PROF. DR. A. ALI ALTINTAS

Philosophy of the Privileged



A PHILOSOPHICAL ESSAY

What Future Are We Raising Our Children For?

Philosophical Questions for the Twenty-Second Century

Maturity is not a single moment.

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FROM THIS ESSAY

A PHILOSOPHICAL ESSAY

Philosophy of the Privileged

Prof. Dr. A. Ali Altintas

What Future Are We Raising Our Children For?

On Maturity, Conformity and the Conditions That Enable Us to Shape the Work and Society of Tomorrow

Philosophical Questions for the Twenty-Second Century

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The Question of Meaning

What gives a life meaning when securing its material basis is no longer a person's overriding task? What makes it worth living when the accumulation of wealth loses its primacy as a goal? These questions lead to the starting point of this series: understanding our own being, discovering ourselves and developing the ability to give our lives meaning consciously.

Meaning arises in a person's relationship with their own life. What they recognise as worth living for is connected with what they perceive, understand, imagine and consider significant. A deeper understanding of one's actions, thoughts and imaginings also changes the choices one can make about one's life. Self-knowledge thus becomes a force for shaping it: a person can examine the goals they pursue, the values they adopt and what they wish to give their time to.

This search depends on conditions. Someone who must devote their energies each day to earning a living has different freedoms from someone whose needs are secure. People ask questions of meaning even amid deprivation. Yet the opportunity to pursue them persistently and by choice is unequally distributed. Here lies the challenge of this approach: as long as that freedom remains the preserve of a few, the philosophy developed here is a philosophy of the privileged. Their privilege begins with having the time and the means to concern themselves with understanding and self-discovery.

Living beings hold their own in their environment through the capacities available to them. Claws can enable attack and defence, wings open other ranges of movement, a shell offers protection. The human being's decisive weapon is intelligence, joined with perception and consciousness. Through these, we grasp connections, imagine possibilities and change the conditions in which we live. We can make ourselves the object of our own thought.

Belonging to the human species does not, however, guarantee an equal development of these capacities. Their development is not determined by nature alone. Education, experience, understanding and the training of perception expand human possibilities to different degrees. The exercise of intelligence, too, develops under differing conditions. Substantial differences therefore arise within the same species in what people can understand, imagine and make of their lives.



Philosophy and its conditions

These differences also concern the philosophical questions that carry weight for a person and the values by which they orient their life. This series takes a definite position here: there is no universally valid philosophy for all human beings. People encounter the world from different starting points, experiences and capacities for understanding. What gives one person direction may be inadequate for another. The task is therefore to develop different philosophical approaches and make their premises explicit.

Looking towards the twenty-second century brings us to a possibility that could alter these starting conditions. If robotics and artificial intelligence take over the work required to provide adequately for everyone, and if everyone actually shares in that provision, the need to secure a livelihood could lose its dominant position. Education and self-knowledge could then gain a space currently open to only part of humanity.

Such a future would open the concerns of this series to everyone. Universal access to the questions would leave differences between people and their answers intact. Time for understanding does not produce uniform understanding; freedom for self-discovery leads to different ways of life. This very diversity calls for philosophical perspectives that enable people to perceive and judge for themselves.

Whether technological development opens this freedom to everyone or further enlarges it for a privileged society remains an open question. In the latter case, this book speaks above all to those who have already attained the relevant position. In the former, it may address questions to which every person could one day devote themselves. Access to this philosophy thus also depends on who has access to the conditions of a self-directed life.

Philosophy of the Privileged begins at this transition. The series examines how understanding, perception and imagination change human beings and how, through them, they find meaning. The twenty-second century is the horizon at which the privilege of a few could become a possibility for all. On that horizon stands a question that already concerns our present:

What do human beings live for when they no longer have to live for their livelihood?



Becoming, freedom and responsibility

This text makes no claim to a final truth. It offers a way of thinking: an attempt to approach a process of life that is often judged in moral terms from another direction. Rather than a race to mature as early as possible, it considers the relationship between freedom, necessity, responsibility and becoming oneself.

Many parents understandably want to prepare their children for adulthood. That desire grows out of care, experience and a legitimate wish to spare a young person avoidable mistakes. Parents know that life will make demands. They want their children to be able to meet them.

Families are not alone in trying to put development on a timetable. Schools, vocational training and the world of work also operate through age groups, deadlines, examinations and expected transitions. Such structures provide direction. Yet they can also create the impression that maturity ought to unfold at a uniform pace.

The difficulty begins when development is no longer something to support but something to manufacture; when maturity is treated as a learning objective that enough rules, pressure and consistent consequences will deliver on schedule. Skills can be trained. Duties can be assigned. Behaviour can be sanctioned. But inner maturity cannot be wholly commanded.

It can be encouraged, modelled and expected. Reality can accelerate it. Yet it also has a dimension in which a person must work out their own relationship to what is expected of them. Only then does conformity become something personally embraced, competent performance become conviction, and an external order become a way of life of one's own.

Maturity is not a single moment. It emerges in the tension between what life demands of us and what we are willing to shoulder out of our own understanding.



The Temptation to Manufacture Maturity

Parents rarely regard their child's unfinished development neutrally. They see disorder, unreliability, resistance, daydreaming or a lack of follow-through, and already anticipate the consequences. Concern becomes correction, correction becomes control, and control sometimes becomes a prolonged struggle over the direction of development.

This is human. Yet it contains a temptation for anyone raising a child: the belief that a certain degree of pressure, sustained for long enough, must turn an adolescent into a responsible adult.

Pressure can indeed change behaviour. A young person may become more punctual, orderly or productive because otherwise punishment, withdrawal of privileges or conflict will follow. They can learn to recognise expectations and meet them. That is not worthless. Life together would scarcely be possible without practised rules.

But compliant behaviour and a mature personality are not the same thing. Someone who obeys a rule for fear of punishment has not necessarily understood its purpose. Someone who takes responsibility because nobody else is available may act with great competence without having freely decided which responsibilities should belong to their own life.

Here lies the limit of an upbringing based exclusively on strict consistency. It can produce the outward forms of adulthood, but it cannot guarantee that a young person inwardly accepts those forms and makes them part of who they are. Sometimes the opposite occurs: control provokes resistance, the demand to be reasonable feels like an attack on the self, and the attempt to establish order produces ever fiercer conflict.

Parents can despair at this point. Some lose hope temporarily; others lose it for good. The child, meanwhile, feels misunderstood, while those around them feel exploited or exhausted. Both sides see part of the truth, but neither yet sees the whole.



A Life of Postponed Responsibilities

I know this situation not only from observation. I know it from my own life.

From the age of fourteen, I grew up without a father. My mother was loving, exceptionally caring and intent on shielding me from burdens. My brother, two years younger than me, took care of some things that should have been my responsibility. We lived in one of Europe's wealthiest countries; external pressure to secure the necessities of life played little part in my daily experience.

Looking back, I cannot neatly separate the effects of losing my father from those of care, personality, the distribution of roles within the family or the limited pressure of the outside world. These conditions probably acted together, sometimes pulling in opposite directions.

Both those around me and I myself would probably have described me then as chaotic, playful, reluctant to take responsibility and deeply absorbed in a world of my own thoughts. In a child, these qualities are readily accepted as part of development. In a fourteen- or sixteen-year-old who also demands respect, independence and greater freedom, they become a considerable burden for others.

My mother bore most of the consequences. She kept difficulties out of my way, fulfilled many of my wishes and carried worries whose weight I did not fully perceive at the time. My brother, too, inevitably had to be dependable where I was not.

This is no retrospective justification. Quite the opposite: any serious examination of a late path to maturity must acknowledge that its openness is often made possible by other people's work.

Some of what I experienced as freedom was the care, patience and sacrifice of others. Late maturity is therefore often more than a personal story; it has a moral context too.

It would be convenient to explain my behaviour then entirely through personality, adolescence or family circumstances. Such factors help us understand, but they do not cancel responsibility. Understanding is not acquittal. Nor, however, must holding someone responsible turn into condemnation.

This double insight is decisive for me: a person can burden others through their immaturity and still be more than that immaturity. Their present condition is neither insignificant nor their final essence.



Three Dimensions of Adulthood

Looking back, I would not describe my own development as a single transition. I did not stop being an adolescent on one particular day and begin thinking, feeling and acting as an adult the next. Several processes unfolded alongside one another, at markedly different speeds.

THREE DIMENSIONS OF MATURITY

1 · Functional maturity

The ability to make appropriate, responsible decisions in a given context, with an awareness of their consequences.

2 · Subjective maturity

The inward sense of no longer being a child and of living one's life as an adult.

3 · Biographical maturity

The sustained assumption of responsibility across different areas of life: relationships, family, conflict, commitments, self-direction and the consequences of one's own actions.

My functional maturity developed relatively early in my professional life. As a doctor, I had to make decisions, weigh risks and take responsibility for other people. Such a profession does not allow you to wait until you feel completely adult inside.

Subjectively, however, I did not feel grown up until I was about twenty-eight. And if I ask more broadly when my conduct across different areas of life began to reflect a stable adult way of living, I would place that threshold closer to thirty-five.

These ages are not precise psychological measurements. They mark thresholds in a life. They show that making responsible decisions, feeling adult and living as an adult are not the same thing.

A society that looks only at visible achievement can easily miss this distinction. Someone may carry great professional responsibility and remain strikingly disorganised in private. Another may appear well adjusted without ever having inwardly chosen their way of life. Yet another may have long felt independent without recognising the burdens that their independence places on others.

Making responsible decisions, feeling grown up and behaving as an adult are three different achievements. They may coincide, but they need not.



Forced Maturity: When Reality Leaves No Choice

Why does this distinction matter so much to me? Because I have met people who were never given the freedom to develop slowly.

In poorer countries, I saw children selling tissues or other small items on the street at the age of eight or ten. Their individual stories differed, and I do not want to force them, from a distance, into a single explanation. Yet one thing was unmistakable: responsibility had not been offered to them as an educational exercise. Their living conditions had imposed it on them.

The children I met did not appear to me solely as passive victims. They laughed, cried, played and dreamed of better circumstances, while often being utterly exhausted. Their vitality did not contradict the compassion outsiders felt. Rather, it showed that even under difficult conditions, people cannot be reduced to a single role.

One might call them adults in children's bodies. More precisely, though, they were children who had to perform adult functions without ceasing to be children. Functioning early is not proof of successful maturation. It may equally express a necessity that leaves a child no alternative.

Those who must function early often develop impressive abilities: attentiveness, improvisation, endurance, an understanding of people or a readiness to take responsibility. These abilities deserve recognition. It does not follow that the burden was good or beneficial to development. Adaptability does not make an imposition just.

A child's adult behaviour does not prove that their burden was right. It shows, first of all, how far a human being can adapt to necessity.

Forced maturity is therefore deeply ambivalent. It can produce competence and resilience. At the same time, it can turn childhood into a function. It deprives a person of the chance to decide when, and in what form, to assume certain responsibilities.

It is thus neither worthless nor desirable. It is a human response to conditions that precede it.



Maturity Made One's Own and the Question of Autonomy

My own development lay almost at the other end of this spectrum. External pressure was slight. Much was taken care of for me. I could remain longer in a playful world of thought, less constrained by convention, because other people bore some of the consequences.

The terms forced and freely chosen do not describe wholly separate worlds. No life is entirely determined from outside, and maturity rarely develops without external demands. They name two poles: at one end, functioning accelerated by necessity; at the other, responsibility that a person gradually recognises as a conviction of their own.

For this reason, I speak more precisely of maturity made one's own. It is not freely chosen without any preconditions. It, too, emerges from attachments, expectations and experience. Its distinctive step is that a person examines these conditions and decides which of them to carry as obligations of their own.

Autonomy does not mean living without influences, attachments or expectations. Such a state scarcely exists. Complete external control makes autonomy difficult because it leaves little room for choice. Complete protection can also delay autonomy by repeatedly postponing the need to decide. Maturity probably emerges neither at the furthest pole of freedom nor at that of necessity, but through their connection.

A person grows up when they no longer do only what is demanded of them, but neither do only what happens to suit them. They grow up when they recognise necessities as such, weigh their legitimacy and are willing to bear the consequences of an order they have chosen for themselves.

Autonomy is not the absence of external demands. It is the ability to take a conscious position towards them and turn mere demands into personal responsibility.

In this sense, maturity that arrives late and is made one's own can have a particular quality: it is not merely enacted but understood. It can involve self-reflection, gratitude and a conscious assumption of responsibility. Yet here, too, late does not automatically mean profound, and voluntary does not automatically mean morally superior.

A decision deserves to be called maturity only when it goes beyond the story one tells about oneself and changes behaviour. Someone who calls themselves grown up without acknowledging the costs of their actions has merely fashioned a new self-image.



The Ethics of a Pace of One's Own

The unfinished has a bad reputation. It disrupts routines, consumes energy and conflicts with society's desire for predictability. Someone who neglects tasks, forgets appointments or passes responsibility to others forces those others to fill the gaps.

It would therefore be wrong to romanticise late maturity. Having a rhythm of one's own is not a licence to make unlimited demands on other people's time, energy and care.

There is a right to a pace of development of one's own, but no right to make others pay for that pace without limit.

This is not a claim to irresponsibility without consequences. It is a claim not to be devalued solely because of the speed of one's development. A developmental step taken late is not necessarily a flaw of character. Some people need longer to make external rules their own. Others mature early in some areas and late in others. Still others must first understand who they are before they can consistently shoulder what is asked of them.

The appropriate attitude therefore lies between excusing and condemning.

UNDERSTANDING AND RESPONSIBILITY

Understanding asks about the conditions behind behaviour without denying its consequences.

Responsibility names those consequences without equating a person with their present behaviour.

Maturity consists in holding both thoughts at once.

Boundaries, too, can express care in this sense. They should not humiliate or break a personality. They can, however, prevent other people from permanently absorbing every consequence. Good boundaries return to a young person some of the reality that others have so far carried for them.

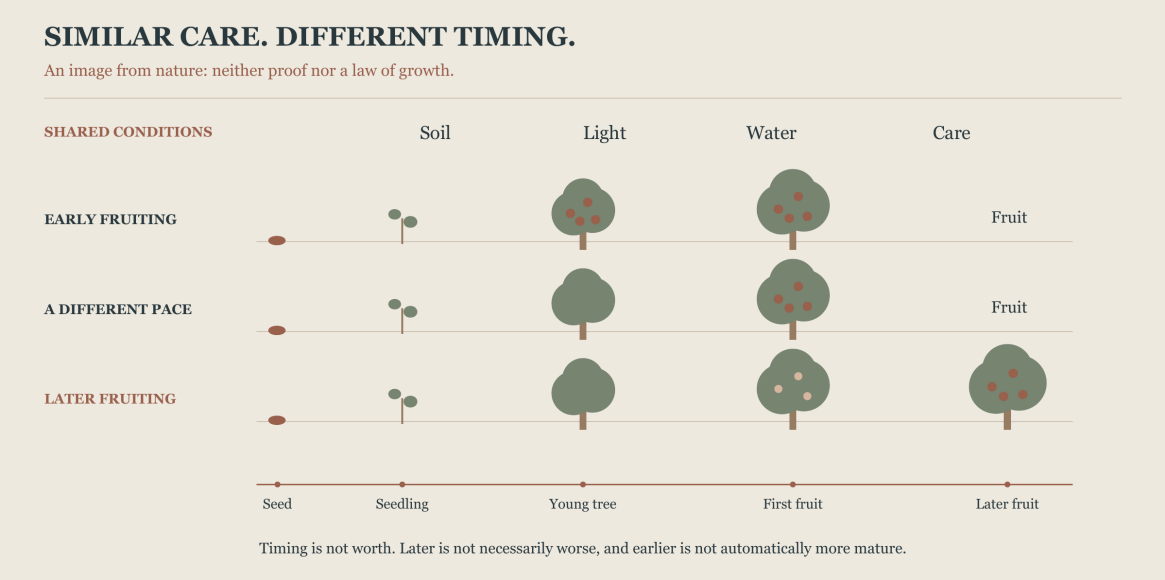
The decisive question is therefore not only: how do we get someone to behave like an adult sooner? It is also: which responsibilities must they already bear themselves, which demands would needlessly overwhelm them, and which aspects of their individuality should we hesitate to treat as defects?



An Image from Nature: The Apple Tree

An image from nature can illustrate this thought, but it cannot prove it. People are not plants, and biological development cannot be translated directly into moral theory. What follows is therefore not an absolute example, but an invitation to look at our expectations, briefly, from another perspective.

Several apple pips may look alike to us. They receive similar soil, comparable light, water and attentive care. Yet the trees that grow from them need not develop at the same pace or bear fruit in the same year. Much may happen in parallel; some things take longer.



An image to think with, not a proof: similar care can enable growth without guaranteeing that fruit will appear at the same time.



A different time

In a garden, we usually accept this variation as part of life. We do not declare the later-fruiting tree a moral failure because another produces apples sooner. With people, such composure comes less easily. There are reasons for this: people bear responsibility, make decisions and can burden others through hesitation or immaturity. A tree does none of these things.

The metaphor therefore relieves no one of responsibility. It merely reminds us that similar care does not guarantee identical inner timetables. Equal treatment is not identical development, and a later arrival does not automatically mean lesser worth.

Sometimes, though neither reliably nor as a law of nature, the fruit of a late-bearing tree may seem especially flavoursome. Applied to people, this does not mean that late maturity is superior to early maturity. It means only that later is not necessarily worse. Openness preserved for longer can yield something distinctive, provided a person eventually learns to shape it, share it and answer for its consequences.

Equal care does not guarantee an equal pace. A difference in timing is no difference in dignity.



Creativity: The Childlike Need Not Disappear

Here begins the possible positive side of a disposition that can be so trying for those around it.

Someone who preserves an element of playful, unbounded thought for a long time often moves less unquestioningly within established categories. Things that others regard as separate can be connected. Rules are not automatically accepted as facts of nature. Problems can be approached from perspectives that a more linear way of thinking may miss.

An unusual creative force may lie here. Perhaps late maturity does not directly produce creativity. Perhaps both arise instead from a shared openness: the ability to resist accepting established orders too quickly as final.

Creativity, however, is not a reward for disorder. It does not arise automatically from irresponsibility, nor does it justify permanently burdening others. Many people who mature early are extraordinarily creative; many who mature late are not. A pattern in one person's life is not a law.

The more modest thought is this: openness preserved over a long period may keep alive possibilities that a very early and exclusive commitment to function, reason and conformity can narrow. Playful thought asks not only what is, but what might be.



From dreams to designs

What would a world be like in which adults no longer pursued childhood dreams, even though they possess the knowledge, resources and persistence to turn imaginings into reality? Many new paths begin with a question that initially seems unrealistic, unreasonable or too ambitious.

The childlike and the adult need not remain opposites. The childlike imagines possibilities, marvels and asks: what if? The adult tests, plans, brings things into being and bears the consequences. Only their combination turns a dream into a proposal for which someone can take responsibility.

The childlike imagines possibilities. The adult tests them, realises them and bears their consequences.

For this to become a contribution, education, discipline, self-criticism and consideration for others must be added. Without form, creativity remains a possibility. Without persistence, it remains an idea. Without responsibility, it can even become destructive.

Perhaps the most productive development, then, is not to discard the childlike altogether. It is to connect its openness with an adult capacity to carry things through. A mature person need not stop marvelling, thinking unconventionally or questioning rules. They must learn to answer for the consequences of their freedom. Yet this raises another question: why does creativity remain socially invisible in so many people, and under what conditions does it become an actual capacity to shape the world?



When Creativity Makes a Difference in Society

Creative thinking may be far less rare than its public visibility suggests. In my observation, it appears early: in children's play, invented rules, unusual questions, improvised solutions or the unselfconscious linking of things that adults have long kept separate. Many digital games, too, can encourage strategic, inventive or problem-solving thought within set boundaries and in moderation. Not every such activity amounts to profound creativity. But it shows that the ability to imagine possibilities is by no means confined to a few.

Why, then, is this ability so seldom explicitly rewarded by society? Perhaps because societies cannot assess the mere presence of potential. They respond to visible forms: a work, a solution, a decision, an improvement or an idea made sufficiently clear and robust for others to do something with it. An insight can be inwardly valuable and still have no social consequence. Institutions therefore tend to reward not the possibility of something new, but its recognisable translation into achievement, usefulness or effect.

This gives rise to two different questions. The first is whether creative thought has human value in itself. It already does, as a form of openness, imagination and inner freedom. The second is when creativity becomes effective in society. Here, its mere presence is not enough. It must withstand resistance, submit to the test of reality and acquire a form that outlasts the moment of inspiration.

Education alone does not necessarily make a person exceptional either. Many people complete school or university successfully. By education I therefore mean more than a certificate: deep knowledge, methodological discipline, familiarity with what has already been thought and attempted, and the ability to distinguish what is merely new from what can actually hold up. Creativity without education may reinvent something long known. Education without creativity may manage what exists superbly without opening a new horizon.



Knowledge and self-efficacy

A third element is self-confidence. More precisely, though, we might speak of self-efficacy: trust in one's ability to act under uncertainty, learn and correct one's course. We need not decide here whether this trust encourages risk-taking, releases curiosity, or is itself strengthened by curiosity. What matters is that a person not only recognises a possibility but also trusts themselves to bring it into the world despite doubt, resistance and the risk of failure.

THREE FORCES THAT MAKE CREATIVE ACTION EFFECTIVE

CREATIVITY	EDUCATION	SELF-EFFICACY
Opens possibilities, connects distant things and imagines what does not yet exist.	Provides knowledge, method, judgement and form; distinguishes the merely new from the new that can hold up.	Turns insight into action, tolerates uncertainty and makes changes of course possible.

Self-efficacy does not mean believing oneself infallible. Boundless self-confidence that becomes impervious to criticism and reality is not maturity; it can become overconfidence. Sound self-confidence does not regard a decision as right simply because one made it oneself. Instead, it trusts in one's ability to face the consequences, acknowledge an error and change course.

Wrong decisions do not thereby cease to be wrong. They can cost time, money, relationships or opportunities. But they cease to feel like a final verdict on one's person. Someone with a sense of self-efficacy does not believe: I cannot be wrong. They believe: even when I am wrong, I can understand, learn, decide again and take responsibility for the road ahead. It is precisely this trust that makes acting under uncertainty possible at all.



Shaping the world responsibly

Perhaps, then, none of these three elements is rare in isolation. Their combination is unusual, and a high degree of all three is more unusual still. Creativity opens possibilities. Education gives them depth and form. Self-efficacy crosses the threshold into action. This does not make someone more valuable than others. It can, however, enable them to shape their particular environment in unusual ways.

One question remains legitimate: exceptional in comparison with whom? Distinctiveness is not an absolute property. It arises in relation to a task, an environment and a time. An idea taken for granted in one field may be new in another. A talent that remains invisible within one institution may have considerable impact under different conditions. What matters, then, is less a ranking of people than whether a rare combination of abilities brings about something that probably would not have existed without it.

This combination may be connected with maturity that arrives late but is embraced through one's own understanding. Someone who experiences adulthood not merely as adaptation to expectations but as taking authorship of their own life may develop a different relationship to error. Mistakes no longer necessarily threaten their entire identity. They become part of a path for which they remain responsible. This, too, is no law: people who mature early can have a strong sense of self-efficacy, and late maturity by no means guarantees it.

For upbringing and education, this implies a more demanding task. It is not enough to praise creativity occasionally while almost everything else in daily life rewards correct repetition. Nor is it enough to declare every spontaneous idea meaningful. Young people need room for their own questions, but also knowledge, method, feedback, tolerance of frustration and the experience of making something real through work on an initial idea. Only then does a widespread creative potential become that rarer capacity to shape things which can change a society.

Creativity opens possibilities. Education tests and shapes them. Self-efficacy turns them into action; responsibility determines what this capacity to shape the world is used for.



Resilience: Enduring, Choosing and Changing

The distinction between forced maturity and maturity made one's own also brings the idea of resilience into sharper focus.

Someone who must function under difficult conditions from an early age may develop remarkable endurance. They learn to organise themselves, withstand pressure and remain capable of action in uncertain situations. This resilience is real. But it may go hand in hand with becoming accustomed to being overwhelmed. A person can become so practised at carrying everything that they barely ask whether they ought to carry it.

Someone who has long been protected and later assumes responsibility through their own understanding may develop a different strength: the ability to choose their way of life consciously. This authorship is valuable. Yet it, too, remains incomplete if it has never been tested by resistance.

A fuller resilience therefore combines two abilities: the ability to endure and the ability to distinguish. Not everything that can be borne must be borne. Not every burden can be avoided. Sometimes maturity demands steadfastness; sometimes it demands leaving or changing a harmful order.

Resilience is not only the ability to endure a great deal. It is also the ability to recognise what must be carried, what may be set down and what ought to be changed.

Forced maturity can teach the first part. Maturity made one's own can deepen the second. No life automatically contains both. Perhaps one task of later development is precisely to acquire the missing side: the person overwhelmed too early learns choice and self-protection; the person protected for a long time learns consistency and endurance.



Institutions Marching in Step

The temptation to synchronise development neither begins nor ends in the family home. Schools, vocational training and the world of work must organise many people at once. They form cohorts, set learning objectives, assess people at fixed times and attach access to qualifications. This creates order, comparability and a measure of fairness.

Yet an organisational necessity can quietly become an idea of what a person should be. What is easy to administer then appears normal; what departs from the timetable looks like a deficit. An institutional rhythm becomes a moral expectation.

The legal order marks adulthood at eighteen. Such a threshold is necessary for many legal transactions and responsibilities. It does not, however, measure inner maturity. Yet the legal threshold often becomes a psychological deadline: the young person is now expected to decide, plan, begin vocational training or university, and function with as few detours as possible.

The image of soldiers marching in step and workers reliably performing an assigned function is deliberately exaggerated. It is not a claim that schools want to produce soldiers or intentionally strip people of their individuality. The image simply reveals a logic: synchronisation makes coordination easier; deviation makes it harder.



Standards and room to grow

This logic has historical and practical reasons. Large systems need standards. They must assess achievement transparently, allocate resources and organise transitions. But the same order can exact a price: slower development is too quickly labelled failure, unusual talents remain invisible, detours count as wasted time, and creative thinking becomes disruptive where only one right answer is expected.

Where conformity is rewarded over many years and deviation is mostly sanctioned, the capacity for creative thought need not disappear. Yet it may weaken through disuse. People learn not even to voice a second possibility because the system chiefly rewards prompt, correct repetition. Creativity is not always explicitly forbidden. Sometimes it is simply required so rarely that it withers.

ORDER, LIMITS AND CORRECTION

ORDER	LIMITS	CORRECTION
Shared standards, dependable qualifications, comparability and predictable transitions.	Pressure to conform, premature labelling and the confusion of identical teaching with identical development.	Flexible paths, second chances, different speeds and several ways of making achievement and maturity visible.

A fair education system need not therefore abandon standards. It must recognise, however, that standards are points of orientation, not complete accounts of human beings. Equal treatment can become unjust when it ignores differences; complete arbitrariness would be equally unjust because it withholds direction and protection.

A system can be orderly and effective and still fail people if it confuses equal treatment with identical development.



Work, Holidays and the Industrial Logic of Rest

The institutional march in step continues in the traditional organisation of work. Industrial production broke complex processes into repeatable steps, tied people to fixed places and synchronised them with clocks, shift patterns and machines. Where the value of an activity lies chiefly in its reliable repetition, variation and interruption are easily perceived as lost productivity.

Modern paid annual leave did not arise from a single motive. It was fought for as a social right, justified as protection for health and dignity, and also connected with the legitimate interest in restoring the capacity to work after sustained strain. What matters philosophically is the form that rest acquired: a long period of regulated work is followed by a legally protected interruption of that work.

This model is particularly well suited to activities whose place, process and pace remain largely unchanged over long periods. Monotonous repetition tires the body and attention; a break temporarily releases a person from the same demands. Rest then appears as a world apart from work: function and obligation here, leisure and recovery there.

Yet people do not cease to be active on holiday. They travel, read, talk, cook, walk, lie in the sun, sleep, play or turn to other tasks. At an abstract level, a holiday is therefore more than inactivity. It is above all a change of rhythm, surroundings, demands and control over one's own time. Stillness may be part of that change, but it is not its only form.

The radical thought is not that we need less rest. It is that rest is more than the temporary absence of work.

This raises an uncomfortable question: must someone who freely undertakes varied, self-directed, creative work recover in exactly the same way as someone tied to a monotonous routine every day? Probably not in every respect. Creative work already contains shifts: between concentration and conversation, invention and testing, movement and stillness, one problem and another. An idea may arrive while travelling, on a walk or during an apparently unrelated activity.



Protected unavailability

Many self-employed people therefore know the experience of work not simply disappearing on holiday. It changes location, intensity or form. A project travels with them in their thoughts; an idea emerges outside the office; a decision matures in another setting. This may express self-directed activity. It may equally conceal a dangerous erosion of boundaries.

For variety does not replace every kind of recovery. Creative people, too, need sleep, physical restoration, psychological distance, relationships that serve no productive purpose, and times when nothing is expected of them. Precisely because creative work can become bound up with one's identity, it is often harder to stop. Passion does not protect against exhaustion.

Nor does the statutory right to annual leave lose its importance. Within an unequal power relationship, it protects employees against having every hour claimed. The idea of more flexible forms of recovery must not be used to dismantle social protections or to glorify permanent availability as freedom.

What needs rethinking is not the right to rest, but the model underlying it. Alongside an extended break, there could be a culture of different rhythms: periods of deep concentration, time at a distance, changing challenges, physical movement, play without an ulterior purpose, travel, silence and genuinely protected unavailability. Some people need a complete break from their usual activity. Others also recover by deliberately changing its form.

FROM THE INDUSTRIAL BREAK TO RESTORATIVE RHYTHMS

INDUSTRIAL RHYTHM	CREATIVE RHYTHMS	ESSENTIAL PROTECTION
Repetition, a fixed place and prescribed hours; rest chiefly as interruption of the same demands.	Changes of task, context, intensity and perspective; distance and incubation as part of working.	Sleep, boundaries, health, time with others and the right to be genuinely unavailable for a while.

This supplements rather than abolishes the rigid opposition between work and holiday. Different activities do not all call for the same rhythm of recovery. Yet everyone needs conditions in which achievement does not become permanent availability. The future of work may therefore be shaped less by a uniform break and more by a responsibly organised variety of ways to work and recover.

Different activities need different rhythms of recovery. Everyone, however, needs protection against the erosion of boundaries.



Maturity in an Age of Machines

The question of conformity and creativity takes on added significance as we enter an age in which machines, robots and artificial intelligence systems can take over a growing share of repetitive work governed by rules. How quickly and how comprehensively this change will unfold remains open. It is precisely this uncertainty that makes the question of what we are educating people for so urgent.

A system that chiefly prepares people for predictable processes, correct repetition and smooth functioning may be optimising them for the very tasks that are easiest to automate. Order and reliability remain necessary. Increasingly, however, they are not enough.

This does not mean that all routine tasks will disappear in the near future or that entire professions will be replaced wholesale. Professions consist of different tasks, and technological change affects them unevenly. In many fields, a shift is more likely: standardisable elements will be automated, while oversight, the handling of exceptions, relationships and responsibility are redistributed.

Activities that require the repeated understanding of new situations and an appropriate response to them will thus gain in relative importance. These include more than research, design or entrepreneurship. Medicine, care, leadership, negotiation and many skilled trades also demand judgement, sensitivity to people and the ability to deal with the unexpected. Technology can assist, but it does not automatically relieve us of deciding what is right and responsible in a particular situation.

Abilities that go beyond mere repetition are likely to gain weight: recognising relevant questions, connecting knowledge from distant fields, judging under uncertainty, creating meaning, empathising with others, choosing goals and taking responsibility for consequences. Creativity here means more than artistic originality. It is the ability to see possibilities where an existing system sees only instructions.

Artificial intelligence, too, can generate variations, connect patterns and support creative processes. Perhaps machines will one day produce achievements that we unreservedly call creative. The value of human creativity therefore cannot convincingly rest on an eternal monopoly over the new.



Soil for the future

Human creativity, however, is rooted differently. It arises from an embodied life, from memory, need, relationships, vulnerability, hope and a particular view of the world. Above all, it is bound to the possibility of choosing purposes and taking responsibility for realising them. This does not make every human result superior, but it places human creativity in a different context and makes its exercise a matter of moral responsibility.

The machine can generate possibilities. Human beings must decide which will be given meaning and which consequences can responsibly be accepted.

For precisely this reason, we need adults who have preserved enough of the childlike within them to imagine what does not yet exist, and who have grown sufficiently adult to test it, realise it and answer for it. A world without such people might be efficient, but it would be intellectually impoverished. It would optimise what exists without imagining new horizons.

What is thought, said or written today is not yet a blueprint for tomorrow. Not every sentence carries a change, not every word becomes an idea, and not every seed becomes a tree. Yet a future can emerge only where possibilities may first be voiced and tested. Thoughts prepare a bed in which new seeds, new species and new forms of living together can grow.

What is said today is no finished blueprint for tomorrow. It may, however, prepare the soil in which new seeds and new forms of creation emerge.

This is no argument against discipline, expertise or dependable work. As we have seen, creative possibility becomes a viable capacity to shape the world only through education, self-efficacy and responsibility. The future therefore needs not less maturity, but a different combination of its elements: less mere marching in step, more judgement; less simple adaptation, more imagination for which we take responsibility.

A system that educates solely for conformity prepares people for a world in which precisely what is predictable can increasingly be taken over by machines.



Upbringing Between Protection, Reality and Individuality

What follows from this for parents, schools and others involved in bringing up young people? Certainly not that the young should be left to themselves, or that every instance of irresponsibility should be celebrated as unusual creativity. Nor does it follow that pressure is inherently harmful. A life without limits does not prepare a person for freedom; it can create the illusion that others will permanently bear the consequences of their actions.

The task is instead to bring together three demands: provide security, let reality make its demands, and preserve individuality.

THE THREEFOLD TASK OF UPBRINGING

PROVIDE PROTECTION	INTRODUCE REALITY	PRESERVE INDIVIDUALITY
Attachment, patience, tolerance of mistakes, trust and the right not to be finished yet.	Boundaries, consequences, participation, consideration and the gradual assumption of real responsibility.	Room for different speeds, interests, ways of thinking, detours and creative development.

Security means that a young person is allowed to be unfinished, to make mistakes, play, dream and develop a personality of their own. They should not have to believe that love or dignity depend entirely on achievement and conformity.

Letting reality make its demands means transferring responsibility gradually. Commitments have consequences. Freedom involves consideration for others. Respect is not a one-way street. Someone who asks for greater independence must learn to carry a growing share of the burden that comes with it.

Preserving individuality does not mean idealising every distinctive trait. It means resisting the urge to treat every departure from the average as a defect. Some young people need different paths, different amounts of time or different sources of motivation without having any less capacity to develop.

There is no universally correct timetable. Children and adolescents differ in temperament, resilience, development and circumstances. Good upbringing therefore does not try to produce a standardised adult as early as possible. It helps a person find their own form without making the community permanently responsible for carrying their immaturity.

Good guidance protects the process of becoming without postponing responsibility. It sets boundaries without confusing individuality with disobedience.



The Right to a Pace of One's Own

People grow up along different paths. Necessity forces some early into roles they did not choose. Others enjoy protection, freedom and opportunities for a long time, recognising their costs only later. Both paths can develop abilities. Both can leave wounds and blind spots.

The distinction between forced maturity and maturity made one's own establishes no moral hierarchy. One path is not inherently nobler than the other. It does reveal, however, that maturity can have different origins and different qualities.

Forced maturity can produce practical capability, endurance and an early readiness to take responsibility. Maturity made one's own can foster reflection, autonomy and conscious acceptance. People who mature early may need to learn that they do not have to carry everything. Those who mature late may need to learn that freedom without responsibility for its consequences comes at other people's expense.

The right to take different amounts of time is therefore not a right to unlimited relief from responsibility. It is a claim not to be devalued solely because of the speed of one's development, and not to be reduced to the slowest phase of one's life.

A pace of one's own concerns more than the age at which a person reaches certain forms of maturity. It also concerns how they work, pause, dream and return to their tasks. Mature autonomy does not reveal itself in doing without breaks. It reveals itself in shaping one's rhythms so that neither one's health nor other people permanently bear the cost of a life without boundaries.

The image of the apple tree can help one last time. An orchard does not become more valuable because every tree flowers in the same week and bears fruit on the same day. It needs care, space, boundaries and regard for the whole. No tree should deprive all the others of light and soil. But a difference in timing is not, in itself, a deficiency.



Gratitude becomes responsibility

And sometimes later fruit can be especially valuable. That is neither a guarantee nor a consolation prize for every delay. What matters is whether the openness preserved eventually produces something that a person gives form to and can share with others. Potential that never accepts responsibility remains only potential.

Perhaps maturity ultimately consists precisely in acknowledging the conditions of our own becoming: the pressure that shaped us; the people who carried us; the consequences we imposed on others; and the abilities that emerged from this particular path.

Someone who grows up late cannot retrospectively remove the burdens of their past. But they can translate gratitude into responsibility. Someone who had to grow up early cannot undo their lost freedom. But they can later allow themselves to recover choice, lightness and play.

Perhaps a mature person is not someone who has finally overcome the childlike, but someone who preserves its openness, gives their dreams form and also takes responsibility for their own life.

My story establishes no universally valid teaching. It offers a perspective: on the difference between functioning early and inner maturity, between conformity and autonomy, between institutional order and individual development, between creative openness and the duty to answer for its consequences.

We need not adopt this perspective in full. Perhaps it is enough if, for a moment, it allows us to look differently at people who have not yet arrived where we long expected them to be, while also asking more carefully what they and those around them need for a rhythm of their own to become a sustainable way of life.



Four questions to carry forward

An essay does not bring a thought to an end. At its best, it sharpens the questions with which we continue thinking.

A PACE OF ONE'S OWN

Where does patient guidance end, and where does a burden begin that others are made to carry indefinitely?

THE CAPACITY TO SHAPE

When does creative possibility become a capacity to shape society, and what combination of education and self-efficacy does it require?

RECOVERY

Do different activities need different forms of rest, change and protected unavailability?

THE FUTURE

Which human abilities gain importance as routines are increasingly automated and professions undergo profound change?

A perspective need not be declared the truth to broaden our horizons.



Thoughts in images.

This personal philosophical essay belongs to the series Philosophy of the Privileged. It explores the conditions under which freedom, care, education and responsibility become a way of life of one's own.

This English edition is a complete translation of the expanded German essay of September 2026, including its preliminary note, highlighted reflections and closing questions. The series foreword and author biography are also translated. The apple-tree model has been redrawn with English labels.

The 25 essay plates and two foreword plates interpret the text on the facing pages. The author portrait is based on a photograph supplied by the author.

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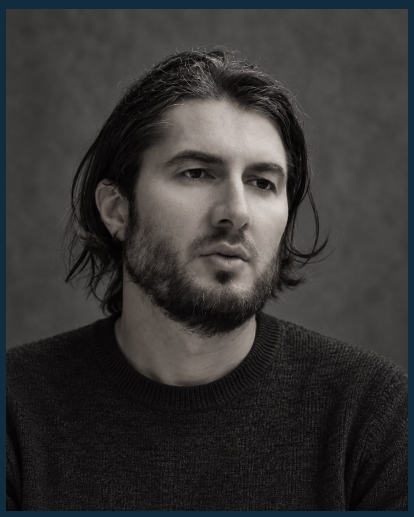
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The highlighted reflections are passages from this essay.

A perspective need not be declared the truth to broaden our horizons.

FROM THIS ESSAY

Can we become ourselves while marching in step?

Maturity cannot be summoned to a deadline. Drawing on personal experience, this essay asks parents, schools and the world of work: how can we preserve individuality and creative openness without postponing responsibility? And what future are we preparing people for as machines take over more routine tasks?



Prof. Dr. A. Ali Altintas

Physician, scientist and philosopher.

He earned his doctorate at Heidelberg University, completed his habilitation at the University of Essen and gained a Master of Science in Healthcare Management at the universities of Heidelberg and Mannheim.

His philosophical essays explore how people arrive at their convictions, how power shapes their standards and how independent judgement becomes possible. His central concerns are autonomy of perspective, personal development and the continuity of a conviction under changing conditions. His thinking connects curiosity across disciplines with the question of how understanding can become responsible action.