
Cohen’s fundamental contention is that, on grounds of social justice, children ought from birth to be accorded all the rights which adults in our society currently enjoy. He rejects the view that the absence of certain capacities renders children relevantly different from adults with respect to rights. Cohen notes that, in order to exercise their rights, adults often borrow from others (e.g., doctors, lawyers, and accountants) capacities which they themselves do not possess. Consequently, he argues, the lack of some capacity is not a reason against granting a right. Cohen accordingly describes a system of child agents designed to “lend” children the necessary capacities; in doing so, he provides a comprehensive and coherent account of the practical implications of extending equal rights to children.

Cohen’s criticisms of opposing views are keen and insightful (e.g., in discussing arguments against granting political rights to children, he exposes many faulty assumptions concerning the character of an adult electorate). His defense of his own view is lively and engaging. His controversial claims and the importance of the issues make this book important reading for social and political philosophers. Its clarity of exposition makes it accessible to a general audience as well.

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