ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOKS

The Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Childhood and Children

Edited by Anca Gheaus, Gideon Calder and Jurgen De Wispelaere

THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF CHILDHOOD AND CHILDREN

Childhood looms large in our understanding of human life, as a phase through which all adults have passed. Childhood is foundational to the development of selfhood, the formation of interests, values and skills and to the lifespan as a whole. Understanding what it is like to be a child, and what differences childhood makes, is thus essential for any broader understanding of the human condition. *The Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Childhood and Children* is an outstanding reference source for the key topics, problems and debates in this crucial and exciting field, and is the first collection of its kind. Comprising over thirty chapters by a team of international contributors, the *Handbook* is divided into five parts:

- Being a child
- Childhood and moral status
- Parents and children
- Children in society
- Children and the state.

Questions covered include: What is a child? Is childhood a uniquely valuable state and, if so, why? Can we generalize about the goods of childhood? What rights do children have, and are they different from adults' rights? What (if anything) gives people a right to parent? What role, if any, ought biology to play in determining who has the right to parent a particular child? What kind of rights can parents legitimately exercise over their children? What roles do relationships with siblings and friends play in the shaping of childhoods? How should we think about sexuality and disability in childhood, and about racialized children? How should society manage the education of children? How are children's lives affected by being taken into social care?

The Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Childhood and Children is essential reading for students and researchers in philosophy of childhood, political philosophy and ethics, as well as those in related disciplines such as education, psychology, sociology, social policy, law, social work, youth work, neuroscience and anthropology.

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As editors, we dedicate this handbook to

My father Puiu and the memory of my mother Doina (Anca)
My siblings Rachel, Gowan and Douglas (Gideon)
My late mother, Yvette (Jurgen)

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INTRODUCTION

Anca Gheaus

A burgeoning field

Children and childhood have, until recently, been largely neglected as philosophical topics. In a way, this is puzzling: we all start life as children and childhood spreads over a very significant proportion of the typical human life. It is during childhood that we change most, and acquire the physical and mental characteristics that individuate us. Moreover, many people tend to think that having a good childhood is very important for leading a successful life.

The scarcity of philosophical reflection on children and childhood can perhaps be explained through the belief that childhood is a state of being inferior to adulthood (Brennan 2014). Philosophers have always worked with a model of the human being that is adult and, at times, have explicitly defended this choice (Slote 1983). Their remarks about children have most often assumed that the latter are merely in-progress, unfinished, versions of the former. Further, philosophers have traditionally assumed that children's moral status is clearly inferior to that of adults: it is not only that children's lack of full autonomy disqualifies them from the same level of moral responsibility that we attribute to adults, and, therefore, denies them the same level of authority concerning their choices. These are fairly uncontroversial beliefs, especially with respect to infants and young children. But children have also been seen as individuals whose moral status cannot prevent adults – usually parents – from using them in order to further their own interests. Legal regimes have often sanctioned this view, with the most extreme illustrations being parents' right to expose or sell their children. Such legal rights are, thankfully, old history, but many social and legal arrangements, including parental powers, continue to allow us to use children as means to promoting adults' projects and goals. Thus, some philosophers claim that the legacy of the children-as-property view is still with us (Brennan and Noggle 1997; Archard and Macleod 2002; Brighouse and Swift 2014). This traditional representation of children and childhood also justifies a host of existing limitations on children's moral, social and legal entitlements, freedoms and powers, and liability.

But the traditional representation of children and childhood has been rapidly changing, first in law – where the principle of the child's best interests is now frequently used as a guideline – and, more recently, in philosophy. In moral and political philosophy, the literature on childrearing, and especially on the parent–child relationship, has been multiplying at an exponential rate during the past four decades, starting with an influential collection by Onora O'Neill and

William Ruddick (1979) and Jefferey Blustein's 1982 monograph, and continuing with the groundbreaking work of David Archard (1993). These days, numerous articles, collections and monographs on childrearing are being published on a regular basis. The question of children's moral status – of their fundamental rights and duties – is, implicitly, at the core of these investigations: today the prevalent belief is that children have full moral status – that is, that their interests have the same weight as the interest of adults. At the same time, in the philosophy of education, several authors have noted that before puberty children are more capable to ask deep, competent philosophical questions than adults who are not professional philosophers (Matthews 1980). On average, children's interest in philosophy – and in epistemic pursuits more generally – is less clouded by conventionalism and less dampened by the responsibilities of life than adults'. These, as well as other goods to which children seem to have better, maybe even unique, access, have been recently called "the special goods of childhood" and have been drawing increasing attention (Macleod 2010; Brennan 2014; Brighouse and Swift 2014). If these goods are indeed very weighty, then childhood is not entirely a predicament, but also a privilege insofar as it is a state of life when we display higher abilities to experiment, learn, enjoy and relate to others in trustful and spontaneous ways (Gheaus 2015; Alexandrova 2017). In this case, children are more than deficient adults.

Some philosophers reject the above, neo-romantic, representation of children (Hannan 2018). Whatever the truth about the value of childhood, it is uncontroversial that children are uniquely vulnerable to the actions – and inactions – of adults. Moreover, it is now generally accepted that children are recipients of duties of justice, although there is much debate with respect to the exact content of children's rights and the identification of duty-bearers.

Bringing children to the forefront of philosophical investigation is, therefore, a natural development. Some of this interest has been centred around the question, "what is a child?", where "child" is to be understood in terms of biological facts – as an individual who is at a stage of development in human life where they have not yet reached biological maturity. What are the unique characteristics of children, and what, if any, special abilities do they have? Answers to these questions bear directly on the issue of what the value of childhood is. In turn, axiological issues bear on the more practical ones concerning how we – as individuals and as society – ought to treat children. Finally, there is the fascinating matter of how thinking about children may challenge theories designed with the model of the adult in mind. If we give systematic philosophical attention to children and childhood, will this lead us to revise some of our views concerning values, morality, political institutions and even knowledge?

This handbook is a result of the growing interest in philosophical analyses of children and childhood. It introduces readers to various debates about the nature of childhood, children's moral status and its direct implications, duties owed to children by various agents and the ways in which society ought to treat children. Our aim is not merely to present the state of the art, but also to draw attention to the many issues that are still under-explored and, therefore, to encourage future research. Most of the handbook discusses children in general, although children of different ages are, obviously, very different in their abilities and level of autonomy; these differences have normative and practical significance. Some chapters address these differences, and one of them focuses exclusively on adolescents. Across the handbook, our aim has been to stay true to the diversity of childhood phases.

The philosophy of children and childhood spans across several sub-fields such as axiology, ethics, political philosophy, aesthetics, epistemology and feminist philosophy. It also bears on research in other fields, such as psychology, neuropsychology and neurolinguistics, anthropology, sociology, social policy, medicine and law. Readers from these disciplines are likely to find some of the chapters directly relevant.

The structure and content of the handbook

The handbook has a thematic structure. A number of chapters cover some ground in the history of philosophy, but many do not. All chapters offer an overview of the current debates. Most authors position themselves within these debates; some spend a fair amount of time defending their views, but a minority of chapters take a more encyclopaedic approach, and do not argue for a particular thesis.

Part I: Being a child

The first section of the handbook is about foundational matters concerning the nature of childhood. It opens with a chapter by Fabrice Clément and Melissa Koenig, drawing on developmental psychology in order to discuss knowledge in childhood. Thinking about children as knowers poses the following problem: we usually attribute some knowledge to very young children. According to the classical theory, knowledge is a species of true belief. We cannot, however, attribute proper beliefs to very young children. Clément and Koenig's solution is to defend a metacognitive understanding of knowledge.

The second chapter, by Mark Cain, addresses children's acquisition of their first language. The chapter is an overview of the long-standing debate on whether or not this process is explained by the existence of a substantial innate basis that is specific to language. Cain argues that it is.

In chapter 3, Suparna Choudhury and Nancy Ferranti critically introduce findings from the science of adolescent brains. The "teen brain" has been enjoying much attention from academics, the media and the educated public, because understanding its peculiarities is key to the well-being of adolescents and those around them. Yet, the authors argue that we ought to interpret the scientific findings by situating them in the social and cultural context that produced them, which sometimes casts doubt on their objectivity and universality. All of the first three chapters rely substantially on literature from neighbouring sciences that study children's brains and children's cognitive processes.

By contrast, the fourth chapter, written by Jonathan Feinberg, focuses on children's artistic abilities. It provides an analysis – much informed by historical knowledge – of the questions of what child art is and what its value is. Following some artists and art theorists, Feinberg believes that children can make real art; as artists, children don't merely emulate what adults do.

The last chapter of the first section is about doing philosophy with children. This is a large and expanding field, and, like many of its founders, and against some critics, Jana Mohr Lone argues that children can engage in genuinely philosophical inquiries. Children's sense of wonder and epistemic openness makes them natural philosophers and adults' tendency to discount their voices can represent a form of epistemic injustice; this, she thinks, is our as well as their loss.

Part II: Childhood and moral status

In the opening chapter of part 2, Agnieszka Jaworksa and Julie Tannenbaum explain the difficulty of accounting for the belief that children have full moral status without thereby concluding that there is no difference in moral status between human children and numerous animals. Their own theory of moral status gets around this difficulty by claiming that individuals have full moral status in virtue of incompletely realizing a cognitively sophisticated activity.

The next chapter, by Patrick Tomlin, analyses the value of childhood, proceeding through a number of distinctions between ways in which childhood can be valuable – intrinsically, and instrumentally – compared with non-existence or compared to adulthood, for the child herself

or for others, etc. This is largely unexplored territory. One part of the chapter is on the question of whether childhood is valuable for the individual who is experiencing this stage of life and whether it would be rational for her to skip it or speed it up, if possible; some of this discussion also introduces the recent literature on the goods and bads of childhood. A closely related chapter is written by Anthony Skelton on the topic of childhood and well-being. It discusses in depth one of the questions identified by Tomlin, namely the nature of children's well-being: How should we account for how well a child's life is going from the point of view of the child living it? Skelton proposes that the nature of a child's well-being changes over the course of childhood and, therefore, theories of well-being must be differential and developmental.

Robert Noggle's chapter introduces the topic of children's rights. Noggle proceeds by explaining the advantages of thinking about obligations toward children in terms of rights and then examines the ways in which the two main theories of rights – the will theory and the interests theory – apply to children. This chapter also discusses some of the specific rights attributed to children and the contribution that the child liberationist movement made to thinking about children's rights.

In her chapter about children's autonomy, Sarah Hannan explains how the most influential accounts of autonomy entail that children can display it to a smaller or larger extent. She argues that autonomy develops in domain-specific degrees; Hannan, like other authors in the handbook, concludes that the current level of interference with children's choices is not always justified. In a similar vein, the chapter by Kalle Grill shows why it is wrong to assume that paternalism towards children is always and obviously justified. By contrast, Grill believes that instances of benevolent interference with children are in need of justification; most likely, paternalistic behaviour towards children can be justified to the extent to which children are less prudent than adults and less harmed when subjected to paternalism.

The final chapter in the section about children's moral status, by David Archard, is about consent. We think that children lack the power to render permissible what is otherwise impermissible by the communication of words or actions – that is, by giving consent. Archard defends a duty on the part of adults to give children a voice – if not necessarily final say – on matters that concern them, in proportion to the child's level of developed autonomy. He also examines particular cases to which children's limited ability to give consent is particularly relevant – including political legitimation, sexual relationships, medical treatment and research involving children, and the conditions necessary for securing children's open future. To the extent to which children lack the power of giving consent, adults' choices ought to be guided by children's interests.

Part III: Parents and children

This section, one of the largest in the handbook, is dedicated in its entirety to parenting; this is where most of the action in the philosophy of childhood has taken place. Christine Overall's chapter on reasons to have children (or not) investigates objectively good reasons for procreating and rearing. Overall takes seriously the main anti-natalist argument, which points to the inevitable suffering involved in any human life, and criticizes as unsound the most frequently invoked reasons to have children. Yet, she thinks that the goods of the parent–child relationships are capable of justifying the decision to bear and rear children.

My own chapter is an analysis of the different questions that are at stake in discussions about the right to parent: Should there be parents at all rather than institutional childrearing of some kind? What are the grounds for holding a right to parent in general? And what are the grounds for acquiring the right to parent a particular child? I explain how these questions are answered by theories that appeal to the child's interest, by those that appeal to the prospective parent's

interest and by hybrid theories that appeal to both. It is generally believed that one of the duties we have towards children is to ensure they have good parents.

Colin Macleod writes about several aspects of good parenting. He argues that genetic ties and sexual orientation do not make a difference to the quality of parenting. Further, Macleod engages with the recently much-discussed issue of whether parents have a duty to love their children, with the parents' duty to promote their children's autonomy, with the limits of legitimate parental paternalism and with the question of whether good parents must strive for perfection. Next, Jonathan Seglow looks at one particular feature of good parenting, namely partiality. There is a long-recognized conflict between ethical theory – which usually requires impartiality – and our tendency to be partial, in particular towards our own children. On the one hand, parental partiality is valuable, and even praiseworthy; on the other hand, given the inequality of resources between different parents, it seems to unavoidably upset fair equality of opportunities. The best answer to the practical problem raised by parental partiality is to curb its expression by putting limits on how many resources parents pass on to their children and, concomitantly, to enact more egalitarian public policies.

Not all parents are their children's procreators; Jurgen De Wispelaere and Daniel Weinstock write about the special issues raised by children in need of adoption, and by the process of adoption itself. First, is the question of whether children have a moral right to be adopted rather than raised in institutions or foster homes, and the correlative duties of prospective parents to prefer adoption over procreation as a means to satisfying their desire to parent. Second, is the question of how to best design policies and regulations that are sensitive to the messy realities of international adoption and of potential parents' preferences for certain kinds of children.

Introducing licenses for parents is another topic that has received much attention from philosophers. The chapter by Andrew Botterell and Carolyn McLeod analyses the suggestion that parents be licensed in the same way in which we license those who engage in high-risk activities. This proposal draws support from the fact that we do, indeed, require adoptive parents to have licenses for the sake of their prospective children's well-being. Alternatively, given the reasons to oppose the licensing of natural parents, we should stop requiring licenses on the part of adoptive parents. Botterell and McLeod assess proposals to introducing parental licensing with an eye on the risks of discrimination against adoptive and fostering families, and prospective parents who are already subject to racism, classism, homophobia and ableism.

Daniela Cutas looks at the importance of family shape for children's well-being. The dominant view has been that rearing children by their heterosexual procreators is best for them, and the debate between the proponents and the critics of this view has often been hidden behind the apparently semantic question of what a family really is. Cutas examines the debate, introduces the readers to the intricate realities of contemporary family formation and presents evidence that children's well-being is primarily influenced by how good the care is that they receive and by the quality of the relationships between the adults who raise them. She also addresses the question of whether the presence of dependent children is necessary for something to count as a family.

In her chapter on parenting and gender, Amy Mullin discusses parental responses to children whose identities and preferences deviate from gender norms and who face particular difficulties in allowing their children to flourish in societies that are hostile towards their deviance. The second focus of the chapter is on parents' gendered behaviour and on their beliefs and implicit associations about gender roles. Parental endorsement of traditional gender norms tends to perpetuate unfairness towards women. This happens partly by directly reinforcing a gendered division of labour – for instance, when girls alone are trained to perform unpaid domestic work – and partly by encouraging gendered aspirations in children and, in girls, higher levels of responsibility for those in need of care.

The section ends with a chapter about filial duties, written by Diane Jeske. Most people share a strong intuition that grown-up children owe special duties to their parents; yet, philosophers have found it difficult to account for this. Jeske presents – and vividly illustrates – some of the most prominent and plausible accounts of filial duties, based on gratitude, friendship and the existence of special goods within parent–child relationships. She also provides an account of what theory of filial duty should be able to do in order to be adequate.

Part IV: Children in society

This part of the handbook concerns the ways in which children are being influenced and shaped by society more generally. Race is one shaping factor, analysed in Albert Atkin's chapter. All children learn their society's norms governing race and some are racialized as minorities. Atkin explores the ways in which children acquire these beliefs and deal with racial identity and race-based prejudice – and pays close attention to the issues raised by racial inequalities in schooling and by transracial adoption.

Disability is another factor that impacts the life of some children to a very significant degree. Gideon Calder and Amy Mullin's chapter discusses the nature of disability – including the debate between competing ways of understanding disability – and the main normative issues raised by children's disability. One of the particular subjects they discuss is how to understand parental love and care – one of the most important goods in any child's life – in the context of raising disabled children. Other important questions addressed in the chapter concern the moral status of children with cognitive disabilities; the normative aspects of the relationship between disabled parents and the children they raise; and what we owe to disabled children by way of education.

Yet another way in which children are shaped by their social environment comes from the beliefs about children's sexuality, which is the topic of Samantha Brennan and Jennifer Epp's chapter. Like most topics covered in Part 4, this is an area so far neglected by philosophers. Brennan and Epp note that children's sexuality is usually discussed in the context of their undeveloped autonomy, special vulnerability and need for protection. But children are also developing sexual agents, and the interest in their sexuality should go beyond the negative aim of protecting them from damaging predators. The authors make the case that we need more research into the nature of childhood sexuality. An important question in this respect concerns the relationship between children's sexuality and their innocence – one of the so-called goods of childhood. Other important questions concern children's budding autonomy as sexual agents and their ability to give consent in a number of respects.

Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka contribute a chapter on children and animals. Individuals from both groups have been traditionally represented as innocent and particularly vulnerable, features that both entitle them to care and exclude them from the rights of citizenship. However, recent developments in the philosophy of children – and, in particular, amongst advocates of children's citizenship – stress that we should give proper weight to children's capabilities, their developing moral responsibility and compassion. Children, too, contribute to society and, therefore, are entitled to some degree of agency as well as protection. Donaldson and Kymlicka note that this view of children's agency puts pressure on rethinking the political status of animals; in particular, they believe that interspecies sociability is unduly suppressed by our current legal and political order and argue that empowering children and animals would create a better world.

Philip Cook's chapter invites us to think about children's labour and, in doing this, to appreciate the various possible conflicts between attending to children's current and future well-being and between allowing them full exercise of their present agency versus nourishing their future opportunities for autonomy and well-being. Such conflicts are particularly stark in non-ideal

circumstances of injustice or serious scarcity. We are used to thinking that child labour is an instance of, or at least in the vicinity of, violations of children's rights. Yet, older children are able to work in paying jobs and some children's labour is essential to their and their families' survival; in certain circumstances, allowing children to work, and directing efforts at improving the conditions in which they do so, is the best practical decision. Cook explores the limitations of objections to child labour, which appeal to harm, to failing to benefit children and to exploitation. He concludes that one of the best ways to contain the exploitation of children is to empower them *qua* workers.

The last chapter, written by Mianna Lotz, deals with children's special vulnerability. Lotz explains the unique ways in which children are vulnerable; this vulnerability puts them at special risk, but it also makes possible the enjoyment of some of the special goods of childhood. She argues that protectionist duties do not exhaust the scope of parents' and other adults' vulnerability-related obligations towards children in their care; some of these duties are facilitative and ameliorative.

Part V: Children and the state

The final part of the handbook covers the large question of how we ought to discharge our collective duties towards children through state institutions and policies. Its opening chapter, authored by Lars Lindblom, raises the general question of how to think about the metric of justice towards children: What is it that we owe them? Since they cannot be expected to take full moral responsibility for their choices, it appears that we owe children more than we owe adults: not only opportunities, but also security in the enjoyment of certain goods. In addition, if certain goods significantly contribute to how well children's – but not adults' – lives are going, it is likely that they feature as part of the metric of justice towards children; this, however, poses a challenge to the view that states should remain neutral with respect to their (reasonable) citizens' conceptions of the good life.

Political neutrality is the topic of the subsequent chapter, by Matthew Clayton. He argues that children have a right against being directed towards particular ethical or religious conceptions, irrespective of whether those who are in charge with children's education are their parents or state-employed teachers. This argument relies on the ideal of political neutrality, which, according to Clayton, applies to children as well as to adults, in virtue of children's development into autonomous individuals. The fully autonomous individuals they will one day become could refuse retrospective consent to having been enrolled into particular ethical or religious views.

The next question, addressed by Serena Olsaretti, is whether the costs of having and rearing children should be borne by parents alone or should be socially shared. One strand in luck egalitarianism has advanced the first answer, by pointing to two facts: that procreators avoidably bring into existence new individuals; and that parents usually see their child-rearing activities as a way of pursuing their own conception of the good life rather than a way of benefitting others. Yet, this position has been contested from different corners and Olsaretti shows how implausible it is when we push it to its logical conclusion. She also shows that any answer to the question of who should pay the costs of having and rearing children bears directly on one's theory of distributive justice.

Not all children have sufficiently good parents. Gideon Calder's chapter addresses the question of how we ought to take collective responsibility for the care of children whose parents prove to be inadequate. Even when the parent–child relationship has gone significantly wrong, its interruption is risky; yet, it is also risky to leave children in the care of abusive or neglectful parents. Calder explores the questions of how to determine when the state should intervene

in the relationship between children and inadequate parents, what makes such interventions legitimate and how to balance, in this process, the interests of all those concerned: children, their parents and the wider society. Moreover, children who are raised in institutions tend to be at significant disadvantage compared to children who are raised by adequate parents. The way in which we should settle these questions depends on the weight we give to children's interests and to the ideal of moral equality in childrearing.

Two of the duties owed to children that we generally believe should be discharged *via* state institutions concern children's education and their access to healthcare. The chapter by Gina Schouten focuses on the first. Schouten distinguishes between education and schooling, arguing that the latter is pervasively coercive and seeks to determine what, if anything, could justify the coercion involved in schooling. Such justification, she thinks, must point to the goods provided by schooling and explains how these can make schooling legitimate to children, parents and taxpayers. Healthcare – the subject of the second duty that states owe to children – is discussed in the chapter by Havi Carel, Gene Feder and Gita Gyorffy. They adopt a phenomenological approach, trying to uncover what is specific to children's experience of being subjects of medical care. The most salient experiences of children in this context, they argue, have to do with their particular way of being embodied – experiencing constant and relatively rapid change, with change generated by their development rather than by illness or disfunction alone, as in the case of old people; by their limited agency, given that adults tend to make most decisions on their behalf; and by being part of families on whom they necessarily depend for the satisfaction of most of their interests. All these particularities raise specific ethical challenges; like many other authors in this handbook, Carel, Feder and Gyorffy support the conclusion that children should be given more power to participate in decision-making on issues that are of direct concern to them – in this case, medical procedures and treatments.

Traditionally, children have been disenfranchised (although the voting age varies across jurisdictions.) This is justified by appeal to several reasons to exclude children from having political rights, many of which have been recently contested. In his chapter about children's right to vote, Ludvig Beckman investigates several grounds for disenfranchising older children – grounds which have to do with children's well-being, with improving the results of the democratic process and with the claim that excluding children is, in itself, undemocratic.

Christopher Bennett looks at some of the distinctive issues posed by thinking about children in the context of criminal justice. Children grow up in environments shaped by particular criminal systems; often, these systems perpetuate forms of economic and racial injustice. Children are sometimes – albeit rarely – the direct targets of criminal justice; but even when they aren't, their lives are impacted by the criminalization of their parents and other significant adults. Of special interest, for Bennett, is the way in which the philosophy of childhood shapes the philosophy of criminal justice, by providing particular answers to questions about children's abilities, the proper length of childhood and the special goods that make childhoods go well.

Our final chapter is on children and war, written by Cecile Fabre. Children are frequent victims of war, but sometimes they are also its agents: they are often being enrolled as soldiers and, sometimes, perpetuate war crimes. Fabre argues that the victimization of children in the context of war, whether intentional or not, is a more serious wrong than the victimization of adults; further, she defends the standard prohibition against enlisting children as combatants, but also the permissibility to kill, in self- or other-defence, children who have been enlisted and who have engaged in wrongful killings. Fabre stresses that, unlike adults, children are always wronged by war – even when they end up as combatants on the side who inflicts an unjust war.

Together, the thirty-six chapters collected in this handbook provide a general overview of the contemporary field of the philosophy of childhood and children. Of course, there have

been difficult editorial choices to be made. Further topics might have been included: childhood is relevant to almost any aspect of any branch of philosophy, and while the handbook covers the key terrain, we have not pursued every possible such direction of analysis. Meanwhile, we have made a conscious decision to include chapters on issues which are important, but which have been paid relatively little philosophical attention – such as child labour, children and race, and children and war. Our aim is to draw attention and interest to these under-explored areas. Doubtless there are other such areas that will become more prominent in time, in a rich and fast-developing field. Overall, we expect that the philosophy of childhood – already thriving, as we see from this volume – will continue to grow and deepen.

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