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The power of innocence: Social politics for children between separation and participation

The attempt to observe and improve children's conditions of life differs from other tasks and intentions of social policy in a crucial way. Firstly and obviously, the intervention into privacy is particularly intrusive, and secondly, there is a specific perspective towards children that tends to be adopted in such endeavours. In my lecture I will deal basically with this perspective, exposing the history, logic, and institutional consequences of what may be called a "*separative view*" – or what also, when used as a political tool, can be called the "*power of innocence*". Such a perspective or assumption of moral power may well foster the political agenda when it comes to children's social problems, lending weight and legitimacy to social and political measures. But the *generational order* underlying both the perceived problems and their intended solutions will be rigid, and the variety of arrangements of private life which remain possible under this regime will be considerably reduced. A crucial factor is that children's *agency* will be largely ignored. This, at least, has been the repeated reproach of the new sociology of childhood towards social policy-makers and their view of children's needs and childhood(s). It has also been the reproach of many critical analyses that see social reformers and experts as "policing childhood" and "normalizing families".

Concepts like participation and citizenship might offer a reconciliation of the approaches underlying these two positions, which differ also in their time horizon, the one focusing more strongly on childhood as a future promise and the other quite strictly on childhood as a phase of life in its own right. The key role of such concepts in developing practical childhood policies will, therefore, be discussed. - The lecture is a quintessence of my studies, on the expertization of childhood, public discourse and political decision-making.

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