Jana Mohr Lone. *Seen and Not Heard: Why Children's Voices Matter.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021. 223 pp. $76 HB, $32 PB, $29.99 (eBook). ISBN: 9781475843255

How would society and children benefit if children were appreciated as original, sophisticated thinkers who make meaningful contributions to the understanding of the world? Rejecting the common assumption that children are immature thinkers, Jana Mohr Lone's *Seen and Not Heard* shows that children are indeed capable of philosophical contemplation. Lone, co-founder and director of PLATO (Philosophy Learning and Teaching Organization), has facilitated philosophical inquiries among and with children for over twenty-five years. This book focuses on her experiences with children between the ages of five and twelve as a Philosophy for Children (P4C) practitioner and includes remarkable excerpts from her discussions with them.

Lone's book consists of seven chapters that are well organized into three main parts: (1) a diagnosis of the phenomenon in question—the ignorance regarding children's philosophical thinking abilities, (2) evidence of children's power as sophisticated thinkers, and (3) a proposed solution for this phenomenon. First, Lone introduces the problem at hand—children not being heard—and traces its origin back to the traditional conception of childhood by engaging with a large body of philosophical, educational, and sociological studies. Starting with Gareth Matthews's critique of the deficit conception of childhood (Matthews 2008, 27), Lone argues that the traditional understanding of childhood as a stage of development prompts adults to treat children as unreliable, unsophisticated conversation partners. She notes that even when a child makes a thoughtful comment or observation, an adult usually dismisses it as "cute," rather than taking the remark seriously. Lone connects this type of ageism with epistemic injustice. People of all ages, Lone argues, are in the process of becoming, and, therefore, children's thoughts should be respected just as those of adults are.

Next, Lone cites short excerpts from discussions among children that the author observed and facilitated. She also offers her analysis of the children's remarks, emphasizing their capability of engaging in philosophical conversations. Themes discussed include childhood, friendship, politics, happiness, and death. Lone begins each chapter with several philosophical quotations, including one sophisticated remark expressed by one of the children. This ingenious device

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invites readers to consider these young philosophers' thoughts as seriously as they do the remarks of adult thinkers. Throughout these chapters, Lone provides an "impressionistic account" (28) that focuses on the thoughts of a small group of children she observed and on the ways their thoughts have expanded her own views. Lone explicitly says that her account does not aim to make final claims about the children's beliefs but to illustrate what they might mean. This methodology might raise concerns about the accuracy of the representation of children, but Lone seems to refrain from stating what the children believe on their behalf. Rather, she focuses on philosophical insights we can get from children once we change our attitudes toward them.

The three chapters that focus on childhood, politics, and death, respectively, play an especially important role in her argument. After offering her analysis of the traditional misconception of childhood, Lone attempts to *hear* from children, which is what she asks of her readers. Chapter 2, "Childhood," shows how the children themselves think both about childhood and about their status as original thinkers. Lone, here, nicely exemplifies herself as a good listener—she *hears* what children have to say about their power as thinkers, instead of providing her own account of children's philosophical thinking. A group of ten-year-olds argues that they possess more creativity, more imagination, stronger curiosity, deeper authenticity, and more openness than adults. They also claim that these traits often help them make better decisions than adults. Having heard the children's voices, Lone confirms their claims through her observations of their exchanges. For instance, Lone reports that the children tend to be unafraid of being themselves—they freely express their thoughts and emotions without concern of how smart or silly they sound. This authenticity allows them to engage in more candid and deeper exchanges.

The chapters on politics and death further support the children's claim about their capabilities. Given that Western cultures have regarded politics and death as inappropriate topics for children, these two chapters function as powerful proof of children's sophisticated thinking. Chapter 4, "Political Voices," challenges the traditional deficient conception of childhood by showing how nicely a group of eleven-year-olds addresses topics that are allegedly too complicated and irrelevant to children, such as fairness, environmental justice, sexism, and racism. Lone argues that each child's life has political dimensions in which they face discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity, class, or education status, just as adults do. Additionally, she makes a significant point about the nature of the hardships children face, rightly pointing out that children are exposed to difficulties that adults do not face, arising from the intersection of their marginalized group identity as children and their other social identities. Though the centeredness of politics in children's life is not a novel claim, Lone succeeds in calling attention to the intersectionality of children's oppression.

Although children's lives are deeply rooted in political issues, there could still be a concern that politics are too sophisticated for them. One might have concerns about a child expressing provocative ideas that are inadvertently offensive, as one of the children in Lone's groups did when he suggested segregation as a solution to racism. However, Lone reports that the children were mature enough to consider that proposal carefully—they appeared to separate the suggestion from the student himself and offered reasoned criticisms of his idea. This episode nicely emphasizes the merits of children's openness and authenticity, which contribute to philosophical inquiry and effectively allay the potential worry.

Chapter 6, "Death," considers death, another putatively sensitive topic that Western cultures try to keep from children. Lone contends that death is not as unfamiliar a topic to children as politics is. Some children have already feared their own deaths or experienced the deaths of pets and family members. They have, therefore, thought about the meaning of life and death, the afterlife, and the mind-body problem to some extent. Lone provides excerpts when children's imagination and openheartedness lead them to consider many creative scenarios regarding death, which supports her and her students' claims that the children's traits contribute to profound philosophical discussions.

Lone concludes the book by offering solutions to the phenomenon of children not being heard—listening to children. She says that as adults, when conversing with a child, we usually "recognize the words being said to us, but we don't stop to appreciate what the speaker is trying to tell us" (158). Since we assume that we already know what children have to say, or even what they *can* say, Lone argues that we do not take their remarks seriously. To listen to children, Lone says adults should equip themselves with the qualities of children—curiosity, openheartedness, and imagination. Furthermore, she argues that allowing for silence, not responding immediately, is important when listening to children. It gives speakers time to gather their thoughts and finish expressing them as they wish and leaves time for the listener to observe the speaker's nonverbal expression, another crucial aspect of listening.

Seen and Not Heard will appeal to a general audience, including parents, family members, caregivers, and educators of children, especially those who have denigrated children's capacity for critical thinking. As for Philosophy for/with Children (P4/wC) scholars and practitioners who have already seen and heard children as sophisticated thinkers, this book will likely resonate with their experiences but ultimately will not add to their toolkit. On the one hand, for the general public Lone's book will be a valuable introduction to the conception of children as young philosophers. These readers will find that Lone challenges their unexamined assumptions about children and makes a persuasive argument in favor of seeing children as original and capable thinkers.

On the other hand, methodologically, I would have liked to see more information about how she chose the short excerpts from the dialogues. In her excerpts, most of the speakers appear to participate actively and state their opinions fairly clearly. However, as with adults, there are varying dynamics among children in their philosophical exchanges—differences in how many times each child speaks, how they present their views, how they rearticulate and develop their ideas in response to others' comments, and so on. Longer excerpts would have revealed some of these dynamics as well as the liveliness of the children's discussions, providing a better understanding of how these children actually engage in philosophical dialogues. Such an addition would also assuage a skeptic's doubts about the accuracy of the representation of children's discussions and other potential suspicions regarding the excerpts and how they might be selectively focused on a few outstanding students. Furthermore, although Lone is excellent at listening to children in her analysis, longer excerpts, including her communications with the children, would allow readers to fully comprehend the importance of listening to, and actually hearing, children.

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References

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