

Desperate, rebellious and contemptuous of the submissive, boot-licking virtues of the mob, these children stand up to the teacher; they have retained one and maybe the last of holies—a loathing of hypocrisy. And this we want to knock down and eliminate. We commit mayhem, resort to the use of starvation and torture to render them powerless; we brutally suppress not rebellion but its open expression. We fan to white heat this loathing toward deceitfulness and cant.

They do not renounce their plan for revenge. Rather, they postpone and wait for an opportune moment. If they believe in good, they will bury their yearning for it in the deepest secrecy.

—Why did you let me be born? Did I ask for such a dog's life?

I reach for the greatest understanding, the most difficult enlightenment. Patient and sympathetic know-how are needed

to deal with offenses and misdemeanors; transgressors need love. Their angry rebellion is justified. One has to feel sorry for an easy virtue, measure up to the solitary, damned offense. When, if not now, will he receive the flower of a smile?

In correctional institutions inquisitions are still the rule, medieval penal torture, a united obstinacy and vindictiveness of ill-treatment. Don't you see that the best children feel sorry for the worst: what are they guilty of?

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Not so long ago the humble physician obediently used to administer sweet elixirs and bitter tonics to the sick; he used to bind the fevered, let blood, and starve his patients in gloomy, funereal waiting rooms. He indulged the powerful and was cold toward the poor.

Finally, he began to make demands—and was granted them.

The physician won space and sunlight for children. Like a general—to our shame—he gave children movement, adventure, the joy of gentle service, the chance on deciding on a decent life, chatting near the camp-fire under a starlit sky.

What is our teacher's role, our area of work? A care-taker of walls and furniture, of order in the playground, of clean ears and floors; a cowherd seeing to it that the herd does not annoy adults in their work and at play; a keeper of torn pants and shoes and a stingy server of meals; a guardian of adult privileges and an indolent performer of unprofessional whims.

What is our teachers' role? A storehouse of admonitions, a dispenser of moral platitudes, and a retailer of denatured knowledge which intimidates, confuses and lulls rather than awakens, animates, and gladdens. Agents of cheap virtues, we have to force from children respect and obedience; we have to stir up sentimental feelings in adults, prod warm emotions from them. To build a solid future on a handful of pennies, to cheat and pretend that children are a number, a will, a force, and a law. The doctor rescued the child from the hands of death; the teacher's job is to let him live, to let him win the right to be a child.

Researchers have affirmed that the adult is guided by motives, the child by impulses, that the adult is logical while the

child is caught up in a web of illusory imagination; that the adult has character, a definite moral make-up, while the child is enmeshed in a chaos of instincts and desires. They study the child not as a different psychological being but as a weaker and poorer one. As if adults are everything—all learned professors!

And what about the adult mess, a quagmire of opinions and beliefs, a psychological herd of prejudices and habits, frivolous deeds of fathers and mothers—the whole thing from top to bottom an irresponsible adult life. Negligence, laziness, dull obstinacy, thoughtlessness, adult absurdities, follies, and drinking bouts.

And the seriousness, thoughtfulness, and poise of the child? A child's solid commitment and experience; a treasure chest of fair judgements and appraisals, a tactful restraint of demands, full of subtle feelings and an unerring sense of right.

Does everyone win playing chess with a child?

Let us demand respect for those clear eyes and smooth temples, that young effort and trust. Why is it that we show respect for that spiritless expression, that wrinkled brow, bristled greyness, stooped resignation?

There is a sunrise and a sunset, a morning as well as an evening prayer; every inhalation has an exhalation; for every systole there is a diastole.

A soldier, when he moves out to battle and returns, is covered with grime. A new generation is mounting, a new wave is gathering. They come with vices and assets; give them conditions under which they can develop better. We won't win a case against the coffin of a sick childhood; we can't order a cornflower to be wheat.

We aren't miracle-workers—nor do we want to be charlatans. Let us renounce the deceptive longing for perfect children.

We demand that hunger be eliminated, cold, dampness, overcrowding, overpopulation.

It is you who bear the sick and the crippled; it is you who create conditions for rebellion and contagion: your thoughtlessness, ignorance, and lack of order.

Beware: contemporary life is shaping a powerful brute, a homo rapax; it is he who dictates the mode of living. His conces-

The Child's Right To Respect

sions to the weak are a lie, his respect for the aged, for women's rights and kindness toward children are falsehoods. Such homeless sentiments wander about lost, like Cinderella. Rather, it is really children who are the real princes of feelings, the poets and thinkers.

Respect, if not humility, toward the white, bright, and unquenchable holy childhood.