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**“Self Becoming as Self-Reception:
Ferdinand Ulrich’s Philosophical Anthropology of Childhood”**

Dissertation Abstract

This dissertation presents Ferdinand Ulrich’s philosophical anthropology of childhood. It will begin with an investigation of the problem of the child in early modern thought. The child is a problem for modern thought because in his physical, social, emotional, and spiritual dependence on others, the child represents the opposite of the ideal modern human: independent, self-sufficient, self-determining, and self-creating. The child is in every respect dependent on others for his existence, survival, and development. What we see emerge, then, in modern thought is that adult independence can only mean giving birth to oneself from out of oneself, can only mean rooting oneself in one’s own self as origin. Childhood is, therefore, a stage which must be escaped as quickly as possible because to remain a child is to remain dependent on and determined by another. Because of the complete dependence of the child, however, the liberation of the child also requires that his natural, historical beginning be replaced by the imposition of some other adult rationality. There is, in Ulrich’s words, always an “adult a priori” that precedes and dominates over the child. The first chapter will trace this problem of the child as it emerges in Descartes, Locke, Rousseau, and Hegel.

The dissertation proposes the thought of Ferdinand Ulrich as a way of understanding the child not in terms of contradiction but rather as the fruit of love, whose growth and development in freedom is rooted in his origin. We will argue that Ulrich mediates the difference between dependent childhood and self-determining, independent adulthood and reveals the correlativity of self-becoming and self-reception by means of a creative appropriation of St. Thomas’ metaphysics of creation and gift. Through his appropriation of St. Thomas, Ulrich understands the child’s openness and receptivity not as an obstacle to his self-determining freedom nor his independence as an impediment to his “being with others.” Rather, Ulrich argues that the child’s self-reception is identical to his self-becoming, his ever-deeper freedom evidence of his ever-deeper dependence on the origin that has given him to himself. The latter part of the dissertation will then apply this understanding of the child’s self-becoming and self-reception to various contemporary issues and problems.