

THE BASIS OF THE INEQUALITY OF CHILDREN

The reader is immediately curious as to the exact nature of this paper. There would (seemingly) be the connotation that children constitute a group who are ill treated and oppressed. This paper does not pertain to the existence of any alleged oppression of children. If I am prepared to acknowledge that children are not an oppressed group, then what *does* this paper pertain to? The preliminary component of this (short) paper will argue that children are not viewed as being truly equal as human beings in relation to adults. The latter component will state the reason for this view.

Since children are not oppressed in any way (assuming they are not victims of child abuse), it would seem ludicrous to attempt to argue that they are not viewed as equal human beings. However, a few points to contest this are as follows. In the languages of French, German, and Russian, there are two different forms of the word you. There are two different aspects to this word. One form is the plural of you whereas the other is singular. However, there is another element pertaining to the plural and singular forms of this word. The singular form is utilized when addressing someone familiar to you, whereas the plural is designated as the polite form when addressing strangers whom you wish to be cordial to. Consequently, when meeting an individual for the first time, it is only socially diplomatic to utilize the cordial form of you. However, the social nuances of these countries allow one exception. If an adult is meeting a child for the first time, then it is expected the adult will utilize the familiar (singular) form of you when conversing with the child. However, this same "courtesy" is not extended to the child. If the child "dares" to utilize the familiar form of you during the course of his conversation with the adult, he will be admonished and corrected. He may be instructed that it is rude to utilize this form of you when addressing another person whom he is meeting for the first time. It is only polite to utilize the formal version of you. The child will be instructed to immediately correct his behaviour. However, the adult will "happily" continue to employ the informal version of you as he continues his conversation with the child as this *is* socially acceptable. Why is it acceptable for an adult to employ the informal version of you when conversing with a child whom he is meeting for the first time, but unacceptable for the child to do the same during the conversation?

Another example of differences between children and adults which exist, but in all probably shouldn't exist, is as follows. There are times when a child may tell one (or both) of his parents to, "Shutup!" At that moment, the child will be disciplined by the parents. The precise severity of the discipline will be contingent upon the nature of the parents. It could potentially range from a scolding to intense corporal punishment for the explicit purpose of teaching the child that his behaviour is rude and disrespectful. However, as an example, the very next day, the parents have no qualms about screaming back at the child, "Shutup!" Although I do not deny that a child should not speak to his parents this way, what gives the parent the right to speak this way to the child?*

Are these examples indicative of oppression? As stated towards the initial part of the paper, no. However, are they indicative of children being viewed as unequal human beings in relation to adults? There is no justification for adults to utilize the informal version of you while

* Some may claim that since children are prone to antagonize their parents via their talking, parents are justified in saying shutup to a child. Although children may have a tendency to antagonize their parents at times, there are less acerbic ways of letting the child know that he should keep quiet.

the child is fully expected to utilize the formal version, or for adults to tell their children to shut up when the children would be severely disciplined for speaking the same way to their parents. The only "justification" would be the refusal to view children as equal human beings in relation to adults. This begs the question, *why* are children viewed in this inferior capacity? The answer can be explained via the following.

For mankind to ensure the perpetuation of a viable society, what is required? *The skills and abilities of its members to engage in the work required by society.* A hypothetical scenario will be presented in which everyone in society loses their ability to engage in their respective jobs. Working within the parameters of this hypothetical scenario, society and civilization would collapse almost immediately. Without the skills and abilities of our various members, civilization cannot exist. Do children contribute to the maintenance and building of our civilization? *As children* they do not. Even though they are absolutely imperative for the *future* maintenance of society, during their childhood they are devoid of any skills or knowledge which facilitates the maintenance of society. Even with a *minority* of cultures in which children may actively contribute to society (an agrarian community where children assist with the harvest), another reality comes into play. These children are incapable of *independently* contributing to their society. If, as an example, the parents of children who partake in a harvest were to die tomorrow, someone must take responsibility for the care and upbringing of those children. They are incapable of independently maintaining their society. Consequently, we have the following.

1. It is the skills and knowledge of individuals which maintain and build our civilization.
2. Children are devoid of any skills or knowledge which maintain or build our civilization.

As a direct result of these two factors, there is the unconscious belief that children are not equal to adults. Although this will not culminate in the oppression of children, there will be times when they are not treated on an equal "footing" with adults. Although only two examples of this were cited in this paper, there may very well be an inordinate number of actions which show that children are not viewed as being truly equal human beings to adults.