



ENVIRONMENT, EQUAL RIGHTS, IMPACT - April 29, 2019

On Taking Children Seriously: Climate Strikes

by [Lewis Stockwell - Senior Lecturer in Philosophy of Education at the University of Hertfordshire](#) 0 comments

If you ask the average student, “What is the biggest problem that the world faces today?” more often than not they will answer with the following two issues: (1) the detrimental effect of social media on society as a whole and (2) the global climate crisis. These are, at least, the responses I get from my students. These are the responses that ring out throughout social media (with some significant irony) and tend to get a great deal of readership throughout the world.

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anguish and frustration, against the lack of meaningful political and economic change for climate justice, has hit many political institutions like a rock rippling on a murky pond.



Photo: Students are demanding action on climate change worldwide. Photo Credit: [Mika Baumeister](#) on [Unsplash](#).

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It is interesting that within the United Kingdom, there has been a significant movement of a relatively well-educated youth, teaching politicians and passers-by about the significant failings of climate policy (which of course are linked to economic and social policy). [The City of Edinburgh Council](#) has, for example, supported students in marching and demonstrating for climate justice, whereas the British Government has shown disdain and displeasure of children 'bunking off on a Friday afternoon'. This split between 'The North' and 'The South' is part of a much larger social and political issue that we do not have time to get into here, but it is indicative of a much larger problem and question governments needs to face: Should we listen to our children?

Academics from the [University of Edinburgh](#) certainly think so. At the heart of the debate in support of listening to the arguments of well-educated, reasonable, articulate young people is this: that we see these children as full-human beings. To see someone as a full human being is to negate objectification. We should, then, treat a human being as a *person*, who has thoughts, beliefs and values. The philosopher, [P.F. Strawson](#), in a paper published in 1963, argued that when a child cannot comprehend the possible consequences of actions, we objectify them. It is a logical consequence of them not being able to have the foresight, the capability of reason, and general ability to be held accountable for their

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... Photo: It is important for students to be treated in a dignified way. Their voices matter. Photo Credit: Vlad Tchompalov on Unsplash.

The Governments of well-regarded educational systems have a lot of answer for if they do not support their children in exercising the very capacities they are educating for. We want our next generation of children to be critical thinkers, who hold each other to account, who question authority when such an authority cannot give reason for propositions (and at worse, policies!) – See Martha Nussbaum’s book *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*. Of course, the reason for disdain in some countries is that education is not intended to develop critical capacities. It is designed to function as a system of social control. There is nothing new in this idea. It is a debate in many historiographies of education and is an age-old issue harking back to Plato.

When the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom emerged from her BREXIT cesspit momentarily and tried to guilt children back to the classroom so as to [save teacher’s workloads](#), she played a dangerous political game with the teaching profession and offered a subtext to be interpreted as the following: we shouldn’t listen to what these individuals have to say. This is of course deeply connected to the political

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education system are, 'behavioural problems'.



Such articulate, knowledgeable, critical and astute *behavioural problems* – thinking persons – they are. [The global site of peaceful youth climate activism](#) is a testament to education systems doing what they are meant to be doing: enabling human beings to become *persons*. Persons who have a voice, who can share their knowledge – what is decided by governments (!) – and joining the dots together and seeing the order to affect change, action must be taken. Imagine then, what kind of world we would live in if we began to take these persons – striking students – seriously. We might begin to see presidents and politicians reading a science book or taking experts seriously. Or, they might continue to degrade the quality and value of education to increase the controls they have over young persons. Both options are possible, but only one should be resisted.

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For now, we should listen to the concerns of youth. We should take them seriously and treat them as the capable people they are. For if we do this, we commit ourselves to a dialogue for changing both the human condition (through education) and the world (that we will be able to live in). Yet we should not be idealistic. At the time of writing this article, the [European Union is showing that it is unlikely to](#)

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children to be ignored or to be objectified. They are persons to be listened to, to be counted. If older generations ignore them, they do so at their own peril.

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