

## The Role of Pragmatism in the Child's Social and Moral Development

دور البرغماتية في نمو الطفل اجتماعيا وأخلاقيا

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### Abstract:

Philosophy and psychology are two closely related disciplines, due to the overlap in their subject matter. This explains why psychology was the last science to separate from philosophy, which occurred in the late 19th century when it established its own methodology and boundaries, distinguishing it from philosophical inquiry. Recently, there has been a renewed convergence between the two fields, giving rise to the concept of philosophy of education, which is based on applying philosophical thought to educational practices. This paper explores the impact of philosophy on the social and moral development of the child . The study aims to examine various theoretical frameworks that link philosophical critical thinking with the developmental stages of the child, in order to explore the advantages and disadvantages of applying critical thinking to children;

**Keywords:** Pragmatism, Dewey, philosophy, education, child

### ملخص:

تعتبر كل من الفلسفة وعلم النفس تخصصان متقاربان، وذلك يرجع لتداخل مواضيعيهما، وهذا ما يفسر سبب تأخر علم النفس عن الانفصال عن الفلسفة، لأنه يعتبر آخر علم انفصل عنها، في أواخر القرن 19 م عندما وضع منهج وحدود خاصة به، تفصله عن الأبحاث الفلسفية. لنشهد مؤخرا عودة تقاربهما، ونتيجة هذا التقارب ظهور مصطلح فلسفة التربية، الذي يقوم على أساس تطبيق الفكر الفلسفي على التربية، وهذا موضوع ورقتنا البحثية والذي يتمثل في دراسة أثر الفلسفة في النمو الاجتماعي الأخلاقي للطفل، فسأحاول في هذا البحث الإلمام بمختلف الأطر النظرية، التي تربط التفكير النقدي الفلسفي ووتطور نمو الطفل بغية استكشاف ايجابيات وسلبيات تطبيق التفكير النقدي على الطفل. كلمات مفتاحية: البراغمتية، ديوي، الفلسفة، التربية، الطفل.

### Introduction:

Philosophy and psychology are two disciplines closely related to each other. Psychology, like other sciences, was once included within philosophical inquiry. Psychological research was part of philosophical studies and considered a branch thereof. With the rise of the scientific revolution in the 17th century and the emergence of the

experimental method, a revolution in scientific knowledge took place. This method became the separator between science and philosophy—between hypothetical rational contemplation and certain experimental inquiry.

As soon as the study of nature was separated from philosophy and became known as physics, the investigation of natural phenomena became characterized by certainty and deterministic explanations. Consequently, most experimental and human sciences attempted to adopt this method to reach the same level of certainty as physics. Several studies in biology emerged aiming to apply the experimental method to biological phenomena. This trend extended beyond the material experimental branches to human sciences, starting with historical and social phenomena and reaching psychological phenomena.

By the 19th century, psychology had separated from philosophy by defining its boundaries and establishing its own method, becoming an independent science like other fields. However, this separation was not absolute, as the two fields converged again in the domain of the philosophy of science—a discipline that encompasses all sciences and aims to examine the methods, hypotheses, and principles of scientific knowledge.

As a result, a new field called the philosophy of education emerged, attempting to apply philosophical methods to psychology and childhood studies, exploring various dimensions such as cognitive, social, and moral development. This research attempts to address the following problem:

What is the role of philosophy in the child's social and moral development?

### **Research Objectives:**

This research aims to demonstrate the role of philosophy in fostering the child's development from various angles, particularly the role of philosophical schools in shaping the child's cognitive, social, and moral growth.

### **Research Methodology:**

We have used the analytical-critical method in this research.

### **Research Axes:**

We divided the research into three main axes:

First Axis: Definition of Philosophy and the Child

Second Axis: Models of Applying Philosophy to the Child

Social and Moral Development in the Thought of John Dewey

Third Axis: Dimensions of the Child's Social and Moral Development

# **1. Definition of Philosophy and child**

## **Definition of Philosophy**

It is commonly acknowledged that it is difficult to provide a single, clear definition of philosophy that is universally agreed upon. However, the linguistic definition remains consistent. Etymologically, the word "philosophy" originates from the Greek term *philosophia*, which is composed of two parts: *philo*, meaning "love," and *sophia*, meaning "wisdom." Thus, philosophy is the love of wisdom, and the philosopher is one who loves wisdom.

## **Conceptual Definition of Philosophy:**

The multiplicity of definitions of philosophy stems from the diversity of philosophical schools and the principles adopted by individual philosophers, each linking the concept of philosophy to their own framework. Definitions of philosophy have varied throughout its historical development from its inception to the present day. Consequently, it is difficult to formulate a comprehensive and exclusive definition. Moreover, philosophy is often regarded as a product of individual reflection, although modern thinkers have largely agreed to define it as the science of the principles of existence.

Natural philosophers approached philosophy from a naturalistic perspective. Thales, considered the first of the natural philosophers, traced the origin of all things to water, observing that everything is dependent upon it. Heraclitus, on the other hand, attributed it to fire due to its capacity to consume all things.

For Aristotle, philosophy is the study of being as being; it seeks to understand the first causes and ultimate principles in an absolute sense. He referred to it using several terms, including "wisdom" and "first philosophy." (Aristotle, 1950, p. 12).

René Descartes defined philosophy as the science of first principles and a comprehensive, universal knowledge aimed at achieving human happiness.

One of the most well-known contemporary definitions of philosophy is that of Oeveregg, who defined it as the science of causes and principles.

### **Philosophy According to Muslim Philosophers**

Muslim philosophers offered their own conceptualizations of philosophy. Al-Kindi, for example, defined philosophy as "the knowledge of things in their true nature, to the extent of human capacity." He considered the highest and most noble form of philosophy to be "First Philosophy"—the science of the First Truth, which is the cause of all other truths. He referred to this form of philosophy as the science of divinity.

## **Definition of the Child**

Defining the concept of the child has long been a matter of interdisciplinary interest and discussion among psychologists, legal experts, and other professionals concerned with childhood and child development.

Linguistically, in Arabic, the word *ṭifl* is derived from the triliteral root *ṭa-fa-la*. It originally refers to something tender or soft, like a young and delicate plant. The plural is *aṭfāl* and the feminine form is *ṭifla*. The term *ṭifl* (with a kasra on the letter "ṭ") refers to a newborn or infant until puberty. A male is considered a child from the moment of birth until he reaches the age of physical maturity (i.e., puberty) (Boujemline, p. 20)

Terminologically, according to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, a child is defined as "every human being below the age of eighteen years," unless the age of majority is reached earlier under applicable national laws. Although interpretations may vary across disciplines, this legal definition has become widely accepted internationally.

From a sociological and philosophical perspective, conceptions of childhood differ (Al-Khatib, 2011, p. 22).

The philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau regarded the child as a complete being—not in the sense of fully developed maturity, but in the sense that childhood is a distinct stage in human development, endowed with its own natural path toward completion. According to Rousseau, the child is not merely an immature adult, but rather a qualitatively unique human being with specific characteristics and needs. He emphasized that childhood should be respected as a phase with its own logic and rhythm, asserting that the principle guiding a child's activity is the same as that which governs adult behavior—though the mechanisms and nature of needs differ.

In this sense, Rousseau drew a clear humanistic distinction between the child and the adult, highlighting the autonomy of the child's development and the natural process of growth that leads to maturity (] Khaled Al-Khattat)

## **2.The Impact of Philosophy on the Child Socially and**

### **Morally**

### **The Role of Pragmatism in the Child's Social Development**

### **Dewey's Philosophy of Education**

John Dewey's philosophy of education is grounded in the use of philosophical thinking to address and examine educational issues. Before delving into the specifics of his educational philosophy, it is essential to understand the foundational basis upon which it was built—namely, the pragmatic foundation. Dewey is regarded as one of the key figures and founders of the philosophy of pragmatism.

He defined pragmatism in a way that reflects his core belief, stating:

"I firmly assert that the term 'pragmatic' means nothing other than the principle of referring all thought and all reflective considerations to their practical consequences." (Djadidi, 2003)

(Djadidi, 2003, p. 05)

In another context, Dewey described pragmatism as:

"An approach that reflects what Peirce referred to as the 'laboratory habit of mind.'"

This philosophy extended to encompass all domains where inquiry can yield fruitful and practical outcomes.

Some of the key principles that characterize the philosophy of pragmatism can be summarized as follows:

- The Scientific Method and Key Principles of Pragmatism
- The scientific method is considered the most effective means for testing ideas.
- Experience serves as a tool for communication and for linking thought to action. An individual's personal experience is a means of understanding and interacting with the external world.

The self is viewed as a symbolic construct produced through social situations, and its continuity depends on those social contexts. (Nasser, 2005, p. 4)

phy of education, it is also a modern term. Its concept, according to As for the philoso John Dewey, is the use of the philosophical method of thinking to address educational .issues

## **Philosophy of Education According to Dewey**

The term philosophy of education is also a modern concept, and Dewey emphasized that it entails the use of philosophical methods to examine educational issues. He regarded philosophy as "the general theory of education." On another level, it is an organized activity that uses philosophical tools to define foundational principles and clarify the objectives education seeks to achieve.

Dewey viewed the philosopher of education as "an engineer who plans and designs educational frameworks based on the needs of society." (Dewey J. t., 1946, p. 322)

From his perspective, differences in philosophical visions naturally lead to differences in educational practice, since the perception and resolution of real-world problems varies from person to person.

Dewey defined education as "a continuous process of reconstructing experience." According to this view, education is a dynamic and ongoing process of organizing human

experience. It is, in essence, a process of growth that shapes the minds of children and youth.

In other words, education is an interactive process marked by depth and inclusivity—between the individual and the environment, between the human being and the world in which they live. Dewey consistently emphasized in his various works that:

“Education is life itself, not merely a preparation for life.”

He also regarded education as a social process that lies at the heart of societal structure, making it the most crucial tool a society can rely on to regenerate and renew itself. (Muhammad, 2001, p. 92)

### **The Concept of Progressive Education:**

Progressive education is an educational approach that emphasizes democratic values in education, encourages creativity in accordance with students’ interests, and promotes learning through active participation. It also stresses the close relationship between teachers and students, aiming to foster a collaborative and student-centered learning environment

Principles and Practices of Progressive Education: (Kennedy, 2019)

Each educational system is characterized by a distinct set of principles that give it its unique identity and value. Progressive education, in particular, is distinguished by a number of foundational principles, including:

A focus on everything that positively influences the natural development of the child, with special attention to the child’s interests.

An emphasis on active learning, particularly through problem-solving approaches. Progressive education encourages cooperation over competition within the school environment.

The adoption of democratic values in educational practice and school governance.

In the view of progressive education, education is life itself—not merely preparation for life. Accordingly, the mission of the progressive school is fulfilled by providing children with content and experiences that align with their social reality, making the child the core of the educational process. This is realized through practical activities and manual work, which serve as vital tools for developing the child. Through these hands-on experiences, the child gains knowledge not just by reading or listening to lectures (as important as these are), but by engaging in meaningful, experiential learning.

Among the most well-known activities in progressive schools are educational and manual projects that utilize a variety of materials such as metals, soil, and paper. These materials support diverse tasks like folding, cutting, measuring, casting, heating, and cooling. Additional activities include field trips, physical exercise, gardening, drama, and

storytelling, all of which help children acquire skills, encourage teamwork, and promote a sense of comfort and belonging—because they align with the children’s capacities and personal interests, nurturing a sense of community and shared purpose.

Despite the importance of manual activities, John Dewey emphasized the need for balance. He cautioned against burdening children with tasks that are overly complex or beyond their developmental capabilities. The teacher’s role, in Dewey’s view, is to guide students in organizing their work at the appropriate time, provide exercises that help them develop their abilities, and assist them in recognizing areas of weakness in their performance. The child should then be encouraged to engage in targeted exercises that address these gaps.

Ultimately, the goal of all manual activity is to foster intelligence and creativity in the child—developing their capacity for self-directed work and refining their skills.

## **Connecting Pragmatism to the Child:**

### **Learning as an Experimental, Not Theoretical, Process**

Pragmatic philosophy rejects abstract theorization and verbal solutions to philosophical problems. It distances itself from rigid principles or closed philosophical systems. Instead, it turns toward the study of what is concrete, real, and experiential—not with the aim of discovering fixed truths or achieving certain outcomes, but rather to adopt a method that allows ideas and meanings to be realized in the external world. According to this view, knowledge arises through practical experience and experimentation.

Based on this, John Dewey advocated for the application of the experimental method across all fields, including religion, ethics, and society, provided that such application is guided by intelligence and informed understanding, so as not to lead to impulsiveness or misjudgment. For Dewey, the value of knowledge lies in inquiry and exploration of the world around us—not in escapist thinking or contemplation of otherworldly realms. Hence, he regarded scientific inquiry as one of the most important foundations of objective thought, because it directly addresses the real-world problems we encounter.

This perspective also extends to ethics, which, according to Dewey, cannot be taught through instruction alone but must be practiced and lived.

## **Thinking as a Tool for Problem-Solving**

Dewey defined thinking in terms of practical and utilitarian ends. Human beings think in order to adapt, survive, and maintain their existence. Thinking arises when an individual is faced with a problem that requires resolution or when confronted with a challenge that must be overcome. Thus, problems are the source of thought; they are embedded at the core of human knowledge. Without problems, human life would be devoid of thinking.

This implies that thinking is a function of human becoming. While other living beings adapt through instinct, human beings adapt through reflection and reasoning. Human

culture, therefore, is the product of the human encounter with the conditions and challenges of life. In this sense, thinking does not begin unless and until a problem is present—it is a response to real-life experiences.

### Human Needs as the Basis of Thought

Human needs are fundamentally embedded in the origins of thinking. Thought does not emerge unless there is a need that gives rise to it. Therefore, the success of thinking depends on its ability to produce suitable solutions to the challenges and problems that individuals encounter. (Mohamed Saeed Al-Ashmawi, February 1998)

The need to solve problems is the primary guiding factor in the thinking process. It is the questions that demand resolution that stimulate and direct thinking. The uncertainty and ambiguity inherent in such problems play a critical role in provoking thought and constructing knowledge. We cease to think when we find solutions to our problems, and we do not resume thinking unless a new problem arises or we are confronted with a new confusing situation. On this basis, it can be said that thinking functions by transforming ambiguity into clarity.

Dewey emphasizes the importance of experience and problem situations in the formation of consciousness, stating:

"To understand thought, we must observe it as it arises in specific situations. It begins when a living being encounters difficulties and obstacles and begins to form hypotheses to guide action, then subjects these hypotheses to observation and experimentation." (Will Durant, 1985, p. 628)

### Problem-Solving as an Application of Reflective Thinking

The problem-solving method is, in essence, the practical application of reflective thinking. According to Dewey, in order to engage in real thinking, the learner must go through the following stages:

1. Experiencing confusion, uncertainty, or doubt about a particular situation.
2. Identifying and defining the problem that needs to be solved.
3. Testing one hypothesis after another by gathering information or data to overcome the confusion or uncertainty.
4. Developing an idea that leads to a possible solution.
5. Accepting a conclusion only if it has been verified by relevant data and evidence, and rejecting any conclusions that have not been adequately supported.

### **3. Prospects and Challenges in Dewey's Educational Theory**

#### **The Prospects of Dewey's Educational Philosophy**

John Dewey's influence and renown in the field of education are evident in the praise found in the writings of many contemporary educators, particularly his own students—such as Randall, Edman, Hook, Raths, and others. Among them, William Kilpatrick was perhaps the most enthusiastic, as he elaborated and explained many of Dewey's educational ideas. Sidney Hook reviewed much of Dewey's work before publication, and Raths compiled his teacher's essays in a volume titled *The Mind in the Modern World*. All of them played a significant role in disseminating the core features of Dewey's educational philosophy (Al-Ahwani, 1998, p. 29).

American schools underwent a radical transformation in their structures, curricula, and teaching methods, with growing attention given to the child's experience and the integration of school life with social life. This shift can largely be attributed to Dewey's advocacy for practical education rooted in the everyday life of the learner (William H. Kilpatrick, 1966).

A key expression of pragmatic education was Dewey's well-known project method, which significantly influenced progressive education reform efforts in Sweden. Many Swedish schools adopted this method, most notably the school established by Arthur Bendixson, who became familiar with Dewey's ideas through German educators already acquainted with his work. Bendixson took charge of the first progressive school in Sweden, known as Samskolan, and served as its director from 1901 to 1904. This school demonstrated a strong commitment to progressive principles in both its curriculum and teaching methods.

Since that time, Sweden has consistently pursued educational reform inspired by pragmatic philosophy, and figures such as Alva Myrdal contributed to this development by writing extensively on Dewey's influence on Swedish education (TareqHarb, 2006). Similarly, many European countries implemented Deweyan ideas—for example, industrial education flourished in Munich, Germany, and child-centered learning gained prominence in Geneva, Switzerland.

## ritical ConclusionCr

Despite the widespread appreciation of Dewey's contributions to education, his theory has also faced criticism on multiple levels. Critics have argued that his emphasis on experiential learning may not adequately prepare students for standardized assessments and traditional academic benchmarks. Others questioned the practicality of implementing Dewey's ideas within large, bureaucratic educational systems that prioritize efficiency over individual needs.

Initial criticisms centered on Dewey's philosophical orientation, which viewed education primarily as a tool for pragmatic utility. As a result, topics that lacked immediate practical outcomes were often excluded from serious consideration. Dewey's rejection of absolute truths and eternal systems, in favor of knowledge rooted in changing experience, was also a point of contention—especially given his long-standing influence from Hegelian idealism, which is evident in many of his philosophical and educational writings. His broad use of the term "experience" sometimes brings his theory closer to idealism and metaphysics, despite his emphasis on empirical approaches.

Moreover, Dewey's educational theory did not sufficiently emphasize the spiritual dimension of the human being, often placing excessive focus on the material aspects of life and viewing the human as a subject of experimentation, almost as an object. These shortcomings were reflected in his conception of education.

Many contemporary educational scholars now contend that Dewey underestimated the psychological needs of the child, emphasizing practical and utilitarian aspects instead—what is useful is good, and what is not useful is bad—despite his acknowledgment of psychological factors.

Nevertheless, Dewey's ideas continue to inspire educators to seek a balance between student-centered learning and the demands of formal education. His legacy encourages ongoing reflection on the goals and practices of education in a rapidly changing

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