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Philosophy and Child Poverty

Reflections on the Ethics and Politics
of Poor Children and their Families

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Philosophy and Poverty

Volume 1

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Nicolás Brando • Gottfried Schweiger
Editors

Philosophy and Child Poverty

Reflections on the Ethics and Politics
of Poor Children and their Families

 Springer

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Philosophy and the Poverty of Children and their Families



Nicolás Brando and Gottfried Schweiger

Abstract Although the philosophical literature on both poverty and childhood is certainly increasing, the status of children living in poverty has been largely ignored as a philosophical subject. The condition of children and the justice-related issues that derive from it compel us to look more deeply into the sources and responsibilities of and towards poverty during childhood. We highlight four challenges raised by studying child poverty, and the mechanisms through which philosophical analysis may aid in addressing them. Philosophy can work as an important tool to (1) conceptualise what child poverty is, (2) assess the limitations of current research on the subject, (3) normatively evaluate how to address this condition, and (4) offer guidelines for how society, law and the polity ought to act in response to it. Child poverty must be looked at from what it is in itself, and how it intersects with other features of the child's life which may exacerbate it. The role of the family is fundamental in any evaluation of what child poverty is, and how to tackle it. Understanding child poverty in the vacuum omits fundamental sources of it, and solutions to it. Other intersecting conditions such as the social and cultural ethos, citizenship status, gender or disability may play a fundamental role also. The second section provides an overview of the volume.

Keywords Child poverty · Family poverty · Philosophy · Ethics · Poverty research

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1

1 Introduction

Child poverty is a structural issue of our contemporary world. The fact that hundreds of millions of children suffer from under- and malnutrition, lack access to sanitation and clean water, sleep on the ground without a proper floor, and become sick, dying of preventable diseases is a severe injustice and moral evil. The inequality in today's world, in which millions of children live in luxury while billions cannot satisfy their basic needs poses great burdens on our moral commitments. Unlike, maybe, previous generations, child poverty today can be effectively alleviated and eradicated, and this suggests, if not proves, that child poverty is a structural, human-made and unnecessary injustice. We have the resources to tackle it; we are just missing the willingness to do so. That said, the philosophical, political and academic debate is still not resolved, by whom and how child poverty should be alleviated.

Child poverty is also not an isolated phenomenon. It intersects with and is reinforced by other disadvantages, being strongly determined by an individual's social, cultural, and political position in her community (Boyden and Bourdillon 2012; Biggeri et al. 2010). Although children (through brute luck, let us say) inherit their socioeconomic position from their elders, it is the social, economic and political institutions and practices (economic exploitation, social stratification and exclusion, and cultural and political oppression) which enable and sustain their disadvantaged position by limiting the options available to the poor to escape from poverty.

Talking about child poverty puts the focus on how this condition affects children and their lives directly. But, who is a 'child'? The concept of childhood is itself contested and dependent on social assumptions and cultural interpretations (Schapiro 1999; Cunningham 1995; Gittins 2009; Graf 2015). This book does not follow a distinct definition of childhood, but most chapters either take the pragmatic route, following the definition given by many legal documents like the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which defines a child as every born person under the age of 18, or they simply assume a common sense position, which largely overlaps with this legal definition. The common sense position, though, often assumes younger children (not teenagers) to be the pragmatic case, aligning with certain other common sense assumptions about typical childlike-features such as immaturity, innocence, incapacity, vulnerability or dependency.

But child poverty is not only about children: much social research on child poverty, and also various philosophical reflections in this volume, look at children as embedded in families (Broussard and Joseph 2009; Fernandez et al. 2015). The "black box" of the household is both a useful tool and a problem for a proper understanding and measuring of child poverty. Certainly, most children in poverty live in families, whether they are constituted through the traditional family structure or not, and the family is an important factor to be considered when evaluating the poverty suffered by children. Thus, many chapters in this book are concerned with children as part of a family, how family and child poverty are intertwined, and how policies can deal with families and parents to support children in poverty. On the other hand, looking at children solely as an element of the family structure may hide certain

manifestations of poverty which affect children in particular. This debate about the right unit of concern is present in philosophy and the social sciences exploring poverty across all populations (Wisor 2012). This volume intends to offer, thus, both views: some chapters explore poverty as it is lived by children within the family structure; and others intend to account for the particularities of poverty as it relates to children.

But why should philosophy come into the picture? Is child poverty not an issue of the social sciences, and social and development policies? There are various reasons why it may be important to have the philosophical discipline reflecting about poverty and childhood. Firstly, we believe that philosophy has something valuable to contribute to the understanding, evaluation and alleviation of child poverty. If one does not stand on an assumption that pure quantitative analyses of efficiency can solve poverty, we need philosophical reflection on how we understand what poverty is, on its particular manifestations during childhood, and the moral groundwork which should guide our policies and practices to alleviate this evil. As we will show in the next sections of this introduction, philosophical questions arise from many different philosophical branches. Although this book is overwhelmingly concerned with ethical issues in moral, social, and political philosophy, this is certainly not the only area of concern. Epistemological, conceptual and methodological issues are of equal importance. Secondly, a philosophical take on child poverty does not substitute social research on the issue, but rather complements it. We believe that philosophy, if concerned with real world issues such as child poverty, does not only depend on the data produced by social research but should enter into a closer cooperation and engage in a mutual learning process with more empirical research on the subject. Social research on child poverty is full of conceptual, theoretical and methodological considerations worthy of philosophical attention. Likewise, social research can be enriched and improved by learning from philosophy and its particular perspective, its analytical and evaluative work. Finally, it is worth noting that although the philosophical literature on both poverty (Barry and Overland 2016; Gilbert 2012; Ingram 2018; Schweiger and Graf 2015) and childhood (Bagattini and Macleod 2014; Brighouse and Swift 2014; Gheaus et al. 2018) is increasing, the status of children living in poverty has been largely ignored. We consider that the condition of children and the justice-related issues that derive from it compels us to look more deeply into the particular sources, disadvantages and responsibilities of and towards children living in poverty. With this aim in mind, the book intends to fill a significant gap of child-specific philosophical discussions on poverty by bringing together original contributions from an international group of scholars who can shed light on this important topic.

In the next section of this introduction we will now name and discuss four challenges posed by child poverty, which are not exclusively philosophical but nonetheless are of philosophical importance. But before that, we also want to say something about the limitations of this book. It was not the aim of this volume to cover all philosophical topics related to child poverty, but to provide an original and substantial treatment of a variety of particular issues. Otherwise we would have aimed for a handbook or similar and not a collection of research papers. Still, three

shortcomings are worth noting. Firstly, this book is overwhelmingly concerned with child poverty in highly developed countries, although some chapters do not mention this explicitly but speak about child poverty in general. There are, though, important differences in the extent, depth and severity of poverty between the developed and the developing world. Secondly, and connected to this focus, is the lack of reflections on global justice and the institutions, which could or should be responsible for change on the global level (Pogge and Moellendorf 2008). Thirdly, this book lacks chapters on the philosophical (ethical, epistemological etc.) issues involved in poverty research and methods used to investigate and analyse child poverty (Bostock 2002; Abebe 2009; Sime 2008).

2 Four Challenges: Conceptualising, Researching, Evaluating, and Responding to Child and Family Poverty

The first challenge is *conceptualising* child poverty. We can briefly name some interrelated aspects of this challenge here, without going into much detail and also avoiding technical issues. All conceptions of poverty are highly contested because poverty is a complex and dynamic social phenomenon (Wisor 2012; Addison et al. 2009; Anand et al. 2010; Besharov and Couch 2012). Partly, this contestation is grounded on the combination between the dynamic nature of poverty in itself, and its descriptive and evaluative (moral) interpretations. Conceptions of poverty tend to be concerned with suffering, deprivation and harm. But defining what this suffering, deprivation and harm is, cannot be neutral but, rather, closely related to normative evaluations about what is (morally) good and bad, just and unjust, and what it means to suffer, to lack and to be deprived. Furthermore, this definition is conditioned by socioeconomic contexts. Conceptions of poverty that fit one purpose (for example, to analyse it in the European Union at the country level) might be inadequate for a different purpose (to understand poverty in rural India). Depending on our moral commitments, and the case in mind, what is understood by 'poverty' and how it should be evaluated changes drastically. The same variation is true for the case of child poverty, where not only our definitions of poverty change due to the incapacity of certain traditional metrics to apply to childhood (think of income metrics, for example) (Alkire and Roche 2012; Main and Bradshaw 2016; Minujin et al. 2006); but also because what is understood as 'childhood' varies. Standard measurements and analyses of poverty (in general) fail when assessing child poverty because the condition and experience of poverty during childhood cannot be framed within these standard evaluative mechanisms. It is no surprise that within poverty research so many different concepts of (child) poverty have been developed, based on different normative concepts and theories about what matters in life and how to best capture it: capabilities, basic needs, social inclusion, well-being, just to name a few. How these concepts and related theories can be applied properly to children (as opposed to adults) remains a key challenge. These discussions are philosophically

relevant, and philosophy might contribute to them. They are philosophically relevant because all discussions about (social and global) justice for children or rights and responsibilities of and towards children somehow have to deal with the obvious fact that some children are worse-off than others and that poverty plays an important role here. So, if philosophy wants to engage with the real-world problems that children face today, what might be unjust about them and how they should be resolved is dependent on such conceptual questions, which underlie all knowledge we have about child poverty as well as other inequalities in children's lives. The contribution philosophy has to offer to these debates is equally important. As far as all conceptions of child poverty, and poverty in general, are somehow related to normative issues, philosophy can help to clarify them. This should not be understood as saying that philosophy has the key to solve all normative and conceptual issues in poverty research, but it does claim that philosophy can offer a unique approach to how these normative and conceptual issues can be understood.

The second challenge is *researching* child poverty. This is a double challenge because research with children comes with methodological and ethical issues as does research with marginalised groups and people in poverty. Let us further differentiate this challenge: firstly, children as well as people in poverty are often not given a proper voice when it comes to evaluate their situation. They face epistemic injustices, and their opinion and knowledge is undervalued (Schweiger 2016; Murriss 2013). There are approaches that challenge these limitations, researching children in a way that takes them, their views and feelings seriously, providing more depth and better knowledge about their situation and the deprivations they face from their particular perspective. For children in poverty both their status as children and as poor individuals needs to be taken into account here, as both these statuses pose its own obstacles for carrying out a respectful and thorough investigation. Secondly, research with children in poverty often involves a certain degree of attachment to those children and their families, for example, if ethnographic or participatory methods are employed. Doing ethically sound research with poor children thus can be emotionally and socially demanding for both those researched and those researching (Sime 2008; Abebe 2009). Thirdly, the families, in particular parents, or other care givers or guardians will be involved when researching poor children. Consent to research raises its own problems, especially if children are older and more mature but legally unable to give consent. Guardians may withdraw consent for unsubstantiated reasons of fear, shame, humiliation or because they want to cover-up parts of the children's lives (for example that they are exploited, beaten or abused). In many countries there are no functioning child protection services, and researchers are confronted with messy realities, which they have to navigate. Fourthly, poverty research should probably not be *l'art pour l'art*. It comes with obligations towards those researched both in respect to how the research is conducted and also what the aims of this research is. Participatory methods aim to empower those in poverty and to respect and enhance their agency, although these are sometimes not more than "buzzwords" (Cornwall and Brock 2005). This is crucial for the research with children in poverty, because they are often active agents in their lives (they must be when, for example, they take care of themselves or family members socially and

economically), and because it follows the moral imperative to support the transition of children to become autonomous. Fifthly, conceptualisations and research in poverty are often not detached from politics. Poverty research is often used to guide politics and policy (which groups, regions, deprivations should be tackled and how) (Harriss 2009). This implies certain responsibilities on the side of the researchers, the funders of this research and those who use this research for certain purposes, like policy design.

The third challenge relates to the *normative evaluation* of child poverty and the deconstruction of the many ethical issues involved in child poverty. We already mentioned that the conceptualisation and research of child poverty are in themselves involved with normative questions, but many more come to the fore. Is child poverty unjust or otherwise morally bad? What kind of theory of justice or morality is needed to make such an evaluation? As many have noticed before, philosophy and theories of justice are often based on assumptions about the rationality of agents, which do not fit in the case of children (Macleod 2015). Furthermore, it needs to be examined what kinds of goods are at stake when normatively assessing what is owed to children in poverty, and how can we value and evaluate them. The discussions about *kindergoods* and the value of childhood and child well-being feeds into this question (Bagattini and Macleod 2014; Graf and Schweiger 2015; Gheaus 2015). Such evaluations must navigate also in between the extremes of considering children as fully mature (thus, overestimating their agency), and viewing them as fully immature (thus, lacking agency all together). Here, descriptive empirical observations and normative assumptions meet again, forcing philosophical analyses to face the task to come up with a substantial concept of childhood both as a social and a biological phase, of the social setting in which children are embedded, and of their agency, capacities, vulnerabilities and development. It also needs to be acknowledged that child poverty is not a matter of material deprivation or family income alone. It also affects political participation, subjective well-being and emotions such as shame and humiliation (Ridge 2011; Schweiger and Graf 2015). It relates to the way in which children understand themselves and their situation, what they aspire, their education and social behaviour. All these are of (potential) ethical weight to a normative evaluation of child poverty, especially when evaluating the potential interests and claims that children have as individuals being in poverty in the present, and how this affects and frames them throughout their whole life-course. Lastly, we must name the under-researched area of global justice for children, which takes a true global look at children and the differences among childhood(s) and the normative commitments tied to them. Children's lives differ vastly according to cultural norms and practices, and injustices often intersect: disadvantages based on sex, gender, disability or race and poverty can become toxic and corrosive in many ways.

Finally, the fourth challenge we want to flag relates to the (moral) *duties, responsibilities, policies and politics* tied to child poverty. Closely related to the evaluative challenge is the task of reflecting on reasonable and feasible applications of the theory to prevent and alleviate child poverty. This involves the search for ways to pin down particular responsibilities and the agents (individual or collective) who

must carry them out. Most often, discussions on responsibility target the family and the state as primary duty-bearers (Archard 2003; Archard and Benatar 2010; Adams 2008; Brighouse and Swift 2014). Both are certainly important, for various ethical reasons. States have particular duties of justice towards the children within their borders or to those who are their citizens. Furthermore, states are powerful actors, and have a wide range of mechanisms for intervention at their disposal. The family is of obvious importance because it is the social sphere where child poverty most often takes place, and those within the family are at the closest physical and emotional distance to bear responsibility over poor children. Children are often poor because they are embedded in poor families, and these heavily influence their well-being, their options and their development. The relation and allocation of responsibilities between the state and the family is not straightforward, involving issues of privacy, consent, self-determination, parental and children's rights (and duties) and paternalism, to name just a few. This picture becomes even more complex if one admits that, in many countries, the state and its institutions are weak, failing children and families in poverty. On the other hand, the role of the family (its structure, internal duties and relations) varies greatly across cultures and social practices, thus, making a strict and universal allocation of responsibilities impossible in many instances. Likewise, tendencies of the state to shift responsibilities to poor parents, in many cases poor mothers, and to blame them for what is truly a structural problem, needs to be countered. Even if, in some cases, "bad" decisions may lead families to fall in poverty, the thick of the problem is beyond the poor individual's control. State policies, economic deregulation and lack of social safety nets and supports tend to be the core reason for most, if not all, cases. Besides the family and the state other potential agents of justice with moral responsibilities might be pinned down: companies and multinational corporations, who exploit children and their parents, transnational organizations like the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund, which shape the economic and social policies of poorer countries and how child poverty is tackled. Understanding responsibility for child poverty, thus, must think beyond the state and the family as the sole duty-bearers.

3 Volume's Synopsis

Finally, we want to present an overview of the sections and chapters in this book. The first section of the book ('Definitions and Measurements') will deal with philosophical questions on the conceptualisation and measurement of child poverty. An important task at hand is to explore the ways in which philosophical and ethical research may contribute to our understanding of poverty during childhood. The chapters in this section address structural questions on how to conceptualise what childhood and poverty are, and the amendments required by the particularities of children when assessing their poverty status.

Douglas Hanes' chapter explores how our normative assumptions regarding what childhood is, strongly affect the way we understand poverty during childhood,

and the responsibility of parents towards their children. Hanes argues that the particular way in which ‘childhood’ is defined and understood in the Global North (namely, as a preparatory stage of life in which children are taken as innocent, and in need of special protections) is used to understand who children are across the globe, having a problematic impact on how child poverty is addressed in the Global South. He considers that the “neontocracy” which pervades the Global North’s relation towards children, and its use as a ruler to evaluating child poverty worldwide fails to take into account the historical and cultural particularities of childhood in different social and cultural settings. After presenting his critical analysis of present approaches to child poverty, it offers an alternative understanding of it that does not impose a Westernised normative model on the rest of the world.

Katarina Pitasse Fragoso’s chapter addresses the epistemic and moral problems that derive from current poverty measurements within populations. She argues that using the household as the unit of analysis when measuring poverty may come with problematic omissions and biases when assessing the poverty of individuals within the household. She considers that inequalities within the family may not be assessed through household measurements, and that we would do well in amending current poverty indexes in order for them to include the voices and claims of all representative groups. She considers that there are both epistemic and moral reasons for doing this: regarding the epistemic reasons, the particular child-perspective on how poverty affects them can be omitted if children’s voices are not heard; regarding the moral reasons, the status of children as equal moral beings entitles them to be included directly in poverty measurements, in order to show the respect that is owed to them in their own right, instead of being taken merely as appendixes to adults. The chapter considers the role that story-telling exercises may play for including children directly in assessment of their own poverty condition.

Jonathan Wolff’s chapter questions the validity of certain assumptions regarding the reasons why families are poor. Namely, those that put the whole burden of their poor condition on the poor person’s own incompetence, improvidence or irresponsibility. Developing a framework inspired on Amartya Sen’s capability approach, Wolff claims that an individual’s choice and behaviour is much less relevant than structural factors in creating and sustaining their condition as poor. He argues, however, that choice and behaviour of parents do play an important role in determining what kind of disadvantages take priority over others, thus leading certain families to suffer from either primary or secondary forms of poverty.

The final chapter of this section, written by Cabezas and Pitillas offers an original understanding of what child poverty is, and how this conceptualisation can reframe the way poverty is addressed, and of the individuals and groups responsible for its existence. They consider the possibility of understanding child poverty as a “moral damage”, thus expanding how child poverty is understood, beyond its material and social dimensions. Understanding child poverty as a moral damage implies looking at the different forms in which individual or collective intentional actions may lead to morally relevant psychological damages to the child, even if she is unaware that the damage is being inflicted on her. The objective of this chapter is to

expand our conceptualisation of the actions which may affect a child living in poverty, and the psychological responses which these actions trigger on the poor child.

The second section ('Children and Families Living in Poverty') brings together papers that explore the condition of children and families living in poverty. The situation of children living in deprivation is also intertwined and highly conditioned by various phenomena, while affecting how we understand other relevant philosophical issues. Thus, this section intends to explore the ways in which research in other philosophical topics (such as gender, migration or disability) may feed into the discussion on child poverty. Furthermore, chapters in this section address the issues that arise from the dependence of children on the family structure and their parents' quality of life. If the family structure suffers great deprivations and parents cannot fulfil their own basic needs, children tend to get the worst out of the situation. Intergenerational transmission of poverty creates many problems to child poverty research: focusing only on the child may be insufficient for tackling the foundational causes that locate her in a deprived situation.

The chapter by Bagattini and Gutwald uses the concept of vulnerability to explore the problems of child poverty, and, through a capability approach as their evaluative framework, they explore the role that resilience may play in the life of a poor child. The chapter introduces the different ways in which a child may be considered as "vulnerable", and argues that, on top of the inherent vulnerabilities tied to the biological condition of the child, poverty during childhood reinforces certain vulnerabilities and creates others which could be labelled as pathogenic. The latter, they argue following Catriona Mackenzie's work, are created by harmful social arrangements and institutional responses to the condition of poverty. As such, they cannot be addressed exclusively through the individual's own actions but require political and social responses in order for them to be eliminated. They consider that understanding social justice through Amartya Sen's capability theory is the most appropriate framework to evaluate who is being wrongfully affected by their social arrangements, and offers the most effective tools to tackle these potential setbacks to an individual's basic interests. The chapter, then, explores how the promotion of resilience during childhood may be fundamental for ensuring that children have the tools to counter their poverty status. The chapter considers that the creation of resilience in children should not be seen as an individual matter, but as a matter of justice: the fact that social institutions are partially responsible for the pathogenic vulnerabilities of children, compels them to compensate these harms by ensuring that children have the tools to respond to these forms of harm.

In his contribution, Gottfried Schweiger explores an entitlement of children, namely, to have positive self-relations (self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem) and considers the ways in which we may understand humiliation as a fundamental obstacle for children to be able to develop these fundamental traits. The chapter, first, explores why are positive self-relations fundamental entitlements of justice, and examines what this entails regarding what should be provided to children as it relates to their self-confidence, self-respect and their self-esteem. He, then, looks at the concept of humiliation and explores the ways in which humiliating acts restrict a child's capacity to develop positive self-relations. Finally, Schweiger links the

discussions between self-relations and humiliation with the particular condition of children living in poverty, and considers five different arguments which show why poverty is humiliating for children, thus, an injustice that should be amended.

Alison Denham's chapter explores the issue of poverty in its intersection with debates about gender equality. Through an analysis of individual cases of low-income, employed single mothers, Denham delves certain underrated tensions that affect their choice-vectors. Namely, the tragic choices that many women must make, due to their particular disadvantaged condition, regarding their opportunity to fulfil their valued interest in being a worker and a mother. Childrearing is a valuable capability for many women, and one of the great inequalities that many women suffer is precisely tied to their incapacity to have access to this valuable good. Through an in-depth exploration of the particular condition of two women, Denham considers questions of who they are, what they value, what gender inequalities affect them the most, and how they should be addressed. She argues that these women stand in a position in which they cannot avoid certain tragic choices regarding the functioning-sets which they can aspire to achieve due to their condition both as women and as poor.

The chapter by Anke Snoek looks at another important intersection between the family and poverty; namely, the case of substance dependent parents. Children of substance dependent parents very often suffer from their parents' choices and dependence. Proclivity towards being neglected, and towards having both their present and future wellbeing and agency affected are consequences of children living under these family conditions. Addressing the issue of substance dependent parents tends to take a punitive approach: parents tend to have their children taken from them, they face jail time and other punishments. Snoek intends to argue that the burden which tends to be imposed on substance dependent parents' responsibility over their actions must be reduced, and that the practices intended to solve their condition should change. The fact that poverty plays a structural role in shaping an individual's reasoning capacities and self-control, implies that we should revise the actual sources of their behaviour. Snoek considers two effects of reasoning in substance dependent parents: a shift from global to local reasoning (meaning that the individual's priorities and behaviours change from fulfilling long-term preferences and interests, to more immediate ones), and second, a resignation regarding their inability to escape their condition, and thus of improving their lives and their children's. The chapter claims that when resignation appears in the behaviour of substance dependent parents, policies should aim at reducing their punitive approach to their actions, and rather search for more constructive mechanisms which may support them into "turning their live around" and avoiding the pitfalls of resignation. This, Snoek argues, is necessary in order to avoid long-term effects on the agency and well-being of the parents themselves, and, very importantly, to address at its root the vicious influence that resignation of substance dependent parents has on the intergenerational transmission of this condition and behaviour to their children.

Sarah Gorman uses philosophical tools to study a different type of case. Namely, she looks at the intersection between disability and child poverty, and argues that the ways in which a society frames who is considered as disabled may have very problematic implications on the individual's (and their family's) poverty status.

Based on her personal experience as a child living with two parents with disabilities, she considers the way in which social and political institutions may affect the family's socioeconomic condition, and the well-being of children living with parents who have disabilities. The chapter studies the ways in which certain inherent vulnerabilities may turn oppressive through their stigmatisation. The fact of living in poverty with disabilities already poses certain difficulties to a family's life and welfare, but the social stigmatisation (of both the condition of poverty and of disability) reinforces these difficulties and obstacles making it even more difficult for families in this situation to counter them. Gorman argues that a political system responsive to vulnerabilities is necessary in order to better address the particular condition of many families living in poverty.

Ang analyses the situation of children living in the ASEAN member states through Judith Butler's ideas of precariousness and livability. She considers that the way society frames whose life has value may hide the precarious reality of many children in this region of the world. The widespread exploitation of the lives of children in ASEAN member states, and the income that children are expected to bring home, argues Ang, forces them to embrace not having a childhood in order to be recognised as valuable beings who contribute to their family's income. She considers that Butler's work does not only help to diagnose why many children in this region are forced to not have a childhood, but also presents a way out. The idea of livability, and the conditions that it imposes on how we understand what poverty is, can challenge the current status quo by reframing our definition of whose life has value.

In a similar line, the chapter by Cummins and Sharifi uses Victor Turner's concept of liminality and Vittorio Buffachi's three-dimensional approach to social injustice to assess the condition of asylum-seekers and refugee children in Ireland and Iran. Although the cultural, institutional and political situation for each of the two cases is very different, this chapter considers how an analysis of liminality and social injustice allows us to see certain fundamental commonalities among the Irish and Iranian situation. The chapter argues that both Ireland and Iran, through diverging practices, and through their legislation and treatment of asylum-seekers and refugee children, have institutionalised and enforced a life in poverty to those children who come within their border with these two statuses. The fact that in both cases children are kept in a liminal state with relation to the state's protections and securities leaves them in an especially vulnerable situation from which they are unable to escape by themselves. The chapter's objective is to make the reader reflect on the potentially pernicious relationship between institutional practices and how they impact child poverty.

Finally, the third section ('Rights, Responsibilities and Policies') explores certain responsibilities and policy mechanisms tackling child and family poverty. Many social institutions and agents play a determinant role on a child's life, and the sources of responsibility towards the alleviation of childhood poverty may rest in many hands. The last part of the book intends to explore the potential ways in which responsibility may be assigned, and possible mechanisms that could deal with poverty during childhood. Furthermore, the peculiar position of children in our society and their condition as especially vulnerable and dependent beings demands

a reflection on how their characteristics makes them relevant subjects of justice, and on how the social institutions that surround them may frame their deprived condition.

The first chapter in the section, written by Stamatina Liosi, revisits the debate on children's rights, the duties of others towards children, and the particular way it affects the socioeconomic rights of children (with a focus on the right to be free from poverty). The chapter takes Immanuel Kant's work as its guiding theory to argue for a duty-based approach to children's right to freedom from extreme poverty. Although not dismissing the discourse on rights in its entirety, the chapter does argue that, especially in the case of children, duties must be considered as taking the centre stage. The particular vulnerabilities and dependencies of children makes the rights-discourse feeble in order to address urgent political questions, and, following Onora O'Neill's Kantian approach to children's rights, the chapter considers that we should start with the moral duties that are imposed on others in order to ensure children's wellbeing, prior to talking about rights. Liosi clarifies the particular way in which these duties, and their consequent rights, ought to be understood, by clarifying the relation between duties and rights, the distinction between human and socioeconomic rights, and the role that constructivism should or should not play in a Kantian approach to moral duties.

Justin Clardy's contribution introduces the concept of "civic tenderness" as a response mechanism to the situational vulnerabilities suffered by children who live in poverty. The chapter considers how certain stigmas attached to living in poverty (with ascriptions such as being lazy, incompetent and irresponsible) lead to a certain social invisibility and institutional indifference towards the lives and outcomes of individuals who are poor. Clardy argues that this indifference is particularly problematic in the case of children who live in poverty due to the special and prominent vulnerabilities that poor children have. Not only do they (in the present) suffer from inadequate nutrition, bad health, lack of education, violence and homelessness, but their long-term prospects in these areas and others are also threatened by their condition. The chapter, thus, considers that the social development of the process of *tenderisation* is necessary in order for the public *ethos* to address the particular vulnerabilities that affect children living in poverty. The objective to be achieved is, thus, the formation of the public emotion of civic tenderness supported by a society's members, institutions and systems towards poor children is necessary in order to alleviate the vulnerabilities that threaten their wellbeing.

The contribution by Karakasis also considers the value of similar mechanisms in order to tackle the problems that affect children in poverty. Standing on Martin Heidegger's concept of "being with others in solicitude", the chapter considers the appropriate way in which the social responses to child poverty must materialise. It argues that mechanisms to tackle poverty must go beyond mere provision for basic needs, requiring an ethics of care in which society actually re-evaluates how it understands the relational requirements to support the fundamental needs of certain individuals. Karakasis approaches children's particular relation to death from an ontological angle, in order to assess the particular threats that their incapacity to understand this event has over their condition. He argues that an ethics of care in

which children's lives are supported and guided through solicitude is necessary in order to actualise their potential to address their condition. The chapter considers, in this respect, the concept of *de-severance* as a fundamental tool to reframe the social response to the condition of children living in poverty. The objective is to revise the perception of distance between those who suffer from poverty and those who do not, in order to allow caring ties and networks to develop.

Douglas MacKay offers an ethical evaluation of a different type of policies which may be implemented to address child poverty, namely, those that target parents' decision-making. In this chapter, he looks at a particular type of anti-poverty policies labelled parent-targeted paternalistic policies. These are supports given to parents by the state, as long as parents comply with certain conditions (vaccinating their children, sending them to school, etc.). The chapter asks whether this type of paternalism which is intended for ensuring the wellbeing of children within the family are pro tanto wrong, and offers an account of the elements which would allow policy-makers to evaluate whether these mechanisms should be implemented or not. He considers that an assessment of a threshold of parental competency (together with other fundamental elements) is required in order to evaluate whether parent-targeted paternalism can be seen as justified or not. MacKay considers the particular cases of the *Bolsa Família* policy in Brazil and the Housing and Urban Development policy in the United States, in order to exemplify the validity of parent-targeted paternalism, and to explore the elements which must be taken into account when evaluating anti-poverty policies.

The final chapter of the collection, written by Mornington and Guyard-Nedelec, addresses the problematic tension between policies of forced adoption and the rights of parents who have their children taken away from them. Forced removal of children from their parents has become an increasingly normal practice in the United Kingdom. A concern with a rise in the harms suffered by children from the hands of their parents, made British policies to turn more inclined towards removing children from their parents if there is likeliness of them being unduly harmed. Mornington and Guyard-Nedelec explore the moral limits of these types of policies, especially concerning the potential bias against poor parents when enforcing them. Although acknowledging that the interests of children should not be harmed within the household, they consider alternative mechanisms that reduce threat of harm, while not violating the parents' rights to keep their children. They argue that potential biases in British policy which hint that poverty is a factor that justifies forced removal ought to be addressed.

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Part I

Definitions and Measurements

Child Poverty, Impoverished Parenting, and Normative Childhood: Some Words of Caution



Douglas William Hanes

Abstract This chapter uses examples of the use of child poverty for racist, colonial, and sexist violence to highlight the dangers of our efforts to address child poverty. Using international appeals for aid, transnational adoption, and the seizure of Black children in the US and Aboriginal children in Canada, it becomes evident that understandings of child poverty assume conceptions of normative childhoods and parenting. These conceptions are grounded in modern Western understandings of children as innocent and in need of special protection, and of childhood as merely a preparatory stage for adulthood. Many efforts to address child poverty fail to see these conceptions as historically and culturally specific, and instead treat them as timeless and universal. This justifies the imposition of this framework on the poor, including through the violent disruption of families and communities through the dispossession of their children. Finally, this chapter offers brief comments on what an approach to child poverty that does not universalize the Western, Global North’s normative models of childhood and parenting would look like.

Keywords Neontocracy · First nations · Child welfare · Transnational adoption · Charitable giving · Child labor · Education · Development

1 Introduction

This chapter will address the major pitfalls that any philosophical approach to child poverty should avoid, especially if such an approach wishes to adequately understand the nature of child poverty and its harms. Specifically, it will focus on the ways that we—philosophers as well as those more directly participating in child-poverty alleviation efforts—imagine “good childhoods” in contradistinction to childhoods spent in poverty. Often, this imagined good childhood is the product of an unacknowledged ethnocentrism that takes the idealized form of childhood in the Western

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Global North as a universal.¹To make this case, much of this chapter will draw on contemporary social-scientific scholarship about childhood and child poverty. It will not offer a systemic philosophical account of the nature of child poverty, its wrongs, attribution of responsibility, or solutions to it; although in the final section, it will offer potentially fruitful new approaches to the problems of child poverty.

The dangers in our approaches to child poverty are very real: there is a long and ongoing history of racist, sexist, and colonial projects that have attempted to address child poverty. These efforts have used white, Western ideals of good childhoods as the basis for negative judgments of communities of color, colonized peoples, and peoples in the Global South; they then uses those judgments to impose corrective actions onto those peoples, sometimes through state violence, but often through acts of seeming benevolence, such as development aid and charity. Most notable among these efforts are the removals of aboriginal children from their families and communities in settler-colonial societies, such as Canada, the United States, and Australia, acts labeled “cultural genocide” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada [TRCC] 2015) by Aboriginal peoples.

The violence against poor children, their parents, and communities in the name of solving that poverty includes not only family separation, but also the incarceration of impoverished parents, physical and psychological abuse of poor children, and the loss of cultural heritage and communities. While it is tempting to see this as a problem of the past, the legacies of these often-recent actions—as well as those activities that still happen today—are not so easily dismissed, nor are they easily separated from well-intended desires and good-faith efforts to address child poverty. When philosophers fail to account for the conception of childhood they are relying on in their analysis of child poverty, including its ethnocentrism and constitution by racial, colonial, and geopolitical hierarchies, they often justify these same projects. The primary questions this chapter will address, then, are: (1) How to understand the normative ideals of childhood and parenting that are foundational to understandings of child poverty; and (2) How these normative ideals are enacted into action, including those that oppress people in the name of resolving child poverty.

The violence committed for the good of poor children is rooted in Western conceptions of childhood and the cultural universalism and superiority they constitute. The cautionary words offered here challenge these conceptions by intervening in the contemporary literature on child poverty that informs mitigation efforts. This literature falls into two large groups. The first are empirical studies of specific aspects of poverty, such as malnutrition, child labor and trafficking, education and development, and health and access to healthcare. The second, more commonly located in philosophy and other humanities, focuses on identifying the nature of

¹There are no uncontroversial terms for either the wealthier parts of the world, or for those areas more strongly influenced by the culture and institutions of western Europe, but Western and Global North are, at the moment, among the more common. Because the Global North can include wealthy nations outside the West, such as Japan, I will mostly reserve use of “Western” for discussions when the intellectual and cultural history is especially important, while “Global North” and “Northern” will be used primarily in the context of the contemporary makeup of institutions and the flow of resources and power.

poverty's harms, apportioning responsibility for poverty, and investigating the best means for addressing these problems. Both literatures raise debates that are essential to addressing poverty, but often remain bounded within the Western conceptions of normative childhood and parenting. They often fail to interrogate this larger framing and its implications for thinking about child poverty, including its history of violence. A key task of any philosophy of child poverty, then, is to observe how these understandings of childhood are culturally and historically specific—and quite recent developments at that (Ariès 1962; Kessen 1979; Heywood 2001; Lancy 2015)—and to reflect on the consequences of that often-unacknowledged specificity in any normative analysis.

The first body of literature I identified, empirical studies of specific aspects of poverty, is often found within the social and health sciences (Arrighi and Maume 2007; Camfield et al. 2009; Jones and Sumner 2011). A philosophical intervention here is necessary because, while this literature is empirically focused, it is also often normative, serving as an exhortation and justification for policies and actions. As Schweiger and Graf (2015) note, because for many poverty researchers the knowledge they generate “should be also used to a large extent to change something and to help end poverty,” they find that “many studies about poverty conclude with some sort of policy advice or name institutions that could make a difference.” (p. 3) They locate this dynamic in the nature of the term ‘poverty’ itself: “describing an adult or child as poor is in most cases also meant to describe the living condition of this person as bad and, to some extent, morally wrong.” (p. 2) Thus deployment of ‘poverty’ “is used to trigger actions of other people or institutions” (p. 2), while the empirical account of poverty in each study points to the problems in need of remedy, and often, goals to strive for.

The second body of literature, philosophical reflections on the nature of child poverty, is usually more explicitly normative. It includes questions about who is responsible for and should act to address it, and how we can bring about that action. However, these normative claims often fail to interrogate which conceptions of childhood the authors are deploying, and ignore alternative conceptions of childhood among the impoverished people they are theorizing. We can see these uninterrogated conception of childhood, for example, in the rhetorical deployment of children's poverty and attendant suffering in this literature. For example, while Peter Singer's stated goal is overall poverty reduction, his examples and thought experiments most often center on children, especially on infant- and child-mortality rates as the measure of success of poverty-alleviation efforts (2009, pp. 4–5; 2015, pp. 3, 8). Thomas Pogge also speaks to the question of poverty more generally, yet rhetorically singles out children's suffering: “50,000 people each day, including 29,000 children under the age of five” die from poverty-related causes (2008, p. 2). What remain unstated in both cases, and in many other invocations of poor children's suffering both popular and academic, are the differences between children in poverty and adults in poverty that would lead to authors' singling the former out. That is: Why would these authors invoke *child* poverty specifically if their arguments do not depend upon it? What is it about child poverty, instead of poverty more generally, that causes it to be invoked so frequently—and often persuasively? Why children?

The remainder of this introductory chapter will present the conceptual framework needed to answer these questions. The structure of the rest of this chapter is as follows: The following two sects. (2 and 3) will address solutions to child poverty; these include actually practiced and proposed solutions. In both cases, I will address the normative justifications of them found in the philosophical literature. Schweiger and Graf (2015) identify four possible responses to child poverty:

If the parents of poor children are responsible for their children's poverty and/or for severe but preventable deprivations to to their to support the parents and help them become better parents and escape poverty; to take the children away and put them in state care; to take the children away and give them to other parents; and, as a preventive option, to make it less likely that poor parents have children in the first place. (p. 148)

I will use a modified grouping of their possible responses to structure my examples in the first sections of this chapter. First, in sect. 2, we are going to consider examples and justifications of the second and third options, child removal; the following sect. 3, will examine the first, support for parents (as well as their communities and nations). (The last option, reproductive control, will receive brief attention in sect. 4.) While Schweiger and Graf posit these four options as *state* responses to child poverty, we shall see that other organizations have also pursued them.

After these case studies, next two sections will critically describe ongoing attempts to address child poverty, and are primarily empirical. Drawing upon criticism of these solutions, sects. 4 and 5 will look more deeply at how child poverty raises questions about the nature of poverty itself and the responsibility for addressing that poverty. The final sect. 6, will contain proposals for new approaches to child poverty and its solutions.

1.1 Why Children?

Many of the answers to the above questions center on those aforementioned assumptions about the nature of childhood: contemporary Western ideals of children as special and sacred, or as anthropologist David F. Lancy describes them, “precious, innocent, and preternaturally cute cherubs”. This image of children is the hallmark of what he terms “neontocracy” in the modern West (2015, pp. 2–3).² He contrasts this treatment of children with that of the “gerontocracy” that characterizes pre-modern and non-Western societies: “the norm for most of human history has been a society dominated by attention to the oldest members” in which adults “adopt a *laissez faire* attitude toward the young”, who are “devalued, seen largely as a liability until they reach an age when they become useful” (2015, 12, 22).

²I am using “Western societies” and “Global North countries” as shorthand for elites within those societies. There are, of course, diverse conceptions of childhood and childrearing practices within these societies that often fall along class and race lines (see, for example, Lareau 2011). And, as we shall see, those who differ from neontocratic norms and standards *within* these societies, or who are unable to meet the demands of neontocratic childrearing, are subject to negative consequences.

Similar to Lancy, Malkki (2015) finds that, in the context of humanitarian aid, children consistently appear not only as “as embodiments of a basic human goodness and innocence,” but as sufferers and as “embodiments of the future.” (p. 80) Viviana Zelizer (1985) highlights another feature of the neontocratic framework, what she calls the “sacralization of child”, in which instead of their economic value, “children, regardless of their social class, were defined as emotionally priceless assets, [and] their death became not only a painful domestic misfortune but a sign of collective failure.” (p. 32) This constellation of children’s innocence, goodness, and their emotional pricelessness means that children’s suffering is “particularly serious and worse than” adults’ (Meyer 2007, p. 96).

Alan Prout’s (2005) characterization of children draws out traits related to this description of neontocracy, but emphasizing the ways in which modernity positions children as subaltern to adults: “By the end of the nineteenth century, conceptions of children as innocent, ignorant, dependent, vulnerable, generally incompetent and in need of protection and discipline were widespread.” (pp. 35–6) Children’s assumed incompetence, in combination with their vulnerability and innocence, licenses adults’ paternalism over them, especially on the part of parents or other familial caregivers. While Gheaus (2015b) places these two characterizations of children, innocent and incompetent, in opposition to one another, Prout encourages us to see them as complementary reasons to disenfranchise children to both protect them from themselves and from the corrupted world of adults. This also creates the possibility for crisis: What happens if those adults—or, indeed, whole cultures or nations—are unable or unwilling to successfully discharge these responsibilities? What happens to adults who have failed to have “good childhoods”—and what happens to their children?

In the context of child poverty, innocence and incompetence result in the impossibility of children’s being autonomous, and so responsible, agents. That is, unlike adults, children cannot be blamed for their own poverty. Because childhood is future-oriented and preparatory, producing good adults requires that children have good childhoods, which are the responsibility of adults and their institutions to secure. Living in poverty precludes this, an attitude evident in empirical studies of child poverty’s effects on children’s educational and cognitive development and in political and educational philosophy’s debates over the place of children within a polity and the requirements of their education in preparation for full citizenship (Callan 1997; Arneil 2002; Hirschmann 2003, ch. 2). Embedded within this understanding of “children as the future” are assumptions about the nature of human and societal development, as well as a sense of lost opportunity. As each child matures into adulthood, they move from the future into the present, making children potent and urgent sites for change, including solutions to seemingly intractable problems like poverty.

This neontocratic approach to childhood is a problem in part because it is abstracted from real children’s lives, and in part because it is treated as a universal ideal, instead of historically and culturally specific. Rather than seeing it as one among diverse forms of raising children, it becomes a standard by which to assess childrearing imposed on impoverished people: Dominant imaginaries—the sets of cultural associations and affective relations mobilised around ‘the oppressively occlude the real conditions of children’s lives, with the complexity and diversity of

children's lives typically reduced and abstracted (especially from class and national identifiers) into some notional, highly symbolized and usually singular (and often young and/or female) 'child'. This means that children whose life circumstances and practices of daily living fail to conform to those idealized norms suffer further marginalisation, or even pathologisation. (Burman 2008, p. 11).

What we will see in the remainder of this chapter is how neontocratic attitudes have shaped practical approaches to child poverty, including licensing violence against impoverished children, their families, and their communities. But, as we shall also see, neontocratic attitudes toward children are likewise evident in philosophical arguments: in the rhetorical invocation of children to define poverty and to attempt to set it outside politics; in the presentation of poverty as an urgent problem in need of solutions; and in the advocacy for certain solutions, such as greater state oversight of parenting, transitional adoption, charitable giving to poverty-alleviation efforts, and the development of greater educational opportunities and protection from child labor. This chapter is going to criticize this broad range of proposed solutions to child poverty, and the justifications for them; it is not going to offer concrete solutions. The purpose in demonstrating the role neontocratic assumptions play in each of these, and the dangers those assumptions create, is not mere naysaying. Rather, it is to demonstrate that child-poverty alleviation is always advancing a substantive vision of good lives for children and adults, visions that are historically and culturally specific to those who proffer them; and these visions have often been realized violently, forced upon unwilling children, families, and cultures. It is only by remaining aware of these risks, by being attentive and cautious in how we understand and react to the problem of child poverty that we can end the ongoing violence enacted in the name of children's well-being and avoid it going forward.

1.2 *Against Neontocracy*

The neontocratic understanding of childhood is not, however, the only one with currency in contemporary scholarship on child poverty. In 1962, Philippe Ariès's *Centuries of Childhood* (1962) claimed that "in medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist" (p. 128). This claim about the existence of childhood in premodernity has since faced scholarly challenge, but it nevertheless reinvigorated interest in children among historians and other scholars, including among those studying poor children (Archard 1993; Heywood 2001; Prout 2005). In contrast to scholarship that relies on modern, Western neontocracy, this *social constructivist* literature makes a broader empirical observations about childhood as a diverse phenomenon, both historically and across cultures in the contemporary world. This pluralism includes variation in how children are raised, their perceived role in the family and in society more generally, in the boundaries between childhood and adulthood, and in visions of what constitute "a good childhood" and "good parenting"—or indeed, if these are issues of widespread concern at all. For most of human history, it appears that they were not (Heywood 2001; Weisner 2014; Lancy 2015).

These observations about the diversity of childhoods historically and globally will enable us to address the shortcomings in how contemporary approaches to child poverty imagine good childhoods and good parenting. In so doing, they enable us to think differently about the problem of child poverty, as well as the assumed normativity of contemporary childhood in the West and North. We can posit a greater normative diversity in how children live their lives and how parents raise them, even under conditions of material want. This in turn will allow us to better understand the nature of poverty and to avoid condoning violent solutions to it.

Such a culturally pluralist approach rests on two related challenges to neontocratic conceptions of childhood, especially in relation to children's futurity and their incompetence. First, "since the 1980s, there has been a paradigm shift in childhood research," as, "what was previously often a predominantly adults perspective directed toward developmental goals projected into the future is now being countered increasingly by a perspective focusing more strongly on the 'here and now.'" (Fegter et al. 2010, p. 8) This focus on the "here-and-now" is also taking place in philosophy, as some scholars like Anca Gheaus (2015a, b) have argued against childhood as merely a preparatory stage, and instead "defend the view that childhood is intrinsically valuable instead of having value only to the extent to which it leads to a good adulthood"—although she still maintains that as it is only as adults that "we become capable of full moral agency." (2015b, pp. 1–2; cf. Weinstock 2018). The second challenge to neontocracy takes up Gheaus's qualifier about moral agency, and instead understands children to be agents, capable of making morally and politically meaningful decisions about their own lives:

One of the strongly underlined assumptions in childhood studies is that children are 'social actors' and active participants that contribute to the everyday life of the societies in which they live. Children's long-lived invisibility in most social science research is seen to be linked to various forms of developmental and socialization thinking which have placed children within the processes of first becoming (and not being) full social actors, adulthood being the assumed end point of childhood development. (Alanen 2014, p. 134)

The results of these two challenges has been to rethink how we study children, their poverty, and the well-being by challenging the assumed moral and mental hierarchy between adults and children that has largely disenfranchised the latter in knowledge-production and decision-making, even as it holds them up as objects of our care and moral urgency. It is not enough to simply study objective material conditions; instead, it is necessary to take into account their own subjective assessments of their lives. "Children should be thought of as the 'experts on themselves,' and... research on their well-being should (also) be based on their self-reports." (Fegter and Richter 2014, p. 740) Similarly, it is not enough to simply resolve the problems of material want and subjection to violence and exploitation. Resolving *child* poverty must also take into account children's self-stated desires and life projects, a project that is also political insofar as it asks "how a democratic society can bring about the participation of all its members (and thereby of children as well)" (Fegter and Richter 2014, p. 742; see also Deveaux 2016). This is not to claim that material deprivation, such as insufficient food, housing, and clothing are unimportant; children themselves have highlighted their necessity (Singer 2009, pp. 5–6).

Finally, recent scholarship has shown that the neontocratic view of childhood is not only culturally and historically specific, it also constituted by race, gender, ability, and class hierarchies. Goff et al. (2014) show that, in the United States, “as the perception of innocence is a central protection afforded to children, it follows that this social consideration may not be given to the children of dehumanized groups, such as Black Americans” (p. 527). This failure to see Black children *as children* is evident in their treatment in the criminal justice system: “Black children... are 18 times for like than White children to be sentenced as adults” (p. 526). Similarly, “Black girls constitute a disproportionate number of juvenile arrests for prostitution,” and “they are more likely than their white counterparts to be adjudicated through the juvenile system, and... are more likely to be detained in a locked facility even if identified as a victim of sexual trafficking.” (Ocen 2015, p. 1588) Because they are denied the neontocratic traits like innocence, vulnerability, and incompetence, Black children are not seen deserving or needing protection. As we shall see, this exclusion of children from neontocracy justifies greater state intervention in their lives, and sets Black parents up for failure.

2 Responses to Child Poverty I: Child Removal

All four above-listed options can be used to globally and domestically, and there are numerous examples of invoking impoverished children’s welfare as justification for a variety of oppressive actions, from negative stereotyping to systematic violence, dispossession, and cultural genocide. In this section, I am going to provide three such examples of child removal: the removal of African American children, which often occurs simultaneously with the criminalization of their parents; the forcible removal of Aboriginal³North American children from their families and communities; and transnational adoption of children from the Global South by families in the Global North. These three cases all arise from the neontocratic conception of good childhoods, and assume that such childhoods requires responsible adults who are able to provide material goods and responsibly paternalistic supervision for their children.

2.1 *Punishing Black Families*

As shown above, Black children are perceived and treated as non-children, denied the innocence, vulnerability, incompetence, and resultant protection, afforded white children. Black parents are also perceived and treated as failures, assumed to be irresponsible and otherwise incapable of good parenting, with Black children’s perceived criminality often used as the justification for this view. Dorothy Roberts

³There is widespread disagreement about how to refer to the first peoples of the Americas; I have opted for “Aboriginal” here, following the use of the TRCC (2015). When referring specifically to Aboriginal Canadians, I will use “First Nations.”

(2002) observes that, in the US, “Black children make up nearly half of the foster care population, although they constitute less than one-fifth of the nation’s children.” (p. 5) This is part of what she describes as “the fundamental conflict between the child welfare system and the integrity of the Black family and community,” the outcome of which is that “Black families are being systematically demolished.” (p. 7) This is evident in numerous racial disparities in the treatment of Black children versus those of other races by child-protection authorities: “Child welfare authorities consider foster care a last resort when it comes to white families”, while “Black children, on the other hand, are separated from their parents with relative ease.” (p. 17) Moreover, Black children tend to spend longer amounts of time in foster care, and are less likely to be either reunited with their parents or adopted, even as Black parents are more likely to have their parental rights terminated, a precondition for adoption (p. 22).

There are several dynamics that explain these statistics: first, in the US, conceptions of child welfare became conflated with concerns about child abuse; the former, a social problem, was displaced onto the latter, a problem of individual pathology or depravity. This then led to a shift in resource allocation; as funding for welfare was cut, more children came under state supervision and out-of-home care, like foster care and other institutions, including juvenile and adult incarceration facilities. In short, instead of providing material resources to help families care for their children in their own homes, governments have removed poor children from their homes, often using stories of abuse and neglect as justification. But this does not entirely explain the overrepresentation of *Black* children in out-of-home care, even given disproportionate rates of poverty among Black families (Roberts 2002; Hancock 2004).

Black families did not acquire the access to state-welfare provision that whites had until the 1960s, as a result of the Civil Rights and feminist movements. At the same time, Black families came under particular scrutiny from the US government; in its efforts to explain their high rates of poverty, the government singled out Black families as uniquely pathological, for example, in having more female-headed households with absent fathers than white families. This stereotype of the too-fecund, sexually and reproductively reckless—yet also too strong and controlling—Black woman would persist into the 1970s and ‘80s in the form of the “welfare queen”, and provided justification for huge cuts to welfare funding, along with stringent and degrading requirements that proved recipients’ worthiness (Cohen 1997, pp. 453–7; Roberts 2002; Hancock 2004, pp. 40–64; Briggs 2012). The need to receive state assistance, and thus poverty, became signs of Black parents’ deficiency of character or pathology, and so demonstrates their unsuitability to raise their children themselves; this in turn justifies the removal of their children into state protection. “Single, poor, Black mothers... are cast at best as incompetent mothers struggling to survive in a bewildering world. At worst, they are presumed to be lazy, baby-making system abusers in violation of the country’s most cherished political values.” (Hancock 2004, p. 60) Ostensibly to redress the problem of Black children being raised in poverty, and thus by unfit poor parents, governments have undertaken a program that simultaneously reproduces the worst stereotypes about Black parents and systematically destroys Black families and communities.

2.2 *First Nations Child Removal and Ongoing Cultural Genocide*

These efforts at destroying a specific group's culture by removing their children is a historical commonplace, as is the use of poverty to justify these efforts at cultural destruction. We witness it in the history of settler colonies such as Canada, the United States, and Australia, all of which engaged in child removal from their aboriginal populations as part of their larger projects of "cultural genocide... the destruction of those structures and practices that allow the group to continue as a group. States that engage in cultural genocide set out to destroy the political and social institutions of the targeted group." As part of this practice, "families are disrupted to prevent the transmission of cultural values and identity from one generation to the next." (TRCC, p. 1).

In Canada, the residential schooling system was the largest and longest-lasting program of child-removal,⁴ but there have been other programs, such as the Sixties Scoop⁵; and, as with Black Americans and Black Canadians (Ontario Human Rights Commission 2018), there are ongoing practices of removing First Nations children from their families and communities by child-welfare authorities. Residential schools had the explicit goal of terminating First Nations cultures, including the abolition of spiritual and religious practices, as well as extinction of Aboriginal languages, with the goal of the cultural assimilation of Aboriginal people into the Euro-Canadian polity. This would then enable the Canadian government "to divest itself of its legal and financial obligations to Aboriginal people and gain control over their land and resources." (TRCC, p. 3).

In contrast, contemporary practices of removing First Nations children from their families and placing them in foster or state care lack this explicit end, even as the government of Canada continues to limit both its financial obligations to First Nations peoples—including child-welfare expenditures—and First Nations' rights to land and resources. The statistics remain alarming: "Although Aboriginal children make up just 7% of the child population in Canada, they account for 48% of all foster children." (Sinclair 2016, p. 9).

First Nations children are often removed from family homes because those families lack the resources to meet the standards demanded by child-welfare authorities, but this has become a problem primarily because federal and provincial governments

⁴The residential school system existed prior to Canadian federation in 1867, and lasted throughout most of the country's history; "the government's partnership with the churches remained in place until 1969, and, although most of the schools had closed by the 1980s, the last federally supported residential schools remained in operation until the late 1990s." In terms of size, "the [Canadian] federal government has estimated that at least 150,000 First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students passed through the system." (TRCC, p. 3).

⁵The Sixties Scoop was the seizure by the Canadian governments of approximately 20,000 First Nations children for fostering or adoption by white families, (despite the name) lasting from the 1950s to the 1980s. Most children taken never returned to their communities. (Manitoba 1985; Sinclair 2007; TRCC 2015).

have shifted funding from providing support to those families to foster and other out-of-home care programs. Alongside these material and institutional changes, Canadian jurisprudence has diminished the significance of cultural heritage to its definition of Aboriginal children's "best interests" (Sinclair 2016), making it easier to place them with non-Aboriginal foster families and more difficult to reverse placement, even after families have remedied the problems that led to the initial removal (Sinclair 2016). The result is that more First Nations children are in government and foster care in Canada today than at the height of the residential school system in what is now being called the "Millennium Scoop" (Canadian Press 2011).

In both these examples, we see institutions and individuals acting in ways they believe are in the best interests of impoverished children; but often these beliefs are grounded in neontocratic assumptions about what constitutes a good childhood, including the material resources it requires. For example, both African American and Canadian First Nations families have been refused the return of their children because child-welfare authorities held that there was insufficient room per child in the home, even if that home was otherwise safe and clean (Roberts 2002; Canadian Press 2011).⁶ Similarly, child-removal is often justified on the grounds that the families have the wrong *kinds* of food at home, usually (more subsidized and thus cheaper) processed and quick-serve foods instead of fresh fruits and vegetables, even if there is enough food and the children are not hungry or malnourished (Canadian Press 2011). The privileging of fresh over prepared foods is especially troublesome, given their differential roles in North American cultures; they also demonstrate the way that historical standards of childcare have changed historically. Prepared foods were until recently signs of modern technology and middle-class tastes; nowadays, government subsidies keep them cheaper than fresh produce, which in many poorer neighbourhoods are difficult to access (Levinovitz 2015).

2.3 *Transnational Adoption and the Location of Neontocracy*

Laura Briggs (2012) links the removal of Black and Aboriginal children from their families and communities to the phenomenon of transnational stranger adoption. Alongside the growing acceptability of white women's unwed motherhood, "more and more women with access to education and careers (or female lovers and partners) were finding themselves involuntarily childless" because of "a structural increase in impaired fertility" (p. 6; see also Yngvesson 2010). The result was a decrease in supply, or a "white baby famine" simultaneous with an increase in demand, so that "adoptable babies and children became disproportionately black,

⁶As Weisner (2014) notes: "Co-sleeping or growing up in 'crowded' spaces by some Western standards may not lead to dependency or stress and can be associated with interdependence, and symbiotic relationships as a goal for well-being." (p. 99).

Latino, and Native, or came from overseas.” (p. 6)⁷ Just as removing children from Black and Aboriginal families were part of larger political projects, so too is transnational adoption: “the interventionist history of overseas adoption to the United States was born during the Cold War”, with “roots in evangelical Christian anti-Communism” that replaced “the defeated model on the left that preceded it, largely involving supporting refugee children until parents or other relatives could reclaim them.” (p. 130) This history “is the sedimented effect of nearly a century of stories of children who will die without ‘us’—middle-class folk in the United States—who need the home and emotional investment that only ‘we’ can provide.” (pp. 129–30) For Briggs, this history also includes the fact that many of the primary countries of origin for transnational adoptees “was run by a right-wing government with close ties to the United States; each was engaged in a civil war against leftist insurgents that included massive human rights violations against civilian populations and used ‘disappearances’—clandestine arrests, kidnapping, and murder—as a tactic of terror.” (p. 161) “Many of the children of those identified as ‘subversives’ and ‘terrorists’” ended up “adoptees who were sometimes kidnapped from their (at least supposedly) leftist parents to prevent the rearing of another generation of ‘reds.’” (p. 162).

As part of this geopolitical project, the US (as the largest receiving nation for transnational adoptees) codified into the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption permission for private adoptions, despite the corruption, profiteering, and coercion they allow. Intercountry adoption, even now in the post-Cold War era, bears the traces of this project, and abuses of the system continue. In many countries, parents are duped into giving up their children to boarding schools, which are then presented as orphanages to prospective adopters from the Global North, with the children either lacking living family, or having been given up by them. In some cases, children are kidnapped, trafficked, and sold to orphanages for adoption out-of-country (Briggs 2012, p. 197; African Child Policy Forum [ACPF] 2012). Other children have living parents who lost their parental rights forcibly, despite “numerous international declarations on the rights of children [that] demand that poverty alone should not justify the loss of parental authority.” (Eng 2010, p. 105). This is permitted because of lax regulation internationally and within both sending and receiving countries, and it is driven by the profitability of private adoptions, not just to adoption agencies, but to many sending countries (Briggs 2012).

We can see in contemporary transnational adoption stereotypes of child poverty and the desire to bring Western childhoods to Southern children. Daniel Eng (2010) describes it as “a popular and viable option not only for heterosexual but also, and increasingly, for homosexual couples and singles seeking to (re)consolidate conventional structures of family and kinship in the face of declining birth rates in the West.” (p. 94) This not only reproduces “traditional ideals of the nuclear family as the primary contemporary measure of social respectability and value” for adoptive parents, especially queer and single ones; there are also “generalized narratives of salvation—from poverty, diseases, and the barbarism of the third world—often

⁷Briggs (2012) points out that there was no change in the availability of babies and children for adoption, as “every generation in the twentieth century faced a ‘baby famine’” (p. 6); instead, the racial and national composition of adoptees changed.

attached to narratives of transnational adoption” that ignore the history Briggs describes (Eng 2010, pp. 101, 102) In many cases, the adopted children have birth parents whose parents were duped into giving up their children (Briggs 2012), Insofar as many of these children are girls, we must also understand transnational adoption as part of the larger “historical and economic legacy of war brides, mail-order brides, comfort women, and sex workers... emerging under the shadows of colonialism and now sustained through the practices of global capitalism.” (p. 105) Finally, transnational adoption presents the solution to child poverty as the transfer of children from the South to North, instead of “a transfer of wealth from rich countries to poor ones to enable the mothers of poor children to continue to take care of their children themselves.” (Perry 1998, p. 155).

For Briggs, this offers “a powerful counter narrative to those who would start with the assumption that adoptable children are orphans, unwanted, or being separated from abusive or neglectful parents (2012, p. 11). This rescue narrative exists popularly, but we see it in philosophy, too. For example, Daniel Friedrich (2013) begins his argument in favor of transnational adoption thusly:

All over the world millions of children are without parental care. These children often have insufficient food, clothing and shelter. They struggle in cold, uncaring and commonly abusive environments.... These children are in desperate need of loving families that could protect them, satisfy their basic needs, and help them overcome the adversity of early years. (p. 1)⁸

Friedrich builds his argument for a moral duty to adopt instead of have children on the assumption that the former is rescuing children and providing them with goods their own families and societies cannot. Similarly, while she recognizes that “the need exact number of children in need of adoption is a matter of deep controversy”, Tina Rulli (2016) nevertheless makes explicit an understanding of adoption as rescue: “This situation is structurally similar to familiar duty to rescue cases.” (p. 311) This framing ignores both the troubling history and consequences of transnational adoption, as well as extant cultural practices to care for orphaned children or children whose parents currently lack the material resources to care for them, such as reliance on extended family to serve as temporary caretakers. It also precludes other possible responses to the problems of poverty, such as increased aid to sending countries, which many women in sending countries have advocated for instead of adoption (Yngvesson 2010).

Finally, intercountry adoption rescue narratives also ignore the consequences for adoptees, many of whom report experiences of racism, ableism, and sexism with their adoptive families (Kim 2010; Yngvesson 2010). Adoptive parents bring chil-

⁸Near the end of his essay, Friedrich addresses the counter-claim that there are few adoptable children by claiming that “it is easy to see there must be a huge gap between adoptable children and children in need of adoption” (p. 11), and that this gap is accounted for by a failure of cultures and institutions. Many countries that he claims have children in need of adoption lack “a cultural environment in which adoption is seen as an option, and sufficiently resourced institutions that identify and look after children in need of adoption” (p. 10), which it is the Global North’s job to remedy “whether we should relax the consent conditions in the Hague Convention, whether we should invest more resources into the bureaucracies tasked to handle adoption cases, whether we should promote the possibility of adoption in communities that do not usually consider it an option.” (p. 15).

dren of color from the Global South to the Global North, often to live with white families ignorant of the lives of people of color in Euro-North American society. As part of the project of rescue and salvation, transnational adoption is premised on incorporating adopted children into their receiving families and nations, a kind of wish for colorblindness that is belied by white adoptive parents' and societies' own treatment of adopted children of color. Yet, "difference" in the adoptee is an effect of "early disturbances" that occurred before the child's arrival in the adopting nation, rather than an effect of postadoptive relations of an adoptee to his or her social surround, such as parents, school teachers, friends, and strangers." (Yngvesson 2010, p. 9) The assumptions about the superiority of adoptive families and countries over those sending children occludes the possibility of self-examination for these shortcomings, and the harms they inflict on adoptive children.

3 Responses to Child Poverty II: Aid to Impoverished Parents, Communities, and Nations

In 1984, Band Aid, a "supergroup" of recording artists, released "Do They Know It's Christmas?" with the goal of raising awareness and funds for famine victims in Ethiopia. The lyrics portray the continent of Africa as devoid of all the hallmarks of Western Christmas celebrations, from snow to toys and happiness. These lyrics, indeed the very title of the song, betray an ignorance of Africa's large Christian population and the varied physical terrain, including snow-topped mountains. Beyond this ignorance, "the song is patronizing in its large-scale assumptions about African deficiency", by "celebrating the goodness of European music fans while romantically depicting the whole continent of Africa in the song as dark, backwards, fearsome, and deadly. The song acknowledges the good work of those who donate while describing pathetic African victims as helpless and deprived." (Jackson 2014, p. 1072) Given the ubiquity of these stereotypes across charitable-giving campaigns like Band Aid, and elsewhere in popular media, we might wonder what—and whose—ends these portrayals serve. While the stated intention of this portrayal is to encourage donations, it also serves to uphold the Global North's sense of superiority over the backward, child-like Global South.

There are numerous material consequences of these portrayals of poverty, especially child poverty and their suffering, throughout the Global North. I want to focus here on the effect of charitable giving for aid purposes, especially in light of philosophical debates about Singer's (2009, 2015) proposal that wealthy persons should increase their charitable giving to aid organizations like Oxfam. Singer indulges in the same kind of stereotyping as the authors of "Do They Know It's Christmas?", portraying the Global South as helpless and deprived, and in need of aid to help bring them up to the standards of the Global North (2009; pp. 5–9). This benightedness understands the Global South as *not having yet developed*, and so their poverty is the result of their failure to achieve full modernness. As we shall see, this has

echoes in the way that Western culture conceives of children as “becomings” instead of “beings”, but for now I want to highlight how this story about the need for aid and development ignores the sources of poverty *in development* and global capitalism. “Singer’s charitable giving based approach to extreme poverty has been criticized for failing to understand poverty as a form of injustice and for not acknowledging that it requires institutional change.” (Kahn 2016, p. 210) Specifically, he ignores the ways that poor countries are “locked into a complex global economic and political order dominated by strongly neoliberal presumptions.” (Kuper 2002, p. 111) The demands of development for participation in global capitalism have led to the impoverishment of entire societies, through the disruption of traditional means of production and property regimes, as well as through the enforcement of fiscal austerity programs that have, in many countries, greatly reduced state-provided aid programs and social services, including healthcare and education (Escobar 2012). Singer’s focus on charitable giving, instead of challenging imposed austerity programs or seeking to preserve non-capitalist political-economic arrangements, risks not just ignoring these problems but more deeply entrenching them.

This entrenchment occurs in part because of the requirements for charitable aid programs to succeed, in two ways. First, charitable programs that rely on advertising to acquire donations must create narratives that are recognizable to would-be donors and that are able to best motivate them to give. Because emotional appeals are effective means of motivating donations, such charitable appeals are likely to rely on stereotypical portrayals of poverty, especially those that focus on children: “Poor innocents with frail limbs and big, brown eyes and flies crawling up their nostrils. They stared at us out of smudgy newsprint or pixelated images from satellite news feeds, but always with a resolution hard enough to make my heart leap into my mouth. Who wouldn’t want to help them, these blameless victims—as soon as possible, no questions asked?” (Wark 1995, p. 36) Indeed, while Singer characterizes his system of “effective altruism” as rational instead of emotional (2009, pp. 15–16; 2015, p. 5–7), the feelings, such as a “*sense of fairness*” and the satisfaction of giving are some of the major reasons he provides to justify charitable giving. Indeed, we can see in his repeated invocations of children, including repeated comparisons between poor children and his readers’ own children (see, 2009, p. 16 and ch. 8), that the argument rests on neontocratic sentimentality as much as on logic.

But we need to be wary of relying on the work of such sentimentality: “emotional appeals increasing a sense of urgency regarding dire issues like child poverty should not necessarily be prioritized... in the face of competing possibilities.... Emotions can be difficult to directly develop, regulate, and sustain.” (Jackson 2014, p. 1070) In the context of child poverty, for example, the urgency of emotional appeals can lead oversimplified solutions (like Singer’s) to complex situations (Wark 1995). The assumed innocence of poor children on which these appeals lean easily turns into suspicion, even resentment, of adults who make claims for aid and a search for “good” and “bad” poor people who are more or less deserving of our compassion and assistance (Hancock 2004; Harkins and Lugo-Ocando 2018).

Second, charitable giving programs also often rely on donations or grants from wealthy donors and the foundations they create to organize that giving. Indeed, Singer's system demands that people become as wealthy as possible in order to be able to give more (2015, ch. 4). Given the resources these donors and the organizations they founded command, this places a large amount of power to dictate certain development goals over others. As with charitable giving, this is going to favor certain development goals that may or may not lead to poverty alleviation. For example, the efforts to bring down child mortality rates, which are the focus of Singer's argument and a seemingly incontrovertible good of poverty alleviation, are more popular than reproductive rights and access to birth control and safe abortion. And yet, these need to come together: "The agencies that intervened to reduce infant mortality were not as ready with contraception and family-planning interventions, and the rest has been masses of humanity living on the ragged edge of poverty." (Lancy 2015, p. 15) This absence of family-planning resources has not been solely due to short-sightedness, however. It was not until 1994 that reproductive rights supplanted "population control" as United Nations goal, when it was "declared that were no longer to be treated as a convenient means toward the 'end' of population control." (Eager 2004, p. 1) At the same time as the UN's codification of reproductive rights as a goal, both the Catholic Church and the US government had become more forcefully opposed to birth control and abortion, instead focusing on maternal health and child poverty (Eager 2004, pp. 88–91).

This donor-led development is premised on the exclusion of the voices and knowledge of the poor recipients of aid: "development aid often fails in treating its target population as equivalent partners and valid agents of knowledge production" (Dübgen 2012, p. 74) This exclusion of poor voices extends beyond the problems that will aid will address, and includes how those problems are defined, measured, and attempted solutions assessed. For example, as part of his charity-based approach, Singer (2009, 2015) advocates for "effective altruism", "a philosophy and social movement which applies evidence and reason to working out the most effective ways to improve the world." (2015, p. 4) The evidence he applies to define effectiveness of charitable giving provides a cost-benefit analysis—which lives are saved for the least amount of money—using metrics developed by former finance executives and North American academics (2009, ch. 6; 2015, ch. 2). This process of measurement once again reproduces extant hierarchies between North and South: "Since those who choose the template and the modes of data collection are typically powerful individuals with experience and connections to statistically advanced countries, this means that powerful and wealthy countries are likely to set the models for less powerful ones and that weaker states and nonstate actors will have difficulty influencing the shape of the indicators." (Merry 2016, p. 7) The result is that, while this "information appears to be objective, scientific, and transparent", it is actually "decontextualized, homogenized, and remote from local systems of meaning." (Merry 2016, p. 3) This hierarchy of knowledge will be exacerbated when it intersects with the neontocratic hierarchy between children and adults that assume the former to be innocent and incompetent to understand their own needs, desires, and to evaluate programs directed toward their benefit.

4 What Is the Harm of Child Poverty? Visions of Good Childhood Under Global Capitalism

In the previous two sections, we saw how efforts to address child poverty can license harmful and even cultural-genocidal practices, especially in combination with structural inequalities like race, colonization, and class. These inequalities and conceptions co-constitute neotocratic conceptions and standards of “good childhoods”. As we shall see in this section, this problem of cultural and historical specificity of the prevailing understandings of good childhoods are also evident in less controversial topics on which there is seeming consensus both philosophically and politically, such as child labor and education. The belief in the wrongness of child labor and the universal good of education, both for children and as solutions to child poverty, are themselves premised on certain understandings of how childhood should look normatively and the functions that children should have within their families and societies. Children’s labor and education rates are common as signs of poverty as well as measures of societal or national levels of development, especially when there is a large gender gap in education levels. For example, in Pogge’s listing of statistics on global poverty, in addition to such figures as the 830 million people who are chronically undernourished, he includes “218 million child laborers” (2008, p. 2). Within poverty literatures, children’s work is seen as harmful when it deprives children of access to Western, Global North-style education, which is both an intrinsic good and an instrument to opening up better opportunities later in the child’s life.

Philosophers, too, tend to treat child labor as a harmful evil in need of eradication: “The widespread existence of child labor has provoked both popular outrage and legislative initiatives aimed at banning the sale of all products made by children” (Satz 2010, p. 155).⁹ What debate remains, and that which Satz focuses on, is primarily directed at whether banning all children’s labor, rather than just the most egregious kinds, is likely to be effective, rather than interrogating more seriously the assumed harms of children’s labor. Debra Satz, for example, finds child labor “morally problematic”, but argues “the worst forms of child labor, including child prostitution and the use of children as bonded labourers, should be unconditionally prohibited”; we can mitigate the harms of other forms of child labor by “ensuring that all working children are educated.” Her ultimate goal, however, remains abolition: “Other types of child labor may need to be tolerated under certain circumstance, at least in the near future, even as efforts are made to eradicate them.” (156).

Satz (2010) articulates a neotocratic view of labor in her argument: “Child labor rates moral concerns because of the weak agency of children (and sometimes their parents), its connections to underlying vulnerabilities, and especially its potential for extremely harmful outcomes for children themselves, and for society.” (p. 157)

⁹Among the most notable and consistent dissenters from this consensus is Michael Bourdillon. See Bourdillon et al. 2010; Bourdillon 2014. For a free-market defense of children’s labor, see Powell 2014, especially ch. 6.

She recognizes that “child labor cannot be addressed without considering our moral and political values” (p. 156), and that these values, as reflected in the very definition of who is a child and who is not, vary across cultures. But Satz nevertheless universalizes the “modern society’s view of childhood”, in which “a child is a person who is some fundamental way not developed, but rather developing” (pp. 156–7). As anthropological research like Lancy’s (2015, 2018) has shown, all societies we know of treat children, at least the very young, as in need of active care and training from adults. Satz’s model, however, is premised on children becoming certain kinds of adults, who resemble Western ideals of liberal individuality: “children have not yet developed the cognitive, moral, and affective capacities to deliberate and act competently in their own interests.” (Satz 2010, p. 157) Childhood, in Satz’s theory, is the process of acquiring these capacities, and working during that stage threatens that outcome.

This approach to child labor and education in the context of child poverty, however, is the product of an understanding of good childhoods that are based on the standard of living and lifecourse of middle-class children in the Global North. Interrogating these bases will ultimately lead us to more seriously question in what ways poverty is harmful, as well as the contexts in which some features of poverty apply and in which contexts they do not. For example, child labor might be deleterious in Global North societies in which formal education is strongly correlated with income, lifelong welfare, and other life chances. But in other contexts, children’s performing paid work is both a necessary component of a child’s place in the family and in society, as well as being good preparation for the child’s adult life (White 1999; Lancy 2015, 2018).

A neontocratic understanding of good childhood comes to define the very category of “labor” itself. Paid and other forms of labor performed predominately by poor children are non-normative and harmful. But because they are seen as preparatory for adulthood, and so beneficial, the unpaid labor of wealthier children in the forms of chores, formal education, and extracurricular activities are normative. Furthermore, the assumption that formal education is a universal and value-neutral good ignores the many ways in which wealthy societies use this unpaid labor to prepare Global North children to be certain *kinds* of adults: good and obedient citizens who respect authority and value productivity as workers (Foucault 1977; Qvortup 1994; Alderson 2008; Levey 2009). Children’s paid labor and their unpaid schooling are both “activities that produce transferable use value and/or produce human capital” (Levey 2009, p. 197). In light of this, we can characterize the Global North’s interest in limiting child labor and encouraging certain kinds of formal, Western education differently: “There have been longstanding colonial interests in the regulation of children and mothers for the production of new, able labour forces and market outlets, and the current debates...to prohibit child labour can be seen to reiterate familiar themes about monopoly capitalism and control of markets in the not-so-New World Order. (Burman 1996, p. 47).

This becomes clearer when we consider the changing distribution of the costs of childrearing: “the costs of schooling are not an investment primarily to the advantage of children and their parents”, but instead “must be understood as a general

expense in line with traffic, research, defence, public administration and the like, to be regarded as beneficial for the common good and therefore shared by all taxpayers.” (Qvortrup 2001, p. 91) Instead of the neontocratic sacralization of children, in which they are valued purely emotionally instead of economically, Qvortrup reminds us that there remains “a positive net wealth flow of resources from children to adults” (p. 92). In the Global North the state expropriates these resources through compulsory, unpaid education that prevents children from working to produce immediate value. The move toward free—but compulsory—state-provided education in the Global South could, absent other changes, prove disastrous for families and communities that depend more directly on children’s labor for survival.¹⁰

Absent this compulsion into schoolwork, “in the village, as soon as children can ‘help out’ and make a contribution, they will do so—eagerly, without coercion, and with minimal guidance.” (Lancy 2015, p. 254) This is because “work is central both to the nature of childhood... and to the child’s progress toward adult standing.” (p. 20) Beginning as young as 4 years old, researchers observe that “most children are quite eager for these opportunities to assume more adult responsibilities” in their working duties (Lancy 2015, pp. 20–1). While there is variety across cultures in terms of the kinds of work and the degree of compulsiveness for children’s labor, in many cultures there remains “respect for the individual and his right to make work choices” (p. 271), even when that individual is a young child. In contrast, “in societies where traditional subsistence practices are very labor-intensive, where there are many mouths to feed, where taxes are levied, and where globalization reduces the value of adult labor, children’s choices (and playtime) will be constrained.” (p. 271) We can highlight two conclusions from this research: the first is that, rather than treating formal education and labor dichotomously, we can see children’s labor itself as educational and preparatory for their future roles in their societies. Second, when child labor has deleterious effects for children, it is important to think as expansively as possible about the sources of those effects; child labor that once was benign or even beneficial may become pernicious when exogenous macroeconomic and social changes occur.

4.1 Child Poverty Between Social Construction and Social Hierarchies

Much of the focus of this chapter has been on the problems of universalizing visions of “good childhood” that undergird our treatment of child poverty. But the issues of child labor and education bring into relief the tension that exists when we theorize

¹⁰Satz points out that removing children from the labor market could also drive up adults’ wages by shrinking the labor pool overall. This, however, is primarily applicable to societies in which wages, rather than say family farming, is the predominant source of income for families; moreover, there is no guarantee that such an increase would be enough to offset either the lost unpaid labor that children, often girls, provide through domestic work.

and seek to address child poverty. Relying on Western neotocracy, “there is always a risk of falsely claiming that circumstances in other communities that might seem harmful to children and to well-being from the Euro-American cultural perspective are in fact deleterious” (Weisner 2014, p. 98) But while this ethnocentrism is one problem, social construction and the focus on children’s agency likewise have their pitfalls, both analytical and normative. Analytically, there is the possibility of a naive assumption of agency that “may lead to the risk of no longer seeing either the social conditions underlying children’s actual abilities to act, decide, and shape their lives or the specific bodily vulnerability of the child.” (Fegter and Richter 2014, p. 741) If we assume that children are always already agents, or that all childhoods are adaptations to their cultures, we will fail to understand how poverty constrains that agency and may even be harmful. Secondly, a strong social construction risks inadequate normative analysis by lapsing into a kind of cultural relativism, failing to adequately address the problems of children’s oppression, marginalization, and exploitation *within* cultures as well as globally.

These worries about social constructivism in addressing poverty are especially acute in addressing child poverty, because childhood is an key stage of life at which individuals’ understandings of themselves and their worlds form. Assessing the conditions of childhood from within a social-constructivist framework must also attend to oppression and marginalization because “the fundamental abilities of human beings are not innate but first have to unfold through being reared and cared for in a nurturing environment.” (p. 744) Childhood, perhaps more than other stages of life, provides the groundwork for individuals to both formulate and address their life projects, including challenging social hierarchies associated with poverty (Weinstock 2018). There also remains the possibility that children in poverty will accommodate themselves to their situations instead of endeavoring to change their situations, whether through individual actions like education or collective actions like political organization. We see this, for example in the phenomenon of adaptive preferences, “the term used to describe how people adapt to situations and, to some extent, can still be ‘happy’ despite exposure to ‘objective’ maltreatment (such as slavery or violence and abuse.” (Fegter and Richter 2014, p. 745). As the literatures on socialization and adaptive preferences show, people are adept at interpreting their own oppression, exploitation, and marginalization as satisfying. Moreover, as Satz (2010) argues, parents’ ignorance about the values of education and the harms of work can exacerbate the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

More fully understanding the consequences of these problems requires attention to the Western conception of adulthood, especially in the liberal tradition, because it exists in a constitutive relationship with neontocratic childhood in its liberal form. It is the liberal ideal of the adult, namely that of the rationally autonomous person, that is presumed only potentially in children. Childhood has posed a problem for liberal theories of citizenship and adulthood since their origins; as Locke realized, children are not rational and thus cannot be autonomous, but unlike animals, the mentally disabled, or (not just for Locke) women, non-rationality coexists with the potential for the development of rationality. As Barbara Arneil notes: “If there is one word that might summarize the role of children in early liberal theory, it is that of

'becomings' rather than 'beings'. Conceiving of children as 'becomings' with the potential rights of citizenship has enormous implications for the ways in which liberal theory has developed in relation to children, up to and including the introduction of children's rights theories." (2002 pp. 70–1).

That childhood is a necessary stage of life poses a problem for modern liberalism's aspiration toward universality; given the fact of diverse childhoods, which are differentially conducive to the achievement of autonomy, how can such a claim for universality of autonomous citizenship be justified? The answer, as many of liberalism's feminist, Marxist, and anti-racist critics have noted, is that such autonomy is not accorded to all persons equally: women, the working class, and people of color have historically been denied rationality and, consequently, full citizenship. Much of this difference is essentialized to the natures of these groups; but it is also the case that, as Hirschmann (2003) argues, liberal writers on rationality and citizenship, including Locke, Rousseau, and Mill, present an account of the social construction of individuals through education. The unequal educations of men and women, of the wealthy and the working class, and of white and racialized people are at least partially responsible for the differences those who are fit for citizenship and those who are not. But, as many liberal philosophers of education (e.g. Callan 1997) argue, if the unequal distribution of such an upbringing is a problem for producing adults that possess these traits, then the solution would seem to be to change how children are raised to guarantee that they all develop the necessary rationality. The solution to the problem of non-autonomous adults is the creation of an ideal childhood that will produce such adults. This is exactly the goal of global liberal regimes like the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which seek to universalize neotocracy, such as education in children's development: children must be "fully prepared to live an individual life in society", and their education oriented toward "preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society" (UNOHCHR 2018, Art. 28) It remains unclear, however, that such aspirations to universality are even practicable. While "claims 'on behalf of' or 'in the name of' children tend to be formulated in global terms, that is, as universally applicable," it is also the case that because of the nature of such treaties, which seek to address individual children and adults in particular situations, we should "see the concept of rights and childhood as necessarily local." (Burman 1996, p. 47).

Even recognizing these issue with social construction, however, does not undermine the larger problems with neontocratic responses to child poverty, including a focus on education. One problem with neotocracy is its universality, including its failure to interrogate its shortcomings *even for the children within its own societies*. We need instead to question both the "badness" of features of childhood that we think of as impoverished, such as work, and we need to question those features of childhood in our own cultures that we would replace them with. These good features include not just schooling, but many of the perceived luxuries of modern neontocratic childhood. The idea that adults in the North are providing children with what they want and what they need is often contradicted by children's own, often unheeded desires. Alderson (2000) argues that many children are "virtually imprisoned in their own homes in Britain... because of dangerous traffic and undue fear of

strangers exacerbated by media panics, because crowded built-up areas have no safe, clean outdoor spaces to play, and so much of the countryside is fenced-off as private property.” (p. 13) Instead, she says, childhood has become oriented toward consumption of goods and activities, even though this is not necessarily what children themselves desire: “when asked what they most enjoy, children tend to say ‘time with my friends’, ‘playing games in the park’, ‘messing about on the beach or by the river’, ‘taking my dog for a walk’. These answers are closer to basic human rights: freedom to enjoy and move around the area where they live, to meet their friends and be members of their local community, to enjoy nature, to play actively and creatively rather than be passive consumers.” (p. 13) These are opportunities often denied rich and poor children alike.

5 Who Should Do What About Child Poverty? Good Parenting, Politics, and Responsibility

How we characterize the nature of child poverty, and the solutions we come up with in order to address it, are going to in part depend upon the accordance of responsibility for meeting children’s needs, however defined. Here we again confront a dilemma: denying the possibility that parents or societies can be responsible for their children risks infantilizing them, and reproducing historical hierarchies between white people and people of color, and between the Western Global North and their former colonies in the Global South. But accord them too much responsibility, and we blame them for problems that they have little control over.¹¹ While this conceptually paradoxical, on the ground we often see their coexistence and mutual reinforcement.

Despite the problems facing wealthy children, and the context-specific notions of “good” that underly assessments of their upbringing, children in poverty are often seen as in especial danger. The result is that, as we have seen in this chapter’s examples, the quality of children’s lives measured against the wrongly universalized neontocratic standard. This, in turn, becomes a way of assessing the overall quality of a country or ethnic group. Addressing the perception of children in the context of international-aid appeals, Erica Burman observes that the North’s perception of children’s suffering in the South, while oriented toward providing help in the form of charitable aid, also serves to justify the sense of colonial paternalism that contin-

¹¹One related problem is evident in Satz’s distinction between children and adults, in which she attributes too much agency to to the latter. The result is a confusing conclusion, such as morally condemning certain forms of labor when children perform them, but not when adults do. Satz argues that particularly harmful and exploitative work, such as sex work, dangerous industrial work, compulsory military service, or bonded labor, are unacceptable for children to engage in. But it remains unclear why, especially among the most dangerous and coercive jobs, it is morally acceptable to participate in systems in which *adults* perform this labor, either. Especially, as Satz also recognizes, those children who do perform such labor often fail to develop the very capacities for agency that she nevertheless attributes to adulthood (2010, pp. 158–9).

ues to characterize North–South relations “The convention of portraying needy children abstracted from context, as the indicator of a more generalized deprivation, has consequences for the maturity, responsibility and autonomy associated with the class, families, countries, and even regions those children are association with” (2008, p. 11–2), so that “the innocence connoted by the imagery of children also confirms the culpability of the rest of their peoples, who are seen as having failed them.” (1994, p. 29) Societies unable to properly care for their own children are deficient, backwards, and possibly even pathological, according to Burman, and so in need of correction.

According to this logic, one reason for children’s suffering in the South is the inability for parents and other adults to properly provide for them, or even to know what they need, because these adults are themselves victims of failed childhoods. When we in the North address face poverty, in contrast, we experience “a sense of our potency, a reassurance of adult capacities,” over and above those of the South, child and adult alike. (Burman 1994, p. 35) Such a view of poor adults undermines the very ideal of *childhood* innocence upon which it is predicated: if non-autonomous, suffering children grow up to be non-autonomous, suffering adults, then these adults are also like children in their innocence and lack of choice for their situation and can be treated as such. What results is a pattern of infantilization and “humiliating paternalism” (Dübgén 2012, p. 72; Deveaux 2016) of the Global South, even as the stated goal is to mitigate the problems of maldistribution through aid to the children. This infantilizing of poor adults through neontocracy retains institutional and epistemic power in the hands of the “true adults” in the Global North, while ignoring the larger problems of capitalist development and exploitation that those same people perpetrate.

Singer (2009) provides an example of this idea of understanding of child poverty, when he describes modern attempts at poverty-alleviation as “an attempt to reach the summit of an immense mountain. *For all the eons of human existence*, we have been climbing up through dense cloud... Now at last we have emerged from the mist and can see a route up the remaining steep slopes and onto the summit ridge.” (p. xiii, italics added) In Singer’s historiography, all human history has been oriented toward the reduction of child poverty, especially early child mortality, and aid through “effective altruism” represents the near-pinnacle of those efforts. In this account, those countries that still experience high levels of child poverty remain in the clouds and are in need of aid to catch-up. This idea of development is also at the heart of Singer’s practical suggestions, such as his endorsement of microcredit programs, industrialization, and his unquestioning support for enrichment in order to give.

Contrasting “modern societies” and other, non- or pre-modern ones that also exist today is a conceptual framework even those more dedicated to valorizing more plural approaches to children’s work are guilty of. For example, Lancy (2018), contrasts “contemporary society” (i.e., Western, Global North societies) with “traditional or indigenous, small-scale societies” (p. 6), despite the coexistence of both kinds of societies in the contemporary moment in time. It is a problem that postcolonial scholars have long decried as ethnocentric for its failure to account for both the simultaneous existence of the modern and the so-called premodern, as well as

the narrowness of how it defines modernity itself (Appadurai 1996; Chakrabarty 2000; Eisenstadt 2000; Gaonkar 2001). As Erica Burman (2008) notes, parallels exist between the Western developmental model of childhood and Western theorization of countries' economic development, including its codification and enforcement through international financial systems and organizations. In the context of child poverty, we can see how this conceptual shorthand functions to underscore the backwardness of poor children's families and cultures, as well as the need for aid from the Global North to help them on their path toward modernity, often coercively through international institutions (Burman 2008, ch. 9; Eager 2004).

There is a parallel structure at work domestically, for example, in the treatments of Black Americans and Canadian First Nations. Historically, Aboriginal-child removal was partly motivated by an explicit belief that good childhoods had to involve conversion to Christianity and the purging of Aboriginal beliefs or behaviours to best facilitate children's assimilation into white settler-colonial society. Tom Flanagan (2008), which claims that "European civilization was several thousand years more advanced than the aboriginal cultures of North America" (6), and that First Nations people in Canada would need to assimilate or else "individuals and bands will remain mired in poverty and social pathology." (p. 233) While this belief is no longer as common as it once was, it persists—sometimes explicitly—in both discourse and government policy.¹²

In the US, sociologists continue to debate the concept of a "culture of poverty" among Black Americans. Even those identifying as liberals have commented that "welfare recipients 'were essentially failed persons.'" (Hancock, 2004, p. 59, quoting Moynihan) Hancock observes the ways in which scholars, journalists, and politicians, liberal and conservative alike, have simultaneously identified Black poverty in the US as a problem with an African-American "culture of poverty", of which the aforementioned welfare queen is the central figure, and "produced policy proposals that encourage behaviour modifications of individual mothers rather than systemic change." (2004, p. 62) These individual-level solutions include drug-testing and job-search for welfare-recipients, encouragements for single Black mothers to marry, and the shift of resources from welfare provision to support childcare to the out-of-home care and child-protection services described in sect. 1. There are several problems with this approach. First, "an exclusive focus on individual transformation didn't lift welfare recipients, particularly the percentage who were Black, out of poverty." (Hancock 2004, p. 62) Second, the persistent failure of these policies has both relied on and reinforced the characterizations of Black families, Black culture, and Black mothers in particular to create a public identity that justifies their perceptions as second-class citizens and unfit parents whose roles are better served by white families and the white-dominated state. The removal of Black children from their families and

¹²While it is tempting to see Flanagan's views as outside the mainstream, the first edition of his book received the Canadian Political Science Association's prize for the best book on Canadian government and politics. Flanagan, a political-science professor at the University of Calgary and advisor to former Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper, was made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada in 1996.

communities has wrought the destruction of normatively and psychologically valuable connections that are wrongly characterized as pathological and immoral. Second, as with child poverty in an international context, there is a tension at the domestic level between the “culture of poverty” arguments that lead from failed childhoods to failed adults, and thus justify cultural destruction through state intervention.

6 Where Do We Go from Here?

Given my criticisms of prevailing neotocratic approaches to child poverty, two questions naturally follow: (1) Are there any universal harms of poverty? (2) Is there a risk of falling into a kind of relativism when arguing for the problems of committing violence against cultures in the name of poverty alleviation? I am not going to answer these questions fully; though I will note that nothing I have argued for here denies that inadequate food, clean water, shelter, or healthcare are serious problems in need of redress. But we do need to be critical of what we think of as adequate provision of these needs, and we need to be aware of the context-dependent nature of needs definition. We also, following Pogge (2008), need to think more strongly about our own active and complicit involvement in perpetuating the harms of poverty and harmful solutions to it. This is true in a proximal sense, in that many shortages of food and shelter occur through our actions, including our economic choices, and the actions of our democratically elected leaders. Domestically, these shortages occur because of, for example, the decline of the welfare state; transnationally, they are often due to interventions by Global North countries and international organizations into Global South societies. It is also true at a larger, structural level, as these organizations have disrupted previous ways of life in the Global South in the name of development for capitalist purposes. In sum, material need often occurs not because those are scarce in absolute sense, but because of institutions, social structures, and material maldistribution.

Even if we could agree on what poverty is and how it harms children in particular; and even if we could agree on remedies to them, this is but part of the theoretical work needed to respond to child poverty. As Nancy Fraser (2013) argues, thin accounts of need are uncontroversial but also insufficient and question-begging: “A needs X in order to Y’... poses no special problems when we consider very thin, general needs, such as food or shelter *simpliciter*.” (p. 55) The problem, however, is that “such theories assume that the politics of needs concerns only whether various predefined needs will or will not be provided for. As a result, they deflect attention from a number of important political questions.” (p. 56) These “thicker” questions include who gets to establish a need as properly political, define that need and its satisfaction; as well as more practical questions about what kinds of solutions are considered, how to evaluate different proposed solutions, which institutions are responsible for meeting those needs, and how deeply to consider the roots of the needs problem.

These questions are ultimately political in nature, and answering them requires that we treat child poverty politically, including as questions of resource allocation,

prioritization, and trade-offs, as well as questions of power. Child poverty alleviation “is a moral-political project and if it displaces, competes with, refuses, or rejects other political projects, including those also aimed at producing justice, then it is not merely a tactic but a particular form of political power carrying a particular image of justice, and it will behoove us to inspect, evaluate, and judge it as such.” (Brown 2004, p. 453) But addressing child poverty often denies this political aspect, and instead “generally presents itself as something of an antipolitics—a pure defense of the innocent and the powerless against power.” (p. 453) In the context of neontocracy, especially the sacralization of the child and its attendant sentimentality and urgency, treating child poverty as a political problem seems unacceptable, if not inconceivable.

Singer, for example, responds to those who criticized him for presenting a charity-based solution instead of a political one by claiming to shield poverty-elimination efforts from politics. Government “aid is still not given solely—or in some cases, even primarily—to relieve global poverty,” but “to serve political ends” (2009, pp. 106–7). We must, then, turn to private charities: “The political and bureaucratic constraints that encumber official aid only make private donations to effective nongovernment agencies all the more important.” (p. 110) Singer thus not only fails to treat poverty as a political problem, he also fails to understand NGOs as political actors—and so fails to see his own project as a political one.

Singer’s reliance on charities is political partly in the way Brown describes above, as a “moral-political project”. Addressing child poverty is also political in that “it is in the nature of every significant political project to ripple beyond the project’s avowed target and action, for the simple reason that all such projects are situated in political, historical, social, and economic contexts with which they dynamically emerge.” (Brown 2004, p. 459) In particular, by trying to exempt child poverty from politics, Singer is also effectively shielding charities from scrutiny about the power imbalance between themselves, as well as their donors, and the receiving countries and communities.

Development aid’s hegemonic image represents itself as a gesture of generosity while at the same time it serves to sustain the status quo, effectively affirming existing power hierarchies. This dominant narrative of ‘aid’ neglect the fact that the present imbalances are often grounded in previous and more fundamental injustices, inherited from the period of colonialism and slavery. (Dübgen 2012, p. 73)

That is, while Singer encourages us to think about what we *could be* doing differently, what we could and should give up to help alleviate poverty, he does not require that we look to what we *are already doing*, that is, that we interrogate our own roles in creating and perpetuating poverty. There is no demand that we look to ourselves and our institutions, and the benefits we continue to derive from the history of those institutions, for complicity in child poverty.¹³

¹³ Singer, in his more recent work (2015), is more open to political advocacy, though he remains skeptical that “whether policy advocacy offers better or worse value for money than direct aid programs.” (p. 164) He also does not include any discussion of our or major donors’ direct responsibility for or complicity in poverty.

I have returned to charitable giving in this section as a way to begin to think differently about child poverty—namely, as a political project that involves struggles over definitions, agendas, and actions, and that requires us to confront structures of power relations and our own places within them. Highlighting politics thusly will enable us to think in new and different ways about questions not only of needs, but also of responsibility. Brown (2004) highlights that moral-political projects like child-poverty alleviation are also political in that they produce political subjects: “there is no such thing as *mere* reduction of suffering or protection from abuse—the nature of the reduction or protection is itself productive of political subjects and political possibilities.” (p. 460; italics in original) I discussed above the ways in which, for example, education seeks to produce children as citizens, workers, and consumers. But the subjects being produced also include their families, communities, and societies that we are trying to help—as well as we, the prospective helpers.

This returns us to a recurring theme of this chapter: the questions of our own responsibility and complicity in the systems that create and perpetuate child poverty. Often, as has been noted, we participate in systems with effects that, at the same time, we are trying to mitigate—indeed, this contradiction lies at the heart of criticisms of Singer’s effective altruism, including its neocratic approach to childhood as an urgent and pre-political need. But we can rethink the kinds of political subjects we want to be, including in relation to those whose poverty we would see ended. Iris Marion Young’s (2004, 2006) work on responsibility for global injustice demands that we account for and see ourselves as connected to those who suffer injustice: “the ‘social connection model’ of responsibility says that all agents who contribute by their actions to the structural processes that produce injustice have responsibilities to work to remedy these injustices.” (Young 2006, p. 102) This is oriented not toward blame, because “we cannot trace the outcome we may regret to our own particular actions in a direct causal chain, we bear responsibility because we are part of the process.” (p. 119) This is less about individuating blame in order to recriminate, but rather to understand ourselves as “belonging together with others in a system of interdependent processes of cooperation and competition through which we seek benefits and aim to realize projects.” (p. 119) Our responsibility is then future-oriented, to make these structures more just and to enable all to participate in them more fully.

Carol C. Gould (2009) expands on Young’s project to show the value of solidarity with the impoverished, treating them as co-agents in a shared political project. This repositions us as actors with solutions, and instead requires “action in support of these others *that they judge helpful*.” (p. 201; emphasis added) This, in turn, “requires receptivity as well as *deference* to these others.” (p. 210; emphasis in original) Rather than being a kind of simple moral relativism, I read Gould as encouraging us to understand more deeply the needs and desires of the poor whom we wish to help, including their own desires and life projects—and to also enable that understanding to provide a critical window in our own desires and projects, and the institutions within which we realize them.

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Children in Measurements of Poverty Within Populations: Two Problems with Current Indexes



Katarina Pitasse Fragoso

Abstract Measurements of poverty generally rely upon assessments made of the situation of the household. Children are currently omitted from direct measurements of poverty: their situation is assessed indirectly by taking the household as the unit of analysis (by income and/or surveys). According to these assessments, when family income or levels of deprivation are below a given poverty line, every member is considered poor. In this chapter, I argue that poverty should not only be measured using such a general assessment. A measurement of poverty should consider children as being part of the population and take into account individual differences in levels of deprivation, varying needs and interests. I will argue, first, that measurements of poverty should take universal and individual approach in order to include representative groups and to reflect intra-household distributions of deprivation that especially affect children. Second, not only should children's individual conditions be measured, but their voices should be included in the assessment as well. Based on this idea, my ambition is to provide two philosophical arguments to justify why we should consider the situation of children in measurements of poverty (understood as epistemic and moral reasons). I suggest, finally, some recommendations for and directions towards a participative child-based measurement with storytelling.

Keywords Measurements of poverty · Individual unit · children's participation · Storytelling

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1 Introduction

Measurements of poverty within populations¹ aggregate information to provide a proxy of who is living in extreme deprivation. The definition of extreme deprivation is commonly associated with a lack of income to satisfy basic needs. Most measurements within populations calculate poverty in terms of absolute or relative deprivation. This is currently done using either adult income or household surveys for they provide a picture of the intensity of poverty (how deprived poor people are) and/or the extent of poverty (percentage of people who are considered poor) in order to analyse, design, implement and evaluate a public policy (Wisor 2012; Pogge and Wisor 2016).

These measurements and their data are aggregated into indexes in order to reflect poverty in a given area, region or country. For instance, information is selected according to one or more dimensions and indicators (based on access to income, clothing, food, shelter, education and health), collected by objective or subjective datasets (with closed-ended or open-ended questionnaires), and focused on the household (that is, the head of the family is the only one measured directly and his/her replies will determine the situation of the other members). Depending on the selection of this information and its scope, some types of deprivation and individual conditions will be highlighted whilst others will remain overlooked.

Measurements of poverty within populations are generally biased towards adults, that is to say, they are made by collecting data on income or asking adults about household living standards, and they measure the situation of children by extrapolating from the condition of their parents.² Children sometimes count as just an addition to adult or family data. For instance, measurements of poverty normally exclude respondents below the age of 16 (Bradshaw and Main 2012: 503; Ridge 2002: 3). This can be justified by reasons of practicality and feasibility, as well as by the idea that adults tend to provide more reliable information, which allows governments to classify families' positions along the poverty line. I contend that this gives us merely a partial picture of who counts as poor, because these measurements assume that if a child lives in a poor family, she will also be poor. Although there is a strong correlation between a child's condition and that of their family, indirect measurements of poverty are unable to portray significant variations in deprivation and inequalities within the family and children specific needs (Roelen 2017).

¹ Here I am interested in the measurement of poverty within populations (macro data at regional or country level) meaning aggregated information about who counts as poor in a given society and what scope these measures have. I focus on three of the most common measurements of poverty, rather than on child-specific measurements.

² I understand children as a group of individuals that is restricted by age, as defined by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, meaning any person aged 0–16, or according to state legal definitions of childhood. It is important to bear in mind that children are in various phases of development and may lack the ability to escape from vulnerability and to act independently (Kallio 2009: 5). It is also important to acknowledge that this is a rather heterogeneous group that involves a variety of particulate development stage and physical, cognitive and emotional capacities.

My task in this chapter is to elucidate the following philosophical claim that measurements of poverty within populations should move from household-centric sources that take only general family deprivation³ into account, towards particular measures that are universal and individual in scope. For a measure of poverty within a population to be more accurate and inclusive, it must first be representative of every group in society (including women, children and the elderly); second, the individual scope should serve as its unit of analysis. I will focus on children in order to illustrate how important it is to capture their condition directly when analysing their deprivation for designing public policy.⁴

An understanding of three of the most widely-used poverty measurements (i.e. income, subjective, and multidimensional measurements) is needed in order to identify what is being measured, with a special focus on the way they obtain access to data on children. I believe that the normative analysis of these measurements of poverty could help us provide a diagnosis regarding what is missing in current measurements. I shall then show that these indexes fail to take into account an inclusive format and the individual level. After providing this diagnosis, I clarify why we should involve children directly in poverty measurements, drawing upon epistemic and moral reasons. I appeal to the former by developing the idea that children suffering from poverty have a particular situated knowledge of their condition, which theorists and policy experts should take into consideration, and I support the latter by claiming that it is arbitrary not to take into account the position of children directly, because this entails denying their moral status as beings individuals and capable of speaking, having needs and interests by themselves. This violates a fundamental condition of an inclusive concept of justice. Finally, I close the chapter with some recommendations for a participative child-based measurement with storytelling.

2 Excluding Children from the Unit of Analysis in Measurements of Poverty

Generally speaking, measurements of poverty draw upon data aggregated at the household level. The definition of household or family is broad, but for pragmatic reasons, most measurements are based on the United Nations' idea that a household is "the arrangement made by persons, individually or in groups, for providing themselves with food or other essentials for living" (UN 1997:50). Additionally, the

³By this I mean the situation of household acts as a proxy for assessing children, but it provides only a bare minimal picture of their deprivation and needs.

⁴I am only focused here on what unit of analysis and what kind of representation a measurement of poverty should have. I argue that children should be both identifiable as a distinct group in data sets, and also be included in measurements within the population. But I will not address the question of how the individual dataset collected should be aggregated and be balanced when trade-offs are to be made.

representation of the household is quite often “headed by ‘economic man’” (Okin 2003:286) and this person is also the source of information in income-based and survey-based measurements. The problem with the household definition and its application is that it leads us to a belief that individuals within the same household experience similar levels of deprivation, excluding the needs and perceptions of non-active or non-respondent members. However, in reality, we know that there are wide discrepancies within families (based on gender, age, etc.) in terms of access to resources and wealth, and in terms of well-being, standards of living, and so on.

I proceed now to explore three of the most common methods for measuring poverty: income-based, subjective and multidimensional measurements. I selected these three measurements because they comply with our general understanding of poverty by monetary and nonmonetary spaces of evaluation. Second, they have been used by the majority of national governments around the world to identify who is poor and to guide the allocation of resources to alleviate poverty in a context of limited resources. Finally, they are based on the available dataset collected in the last years, which makes them comparable measurements (Pogge and Wisor 2016:649). Although these measurements have their own merits, my aim here is to highlight their weaknesses when it comes to taking into account the individual as a unit of analysis, as they constitute indirect measures of who is poor. Let us begin with income-based measurements.

Income-based assessments can establish a poverty threshold by using either an absolute or a relative line. An absolute line is one focused on income minus the household expenditure necessary for a family to afford basic needs. This level is calculated in real terms (i.e. it responds to price changes, but it does not respond to income growth or changes in living standards) (Foster 1998: 336; Blank 2008:234). The United States has a regular absolute measure of poverty (Smeeding 2006: 70). In this case, families are said to be living in poverty when they do not have a budget of up to three times the cost of a minimally adequate meal. A relative line, on the other hand, is set by a percentage of the median income in a given society. This could be fixed at say 40%–60% of the overall income (Ravallion and Chen 2011: 1251). This line is thus sensitive to income growth or standards of living. Currently, Western European countries use a relative poverty line. The European Union, for example, sets an at-risk-of-poverty threshold, which is 60% of the national median equivalised disposable income (Damon 2012:10; Blank 2008:234).

These income-based assessments provide objective and quantitative indicators which allow for an assessment of family incomes in comparison with an absolute or relative poverty line. However, they clearly do not provide a good way to include children in the measurement. First, simply tracking a family’s income will not reflect the intensity of the multiple types of deprivation a child may face. We could easily envisage a case where the household itself is not considered poor, but the child is not receiving essential resources (e.g. nourishment). What is more, two children living in the same household may have different opportunities to access the fundamental resources and services that they need (such as food, education and health) (Wisor 2012:161). Third, income-based assessments such as unidimensional measurements are, generally speaking, insensitive to the actual living conditions of

a person (child or adult), and to the many different types of deprivation he or she may suffer. Finally, income-based measurements are inadequate for capturing the incapacity of certain children (as well as adults) to convert income into achievements in terms of well-being (Sen 1992: Ch.2).

Another method for identifying who is poor involves the use of subjective measurements, meaning self-evaluation of one's own deprivation. This method involves questionnaires, which include questions asking whether respondents feel poor or not. This allows us to understand a person's subjective assessment of how poverty is experienced through the evaluation of one's own well-being. Subjective measurements shed light on the basis of happiness and subjective well-being (such as the Gross National Happiness index – GNH). Because subjective measurements reflect on how deprived a person may feel on an individual level, it can be a complement to the monetary evaluation of her status. On the face of it, this measure would seem to suggest that it is possible to both include the individual as a unit of analysis, and focus on the particular situation of children. Hence, this can be a good method for capturing the particular position and the deprivation a child may face according to her own evaluation and voice. This is exactly the aim of the research made by Mario Biggeri et al. (2006), which proposes experimenting with a measurement based on the conceptualisation of children's capabilities and deprivation using children's own subjective understandings. For example, if this measurement is used to evaluate an individual child's subjective conception of poverty, it will help us to clarify why a girl who lives in a poor family is poorer and more deprived in many dimensions of development than other siblings in her family.

However, at the national and institutional level, subjective measurements have been based only on family surveys; that is, questionnaires are answered by adults (normally, the head of the family), leaving aside children's intra-household position, needs and deprivations (Okin 2003). Additionally, subjective measurement is directly affected by the respondent's mood and personality, which may lead to misunderstandings, since people tend to disagree on the meaning of happiness, deprivation, oppression and well-being (Posel and Rogan 2016: 58; Pogge and Wisor 2016: 649). Given its potentially arbitrary identification of who counts as poor and its inability when used alone to compare the situations of different people, the subjective method must be carefully used and complemented by an objective measurement (Bradshaw and Finch 2003; Wolff and De-Shalit 2007).

Finally, the third method, multidimensional poverty measurement, is based on the idea that poverty is either not solely about a one-dimensional assessment or not solely about a subjective evaluation. Multidimensional measurement expands upon the evaluative basis for understanding poverty by including multiple indicators and dimensions based on living standards (access to water, cooking fuel, sanitation, electricity, and so on) and basic necessities (health, education, etc.). For instance, the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) used in the Human Development Report is an international measurement assessing the fundamental types of deprivation that affect a poor family in terms of living standards, health and education (Alkire and Foster 2011). It is based on 10 indicators, each with the same weight, divided into two indicators for education (years of schooling and school attendance), two for

health (nutrition and child mortality), and six for standards of living (cooking fuel, sanitation, water, electricity, floor type and assets). This information is obtained from available national family surveys (as we have seen, responded to by the head of the family) and its aim is to gather statistical information concerning adult and child well-being (Alkire and Sumner 2013:2). The MPI expands the elements used in measurements of poverty by introducing multiple indicators and dimensions of well-being that consider both adults' and children's needs, and by comparing them with a combination of similar national datasets from household surveys (Wisor 2012:103). However, because it is based just on household surveys – as decided upon by its creators- and so remains only a partial proxy of well-being (Alkire and Santos 2011:13; Roelen 2017:505), it tends not to be so accurate regarding individual conditions and it does not reflect child-specific voices. Furthermore, its unit of analysis does not indicate how deprived a child is in absolute terms and in comparison with other members of his family (Brando and Pitasse 2018).

Therefore, depending on the unit of evaluation used in measurements and the list of dimensions aggregated, population indexes may exclude certain groups (in particular those who tend to be underrepresented such as women, children, the elderly and the disabled) and certain forms of inequality between members of the family. The household as a unit of analysis assumes, for instance that if a child is living in a poor family (e.g. a group of people that share the same sources of income or living standards), she must also be poor. Although there is a strong correlation between the condition of a family and the condition of a child in that family, the household as a unit of analysis is biased towards adults and is not able to accurately portray child poverty. The three measurements presented here thus fail to consider individuals separately, and fail to provide specific and focused information about children living in poverty.

Recall that, income-based measures track the monetary status of a family based on adults' earnings. This is a fundamental proxy of poverty which entails the assumption that children live in the same conditions as those disclosed by their parents. However, by its scope, this form of measurement cannot access children directly leading us to a restricted view of poverty; which does not take into account differences in the levels of deprivation among individual members of the family, or illuminate children's varying personal, social and environmental circumstances such as age, gender, social roles and geographic location, amongst other factors. These circumstances directly affect the possibility for a person to transform resources into well-being (Sen 1992: Ch. 4; Wisor 2012:160). Subjective measurements, on the other hand, because they are based on adult surveys, seem not to offer ways to include children in measurements of poverty and are therefore unable to reflect household inequalities. Multidimensional measurements expand upon our idea of poverty, by aggregating relevant dimensions and indicators as well as by highlighting children's needs. For instance, the MPI takes into consideration child mortality, nutrition, school enrolment and years of education. For practical reasons, these indicators are calculated by the household datasets which are available in the country or area of analysis. These have a tendency to under- or over-estimate the

extent of deprivation suffered by children,⁵ because the MPI does not take into account the individual's and child's specific capacities (or lack thereof) to make use of the resources at their disposal, by their own voices (Brando and Pitasse 2018). Finally, using the household as a unit of analysis does not allow for an assessment of intra-household inequalities which are unevenly spread among different genders, roles and ages, and ignores for instance, the specific position of the child (as well as other subgroups) (UN 2015).

With this diagnostic, I shall claim that in order to capture an accurate and inclusive picture of the poor, we should expand upon the evaluative space of measurement by including individual unit and children directly in measurements of poverty wherever possible (Wisor 2012:160). Moreover, we need to do this via adequate modes of communication. In philosophical terms, we have at least two main reasons to formalise the inclusion of children in measurements of poverty: epistemic and moral. I elaborate on these reasons in the next section.

3 Expanding Poverty-Measurement: Two Reasons for Taking Children into Account

Children are one of the most disadvantaged groups in society. According to Harry Brighouse (2002), what it means to be a child general involves a combination of three characteristics. First, children are profoundly *dependent* beings, that is to say they depend on adults and institutions for their well-being. Second, they are profoundly *vulnerable* to the decisions and actions of adults and institutions, insofar as they need access to special levels of well-being in order to grow up in optimal conditions encompassing survival factors (e.g. sufficient nourishment, access to clean water and sanitation, clothing, food and shelter), developmental factors (e.g. education, health and safety) and relational factors (e.g. family support, friends, love and care). Finally, they are in *development*, implying a process of mental and physical construction of their beings which can cause them to be profoundly affected by external influences (Brighouse 2002:40). The combination of these three characteristics (dependence, vulnerability and development) is fundamental to our understanding of child poverty and its implications.⁶

Poverty is an extreme deprivation; it constitutes an unacceptable situation. Overall poverty rates are higher among children, and children also tend to be the group most severely affected by poverty (Main and Bradshaw 2018). Talking into

⁵For Jonathan Bradshaw and Gill Main, the inclusion of children in measurements can avoid two kinds of common errors: "non-poor children living in poor households are not counted, and therefore child poverty may be over-represented; at the same time, poor children in non-poor households are assumed not to exist" (Bradshaw and Main 2012:505).

⁶Children are a unique group that is different from certain disabled individual, who may lack the ability to escape from social and economic vulnerability and to act independently, but who are not a being in development. I owe this distinction to Nicolás Brando.

account the conditions of childhood described above (e.g. mental and physical development, vulnerability to external influence and dependence on adults), we can say that poverty has an irreversible effect on the life of a child (Graf and Schweiger 2015: Ch. 2). That is, poverty constrains children's lives differently in comparison to those of adults; for instance, children depend on specific dietary requirements as well as robust health and education systems for their present and future lives. Also, a poor child is likely to become a poor adult because growing up in precarious health and education conditions affects their future access to basic needs, social activities, social networks and the labour market (UN 2015; Ridge 2002). To sum up, when we talk about child poverty, we should consider the child's current developing conditions, as well as his/her future flourishing life.

Additionally, children are often seen as unable to speak about and evaluate their own conditions. Although this is true in some cases, especially at a very early age, it does not apply to all. In Martin Woodhead's words, children are "social actors, trying to make sense of their physical and social world, negotiate with parents and peers (...) and make the best of the oppressive and difficult circumstances in which they find themselves" (Woodhead 1999:29). Omitting children from measurements of poverty due to their age therefore seems unjustified, as clearly children have particular needs and concerns, and are capable of voicing these. Furthermore, some children perform vital bread-winning roles within the family, and actively contribute to the upkeep of the household; as such, they should be treated as integral members, whose perspectives should be actively sought for (Abebe 2007: 90). However, in practice, children are rarely consulted in measurements of poverty. To be sure, I think that data on poverty needs to be obtained equally through the lens of children, by including them in surveys related to poverty measures (Bradshaw and Main 2012). The rationale behind this is both epistemic and moral.

The epistemic claim for including children in measurements of poverty is based on the instrumental justification of accessing new insights in order to create accurate policies. Children living in poverty are sources of practical and relevant knowledge regarding their circumstances and conditions, which may provide theorists and policy experts with valuable insights for improving their understanding of poverty and their strategies for tackling it (Harding 2004; Young 2004).

The inclusion of children in measurements of poverty may help clarify the nature of their condition and the level of their access to basic needs as well as how inequalities within a family affect their lives (Roelen 2010: 145). Particularly in the case of children, activists and practitioners are not always able to abstract and imagine the conditions children face simply by considering the situation of their families. They must recognize the generation gap and the need to supplement their information by encouraging the participation of children.

More specifically, the participation of children should be encouraged because, first, poor children have a social perspective that is different from that of adults, meaning that they have a particular way of framing the experience of living in a state of deprivation. Second, they suffer from multiple and accumulated disadvantages that cannot easily be reflected in a general family measurement (Graf and Schweiger 2015; Wisor 2012). Third, inequalities may exist within families meaning

that it is even more important to listen to children, whose particular conditions may need a particular set of policy responses (for instance, think of families that prevent girls from obtaining a formal education whereas boys are encouraged to do so) (Pogge and Wisor 2016). Including children in such measurements would make it possible to provide a more complete identification of the child's position within the family and facilitate the design of a more tailored public policy (Ridge 2002; Roelen 2010).

Another advantage of including children in measurements is that it prevents theorists and policy experts from committing bias or injustice in their analysis: if we agree that poverty measurements, by nature, should be universal, this means that every representative group within society should be taken into account (women, children, the elderly and so on). The inclusion of children within measurements of poverty may prevent us from falling into knowledge biases and, consequently, from enacting potentially unjust policies (Roelen 2017).

It may be helpful to consider the notion of epistemic injustice here. Miranda Fricker refers to epistemic injustice in two ways: first, in terms of testimonial injustice which prevents a person from having credibility; and second, in terms of hermeneutical injustice which prevents a person from creating knowledge and shared meanings. The case of *testimonial injustices* can be explained when a person – for instance a young girl – gives her point of view about her situation (such as deprivation), but her testimony is not viewed as credible. She is disregarded because she encounters prejudices, which constitute an obstacle to the proper consideration of her views.⁷ The second form of injustice, according to Fricker, is *hermeneutical injustice*, which prevents some people from understanding what is going on around them and from being understood by others. Moreover, what lies behind the notion of hermeneutical injustice is the reduction of a person's capacity as a knowledgeable contributor for she is not part of the group that 'makes' knowledge. In this case she possesses traits (age and lack of ability to escape from vulnerability and to act independently) that constitute a barrier to entering that group (Fricker 2015: 78–79). Indeed, the young age of children plays a role in generating an epistemic injustice. Karen Murriss, inspired by Fricker's ideas, makes this point when she claims that children suffer epistemic injustices in two ways: in their capacity as *givers of knowledge* (testimonial injustice) and in their capacity as *knowers* (hermeneutical injustice) (Murriss 2015: 333). By including children in the measurements of poverty, we may avoid these two types of epistemic injustices.

What is more, even if the perceptions of children could not provide any new information or insight that could expand on or improve existing measurements of poverty, we would still have moral reasons to include them. Signatories to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child already acknowledged in 1989 the importance of giving children a voice when decisions are being made that concern them:

⁷ Karen Murriss argues that testimonial injustices currently appear at school where "teachers do not believe a child because it is a child who is speaking" (Murriss 2013: 248).

1. parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child (...);
2. for this purpose, the child shall in particular be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through representative or an appropriate body (...) (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989: article 12).

This article 12 identifies children as being a unit of moral concern and as being capable of speaking for themselves and representing their own interests by considering their voice in “any judicial and administrative proceeding”, such as in measurements of poverty. This is based on the intrinsic criterion that involving children is a moral way of treating them as ends in themselves. First, this recognises children (and all their varieties) as having a moral status in their own right with particular deprivations, needs and interests, and not being seen as just a part of a household unit or intrinsically linked to other individuals. Second, treating children as ends in themselves also means respecting them as individuals capable of saying what they have, lack and need, instead of being defended by others (adults) (Putnam 2015). This is especially true because adults and children have different interests, which may at times conflict⁸ (Ridge 2002:150). This does not entail, however, that children are always the best defenders of their interests or that others cannot represent them. Children are in a state of development and at times need help to convey their best interests. Adults and institutions should be prepared to listen to them and discern what they really want (Brighouse 2003:44), without rejecting their moral status and denying their voices.

Child poverty is commonly measured based on the household unit for at least two conceptual reasons: the assumption that the deprivation suffered by a family is an adequate representation of the deprivation suffered by children, and the idea that adults are adequate judges of children’s needs and wants (Main and Bradshaw 2012). We have seen that not only is this form of measurement insufficient in terms of identifying children’s deprivations and needs, but it is also unjust as it excludes children from actively participating in data collection exercise. A universal and individual measurement should aim at capturing child-specific deprivation and recognize children’s capacity to exercise an active role. This raises the question of how we can best develop a practical and flexible communicative format that allows us to capture children’s social, cultural and monetary circumstances within the family and society.

⁸For instance, it has been observed in Brazil that poor parents in rural areas are inclined to send children to work instead of school; thus the parents’ short-term interests are in conflict with the long-term interest of their children (Rego and Pinzani 2013).

4 Possible Routes for Involving Poor Children in Measurements of Poverty Within Populations

So far, I have discussed why children should be included in measurements of poverty: firstly, it may expand our knowledge of the nature, intensity and extent of child deprivations and needs, and secondly, can recognise children as having a moral status and an active role. However, the question remains: how should children be heard, and to what extent? This section contains a limited set of practical suggestions for accommodating children in measurements of poverty within populations using existing methods of communication.

As we saw in section one, income-based measurement is too simplistic a way to reflect child poverty, because it cannot assess children directly as part of the measurement or consider them on an individual level. Children have different conditions and experiences in comparison to adults. This is why in order to assess them, it is imperative to use data provided by surveys and participatory measurement (Roelen 2017:507). We have at least three common modes of communication in poverty studies that can capture their situation: (1) surveys with closed questions; (2) surveys with open questions; and (3) storytelling based on their personal experiences.

Firstly, closed-ended surveys are used to obtain simple statistical information about the population. This is gathered using questionnaires with selected possible answers in which respondents simply need to say yes/no or rate different options. This kind of survey is currently used to gather national census data for a numerical representation of the poor population. For instance, the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) presented in section one has used this kind of survey to calculate the extent and intensity of poverty. It can avoid certain forms of data distortion because questions have been previously studied, and are restricted by a closed-ended format, and guided by external experts. This means that the information collected will be presented in a statistical and impartial format. Concerning the current measurements focused on child well-being, the 2012 Poverty and Social Exclusion research project (PSE-UK 2012) and the Multiple Overlapping Deprivation Analysis (UNICEF-MODA) are standard examples. Both measurements are based on surveys focused on children, and questions were asked of all children within the household, taking adults as respondents (Main and Bradshaw 2018; Ferrone and Chzhen 2016). For example, they included questions regarding the number of family members living in the same house, the number of children enrolled at school, the number of meals children receive per day, and so on. PSE-UK 2012 and UNICEF-MODA reflect whether a child is living in a deprived household or not, and measure some types of well-being deprivation suffered by them (Main and Bradshaw 2018:151; Ferrone and Chzhen 2016:7). Although these modes of communication are focused on children's well-being, I believe that closed surveys are too restrictive in their institutional design to be able to include and access their accurate conditions. More precisely, a closed-ended survey, because of its scope of measurement, does not include children as respondents directly and its format employs objective questions to extract simple quantifiable and statistical information. This type of survey, then,

does not address the issue of children's non-participation measurements of poverty. Using this means of communication alone may be misleading and may misrepresent the extent and intensity of child poverty.

Another way to involve children in poverty measures is through surveys with open-ended questions. This is a method based on interviews, which allows for a wide variety of responses to be recorded and taken into account. The World Bank's Participatory Poverty Assessments (PPAs) are an example of this type of survey (Robb 2002). PPAs select a number of poor people to take part in public meetings that focus on understanding what it is like to live in poverty. Practitioners and facilitators from the World Bank propose an open-question method in order to evaluate public policy against the poor's preferences and experiences of living in extreme disadvantage (Narayan et al. 2000; Ballet et al. 2011). Using a similar format, but applied in particular to children, Mario Biggeri et al. proposed an exercise at the Children's Congress on Child Labour with an open-question survey. Biggeri and his team applied an open-ended survey questionnaire to a selected group of children in order to create a list of deprivation types based on children's own subjective assessments (Biggeri et al. 2006:67). Open surveys, then, have the advantage of allowing children to formulate their own answers, without being restricted by closed-ended questions. What is more, open-ended surveys are capable of accessing a range of complex information regarding the structure of the family and the position of children. Finally, even if the questions are already formulated by practitioners and research groups, there is still room for a dynamic process of interaction between practitioners and children, leaving the latter to express a specific and contextualised answer (Roker and Colema 1998; Spicer and Sarche 2012; Davis and Ridge 1997). Although this format allows for the inclusion of children as main respondents, it is a mode of communication that does not allow for a deeper exchange of views between children and practitioners. That is, it still presents a predetermined script/set of questions that may affect the nature of the data collected, and be too restrictive when it comes to capturing the full range of circumstances that poor children find themselves in. Finally, an open survey does not transfer to the children an active role to influence the ongoing process of measurement (such as including them in one of the process of the formulation, analysis and interpretation of the questions).

Lastly, storytelling goes further than open-ended surveys, as it takes the form of a conversation and dialogue in an ongoing collaborative process of participation. Storytelling (or the telling of personal narratives) is a mode of communication based on first-person narratives that takes into account memories, social experiences and power struggles experienced by individuals. According to Francesca Polleta and John Lee (2006), stories integrate description, explanation and evaluation; they also create a space of interaction capable of bringing new narratives and interpretations.⁹ Storytelling has a simple format of exchange; it is used in small groups, within local institutions (such as neighbourhood associations and schools) and does not require

⁹Officially, this mode of communication was used, for instance, in the "Listening to the city" forum in the United States, established to discuss in a virtual forum and decide what should be built on the site of the former World Trade Center after the attacks (Polleta and Lee 2006; Black 2008).

prior education or a high level of argumentation. There exists considerable scope in the design of storytelling formats, instruments, and degrees of participation. It can be held in a circular conversation table, or involve the exchange of pictures and photos to help participants share a story. Because of this, it is an appropriate method for including children directly. It permits them to be in a comfortable position to tell their stories using a natural way of communicating (that does not require the constant intervention of adults) and is capable of accessing their multiple and complex views (Sarti et al. 2017:3).

Insights from experimental research and from social movement can exemplify how storytelling as a mode of communication has been used in practice to include children. This is the case of the empirical research done by Asia Sarti and her team of researchers in the Netherlands. They have used photos, focus group discussions, casual conversation and participant observation in order to gather stories about a selected group of children living in poverty. They met the children weekly over a period of one and a half years. Children are seen as partners during this research process, as they consent to participate or not, and decide what to include in their stories. Asia Sarti et al. (2018) have collected information from children about how poverty has affected their lives, what it is like living in inadequate accommodation, not having access to basic needs, and having parents who are unemployment long term (Sarti et al. 2018:2–4).

Another example of using storytelling to involve children in poverty reflection is that of the ‘*Sem terrinha*’ meetings (Children without Land) – a group of Brazilian children that grew out of the agrarian land movement (*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra – MST*).¹⁰ One of the aims of the *Sem terrinha* meetings is to allow children to share stories about the agrarian land movement. In their meetings, there is a workshop called “building stories” where children are invited by local educators to recount their experiences of living in the agrarian land settlements. Children have the opportunity to express their stories through discussion, drawing or writing. They also have an active and powerful role in choosing the topic of each meeting as well as setting the speaking time for each participant.¹¹ This exchange is centered on agrarian issues and the social dynamics of the *Sem terrinha*, including insights into the agrarian movements, education, social and political struggles (see MST’s blog 2018¹²).

These examples show how storytelling has been put into practice. I contend that storytelling provides an appropriate way to include a group of children in measurements of poverty and to capture their individual needs and conditions as well as

¹⁰MST is a group of politically-organized farmworkers fighting exploitation, the seizing of land, expropriation, expulsion and social exclusion.

¹¹According to Márcia Ramos, member of the Education Sector of the MST, children are an important part of the MST where they play an active and critical role (Brasil de fato 2017). Indeed, it is vital for the movement to integrate children in their daily struggle, as they are also the future of the agrarian land movement.

¹²See here: <http://www.mst.org.br/2018/07/26/o-sonho-de-josue-pelo-direito-das-criancas-sem-terrinha-contarem-sua-propria-historia.html>

highlighting their achievements. Storytelling is not just an extraction of statistical information or a description of facts, as pointed out by David Ryfe: “stories pivot around a problem, what is sometimes referred to as a dilemmatic situation or a complicating event” (Ryfe 2006:74). If it is well-designed, for instance and held in a safe and friendly environment with a facilitator to guide the exchanges of stories and another person to record the information shared (Woodhead 1999:30), storytelling can allow for valuable interactions between children, parents and practitioners, and improve our understanding of child poverty.

However, including storytelling may create epistemic distortion or be intrusive in children’s lives. The first issue of epistemic distortion arises from the fact that children may provide an exaggerated or biased version of their experiences or circumstances that may affect negatively the outcomes of the process. What is more, children’s views of poverty may conflict, with varying kinds of narratives concerning the same issue arising from the same group. Is this really problematic? We should not pay too much attention to these cases; what is problematic, rather, is to systematically regard children as always having incorrect insights into their own lives (Herzog 2017; Fricker 2015; Murriss 2013). Also, children’s statements can be combined and countered with other sources of information, from existing datasets such as income-based measurement or closed and open ended surveys (Roelen 2017).

Indeed scholars and practitioners usually agree that storytelling may bring about new insights and fill the information gap on groups of different backgrounds and ages (Young 1996; Black 2008; Ryfe 2006; Sarti et al. 2018). However, it could also raise some ethical issues regarding the extent to which we should involve children in poverty measurements. For instance, Valeria Ottonelli argues that whenever we involve a group that shares its experiences, especially on sensitive and private issues (e.g. children sharing their stories regarding poverty, exploitation or harm within their families), and by placing this information in the public arena, we could inadvertently cross certain ethical lines of respect and dignity (Ottonelli 2017: 9).

This kind of worry can be eased. A measurement of poverty using storytelling can be carried out whilst at the same time respecting children’s privacy. First of all, practitioners and researchers using storytelling must be discreet and avoid sensitive issues that could humiliate and cause harm to the children. Second, storytelling ought to respect children’s autonomy by being founded in the principle of voluntary participation with a relationship of trust between practitioners and children. By this I mean that children should not be forced to participate or to disclose sensitive stories. Third, children should have the power to decide by themselves what they would like to share, and consent to their participation (parents as well as may be consulted, that is to say, they may be informed about the content and nature of the participation of their sons and daughters). Fourth, children should act as co-researchers in the ongoing measurement of poverty; practitioners should simply give some direction and facilitate the exchanges of narratives among the group of children and with themselves. This creates a sense of collaboration among the participants, which can ensure the active role of the children, raise their self-esteem and incentivise them to work together in order to provide their views and perspectives with regard to the

issues under discussion (Main 2013: 57; Main 2018:242). Finally, children's interests can often be better understood and respected by employing a communicative and inclusive strategy that is based on expression of affect and struggles, which may help to create empathy between the storyteller and others¹³ (Mansbridge et al. 2010:68).

In this chapter I have explored the idea that we should involve children in measurements of poverty by drawing upon the tools provided by storytelling approach. I believe that this mode of communication and data gathering has the potential to provide us with new information, allow for empathetic identification, and broaden our understanding of children's conditions, assessments and interests, to a degree that is not possible with closed or open ended survey questions alone. Measurements that already exist should be combined with storytelling in order to construct a more accurate and inclusive map of poverty within the population. My limited capacity as a philosopher does not allow me to give more practical details about storytelling in poverty measurement, but I do hope I have at least clarified why it is so important to include children's voices in our measurements of poverty; and what such a mode of communication and data gathering might look like.

5 Concluding Remarks

I have tried to show that despite the increasing importance placed on including children in measurements of poverty, all current methods – income, subjective and multidimensional indexes – are biased towards the use of household datasets that do not directly take children into account. There are two main problems with existing measurements of poverty: they do not target individuals, and they do not reflect children's needs and state of deprivation. However, we have epistemic and moral reasons to include children directly in measurements of poverty. With regard to the epistemic reason, I have appealed to the fact that we obtain greater insight into child poverty and intra-household inequalities by including them in the analysis. Such an approach may help us to avoid two types of injustice - testimonial and hermeneutical - as some are omitted from participating in the construction of information (about themselves) and in its interpretation. Unless we are prepared to address this, we stand to lose a great source of knowledge about the complexities of child poverty. The social justice perspective provides us with morality-based reasons for including children in poverty measurements: it allows us to recognise children as individuals in their own right, that are owed equal opportunities for expressing their own needs and their ability to speak for and by themselves. I have also reflected in these pages on the need for an inclusive mode of communication and data gathering. I proposed to employ storytelling as a route to listen to and take into account the

¹³ Jane Mansbridge et al. brought this point: "Acts of empathy, which require trying to put oneself in another's place, usually engage the non-cognitive faculties and require non-cognitive forms of communication" (Mansbridge et al. 2010:68).

views and experiences of children. This mode of communication and data gathering, combined with existing adult and family data, may provide an accurate and inclusive way to inform and enhance public policy aimed at alleviating poverty.

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Poverty, Social Expectations, and the Family



Jonathan Wolff

Abstract A persistent right-wing discourse on poverty insists that, in many cases, poverty is the result of domestic incompetence, improvidence, or male irresponsibility. Poverty is, on this view, to some significant degree, the result of poor management and irresponsible choices. Poverty researchers, by contrast, typically argue that there is very little evidence to support this diagnosis, and that poverty is largely simply a matter of lack of financial resources to live the type of life that is regarded as normal or socially expected, at a minimal level, in the affected person or family's society. Nevertheless, for people on very low incomes there are normally difficult choices to be made, especially in terms of provision for children, particularly in the light of social expectations. Here I draw on a framework inspired by Sen's capability approach, coupled with Rowntree's distinction between primary and secondary poverty, and Townsend's distinction between absolute and relative poverty. It allows us to see that even though the role of choice and behaviour in the causation and persistence of poverty is far less significant than structural factors, nevertheless individual choices will shape the type of poverty a family may face. In sum, I argue that a significant proportion of parents place themselves in secondary poverty in order to avoid a form of relative poverty for their children, especially so that they can meet the social expectations of their peers.

Keywords Poverty · Children · Responsibility · Relative Poverty · Capability Theory · Social Structure · Choice · Behaviour

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1 Introduction

What explains the fact that even in a country as apparently wealthy as the UK a significant number of people live in poverty? No doubt causes are complex and will vary over time and place. However, a reactionary line of argument has been common for as long as poverty has been observed. It is to say to a large degree poverty can be explained by the choices that people in poverty, and especially heads of households, make. In the words of Digby Anderson, writing in 1991, the ‘unmentionable face of poverty’ is that ‘domestic incompetence, improvidence, and male irresponsibility’ has a significant role to play in turning low income into the experience of poverty (Anderson 1991). This theme has been revived in the more recent report on child poverty by Labour Member of Parliament Frank Field, notoriously writing:

I no longer believe that the poverty endured by all too many children can simply be measured by their parents’ lack of income. Something more fundamental than the scarcity of money is adversely dominating the lives of these children. Since 1969 I have witnessed a growing indifference from some parents to meeting the most basic needs of children, and particularly younger children, those who are least able to fend for themselves. I have also observed how the home life of a minority but, worryingly, a growing minority of children, fails to express an unconditional commitment to the successful nurturing of children (Field 2010, 16).

Note that there are several possible claims here, aside from the implication that something has changed for the worse. Anderson uses the terms ‘incompetence’, ‘improvidence’ and ‘irresponsibility’. These are different. The first refers to a supposed lack of ability, the second a lack of foresight, and the third a lack of responsibility, in the sense of parents putting their own interests before their children. Field’s idea of a ‘growing indifference’ suggests something close to irresponsibility in this sense too, although some would insist that incompetence and improvidence are themselves symptoms of irresponsibility, as a truly responsible parent would take steps to improve competence and foresight. Whether or not that additional move is made, these are very serious allegations. Anderson and Field are accusing low income parents of pursuing their own selfish interest at the expense of damaging the lives of their children when they could have done otherwise. These charges need to be examined.¹

Anderson’s critics, such as poverty researcher Elaine Kempson and colleagues, say that they have found scant evidence to support Anderson’s claims (Kempson 1994, 83). More recently David Gordon, in explicit response to Field, has insisted that ‘poverty is not a behaviour’ (Gordon 2018, 26). In the large, most theorists agree that structural factors, such as economic recession, business failure, low wages, job loss, and the high cost of housing and child care, play the overwhelming role in the explanation of the existence of poverty, at least in the UK and other higher income countries.

¹For a parallel discussion of the US debate see Young 2011, Chapter 1.

There is, however, something of a puzzle in the empirical material. Field's report is sub-titled 'preventing poor children becoming poor adults', which seems to presuppose that without concerted social action, poverty will be transmitted from one generation to the next. Children living in poor families today, so it is assumed, will be the parents of poor children in the future, and hence it is vital to break this generational recycling of poverty. This is also an assumption made by many leftist thinkers, believing that social disadvantage creates a type of trap that is replicated over the generations. The main disagreement is the supposed mechanism of transmission. Conservatives emphasise irresponsible behaviours and attitudes that first, are said to explain poverty, and second, are passed on to children, which is a view that is repeated in part in more popular works (see, for example, Vance 2015). Progressives, in contrast, are likely to look to structural factors which either directly determine poverty, or do so indirectly, by reinforcing patterns of behaviour, which, while understandable, or even unavoidable, in the circumstances, again are passed on to children who will become poor in adulthood, and in turn pass on those behaviours to their children. Both sides, for example, may point to educational failure of poor children, but have different diagnoses of the why these failures occur in the way they do.

On the surface, therefore, this looks like a debate about the best explanation of a known phenomenon. The puzzle, however, is that the phenomenon may not actually exist, or not in the form it is thought, at least in developed economies such as the US and UK. Writing in 2005 about the US, Mark R Rank set out evidence that poverty generally has relatively short duration of a few years (Rank 2005, 28), and that around 50% of Americans will experience at least 1 year of poverty as an adult (Rank 2005, 3), and 75% 'near-poverty' (an income of 1.5 times the poverty line) (Rank 2005, 81). These figures vary considerably by race in the US. Astonishingly, for example, at time of his study, by the age of 75, 91% of black Americans can expect to have spent at least 1 year of their adult lives living below the poverty line (Rank 2005, 96). Morduch and Schneider, in their detailed studies of how low income Americans manage their money, show how many families cycle in and out of poverty (Morduch and Schneider 2017), and similar points are made by Elaine Kempson in her 1994 UK study. Rank uses the analogy between poverty and sickness: it is something from which many people recover, yet can suffer again in the future (Rank 2005, 180). The group of people in poverty undergoes substantial shifts from year to year, and certainly from decade to decade. Even in 1901 Rowntree argued that there is a life-cycle to poverty, with different experiences at different life stages. Yet this observation appears in conflict with claims that social mobility is currently falling in the UK and US (for discussion regarding the US, see Chetty et al. 2014), as well as studies that indicate patterns of behaviour leading to low educational and economic success are, indeed, passed on from generation to generation (see, for a striking example, Lareau 2011).

Notably, however, Lareau remarks that, in her study, the characteristics of poor people and those of the working class (those in work, and above the poverty line) are similar. I think this provides the clue to the puzzle that, on the one hand, poverty is thought to be transmitted over the generations, but on the other, there doesn't

seem to be a persistent group of poor people passing their poverty on, as ‘those in poverty’ does not pick out a particular group. Instead, I think, the evidence supports two closely related claims. First, there is transmission not so much of poverty, according to official definitions of falling below an income line, but of living one’s life in the lower income bands (which is consistent with a lack of social mobility taken in a broad sense). Second, accompanying low income, and with it lack of family wealth, is an increased *risk* of falling into poverty. A striking fact about some of the poverty stories told in this literature is how little it takes to tip some families into extreme financial difficulties, where others might have weathered the storm by relying on savings or the generosity of a richer family member. But even this needs to be set in a broader context, as structural factors, such as economic recession, clearly greatly influence the absolute numbers who are in poverty at any one time (Schweiger and Graf 2015, 151).

In sum, the theory that children who grow up in poor families will become poor adults, and continue then to pass on their poverty to others, rests on a number of assumptions. The most notable are first, that there is an identifiable group of persistent poor families, and second, there is something that happens within those families (child neglect), or the situation in which they find themselves (structural injustice), that leads to the replication of poverty. We have seen some reasons to doubt the first claim, as poverty is generally a limited-term phenomenon in wealthy countries. Nevertheless, there are, no doubt, families who live for many decades in poverty, and therefore children who will experience poverty throughout their entire childhood, and others for a considerable part. Hence there is still reason for investigating whether the behaviours of poor people exhibit the patterns that Anderson and Field suggest; namely that the chosen behaviours of poor, mostly male, adults leaves their children grossly deprived during their childhood, and leads to a pattern of behaviour that they will repeat with their own children. My focus, however, will be on what evidence there is for the first claim: that poor adults act in ways that deprive their children. The research literature (as opposed to opinion pieces) of which I am aware, however, suggests the opposite, and that poor parents are much more likely to sacrifice themselves for the sake of their children; not only for their health and safety, but also so that they are not humiliated by failing to be able to meet social expectations (see, for example, Kempson 1994; Ridge 2002; Daly and Kelly 2015; Morduch and Schneider 2017; Gordon 2018).

For this reason I want to suggest that the connection between choice and poverty is not the one that the conservative discourse suggests. Rather, I will argue that, especially for families with children, individual choices, though rarely improvisation, greatly influence the form that poverty takes. By this I mean decision-makers within a family can determine how poverty will be experienced and distributed within the family, which is not the same thing as whether or not a family is in poverty. In short, choices rarely lead to poverty, but they do shape how poverty is experienced, especially in relation to the choices parents make in regard to their children. I will use a framework inspired by Sen’s capability approach as a way of making these issues vivid, and explain what I believe to be a characteristic form poverty takes, as a family adapts to some social expectations at significance cost. Essentially,

in the following sections, I will argue that a substantial number of parents put themselves in secondary poverty in order to shelter their children from relative poverty.

2 The Experience of Poverty

What is it to live a life of poverty? It is not my purpose here to investigate the definition of poverty, or how it is measured, which are questions I have considered elsewhere (Wolff [forthcoming, 2019](#); Wolff et al. [2015](#)). Wherever the line is drawn the same considerations as those discussed in this paper will apply. Instead, I will start with the rather unusual strategy of beginning with the contrast case. At what point can we conclusively say that people, though living modestly, are not in poverty? I want to build on a picture that the St Lucian development economist Arthur Lewis set out in 1949, as what he considered to be the demands of the socialist movement:

A society in which every child shall grow up in pleasant homes and attractive surroundings and with good educational opportunities; in which every adult shall be provided for in sickness and adversity; and in which the pensioner can take untroubled ease (Lewis [1949, 32–3](#)).

On reading this it is easy to think that this simple standard is, first of all, a reasonable aspiration for all, in the sense of not being too much for anyone to ask, provided that they are prepared to make a reasonable effort or contribution of their own to help themselves and others achieve it. Consequently, it may also seem reasonable that governments should accept that they have a responsibility to put into place the social and economic infrastructure to make this an achievable aspiration for all. The idea that governments have such obligations is hardly unique to socialism, given that I have stated the obligation in deliberately vague terms, saying nothing about means. Ideologies will vary over how governments should act: should there be extensive state provision of all relevant services, including housing, schooling, health and pensions, or is the government's job to unlock free enterprise so that the great majority of people can earn the necessary resources to purchase the appropriate goods (including insurance) on the free market?

Putting Lewis's picture into the terminology of contemporary political philosophy, we can interpret him as providing an account of what 'sufficiency' could amount to, adding details to theories such as that of Harry Frankfurt, who proposes that justice requires not that everyone should have an equal share of resources, but that everyone should have enough to live a good life (Frankfurt [1987](#)). The particular strength of Lewis's picture is that it takes the entire life cycle into account, rather than focusing on family income alone, or, even more commonly in political philosophy, only considering those of working age as subjects of justice and distribution.

It is unclear whether Lewis regards himself as having given a complete account of the demands of justice, or, indeed, socialism, but on reflection it appears overly individualistically, in the sense that it seems to take people as largely self-contained.

Mentioning different stages in life implicitly assumes the existence of family relations, but there is little in this account that sees an individual as anchored in social relations, which themselves can be a source of fulfilment, but equally, of anxiety. Consider, for example, this brief account of child poverty from the Child Poverty Action Group (2018). ‘Child poverty blights childhoods. Growing up in poverty means being cold, going hungry, not being able to join in activities with friends.’ This social side, while compatible with Lewis’s account, is not obviously present in it, but needs to be made explicit. And, typically, a social life requires resources, whether, for a child, it is money for a school trip, or the right trainers or the latest toy or gadget, to feel part of the group.

Social participation requires resources, as do other aspects of life. For the purpose of what follows, it will be helpful to divide forms of consumption, rather crudely, into six types. I am not claiming that all consumption will fall into these categories, and it is clear that some consumption will fall into more than one category. Furthermore, there are complex causal relations between them. But nevertheless, I will use the following ideas:

1. Basic goods: this is consumption of those things that are needed simply for day to day survival. Food, clothing and basic shelter fall into these categories. Without them, even for a reasonably short period, serious illness, even death, is a near certainty.
2. Physical efficiency goods: here I use Benjamin Seebohm Rowntree’s rather dated terminology. Rowntree suggested that there is a type of cut-off threshold of consumption. Below this level one risks significant detriments to health through malnutrition or the type of respiratory or infectious illness associated with living in unsanitary accommodation. In practice it may well not be the case that there is some clear threshold, rather than a continuum, at least over a certain range. But it is plausible that at a certain increasing level of consumption the risk of illness and early death is reduced, though of course never eliminated. (I will return to this later.) The difference between physical efficiency and basic goods is that without basic goods (food, water, shelter and heating if living in a harsh environment) you have a very high chance of dying in a matter of weeks or months. Lacking physical efficiency goods is likely to damage health and lead to early death, but over a much more extended period and in a much more mundane fashion. Again, we can ask whether there is a clear threshold, though the general distinction seems clear.
3. Normal goods: as Rowntree himself observed, physical efficiency focuses on the individual person’s physical well-being, without considering the quality of the life that is preserved. But life must be led on more than a ‘fodder’ basis, to use Rowntree’s term. Hence in his later work Rowntree included, for the working man, an allowance for such things as a newspaper, tobacco, a small amount of alcohol, a wireless and a ticket to a football match or to spend on other hobbies. (Rowntree 1937) To call these luxury goods doesn’t capture the idea that these ordinary extravagances are part of a normal human life. Hence, for want of a

better term I have called them ‘normal’ goods. They will vary greatly from society to society. Some may be sceptical that normal goods are necessities in any sense, but consider this passage from a speech by the Labour MP, Dr. Edith Summerskill at the time of the founding of the NHS:

It was the suffering of a woman which finally drew me into the political world. One wet cold night many years ago at the age of 22, a newly qualified doctor, I went to attend my first confinement. Very nervous I arrived with my new black bag. My knock was answered by the young husband, pallid and shabby, with the familiar signs of long unemployment upon him. He took me upstairs to a room stripped of all but the bare necessities of life. There lay the patient on a mattress covered by a threadbare blanket – a girl of my own age – in labour with her second child. By the bed stood a cot and standing grasping the wooden bars was a child with bulging forehead and crooked legs, the classic picture of rickets, a disease of undernourishment. The young mother clutched my hand with her own moist bony fingers on which she wore a greenish brass wedding ring twisted round with cotton to prevent it falling off. In that room that night I became a socialist and I joined in the fight – not against a class but a system – a system which refused to accept responsibility for the welfare of the most helpless among us (BBC 2008). Notice that the image of the cheap, ill-fitting, wedding ring is just as much a part of the picture of poverty, alongside the signs of illness and malnutrition.

4. Participation goods: these will overlap considerably with normal goods. The earlier example of a school trip falls into this category, as would an evening with friends, over a meal or in the pub, or a birthday party. They are normal goods but allow you to enjoy relations with, or at least the company of, other people. These goods facilitate social participation (Kempson 1994, 281) or help create a special sense of family (Daly and Kelly 2015, 73). Some participation goods may seem extravagant, such as the cost of a wedding or other celebration, and of course they can be a form of ostentation, but equally, often not providing the right type of celebration can be a source of shame.
5. Status goods: here I have in mind such goods as the branded clothes that a teenager may feel is needed to be accepted, or one good suit or dress for special occasions, so that you ‘fit in’ with social expectations. Without the right clothes you might not be able to accept an invitation to a relative’s wedding, for example, or if you do go wearing unsuitable clothes, you may feel awkward and unwelcome, even if others make an effort to be kind to you. Adam Smith’s famous examples of a linen shirt and leather shoes, which he regarded as necessities in the England of his day, fit into this category. (Smith 1976, 869–872.). It is easy to think that items in this category are optional, but for children they can make the difference between a happy and an anxious childhood, for example, and for an adult can make all the difference about whether one is taken seriously by an official. Many goods are both participation and status goods, such as a school trip, which can also be seen to be a normal good too.
6. Luxury goods: goods that are not needed simply for a normal life. This will vary in different social circumstances, but some examples are obvious. A collection of high performance cars, holiday houses in addition to a primary residence, season tickets to the opera, and so on are rather clichéd examples. The position is somewhat complicated by the thought that a normal life should include some minor luxuries,

although calling such things ‘treats’ perhaps better captures their role. I add this category for completeness but it will play little role in the following analysis.

One common ‘hard-nosed’ attitude to poverty is that only the lack of the first two categories of expenditure are significant enough to call for social action. If people cannot afford to go to a football match, or to purchase fashionable clothes, that may be sad, but, it is sometimes said, does not make them poor, or generate claims on others. Furthermore, it is thought, if people do have enough money to meet their physical efficiency needs, but spend some of it on something else, then that shows they don’t really need any more. Rowntree used the term ‘secondary poverty’ to describe those who had the money to meet their physical efficiency needs but chose to spend at least some of that money on other things, and thereby did not manage to meet their physical efficiency needs. Later he realised that this distinction encouraged the attitude that somehow those in secondary poverty had brought their situation upon themselves. Indeed in 1991, Anderson revived Rowntree’s distinction for exactly this purpose and Field (2010) draws on Rowntree in the same way, though without using the terminology. However, Rowntree, understanding that he had given a hostage to fortune to conservatives, changed his position, as we saw, to include an allowance for modest normal and social spending in the calculation of a poverty line, rather than keep the primary/secondary distinction, a practice which has subsequently been followed in social policy. In books published in 1936 and 1937 he explicitly considered versions of the ‘poverty is the fault of the poor’ argument, in the form of the objection that if people on low incomes wasted their money drinking, smoking and going to the cinema then any resulting hardship was their own responsibility. Talking of the poorest older people in York in 1936 Rowntree remarked: ‘Of course they do get the occasional ounce of tobacco, or a glass of beer, but only by suffering a little more from cold or under-nourishment’ (Rowntree 1936, 99). And with regard to low income working people in 1937, he commented:

Working people are just as human as those with more money. They cannot live just on a ‘fodder basis’. They crave for relaxation and recreation just as the rest of us do. But... they can only get these things by going short of something which is essential to physical fitness, and so they go short They pay dearly for their pleasures! (Rowntree 1937, pp. 126–7).

What, though, is the price people pay? In the immediate future the sacrifice will be felt in terms of routine scrimping and saving: lower consumption of healthy food; an exhausting walk to and from work or social events to avoid travel costs; or not heating one’s home. In the medium term debt may follow, and, by definition of secondary poverty, risks to health. Virtually all detailed investigations of poverty emphasise the stress and anxiety of shortage of money to pay bills; the juggling of finance; domestic rows about money, including violence; even court cases. Ultimately there is fear of destitution, meaning that it is no longer possible to stay in the family home, or children will be taken into care.

The ‘price’ that people have to pay will vary from case to case. Skipping a meal to go to the cinema is very different to the accumulation of large debts to finance the purchase of luxury goods. Yet what looks like extravagant spending may be nothing of the sort. For example, Kempson points out that many people, especially in a

recession, will suffer from low income as a result of unexpectedly losing their job. Some will have taken on financial commitments, such as a mortgage, or loans to finance home improvements or to buy furniture premised on their income remaining stable. Kempson found that most loans of this sort were for items such as cookers, washing machines and vacuum cleaners (Kempson 1994, 195). Once people lose their jobs and income paying these bills can be daunting. Staying in the family home can become very difficult, and furniture and appliances often cannot be sold for anything close to their purchase price, leading to continuing demands for payment for goods that are no longer wanted but can't be returned or sold. Those with savings will soon run them down, and debt is a very common consequence.

And once debts are occurred different outcomes are possible. Some will be able to turn to family to help, but others who are unable or unwilling to do so instead risk health further by taking on multiple jobs. Others will step outside the law, engaging in benefit fraud, not paying car tax or TV licences, or buying stolen goods (Kempson 1994, 118, 215). Most of these are 'victimless' crimes, or at least have no immediate victim, but it is not uncommon for this line to be crossed into shoplifting for food, or other forms of robbery (Kempson 1994, 286). These in turn have psychological costs, as well as the risk of being caught and sentenced. And, of course, some will turn to sex work, which, while not illegal, is nevertheless highly stigmatised and has its own risks. Kempson, for example, quotes one woman who was considering sex work but says that she would leave the country and go to Germany where she does not run the risk of being found out and shaming her children (Kempson 1994, 287).

Understanding the experience of poverty also allows us to appreciate what is so appealing about the picture that Arthur Lewis presents in the quote I started with, in which every child should have a pleasant home and good educational opportunities, adults protection against sickness and adversity, and the pensioner can take untroubled ease. Of course, no one can be free from anxiety: a child will be worried about exams or making friends; an adult falling sick or losing a job; a pensioner how to cope with the extreme change in life of no longer working. But, we can say, they are all spared the compound anxiety of how to cope financially with life's contingencies. With an adequate national health and insurance scheme, a worker will still be able to provide for his or her family even if sickness prevents work. The pensioner loses the companionship of work, but will not have to worry about the electricity being cut off because of inability to pay to the bills. And so on. Lewis depicts a society with a high safety net. For those in poverty, in the worst cases, the experience can be more like falling down into quicksand, and finding that everything you do to try to make it better makes it worse in the longer term.

3 Concepts of Poverty

To recall the purpose of this paper: I want to explore the claims made by conservatives that the cause of the low standard of living experienced by people on low incomes is a result of irresponsible behaviours, and especially forms of child

neglect. This then leads them to the two-fold policy recommendation that, first, providing poor people with more money will not help them (as much as might be expected) and, second, the situation of poor people could be significantly improved by bringing them to change their behaviours. Here I am less concerned with anti-poverty policies, which I have discussed in detail elsewhere (Wolff 2019), but on the role of choice and behaviours on poverty. I want to argue that people living on low incomes do have a measure of choice over the type of poverty they face, but much less (though not none) about whether they are in poverty. In the next section i will provide an analytical framework, inspired by Sen's capability approach, combined with empirical studies of poverty, to demonstrate my claims. But informally we can understand the issues by considering this summary from Digby Anderson, who claims that many poorer people are in difficult circumstances through their own disorganised habits. He writes:

For those 'living' as one study puts it 'on the edge' domestic incompetence can push them into lasting misery and a tangle of debt and prolonged welfare dependency. The studies also show, some of them unwittingly, that the difference between managing and failing to manage is not due simply to skills – which might be taught in a brief advice session – or even information. The families which organised their slender resources successfully display *moral* characteristics; perseverance, a willingness to go without in the short term to stay out of debt, fortitude and especially in the case of many of the wives, personal sacrifice and sustained commitment. Managing is a mix of skills, moral commitment and habits (Anderson 1991, 5).

Anderson is in a tradition of commentators who have suggested that better habits could greatly improve the standard of living of poor people, without an increase in resources. Even in 1901 Rowntree mentions diet sheets produced by good intentioned well-to-do ladies for use of the poor that are utterly unrealistic, by, for example, assuming that it is possible to have the money and the storage facilities to buy in bulk, or that one already has a pantry well-stocked with spices and condiments. Maud Pember Reeves pokes fun at the middle class visitors who preached 'the gospel of porridge' as she calls it, to women struggling on meagre resources to provide healthy nutrition for their families. As Reeves points out, women on very low incomes often also had to tend to a number of infant children, in danger of coming to great harm if left unwatched. This alone was incompatible with giving porridge the attention it needs to prevent it from spoiling as it cooked. Furthermore, milk and sugar were often beyond the means of these families, who also generally only owned one or two old and damaged saucepans. An evening meal of fish or stew would 'leave a taint' that affected the taste of porridge cooked in the same pan the following morning, rendering it too disgusting to eat (Pember Reeves 1914, 57–9). Close to 100 years later, Anderson points out that few poor people seem to make their own bread or jams, even though, he says, they have plenty of time on their hands (Anderson 1991, 18). By contrast he praises an unemployed man who goes night fishing and has a freezer full of cod (Anderson 1991, 13). (Yet one wonders whether the freezer remains full because the family has eaten all the cod they can stand.) In other words, the advice and values of the middle classes often fails to reflect the constraints under which people have to live.

In the passage quoted above Anderson is especially concerned with the distinction between managing your poverty in the sense of achieving a measure of stability in pressed circumstances, and failing to manage, which is likely to lead to chaos or a downward spiral. Yet, one has to ask, is ‘going without in the short term’ or making ‘a personal sacrifice’ a way of avoiding poverty? Or is it simply one form that poverty can take? I assume the latter, and will in the following sections set out a framework to help understand the position. This will also allow me to develop the picture further by considering how consumption within the family – and here I mean how parents spend in relation to their children – adds further complexity and reveals some common patterns.

In doing so, I will also be relying on two important distinctions. One I have already mentioned several times, the distinction between primary poverty – failing to achieve physical efficiency – and secondary poverty, as revived by Anderson and Field, which is having the means to achieve physical efficiency, but spending some of the resources on other things. Contrary to the impression that some have taken away, Rowntree does not claim that achieving physical efficiency makes possible anything like an adequate human life. Far from it:

And let us clearly understand what ‘merely physical efficiency’ means. A family living upon the scale allowed for it in this estimate must never spend a penny on railway fare or omnibus. They must never go into the country unless they walk. They must never purchase a halfpenny newspaper or spend a penny to buy a ticket for a popular concert. They must write no letters to absent children, for they cannot afford to pay the postage. ... The children must have no pocket money for dolls, marbles and sweets (Rowntree 1901, pp. 133–4).

The question of how money is, or could be, spent gives rise to a more familiar second distinction, between absolute and relative poverty. Absolute poverty can be understood along the lines of Rowntree’s idea of primary poverty, while the concept of relative poverty, which still shapes contemporary poverty research, was introduced in the following terms by Peter Townsend:

Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the types of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or at least widely encouraged or approved, in the societies in which they belong. Their resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are, in effect, excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities (Townsend 1979, 31).

The concepts of secondary and relative poverty will be important in what follows. The concept of relative poverty is open, however, to a range of interpretations. The aspect of it that I will fasten on to here is that of being ‘excluded from ordinary living patterns’, by which I will mean not be able to afford to do what is taken to be normal within your society. In this respect it is outward facing, and concerns social expectations.

4 A Framework for the Analysis of Poverty

As indicated above, I wish to introduce a framework which allows us to recognise the role of choice in the experience of poverty. Now, immediately this project faces an important objection. There is an important and impressive body of research in behavioural economics suggesting that poverty impairs the decision making process, with the result that the ‘choices’ made by people in poverty are far less ‘free’ than is commonly assumed (Mani et al. 2013; Sheehy-Skeffington and Rea 2017). Clearly this is very important when debates about poverty become moralised, and when policy options are under discussion. For present purposes, however, the relevance of this point is more limited, as my project is to look at options and the choices people actually make, without exploring whether those choices show perfect rationality or the degree to which they should be defended or criticised on moral grounds. For my limited current purposes, I can leave this vital issue to one side.

The schematic picture of poverty I shall build is inspired by Sen’s understanding of the capability approach (Sen 1983), and in particular, Sen’s idea that a person’s capability is a vector of a set of functionings, but I will render it in more intuitive terms and use the language of ‘option’ and ‘sets of options’ rather than Sen’s language of functionings and capabilities as what I say does not depend on any particular theory of well-being. I am very well aware that the abstract model I shall present leaves out of account what Daly and Kelly appealingly describe as ‘how people create rules rituals and practices to organise their lives and their relationships in a familial context’ (2015, 13). However the purpose of the model is to provide a framework by which some elements related to family poverty and choice come out clearly, rather than to provide a faithful description of the situation as a whole.

I will start with a simplified model, based on an example from Elaine Kempson of a family that has faced a dramatic fall in income and realizes it can only sustain something approaching its previous way of life by going into debt (Kempson 1994, 286). Therefore, it has to make the stark choice between ‘keeping up appearances’ (what I have been calling ‘meeting social expectations’) and ‘keeping out of debt’. Anderson and others might say that this is a basic choice between irresponsibility and responsibility, but it is not always that simple, especially when children are involved. One single mother, for example, reports that she took out a loan at high interest in order to take her children on holiday, so that when they go back to school they don’t have to say that for the summer holiday ‘we went round the garden’ (Kempson 1994, 238). The subtext is that ‘keeping up appearances’ can be critical to confidence and psychological well-being, especially for children. But at this stage I want to look at the range of options people have, rather than their reasons for choosing one set over another.

One way of representing this family’s choice is that they have to make a choice between two sets of behaviours:

1. {Not keeping up appearances, avoiding debt}
2. {Keeping up appearances, getting into debt}

This contrasts with their earlier life when they experienced a third, much more comfortable position.

3. {Keeping up appearances, avoiding debt}

Sadly, option 3 is no longer available, and so their set of feasible options has been reduced to the choice between sets 1 and 2.

Looking more deeply into the issues, however, we can see that their set of feasible options is actually larger than represented, which is to say that the family may have other so far unstated options, of varying appeal, in the sense that there are other behaviours that could allow them to both keep up appearances and avoid debt. I will continue to assume that they have no prospect of increasing regular income through the formal economy, which would generally be the preferred behavior. But nevertheless, there can be things they could do. To use examples from Kempson's discussion of other families, they might be able to run down savings, or sell goods the absence of which would not be missed by friends or neighbours. (Pawning goods is also possible, but that can be considered to be covered by 'going into debt'.) They might turn to crime, or even to sex work. There may be other possibilities too. For example Kempson describes one woman who attempted to reduce her poverty by allowing a violent partner move back in, thereby putting her personal safety at risk again (Kempson 1994, 284). But to keep the discussion within bounds, let us assume that this family has no savings, or other alternatives, and so the additional possibilities it faces are: sell goods, engage in crime, or engage in sex work. From this it follows that the statement of sets of options 1 and 2 are not complete, for each assumes that these alternatives are not taken. A fuller list of options, with the fully expanded set of behaviours now appears to be this (with the key strategy picked out in bold):

1. {**Not keeping up appearances**, avoiding debt, not selling goods, not engaging in crime, not engaging in sex work}
2. {Keeping up appearances, **getting into debt**, not selling goods, not engaging in crime, not engaging in sex work}
3. {Keeping up appearances, avoiding debt, **selling goods**, not engaging in crime, not engaging in sex work}
4. {Keeping up appearances, avoiding debt, not selling goods, **engaging in crime**, not engaging in sex work}
5. {Keeping up appearances, avoiding debt, not selling goods, not engaging in crime, **engaging in sex work**}

Anderson would ask why I have not included the further behavior 'improve management of household economy' but at this point I will leave that aside, although I will return to it shortly. It might equally be asked, however, why I haven't included the option of 'going without adequate nutrition', and that will be an option for most families, even though it may well not be sustainable over time.

The need to continue to add options suggests that while the schema just given is a useful way of representing the particular family, there is a risk that the option sets will become so large as to be unmanageable and incomparable between different

cases. Hence for theoretical purposes it would be much better to group different options into categories, to provide a more general schema. And indeed the first five categories of consumption I laid out in Sect. 2 above (leaving aside luxury goods), provide a ready made way of starting such an analysis. Those categories are:

1. Basic goods
2. Efficiency goods
3. Normal goods
4. Participation goods
5. Status goods

The first stage of analysis is to see which combinations of these goods are available on the family's resources. A family that is not in poverty will have the option of achieving an acceptable degree of all of them, whatever they, in fact, end up choosing. A family in poverty will have hard choices to make. This leads us to the second stage of analysis in which they may consider other strategies such as crime, sex work, selling possessions and so on, which I will collectively refer to as 'distress behaviours', as these are all somewhat desperate remedies, that have high cost, or high risk, and are also highly likely to affect physical and/or mental well-being. However, I will put these into two categories 'socially disapproved distress behaviours' (crime, sex work, benefit fraud) and 'socially approved distress behaviours' (selling possessions, working multiple jobs for low pay and/or at unsociable hours). Some behaviours are hard to classify. A modest interest-free loan from a family member may be a socially approved distress behavior, but a large loan from an illegal doorstep lender could be socially disapproved. Taking a government loan, but lying about what it will be used for, seems to be in borderline territory. Working cash-in-hand while on benefits is illegal, and socially discouraged, if above a certain very low limit, but working, for example, on a market stall and being paid in food is harder to classify. I do not, therefore, aim to be comprehensive, but rather to use this schema as something of an idealization.

For ease of representation, when referring to the goods or behaviours mentioned, I shall use the first initial of the category, hence the five listed categories above are b(asic), e(efficiency), n(ormal), p(articipation) and s(tatus), and the additional categories d for disapproved distress behaviours and a for approved distressed behaviours.

Let us consider again a low income family that cannot afford all of b, e, n, p, and s, unless they engage in d(issaproved distress behaviours) or a(approved distress behaviours). Let us suppose that they are not prepared to consider the distress behaviours and therefore are committed to not-d and not-a. They do have the resources to achieve basic day-to-day survival and would not think of doing without. Hence, they have chosen b. And they also, if they so decided, have enough resources to choose e rather than risk health. But this is their limit, and if they attempted to choose n, p, or s they could not achieve e. Rowntree's example of the person or family that chooses to go to the cinema but 'pays a price', could be an example. This is a useful case as going to the cinema with friends who expect you to go would be an example of a normal good, a participation good, and a status good

all in one. Hence, we can represent the family as, in effect, having to make the choice between these options in the following set of options:

1. {**b**, **e**, not-n, not-p, not-s, not-d, not-a}
2. {**b**, not-e, **n**, **p**, **s**, not-d, not-a}²

As noted they do, theoretically, have other options such as crime or sex work, but they have ruled these out, probably simply by never seriously considering them. Although this framework may seem to do little more than restate the obvious, it has the great advantage that it allows us to understand the relationship between secondary poverty and relative poverty (Wolff, [forthcoming](#)). A family that chooses 1 can be described as being in relative poverty, in that it is not engaging in behaviours that are normally expected in its society, because of its gravely limited resources. And a family that chooses 2 can be described as being in secondary poverty as it has chosen not to spend its money on physical efficiency, but on other things instead. But it avoids at least one very significant aspect of relative poverty, that of failing to meet a certain type of social expectations.³ This is interesting because the concept of relative poverty is at the heart of the progressive discourse on poverty (e.g. Dermott and Main 2018) while only conservative commentators have retained the concept of secondary poverty in words or spirit (Anderson 1991; Field 2010). Yet at bottom we can see that they are very closely related. Those in secondary poverty and those in relative poverty will very often face the same set of feasible options, but simply make different choices within that set. Hence, we can already see that choice can shape the form that poverty takes, as I suggested above. The main difference between conservative and progressive narratives appears to be this: conservatives sometimes appear to suggest that the cause of poverty is that people on low incomes sometimes choose option 2 (secondary poverty) over 1 (relative poverty) thereby ‘wasting’ valuable resources on such things as going to the cinema, whereas progressives say that the fact that people are forced to choose between 1 and 2 is the problem, and overcoming poverty requires giving people a wider range of options. If poverty is a matter of not having enough to meet your needs, the root dispute comes to what counts as a ‘need’ with conservatives taking a much narrower view.

However, in order to accommodate the conservative discourse on poverty, it is necessary to add yet another category, as touched on above, that we can call ‘improvident’ behavior, or ‘i’ in the category set. This would include very poor household management, such as buying expensive food and letting it spoil, shopping at expensive shops rather than taking a slightly longer journey to get cheap food, ignoring cheap but nutritious options, and so on. But it would also include

²Of course, while going to the cinema will provide some normal, participation and status goods, it is likely that it will still leave the family short of what is normally expected in their society. But I will leave this complication aside.

³It can be argued that it still suffers relative poverty in another respect, in that it is likely not to be meeting social expectations related to diet. This is a fair point, though in this paper I am particularly concerned with what is available to public view, and diet is much less visible than joining in group activities, for example. I thank Gottfried Schweiger for pressing this point.

spending money on alcohol or gambling to a degree that is in excess of what is reasonable on the family budget. Improvident behavior differs from buying status goods that are in the normal range for your society, but could include very extravagant status purchases, copying the life-styles of the rich.

Improvident behaviour is always possible. Sometimes it will be the result of addiction or, perhaps, mental illness, making responsibility problematic, but fully chosen improvident behaviour must surely also happen. However, many theorists have argued that there is no evidence that it is widespread among the poor (Kempson 1994; Gordon 2018; Dermott and Main 2018; Main and Bradshaw 2018). Nevertheless, the addition reminds us that for various reasons, it is important to understand that these option sets are not necessarily static. Some option sets include the possibility of improvement, in the sense of widening the future set of feasible options. Accordingly, it is equally important to add the mirror image to imprudent choices of what we could call ‘future-oriented choices’ (f), which is a type of deferred consumption in contrast to the immediate consumption choices already listed.⁴ This represents sacrifices or investments taken with the expectation that they will yield dividends in the future. Training to acquire skills is an obvious example, as is stretching the family budget to save to build up the capital for a small business.

In many cases there is uncertainty about the consequences of an option, although such uncertainty is too complex to model using the simple tools adopted so far. For example, taking a cash-in-hand job, while on benefits, will improve options in the short term, and could lead to opportunities that will provide a route out of poverty, but at the same time carries a risk of being detected, which in the worst case could lead to a prison sentence and loss of home and family. Borrowing to retrain, or to start a business, carries a great risk of leaving significant debt without positive benefits. Elsewhere I have referred to this situation as one of extreme disadvantage: where the only steps available to you to improve your situation run a significant risk of making you much worse off than you were to start with (Wolff and de-Shalit 2013).

5 Poverty and the Family

So far I have been treating the family as a ‘black box’, but of course poverty affects family members in different ways, as feminist theorists of poverty have persuasively argued (eg Bennett and Sung 2014). Children too will be affected in different ways. In a full treatment each option should be broken down with a line for each family member. So, for example, Anderson’s claim that poverty can be a result of ‘male irresponsibility’ would have a line for the male adult member of the family showing that he had chosen ‘i’ (improvidence) as well as other selfish behaviours, with other family members suffering, perhaps lacking everything except ‘b’ – sufficient consumption of basic goods to allow day to day survival, but nothing else. It would be wrong to rule this out as never happening, but the available evidence suggests it is very rare. For example, Main and Bradshaw suggest that, on the contrary, without

⁴I’m very grateful to Anna Snoek for emphasising the importance of future oriented choices.

parental sacrifice most children in poverty would be doing significantly worse than they are (2018), and Daly and Kelly tell a similar story (2015).

Kempson concurs, finding little evidence of irresponsibility in the families she studied. Gambling did take place, but was generally budgeted for and took only a small part of income. At the time she was writing football pools were pervasive, and complex to a degree that it was a type of leisure-time relaxation. Some also took part in bingo, which has a social and leisure aspect to it as well (Kempson 1994, 153). The football pools have now been replaced with the lottery, which may well lack the 'hobby' aspect of the pools or the social side of bingo. Rowntree was particularly interested in how poor people spent money on alcohol, but observed that few consumed more than a moderate amount as an understandable form of social relaxation. Kempson suggests that heavy drinking was very rare among the families she studies, although, in 1994, smoking was regarded as a normal activity and part of the family budget. For modelling purposes, therefore, irresponsible behaviour should be included, but the evidence suggests that it is rarely a significant factor. The one exception is borrowing at a high rate of interest, which can be better thought of a 'distress' behaviour.

Such debt may need separate analysis, for it does highlight the role of behaviour in escaping from poverty, at least in some circumstances. Although she does not discuss it in detail, Kempson has clear examples where people could only extract themselves from debt, and the threat of destitution, by radical behaviour change. This is confirmed by the experience of social enterprises such as Fair Money Advice, which describes its activities in the following terms:

Fair Money Advice (FMA) helps individuals regain control of their money. FMA assists with emergency debt issues, whilst also helping clients work towards long term financial stability, resilience and control. We offer clients impartial advice and support in times of financial crisis, and provide preventative financial capability programmes to strengthen financial literacy and efficacy. (Annual Report 2017).

Sometimes, if debt can be repaid or forgiven then a stable situation would be possible. This is most likely if debt is the result of a one-off misfortune. But if debt is a response to the recurrent mismatch between income and expenditure then forgiving debt will only bring temporary relief, and something else needs to change to stop the pattern repeating. It does not, however, follow that the previous spending patterns were reckless or inefficient, only that they cannot be sustained on current income. Nevertheless, money management may be the one kernel of truth in the conservative argument, where for some families a change in spending and borrowing habits will bring much-needed stability, if not an end to poverty.

But even here the picture is complex. One reason why people get into debt is for the sake of their children. I have already mentioned the single mother who borrowed money to take her child on a summer holiday. In fact, she was deceptive about the purpose of the loan (Kempson 1994, 238). This is just one of many ways in which low income parents make risky personal sacrifices for their children. Other examples include losing days of work to look after sick children, or in the summer holidays, or during unexpected teacher absences. Putting the interest of children first is very common. Examples include buying fruit only for the children to eat, as well as the

occasional higher quality snack as a treat (Kempson 1994, 111); making sure there are Christmas presents of the same type that schoolfriends are getting (130); making sure that children have decent clothes, rather than being a ‘scruffbag’ (117) or being sent home from school (40), making sure that there is an emergency electricity supply for the TV so that children can join in conversations at school (122), and the importance of going on school trips. All of these can require the further pinching of a very strained budget. Sometimes relatives can help out, for example paying for the cost of Holy Communion and Christmas and providing childcare (Daly and Kelly 2015, 113–5). Another example is taking children for a few weeks in the summer so that they get some kind of holiday. It is reported, nevertheless, that 50 per cent of families in the bottom income quintile would like, but cannot afford, to take their children on holiday for 1 week a year (Child Poverty Action Group 2018).

While it is very common for parents to make sacrifices for the children, Tess Ridge points out that the sacrifice is not always one way. Children learn not to ask for things that are difficult in order not to humiliate their parents (Ridge 2002, 140). But this has a cost in terms of how well those children will be able to enjoy what I called normal, participation and status goods. And the lack will have further effects.

Notice, however, that the examples show that parental sacrifice is made to be able to ensure that children can enjoy goods in all categories. Parents are very concerned that their children are not marked out and stigmatised as coming from a poor home, as well as being able to have the fun of joining in group activities. This is in addition to concerns about living a healthy life and not getting in trouble with the police, or being put under undue stress. In the notation used here, parents try to ensure that their children have at least a minimal threshold level of the following ideal goods and behaviours, which allows them something close to a ‘normal’ life, free of stigma. If generalised to the family as a whole it would put them above any reasonable definition of poverty: {b, e, n, p, s, not-i, f, not-d, not-a}.

When this is not possible children will react in different ways. Some will accept that they cannot do what other children, can, but others will steal (a disapproved distress behaviour) or find ways of working themselves, legally or illegally.

Empirical evidence allows us to understand more about the dynamics of families on low incomes. It suggests that ‘parents are likely to prioritise basic survival needs such as food and clothing over more social and developmental needs relating to family and children’s participation in wider society’ (Main and Bradshaw 2018, 145). And there is evidence concerning the issue of whether, as Anderson and Field suggest, somehow the irresponsible behaviours of parents are making their children poor. Indeed, government minister Ian Duncan Smith was so convinced of this explanation that he proposed giving poor families vouchers rather than cash benefits in order to cut down such alleged misuse of funds (Guardian 2014). However, there are now studies that allow us to examine the poverty of family members individually, in terms of their consumption of age-appropriate necessities. On this basis Main and Bradshaw suggest that in the UK there are 27% of households where all household members are poor, but 16% of children lived in households where the adults but not the children were poor. These, therefore, are households where adults are going without to a significant degree to ensure that their children can have access

to all necessary goods and services. And only 1% of children live in households where the children are poor but the adults are not, or, in other words, where the parents put themselves before the children (Main and Bradshaw 2018, 148). Of course, this does not prove that parental neglect does not cause child poverty, but it hardly supports the Anderson/Field position. Generally, Main and Bradshaw's analysis confirms Kempson's earlier study. Commonly observed parental sacrifices include, in increasing order: skimmed on own food (in about 23% of low income families), buying second hand clothes, wearing old clothes, not visiting hairdresser, not visiting dentist, spending less on hobbies, and cutting back on social visits (which is reported by about 60% of low income adults) (Main and Bradshaw 2018, 162).

In conclusion, we can see that various types of family poverty are possible. The main choice faced by many parents is stark. We start from the assumption that the 'ideal set' that avoids poverty for all family members is not possible. What happens next? There are three main possibilities in terms of distribution within the family. First, the parents could put themselves first. This is the Anderson, Field and Duncan Smith worry. Second, the burden could be shared by the family as a whole, and the decision will have to be made between secondary and relative poverty for the entire family, as we have seen in the examples where we did not try to disaggregate the family. Both will have costs. Finally, the parents could put the children before them, trying as best they can to provide the ideal set for the children. And we saw that this is very common. But it comes at severe cost, requiring one or both of secondary poverty or distress behaviours. In other words, parents are very commonly putting themselves in secondary poverty in order to avoid a very significant aspect of relative poverty for their children. They are, therefore putting themselves at a high level of risk for their children. Far from 'irresponsible' this could be described as 'heroic' behaviour. Indeed, what Anderson regarded as the model case that he recommends of parents making considerable sacrifices appears to be perhaps the standard case. But, as noted above, it is not a way of avoiding poverty, it is a way of being poor. It is not a replacement for expanding the set of options available to poor families.

Hence, although the conservative arguments that children are poor because of the consumption behaviour and/or poor household management of their parents is possibly true of a small number of families, the evidence in the literature is that it is very much the exception, especially regarding the claim that parents privilege themselves. While it is clear that choices can partially determine the shape of the poverty a family experiences, the literature does not support the claim that the selfish choices of parents plays any significant role in child poverty. Indeed, without substantial parental sacrifices, many more children would suffer the effects of poverty.

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Beyond the Material Wounds of Child Poverty: The Conceptualization of Child Poverty as Moral Damage



Mar Cabezas and Carlos Pitillas

Abstract In this chapter, we aim to develop a set of considerations regarding the status of child poverty as moral damage. This approach may enrich the perspectives centered on material and social aspects, by enhancing our understanding of the complexities involved in the experience of child poverty. The consideration of child poverty as a form of moral damage could offer a complementary theoretical tool to analyze how the classic binomial aggressor-victim changes its shape in systemic collective problems. Hence, the aggressor could be made of multiple hands; the damage could be understood as omission or enabling of some conditions; and the victims could be both aware or to some extent unaware of their conditions. In this sense, moral damage would work as a key concept of ethical reasoning, allowing us to identify instances of damage with and without conscious victims, as well as cases without one clear direct aggressor. Emphasizing the key role of moral damage for the ethical argumentation on child poverty may be especially useful to shift the focus to children and to their development. Thus, we will explore the mechanisms by which poverty specifically promotes parental neglect, and how this phenomenon creates developmental and intergenerational impacts that objectify, in a very concrete way, the nature of child poverty as moral damage. Based upon this exploration, we will delve into the basic lines of a resilience-centered approach to policy as a measure to make justice in the long term, which intends to protect the child's integral development, and to prevent revictimizations, in the face of adversity.

Keywords Poverty · Neglect · Childhood · Moral damage · Social justice · Prevention

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1 Introduction

Child poverty has traditionally been approached from an economic or social perspective, taking into consideration development and welfare markers of a given state (Schweiger and Graf 2015), as well as its structural aspects. However, it is a complex phenomenon that affects and modulates different interconnected aspects of a child's life. In this sense, although the aforementioned approaches are necessary and the eradication of poverty through measures focused on the lack of basic materials is also a priority, we aim to add some considerations that may enrich the understanding of child poverty and open complementary pathways to reflect upon the responsibilities related to it.

In order to accomplish this, we suggest delving into the conceptualization of child poverty under the category of moral damage. Labeling child¹ poverty as such, we hope to generate a potential fruitful path to explore the ways in which ethical considerations may enrich our understanding of this phenomenon, making more visible an individual or micro perspective, without excluding other frameworks that highlight the lack of material resources, social capital, or social justice.

Poverty is both a multi-causal phenomenon and a complex concept. As Schweiger and Graf (2015, p. 1–2) point out, the questioned nature of poverty, alongside its double nature as a descriptive and normative concept, makes it almost impossible to reach a shared definition. Moreover, child poverty exists in a wide variety of shapes, and there are some open questions concerning poverty thresholds and the boundaries between relative and absolute poverty. That being said, we will take Townsend's approach to poverty as a starting point: "Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the type of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or are at least widely encouraged or approved, in the societies to which they belong. Their resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are, in effect, excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities" (Townsend 1979, p. 31).

Our main interest here is to add some new considerations that might enrich the understanding of poverty and its effects on childhood by addressing its connection to moral damage. Concretely, we will advocate for the idea that child poverty entails an instance of moral damage *per se*. In order to accomplish this, we will firstly explore the concept of moral damage and secondly, we will defend how child poverty fulfills the criteria to be considered as such.

¹As a preliminary clarification, we will not explore the philosophical debate regarding the social construction of childhood, as doing so would surpass the scope of this chapter. For this reason, we will understand childhood as the concept that refers to the period of human life from zero to 18 years old, with an especial focus on young children and preadolescents.

2 An Approach to Moral Damage

Moral damage, as it occurs with other thick concepts (Goldie 2009) that imply some descriptive and normative traits, could be seen as a contested concept. However, some shared ideas of what an instance of moral damage is, can be found. Moral damage could be defined in general terms as a wrong coming from human actions: “the wrong that we do to each other without having to do it” (Arteta 2010, p. 24). To damage someone could be understood, following Feinberg (1984), as to treat someone wrong and, in this sense, as a violation of someone’s right. In the same line of arguments, moral damage could be labeled as “the human form of evil” (Thiebaut 2005, p. 18).

However, the assimilation of moral damage with human moral wrongness or evil could lead to tautologies as well as it would imply to delve into some ontological premises on nature evil versus human evil or even debates on theodicy, all of which would make it hard to find shared standards. Therefore, we opt for decoupling the term moral damage from the more metaphysical one of *evil*. Instead, we suggest defining it in less abstract terms, closer to human interactions and human experience. Thus, moral damage could be defined as an undeserved suffering inflicted upon (at least) another human being. It is the consequence of a human -and therefore contingent- action that could have been avoided, which tends to cause indignation and shame. In other words, moral damage would be the consequence of “intentionally inflicting pain and suffering on another human being, against her will” (Vetlesen 2005, p. 2). In this sense, the aggressor must be an agent who is susceptible for being charged responsible for the consequences of their actions. Moreover, the victim should be a subject with moral standing or moral consideration,² that is, someone whose wellbeing is morally relevant,³ someone who deserves to be well treated or respected. Hence, an abuse by human hands of a morally relevant subject generates feelings of indignation as well as rage, fear and shame, both in the victim and the moral spectator.⁴

Accidents, natural catastrophes and harm executed by beings that cannot be held morally responsible for their actions, such as non-human animals, would surpass the scope of moral damage. Non-moral agents cannot be charged with moral responsibility and moral intention, for we cannot demand them to have acted in a different way. Such would be the case, for example, of the lion that aims to harm you in order to get something.

²A deeper analysis on moral status and moral consideration can be found in Goodpaster (1993).

³We are aware of the open debate on the limits of the moral community and who deserves moral consideration, namely humans, non-human animals, nature, etc. The work developed by Velayos-Castelo (1996), as well as Tugendhat (1997), provides an in-depth look of these positions, from anthropocentric views to the deep ecology movement. However, given that the implementation of the idea of moral damage in this chapter is only concerned with child poverty, a deeper analysis would surpass the purpose of our main thesis here.

⁴A good study on the relation between damage, wrongness and moral emotions can be found in Nichols (2004).

Given that moral damage is the consequence of human actions (or omissions), it is by nature contingent, avoidable and unnecessary. Moreover, from a moral point of view, the occurrence of moral damage breaks the assumption of reciprocity and recognition between human beings. In this sense, moral damage would refer to that type of suffering that “does not need to happen and that, with different agents and motives, would not have happened” (Arteta 2010, p. 24–25). It becomes something contingent that “should not have existed” (Thiebaut 2005, p. 25) in a normative sense.

When the focus is on the agent, actions involved in moral damage can be collective or individual. When the focus is on the type of action, they can be direct, indirect, or omissions. This is key for a consideration of the place of moral damage with respect to poverty, as we will develop in what follows.

Finally, with regard to the suffering involved in moral damage, this may be physical, but it is at least always psychological at some level, as it implies both the violation of the assumption of reciprocity and recognition, and the violation of some explicit or implicit rule on how the person should be treated. In this sense, humiliations, broken promises, betrayals, lies, apart from physical violent aggressions, would be examples of moral damage. As such, moral damage would be, following now psychological terminology, a form of victimization (Finkelhor 2008).

3 Child Poverty as an Instance of Moral Damage

We will now shift the focus towards child poverty, in order to answer the question on whether child poverty fulfills the conditions to be considered a case of moral damage.

For an event to be considered an instance of moral damage:

1. The aggressor should be a moral agent, being so the result of human actions;
2. The event has to be the result of an intentional act; and
3. The victim should be morally relevant.

The first criterion, the harm being the result of human actions, and the second one on intentionality are deeply interwoven, and key in order to establish responsibilities.

Child poverty is the result of a specific human way of organizing resources and the access to them. Nevertheless, one might argue that there is no intention of denying resources or deprivation in child poverty.

This line of arguments would lead to the debate of the “harmless torturers” (Parfitt 1984). Similarly to the case in which an act can be morally incorrect despite the absence of harm (there is no victim), an act could be morally incorrect despite the apparent absence of an agent, as long as it is part of a complex network of consented and tolerated acts that do harm someone.

In this sense, the same action, analyzed out of context, would not be wrong or morally relevant *per se*, but when analyzed inside a given social context, this same action may acquire a qualitative different sense, meaning and range, as long as it is part of that system. This would be the case of the aggregation of omissions and indirect actions that tend to perpetuate child poverty or at least enable its chronification.

In other words, “this gap between the (almost or perhaps entirely) harmless singular act and the harmful performance of the same act by many spells trouble for the moral evaluation of these acts and for assigning responsibility” (Spiekerman 2014, p. 75). As a kind of *Frankenstein*, the parts may not be incorrect, but the result of adding all of them is in fact a perversion. Thus, speaking of moral damage instead of moral wrongness/correctness may help visualize the sometimes-invisible connections between aggressors, victims, and damage, which may go unnoticed when context and relationships are complex. Such would be the case of multiple-hands damage. As Spiekerman states, “in an increasingly crowded and interactive world, there are more and more ways to harm people in an indirect way” (2014, p. 75). This would be the case of child poverty.

Although it might be hard to recognize, child poverty is not an accident, but the sum of human actions, omissions, and decisions in a given system. When structural systematic problems are the case, it might be harder to identify a single responsible hand. However, this relative ‘anonymity’ of the causing agents does not mean that the damage is of a non-human nature. Instead, the responsibility may be extended through a collection of events, and the hand that holds the weapon (using a metaphor from Scarry 1985) may be made of many hands.

In relation now to the second criterion (intentionality), it would be hard to label child poverty as moral damage, if by intentional we only contemplate actions that pursue a desired outcome. On the contrary, if also collateral, predictable effects of one’s actions are considered as intentional, although unwanted, then child poverty would be a clear case of moral damage. Being aware of the potential – and, to some extent, predictable- consequences of one’s actions, and consciously acting (or omitting an action that would prevent the consequences) may be sufficient to categorize an act as intentional - not as a synonymous of wanted, but as a synonymous of non-accidental. The difficulty in assessing intention to agents involved in child poverty may lie in the fact that, here, moral damage is closely related to omissions or neglect, rather than direct actions. Child poverty has a lot to do with omissions that deprive the child of the necessary supervision and/or attention for her development, and with basic needs that go unmet. Thus, it would entail any omission of physical and psychological care of the child that can cause an instance of moral damage through physical, cognitive, emotional and social damage, such as the abandonment of functions of supervision and care related to health and hygiene, custody, food or education.

Assigning intention to negligent behaviors might result problematic to some approaches, moreover when neglect is of a social or structural nature, instead of being the result of a single person’s actions and omissions. Nevertheless, the difficulty in recognizing individual responsibilities in collective problems might be

due, among other reasons, and beyond the philosophical debate on intentionality, to the fact that “power is cautious. It covers itself. It bases itself in another’s pain and prevents all recognition that there is “another” by looped circles that ensures its own solipsism” (Scarry 1985, p. 59).

In this sense, the idea of *enabling* (Barry et al. 2014), both in the sense of allowing and facilitating, is crucial to show how child poverty entails an instance of moral damage.

Given the fact that the determination of responsibility is largely linked to the causal relationship between the action of the agent and the result, and not only to the agent’s desired intention, the distinction between action, omission and facilitation of moral damage becomes clarifying. Between causing an instance of moral damage, letting it happen and preventing it, one can enable it. This category would indeed help seeing how child poverty entails a case of moral damage and fulfills the first criterion, even if many agents of justice cannot be found responsible of causing it in a direct active way. To put it in a nutshell, one enables an instance of moral damage when one’s behavior is linked to the final damage in a relevant – although indirect-way. The causal line is less clear than in other direct relationships of aggressor-victim and cause-effect. Therefore, the attribution of responsibilities vanishes among all the agents involved, so that child poverty would be a type of moral damage that implies a sum of cases of neglect.

With regards now to the third criterion, it is undeniable that children are morally relevant and belong to the moral community, that is, they are beings with recognized basic rights and moral status, and deserve consideration, so that whatever one does to them is relevant. Another question would be if one argued that, in order to be a victim, you have to be aware of your condition as such or have a reference framework that enables comparisons. This would mean that there is no damage in cases where the potential victim does not recognize herself as such.

One could argue that, especially in cases of absolute poverty or cases where the victim lacks other experiences to compare with or other expectations, it would be hard to defend that there is a case of moral damage involved since, in order to label something as moral damage, a victim is required.

It is our view that, when it seems that there is moral damage without a victim, these are examples of a double victimization, which involves both damage and the lack of awareness of it (Cudd 2006). Thus, an analysis of child poverty through the lens of moral damage may help visualize the instances of epistemic injustice (Fricker 2007) and active ignorance (Medina 2013), which perpetuate the asymmetry involved in child poverty, especially when the victim lacks the symbolic and narrative resources to consider herself as such. Once the three criteria to recognize moral damage are applied to the analysis of certain situations, many cases of both testimonial and hermeneutical injustice may easily arise without requiring the subjective evaluation of the victim as such, on the one hand, and without requiring the acceptance of any ontological position defending moral objectivism, on the other hand.

In this sense, moral damage would fulfill the previous criteria and work as a key concept of ethical reasoning on child poverty, allowing us to identify cases with and

without conscious victims, as well as cases without one clear direct aggressor. Being child poverty a systemic collective problem and, at the same time, a phenomenon with a tremendous impact on children's lives, the consideration of child poverty as a form of moral damage could offer a complementary theoretical tool to analyze how the classic binomial aggressor-victim changes its shape in systemic collective problem, as we have tried to argue throughout this section.

Likewise, emphasizing the key role of moral damage for the ethical argumentation on child poverty may be especially useful to shift the focus to the child and to his/her development. It would be a way of denouncing and making explicit how both forms of poverty harm the child's identity in a deep sense, even if some basic material needs are met, or when the child does not perceive the situation as somehow harmful given a lack of other previous experiences or a reference to establish comparison. Therefore, an approach focused on moral damage could help advocate for interventions based on resilience as a complementary tool to make justice and to avoid the perpetuation of poverty (as well as some corrosive forms of paternalism), as we will advocate for in the following sections.

4 Objectivizing the Wound: The Psychological Trace of Moral Damage in Child Poverty

Understanding child poverty as moral damage helps us understand that measures against child poverty must not only deal with the redistribution of material goods, the minimization of threats, and the guaranteeing of equal respect to the citizens' interest in their well-being (Cabezas 2016). Agents of justice should also provide specific measures to recover or rebuild identities that have been damaged morally.

This is to say that the implementation of the principle of justice, in an inclusive sense, should include a long-term perspective, that is, measures focused on providing the agent the tools to lead the life she or he desires. In this sense, measures focused on resilience should not be perceived as contrary to distribution-centered measures, since resilience reinforces autonomy and recovery from psychosocial harm.

In turn, understanding moral damage in relation to some sort of psychological suffering, as we will develop in this section, may help include the non-material aspects of child poverty in the agenda of measures against poverty and in favor of social justice. If moral damage is understood in terms of psychological suffering (from the point of view of the victim) and neglect (from the point of view of the actor's responsibilities), and not only connected with moral wrongness, then the trace of moral damage would be more visible, objectively determinable and changeable, which is key to address a problem of social justice and implement measures.

Needless to say, an event becomes a matter of social justice if it is objectively determinable and bears social influence, that is, if it is socially changeable (Anderson 2010). The first criterion allows including shared standards beyond subjective preferences, whilst the second one allows tracking the efficiency of a given measure

as well as it helps distinguishing accidents and natural catastrophes -which would be outside the scope of social justice- from negative or tragic events that are linked to human actions, which are controllable and changeable through some measures (Cabezas et al. 2014). For this reason, once moral damage is measurable, objectively determined or somehow materialized, understanding child poverty as an instance of moral damage may enrich us in two ways. First, by enabling us to ascertain it's the non-material aspects of poverty that impact upon the person's well-being, what a person deserves and how a person should be treated at an individual level. Second, by promoting a discussion around what we owe each other at a social level, as well as the incorporation of those aspects in the social justice agenda.

In the interest of implementing preventive and non-material measures in favor of social justice, moral damage could be tracked in view of whether a phenomenon resulting from human action increases or diminishes the psychological suffering of the victim. This does not imply that any suffering entails a moral damage. Rather, it only points out that, as previously mentioned, any moral damage implies some sort of psychological suffering to the victim. In this sense, the trace of moral damage in child poverty, beyond its material aspects, could become tangible through its psychological cognitive, social and emotional effects. These effects, in turn, can be measurable, alleviated and prevented as required in order to implement social justice measures.

Bearing in mind that suffering an instance of moral damage implies to some degree the breakage of basic moral principles such as trust, reciprocity, and the recognition as someone valuable, we will now shift the focus into useful ways to track the trace of moral damage in child poverty in an objective way.

One of the ways by which poverty creates moral damage upon children, is by the distortion of the early attachment relationships between parents (or other primary caregivers) and child, where dynamics of basic care and protection take place. In this sense, child poverty is a form of structural neglect that reaches to the child through her primary caregivers. In the context of poverty, dynamics of care within the family may be transformed into dynamics of disengagement, threat, and abandonment. In the following lines, we will explore the mechanisms by which poverty specifically promotes parental neglect, and how this phenomenon creates developmental damages that objectify, in a very specific way, the nature of child poverty as moral damage.

Poverty incorporates into the lives of parents an excess of demands (raising children, facing unemployment, making ends meet, etc.), combined with multiple sources of danger (violence, stigmatization, isolation, etc.), which also tend to be combined with deprivations in material and social capital (money, knowledge, community and extended family support, etc.). In a multi-stressful context such as the one just described, the allocation of parents' attentional resources can become inconsistent and unpredictable: parents have so much to attend to, that they care for the child inconsistently. This allocation of parental resources usually depends upon the dangers that are most salient at each moment, and not upon the child's needs (e.g., mother leaves the baby crying at home because she needs to run to the food bank before it's closed). Thus, the competition between contextual cues (which indicate different sources of danger or multiple tasks) interferes with parents' ability

to prioritize the child's needs and provide consistent care. As a result, different levels of parental neglect may emerge: the child becomes invisible (extreme neglect); the child receives insufficient care (partial neglect); or the child receives care that is inconsistent and unpredictable (intermittent neglect).

In the context of parental neglect provoked by poverty, some of the child's basic psychological needs (being protected from danger, being soothed from pain and distress, obtaining support, receiving social stimulation, etc.) go unattended. Especially, the child finds herself alone to face emotional states that are difficult and she cannot manage with autonomy: hunger, anxiety, fear or anger are some examples. The child faces the paradox of needing help when it is inaccessible, or of needing to be protected from harm by the very figures that are causing it (in the form of neglect). The resulting experience of helplessness creates a traumatic effect, which very easily may derange some aspects of the child's psychological development, bringing about chronic problems of social adaptation, or pathology.

The most immediate and powerful effect of neglect upon development consists of a rupture in the sense of basic trust (Erikson 1950) that supports adaptation and psychological growth in human beings. According to Erikson, the first developmental crisis individuals must face is one in which there is a conflict between trust and mistrust. During this stage, the child is uncertain about the world where she lives. To resolve these feelings of uncertainty, the child looks towards her primary caregiver for stability and consistency of care. If the care provided to the child is consistent, predictable and reliable, she will develop a sense of trust that will carry with her to other relationships, and will provide a future basis of psychological security in the face of stress or threat. In face of parental neglect brought about by poverty, the child is unable to develop a sense of trust in the environment as a source of care, and in oneself as a social agent capable of generating changes in the environment.

Basic mistrust is one of the structural elements that, in the long term, may sustain social exclusion and contribute to the perpetuation of poverty. It may help explain why adults who suffer from poverty and/or social exclusion may find it difficult to benefit from support and counseling provided by professional services: basic mistrust interferes with the use of the professional as a reliable source of information, and as a secure base that may facilitate personal growth. Also, it may shed some light on the difficulty experienced by some individuals to profit from economic, training and job opportunities: basic mistrust in oneself leads the person to feel hopeless even in the face of a context of new opportunities. Finally, the absence of trust may interfere with the adult's ability to provide care when he/she becomes a parent, thereby contributing to the intergenerational repetition of neglect and the circle of poverty.

These are only some examples of the pervasive developmental effects of neglect and the ensuing sense of social mistrust, which in a very clear way materialize the status of poverty as moral damage. Hence, these effects show how moral damage during childhood could be materialized through the fracture of basic trust, and social, cognitive, and emotional development, which are effects that (1) are present in child poverty, (2) go beyond the lack of material resources, (3) entail a tangible

impact on the wellbeing and well-becoming of the child, and (4), as a result of human interactions, are changeable, and susceptible to improve through child sensitive specific measures.

5 Promoting Resilience as a Measure against Moral Damage

As already argued, emphasizing the key role of moral damage for the ethical argumentation on child poverty may be especially useful to shift the focus to the child and to her development, which could lead to child-centered approaches, without dismissing economic measures. In our view, measures oriented only to repairing the material aspects may eradicate one source of damage while leaving the other sources of damage unattended. These other sources of damage, of a relational nature (and linked to early emotional neglect), may modulate the child's present and future, as we have shown in the previous section. Moreover, short-term measures oriented to rebalance the material deprivations without paying attention to the psychological effects of this type of moral damage could be seen as paternalistic, as well as they could lead to victimizations, since they would fail in seeing the whole picture in terms of the impact of poverty on a child's self-relation. Other measures based upon our knowledge of the developmental impact of poverty, could help break the circle of poverty, as they focus on the person's early relational environment, and her skills. They could also lead to the reconstitution of the person's identity, and self-esteem.

As a result, in this section we will advocate for person-centered measures around child poverty. Concretely, we will argue in favor of the promotion of resilience in children as a strategy to counteract the effects related to moral damage. The following measures would help prevent the perpetuation of damage and double victimizations in the context of child poverty.

Firstly, it is important to highlight that not every child exposed to poverty-related neglect shows dysfunction or psychopathology. This is due to resilience. Variable levels of resilience (i.e. children's ability to recover normal levels of social and psychological functioning after being exposed to adversity) have in fact been proven across a wide array of studies (Cicchetti 2010; Cyrulnik 2005; Gewirtz and Edleson 2007; Werner 1993). Hence, resilience demonstrates that some children may be able to cope with poverty and neglect related to it, flexibly adapt to these sources of adversity, and even build strengths out of difficult experiences. This does not mean that those children who coped better have not suffered an instance of moral damage. On the contrary, this is important for the measures we will advocate for, since resilience can be a key ability to surpass or alleviate the deepest aspects of the damage suffered.

Results across a variety of studies show that resilience may be composed of three interrelated dimensions (Gewirtz and Edleson 2007; Cyrulnik 2005; Gray et al. 2015; O'Donnell et al. 2002): the level of risk and its cumulative nature (multiple sources of adversity tend to diminish the child's resilience); the child's personal characteristics (temperament, social competence, intellectual abilities, etc.); and the efficacy of protective processes that surround the child and may buffer the impact of

adversity (quality of parent-child relationships, relationships with peers, mentors, the school setting, etc.).

Factors belonging to these three dimensions interact with each other and point to the importance of integrating the complex, multi-layered nature of resilience into the design of intervention programs against child poverty, if these interventions aim to make justice to children in poverty in an integral way.

In line with this, Masten and Coatsworth (1998) posit that intervention strategies should belong to three different categories: (a) risk-focused (focusing on reducing or preventing risk and its impact); (b) protection-focused (adding resources to counterbalance risk); and (c) process-focused (promoting processes that underlie competence in children). Examples of risk-focused strategies entail the traditional way of dealing with poverty and might include economic and policy measures to reduce poverty; legal strategies that reduce exposure to neglect and its effects; or the development of urban projects that promote integration and accessibility of resources. Protection-focused strategies might include protocols for the notification of situations of neglect affecting poor children; the deployment of protective responses (i.e. separating children from neglectful parents); crisis intervention and psychological first aid; among others.

Although the two first types of measures are crucial, we will now focus on the relevance of the third type of interventions, due to its direct impact on the less visible effects of moral damage, and given the fact that many of the mentioned effects may modulate the child's life both in the short and long term. As moral damage breaks reciprocity, recognition and trust, within this last category, attachment-centered interventions aimed at enhancing positive relationships between parents and children may be of special relevance, regarding the subject of this chapter. A number of programs designed for working with parents in high-risk contexts have shown promise in the reduction of violent and neglectful parental practices (see Zeanah 2009). Parents (or other primary caregivers), as agents of justice for children, play a central role in the impact and depth of the wounds related to child poverty. Therefore, interventions focused on strengthening secure attachment within the family or the community may reduce the sense of threat and helplessness, which could lead to feelings of agency and autonomy, and alleviation from the feelings of shame and vulnerability that stem from suffering an instance of moral damage, as it is the case of child poverty and social exclusion. Likewise, identity-related interventions as an essential part of social justice measures against child poverty could help children revise their self-concept and their social position within their family or larger groups (peers, community), which could help build a strong, healthy sense of oneself and one's worthiness. Moreover, these interventions would leave space to cultural and casuistic differences, as they entail a flexibility that other economic measures would not be able to provide. Other examples of process-oriented strategies might include the promotion of adapted school curricula; measures for the integration of the children into wider communities; and the improvement of their social skills, among others. In general, this third level of intervention is the one most closely related to the promotion of resilience, insofar as

it includes measures that aim to provide the child and/or her caregiving environment with skills that promote healthy social, emotional and identity development.

It should be noted that interventions with families living in high-risk contexts and poverty are delicate and full of risks. As it has been stated above, most adults who develop as parents in contexts of extreme poverty have developed a sense of helplessness and inefficacy as caregivers. Therefore, in order not to perpetuate some forms of moral damage in form of humiliation, shame or undervalue, interventions should also be strength-based, and primarily focused on detecting, reflecting and enhancing parental capacities (versus deficit-focused approaches). Strength-based approaches aim to build a collaborative relationship between the family and the professional by detecting and reflecting upon the caregivers' abilities (e.g. instead of beginning intervention by highlighting the risks associated to leaving the baby alone at home while running to the food bank, this approach would start by celebrating the mother's investment on her child's and the family's nutrition. A strength-based approach also helps adults build a project of parenting upon their experiences of good care within relationships, instead of solely focusing on parental unresolved trauma and parental insecurity (e.g. conversations are often centered around 'what was good about my upbringing', 'what aspects of the care that I received I would like to pass on to my children', etc.). Finally, strength-based approaches capitalize on natural processes and networks of mutual support and understanding that exist in the community. Hence, group interventions where families share experiences and advice, and where dynamics of mutual recognition and emotional support take place, are highly recommended; these interventions also promote the prevention of social isolation among poor families.

Besides their evident benefits, the implementation of these measures would promote the belief that these children deserve something better and are able to have an impact on their own life. However, it is noticeable how the general tendency has been to approach different problems, such as low school performance, violence, lack of attention, etc., as unrelated issues, forgetting to see the person as a whole. These measures may get us closer to breaking the circle of poverty.

6 Conclusion

To conclude, we would like to highlight some probable benefits of approaching child poverty, not only as an economic structural problem, but also as an instance of moral damage.

Firstly, if this framework had an impact on public opinion, it could drastically change the prejudices associated to poverty, it could lead to a better comprehension of this experience and it could also help visualize the collective responsibilities involved not only in direct active behaviors, but also in systemic injustices where omissions play a key role in terms of victimizations.

Secondly, setting the focus on the relation between moral damage and poverty, could also serve as an explicit response to criticisms in relation to the relevance of

relative poverty in comparison to absolute poverty. That is, one might think that, as the welfare system does not normally lead to child mortality in affluent countries, relative child poverty does not really imply a severe violation of children's rights. In fact, one could defend, some basic standards are granted as these children have theoretically access to education and basic health care (Axford 2012), so that relative child poverty would become a secondary issue. Nevertheless, we have tried to show, by exploring the non-material wounds of child poverty, how both forms of poverty imply a case of moral damage to the child, with potential developmental and intergenerational impacts, even if some basic material needs are met.

Finally, as we have tried to defend, due to the connection between moral damage, poverty and psychological suffering, this understanding could lead to more integral policies where psychological and material support are both essential. In this sense, we have advocated for an implementation of mental health, resilience-centered measures, and an increase in the awareness of their key role. This, in turn, could help establish an inclusive vision on the problem in terms of policy design, to both prevent and alleviate the impact of poverty on children.

When poverty is approached not only as a side-effect of a given economic system, or as a problem related to the lack of material and social capital, but as a type of moral damage with a tremendous impact on the child personal development, then the justification and the understanding of the need for mental health preventive and therapeutic measures as a matter of justice may become clearer.

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Part II
Children and Families Living in Poverty

Making Them Strong? Vulnerability and Resilience in Poor Children



Alexander Bagattini and Rebecca Gutwald

Abstract The main purpose of our paper consists in establishing the idea that the negative consequences that result from child poverty can be mitigated if the government and social workers promote the resilience of poor children. We use Amartya Sen's capability approach as an evaluative framework to argue for this thesis. By distinguishing different sources of vulnerability we assume that children are inherently vulnerable, because they are dependent and in need of care. Poor children are, however, even more vulnerable in specific ways. Following Catriona Mackenzie, we call these vulnerability "pathogenic"; they are caused by social arrangements like institutional settings. We claim that at least some of those vulnerabilities can and should be diminished by promoting children's resilience. We proceed in three steps. In the first part of the paper, we develop our concept of vulnerability and explain how child poverty renders children vulnerable to specific harms. Here we also introduce the capability approach by asking which capabilities children need for coping with this situation. In part two we argue that the concept of resilience helps us to understand why capabilities (and not resources or abilities) are relevant for coping with the adverse effects of child poverty. We claim that promoting the capabilities of children is a matter of justice, and that implementing resilience is, too. It is also highly important to see that promoting resilience is mainly a social matter, not a task the individual child has to fulfil on its own. Hence, we argue that children are entitled to gain those capabilities that promote their resilience against the adverse effects of poverty. In part three we discuss several difficulties of our account, such as the danger that children will be burdened with coping with the effects of poverty instead of society fighting poverty.

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Keywords Vulnerability · Resilience · Capability approach

1 Introduction

Child poverty is a worldwide issue that occurs not only in undeveloped countries but in highly developed and rich parts of the world as well, such as Europe or Northern America. According to the social report of the European Union (EU) of 2007, more than 19% of children in Europe live in poverty (based on household income, European Commission 2007). No one denies that poverty has many adverse effects on the people suffering from it, no matter how poverty is defined, e.g. as mere monetary deprivation or as a more comprehensive form of disadvantage. We will say more below on how we understand poverty with regard to vulnerability in children. However, even if one uses a rather narrow definition of poverty as lack of monetary resources, it can hardly be denied that the people affected are statistically less healthy, less educated, less happy and more concerned by social and familial problems. One does not need a demanding conception of poverty disadvantages those suffering from it and that any adequate conception of justice has to address it in some way. This is even more pressing in the case of children. Children are at least less competent than adults when it comes to facing the effects of poverty. Moreover, children are passively exposed to the conditions they live in and not responsible for it. Taking into account the adverse effects of child poverty there is, therefore, a strong rationale for claiming that children should be protected from those effects. This paper investigates a specific idea for doing so.

The main thesis of this paper is that many adverse effects of child poverty could be mitigated by promoting the resilience of children. Our background assumption is that child poverty renders children vulnerable in specific regards. We argue that at least some of those vulnerabilities that are linked to childhood poverty can be mitigated by promoting children's resilience. In the first part of the paper we develop the concept of vulnerability and explain how children are specifically vulnerable and how this vulnerability is a concern of social justice. In part two, we will define poverty as a form of capability deprivation, and ask which capabilities children need for coping with this situation. We argue that the concept of resilience helps us to understand why capabilities are relevant for coping with the adverse effects of child poverty. We claim that promoting the capabilities of children is a matter of justice, and that implementing resilience is thus mainly a social matter, not a task the individual child has to fulfil on its own. Hence, we argue that children are entitled to gain those capabilities that promote their resilience against the adverse effects of poverty as capability deprivation. In part three we discuss several difficulties of our account, such as the danger that children will be burdened with coping with the effects of poverty instead of society fighting poverty.

2 Vulnerability and Child Poverty

2.1 *What Is Vulnerability?*

Vulnerability is a critical concept. Contrary to traditional conceptions of justice - where the liberal subject plays a key role - the concept of vulnerability draws on human needs and the constitution of humanity as such. In this paper we advocate that persons do not inhabit those empty social spaces that are presumed in liberal accounts of justice. Furthermore, people depend on specific social relations that they, at least sometimes, do not choose themselves. Persons like children, elderly or very ill persons, and some severely disabled persons need special care. In the case of those people the liberal call for personal freedom seems to be unjust because they are not able to make equal use of it. Hence, social justice needs to be realized by (re)arranging social institutions in a way to reduce human vulnerability. In this vein, authors like Martha Nussbaum, Alasdair MacIntyre or Martha Fineman argue that the concept of vulnerability should play a central role in any theory of justice (Macintyre 2001; Nussbaum 2006; Fineman 2008). They do so because they take vulnerability as an essential feature of the human condition. Hence, according to these authors, any egalitarian account of justice is in some way confronted with the question of how to deal with the situation of the vulnerable. Pointing to those universal features of vulnerability (meaning features that are inherent to the ontological condition of humans) is, however, not sufficient. As Robert Goodin points out in his book *Protecting the Vulnerable*, many forms of vulnerability are “created shaped, or sustained by existing social arrangements [that are not] wholly natural” (Goodin 1985, 191). The upshot of Goodin’s critique is that mere pointing to human vulnerability is susceptible to neglecting circumstances that depend on social arrangements and that render persons vulnerable. In other words: the social arrangements that we construct to help those in dire need can themselves produce vulnerabilities. Consider the situation of children having been removed from their families because of maltreatment. In such cases children typically will become institutionalized in a protector. However, this leads to situations which make children vulnerable to their new situation, for example when being stigmatized as “home-children”, inasmuch as they lack persons they feel attached to, or simply because they have been removed from their familiar environments. In some cases the institutional setups might be even worse for children than the sort of maltreatment they suffered at their homes. In such cases we would clearly face social arrangements that, as Goodin puts it, create new forms of vulnerability for children.

Hence, a thorough analysis of the concept of vulnerability needs to take account for different sources of vulnerability. Such an analysis has been proposed in two recent papers by Catriona Mackenzie and Susann Dodds (Mackenzie 2013; Dodds 2013). Both distinguish *three different sources of vulnerability*: inherent vulnerability, situational vulnerability and pathogenic vulnerability. Some sources of vulnerability are part of our human nature. This is why they are called *inherent sources* of vulnerability. According to Mackenzie “we should expect from the just society [...]

that its social and political structures are responsive to and mitigate the effects of inherent vulnerabilities [...]” (Mackenzie 2013). Examples mentioned by Mackenzie are: universal health care, social welfare support, and subsidized child-care. In contrast to inherent sources of vulnerability, *situational sources* of vulnerability are brought about by social and environmental factors like certain institutional norms or economic and ecological crisis. In such situations, vulnerability is due to human behavior, which may or may not be unjust towards the subjects of vulnerability. For instance, environmental crises like storms or earthquakes may be linked to injustice, e.g. because the population that is their victim may not have enough resources to cope due to global inequalities, but these events are not inherently unjust. Other cases of situational vulnerability, however, are brought about by social arrangements that are unjust per se, such as discrimination or oppression. Hence, their causes are unjust. To distinguish them from situational vulnerabilities they will be called *pathogenic sources* of vulnerability. Pathogenic vulnerability is a subclass of situational vulnerability because it is caused by social arrangements like institutional settings. But it is a specific form of situational vulnerability, since its sources are located in injustices as such.

To see how these distinctions work, let us again consider a child that has been removed from his or her family. All children are inherently vulnerable insofar as they lack competencies like foresight, risk assessment, or emotional stability. Hence they need the attention of their caregivers. If the caregivers, however, fail to come up to the needs of the children they are supposed to care for, children become situationally vulnerable. This situational vulnerability is a case of pathogenic vulnerability if it is created by sources that are themselves unjust. Consider the case of child poverty. If caregivers are not able to care for their children in an appropriate way because they simply lack the economic means to do so, we are faced with a situation when the child is vulnerable, but this vulnerability is due to unjust causes. Or consider, once again, the example of the “institutionalized child” that suffers from inappropriate treatment at a children’s home. Again, this would be a case of situational vulnerability, since the child has already been removed from its home. But furthermore, the vulnerability of the child is intensified on a qualitative and quantitative level if it is not adequately treated at the institution that is supposed to protect its interests. We can call this situation pathogenic because unjust rules of our institutional arrangements render situations for children which make them more vulnerable. Those rules are unjust if they violate basic sufficientarian principles according to which all children should have access to at least a certain adequate amount of goods that are important for their well-being and development.

2.2 Vulnerable Children

Childhood is arguably one of the most vulnerable periods of human life. Children are highly dependent on others to satisfy their basic needs, and this makes them particularly vulnerable. This is, of course, true for other stages of life as well. Many

elderly people, for example, are not able to care for themselves, and some severely disabled people are not either. However, they are at least in principle entitled to choose the persons that care for them. The situation of children is categorically different insofar as they do not start, as elder people normally do, from a position in which they are autonomous, i.e. entitled to make their own decisions about their course of life. Children are dependent on decisions that others make for them right from start. This seems to be the most salient source of children's vulnerability. All societies need to take account of this feature of childhood which can best be called the *fact of dependency*. While the fact of dependency is an inherent source of children's vulnerability, the respective societal arrangements for coping with this fact are not. These arrangements might, as in the ancient conception of *patria potestas*, be completely in favor of parental (paternal) prerogatives. Nevertheless, even here we can speak at least of an institutional standard, namely the complete neutrality of the state in educational questions. Contrary to the doctrine of *patria potestas*, most contemporary legal systems have implemented what David Archard calls the *liberal standard* (Archard 2004, 153). According to the liberal standard, the parents have the right to care for their children. The state, however, is not completely neutral concerning the way in which parents raise their children. Rather, the concept of custody is best understood as entailing parental *duties* to the same extent as the *right* to raise one's children. In accordance with this model of child-raising, the state interferes with parental prerogatives in the context of education if parents neglect their parental duties. Hence, the liberal standard can be considered a situational source of children's vulnerability. Many people endorse the liberal standard, due to its function to protect children's interests while, at the same time, it treats child-raising as a private matter (within families). Nonetheless, some authors consider the liberal standard a source of unjust disadvantages for children growing up in dysfunctional families (Archard 2004; Exenberger and Juen 2014). If the state's intervention with parental prerogatives comes only *after* the parents have been convicted for child-maltreatment, the maltreated child has already suffered from parental misconduct other children do not experience. This seems to be unjust and leads to the question if the liberal standard might even be a pathogenic source of children's vulnerability. Because any answer to this question is far too presuppositional for the limited space of this paper, we will focus on the very specific topic of child poverty.

Are children from poor families more vulnerable or vulnerable in very specific regards? To answer this question in more detail we first need to understand what poverty means. Since conceptualizing poverty is a tricky matter, we will devote more attention to it in the following sections, using the capability approach as a basis of a plausible concept of child poverty, by using a conventional definition of poverty as lack of resources in a household (as e.g. in European Commission 2007). Due to their dependency, children's well-being and development depends largely on their parent's behavior. If parents lack economic resources themselves, their children run the risk of being in a disadvantaged situation compared to children from better-off families. Still, this does not tell us enough about the problematic effects of poverty as a matter of social justice. If we understand poverty in a conventional

way as mere absence of material resources in a child's household, questions of vulnerability arise only with regard to this form of deprivation. For sure, there is a material side of vulnerability which should not be denied, but it needs to be carefully analyzed how far the material dimension creates vulnerability. Focusing on the material lacks can thus be seen as (only) a first step to analyzing child poverty. We draw two tentative conclusions here, that we will use as a starting point for the discussion of child poverty below.

First (and obviously), children from poor families have less economic support than children from higher-income-families. Hence, children from poor families are more limited in respect of the fulfillment of their desires, which may be seen as a kind of vulnerability. This point has of course no normative relevance per se. Justice certainly does not require that persons (children included) are supplied with all the goods to fulfill all of their desires. It is different with their basic needs though. There seems to be a certain economic threshold for the provision of goods for children that any conception of justice has to endorse in our view. We will deal with this point in more detail in the next section. The next (and less obvious) way in which children from poor families are more vulnerable than children from higher income families concerns the habits and naturalness of discriminating and unhealthy behavior of the parents. Consider, for example, the studies on children's speech development by Betty Hart & Todd Risley, presented in their book *Meaningful Differences* (Hart and Risley 1995). According to Hart and Risley, there is a strict statistical correlation between familial backgrounds of children and their speech development. In one of their studies they literally counted the vocabulary of children from two different preschools. While the children from one preschool came from poor and low-income families, the children from the other preschool came primarily from families with higher income and academic backgrounds. The troubling result of the study was that, by the age of four, the vocabulary of the children from higher income families was 0.3 more extensive than the vocabulary of the children from poor families.¹ Furthermore, Hart and Risley analyzed the vocabulary growth rates until children's enrolment at school. As a result they found out that the children with less vocabulary even fall more behind until their first days at school (Hart and Risley 1995, 12ff). In the end, children from poor families do predictably worse when it comes to simply understand the lessons of their schoolbooks, simply because they lack the necessary vocabulary. Another example is the far more extensive occurrence of obesity in poor families. Gopal K. Singh et al. in their long-term-study (1976–2008) analyzed that obesity among American children from poor families is more than 0.2 higher than among children from higher income households (Singh et al. 2010). Another quite recent study has revealed that the rates for severe obesity are 1.7 higher than in higher income families. Given that there are correlations of obesity and health risks,

¹Hart and Risley counted 15,000 spoken words and recorded the vocabulary size in relation to that. In the case of children from poor families they counted that the children (statistically) used 1000 different words, while children coming from an academic background used 1500 different words. (Hart & Risley 1995, 10f)

life span and general well-being, there seems to be a clear nexus between child poverty and children's vulnerability (Voigt et al. 2014).

However, it is not self-evident that such a disadvantaged situation is already unjust. For making this claim we furthermore need to clarify the notion of child poverty and the vulnerabilities that can serve as a basis for entitlements to justice.

2.3 *Children's Vulnerability and Capabilities*

What do we owe to children because of their vulnerability? In order to answer this question with regard to child poverty, it is important to keep in mind that vulnerability is a complementary concept to conceptions of justice where entitlements of persons are solely founded in notions of consent and individual liberties. Goodin is very clear in this respect. "Duties and responsibilities are not necessarily [...] things that you deserve. More often than not, they are things that just happen to you" (Goodin 1985, 133). Goodin argues explicitly against contractarian and voluntarist models of obligation because they focus only on situations where in which an individual is situated in ideal decision-making-processes. According to Goodin, this blurs the relevance of situations when a person A is in need of help while another Person B is in the position to help A. According to Goodin, the obligation to help A is not derived from B's consent in the first place but from the mere fact that A is in need of help. This leads to the question, in which situations is B obliged to help A (or A is entitled to being helped by B)? Goodin answers this question by introducing the concept of basic needs. For Goodin, the principle of protecting the vulnerable is "[...] first and foremost [a principle of] aiding those in dire need" (Goodin 1985, 111). But what are *dire needs*? In our interpretation, 'dire needs' are basic needs. Connecting the concept of vulnerability to the basic needs of persons is intuitively compelling. Yet the concept of basic needs leads to notorious obscurities about what is basic and what is not. Instead of following this path, we suggest another model for measuring inequalities in relation to children's vulnerability, namely the Capability Approach (CA) as it has been developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum. We are aware that there are several differences in Sen's and Nussbaum's accounts, e.g. differences they make between different types of capabilities (Robeyns 2005). Still, we believe that Sen's and Nussbaum's critique of resource based forms of justice and utilitarianism comes from the same concerns for human vulnerability. Their theories share the core idea of justice as a matter of creating substantial freedoms (in the form of "capabilities"), and they come from the same philosophical roots, namely Aristotelian thought.

The CA departs from a critique of resource theories of justice for measuring unfair advantages or disadvantages primarily in terms of resources or goods. The CA does not deny that the provision of resources is in some sense relevant for justice. Still, it stresses that opportunities have to be somehow *accessible* for a person. Consider, for example, the case of 'learnt helplessness' when persons simply lack the competencies for actively using their chances and opportunities. If someone

does not believe that he or she is part of the democratic system, for example, he or she will probably not be motivated to join political participation. In the same way, children from poor families seem to have the same chances and opportunities in life as children from higher income families because they go to the same public schools. However, they may still lack certain capabilities that children from more economically well-off backgrounds have.

As we shall argue in more detail below, disadvantages in children's well-being should therefore be measured by the evaluative perspective of the CA, which assesses well-being in terms of capabilities and functionings, because it adds something to the conception of well-being that alternative accounts lack. Sen argues that traditional economic and philosophical approaches to measure human well-being fail to take into account certain aspects of human freedom. Thus, they overlook crucial human inequalities. For instance, an able-bodied person and a disabled person may well have the same amount of resources at their command, but the latter is not able to make use of them in the same manner as the former. For instance, she may need a wheelchair to perform the same tasks as the former, such as getting from one location to another. The person in the wheelchair thus lacks certain substantial freedoms that able-bodied persons have, even though their stack of resources may be the same.

Sen couches this idea in the language of functionings and capabilities: functionings are beings and doings a person may value (Sen 1999), such as being adequately nourished, being able to participate in politics, or personal states such as having self-respect (Sen 1999). Capability or, more precisely, a person's *capability set*, is defined derivatively from functionings (Sen 1999). Having a capability set means having a set of potential functionings that one may realize. In a nutshell we could say that a person possessing a large enough capability set has the real freedom to achieve various lifestyles. Sen claims that evaluations of human well-being should focus on both: on what people actually do and are, i.e. their *functionings*, but also on what people can do and be, i.e. their *capabilities*.

Focusing on functionings and capabilities does not mean that resources play no role for well-being. On the contrary, people need certain resources to achieve functionings. For instance, being well-nourished depends on having food. However, the CA claims that it is important to regard a person's ability to convert these resources into functionings. If, for instance, you possess the resources of a computer, but your home lacks electricity, you make very little out of that resource. Conversion factors can be *personal* (i.e. a person's abilities, qualities and skills), *social* (e.g. social norms, the political system, family) or *environmental* (e.g. climate, nature, technology). We will come back to the topic of conversion factors below, since they play an important role in resilience promotion among children.

We believe that the perspective of the CA provides a plausible tool to evaluate disadvantage and characterize the vulnerability of children in poverty more adequately as the conventional definition of poverty as lack of resources in a household. It presents what Gerald Allen Cohen (1989, p. 921) characterized as the "currency" of justice, i.e. the goods that are to be distributed within a just state. The CA provides a valuable insight for conceptualizing human well-being because it captures a

dimension of freedom that other approaches do not. For instance, “resourcist” accounts (Schweiger and Graf 2015 p. 19) cannot show the difference in freedom that exists between an abled-bodied person and one in a wheel-chair (as we have pointed out above). The same goes for rights-based approaches. Even though two persons may have the same rights, there may be considerable differences in their powers and abilities to realize those rights, e.g. if one of these persons belongs to a group that faces a lot of prejudice and discrimination (Sen 1999; Nussbaum 2001).

We think therefore that the CA also highlights dimensions in children’s well-being and lack thereof that alternative accounts overlook. Before we can argue for this claim, however, we must concede that the CA was not originally designed to apply to the well-being of children, even though recent research aims to change that (see e.g. Ballet et al. 2011; Stoecklin and Bonvin 2014). Sen and Nussbaum mainly focus on autonomous adults. Sen emphasizes a person’s *agency* in choosing the combination of functionings from the capability set that he may value or rather has reason to value (Sen 1999). As we have already stated, the abilities of valuing, choosing and deciding are not fully developed in children, especially not in young ones.

In our view, however, excluding children from the realm of capability justice would be a grave mistake. This move would violate the basic tenets of the CA as being inclusive of people in their real, actual situation. A considerable part of Nussbaum’s criticism of Rawls and similar approaches points out how these accounts fail to include vulnerable people such as the disabled, elderly or severely discriminated into the basic model of justice (Nussbaum 2006). It would be almost contradictory to exclude children as a group of concern on the ground that they lack certain abilities to choose while including the groups mentioned.

Schweiger and Graf (2015) point out that the CA needs to be modified in two ways if it is to be applied to children. First, along with Schweiger and Graf (2015) we claim that a theory of justice for children (and for other vulnerable groups) should not rest on the assumption that its subjects are fully autonomous beings like in the liberal model, which is not able to adequately deal with vulnerabilities. Even many adults do not fulfill this assumption. The well-being of children, especially babies and toddlers, who are hardly able to make the choice of capabilities and valuing them in the ways required, should therefore rather be judged along their actual achieved functionings. Correspondingly, these are the elements we should promote in the lives of young children, e.g. making sure that they are well-nourished, learning how to read and write etc. Second, children’s capabilities *evolve* along with the changes and development that they are going through (Ballet et al. 2011, p. 34). Most important for our discussion is the fact that the development of these capabilities is severely shaped by the social environment of the child, especially the family and social relations.

As we shall argue in the following, conceiving of children’s well-being along the lines of the just described CA helps us understand the concepts of child poverty, resilience and the latter’s role in dealing with vulnerability. Before turning to this argument, we point out how the CA’s concept of well-being is a plausible normative basis for assessing the severe disadvantages of child poverty – therefore creating

entitlements based on the vulnerabilities – also conceived of as lack of capabilities – that arise for poor children.

3 Resilience, Capabilities, and Child Poverty

As initially claimed, child poverty is a bad thing, however you may look at it and wherever it may occur. But what exactly is the ethical problem about it? We think that the considerable body of empirical and normative literature on the topic (e.g. Zander 2008; Luthar 2003; Ballet et al. 2011) has made a convincing case that poverty poses a severe risk for what we call a child's present and future well-being. The risk is multidimensional: poverty has detrimental effects on important functionings such as being well-nourished, being clothed appropriately, not to be socially excluded or knowing how to read and write. Also children from poor families are statistically more prone to developmental disadvantages like having less communicative and educated parents and, as a consequence, developing less vocabulary. Further, due to the fact of dependency children are extremely vulnerable to parental misconduct, even if they are not directly affected by it (like in cases of child-maltreatment).

3.1 *Child Poverty as a Capability Deprivation*

The CA delivers the normative background for calling these effects of poverty on children unjust. Consider again Hart & Risley's example of speech patterns: even though – formally – the children in the example have the same chances in education, because they attend the same schools, their actual functionings and their evolving capabilities are different, due to their parent's economic disadvantages and its further effects which go significantly beyond the material dimension. If we measured child well-being by rights or resources only, we would not detect much inequality with regard to education. If, however, we look at the capabilities of these children, we can pinpoint how children from economically weaker groups are disadvantaged in a more substantial and multi-dimensional way: they lack many important conversion factors such as social and emotional support, so that many opportunities are not realizable for them in the same way as for the kids that come from more well-off backgrounds. Providing these families with financial support will not be enough to remedy the adverse effects of lacks in education, emotional support or even time for care (since the heads of many poor families are of single parents, this can be an important factor). Hence, the CA directs our attention to further important dimensions in which children may be made vulnerably by poverty in giving us a more comprehensive concept of poverty. As a sufficientarian theory of justice, the CA shows that this form of inequality in capabilities is problematic as a matter of justice if it is significant enough for children to fall under the threshold. As we have pointed

out, children are dependent and cannot themselves cope with this situation. Justice requires that poor children will be supported by societal institutions in developing their capabilities, if economic and further support from the immediate social environment fails.

One recent discussion in this context makes use of the concept of resilience. Its advocates can mainly be found in social work and pedagogics. They hope that fostering resilience – as the capacity to cope with severe risk – will help children to deal with the adverse effects of poverty (Yates et al. 2003). They thus use it as a form of poverty prevention on a secondary level (Zander 2008). So far, the topic of resilience has not been linked very often with questions of social justice. We think, however, that a discussion of the normative aspects of resilience is long overdue. For instance, we may ask: What exactly is it we want to foster here if we talk about coping or adapting? Is it a good way to foster resilience if we want to change the situation of children in situational and especially pathogenic vulnerability? If so, do children have an entitlement to have their resilience promoted? In the following, we cannot give full attention to solving all of these tricky questions. Our hope is to give a first account of the normativity of resilience and of how it should be understood with regard to social justice. We argue that resilience plays an important role in removing poor children's (situational) vulnerability by promoting their capabilities.

3.2 *What Is Resilience?*

The concept of resilience comes from the social sciences and some branches of the natural sciences (mostly ecological studies, Walker et al. 2012). In addition, resilience has become a buzzword in the media, signifying the hope for training people to cope with stress e.g. at the work place or at home. We claim that the fact that nowadays so many people are interested in the idea leads us to certain philosophical questions that have been troubling people long before the word “resilience” was invented. Among them are: coming to terms with human shortcomings, dealing with inequalities and disadvantage in society or identifying the resources we need to stay strong and hopeful.

Despite its popularity (or maybe because of it), the concept of resilience is often used in a rather vague way, especially in developmental psychology and social work, where it is related to “positive adaptation” or “successful life”, but also to “robustness”, “hardness” or “resistance” (Yates et al. 2003, pp. 243). Different associations are evoked which go from extreme flexibility that demands radical adaptation to some form of robustness, which seems to imply just the opposite. If, as we propose below, human resilience is defined in some form of agency, these seemingly contradictory implications can be matched.

As a first approximation to the idea of resilience, we can say the following. Two characteristics must be present so that we can call a person or a group “resilient”: (i) being subjected to a significant risk and (ii) coping with this risk successfully. The definition of *risk* and successful coping are heavily dependent on the normative

definition of child-well-being and vulnerability. In a way, resilience is a counterpart to certain forms of vulnerability, because it implies that vulnerabilities that are created by risks such as poverty.

In developmental psychology, thinking about resilience leads us to another, rather fundamental, normative question about the general goal of fostering resilience (Zander 2008). To put it provocatively: there may be people that are very well able to cope with regard to risk, but we may not view this positively. For instance, criminals or dictatorships may withstand the severest threats and impacts, such as punishment, violence or embargos. Similarly, people or groups who strongly resist changes or even deny reality, such as severely delusional persons, may thereby have a successful strategy to deal with changes. In a way, they may be called resilient, if resilience is given the mere descriptive meaning mentioned above.

However, if we look at the treatment of resilience in the social sciences, resilience is usually defined in a positive way, especially when it is evoked as a basis for promoting certain capacities of children that should help them succeed in life. We also believe that the term “resilience” should be used only for certain positive cases (whereas in the cases just mentioned we should speak of resistance or survival skills). This is backed up by our project of closely connecting the notion of resilience with the normative demands of the CA, as we point out in the following.

3.3 Resilience and Capabilities

If resilience is taken to be normatively valuable, we need to identify a normative basis from which we can form judgements when strategies to cope with risk are valuable – and conversely when the risk is a bad one that needs to be overcome. A pivotal normative basis is Sen’s ideal of agency that is closely connected to his CA: Sen takes an agent to be an active being that brings about change, whose achievement can be evaluated in terms of her own values and goals (Sen 1999). To realize these goals, agents need real opportunities, i.e. capabilities.

The problem with this definition is, however, its implications of individualism and rationalism. It seems that Sen only has adults in mind who are able to set their goals freely and on the basis of their own individual values. Thus, his view of agency comes close to the classic view of personal autonomy in liberalism which assumes that autonomous agents are rational, self-governing individuals, thereby denying that another person or group has authority over them (Buss 1994). Children clearly are not autonomous in this way, nor should they be, because they are dependent and vulnerable in the ways we have already pointed out.

Still, Sen’s conception of agency is interesting for our project in two ways. First, even though it is not fully applicable to a child’s actual life, it highlights the idea that we need normative ideals and goals in rearing and educating children. One important goal in parenting should be to equip children with the competence to navigate their way through adult life. Sen’s idea of agency highlights that being someone who makes changes for himself and in the world happen forms a central part of what

an agent should be. This ability is already basically present in children and is also encouraged by their care-givers who teach them how certain feasible goals can be reached. For instance, good parents gradually teach children how to eat alone, how to put on their clothes or to reach for an item they want to have. They thus do not only promote technical abilities to become efficient in bringing about changes but also enhance children's *self-efficacy*, i.e. a belief in one's ability to complete tasks and reach goals (Osterndorff 2013). The goal thus should be helping children with becoming a self-efficient agent.

Second, having actual agency depends heavily on the capabilities that are open to a person. Therefore, the question whether Sen's concept of agency is too individualistic also depends on the interpretation of capabilities. Going back to the definition of capabilities and conversion factors set out above, it becomes apparent that many of them are formed by social and environmental conversion factors. For instance, the capabilities someone has in graduating from school heavily depend on public institutions of education, family relations and social acceptance. Even the impact of personal factors such as sex or age is heavily influenced by the societal context, e.g. by norms discriminating against women or girls (Nussbaum 2001). We think it is thus consistent to emphasise the social nature of capabilities and the dependency of individuals on these contextual aspects. Children are especially dependent on the social environment, as we have pointed out. Their dependency becomes particularly obvious by having to rely on the social environment to have their functionings and capabilities realised.

This social interpretation of the CA gives us more insight in the normative aspects of resilience we have introduced above. Resilience is often understood, as we have briefly sketched, as the individual capacity of coping with risk. It thus suggests that resilience is some kind of invulnerability of an individual, often herself working on overcoming the odds that society has thrown in her way. Emmy Werner's pioneering longitudinal study on the Hawaii island of Kauai, which has introduced the idea of resilience in the social sciences, seems to support an interpretation of resilience as an individual capacity (Werner 1993). The study ran over 30 years and focuses on children within the birth cohort of 1955 facing multiple risks such as poverty, premature birth or violence. The, then, surprising results of the study suggested that one-third of the children of this cohort grew into competent adults. Many readers thought that these children must have some favourable genetic makeup or some other remarkable strength that makes them unbreakable. This is the image of resilience that has stuck with many popular works on the subject as well as psychological research. Initial research in psychology also mainly focused on the competences and abilities of the individual (Exenberger and Juen 2014).

Yet, a closer look reveals that resilience is far from being extraordinary (though still admirable). Even Werner (1993) herself argued that resilience is a common mechanism of the human adaptive system which is able to react aptly if the preconditions are adequate, e.g. there are strong social relations (to parents, teachers or other care-givers). In several works the question of resilience was shifted from the individual to the issue of what the *social environment* (parents, teachers, other adults and children) do to promote coping skills among children. In a second step, larger

contextual concerns were addressed by including the political system, social institutions and the general provision of resources (Exenberger and Juen 2014). The psychologist Manuel Ungar (2005) assumes that environment and context may count even more than individual capacity as antecedents of successful coping. He therefore demands that the promotion of resilience puts great emphasis on the provision of resources and respective institutions.

For the reasons just given in our social account of capabilities, we concur with the following definition of resilience stated by Ungar: “In the context of exposure to significant adversity, resilience is both the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to the psychological, social, cultural, and physical resources that sustain their well-being, and their capacity individually and collectively to negotiate for these resources to be provided and experienced in culturally meaningful ways” (Ungar 2008, p. 225).

We think that this account of resilience only works fully with a normative background which explains why the multivariate factors mentioned, e.g. psychological or social ones, should be viewed as central elements of successful lives. After all, it is a normative issue what counts as ‘successful life’. Above we have already pointed out how well-being and agency – understood as having capabilities - should be part of such a life. Therefore, the CA provides insights into understanding the *concept* and *value* of resilience.

Despite the similarities, we need to be careful in keeping the ideas of resilience and capabilities conceptually distinct. Resilience is not equivalent with having capabilities. Rather, capabilities constitute the normative backdrop of resilience in a system of social justice: as defined, capabilities form the real opportunities a person needs to sustain her well-being. They are what Ungar calls “resources” in the quote above: resilient people need them as preconditions for coping which people have an entitlement to in the name of social justice. Correspondingly, capacities that are associated with resilience, e.g. self-efficacy, are necessary to fully realise capabilities, because they provide persons with the abilities and competences to do so. Building resilience in children should aim at giving them the present and future capabilities (and the suitable preconditions) to lead a life that they can value themselves, i.e. that they can be an agent. Thus, the CA and the idea of resilience form an interesting interplay which provides a basis for fighting child poverty.

3.4 Resilience as Coping with the Negative Effects of Child Poverty: Protective Factors and Capabilities

What we have left to discuss is how promoting resilience according to the just given definition would help relieving child poverty. Let us draw attention to the features of resilience that are relevant with regard to putting it into practice via social policy. For characterising someone as being truly resilient, we must find out whether that individual *has already successfully overcome* a crisis. However, most work in

psychology and social work that focuses on policy is interested in promoting factors that make people more likely to be resilient in order to avoid a break-down. Hence, we should rather speak of *resilience potential*. The literature on psychological resilience identifies so-called “protective factors” which make it more likely to overcome the negative effects of a crisis. Among them are strong social relations, self-efficacy and stable institutions (Yates et al. 2003). Protective factors of these kinds are almost exactly similar to some of the “conversion factors” which the CA demands in the name of social justice, which, as we have explained above, individuals need to convert resources into valuable capabilities. Hence, we claim that having resilience potential is the same as having suitable conversion factors: they are what makes children able to realise capabilities.

There are two crucial ways in which interpreting resilience potential on the basis of the CA contributes to coping with the adverse effects of child poverty. First of all, we argue that, for the reasons stated above, child poverty should be defined not only as material deprivation but also as a lack of basic functionings and capabilities in children’s lives. As noted, this provides a better way to evaluate the multidimensional disadvantages poverty entails for children. We can thus identify the crisis that needs to be overcome by resilient conduct. Second, we can classify potential protective factors such as secure attachment, supportive relationships or institutions, as those that should be promoted in a poor child’s life, in order to balance the adverse effects of poverty. Take the example of children brought up in institutions, which we have sketched above. Those children are often unable to find a secure relationship on their own. Extra care should be taken by social workers to promote attachments to other adults such as teachers or foster parents. Thereby social policy and social workers can meet the vulnerabilities of the situational and especially the *pathogenic kind*: children are entitled to certain capabilities, i.e. resources and conversion factors that counter-balance the injustice of poverty. Hence, they are less vulnerable with regard to unjust institutions and social settings, because they will be given the respective social surrounding that substitute or balance these unjust influences.

Still, resilience is not an ideal solution. It is a mere second-best strategy in fighting child poverty, because it does not subvert its structural causes. Thus, ultimately, the goal of social justice is to prevent poverty on a systemic level – a concern that the CA strongly has. However, since we live in a non-ideal world that demands workable solutions for the present, we think that social justice should also focus on the urgent problems here and now. Also, here is another similarity between accounts of resilience and capabilities: they are concerned with helping people now, not in an ideal system of justice (Sen 2010).

4 Resilience, Children's Vulnerability and Justice: Some Tentative Conclusions

In the previous sections we have argued that child poverty constitutes specific vulnerabilities of children that should be understood in terms of a lack of capabilities. Furthermore we have claimed that the concept of resilience combined with insights from the CA helps us to analyse the normative structure of child poverty insofar as it helps us to understand in which sense child poverty is unjust to children. Child poverty is unjust to children because it undermines the development of the capabilities that are necessary for becoming an agent – an agent that is also resilient to risks because she is self-efficient and has the adequate capabilities to overcome a risk. In this sense, promoting children's capabilities is a matter of social justice. The presence of certain capabilities, e.g. those for education or health care, are necessary social and political prerequisites to develop factors that make one resilient in a desirable way. i.e. if they are able to realise their capabilities.

In our account, resilience is a complex competency that helps reducing children's vulnerability insofar as it enforces children's ways of coping with adverse effects of child poverty. Consider, once again, the example of obesity in poor families. Children from poor families have a much higher risk to develop eating habits leading to obesity than children from higher income families. Children typically adapt to parental behaviour, and there is a strict statistical correlation between poverty and obesity. Poorness and neediness of families might be considered an unjust social phenomenon *per se*. In this sense, children from poor families should be treated as situationally (or even pathogenically) vulnerable persons. In this context the question occurs if society should, for example, solve the situation for children by a redistribution of wealth. However, as we pointed out at the end of the last section, we live in a non-ideal society where child poverty remains a social fact. In this context, making children resilient by making changes in their social surroundings might be a proper 'tool' for making them less vulnerable to the adverse effects of poverty. In the case of obesity the solution could be that new policies are implemented in educational domains such as preschools, schools and youth clubs where children gain knowledge of their diet (Voigt et al. 2014). This knowledge could help children to become resilient against the influence of their parents concerning their eating habits. Sport programs, musical programs and other educational approaches could help taking children's resilience against adverse effects of child poverty on a more substantial and holistic level. No doubt, the implementation of such policies would face many problems and raise difficult questions concerning economic sources, legal feasibility, and, of course, the authority of the state in general. We are aware of these issues. However, it has to be kept in mind that child poverty has many normative and practical implications that must not be ignored. Child poverty can lead to substantially unjust situations for children, and this is a serious stain for any society that endorses the idea of equality of chances and opportunities. Furthermore, consider the negative effects on social systems like the health system and the political system if children's development is neglected. Hence, we believe that making

children more resilient is not only important from a normative perspective but from a pragmatic or political perspective as well. We want to conclude our paper by pointing to some normative worries that any analysis of the concept of resilience should attend to.

Our first point concerns a hitherto undissolved tension between the concepts of resilience and vulnerability. In our account resilience means making children more capable for coping with their specific social set-backs and in this sense making them less vulnerable. However, the modern concept of childhood entails that children are vulnerable persons in the sense of needing special protection by their caregivers (Archard 2004). In other words, the modern conception of childhood entails that children have a right to be vulnerable. Bringing the concept of resilience into the discourse bears at least the risk that children might become overburdened with the responsibility of, so to say, becoming stronger. Resilience is still connected to ideas like performance, control and strength. While being strong and able to perform are certainly good traits in general, we run the risk of undermining the modern conception of childhood if we focus on them too much. Even if we understand resilience as the capacity to keep capable of acting and exploring the world in a child-like way, we still face the problem that children are expected to behave in a certain way. This is what Colin Macleod calls the “agency assumption”. We have to some extent countered this objection by pointing out how truly valuable resilience should mainly be dependent on contextual and social factors: children should not be burdened with responsibility and individualistic expectations. Resilience, as a kind of healthy behaviour, may thus also involve not overcoming any obstacle or risk – a good agent (especially a child) should also be able to engage social support and rely on others. Children should therefore not be made fitter and stronger as individuals. Rather, their environment should be changed in order to diminish the situational and especially pathogenic vulnerabilities which are unjust. Nevertheless, this is just a first approach at a complex normative subject. Much more has to be said about the relation of the concept of resilience to the concept of children’s vulnerability to make sure that we do not run the risk of undermining the value of childhood itself when trying to make children more resilient.

Secondly, and related to our first point, still resilience has some descriptive (psychological) aspects. What we mean by this is that some children may have the necessary capacities and the respective protective factors to a larger degree than others – partly due to their privileged social surroundings. By highlighting the normative aspects of resilience, we certainly do not want to enforce the elitist idea that specially gifted or privileged children should enjoy special treatment. On the contrary, we think that making children more resilient is compatible with the notion of equal treatment insofar as every child could benefit from the transfer of capabilities that make them more resilient. There is the worry that by expecting children to be more resilient we might set a new level of normality for all children and that this, in turn, might lead to more and more pressure and stress for children in general. Again, to meet this challenge we need to state more clearly how the concept of resilience and its social nature is related to other important values of childhood.

Third, by demanding the promotion of resilience in children we have to bear in mind that there are many factors of child poverty and adverse effects of child poverty that cannot be solved merely by making children more resilient. As we have stated, promoting resilience is a second-best solution. We must not forget about the manifold social sources of child poverty that still remain to be solved. Consider, for example, the case of families in which the parents have to exert several jobs for earning enough money. In this case, just trying to make children more resilient by enabling them to take part in several educational programs or other social ‘substitutes’ seems to be futile. In such cases the whole family is in need of support. What children in such a situation need is more time with their parents and not primarily more educational support. In short: we must fight child poverty on a primary level, so that extraordinary resilience becomes obsolete. We still must strive for that ideal world.

Our fourth and last critical remark concerns the intra-family-consequences for the child when it learns to be resilient against the adverse effects of poverty. When children gain the capabilities that make them more resilient, they run the risk of becoming alienated from their family-background, especially when the child forms strong relationships with other care-givers that give them what their immediate family cannot. Family relations are still a most important value in a child’s life, and they can almost never be fully substituted. Hence we strongly suggest that social policies that are directed to promoting children’s resilience should always be accompanied by free consulting services for poor families.

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Humiliation and Child Poverty



Gottfried Schweiger

Abstract As a matter of justice children have several claims and are entitled to a range of goods. In this paper I will argue that one of these goods is positive self-relations (self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem). Since poverty during childhood distorts the proper development and experience of these three self-relations it violates children's claims to justice. I will defend this argument in three steps: (1) I will introduce and examine three types of positive self-relations (self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem) and argue that children are entitled to all of these; (2) I will move on to examine the concept of humiliation and argue that acts of humiliating are unjust even if the victims do not experience them as humiliating; (3) finally, I will provide six arguments as to why it is humiliating for children to live in poverty. The six arguments presented in the last section are: (a) poverty is connected to other forms of injustice; (b) poverty is undeserved and represents an arbitrary feature of affected children for which they cannot be held responsible; (c) poverty is widespread among children; (d) poverty is imposed on children because they are part of a larger social group; (e) poverty is an enduring humiliation and not just an occasional incident; (f) the humiliation caused by poverty targets the particular vulnerability of children as developing beings. Based on the humiliating nature of poverty, which violates children's claims to the aforementioned types of positive self-relations, I can conclude that it is unjust for children to live in poverty.

Keywords Humiliation · Justice · Poverty · Children

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1 Introduction

This paper will discuss a certain aspect of child poverty, namely the humiliation it causes, and how the concept of humiliation can be used to criticize child poverty as unjust. I do not claim that this supersedes other forms of criticism or is superior to them, but I do seek to show that this is an important but often overlooked aspect of criticisms of child poverty (Schweiger and Graf 2015). I will argue that child poverty threatens and undermines the positive self-relations of these children, their self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem, because they experience their living conditions as humiliating. These positive self-relations play a crucial role for children's well-being and well-becoming and children are, as I will argue for, entitled to them as a matter of justice.

Our approach is grounded in two distinct approaches to justice. On the one hand it follows the tradition of the capability approach, which acknowledges the importance of positive self-relations – self-respect, for example, is one of Martha Nussbaum's "central capabilities" (Nussbaum 2011) – and their deterioration due to poverty, especially in contexts of absolute poverty (Zavaleta Reyes 2007). On the other hand I will employ recognition theory in the tradition of Axel Honneth (Honneth 1996) to explore the concept of positive self-relations and its differentiation in the three types of self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem. Both the capability approach and recognition theory are not originally concerned with justice for children, which makes it necessary to amend them at some points to fit for the particular nature children's needs and agency. I will acknowledge such shifts throughout the chapter.

Let us begin by saying a few words about the framework of this chapter and how it understands justice. I will claim that positive self-relations – self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem – are dimensions of the well-being and well-becoming of children and that children are entitled to them as a matter of justice. This focus on children's well-being is not new in the capability approach and is based on an understanding of children's well-being as multi-dimensional and comprising a set of different capabilities and functionings, such as being physically and mentally healthy, being socially included, having sufficient shelter, material resources and goods, or being well nourished (Biggeri and Mehrotra 2011). Hence, well-being does not refer primarily to a certain state of mind like happiness or satisfaction. Within the capability approach, capabilities are to be understood as beings and doings (Robeyns 2011), which people are able to achieve, and functionings are to be understood as such achieved beings and doings. A person has the capability to be well-nourished if she has access to sufficient food and is able to consume it, and she has the functionings to be well-nourished if she actually eats the food. This distinction is important because on the one hand it highlights choice and autonomy, on the other hand it highlights a particular differences in what justice means for children compared to adults. In a nutshell, this chapter assumes that functionings are primary for children and only as they grow-up and become mature capabilities become the "currency of justice" for them (Schweiger and Graf 2015). So, as long as children are not

sufficiently able to make choices for themselves it is not enough to secure that they have the capability to be well-nourished but to secure that they are actually well-nourished. I will come back to some complications involved in this claim later on in this paper, when I discuss children's agency in relation to their positive self-relations.

Now, justice should be equally concerned with the well-being and the well-becoming of children (Schweiger 2015). This means that a view from justice should not look only at what children have as children but also take into account how they will fare later in life. Childhood is a crucial phase for one's future life-course and certain disadvantages during childhood translate into disadvantages in later life. Furthermore, the capabilities and functionings which matter for justice should be objectively determinable, and their distribution among children influenced by societal and institutional arrangements – although not all of them are fully controllable by the state. So this chapter employs a state-centred view of justice and understands it as a virtue of institutions and not of individuals, although the latter have certain obligations to promote justice. For example, health is largely determined by social factors that can be controlled by the state; however, there are many cases of ill-health which are beyond the control of the state, such as those caused by genetic variation or tragic accidents. That makes health a matter of justice. As I will show, positive self-relations also fall into this category: they are to a large extent, though not totally, determined by outside factors. It is therefore not the obligation of the state to make sure all children have these positive self-relations, but it is the obligation of the state to provide all children with the resources and conditions that give them the best chance of gaining these positive self-relations. Henceforth, I will call this the obligation of the state to provide children with the sufficient “conversion factors” to achieve those capabilities and functionings to which they are entitled as a matter of justice. Still there are cases where positive self-relations are not achieved for reasons outside of the responsibility of the state, for example genetic diseases. Or because the provision of the needed conversion factors would be unjust in itself. In an hypothetical case where a child would need to see other people suffer to achieve positive self-relations it would be unjust for the state to enable this. Such cases do not fall under the jurisdiction of justice and thus the associated lack of positive self-relations is not unjust, although they could trigger certain special claims of justice like to receive the sufficient treatment and support from public health care.

2 Recognition and the “Fertile Functionings” of Positive Self-Relations

In this section I will first argue that each and every child is entitled to positive self-relations as a matter of justice. These positive self-relations are part of the set of capabilities and functionings that are needed for sufficient well-being and well-becoming. A just society is responsible for securing the conversion factors that are

needed to develop and sustain these capabilities and functionings throughout childhood and a person's whole life course. I want to differentiate three such positive self-relations: self-respect, self-esteem and self-confidence, which are closely connected to each other, so as to discuss their respective social bases. For this I will refer to the works of Axel Honneth and his tripartite model of recognition (Honneth 1996). These three positive self-relations are "fertile functionings", which means that they positively influence the development of other capabilities and functionings (Wolff and de-Shalit 2007). I will go on to stress that children are entitled to these fertile functionings of positive self-relations and not only to the capabilities to achieve them if they want to. It is important that children have and develop self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem — although, as stated above, the state cannot fully control that this happens.

Honneth distinguishes three types of positive self-relations: self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem (Honneth 1996). Self-confidence refers to the idea of trust in oneself (and in one's own body and mind) and also in one's close environment. Self-respect describes the view of oneself as possessing dignity and moral worth. Self-esteem describes the view of oneself as a particular and valuable member of a greater community because of one's traits and contributions. Honneth links these to three forms or modes of intersubjective recognition that are necessary to develop and sustain self-relations. These are love and care, moral respect and rights, and social esteem. While love and care refer to one's physical, mental and emotional needs, moral respect refers to the idea of being a moral (responsible) person, and social esteem refers to one's particular traits and abilities. Honneth's model claims that humans need to be loved and cared for in close personal relationships to build basic self-confidence, that they need to be respected as moral agents, and that this respect needs to translate into certain rights that enable a person to respect themselves; people also need to be socially esteemed for their particular contributions within a social group to acquire a sense of their own self-esteem. Together, Honneth argues, these three forms of positive self-relations are at the core of an individual's subjectivity and identity. They are closely connected to the ability to realize one's self and one's own goals and life plans. In this respect, the recognition approach and the capability approach are congruent, for they both highlight the normative weight of individual freedom and self-realization; Honneth, however, puts particular emphasis on their intersubjective conditions, which are described as forms and modes of recognition (Graf and Schweiger 2013). Only if persons are enabled to experience all the modes of recognition, and are thus enabled to develop the three positive forms of self-relations can they become autonomous beings – people happy with their identity and living the lives they want. To put it differently, the development of the "We" is bound to the successful integration of the "I" (Honneth 2012). On the other hand, the recognition approach also conceptualizes the threatening of these positive self-relations and their deformation through forms and modes of misrecognition, which mirror the three types of positive recognition. Honneth distinguishes here physical abuse, which destroys self-confidence, exclusion and the deprivation of rights, which threaten self-respect, and denigration and humiliation, which undermine self-esteem. Each and every human being is entitled to be

protected from such experiences of misrecognition that distort and undermine the development of personal identity; this is the core of a recognition-theoretical understanding of morality and justice, which aims to secure the intersubjective conditions of self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem, and consequently autonomy and self-realization. In recent years Honneth has moved increasingly into the field of social theory, seeking to develop an institutionalized understanding of love, moral respect and social esteem (Fraser and Honneth 2003; Honneth 2014). Hence, the recognition approach should not – at least not primarily – be understood as a psychological or anthropological theory about the development of the self, but rather as a way to conceptualize the configuration of modern capitalistic societies and the social embedding – and deformation – of the individuals within them. Love and care, respect and rights, and social esteem and solidarity describe generalized forms of intersubjective relations for which people strive (Pilapil 2012). Humans need and want to be loved, respected and esteemed, and if they are not, then the experience is harmful and unjust.

Some modifications are necessary to apply Honneth's model of positive self-relations to children and their development through the three modes of recognition. While Honneth discusses self-confidence in regard to children and how love and care are necessary to develop it, he does not do the same for self-respect and self-esteem. These two seem for him to be reserved for adults, and maybe also mature adolescents. Children, especially young children, do have rights, but in a different way to adults. They cannot act and reason about their actions in a fully comprehensive way and hence cannot be held responsible in the same way as adults (Archard 2009). This means that their self-respect cannot be based on the same grounds. This is also, although in a different way, true for self-esteem. Honneth understands self-esteem and the correlating form of recognition of social esteem in the context of a modern working society, where people are valued for their contribution in the sphere of work and labour (Laitinen 2012). Children are excluded from this sphere; they do not and should not work in modern societies. In those societies where children do work, the practice is often criticized as cruel and inappropriate. Honneth conceptualizes both self-respect and self-esteem in such a way that they do not fit for children – this raises the question of whether they simply cannot have them, or whether it is not also unjust if they lack them. Honneth has not engaged with this question in any detail, but I believe that it is reasonable to consider it.

Psychological research supports the idea that children need to be recognized in order to develop and actually experience self-respect and self-esteem from an early stage; such research shows that these positive self-relations are of actual importance for children and not only for adults (Thompson 2007). Any approach that focuses on the needs of children for recognition should take into account the points raised by Nigel Thomas, who argues that children are certainly not only subjects with particular needs (to which love and care relate) but also moral beings and rights-bearers, and that they do make valuable contributions for which they claim recognition (Thomas 2012). So, children not only need recognition, and are entitled to it because it influences their development and in consequence their well-being and well-becoming, but should also be seen as people worthy of recognition in their own

right. As Thomas also states, the particular contributions of children and their status as rights-bearers are both under-recognized in theory as well as in practice. Children are not passive (moral) objects but active (moral) subjects. Their status as subjects should be taken seriously; children should not be viewed as somehow “defective” in comparison to adults, although they show important differences in the capabilities and functionings they possess.

I will now move on to explain the positive self-relations of self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem as particularly valuable functionings for children, and which children should be entitled to as a matter of justice. Positive self-relations are valuable in themselves, and without them a child’s well-being could be damaged severely. But positive self-relations are also of great instrumental value, because they are the basis for developing other important capabilities and functionings. Jonathan Wolff and Avner de-Shalit introduced the concept of “fertile functioning” to describe functionings that have a positive influence on other capabilities and functionings (Wolff and de-Shalit 2007). Positive self-relations are “fertile” in two senses. On the one hand, they are fertile for the development of the child, because these positive self-relations are – as Honneth suggests – necessary for children to develop into autonomous adults and to realize themselves and become authentic agents. Without the achievement of self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem it is very unlikely if not impossible for a person to develop an undistorted self and to make important life choices for themselves. However, a sole focus on autonomy and the ability to live a life one has reason to value would be inappropriate for children. Autonomy is not the only value during childhood and it is also not the only development goal. To focus only on autonomy would reduce children to adults-to-be and devalue their status as children. On the other hand these positive self-relations are also fertile for the actual well-being of the child and the achievement of other capabilities and functionings that matter for the child during childhood. For example, self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem are connected to and greatly influence (physical and mental) health and the ability to participate in social activities and to engage in social relationships or learning and playing. All these are valuable functionings for children, which they should be able to achieve as a matter of justice; positive self-relations influence whether and to what extent this is possible.

The recognition-theoretical model shows how self-relations and social interactions are intertwined, and how they provide the conditions for valuable “being” and “doing”. Recognition theory also highlights the idea that positive self-relations are (normally) the result of interactions with one’s environment and the persons and institutions within that environment. Positive self-relations are socially influenced, and material living conditions are an important factor. Because of their importance for the well-being and well-becoming of children, as well as for their fertility in respect to other capabilities and functionings, and because they are at least partly controllable by societal arrangements, positive self-relations can be seen as a matter of justice. A just society is thus obliged to provide each and every child with the conversion factors that are needed to develop and sustain self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem – although there will always be cases where the state cannot control and guarantee the actual achievement of these positive self-relations. If

poverty can be shown to be disadvantageous in this respect, then this gives rise to obligations of the state to alleviate it.

3 The Injustice of Humiliation

Poverty is humiliating and can undermine and destroy the positive self-relations children have. Honneth's notion of humiliation is not very elaborate; it seems he understands all different forms of misrecognition as (potentially) humiliating (Honneth 1996, 2003). I want to make a few important points about the relation between humiliation and justice before I discuss the case of child poverty.

The first point is about the concept of humiliation itself. One important starting point to discuss this is Avishai Margalit (Margalit 1996). He reserves humiliation to those practices that target the self-respect of people, which would give them reasons to think of them as expelled from the community of humans – self-respect is for him the awareness of being a member of this community of humans –, while he reserves “insult” for those practices that hurt the person's honor or self-worth. Humiliation is for Margalit a normative and less a psychological concept, and many forms of misrecognition that Honneth discusses are not humiliating in Margalit's sense. The fruitfulness of Margalit's conception and its application to relative poverty (of adults) was explored by Christian Neuhäuser and Julia Müller (Neuhäuser and Müller 2011), but I want to use a different and wider concept of humiliation that targets not only self-respect – in the sense of Margalit – but also other self-relations. Humiliation does not need to target the sense of being part of the community of humans but can target all different aspects of the self and identity. It is important for a theory of justice to uncover and to evaluate also these other forms of humiliation, because they give a clearer picture of the many injustices in today's world. The topic of this chapter, child poverty, is one example as I will show which causes a range of experiences of humiliation that not all target the self-respect of these children in the definition of Margalit but are nonetheless important to criticize. Poverty is not a stigma of not belonging to the community of humans at all but it is a stigma that those who are poor are of less worth, that they do not have and do not deserve the same life chances. But I want to take up the main insight from Margalit's theory, namely that humiliation needs to be judged based on reasonable criteria and that it is not enough that victims simply feel humiliated. It is also not necessary that victims need to know that they are humiliated. For the case of children it is crucial to keep in mind that it is also not necessarily themselves who have to reason about if an action that affects them counts as an humiliation, because they maybe not in the position to reason in such a manner. For our purposes I want to define humiliation as such acts that can reasonably be judged to injure the positive self-relations of a child. Or in a different wording: Humiliation is such an act that can reasonably be thought to cause an experience of feeling humiliated on the side of the victim even if this is not the case. The actual experience of feeling humiliated is important, and damaging, but the normative benchmark has to be applied to the act that causes this

feeling or can be judged to likely cause this feeling. Children are entitled to grow-up and live in conditions that are non-humiliating in this sense and in which they find all the sufficient opportunities to develop positive self-relations. Especially because childhood is a very sensitive phase, children have a right to be protected from humiliation.

The second point is to highlight is that humiliation can be understood as both an act (of those who humiliate others) and an emotion (of those who are being humiliated).¹ Evelin Lindner describes the act in powerful words:

“Humiliation means the enforced lowering of a person or group, a process of subjugation that damages or strips away their pride, honour or dignity. To be humiliated is to be placed, against your will (or in some cases with your consent as in cases of religious self-humiliation or in sadomasochism) and often in a deeply hurtful way, in a situation that is greatly inferior to what you feel you should expect. Humiliation entails demeaning treatment that transgresses established expectations. It may involve acts of force, including violent force. At its heart is the idea of pinning down, putting down, or holding to the ground.” (Lindner 2007, 5).

Such acts of humiliation usually, but not always cause victims to experience the emotion of feeling humiliated. The normative weight of humiliation can be attributed to both the act and the emotion of humiliation, and both can be separated from each other. In the first case, people are obliged to refrain from actions that can be described as humiliating regardless of whether or not those who are victims of such actions are actually humiliated by them. In the second case, people are obliged to refrain from such actions that do actually humiliate people regardless of whether these actions are humiliating according to the above definition by Lindner. Consider the perspective of those who are humiliated: in the first case people are entitled not to be treated in ways characterized by the above criteria of humiliation even if they do not experience them as humiliating. In the second case, people are entitled not to be treated in ways that actually do humiliate them, whatever these actions are.

The third point worth making is that in many cases this differentiation between the act and the emotion of humiliation will not turn out to produce different results on the side of justice, because, as Lindner suggests, most acts of humiliation will cause the emotion of feeling humiliated on the side of the victims. Nonetheless, there will be cases in which the victims will not experience or describe themselves as being humiliated, for example due to distorted self-perception or the acceptance of cultural norms. The capability approach discusses such phenomena under the term of “adaptive preferences”; they can be developed in people in deprived living conditions (Teschl and Comim 2005). Adapting to a cultural norm that can be described as humiliating from the outside can in fact be a way to cope and make the best of a seemingly hopeless and powerless situation. A normative account of humiliation should be able to criticize such forms. There are also cases in which

¹ I do not wish to dig deeper into the question of what an emotion is in contrast to a feeling or sentiment. What is important here is to note that the emotion of humiliation involves a cognitive and evaluative element. Most of the literature that is concerned with humiliation and poverty seems to use the terms “emotion” and “feeling” interchangeably.

people feel humiliated where there is no humiliating action, because of a misunderstanding or also a distorted expectation towards another or others. So I suggest interpreting humiliation as an act that need not result in a certain emotion of humiliation experienced by the victim. It is the action that needs to be evaluated against moral standards – for which the reaction of the victim is a part – and not the actual result of this action. A similar point was raised by Ann Cudd in her discussion of oppression, where she argues that I should evaluate it against external rather than internal standards (Cudd 2006). I mentioned Margalit's definition of humiliation as a "behaviour or condition that constitutes a sound reason for a person to consider his or her self-respect injured" (Margalit 1996, 9). I wish to preserve here Margalit's insight that acts of humiliation need to be judged based on reasonable criteria that go beyond the experience of the victim. Hence, it is not enough that victims simply feel humiliated to judge the actions that lead to this emotion to be morally reprehensible and unjust. It is also not necessary that victims actually feel humiliated and know that they are humiliated; as long as they would have had good reasons to feel so.

The fourth point that I want to make explores the role that experiences of humiliation can play. As said, from the standpoint of justice it is not decisive if a child in poverty feels humiliated but if she was humiliated, although the experience of humiliation is important in at least three ways: Firstly, such feelings can be viewed as important indications of injustice, which can guide its detection but not justify its critique. This idea is particularly prominent in recognition theory, where the articulation of experiences of suffering and harm are conceived as one of the necessary pre-conditions to detect and criticize them (Pilapil 2011). I interpret this in two ways: on the one hand, feelings of harm or shame and their expression by children in relation to their poverty may point towards the detection of injustices that would otherwise go unnoticed. Being humiliated and ridiculed for their poverty by peers and feeling depressed and lonely due to fear of others becoming aware of the deprived situation at home can direct the awareness of researchers and policy makers in new directions. On the other hand, these feelings can be interpreted in a way that they point towards such injustices that matter most for those children. This does not necessarily imply that they should matter most for the critique of the injustice of child poverty or for policy makers and the design of just institutions for those children; it is, however, a valuable piece of information to know about what victims of injustices care most even if this does not justify related actions. Secondly, such feelings can be viewed as negative by-products of injustice, which add something important to their critique but, again, without much justificatory weight. This seems obvious since no one would claim that it is not a moral problem that children have such poverty related feelings of suffering and humiliation. But what can this mean exactly? Our point is that feelings should not be separated from their causes, and, together, both account for their injustice. The lack of the functioning of health is unjust because it is exactly a lack of something that children are entitled to and because this lack is experienced – not by all, I might add – as suffering. The main weight lies on the lack of that functioning, which is chosen as important based on the criteria lined out above and which is measurable objectively – at least to some extent; the fact this injustice is also felt

and experienced emotionally in a certain way, however, adds to it. It does not automatically become an injustice because children experience it emotionally in a negative way, but if they do, this must not be neglected. Such by-products of injustice also have a right on their own that they demand to be treated and those children helped. For example, if a child has no adequate housing, feeling thus ashamed and avoiding inviting friends over for that reason, justice demands the housing situation be changed and these other capabilities and functionings be made possible; it demands further that this child be provided with the support to talk about its shame and be helped in order to cope with it. Thirdly, such feelings are relevant for a critique of child poverty not so much on the individual but mainly on the group or societal level. Two things should be noted here. Firstly, feelings and emotions shared, experienced and articulated by more children are an indication that they are not individual, random or arbitrary. For justice that seeks to guide the design of institutions, it is important to know the causation, severity, depth and scope of a problem to take the needed measures and also to prioritize them. I have no definite answer on how many children have to articulate a certain feeling in reaction to a certain condition in order to be taken serious in this way; this is an uncertainty that has to be tackled from case to case. Our account would be then still ethically individualistic in the sense that what ultimately matters is the individual child and her well-being and well-becoming, not that of a group or community (Robeyns 2005). It would also hold it be wrong to dismiss or downplay the expressions of harm of one child simply because they seem uncommon. Children experience poverty ultimately in a variety of ways and feel differently about it. Especially the qualitative literature reports a wide range of reactions and feelings and emotions and they are certainly not shared by all children. This means that feelings and emotions that are shared on the group or societal level do not have more moral weight than those experienced by only one child or a few, but they do have more functional weight on the matter of formulating a critique on the society level, on which justice is primarily located. A critique of the injustices of child poverty can be located on different levels and use different methodologies, it can focus on single cases, groups and communities or states or the global level. Normally, and this is also our own approach, justice “thinks big” and not “small” about child poverty (Schweiger 2016). And it can never hope to account for all forms of injustices but is always selective; moving from the individual to the group level makes more prevalent feelings more visible and puts them into focus. To put it differently: it is a certain kind of priority view, namely to prioritize those feelings that are more common.

The feelings and emotions caused by child poverty are not to be neglected and taking them seriously does not undermine the goal of objectivity in justice. As a consequence, the value of asking children how they feel and of giving them the chance to articulate their emotions becomes prominent. Likewise, as I claimed that the opinion of children is important for choosing capabilities and functionings, it is also important to know their feelings about their situation and about living in pov-

erty. I still hold on to our claim that the capabilities and functionings chosen as objects of justice and used as the benchmark to criticize the injustice of child poverty should be, to the greatest possible extent, objective, but that does not exclude giving feelings and emotions a different place. It is not a feasible and reasonable goal of justice to make all children perfectly happy or to try to avoid all hurtful feelings – but the possibility that children will actually feel better without the experience of poverty is also more than a welcomed by-product, and as I have argued, it gives the critique of this injustice much more weight.

The fifth point that needs to be considered is about the relation of humiliation and autonomy. There are as also Lindner points out certain acts of humiliation that are freely and willingly experienced by those who are humiliated. Such acts are often thought to be unproblematic from a moral point of view, because the autonomy of the person has to be respected. If a person freely chooses to experience humiliating acts perpetrated upon them by others, or to humiliate him or herself, he or she should be allowed to do that. The concept of “adaptive preferences” claims that at least some of these acts of freely chosen humiliation are problematic, because people can be alienated from what they really want. It is also possible that victims of abuse can try to deal with what happened to them by convincing themselves it was what they wanted. In such cases a certain degree of paternalism in administering support seems justified. In the case of children, the focus of this article, choice and autonomy are even more problematic. Children are still in the process of developing the mental and emotional capacities to choose freely and to be autonomous. Choice is important for children but it seems unreasonable to think that children have the capacities to choose to be humiliated, although this ability is developed during childhood and adolescents can make a wide range of rational choices regarding their own well-being and what kind of experiences they want to make (Graf and Schweiger 2017). In general though I reject the proposition that acts of humiliation towards children can be justified by the argument of free choice on the side of the child.

Finally and our sixth point is that to speak of humiliation as an social injustice it is necessary to look at it not as an individual action or behaviour but from a structural perspective. Individual acts of humiliation can be immoral but do not necessary constitute a problem of social justice. To do that they must be embedded in structures that enable humiliation, do not sanction it or are themselves humiliating. Here the state, its institutions and representatives play a crucial role as actors of humiliations, as enablers and as setting precedents. This has been documented with respect to poverty at length (Gubrium et al. 2015; Lavee 2016; Reutter et al. 2009). Thus it is also an important difference is a person is humiliated by an representative of the state in her function as such or if this humiliation is not tied to this. Humiliation can be deeply embedded in institutions, societal norms and practices, and become endemic, or to use the conceptual language of recognition theory, they become a social pathology (Zurm 2011).

4 Humiliation and Poverty During Childhood

Poverty humiliates children in different ways. The first question is whether children actually experience their poverty as humiliating, and how this affects their self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem. The second question, which should be carefully distinguished from the first, is whether it would be understandable and reasonable for those children living in poverty to have their self-relations negatively affected by it, although they do not actually experience their poverty as humiliating. The distinction between these two questions is important because an injustice is still an injustice even if its victims have the coping resources and resilience to adapt to their living conditions, and are still able to live a subjectively good life. I argue here that the injustice of poverty should be determined more or less independently of the subjective experience of it. To claim that poverty is unjust because it undermines the positive self-relations of its victims is therefore not to say that this is happening in all or even the majority of cases, but to say that poverty is a condition that it would be reasonable to experience in such a way. It is unjust because it puts those who are affected by it in danger even if they have the resources to avoid the most negative consequences. I evaluate poverty from a third-person perspective and not from a first-person perspective. This does not mean that I exclude from our analysis the perspective of children who are victims of humiliation. The views of the victims of humiliation in determining these acts as injustice in a moral sense are nonetheless not authoritative, but play a consultative role (Archard and Skivenes 2009). This consultative role should not be downplayed but is important in at least two domains. On the one hand, the views of children feeling humiliated by their poverty are to be considered because the victims have a right to be heard. That speaks about the moral status of them as children and as victims. On the other hand many injustices would potentially go unnoticed if children would not be heard. That is not only to say that they point towards otherwise overlooked injustices, I mentioned this feature already, but also has the stronger meaning that without the voice of children the nature and complexities of some injustices are not accessible. Children in poverty occupy two important epistemic perspective, those of children and those of victims of poverty, which are to varying degrees not accessible to researchers and political philosophers. Thus, to discount children and their experiences of humiliation would establish another type of injustice, namely an epistemic one (Schweiger 2016; Murriss 2013).

The available empirical evidence suggests that children, like adults, also experience poverty as humiliating and that this has sometimes devastating effects on their mental health and well-being, as well as on their self-relations. Poverty causes shame; it is perceived as stigma and many children feel they are of less worth than others because of their poverty (Walker 2014; Boyden and Bourdillon 2012; Chase and Bantebya-Kyomuhendo 2015). This again triggers coping mechanisms that do not always work in the child's best interests, like withdrawal from social relations, anger and aggression, or giving up. Tess Ridge summarizes the empirical evidence from qualitative studies on child poverty:

“Fears about being left out or marginalized pervaded children’s accounts. Poverty in childhood extracts a high emotional toll on children trying to ‘fit in’ and ‘join in’ with their peers. Children’s inner fears and their experiences of feeling humiliated, sad and shamed are often hidden and they are rarely asked about their thoughts and feelings. However, sensitively conducted studies have revealed the deep emotional costs that hardship can bring to children’s lives” (Ridge 2011, 76).

As already suggested, it would be insufficient to jump from such empirical descriptions of the experiences of humiliation to the conclusion that they constitute an injustice. In theory it is easy to construct an example in which a child feels all these emotions but which is morally unproblematic. For example, a child can feel sad, ashamed and humiliated for being the only child to get a bad mark on a test or for being caught stealing some sweets in a shop. The question is therefore whether, and if so on what grounds can poverty reasonably be judged to injure the positive self-relations of a child, whether or not these children experience it as humiliating and harmful. Here I discuss six such reasons:

1. The humiliation caused by poverty is connected to other forms of injustice. There are many good reasons to argue that the poverty of children is unjust regardless of its humiliating nature, that it threatens certain central capabilities and functionings like health and education, or that it is socially excluding (Leßmann 2014; Alkire and Roche 2012). The humiliation of poverty is closely connected to these other injustices and would not exist without them; hence, it is an additional burden with its own normative weight. Two forms of humiliation connected to poverty can be distinguished here: on the one hand, poverty itself can be humiliating without children being ridiculed, denigrated or in any other way humiliated by others for being poor. The public discourse on poverty stigmatizes those who are poor, and children are aware of this stigma even if others do not humiliate them directly. Having less in common with others can be humiliating if it is a question of lacking basic goods – or capabilities and functionings – that are seen as normal in a society. It is not possible to name a specific actor who is responsible for this kind of humiliation; instead, it is caused by a societal atmosphere that constantly suggests to the poor that they are of less worth, that they are lazy and on the bottom rung of society. On the other hand, poverty is connected to separate acts of humiliation that victimize poor children. They are humiliated because of the clothes they wear and the toys they have to play with by others (children and adults), simply for being poor. In both cases – poverty as humiliation in itself and poverty as the cause of being humiliated by others –injustice is at the centre of poverty.
2. The humiliation caused by poverty is undeserved and targets a feature of those children for which they cannot be held responsible. Children growing up in poverty cannot be held responsible for their poverty. Children do not choose to be poor and they cannot choose the families and social environments they are born into. Also, children have very little possibility to alleviate their poverty and they are dependent on support from others. The humiliation they experience as well as all the other hardships connected to poverty are therefore not deserved or any

form of legitimate punishment for any actions of these children. This is true for the humiliation that is inherent in being poor and for the additional acts of humiliation that target poor children. Being poor is not a personal failure and nor is being ridiculed for being poor a legitimate response from other people. It is a particularly cruel fact that children in poverty often feel responsible for their situation and blame themselves.

3. The humiliation caused by poverty is widespread and a common experience of children in poverty. Humiliating acts in connection to the poverty status of a child are widespread – they are not rare incidents. Children are often confronted with such acts in both public and private places, for example the school, the playground or the hospital. Humiliation is also present in the media, where poor people are labelled as lazy and anti-social. Poverty influences the social relations children can have and it is nearly impossible to avoid humiliating acts without huge personal costs such as those caused by withdrawal and self-imposed exclusion. As I have already cited, feeling humiliated and ashamed of oneself is a common reaction to being poor, even in the absence of particular acts of humiliation. This is because the condition of being relatively poor necessarily implies that one has less and can do less than is seen as normal in the respective society. Failing that standard can lead one to feel that one is of less worth, and to the avoidance of displaying that deprivation in public and even in front of friends.
4. The humiliation caused by poverty is imposed on these children because they are part of a larger social group. The humiliation that comes with poverty targets children not because of any individual traits in them that make them particularly different but because they are part of a larger social group, as is the case when children face humiliation for being part of a certain social, racial, ethnic or religious community.² Once again, it is important to note that children cannot choose to be poor or not, and nor can they choose to which social group they belong. Many victims of poverty, both children and adults, internalize their condition and the public discourse about it in such a way that they come to feel guilty and responsible for being poor. They attach blame to themselves for something that they are not responsible for and which they cannot change. If one takes a neutral position, in general poverty is not caused by individual choices but is a systemic issue. Feeling and being humiliated by and for poverty is therefore morally wrong.
5. The humiliation caused by poverty is enduring, not only an occasional incident. Even short-term poverty lasts for months and often years, and is very difficult to escape. The longevity of poverty is problematic because it leaves fewer chances for recovery and increases the damage caused. Especially child poverty has been proven to have damaging consequences that influence a person's whole future life-course, including his or her socio-economic opportunities and health.

²One important difference should be noted here: being poor is humiliating in itself, whereas belonging to a racial or ethnic group is certainly not. But in both cases people are humiliated for belonging to a group and not for whom they are in particular. In the social sciences the notion of “group-focused enmity” has been developed to describe such acts and beliefs.

6. The humiliation caused by poverty targets the particular vulnerability of children as developing beings. Although all humans are vulnerable to the harm of humiliation, children's vulnerability is different for two reasons: children lack coping resources and children are in development and some harms can have enduring or long-lasting effects on them (Schweiger and Graf 2018). Both conditions are often even more precarious for children in poverty, where stresses and strains and limited resources shape the everyday family life (Barnett 2008; Ridge 2011; Schweiger and Graf 2015). Children depend on a safe and caring environment to experience a good childhood and to develop into functioning adults. The humiliation connected to child poverty targets human beings in a particularly vulnerable phase, when they lack the resources and abilities to care for themselves in the face of hardships and the actions of others. This can lead to experiences of a variety of negative emotions, mental health problems and anxiety issues, which can stay with them for their whole life (Strohschein and Gauthier 2017; Straatmann et al. 2017; Yoshikawa et al. 2012). Even if children do not feel humiliated by their poverty or the actions of others towards them being poor, it can be reasonably expected that this would hurt them in their emotional and psychological development. Furthermore such stress, desperation and lack of perspective can trigger a vicious circle of anger and aggression, which diminishes life chances even more and can further increase the social exclusion of these children and young people (Berti and Pivetti 2017; Mazza et al. 2016).

These six reasons are sufficient to criticize the humiliation connected to poverty as unjust, even if children do not experience the emotion of feeling humiliated and even if they have the coping resources to protect their positive self-relations (only very few affected children have these resources). It is reasonable to judge poverty as humiliating both because it is in itself humiliating and because other people and institutions engage in humiliating acts that target children living in poverty. Under the current regime of capitalism, which constantly produces and justifies the existence of poverty, it is very unlikely that things will change, or that these six reasons will be enough to trigger such change. Child poverty is unjust for many reasons and is a major obstacle to equality of opportunity, a value that is held high in the ideology of capitalism although the system violates it all the time. I have a much more modest goal in this article: to show that humiliation connected to child poverty is unjust and that it should be criticized on this basis.

5 Conclusions: A Society Without Humiliation

Children are entitled to grow up and live without being humiliated. Poverty makes children more vulnerable to humiliation; it is in fact often experienced as such and there are good reasons to understand poverty as being humiliating even if children experience it otherwise. Our argument that poverty should be alleviated because it threatens the positive self-relations of affected children is built on both empirical

knowledge about poverty and on theoretical grounds. A just society is also a society without humiliation, where each and every child lives and grows up in an environment that lets them develop and achieve the functionings of positive self-relations. Such an environment is described by the recognition approach with three types of recognition: love and care, respect and rights, and social esteem and solidarity. These insights can be integrated into a capability approach and conceptualized as external conversion factors. In a just society each and every child is entitled to experience love and care, respect and social esteem. A society without humiliation will have to end poverty – not only for children but for all. This means that such a society will on the one hand have to prohibit acts of humiliation connected to poverty that are perpetrated by its members and institutions, and on the other hand will have to target the eradication of poverty, or at least change the public framing in such a way that it is less humiliating to be poor. A society without humiliation will not allow children to grow up under conditions that diminish their well-being and well-becoming. The social, economic and political structures that allow poverty to exist are to be held responsible and changed. Child poverty is a systemic injustice, within which further acts of injustice and humiliation can happen more easily.

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Education, Voice and Empowerment: Learning with and from Children in Poverty



Rosie N. Yasmin and Babak Davvand

Abstract The social construction of childhood as a period of dependence, innocence and passivity often works to silence children's voices and undermine the contributions that they can, and do, make to their social worlds. Children in poverty face a double disadvantage in this regard. On the one hand, they are viewed as incapable of participation for their alleged incapacities due to being young. On the other, these children are framed through deficit discourses that identify them as sites of problems in need of external interventions. In this chapter, we interrogate some of these discourses. We engage with accounts from five children living in an urban slum in Bangladesh to examine their experiences in the context of their flexible education program. We contend that valuable insights can be gained from listening to these children about their aspirations and what they value in their education. By engaging with the 'subaltern' voices of children in poverty, we highlight their aspirations for futures free of poverty and as contributing members of community. We also discuss the importance that these children attribute to their school as a space of belonging which fosters caring relationships, and nurtures their sense of safety, protection and wellbeing.

Keywords Childhood poverty · Flexible education · Participation · (Re)engagement · Voice

1 Introduction

In this chapter, we draw upon data collected from a flexible primary school program offered to a group of children living in an urban slum in Bangladesh. We use notion voice to examine the experiences of five children in the context of their education.

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We contend that valuable insights can be gained from listening to the voices of these children about their aspirations and what they value most in their education. By engaging with accounts and narratives from the participants, we hope to provide a space for the ‘subaltern’ (Spivak 1988) voices of children in poverty who have become target of increasing policy interventions and are often constructed through the discourses of ‘immaturity’, ‘risk’ and ‘vulnerability’.

Our child participants deal with varying degrees of socio-material disadvantage and are burdened with adult responsibilities. Hena, a 14 years old girl, spends up to 5 h a day doing household chores due to her mother’s prolonged illness. Dola, 11 years old, faces a similar predicament; she spends up to 3 h a day assisting in household work and looking after her younger brother because of her mother’s illness. Our other participants are Koli, a 10-year-old girl and the youngest in the group, Milon, a 13-year-old boy and a class Capitan, as well as Sagor who is an 11-year-old boy. Although Koli, Milon and Sagor all have working parents, they are tasked with care giving duties because of their families’ difficult financial circumstances.

We used a focused ethnographic methodology in our research to explore the views and voices of these participants about their education. Our choice of methodology was informed by Hulme’s (2004) call for ‘thinking small’ in studies of child poverty. The notion of thinking small requires the conduct of small-scale research that foregrounds the story of one person, one household or one community at a time. Such an approach can provide deep insights into what it actually means to live in circumstances of material disadvantage. Focused ethnography was deemed an appropriate methodology for researching and representing slum children, a group who is often talked about, but is seldom given an opportunity to speak.

Our discussions in this chapter are organized in six sections. Section 2 examines the theoretical debates about voice, participation and representation and how these debates intersect with the notion of childhood and poverty. Section 3 provides background information and a context to our discussion of child poverty and education in Bangladesh. Section 4 describes our research design, and Sect. 5 draws on the voices of the child participants to examine their aspirations and what they valued most about their flexible primary education program. Section 6 synthesizes our discussions calling for an agentic view of children in poverty. We maintain that such a view can be particularly useful in designing better educational policies and programs that can respond the needs of these children.

2 Children in Poverty: Voices from the Margins

Over the past few decades, the notion of voice has gained traction in debates in various disciplines from philosophy, sociology and feminist studies to political sciences and education. When discussed in relation to children, voice acquires a meaning beyond expressing an opinion; it incorporates wider issues of inclusion, representation and participation. To have voice denotes having the chance to express an

opinion, being listened to, taking part and exercising agency in practices that bear upon one's life. This makes voice, as McLeod (2011) has aptly argued, a political project and a metaphor involving identity, agency, as well as a powerful strategy for promoting empowerment, equity and inclusion.

Debates about child voice are polarized between protectionist and participatory views. This is because children constitute a particular category in terms of their rights and responsibilities. Children are often constructed as a group who is both distinct from and 'other' to adults (Smith et al. 2005). This rather precarious space is reflected in the phrases that cast childhood as preparation for adulthood, phrases such as *citizens-in-making* (Marshall 1950), *citizens-in-waiting* (Kennelly 2011), *not-yet-citizens* (Moosa-Mitha 2005), *tomorrow's citizens* (Dobozy 2007), *future citizens* (Arthur 2015; Print 2007), *apprentice citizens* (Wyness et al. 2004), or *semi-citizens* (Cohen 2005).

More recently, there has been growing acknowledgement about the limits of 'transitional' and 'developmental' thinking about childhood. Such and Walker (2005), for instance, argue that children understand and experience the world in the present, and are actively engaged in its construction. Pugh (2013) also maintains children should be viewed as "active social agents, strategizing within their constraints, deploying and utilizing their cultural fluency." Such an understanding opens up a new way of thinking about children, one that transcends the dominant adult-centric perceptions about childhood as a period of passivity, ignorance, innocence and vulnerability. It acknowledges the lived experiences of children in the context of their families, schools and communities and the role that they play in contributing to their social worlds.

Studies of childhood also need to take into account the social divisions and differences that exist among children and that can mediate their experiences (Dadvand 2018). Such an understanding invites reflection on how elements in children's backgrounds, for example due to poverty, dynamics of gender and gender relations, disability, etc., may limit their opportunities for voice and participation and thus act as a source of social exclusion (Liebel 2008; Savelsberg and Martin-Giles 2008). A one-size-fits-all approach that presents childhood as a homogeneous social group masks the diversities of experiences; it conceals the reality that much similar to adults, children's experiences are mediated by an intersection of factors including socio-economic status, ethnicity, locale, gender, sexuality and disability.

An intersectional lens (Yuval-Davis 1997, 2011) also inform our thinking about the politics of childhood by drawing attention to the dynamics of power involved in relation to who gets the opportunity to speak and whose voice gets to be heard. As Alcoff (1991/1992) explains, "rituals of speaking are politically constituted by power relations of domination, exploitation, and subordination. Who is speaking, who is spoken of, and who listens is a result, as well as an act, of political struggle." Similarly, Hadfield and Haw (2001) argue that debates about voice are inevitably intertwined with "issues of power and how power intersects with, and emerges through, positions of, for example, age, social class, ethnicity and gender."

Understanding child voice as embedded within the already existing structures of power can account for the subordinate voices of some children. Such an understand-

ing redirects our attention from the dialogic process in articulating voice to the conditions that moderate “who can say what, when and how” (Mockler and Groundwater-Smith 2015). This can be particularly useful in providing an account of those children who live in poverty. In a sense, these children face a double disadvantage. On the one hand, they are viewed as not-yet mature enough to have voice and agency, and on the other hand, they are burdened with adult responsibilities and have to undertake work and care giving duties because of economic hardship.

One implication of these theoretical understandings relates to the interventions that aim to alleviate childhood poverty. More often than not, these interventions are developed with little consultation with those who are most affected by them, namely children themselves. We do not aim to critique the intentions behind these interventions. We acknowledge that such interventions often have the best interest of the child. What we problematize, however, is the wider discourses that position children in poverty as either ‘at risk’ or ‘a risk’ and thus in need of external intervention. Absent from these discourses is the understanding that valuable insights that can be gained by listening to the voices of these children about what matters to them.

In the remainder of this chapter, we apply some of these understandings about voice to the context of children’s education in the developing world. We focus on an education program designed specifically to address the needs of slum children in Bangladesh. Engaging with direct accounts and narratives from five child participants, we examine their aspirations, and discuss what they value most in their flexible education program. Through our analysis and discussion, we hope to counter the dominant cultural narratives around slum children as a group who is deemed to have little to offer to policy discussions about education. Before reporting on our case study, a brief note is needed about the context in which we undertook this research.

3 Child Poverty: A Wicked Problem in Bangladesh

Poverty is one of the most urgent global problems that has serious implications for development. It is estimated that today almost one in ten people lives under the internationally recognized poverty line of less than \$2 US dollars a day (World Bank 2018). As a result, tackling poverty has become a priority and now many international, government and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) are actively involved in initiatives that aim to alleviate poverty in different parts of the world. Ending poverty has also gained such a level of significance that it has become the first goal of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations 2018).

There is no single and universal definition of poverty (Schweiger and Graf 2015). Broadly speaking, though, poverty denotes more than lack of adequate income and material resources; its manifestations encompass “hunger and malnutrition, limited access to education and other basic services, social discrimination and exclusion as well as the lack of participation in decision-making” (United Nations 2018). These

wide-ranging adverse implications make tackling poverty a social justice issue that involves not only dealing with the material basis of inequality (Rawls 1972) but also addressing the impacts of socio-material disadvantage for wider issues of participation, voice and representation (Fraser 1997, 2010).

The adverse impacts of poverty are compounded when the dynamics of childhood is attached to it. This is because of the particular status of childhood as a period of social and cognitive development which makes the young person more susceptible to the negative effects of poverty. Lack of access to adequate food, hygiene and health services, formal education, risks of sexual exploitation and child labor are some of the many ills emanating from child poverty. Childhood can also intersect with social divisions and differences rooted in the complex nexus of gender, ethnicity, locale, capabilities and other power relations (Yuval-Davis 2011) to put certain groups of children at further disadvantage compared to others.

While child poverty remains a global issue, it is a more prevalent and pressing issue in the context of developing countries. Today poor children account for a third to a half of the population across developing nations (Biggeri and Mehrotra 2011). In Bangladesh where we undertook this research, 26.5 million children live below poverty line (UNICEF 2009). It is also estimated that up to a quarter of Bangladeshi children who live in poverty are deprived of one of the four basic needs of food, education, health, information, shelter, water and sanitation (Shohel 2012). Poverty is also one of the main contributors to child labor, approximately affecting one in every six children or more than seven million children in Bangladesh (UNICEF 2009).

Dealing with the issues arising from inter-generational nature of poverty and child labor has been a major concern for successive Bangladeshi governments and a reason for extensive NGO interventions over the last few decades. With the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations 1989), provision of universal (primary) education has been advocated as a long-term solution to poverty and child labor in the country. A policy response that focuses on access to free and flexible education is informed by understanding that children affected by poverty are less likely to attend school, more likely to dropout from school or be 'silently excluded' from education even when they attend schools (Shohel and Howes 2008).

Primary education in Bangladesh is unique in two ways. First, Bangladesh has one of the largest primary education systems in the world accommodating for more than 18 million children (World Bank 2013). In Bangladesh, primary education extends from Year 1–5 and has been free and compulsory for children aged 6–10 since 1990. Despite remarkable progress in access to universal education over years, the primary education sector in Bangladesh suffers from significant inequities in terms of access, participation and outcomes. A third of primary school students are 'first generation learners' from families with no prior education (Nath 2012). One in every three children drops out before completing Year 5 (UNDP 2013). Drop-out rate is also twice as high in the bottom quartile of socio-economic advantage (EPDC 2014).

In addition, Bangladesh is unique in its reliance on the non-government sector in the provision of primary education. Government primary schools enroll more than half of Bangladeshi children (DPE 2014). The rest of the primary student population is served by other education providers. NGOs are significant stake-holders in the primary education sector catering for some hard to reach communities that have not been traditionally served by the central government. One such NGO is Building Resources Across Communities (BRAC). BRAC provides second chance or 'catch-up' education for children who have not enrolled in or have dropped out of primary school. Since the inception of the BRAC education program in 1985 until 2011, five million children have graduated from its primary schools (Nath 2012). BRAC schools are currently attended by nearly four hundred thousand students (BRAC 2018).

BRAC uses a single-classroom, single-teacher school model which (ideally) hosts 33 children. Students enroll at the beginning of the school year and complete the 5 years of national primary curriculum within 4 years. BRAC schools run between 4 and 4.5 h a day, 6 days a week and most of the teaching materials are provided free of charge. School locations, opening hours, and schedule are decided in consultation with parents and communities. The schools adopt child-centered, participatory and gender sensitive education approaches. There is no summative assessment except for Year 5 completion exam. BRAC schools use a range of extra-curricular activities to teach children in drawing, story writing, savings skills and aesthetics.

Research shows that BRAC primary schools often outperform mainstream primary schools in terms of learning outcomes, school participation and cost effectiveness (World Bank 2013; DPE 2014; Ahmad and Haque 2011). This has generated interest into what contributes to the success of the BRAC primary school model for children in poverty. Much of the existing research, however, relies on input-output based economic analyses of school performance (Reynolds 2000). This line of research does not provide adequate insights into the complex issues that influence children's learning and wellbeing in contexts of poverty in Bangladesh. To explore the lived educational experiences of slum children, one therefore needs a broader framework that prioritizes the voices and views of young people themselves.

As we outlined in our theoretical discussions in Sect. 1, children who live in poverty are often constructed through the discourses of immaturity, risk and vulnerability. Such deficit discourses relegate the voices of these children to the margins and undermine the active role that they often play in tackling their social exclusion. In the remainder of this chapter, we engage directly with the accounts and narratives from a group of five slum children to tap into their future aspirations, and to explore their views about what constitutes enabling educational experiences for them. By drawing on the voices of these children, we hope to provide a 'situated gaze' (Yuval-Davis and Stoetzler 2002) into their lived educational encounters and experiences.

4 The Present Study

Our data for this study comes from a BRAC school situated in an urban slum in Dhaka. The school had 30 students. From these students, 27 (19 girls and 8 boys) agreed to participate in the study. Due to the limits of space, we only report on the data collected from 5 of these students. Data were collected through a focused ethnographic research design which lasted for 6 weeks. We used a range of participatory methods including photovoice, drawing and storytelling, and individual semi-structured interviews. Given the context of poverty in which the children and their families lived, a digital camera was provided to the children to allow use of photos as prompts for discussions, a procedure that can make group discussions and interviews with young people enjoyable, fluent, stress-free and productive (Colucci 2007).

The data collection phase followed a number of sequential steps. First, the participants were invited to draw four pictures about what they liked most to do, what they wanted to do or to be in future, what they liked most about their school and what they wanted to change in their school. The students also took three pictures of their school. The participants then took part in individual semi-structured interviews. Children's interpretations of their drawings and photos elicited using storytelling techniques provided insights into their experiences in the school and their future aspirations. This enabled us to explore their visions and what they valued in their education through their own language. In the final phase, we used 'member's data check' (Lincoln and Guba 1985) to cross-check the validity of the findings with the children.

5 Children Speaking Up

Our analysis and discussions of children's voices are organized in three sections. In the first section, we discuss what the participants had to say about their aspirations and the values that underpinned those aspirations. In the second section, we examine what the participants valued most in their education. Our discussion highlights the integral role of safety and wellbeing in the construction of educational spaces to which the participants had a strong sense of attachment. Closely related to and contributing to these spaces of belonging was positive relationships with peers and the teacher, a topic that we explain and discuss in the third section.

5.1 Aspirations and Imagined Futures

Given the prevailing deficit discourses of immaturity, risk and vulnerability through which slum children are often framed and recognized, we first explored what aspirations the participants held for their future. In doing so, we were conscious of the adverse impacts that poverty can have on young people's capacities to image futures unfettered by their current conditions of socio-material disadvantage. As Ray (2006; emphasis in original) points out, "[p]overty stifles dreams, or at least the process of *attaining* dreams. Thus poverty and the failure of aspirations may be reciprocally linked in a self-sustaining trap."

Research also shows that children who live in poverty often have lower aspirations compared to their more privileged peers (Dalton et al. 2016). This is often attributed to an aspiration gap, which denotes "the distance between what an individual might aspire to and the conditions she currently finds herself in" (Ray 2006). However, contrary to such expectations, our participants showed high levels sophistication in talking about their aspirations and the role that they attributed to education in moving towards their future aspirations.

The participants used the medium of drawing to depict themselves as contributing and productive members of their community. In response to a prompt about what she would like to do most when she grows up, Dola drew herself as a teacher standing in front of a book shelf and reading out to her class of students (Fig. 1). This, in part, reflected Dola's passion for learning and her reputation in the school as a 'book worm'. Koli, who also excelled in the school, wanted to be a doctor (Fig. 2) so that she will be able to help poor families and those in need in the slum.

Hena and Sagor also wanted to become teachers, a profession that is held in high regard in their slum for the contribution it makes to uplifting children and families from poverty. All the five child participants in our research aspired for roles that help them overcome their poverty. For the participants, access to education was

Fig. 1 Dola aspired to become a teacher to help other kids in the slum



Fig. 2 Koli wanted to become a doctor to help the poor and the sick in the community



integral to what they perceived as a valued future life. This highlights not only the importance of education as a means to a better future, but also the significant role that empowering educational experiences play in broadening children's horizons with regards to their 'imagined' futures (Schuller et al. 2004).

Closely related to their future aspirations for a fulfilling life was the way the participants viewed the role that their school played in helping them to develop and flourish *in present*. In their discussion about the contributions of their school education, the participants used the Bangla phrase '*adarsho manush houya*' to explain how the education they received assisted them to become 'an ideal person'. For the children, an ideal person was one who embodied the ethical and moral parameters of conduct; it represented three qualities of 'respecting elders', 'showing compassion to minors' and 'speaking truth without fear'. Milon, for example, shared his views about the three qualities in the following ways: By 'respecting elders', I mean that I always give Salam (An Islamic way to address others by saying, 'peace be upon you'); I listen to the instructions of the elders, particularly those of my mother's and the teacher's... I mostly help my junior peers and the teacher in lifting any heavy stuff such as the school mat. I am also patient to assist my peers in learning... I'm not scared of pointing out the occasional errors the teacher might make... I admit if I am not being able to complete my homework... Our teacher likes us to be honest about the homework and gets upset if we lie or make lame excuses.

By and large, these values reflect wider cultural norms and codes of conduct in Bangladesh. For the slum children, however, education was key in providing an opportunity to learn about and practice these norms and values in their interactions with each other within the program and later in their encounters with others throughout the broader community. In so doing, the program played an important part in the moral and ethical character formation of the children. This was also a contributing factor in the visions and aspirations that the children held for their future roles as contributing members of their communities.

5.2 *Enabling Spaces of Belonging*

Although all the child participants were burdened with care giving responsibilities at home, their school attendance was regular. In their discussions, the participants described their school-time as ‘the best part’ of their day. They used phrases such as ‘*moja pai*’ (have fun), ‘*anonda pai*’ (enjoy and become happy) or ‘*bhalo lage*’ (feel good) to talk about how they felt in the school. Some of the students also explained how their school enabled them ‘to do many things that they wished, aspired or liked to do.’ Other students talked about ‘empowerment’ explaining the ways in which ‘the school equipped them with good education’.

These reflections highlight the value that the participants attributed to their school as ‘a place of belonging’. Contributing to geographies of belonging is a sense of accord with one’s material, physical, social and relational context (May, 2013). This highlights the importance of relationships and positioning to the formation of a sense of belonging (Dadvand and Cuervo 2019). For our participants, a strong sense of belonging stemmed from the ways in which they were poisoned and treated in the school. The children talked about how they were often ‘acknowledged’ by their teacher and their peers for their efforts and contributions.

Safety and protection from harm were among other factors that the students valued about their school, and which also contributed to their sense of belonging. In their discussion, the participants contrasted their school with other schools, explaining how absence of physical punishment increased their sense of safety and protection in the school. Corporal punishment remains a common phenomenon in schools in Bangladesh affecting 9 in 10 students (UNICEF 2009). The non-punitive approach of the school which emphasized ‘respect for the integrity of the child’ and their overall wellbeing was perceived in the eyes of the children as an acknowledgement of their ‘agency’ and their claims for respect, voice and recognition.

Emphasis on skills development for wellbeing was yet another characteristic of the education valued by the participants. The students talked about the value of care, and the learning activities that helped them develop the skills that they needed to maintain their health and wellbeing. Teaching about the importance of hygiene was an important part of the school curriculum. This was a recognition on the part of the school that these children often did not receive such an education from home. In the school, the students also took their health-related instructions seriously. Cleaning the mats, sweeping the classroom and refilling the water dispenser were all part of the daily routine for the students. Koli, for instance, stated: Setting-up the school in the morning is not a big thing to do. We try to make and keep our school beautiful, tidy and presentable with whatever resources we have. We are happy to work for our school... Our teacher taught us from grade one how to always keep the school clean. Now, we know very well what to do for our school.

Health and wellbeing were also discussed in relation to aesthetics. Most of the children used simple measures such as their drawings to keep their classroom presentable. A photo taken by Milon of the school’s bulletin board (Fig. 3) provides a good example of this. For girls, the school mirror and comb (Fig. 4) were important



Fig. 3 The students took an active part in making their school presentable by contributing to the bulletin board

Fig. 4 The mirror and a comb reminded the students about the importance of health and hygiene



symbols of aesthetics and hygiene. Koli, for example, explained that combing her hair was *'about discipline, looking good and feeling good.'* Similarly, Sagor explained that being orderly is their way of giving back to the school and would help them to maintain the school's reputation as a good school.

5.3 *Relationality and Peer Support*

Positive relationship with the teacher and peers was another feature of the flexible education program which was highly valued by the slum children. Positive relationships also had a significant impact on the students' sense of belonging to their school as a safe and enabling space. Research shows that effective schooling is related to the forms of relationship among students, teachers, parents and the community (Cahill et al. 2014). The students in our research used the analogy of 'family' to describe their close bonding with each other. For example, in response to a question about why she helps other students, Koli replied: In this school, we usually take care of each other. We're not only good friends, we're also like siblings for each other.

The friendships and the connectedness that emerged among the students within the social space of the classroom extended well beyond the school. The students often talked about how they benefited outside the school from the friendships that they forged within the school. This is reflected in the following excerpt from Sagor: We, the three best friends, Shopan, Ishan and I, study in a group as we do in the school; we go to Shopan's house at 6:00 pm and study until 9:00 pm... It has many benefits; we can help each other. Group work is particularly useful in math.

A large body of literature on the effectiveness of alternative school arrangements show that the most effective factors of these schools are their child-friendly classrooms, interactive pedagogy, and caring relationships between teachers and students (Shohel and Howes 2008, 2011; Nath 2012). Our own research also shows that establishing positive relationships with students is integral to effective and reflexive teaching practices (Akbari et al. 2010; Akbari and Dadvand 2014). For children in poverty, positive and caring relationships acquires extra significance because of the absence of significant others in their lives who might act as a source of social and relational support for them. The value that the participants attached to caring relationships is reflected in Dola's drawing about what she appreciates most in her school (Fig. 5).

In the follow up individual interview, Dola commented on her drawing along the following lines: All members of our group sit together in a round shape. We help each other to understand the topic, and then assess each other ... The teacher moves around and supervises our activities ... When we finish, she assesses the lesson ... She randomly brings one of us in front of the class to repeat the lesson and we write down in our notebooks.

Other students used the Bangla phrase '*shahajjo kori*' (to help others) to talk about their peer relationships. Many viewed helping others not merely as an act of benevolence, but as a strength and a capability. Dreze and Sen's (2002) research shows how helping others can be seen as a valued capability, especially among people in contexts of poverty who are often positioned as recipients of others' help and incapable of making contributions. This repositioning of the children from source of a problem to solution builders was perceived by the participants as an acknowledgement of their agency for participation and change.



Fig. 5 There was a focus on positive and caring relationships among the students, and between the students and the teacher

The importance of providing support for others is also reflected in the following excerpt from Dola who talks about her reasons for helping one of her peers: I always help Lina in learning as she is the weakest girl in the class and most importantly, she has no one at home to assist her... I help her in all subjects... I know that both of her parents are illiterate, and she has no brother or sister at home to help her in learning... others also help her.

Implicit in the above reflection is Dola's commitment to an ethic of care for her friend. This ethic of care is built upon relationality and a recognition of differences (Dadvand and Cuervo 2018). The above reflection also highlights how an educational context that capitalizes on the participants' strengths can contribute to their sense of agency as solution builders, rather than as sites of problems. The relational ties and the caring practices among the students have also been crucial in the social construction of space (Massey 2005) where the students feel that they are safe and that they belong. These are also important factors that have played a significant part in the educational participation and engagement for the students.

6 Concluding Remarks: Learning with and from Children in Poverty

In this chapter, we examined the school experiences of five slum children in the context of their flexible catch-up education program. As we demonstrated and discussed using the voices, drawings and photos from the participants, the children

valued their education and saw it as a means towards achieving their future aspirations. These aspirations depicted the participants living a life free of poverty and as contributing members of their community. We also discussed how for these children a strong sense of belonging to the school was key to their (re)engagement in learning. A spirit of collaboration entwined with a sense of safety and protection created atmospheres of trust and mutuality among the students, and between the students and their teacher. The students also demonstrated a strong sense of ownership of their learning and education, often acting as a source of support and care for their peers.

In this section, we reflect on some of these findings to discuss the insights that we can gain from listening to the voices of children in poverty. As we explained in our theoretical discussions about voice, childhood and participation, there has recently been growing recognition of the contributions that children can (and do) make to their social worlds. However, policies and institutional practices still remain, to a large extent, oblivious to this recognition. Programs are often developed with little regard for the views of children with the underlying assumption being that children have little to offer in decision-making about important matters (Cahill and Dadvand 2018). While there have been moves in recent years to engage children in initiatives that affect them, these have often been limited to tokenistic forms of consultation or feedback.

Children in poverty, in particular, face a double disadvantage when it comes to voice and participation. On the one hand, the cultural politics of age constructs these children as not mature enough to contribute. On the other hand, these children are viewed through a deficit lens that focuses on vulnerabilities and risks. We maintain that these discourses play 'a governing' role (Foucault 1975) and limit imagination as to what is possible to achieve in children's participation. We take the accounts that we have reported from our child participants as a case in point. Contrary to wider discourses around children in poverty, these children have valuable insights about their conditions, needs, interests and aspirations. These insights can be harnessed to better engage them in ways of learning that are meaningful and relevant to them.

Finally, as our child participants helped highlight, empowering education builds aspirations and contributes to ethical and moral character formation. For doing so, such an education takes as its starting point 'the funds of knowledge' (Zipin et al. 2012; Zipin 2013) that children bring with them to their schools and classrooms. Capitalizing on the knowledge that marginalized children already have makes education a more a meaningful experience and a relatable encounter for them. Meaningful and participatory education also requires and contributes to the formation of 'spaces of belonging' that help nurture the overall wellbeing of children and cultivate their sense of safety and protection. An important contributor to such a space is caring practices and relationships that work with these children to address their needs, rather than acting upon them as objects of adult interventions.

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The Nature of Nurture: Poverty, Father Absence and Gender Equality



Alison E. Denham

Abstract Progressive family policy regimes typically aim to promote and protect women's opportunities to participate in the workforce. These policies offer significant benefits to affluent, two-parent households. A disproportionate number of low-income and impoverished families, however, are headed by single mothers. How responsive are such policies to the objectives of these mothers and the needs of their children? This chapter argues that one-size-fits-all family policy regimes often fail the most vulnerable household and contribute to intergenerational poverty in two ways: by denying at-risk children adequate parenting, and by undermining their mothers' legitimate interest in nurturing and caring for their own children. The capabilities of these mothers and the well-being of their children are better served by policies which recognise maternal caregiving as a productive and valuable occupation meriting equal respect and social support.

Keywords Conditionality · Dual-earner regimes · Early childhood education · Early childhood care · Single parenthood · Single mothers · Father absence · Gender equity · Diverging destinies · Parenting · Maternal capabilities · Child support · Biological capabilities · Welfare-to-work policies

1 Introduction

When Anne-Marie Slaughter stepped down from her role as President Obama's Director of Policy Planning, her decision was, by her own account, largely driven by her maternal obligations. Slaughter had come to feel that she could not both meet the demands of her office and do justice to the needs of her children – that 'juggling high-level government work with the needs of two teenage boys was not possible' (Slaughter 2012). She reluctantly resigned, leaving behind 'the job of her dreams'.

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Slaughter did not disappear into domestic obscurity: she remained a full-time, top-wage Professor at Princeton University, and in due course took up her current post as President and CEO of *New America*, a public policy think tank. She has also made forays into popular journalism, penning her now-infamous article in the *The Atlantic Monthly* titled – without irony – “Why Women Still Can’t Have It All”.

Slaughter’s professional achievements may be exceptional, but in other ways her life has followed a classic trajectory for well-educated, high-income, married woman of her generation. Despite making some significant compromises, she has combined family life with a well-paid, fulfilling career, in partnership with an educated, cooperative husband who supports her professional ambitions and accepts a large share of domestic and parental duties. Even Slaughter’s choice to step back from her work to devote more time to her children mirrors current trends among mothers of similar educational and economic standing, who are increasingly opting for work arrangements which allow them to invest more in their family relationships and responsibilities. This is particularly true for married mothers of infants and young children in countries where family policies provide for income-calibrated paid leaves and job protection, and where women are assured of professional re-entry.

This chapter does not address challenges of the kind that Professor Slaughter faced. It will look instead at the challenges faced by women who do not have her advantages, and whose concerns are very different. My focus is the low-income single (unpartnered) mother, whose limited resources and education pose challenges to both her parenting and her working life. This woman, like Professor Slaughter, often feels pulled to offer her children more of her time and personal attention, and to be more intimately involved in promoting their development; she, too, would like to be an optimal, or at least a capable, parent. Again like Professor Slaughter, this woman would happily combine parenting with well-remunerated, rewarding employment with a child-friendly schedule. Unlike Professor Slaughter, of course, neither optimal parenting nor optimal labour are aims the unskilled single mother can easily pursue: they are luxuries typically afforded only to mothers who are either partnered, or well-educated or affluent or, like Professor Slaughter, all three.

Both Professor Slaughter and the women whom this essay concerns face gender inequities. It is not obvious how these might be corrected in Slaughter’s case. That is, it is not obvious how we might alter our social arrangements to eliminate the special obligations she felt to her children in virtue of her role as their mother. (It is not even obvious that she herself would have wished these eliminated.) However, the inequities confronting the low-income, low-educated, single mother are another matter. Our social arrangements could, and should, better respect both her children’s needs and her own legitimate claims. That is the conclusion for which I shall argue.

Section 1 of this chapter offers a profile of my target population: Who is the low-income single mother? Why does she matter? What challenges does she pose for developed societies now, and in the future? Section 2 turns to the question of how policymakers should respond to those challenges. A near-consensus exists among

family policy theorists that the best response to the disadvantaged single mother and that appropriate to the partnered, middle-class one are much the same: state provision of (high-quality) childcare, conditional upon maternal employment. This strategy, many argue, not only draws the failing single mother away from her parenting activities (which are, in any case, too often poorly discharged), but reliably recruits her into the taxable labour force. It therefore seems justified by both paternalistic considerations (being good for her children) and contractualist ones (moving her out of dependency and into productive activity). Does this strategy successfully mitigate disadvantage, fulfilling its ethical aims? That is the question explored by Sect. 3. Section 4 considers the contractualist justification from the perspective of maternal capabilities. Does the requirement of workforce participation respect the single mother's capabilities and her interest in competently parenting her children? I conclude in Sect. 5 with some positive recommendations for family policies to redress the injustices which these mothers so often confront.

2 Having It All or Doing It All? A Tale of Two Transitions

There is considerable evidence that the unequal position of women in our society is rooted in their preponderant responsibility for rearing children. This should not be. (Cleveland and Krashinsky 2003)

In the last half-century, the role of mothering has undergone a demographic shift of seismic proportions, transforming the family structures within which it takes place, the responsibilities with which it is associated and the subjective experience of mothering itself. Perhaps the most powerful, single factor in this shift has been the entry of women, including mothers, into the labour force. This is often rightly lauded as a triumph for the agenda of gender equality, liberating women from the historical chains of domesticity and opening a route not only to opportunities at a personal level, but effecting an unprecedented societal transfer of economic, social and political power. From this perspective, ‘...the trends associated with...[this] demographic transition are all of one piece and are fuelled by a common factor, such as...women's growing economic independence.’ (McClanahan 2004)

The celebrated narrative of female empowerment-through-labour, however, is only half the story. Indeed, it is arguably somewhat less than half, since in many OECD countries it only narrates the trajectory of an upper decile of married, college-educated mothers like Professor Slaughter who, with the cooperation of their spouses, pursue a valued, remunerative vocation in parallel with parenting. The enlistment into the workforce of women from less advantaged backgrounds has yielded a very different experience, both for mothers and their children. As policy theorist Sarah McClanahan observes,

[T]he forces that are driving the transition are leading to two different trajectories for women – with different implications for children. One trajectory – the one associated with delays in childbearing and increases in maternal employment – reflects gains in resources, while the other – the one associated with divorce and non-marital childbearing – reflects

losses. Moreover, the women with the most opportunities and resources are following the first trajectory, whereas the women with the fewest opportunities and resources are following the second. (McClanahan 2004: 608)

Imagine a percentage spectrum scale of working mothers, the right pole of which constitutes ‘choice and welfare enhancement’ and the left pole ‘choice and welfare restriction’. On this scale, older, educated, married, professional mothers cluster in the decile furthest to the right – among the top 10%. Occupying the left-most decile are younger, single, poorly educated, mothers employed in low-wage, unskilled jobs. These are mothers for whom the question of working-or-parenting is a moot one because, as their household’s primary or sole providers, they must do both. They are also mothers who have no stake in the battle for a more equal gender distribution of domestic responsibilities, for those burdens fall solely to them. Finally, they are typically mothers who, like most mothers, want to be capable caregivers and nurturing parents, but who often lack the time, attention, knowledge and resources to achieve that aim. Many of the ‘hard choices’ that more privileged mothers face have no bearing on their specific challenges. What does interest many of them greatly, however, is the possibility that their children’s future opportunities are better than their own. Unfortunately, the overwhelming evidence is that a statistical abyss divides this possibility from actual probabilities. As Ariel Kalil summarises the research in the US context,

Children growing up in more advantaged families have better achievement and higher attainment on average, than low-SES children. They have fewer behaviour problems and are less likely to become pregnant or have a child as a teenager. They also have higher rates of college enrolment and completion. As adults, they are more likely to be employed, have higher earnings, avoid participation in welfare programs and enjoy better health and longer lives...42% of children who grew up in households in the bottom quintile of the income distribution end up in the bottom quintile themselves as adults, whereas only 6% of such children reach the top quintile of the income distribution as adults. (Kalil 2015: 63)

Whether one’s concern is with the burdens assigned to single mothers or the well-being of their children, there is reason to be worried about these growing disparities, especially in association with increases in single motherhood among less-educated women. (McClanahan and Jacobsen 2015).

There is no denying that the agenda of gender equity that has unfolded in developed countries over the last half-century has created a much wider menu of alternative life courses for women of all social classes. Women in industrialised countries across the board have been brought into the labour market, increasing the percentage of working mothers across the OECD from 28% in 1960 to over 70% today. Working motherhood has become the norm in developed countries around the globe. (OECD Family Data Base 2018) Many policy theorists now regard maternal employment not only as an entitlement, but as something nearer to a moral and economic imperative. Jane Waldfogel, for instance, holds that it is a *desideratum* of any acceptable US family policy that it promotes mothers’ employment.

The work ethic is a widely shared American value. Moreover, women’s employment is seen by many as key to gender equity and women’s well-being. Women should not be forced to take a backseat to men in the labor market, just because women have children. In this view, we must be careful not to enact policies that would discourage women from working or that

would widen existing gaps between women's and men's employment or earnings. (Waldfogel and Washbrook 2011: 76)

On Waldfogel's view, the tradition of stay-at-home, full-time parenting no longer serves most families' wider interests; it is not a realistic option for women (apart from an affluent few) to make parenting their sole vocation. Perhaps she is right. Certainly, for many mothers this view tracks a descriptive, if not a normative reality: in the US, a record 40% of all households with children under the age of 18 now have 'breadwinner' mothers, up from only 11% in 1960. (Child Trends 2018).

Some of these breadwinners are married women like Slaughter, whose incomes exceed (and are added to) their husbands. More than a quarter of all working mothers, however, are single, and for many of these employment is not so much a choice as an imperative. The demographic of the single working mother differs radically from that of her married or partnered counterpart. The returns on her labour are consistently lower, and her household is far more likely to be impoverished. For instance, across European OECD countries, children in single parent households (the great majority of which are headed by single mothers) are three times more likely to live in poverty than those in two-adult households.¹ Single parents in many English-speaking OECD countries (Australia, Canada, Ireland and New Zealand) fare even worse; their households have a poverty rate of nearly five times that of partnered households. In the United States, the prognosis is bleaker still, with a poverty rate for single mothers at more than six times that of partnered ones; roughly 43% of single-mother households are impoverished, compared to just 7% for partnered ones.² (OECD FDB 2018) These disparities are perhaps most vividly presented in absolute terms. For instance, in the US the median total family income of the single mother is about \$22,000. Her household is not only low income, but only barely above the poverty line.³ For the partnered working mother, it is nearly four times that at approximately \$85,000.⁴ (US Census Data 2016).

These interactions between single motherhood and economic disadvantage should sound a note of caution to theorists who see the emergence of women in the workforce as a victory for gender equity. As McClanahan says, the feminist revolution has not produced a single, unified demographic destiny for working women, but two divergent ones. Married, college-educated working mothers in the US – both breadwinners and contributors – are disproportionately white and high-income.

¹ Percentages vary from country to country. However, in every OECD country at least 85% of single parents are single mothers; in others, such as the UK, it is more than 90%.

² This is a colour-blind figure. In the African-American population, more than 65% of impoverished households are headed by a single mother.

³ The Federal Poverty Line for a two-person (e.g., one parent and one child) household in 2017 was \$20,290. However, the median income for single mothers in the US includes a population with much larger households. According to the NCCP "...on average, families need an income equal to about two times the federal poverty level to meet their most basic needs". (NCCP Fact Sheet 2018)

⁴ The income gap between the two groups remains when using personal income as the measure. The median personal income of married mothers who out-earn their husbands was \$50,000 in 2011, compared with \$20,000 for single mothers.

They are also older, with an average child-bearing age of about 30. By contrast, single working mothers are much more likely to belong to a racial minority, much less likely to have a college degree, and have a younger median age. (McClanahan and Jacobsen 2015).

Similar profile gaps also hold in EU countries, despite the generally stronger systems of family support they offer. As a recent EU Policy Brief observed,

Not only are single mothers on the rise, but their situation is in many ways more problematic than that of other women. Single mothers are more likely to fall into poverty...to be unemployed, to have taken a part-time job in order to combine professional and family life, to have poorer physical and mental health – the rate of depression is particularly high among single mothers – and to have difficulties in building lasting new relationships. (EU Policy Brief No 42 2016)

While it may be good news that more mothers are working, it is bad news that single mothers are faring so poorly – not least because their numbers are increasing precipitously. There have always been single mothers, of course: they have headed countless households throughout history. In past centuries, this was largely due to high male adult mortality rates caused by disease, war, and work-related accidents. Today, however, lone motherhood is overwhelmingly owed to father absence resulting from divorce, separation and abandonment. (IPS Report 2018) This is the case not only in North America, but across the OECD, which has seen a surge in divorce rates in the last four decades, paralleled by a decrease in marriage rates and a rise in unpartnered mothers giving birth.⁵ These three factors together have seen the proportion of single parent households in many countries – including mainstream economies such as France, Japan, Sweden and the UK – double since 1980, and more than treble since 1968. It has risen in the US from 8% to over 40% today.⁶ (IPS 2018) Looking ahead, OECD projections for the coming two decades see no abating of this upward trend. Instead, it is expected to continue at an even faster pace, with the bulk of individual country projections to 2025–35 expecting single parent households to increase by between 22% and 29%.⁷ Single motherhood seems set to stay, at least for the foreseeable future. And the single mother's disproportionate risk of poverty seems set to increase in concert with her numbers.

These trends arguably represent the inglorious underbelly of the narrative of women gaining greater choice and independence through employment. For the low-SES single mother is not so much having it all, as doing it all. While she works at her low-wage (and often wearing) job, she and her children continue to fall behind, inviting an intergenerational downward spiral. As McClanahan observes,

⁵ OECD data report.

⁶ The doubling occurred between 1980 and 2005; the Great Recession saw a halt to this increase for the last decade. As noted above, however, OECD predictions see the earlier trend continuing at an even faster pace.

⁷ OECD data report. There are exceptions. The US projects a further increase of only around 10%, but its baseline of 40% still predicts that single parents will head half of all US households. German is the one exception, with a projected decrease owed to reduced fertility rates.

The demographic transition is widening social-class disparities in children's resources.... Children who were born to mothers from the most-advantaged backgrounds are making substantial gains in resources. Relative to their counterparts 40 years ago, their mothers are more mature and more likely to be working at well-paying jobs. These children were born into stable unions and are spending more time with their fathers. In contrast, children born to mothers from the most disadvantaged backgrounds are making smaller gains and, in some instances, even losing parental resources. Their mothers are working at low-paying jobs...for many, support from their biological fathers is minimal.⁸ (McClanahan and Jacobsen 2015: 2)

In view of these trends, it is time to look again at the merits of workforce participation for disadvantaged single mothers, and consider how these are moderated by income and education. We need better to understand how maternal employment affects the welfare and capabilities of their children. It is also, I shall argue, time to consider how employment interacts with the capabilities of the low-skilled, single mother herself.

3 Inequality Begins at Home: The Working Mother

It is extremely difficult for a single mother who has two or three jobs to have time with children. Ways must be sought to facilitate women to engage in income generating activities that allow them more time at home. ...[T]he youth are raising themselves because grandmothers and mothers are away from home. Who in the family circle will sacrifice to spend time with children? If they do, how will they fight the cost of living? Waithera Mwangi (BBC Caribbean 2008)

The aim of promoting more equal employment opportunities for mothers, both single and partnered, is a cornerstone of gender equity policies. At the same time, maternal employment is often perceived to be in competition with the aim of promoting the best interests of children, especially when those children are very young. (In a recent PEW survey more than 63% of US respondents agreed that full-time maternal employment “is bad for children”.) (PEW Social Trends 2018) The strategy most often proposed to square this circle is state provision of high quality ‘early childhood education and care’ (ECEC). Numerous studies have assessed ECEC’s effects on child welfare, producing a convergence of opinion that its benefits to child well-being largely outweigh the losses incurred. For instance, both the large-scale US NICHD study and the Canadian NLSCY yielded evidence that young children whose mothers work show (modest) cognitive and language gains, in addition to significant social and economic long-term benefits from increased family incomes and job security. (OPRE 2009) Although some studies have found an increase in negative behavioural outcomes associated with very early childcare

⁸In the US, only about 15% of low-income, lone parents receive financial support from the absent parent. (Child Trends 2018) In the OECD, on average, fewer than half of all lone parents reported receiving financial help from the absent parent. There is considerable variation across countries. Less than 25% of sole-parent families in the Mediterranean countries, Ireland, the UK and the Netherlands received cash transfers from the absent parent, while this is over 80% in Denmark, Norway and Sweden. (OECD FDB 2010)

(before 12 months of age), these are more pronounced for children of middle-class and affluent households. Negative outcomes also appeared, unremarkably, when poor quality early childcare was combined with insensitive maternal care. Overall, however, analysts concluded that maternal employment after early infancy is not in itself a risk factor for children:

There is a trade-off: mothers who do not work outside the home have more time to engage with their child, and this has positive effects...But stay-at-home mothers generally have a lower family income, and thus their children do not benefit from some of the effects associated with increased income. Stay-at-home mothers also tend to be slightly more prone to depression, which can have detrimental effects on their child's development.... On balance, there are minimal long-term effects of either working or not working outside the home. What matters most is that the child is cared for throughout the day by warm and responsive caregivers in an environment with opportunities to learn. (Willms 2002: 348)

The take-home message from the two most comprehensive and large-scale North American studies is that, all considered, a mother's employment is not, after all, in competition with her child's developmental needs.

Setting aside averages, however, what effect does maternal employment have specifically on children from less advantaged, low-income households – of which more than half, in the US and many other countries, are supported by single mothers? An even stronger message seems to emerge in response to this question: disadvantaged children stand to gain the *most* from high-quality ECEC, showing a 'statistically significant association with achievement, language, and social skills for low-income children after controlling for background characteristics.' (OPRE 2009) Numerous evaluations of children enrolled in innovative, high-quality ECEC programmes such as the Perry Preschool and Abecedarian Projects have yielded the same results. (Heckman 2013) The less advantaged a child's home circumstances, it seems, the more he or she apparently stands to gain from being taken out of them. It is tempting to conclude that if high-quality care is available, then poor, single mothers of pre-school age children not only may, but should seek employment outside the home. They can best serve their children's developmental needs by taking paid 12 months' maternity leave and then turning their care over to ECEC professionals while they return to work.

The 'if' qualifying this conclusion is significant, of course: some countries offer little or no provision for either paid leave or childcare, let alone high-quality ECEC. That much is obvious. But there are two further, less obvious worries that deserve attention. First, the only conclusion the evidence clearly licenses is that, in the case of disadvantaged single mothers, a (work-conditional) ECEC intervention has better outcomes than *no intervention at all*. It clearly does not follow that conditional ECEC is preferable to any other intervention, nor that additional interventions would not better promote child development. Are there different interventions which would better meet the specific needs of the children of disadvantaged single mothers? Secondly, the conclusion is drawn from an argument premised on the child's interests alone. It sets aside the fact that there are two parties' immediate interests at stake: the child's *and* his mother's. Does the mother have her own interests, or even entitlements, which should be taken into account?

Without answers to these questions, policy-makers often leap too hastily to a package of ECEC-plus-employment as a one-size-fits-all solution to the problem of reconciling maternal employment and children's needs. This is, indeed, a package which promises to benefit affluent, dual-earner households. But how successfully does it address the complexities and conflicts that shape low-income, single mother households? It is easy to lose sight of the myriad ways in which father absence combines with poverty to constrain a household's material and psycho-social resources on a day-to-day basis. Let us bring into sharper focus some relevant details by considering the individual case of Clarissa, a young, uneducated, low-income single mother from Sheffield, England.

Clarissa, aged twenty, lives in a one-bedroom rented flat with her son, Sammy, aged three. Sammy was born when his mother was seventeen.⁹ Clarissa works two part-time jobs and receives some state benefits (the welfare-to-work UK Universal Credit programme).

She left school early in her pregnancy to live with Tom, Sammy's father, against the wishes of her parents, from whom she is now estranged.¹⁰ At that time, Tom worked part-time as a housepainter and, with Clarissa's maternity allowance of £136 (\$180 USD) a week, they felt they could manage. Clarissa was not overly concerned about abandoning her school exams – she intended to return and finish the following year after she and Tom were married and he was working full time.

That did not happen. Tom and Clarissa's relationship deteriorated after Sammy was born; Sammy had had a low birthweight and was a fretful infant. Clarissa struggled to cope; she tried to breastfeed but was often too agitated and gave up after a few weeks. When Sammy was a 4 months old Tom moved to Scotland. The Child Maintenance Service has tried to locate him without success. He has never paid child support. When Clarissa complained to the CMS, her caseworker told her that tracking Tom was not their job: 'We calculate; we don't investigate'.

For a time, Clarissa managed on the state maternity allowance, but this ran out when Sammy was 28 weeks old. Because Clarissa had not been employed before Sammy's birth, she had no additional weeks of employer-subsidized maternity leave. After that, she had the standard child benefit of £20.90 a week and received welfare benefits of another £248 a week, but her rent alone was £105 a week. She moved to a less expensive flat across town, where she and Sammy live now. The area is rough, heavily trafficked and unsafe at night. Clarissa does not know any of her neighbours.

⁹In the US, 89% of women aged 15–19 years who gave birth were unmarried, as were 66% of women aged 20 to 24. (Childtrends, 'Births to Unmarried Women' 2018). Over half of low-income single mothers (52%) are under age 34, compared with 38% of higher-income single mothers. (Mather 2010)

¹⁰In the US over half of low-income single mothers (52%) are under age 34, compared with 38% of higher-income single mothers. Three-fifths (61%) of low-income single mothers have not attended college, compared with two-fifths of single mothers in higher-income households. Low-income single mothers are also more than twice as likely to be unemployed or not in the labor force (43%) compared to their higher-income counterparts (16%). (Mather 2010)

When Sammy was 8 months old, Clarissa started working part-time cleaning private homes for cash-in-hand payment. She would have preferred above-board work, but the minimum wage for under-25s subject to a 30% reduction in the UK. When Sammy turned three, he became eligible for subsidized ECEC, but this – and Clarissa's other benefits – became conditional on her being employed, so she took a job cleaning at a nearby hotel.¹¹ Her employer usually schedules her for only 29 h a week, with irregular alterations between morning and evening shifts. This arrangement offers him maximum flexibility and he does not have to provide Clarissa with the employee benefits due to full-time employees. Sometimes she has fewer hours.

Unfortunately, the subsidized ECEC schedule caters to parents who work regular office hours: it runs only in daytime hours and requires a termly commitment. This does not fit with Clarissa's volatile schedule and evening shifts, and she is only able to use it a few hours a week. Otherwise, Clarissa pays her 16-year-old step-sister, Tonya, to babysit during her evening shifts. Tonya has had little childcare experience and is often occupied on her phone, leaving Sammy in front of the television. At other times, Clarissa uses a neighbourhood childminder who charges a premium in the evening. All in, over 50% of Clarissa's income goes on childcare. She has had her electricity turned off for non-payment three times already in the past year. She worries continually about money.

Sammy has frequent colds, and has developed a kind of asthma.¹² Clarissa has access to a family doctor through the National Health Service, but the surgery does not accept walk-ins after 8:30 in the morning, before Sammy is awake, and advance appointments are often missed owing to Clarissa's variable work schedule. She has never managed to complete his vaccinations, despite frequent notifications. Because Clarissa is not full time, she is not entitled to paid sick days or vacation days, and her employer is intolerant of schedule changes.

Outside of her work hours, looking after Sammy is Clarissa's 'second shift'. He seldom sleeps through the night, and when he wakes he is often distressed and wants a bottle, although he has teethed. Owing to her variable work hours, she finds it difficult to settle Sammy into a regular routine for either eating or sleeping. The NHS home health visitor told Clarissa that a more regular routine and more protein in his diet would help to quiet Sammy's frequent tantrums but Clarissa finds it hard to make that happen.

Socially, Clarissa has fallen out of touch with her former classmates, most of whom have moved on to further schooling or vocational training. Sometimes one of them invites her out, but Clarissa would have to pay for babysitting, and there would be other costs. It is usually more trouble than it is worth. Clarissa would like to start up a new relationship, but she does not know where she would find the time. She often feels isolated and hopeless. After Sammy is in bed, she usually just has a few drinks on her own.

¹¹ Employed, low-income single mothers are much more likely to work in the service sector (41%) compared to single mothers in higher-income families (17%). (Mather 2010)

¹² Children in households in the bottom income quintile are three times more likely to develop asthma than those in the top quintile.

Clarissa wants to return to school some day and even go on to university. When Sammy was about a year old, she attempted to attend a Saturday school-leavers programme. However, she found that it difficult to focus on the required studying at home. She also found that this made her short-tempered with Sammy, who tends to be clingy and fidgety. Further schooling will have to wait.¹³

Clarissa’s circumstances are neither anomalous nor exaggerated: they are representative of the interactions of low maternal resources, father absence and poverty not only in the UK, but in Canada, Australia, New Zealand and many southern and eastern European countries. These interactions produce well-known risk factors for Sammy’s functionings as an infant and toddler, and for his future capabilities. The risks may be roughly divided into three categories: those deriving from his mother’s resources, those deriving from father absence (leaving one, solo caregiver-provider) and Sammy’s endogenous, developmental characteristics:

Mother risk factors	Father absence/single provider risk factors	Child endogenous risk factors
Adolescent birth mother	Paternal non-involvement	Low birthweight
Education interruption	Food and housing insecurity	Asthma
Low education/low skills	Domestic instability	Insecure attachment
Low wages	No unpaid caregiver reprieve	Disrupted/irregular sleep
Variable and volatile work schedules	Irregular/chaotic home routines	Breastfeeding failure
No sick leave/holiday leave	Non-receipt of child support	Externalizing behaviours
Social isolation	Low-quality childcare/care by multiple providers	Hyperactivity
Substance abuse	Irregular medical care/vaccinations	
Persistent/toxic stress	Exposure to neighbourhood violence	
Anxiety, depression, irritability	Exposure to environmental toxins	

The categorization of these factors is inevitably somewhat artificial; it fails accurately to reflect their inter-dependence. Above all, it fails to capture the extent to which the cause of Sammy’s many perils is the *combination* of father absence and low maternal resources. Were Clarissa and Sammy financially and emotionally supported by a second caregiver-provider, almost every one of these risks would be greatly mitigated. To see this, consider for which factors father absence is likely to stand as a sufficient condition. Clarissa’s personal and interpersonal vulnerabilities are good candidates: her social isolation, stress-related mental health disorders, reduced caregiver reprieve, substance abuse, withdrawal from intimate relationships and, perhaps, her inconsistent maternal sensitivity and responsiveness, which in turn influences Sammy’s fragile attachment, externalizing behaviours and incipient ADHD. It is principally in her role as a combined caregiver-provider that Clarissa’s personal resources are overstretched. Clarissa’s young age and low education need not, on their own, exclude her as a capable, caring mother. However, they are clearly

¹³As Mather observes, ‘A large number of lower-income single mothers have become “disconnected” from education.... Given the current state of the job market, these single mothers are at high risk of remaining poor, with little hope of pulling themselves out of poverty.’ (Mather 2010, 3)

liabilities for her as a solo caregiver-provider, and then inevitably bring in tow Sammy's exposure to the risks of low household income, volatile domestic schedule, low quality child care, food and housing insecurity, neighbourhood criminality, environmental pollution and the rest. Clarissa's case is no imaginary composite: it illustrates statistical probabilities for unpartnered mothers with low educational achievement across the board. (McClanahan and Jacobsen 2015). All of these risk factors are disproportionately represented in single mother households throughout the OECD.

Let us now suppose that Clarissa is subject to a compulsory welfare-to-work programme, and that she is successfully placed in a new (minimum-wage) job with daytime hours, giving her access to (work-conditional) ECEC. This would ameliorate the negative impacts of Clarissa and Sammy's home circumstances to some extent, just as the evidence indicates: Sammy would no longer be subject to a changing menu of untrained caregivers, his mother's childcare costs would be reduced, and both would have a more stable routine. Sammy's nutrition would improve with ECEC lunches and he would benefit from more stimulating interactions. These changes could yield multiple knock-on benefits for his externalising behaviours, disrupted sleep, attachment insecurity and incipient ADHD.

Nonetheless, access to ECEC alone would most probably fail to remedy many of the perils of Sammy's circumstances. A key reason for this failure is that most out-of-home ECEC leaves untouched the *parenting* that a child receives. Indeed, when ECEC provision is conditional on maternal workforce participation, it guarantees that parenting becomes the single mother's 'second shift'. The low-waged mother's earnings seldom permit her to buy in assistance discharge the many duties of this shift; nannies, tutors, music lessons and other child enrichment activities are beyond her reach. Does this matter, so long as the ECEC provision is extensive and high-quality? After all, the primary paternalistic aim of ECEC is to benefit the child for what his home environment anyway fails to provide. As one policy report observes, 'The main line of attack is to...compensate for skills not acquired in the home.... The goal is, in effect, to *detach* the opportunities of the child from the abilities of the parents.' (Reeves and Howard 2013, emphasis added).

Detaching a child from the influences of his parental ties, however, may be an unrealistic goal. Parenting may still matter.

4 The Privilege of Good Parenting

The imprint of social origins is...already firmly established before the welfare state plays any major role in our lives (Waldfogel and Washbrook 2011: 2)

The available evidence suggests that the quality of parenting is the important scarce resource. (James Heckman 2013: 35)

Home parenting exercises a profound influence on children's everyday lives, even for those participating in the very best ECED. Maternal sensitivity, practices of talking and reading to a child, out-of-home activities, disciplinary style, and paren-

tal expectations are all important determinants of almost every dimension of a child's development.¹⁴ The developmental dimension most positively affected by ECEC is children's 'school readiness' cognitive skills – their verbal, numerical and reasoning abilities at age five. Yet even there, observational research indicates that the amount of *parent-provided* cognitive stimulation and emotional support in a child's home environment accounts for up to half of the relationship between socio-economic status and disparities in children's cognitive test scores (Klebanov et al. 1998; Smith et al. 1997). And these disparities are considerable. At age four, children from US families in the poorest income quintile score on average at the 32nd and 34th percentiles of the national distribution mathematics and literacy respectively, compared to those in the richest quintile who scored in the 69th and 63rd. The gap persists as children move on through education, and similar striking gaps exist on measures of attention and engagement in school', SAT scores, and college graduation rates.¹⁵ Even when controlling for other variables

...parenting behavior [explains] more of the gap between top income quintile children and bottom income quintile children than any other factor, including maternal education, family size, and race. Similarly, maternal sensitivity, measured when the child is six months and again at 15 months, explains one-third of the math and language skills gap at the beginning of kindergarten between black and white children (Murnane et al. 2006)

What explains these correlations between income and parenting? How, exactly, does poverty compromise parenting? After all, being poor does not in itself make one an inadequate parent. Poverty clearly affects housing choices, health options, educational options and a range of other resources that can improve a child's outcomes—but why should it specifically compromise parenting quality, where this refers specifically to the quantity and quality of interpersonal, parent-child interactions?

We already know that many impoverished households are headed by single mothers. In fact, in many countries any study of impoverished children is, *ipso facto*, a study in which roughly half the population lives in a single mother household. In the US, for instance, children with single mothers make up the majority (at least 54%) of poor children and at least 42% of low-income families.¹⁶ (Mather 2010) In these families, father absence at least halves the material resources of a household – even if we assume, counterfactually, that a working woman's earnings are equal to a man's. Does father absence also compromise parenting quality? The mathematics

¹⁴Various measures of parenting competence exist. The CNLSY (Children of the National Longitudinal Study of Youth) measured parenting using the well-validated HOME-SF scale (Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment-Short Form). The HOME scale consists of mother self-reports and interviewer observations on the emotional and learning environment of the home. A full list of items on the HOME scale can be found at <http://www.nlsinfo.org/site/childya/nlsdocs/guide/Appendixes/A-HOMEScales.htm>

¹⁵Family income is, overall, a much stronger predictor of children's school success than race. (OECD 'Doing Better for Families' 2011)

¹⁶These are strikingly disproportionate numbers, given that single parents head only about 9% of all US households,

alone suggest a provisional answer to that questions: if a single mother works, then parental *time* resources are halved as well. As Waldfogel observes,

A single mother, particularly if she is working, will not have as much time to give to her children as would two parents in a married-couple family. There can be no division of labor within her household—the single mother bears all the burden.... (Waldfogel 2010)

Unsurprisingly, one of the most important differences between advantaged and disadvantaged working parents is in how much time the parent spends with the child. (Lareau 2003) One study found that ‘working mothers...with a college education or greater spend roughly six hours more each week caring for their children than mothers with a high school degree or less’. (Kalil 2015: 68) There is a longitudinal dimension to these differences as well: between the mid –1990’s and 2009, college-educated mothers increased their childcare time by over 9 h per week, while the increase for less-educated mothers was less than half that amount. (Ramey and Ramey 2010).¹⁷

It is not just quantity of parental investments that matter, however, but their quality. Here, too, low-income and poverty predict significant losses. As Kalil reports,

Economically advantaged parents display more optimal parenting behaviours across a range of domains, including more authoritative (vs. authoritarian) parenting styles..., more sensitive and responsive mother-child interactions..., greater language stimulation..., and great levels of parental management and advocacy. (Kalil 2015: 67)

Of course, as any working parent knows, quantity of parenting time directly affects parenting quality: it simply takes fewer minutes to threaten a child with authoritarian punishments than to sensitively negotiate boundaries and values through meaningful conversations. So, if single parents have both less income *and* less time, at least part of the correlation between economic disadvantage and poor parenting is unremarkable. That said, pressure on time is certainly not the whole of the story. Parenting quality is also mediated by maternal education, independently of employment status. Why should that be? Are more educated mothers simply better placed to know what matters and what works in parenting?

Some evidence suggests that they are. Educated mothers, for instance, more effectively tailor their activities with their children’s developmental stage across three categories – basic care and play at ages 0–2, parental teaching at ages 3–5, and, in the middle years (6–13), parental management. (Kalil et al. 2012) It would be too hasty, however, to conclude that the educated mother’s advantages derive solely, or even principally, from an epistemic advantage – that is, that she just has access to more and better *information* about her child’s developmental needs. Maternal educational attainment interacts with numerous other non-epistemic factors shaping the patterns of domestic life – factors which refer us back again to the stresses and strains of father absence and its consequences for household income. For example, economic insecurity is stressful, and persistent stress contributes to

¹⁷Financial investment differences are also high. In 1972–73, top quintile families spent \$2700 more per year on child enrichment than the bottom quintiles. By 2005–6, this difference had almost tripled to \$7500 (Kornrich and Furstenberg 2013)

the problem of cognitive scarcity. Cognitive scarcity arises when an individual's cognitive resources are overstretched by immediate attentional demands, leaving too little 'mental bandwidth' to plan ahead and to invest in longer-term consequences. Parents whose cognitive resources are strained in this way are more given to myopic practical reasoning in which future goals – such as Clarissa's educational and housing hopes – become less visible, or even disappear from view altogether. Even if the parenting-relevant information base of the disadvantaged mother is similar to that of the advantaged one, the immediate and often changeable demands of daily life can limit the cognitive resources she needs to translate it into strategies and actions. Kalil describes the problem as a combination of stressors reducing attention and agentic control:

One potentially important source of income-based differences in parenting is the repercussions of the financial strain typically experienced by low-income parents on their decision making. The daily stressors of low-income parents' lives place cognitive and emotional demands on parents' attention and self-control in the present. Parents' focus and energy needed to meet the demands of today leave little room to follow through on decisions that can affect the future of their children...Accordingly, the possibilities for purposeful, goal-directed parenting are greatly diminished. (Kalil 2015: 76)

Access to theoretical knowledge about parenting is one thing; the ability to implement that knowledge in practical day-to-day practical reasoning is another. The lone mother whose capacity for strategic thinking is overstretched will, on this view, be less motivated to invest time and money in supportive home activities for her child.

Even more importantly, the emotional dimensions of her interactions with her child are likely to be similarly affected, compromising their sensitivity and responsiveness. Consider again Clarissa who, at age twenty, must marshal the cognitive resources to manage the family finances, handle domestic upkeep, and meet Sammy's basic needs (food, clothing, medication, activities, childcare) while working a volatile schedule at a physically demanding job. By her own admission, she often finds herself failing to engage with Sammy as she knows she should. This is arguably the most serious vulnerability to which he is exposed. Analysis of the exceptionally large and diverse Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-BirthCohort (ECLS-B) concluded that

compared with a number of other factors (i.e., mother's education, mothers' health, pre-school enrollment child health, and a set of demographics including race/ethnicity, family structure, nativity, family member disability, maternal age at birth, number of children in the household, and child gender) parenting style, in particular mothers' sensitivity and responsiveness, is the most important fact explaining the poorer cognitive performance of low-income children.... (Kalil 2015: 70)

Low maternal sensitivity and responsiveness, moreover, is not compensated for by out-of-home childcare, however good its quality. In the ECLS-B study, differential enrollment in a quality-controlled ECEC (Head Start) only reduced the gap in cognitive scores by 6–9%, and by the third grade had no measurable impact on academic performance whatever. (Reeves and Howard 2013: 2) Related analyses yielded similar conclusions for children's behavioural and social outcomes; mater-

nal sensitivity and responsiveness make a difference that ECEC does not mitigate (Waldfoegel and Washbrook 2011). It is well-known that these qualities matter greatly in infancy and early childhood, but they continue to matter as a child matures and needs disciplinary guidance from his caregivers. Summarizing the data on ...

single parenting and discipline, Jackson et al. note that ...single parenting—especially among mothers with limited access to social and financial support—is associated with parent stress, stemming in part from the single-handed negotiation of heavy parenting responsibilities.... In addition, research has consistently shown that parents who experience economic stress display less nurturance and more harshness in their responses to their children...that poverty diminishes the quality of parenting due to persistent daily stressors; ... and that emotionally stressed mothers are more likely than others to rely on aversive, coercive discipline techniques'. (Jackson et al. 2010)

These findings strongly indicate that the inequalities which begin – and persevere – at home wield an influence which cannot be remedied by ECEC alone. In the context of single mother households, moreover, it is the quantity and quality of *maternal* parenting alone that wields this influence. Clarissa's concerns about her inconsistent attentiveness to Sammy are not misplaced: the disadvantaged, working single mother struggles to provide the time, the quality of interactions, the sensitivity and responsiveness that her children need.

From a family policy perspective, does it make sense to offer these mothers the same programmes that suit their advantaged, married professional counterparts? The nature of single mothers' concerns are profoundly different, as are the consequences for their children. Anne-Marie Slaughter and Clarissa both face challenges in their roles as mothers, to be sure. In Anne-Marie's case, the challenges are bound up with the extensive mother absence her preferred career required. These were partly addressed, for a time, by her access to salary-calibrated maternity leave, high quality, daytime ECEC and a willing husband to share her domestic and caregiving responsibilities. These measures did not eliminate the inequities of her maternal role, but they did go a great distance towards mitigating them. Clarissa's difficulties, at the heart of which is the absence of any second, supportive parent, are utterly different. The policies and arrangements which assisted Anne-Marie to become a more effective and better-paid Policy Director and CEO will not necessarily help Clarissa to become a better mother. It is doubtful, for instance, that making Clarissa's access to childcare conditional on minimum-wage employment stands to improve her parenting; indeed, given her limited employment opportunities, it almost certainly contributes to the circumstances which compromise her parenting. For families like Clarissa and Sammy's, policies governing work conditionality and ECEC will need to be reconfigured if they are to achieve its paternalistic aims.

Above all, these policies will need to engage with both generations in the household – children *and* their mothers. Conventional, dual-earner models assume shared earnings, shared caregiving and family-compatible employment alternatives. The current trend of increasing father absence defeats all of these assumptions. Successful child development in a father-absent, single-earner household is possible, of course, but that assumes a mother who is well-resourced materially, vocationally and personally – conditions which in turn are mediated by her gender, level

of education and maturity. Effective interventions for children in these households will be interventions as much for their parents as for the children in their care. What Sammy needs, if he is to have more equal developmental prospects, is the remediation of various immediate deficiencies in his home experience – deficiencies in Clarissa’s available time, attention, cognitive resources, and the sensitivity and responsiveness she brings to her interactions with him. For this to happen, it is likely that Clarissa would need to leave her wearing and low-waged employment, and be paid a living wage for what is itself a full-time job: parenting Sammy in his pre-school years. Longer term, her son needs her to extend her education and qualify for more stable, higher-waged employment, allowing her to plan for his future without the distorting influences of isolation, fatigue and financial anxiety. These changes plainly will not be brought about by one-generation, welfare-to-work family policies which invest solely in Sammy’s out-of-home ECEC, and do nothing to promote Clarissa’s economic and educational prospects. If the characteristics of his home experience remain as they are, Sammy stands to inherit his mother’s disadvantages, and to pass them on to his own children in turn.

In sum, capable maternal nurturing and parenting matters greatly to a child’s developmental opportunities. That is the their instrumental value in the context of child welfare, and a key premise in the argument for not only investing directly in children through ECEC, but in their mothers. Do maternal capabilities have any other value? If anything has been learned from the feminist agenda of the last half-century, it is that women’s capabilities are not mere means to the ends of men, nor even to their children’s ends. Do maternal capabilities have any non-instrumental, intrinsic value?

5 A mother’s Capabilities: Nurturing and Tragic Choices

When I think about leaving my baby with someone else and not being with her all day, every day, my stomach literally hurts. I think about her missing me, wondering where I am, and if I’m ever coming back. (Lilley 2011)

The view that mothers are entitled to work is now firmly entrenched in the popular imagination. Indeed, the perception of maternal employment as an entitlement has played an important part in promoting welfare-to-work family policies throughout the OECD. Traditionally, contractualist considerations have provided the main normative support for conditionality. On the contractualist view, it is only fair that everyone, including mothers, make productive labour contributions to society; conditionality simply prevents free-riding. Conditionality wins a further – and more marketable – paternalistic justification, however, if maternal workforce participation is perceived as a benefit, rather than a burden to mothers themselves. So, for example, when the UK’s New Labour government first sought (in 1997) to abolish the ‘Lone Parents Premium’ component of Income Support and to introduce mandatory work requirements for single parents on Income Support, these were presented as permitting women to ‘concentrate on *their* longer term goals’. (DWP 2005: 96, emphasis added) Advertising for more restrictive work conditions is now

generally silent about contractualist social obligations; government apologists instead enthuse that ‘work is generally good for physical and mental well-being’, and that conditionality ensures that more women can now ‘enjoy the financial and non-financial benefits of paid employment’ (Gregg 2008: 10).

Much less is heard about a woman’s entitlement to nurture and parent her children. This is unsurprising for at least two reasons. First, it can seem unnecessary to argue that one is entitled to a role that is anyway imposed on one, and childrearing is today more often framed as a duty unjustly foisted upon women, than as a fundamental interest they endorse. Mainstream media lends ample evidence on this score, with its regular references to childrearing as a ‘sacrifice’, an ‘unfair burden’, and a ‘barrier to women’s opportunities and gender equality’. (Jericho 2017) Another reason that we hear less about a mother’s ‘right to nurture’ is that, in the distribution of entitlements and responsibilities surrounding motherhood, we more naturally associate the former with the vulnerabilities and needs of children. To the mother fall the responsibilities.

Yet many women still identify childbearing as a valued personal goal, and many, even most mothers wish to nurture their children, especially in their early years.¹⁸ Indeed, a mother’s effective nurturing of her child is not typically just one of her interests alongside others, but an interest interwoven with her personal and moral identity. A woman’s opportunity to fulfil that interest is regarded by many – albeit not all – as a valuable capability. In the vocabulary of the capability approach, the activity of nurturing one’s child – promoting his or her flourishing through personal engagement – is a valued *functioning*, a ‘being or doing’ that is available to women and is regarded by some as having intrinsic value. At the same time, feminist theorists often deride women’s interest in nurturing as an adaptive one, culturally imposed by several millennia of oppressive masculine coercion. And it is true enough that, until the last century, women had few opportunities to forego the role of mother and homemaker. It does not follow, however, that mothering is no longer an intrinsically valuable functioning for many women.

Evidence from both the developmental sciences and the testimony of mothers themselves offer a more nuanced story. We now know that (at least for the human species as it is presently constituted) powerful, biological conditions support maternal felt interest and behavioural investment in child caregiving. Biology is not destiny, and epigenetic interactions make it difficult to disentangle environmental from nature-given dispositions. Nonetheless, biological privileges permit the vast majority of women an intimacy with their children that is unlike any other personal relationship. This intimacy typically begins at conception and develops during pregnancy. Women’s bodies provide the gestation environment and pre-natal nutrition for their

¹⁸I here discuss only the mother’s engagement with the child. I do not mean to imply that there are not equally important interactions with his biological father. However, these interactions do not have the same biological basis, nor do they typically underpin the same agent-relative moral reasons. My topic in this section is the biological trajectory of mother-child relations, the character of the mother’s experience of these, and the moral intuitions they very commonly, although not exceptionlessly, generate.

children; by the time an infant is born, a woman has been interacting with him or her physiologically, emotionally and cognitively for almost 40 weeks. Throughout this time, her experiences have been, quite literally, mixed with those of her infant, not least through the effects of her serotonin and dopamine neurotransmitter systems on the development of the foetus – a development that is causally correlated with her future child’s health, capacity for emotion regulation, intelligence and resilience against psychological disorders. Post-natally, this symbiotic relationship of physical and psychological involvement continues far longer for our species than for most others, simply because human newborns are born at an exceptionally immature stage of development, wholly incapable of self-sustenance or even independent mobility. Caregiver proximity is thus crucial to survival, providing the infant with physical warmth, nutrition and protection. As Susan Gerhardt observes,

Physiologically, the human baby is still very much part of the mother’s body. He depends on her milk to feed him, to regulate his heart rate and blood pressure, and to provide immune protection. His muscular activity is regulated by her touch, as is his growth hormone level. Her body keeps him warm and she disperses his stress hormones for him by her touch and her feeding. This basic physiological regulation keeps the baby alive. (Gerhardt 2014: 38)

The mother’s body and brain are biologically organized to promote this provision through a multitude of modifications within the mother’s psycho-physical economy. The hormonal changes which accompany pregnancy continue long after birth, as a mother’s interactions with her child affect her affective repertoire, perceptual processes and cognitive biases in ways that (typically) motivate heightened responsiveness to her child’s needs and wants. (Steinberg 2010). Even beyond infancy and well into the pre-school years, a child’s emotional signals to his mother continue to activate a range of psycho-physical responses (e.g., the release of oxytocin) affecting his attentional focus, affective arousal and, at the experiential level, his motivation to maintain proximity. Reciprocally, the child’s focus for his development of emotional expressions and his guide to his social referencing is his primary caregiver – most often his mother. (Steinberg 2010) These ubiquitous natural mechanisms potentially promote the persistence of mothers’ engagement with their children throughout their early years and beyond.

All of this is well known to developmental scientists, child psychologists, pediatricians, social service practitioners and others who engage professionally with child welfare. What is less often recognised, however, is the extent to which it features in the subjective, evaluative perspective of mothers themselves. A woman’s intimate ties with her child are experienced not merely as one set of desires and intentions alongside others, but as a personal imperative: caring for her child’s needs is not just something that she typically wants to do, but that she feels she *must* do – a commitment that is bound up with her integrity and psychological identity.¹⁹ In philosophical terms, this is effectively a *moral* imperative – not merely a contingent motivation to which a woman happens to be sensitive, but a normative requirement to which she feels herself accountable, whatever other motives she may have.

¹⁹In Bernard Williams’s well-known terminology, it is a ‘fundamental project’ underpinning an agent’s ability to regard his/her life as meaningful.

Moreover, the imperative at stake – in the ordinary experience of many ordinary mothers – is not the agent-neutral one requiring of just anyone that they care for just any child. It is experienced as an agent-relative one, making an essential, first-personal reference to the *mother's* specific obligations to *her* child.

It is, of course, possible to mistakenly experience oneself as subject to a moral imperative. Racists, xenophobes, misogynists and murderers frequently take themselves to be acting on moral requirements which should be dismissed as imaginary. It is not my aim here to assess the accuracy of the maternal moral sensibility; what matters in this context is how some mothers intuitively perceive and respond to their commitment to their children – not whether their judgments comply with this or that normative theory. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that such intuitions are familiar the world over, and widely regarded as legitimate and warranted; we do not typically dismiss them as pathological aberrations. Even a debunking, evolutionary view of moral intuitions can only dismiss them to a point: a mother's special commitment to her own offspring is plainly adaptive for our species, and is at least in that respect wholly justified for those who think human survival a good thing. Historically, in some religions, its special value is even woven into sacred symbolism and serves as an archetype of the divine. From a more everyday perspective, the subjective, first-personal dimensions of the mother-child bond is recognized by many as a source of profound fulfilment. All considered, a mother's experience of herself as subject to an authoritative imperative is neither eccentric nor anomalous. Her sensitivity to this value is not to be lightly mocked or dismissed.

In sum, for many women, the successful nurturing of their children is an intrinsically valuable functioning, and one which is often experienced as having moral value. What does this suggest about the value of the related capability – the value of having the the real freedom or opportunity to achieve that functioning?²⁰ Amartya Sen describes some capabilities as 'basic' in the sense that they are necessary "to satisfy certain elementary and crucially important functionings up to certain levels" (Sen 1992: 45 n.19). In the context of social justice, there is good reason to think that just social arrangements will ensure that such basic capabilities are available to all. Put differently, in a just society, basic capabilities will count as something like entitlements. Martha Nussbaum's account of 'minimal social justice', for instance, specifies thresholds for a well-known list of capabilities that all nations should guarantee to their citizens; citizens are entitled to capabilities at these thresholds (and perhaps beyond them) as a matter of social justice.²¹ Is a woman's capability to effectively nurture her child a basic capability in this strong sense?²² Public policies

²⁰A freedom or opportunity is 'real' for an individual just if it stands as a genuine option open to him, and is not merely a formal or legal negative liberty (Williams 1973).

²¹Nussbaum assigns to the phrase 'basic capabilities' a very different meaning than Sen's. For convenience and economy, I adopt Sen's use of it here, although it does not strictly apply to Nussbaum's well-known list of ten capabilities which a minimally just society will guarantee.

²²It is worth noting, however, that UK and many other national health service policies allow that a woman's capability to *conceive* a child – her opportunity to achieve reproductive functioning – is a health entitlement justifying public support for assisted reproductive therapies such as IVF.

most often reflect the view that, however valuable nurturing may be to this or that woman, it lies beyond the minimum threshold; it may be a good thing, but it is not, as a matter of justice, an entitlement. The mother whose circumstances deny her the opportunity to achieve this functioning may simply face a tragic choice. This is how Ingrid Robeyns describes the case:

[S]uppose I am a low-skilled poor single parent who lives in a society without decent social provisions. Take the following functionings: (1) to hold a job, which will require me to spend many hours on working and commuting, but will generate the income needed to properly feed myself and my family; (2) to care for my children at home and give them all the attention, care and supervision they need. In a piecemeal analysis, both (1) and (2) are opportunities open to me, but they are not *both together* open to me.... [W]e must take a comprehensive or holistic approach, and ask which *sets* of capabilities are open to me, that is: can I simultaneously provide for my family and properly care for and supervise my children? Or am I rather forced to make some hard, perhaps even tragic choices between two functionings which both reflect basic needs and basic moral duties? (Robeyns 2016)

For the poor single mother whom Robeyn's envisages, the answer to this last question is, under prevailing family policy regimes, all too straightforward. The provision of ECEC programmes aimed at detaching children from maternal care, and policies making such provision conditional upon mandatory employment, together guarantee that many disadvantaged mothers must make such 'hard, perhaps even tragic' choices. Yet the tragic dimensions of the choices facing the disadvantaged single mother have attracted little attention from either justice theorists or gender activists. The functionings and capabilities of children, not mothers, occupies the centre stage in the former – in the literature of developmental justice and public policy. This is understandable: there, the debates are often inspired by findings in economics and so framed by utilitarian reasoning focussed on prudential, rather than moral reasons for promoting children's welfare. It is unsurprising that considerations appealing to entitlements, rights-based claims and tragic dilemmas often go unremarked.

The same cannot be said, however, of the debates surrounding issues of gender equality, in which the disadvantages and inequities traditionally borne by women are purportedly front and centre. I confess to some bafflement at the exclusivity of the issues which often dominate discussion in this arena: corporate glass ceilings, equal pay in high-income professions (medicine, law, technology), male resistance to an equal share of domestic duties, the need for more gender-neutral language in public institutions. I do not mean to belittle the injustices at stake in these disputes, nor to dismiss their victims. (Anne-Marie Slaughter's disappointment at trading in a coveted government position for a professorial chair was, I am sure, sincerely felt and genuinely difficult.) It is controversial, at best, to rank some inequities as greater than others; different lives in different environments can generate different, equally legitimate, grievances. Nonetheless, I agree with Robeyns that there exist today injustices which confront the 'low-skilled, poor single' mother with distinctively tragic choices – choices with respect to which some element of wrongdoing and loss are inescapable, leaving behind them a trail of regrettable moral remainders. These choices, and the social arrangements which allow them, merit more attention than they receive. Consider Clarissa and Sammy, and the millions of other young

families who, in growing numbers and despite their willingness to work, face poverty, isolation and, perhaps most painfully, the probability that their children's destinies will mirror their own. Policymakers and gender activists alike owe them a more thoughtful response.

6 Giving Mothers a Fair Chance

[This is]an opportune moment to look again at the scope for interventions that tackle the problem of poor parenting more directly: in other words, parents themselves. (Reeves and Howard 2013)

This chapter began with a review of data evidencing two key facts. One is that single motherhood is on an upward trajectory which shows no signs of abating. The other is that, as single mothers' numbers have increased, so too has their disproportionate share in economic disadvantage. We ought, perhaps, to find this combination of facts puzzling. If single motherhood is so fraught with risks and difficulties, why do so many women stand by their maternal responsibilities? After all, the pattern of family and relationship instability that provides the backdrop for single parenthood typically involves both women *and* men in equal shares. Yet in more than nine out of ten single parent households, women alone are the primary caregivers. Why do mothers so often stay on, long after the fathers have moved on? Why do women not pursue a more independent path when partnerships fail, as do nine out of ten men? Why do women persist with the dual burdens of caregiving and breadwinning? (Why did Clarissa not walk out the door, as did Tom, to pursue a more rational and less burdensome life course?) A full answer to these questions lies beyond the scope of this paper. I have proposed just one part of the answer: a woman's role in creating and caring for children is often experienced as an intrinsically valuable functioning, overlain (rightly or wrongly) with a sense of moral obligation. This is only one dimension of the wider story, of course. But perhaps it is enough to remind us that the problems associated with impoverished single motherhood are not just problems of economic inequity, but of gender inequity. If mothers in their numbers responded to children as do men in theirs, the streets of even the most affluent, developed countries would be flooded with orphans and waifs.

This has not happened. For all their shortcomings, disadvantaged single mothers tend to persevere; they stand by their offspring, however fitfully, despite many reasons to choose a different course. It is still common in political debate to portray single mothers as a problem and a burden. From another, more respectful point of view, they are not so much a problem as a miraculous, if fragile, tidewall standing between the storm of father absence and widespread social chaos.

With this prospect in view, how should our family policies be configured to better serve these mothers and their children? Noble prize-winning economist James Heckman has vigorously advocated for increased investment in early years development, and especially ECEC, under the banner of 'Giving Kids a Fair Chance'. (Heckman 2013) His favoured models of successful ECEC, however, are pro-

grammes that intensively and directly involve and benefit the *parents* of high-risk children, and especially their mothers. Heckman has chosen his models wisely. The sooner we recognize the extent to which the strains of disadvantage are gendered, the better placed we will be to design policies that give not only children, but their mothers, a fair chance. I conclude with four provisional suggestions:

1. Single parents need to be assured of an adequate basic income throughout their children's pre-school years, not only to protect early development but to permit a period of regrouping to prepare for the long road of caregiving ahead. (It is time to recognise that mothers of young children *are* gainfully employed, and will remain so for some years.) Receipt of income should be conditional, but not on dead-end, low-wage employment. Rather than using conditionality to increase the minimum-wage labour force, a progressive system will use it to increase participation in parenting development programmes, household and economic management programmes, and in education and vocational training. Models of such programmes are widely available, including the not-for-profit Mobility Mentoring, the UK government home visitor programme and the US government Nurse-Family Partnership. These conditions, unlike arbitrary employment requirements, stand to benefit the mother *and* the child both in the early years and beyond.
2. ECEC should not be so much a strategy to detach children from their parents' abilities, as an opportunity to enhance their abilities. Provision should be universal, not least to avoid the 'ghetto-izing' stigma of programmes such as the US Head Start. (Progressive initiatives in several OECD countries have already successfully implemented universal, standardized ECEC provision serving the children of the rich and poor alike.) At the same time, this provision should be coordinated with bespoke, additional provisions responding to the special needs of single parent families, low-income families, and households at the intersection of both. Finally, provision should be means-tested, ensuring that affluent parents who enjoy the advantages of stable, high income, dual-earner households contribute an affordable share.
3. Fathers must contribute to their children's needs. If they cannot or will not contribute as caregivers, then they must do so as providers. Current arrangements, in which mothers are left to pursue child support from reluctant fathers through their own devices, often without legal assistance, do not work.²³ Not only are many mothers simply too busy to navigate the slow and byzantine legal bureaucracies of state support systems, but the process itself creates divisiveness, stress and disappointment for the children involved. Fathers should be required to fulfil their parental obligations as a matter of *public* interest, if they are unmoved by the interests of their children. Too often the 'deadbeat dad' is seen as a costly

²³ Less than 20% of low-income single mothers in the US receive regular child maintenance from the fathers of their children. In the UK the figure for single mothers overall is only slightly better at 29%; low-income single mothers fare far worse. Absent fathers are, as an OECD average, required to pay just 15% of their gross incomes support for one child. Resident mothers typically spend roughly four times that on their children's needs.

burden for mothers and children, when he is, in fact, a costly burden to us all. Claims that child support enforcement is too complicated or too costly or too sensitive should be called out for the (patriarchal) nonsense that they are. After all, governments generally act efficiently with respect to income tax and other collections of public interest: they do only calculate, but investigate and enforce. A significant portion of the cost of a guaranteed basic income for children can and should be offset by child support collections.

4. In developed, western societies, impoverished single mothers bear some of the greatest burdens of gender inequity. Feminists and gender theorists should direct due attention to their concerns and entitlements, as they already do to the grievances of advantaged, educated, professional women. Contractualist justifications for compulsory employment in low-waged, welfare-to-work programmes express contempt for women's distinctive, maternal capabilities, and dismiss the vital interest they often have in realising their maternal aims. Adding injury to insult, social contempt also undermines one of the disadvantaged mother's fundamental projects: the flourishing of her children. Competent mothering fulfils a social function of first importance, meriting respect and support. It is the responsibility of the educated, affluent feminist to use her privileges and public voice to recognise its value.

These are provisional suggestions only, none of which is uncontroversial. Implementing any of them would require a sea-change in family policies and public attitudes, reorienting them to the needs of the less advantaged rather than the affluent, and to women's capabilities over men's opportunities and liberties. Nonetheless, those with an interest in either justice for children or gender equality have reason to consider them.

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'I've Been Trying to Change My Life Heaps But I Always End Up Back Here'. The Complex Relationship Between Poverty, Parental Substance Dependency, and Self-Control



Anke Snoek

Abstract The aim of this chapter is to question the punitive approach towards substance dependent parents, especially substance dependent parents struggling with poverty, by outlining the complex ways in which poverty can shape reasoning, and hence capacities for self-control. I will outline two ways in which poverty can shape reasoning: a rational shift from a global to a local perspective, and a more invasive one: resignation. I will argue that when people with addictions become resigned, it is especially important to not hold a punitive approach, but to treat them with compassion while simultaneously bootstrapping their sense of agency. I will argue that having children can be an important turning point for people struggling with addiction, and possibly resignation. In order to successfully turn their lives around, they must feel comfortable to seek professional support without fear for retribution or stigma. This paradigm shift in how we treat substance dependent parents will be an important contribution to breaking the circle of intergenerational transmission of resignation, poverty and substance abuse.

Keywords Self-control · Agency · Poverty · Addiction · Substance dependency · Parental responsibility

1 How Should We Judge Substance Dependent Parents?

Children of substance dependent parents often face poor outcomes in life: they are at higher risk of becoming substance dependent themselves, to have poor cognitive and academic functioning, and to have emotional, social and behavioural adjustment problems (Drake and Vaillant 1988; Chassin et al. 1999; Hussong et al. 2008, 2010; Solis et al. 2012). In order to help these families and reduce the poor

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outcomes of these children, we need to have a good assessment of what goes wrong in these families.

A moralistic explanation (Dalrymple 2006) would be that parents who use substances must value their own pleasure over the well-being of their children. The easiest explanation for people's behaviour, is that their actions reflect their values. A modern proponent of this view is Stanton Peele. He describes how he cannot imagine that any disease or genetic predisposition could ever overrule his values as a parent (Peele 1987). I sat with an older woman watching a program in which a woman who directed a prominent treatment program described how, as an alcoholic in denial, she drank alcoholically throughout her years as a parent, thus raising six children who all either became substance abusers or required therapy as children of an alcoholic. The woman's argument was that she had inadvertently inherited her alcoholism from her two alcoholic grandfathers (a model of genetic transmission of alcoholism, incidentally, which no one has actually proposed). The woman I was sitting with clucked about how insidious the disease was that it could make a mother treat her children this way. I turned to her and asked: "Do you really think you could ever have gotten drunk and ignored your children, no matter how delightful you found drinking or how it relieved your tension or however you reacted to alcohol genetically?" Neither she nor I could imagine it, given her values as a parent.

Peele states that researchers tend to ignore people's values systems in explaining addictive behaviour because we are uncomfortable with judging people's values. If Peele's analysis is correct, and addicted parents are mostly bad people, then a punitive approach to substance dependent parents is validated. In some states in the United States there is a tendency towards a punitive approach, and substance use during pregnancy is prosecutable, also some parts of Australia seem to favour this approach (DeVile and Kopelman 1998; Flavin and Paltrow 2010; Olsen 2015). Some have also described the removal of children in the context of parental substance use as a punitive approach (Olsen 2015). The risk of a punitive approach is that parents will avoid seeking treatment out of fear for retribution (DeVile and Kopelman 1998; Jessup et al. 2003). Many researchers contest that a punitive approach is justifiable and in the best interest of children (Garcia 1993; Baker and Carson 1999; Goldsberry 2001; Flavin and Paltrow 2010; Valentine and Treloar 2013; Olsen 2015).

Recent insights in the neuroscience of addiction have shown that our behaviour is not always initiated by our values. Mostly we desire what we value, and we value what we desire, but valuing and desiring are in fact mediated by two different neural pathways, and can come apart (Berridge et al. 2009). When consuming substances like heroin, a huge amount of dopamine is released. Dopamine is a neurotransmitter that fuels the reward system to signal us which behaviours are essential for our survival. Addictive substances hijack this reward system by creating a strong wanting for substances, even in the absence of valuing (Robinson and Berridge 2000). The values of users might not be the best explanation for their behaviour, their actions are determined by their craving. Some claim that the neurological changes that result from repeated substance use are so strong, that addiction is best characterised as a brain disease (Leshner 1997; Nesse and Berridge 1997; Kalivas et al. 2005). Addictive behaviour is characterised by deformed attention and memory (Field

et al. 2009), a strong insensitisation of cues (Robinson and Berridge 2008), and weakened cognitive control (Kalivas et al. 2005).

In the past decade, the brain disease model has become increasingly dominant in explaining the behaviour of substance dependent people. However, in the discourse around parental substance use, a moral model is often still implicitly, or explicitly used. He et al. (2014) gathered data from over 1.600 child welfare and Alcohol and Other Drug workers (AOD), and found that although AOD workers often subscribed the view that addiction is a disease, they simultaneously held a punitive approach towards the parents (He et al. 2014). Adams (1999) interviewed 75 social workers, and concluded that although the majority state that they favor a family strengthening approach for these families, they often simultaneously hold strong negative views on these families, which results in a punitive approach. Yet, if people are incapable to control their substance use due to the changes caused in the brain, they should not be punished for their substance use. Proponents of the disease model hoped that it would counteract the stigma of the moralistic model, lowering the barrier to treatment. However, research has shown that stigma is not reduced by the disease model, but has just shifted the stigma from 'bad people' to 'neurobiological others' (Mehta and Farina 1997; Angermeyer et al. 2011; Buchman et al. 2011). Treatments targeting the brains of addicted dependent people are still underdeveloped (Lewis 2015), with an exception of methadone treatment. However, substance dependent parents describe that there is a huge stigma attached to methadone treatment (Chandler et al. 2014).

The above explanations implicitly assumed that the substance use of the parents is the main cause for the poor outcomes of their children. However, there is a growing amount of literature showing that the link between parental substance dependency and poor outcomes of children is exaggerated due to the stigma these parents face. Victor et al. (2018) analysed more than 500.000 child welfare cases in which parental substance use is involved, or domestic violence. They conclude that although child protection services have moved in the direction of excluding exposure to domestic violence and parental substance misuse in and of themselves from their official definitions of maltreatment, child welfare workers may still give these behaviors a prominent place when making decisions around children's safety. Studies even found a strong bias among research against substance dependent parents (Glenn 2014; Stadterman and Hart 2015; Torres and Hart 2017; Snoek and Horstkötter 2018).

In fact, the relationship between parental substance use and poor outcomes of children is mediated by several factors, among which also poverty (Klee 1998; Chandler and Whittaker 2014; Benoit et al. 2015; Olsen 2015). An example of how the poor outcomes of children are wrongfully attributed to the parent's substance dependency, rather than to the social circumstances they live in are the so called crack baby studies in the 90's. Grave concerns about the effects maternal crack use had on fetuses, resulted in studies that indeed reveal deficits in babies prenatally exposed to crack cocaine. However, when studies compared 'crack babies' to other babies from low socio-economic backgrounds with a low birthweight, it turned out that 'crack babies' did not perform worse. Broader life circumstances including poverty and racial discrimination, and *not* drug usage, had been the main source of

damages (Frank et al. 2001; Hurt et al. 2008; Betancourt et al. 2011; Glenn 2014). Several researchers have highlighted the ‘inherent unfairness of a system that expects disadvantaged women to provide their foetuses with health care and safety that they themselves are not able to access’ (Flavin and Paltrow 2010; Benoit et al. 2013). Poverty rather than substance dependency might be the main cause for the adverse outcomes of the children of substance dependent parents.

Here we see a direct effect of poverty on the poor outcomes of children of substance dependent parents: poverty puts up barriers for parents to access facilities that can help them provide good care for their children: sport facilities, schools, good nutrition, health care, et cetera. One major objection against this point of view however, could be that if parents would stop using substances, their poverty would be elevated. This view will still fuel a punitive approach towards substance dependent parents.

The aim of this chapter is to reduce a punitive approach towards substance dependent parents, especially substance dependent parents struggling with poverty, by outlining the complex ways in which poverty can shape reasoning, and hence capacities for self-control. I will outline two ways in which poverty can shape reasoning: a rational shift from a global to a local perspective, and a more invasive one: resignation. I will argue that when people with addictions become resigned, it is especially important to not hold a punitive approach, but to treat them with compassion while simultaneously bootstrapping their sense of agency. I will argue that having children can be an important turning point for people struggling with addiction, and possibly resignation. In order to successfully turn their lives around, they must feel comfortable to seek professional support without fear for retribution or stigma. This paradigm shift in how we treat substance dependent parents will be an important contribution to breaking the circle of intergenerational transmission of poverty and resignation.

We saw above that the punitive approach to substance dependent parents roots in an assumption that substance dependent parents are somehow responsible for their own addiction. We saw that the neuroscientific model so far has not been really effective in changing this view when it comes to substance dependent parents. Although many have argued that poverty is a mitigating factor, or maybe even the main cause of the poor outcomes of the children of substance addicted parents, this is often met with moralistic scepticism. Poor people are often blamed for poor choices they make with regard to their lives and finances.¹ Highlighting the complex way in which poverty influences the self-control of people, we can contribute to counteracting a punitive approach towards these parents.

I will first outline a philosophical framework on how we can assess loss of self-control. I will outline two ways in which poverty can impair self-control: by shifting to a local perspective and by causing resignation. I will show how these impairments can fuel addiction. I will argue that expecting children often hold an enormous motivational force for people to turn their lives around. This is an important opportunity for care to support these parents. Having a non-punitive

¹ See also the paper of Jonathan Wolff in this volume.

approach towards these parents will lower the barrier to seek treatment or support, and will hence increase the changes that the cycle of intergenerational transmission of poverty and addiction will be broken, and will improve the life of the children. I will advocate an attitude of 'responsibility without blame' towards these parents.

2 A Philosophical Framework to Assess Loss of Self-Control

In order to help families in which one of the parents struggle with substance dependency, we need to have a good assessment of what goes wrong in these families. One explanation is provided by the neurobiological model, showing how substance dependency changes the brain, and hence people lose control over their consumption, all their resources are spent on substance use, hence they neglect their children emotionally and financially. Other studies have shown that poverty can be responsible for the adverse outcomes of children of substance dependent parents.

We saw that although the neurobiological model has become dominant in explaining addicted behaviour, when it comes to substance dependent parents, people often simultaneously still hold a moral model. The same is the risk with poverty, poor people are often accused of not doing enough to break their poverty. To elevate this punitive approach, we need to elaborate more on how poverty influences not only resources, but also people's sense of self, and hence their ideas on what they are capable of in life. To understand how substance dependent parents lose control over their lives, and the role poverty plays in this, we need a more elaborate model to assess self-control.

Self-control is often equalised with willpower. In our everyday lives when we exercise self-control, it is often to resist a temptation by using willpower. For example, we want to watch another episode of *Games of Thrones*, but we control ourselves, and go to bed in time in order to make sure we will perform well at work the next day. Kennett has shown that this is only one aspect of self-control (Kennett 2001). She calls this intentional self-control, the ability to carry out an intention. She argues that although mostly we focus on internal aspects that hinder intentional self-control, like lack of willpower, there are also many external factors that threaten our intentional control. For example, I can have the intention to be in time for a meeting, but a flat tyre can derail my plan.

Intentional control is about a short time frame: watching another episode of *Games of Thrones* or performing well at work the next day; eating an extra desert or watching one's weight. But self-control also has a more diachronic aspect, it is not so much about doing what one wants every day, but about reaching goals we set for ourselves. Kennett calls this diachronic aspect of self-control instrumental self-control. From a local perspective, it can seem like someone has self-control: he or she is doing what she wants, but if this person fails to reach her goals, we will not see this person as self-controlled. If someone buys a flat screen television because he likes watching television, this behavior seems self-controlled, but if as a conse-

quence he will not have enough money to go to Barcelona with his friends, a holiday he looked forward to very much, we might judge his behavior as not self-controlled. The reason why we control our behavior is diachronic: because it enables us to reach certain long-term goals that are essential to our human nature: investing in long-term friendships, raising one's children, or developing one's talents, finishing an education. These long term goals give us fulfilment and define who we are as a person.

This brings us to the third form of self-control: normative self-control. How do we set goals for ourselves? Hereby our sense of self, and our belief in self-efficacy is extremely important to determine what we dare to hope and dream for ourselves, and if we are motivated to pursue these. Normative self-control is exercised by seeing oneself as a certain kind of person, being capable of certain things.

Poverty can impair all three forms of self-control. Poverty can deprive us from our means to carry out our intentions, or our flexibility to deal with unexpected external circumstances that derail our plans. In the next two sections I will outline how poverty can impair diachronic self-control and normative self-control.

3 Poverty Makes Us Shift from a Global to a Local Perspective on Our Lives

Several studies have shown that when people are poor, it can be a good strategy to adopt a more local view on life. When we have to choose between a smaller sooner reward, and a larger later reward, we calculate how likely it is that we will still be around when the larger later reward becomes available. When people grow up in harsh circumstances, they have less security that they will have a future, so they tend to choose the sooner, smaller reward (Chisholm 1993). People who are poor are often very efficient in making the most out of today's resources, although often at the cost of future resources. Shah et al. (2012) conducted an experiment in which people played a game similar to Angry Birds. People could earn rewards by taking shots. One group was given more shots than the other group. The scarcity group became very efficient per shot. However, when the groups were given the option to borrow shots from future games, the scarcity group tended to borrow in a counter-productive way from future games. Mullainathan and Shafir show that scarcity makes people very efficient at managing pressing needs, however, they become less effective in managing their lives in the long run (Mullainathan and Shafir 2013, p. 15).

Adopting this local perspective on one's life increases the chance of becoming substance dependent as well. Using substances excessively is often a good local strategy: it provides pleasure, and numbs pain. Hence people from poor socio-economic backgrounds are more vulnerable to abusing substances (Becker and Murphy 1988; Heyman 2009).

There are several ground breaking studies that show how poverty, and the lack of opportunities and feelings of misery that accompanies it, make substance use more appealing. In 1978 Bruce Alexander conducted his now famous rat park study. Up

until then most animal studies on addiction were performed with rats living in so called skinner boxes: small isolated cages, which does not resemble a natural habitat at all, containing one rat each. Alexander and his colleagues put rats together in a large cage, where they could interact and entertain themselves. He compared these rats with rats put in skinner cages. Both group of rats were forced to consume morphine for 54 days by only offering them fluids containing morphine. After a period of abstinence rats could chose to self-administer morphine by pushing a lever. He found that the skinner box rats increased their consumption, while the rat park rats decreased theirs. This study provided important evidence that not so much the addictive properties of substances determine dependency, but also the social situation people find themselves in determining how attractive the consumption of substances is (Alexander et al. 1978).

Neuroscientist Carl Hart came to similar conclusions in his human crack cocaine study. In his inpatient study, people from poor neighbourhoods addicted to crack cocaine were given the choice between crack cocaine or a money incentive. Conform the neuroscientific model of addiction, which claims that addictive behavior has strong compulsive tendencies, Hart expected that these people could not make rational choices about their use. He hypothesised that their brain was altered by their crack cocaine use, and he expected them to compulsively consume as much cocaine as possible. However, his participants often chose the money incentives. But when the choice was between a merchandise voucher, they preferred the cocaine (Hart et al. 2000; Hart 2013). In his autobiographical book on addiction, Hart describes that he grew up in a poor neighbourhood as well, and that he himself tried cocaine a few time with his friends. However, he never became addicted since he got an opportunity to go to college, and his career took off, while his friends, trapped in a life without perspective became addicted (Hart 2013). These studies also show that the addictive properties of substances do not tell the whole story, and that social circumstances play an important role in the initiation and continuation of substance use (Zinberg 1984).

These models of Bruce Alexander and Carl Hart enlighten the role of social circumstances in the development and recovery from addiction, however, I will argue that they do not explore this role sufficiently. There are three ways in which I will argue these models are not sufficient. First, in these models, substance use is often presented as a rational choice. When growing up in poverty and lacking opportunities for a better future, it is best to enjoy the present, or to kill the pain using drugs. Take the following quote:

... first and foremost is I’m extremely lonely ... I’m totally unemployable. I’m over the hill, got no references, no appreciable skills, patchy work history at best, former alcoholic and addict, homeless ... it’s very depressing. I mean [participating in treatment] is not the answer to all my problems. Recovery is not going to make my problems go away (Weinberg and Koegel 1995, p. 217).

Maybe for this person, given the options that he has, substance use is not such a bad choice. However, I will argue that in the case of poverty, substance use often is not a rational choice – and neither is it a hijacking of the brain – rather, poverty can

cause a resignation from one's normative goals. This resignation is a form of loss of self-control caused by poverty, rather than a rational choice. Studies on addiction and poverty often focus on the social circumstances only, and not on how poverty influences people's capacities for self-control – their normative outlooks, and their hopes and dreams.

Secondly, the models of Alexander and Hart mostly describe poverty preceding substance use, but the model of the resigned addict, which I will present, shows how poverty in general (whether caused by addiction or preceding addiction) can compromise self-control. This is important because often the poverty of substance dependent people is attributed to their substance use, and hence dismissed as an important factor that influences their self-control. I will show that whether poverty is a cause or effect of substance use does not matter for the tremendous effect it can have on self-control.

Thirdly, the models proposed by Alexander and Hart suggest that once we improve the social circumstances of people living in poverty, their substance use will automatically decrease. I will argue that for some people improving their circumstances will not be enough, they also need to have their feelings of self-efficacy and self-worth restored.

When we look at a real case of a parent struggling with poverty, we see that poverty is more than material deprivation. Poverty has an influence on how one sees oneself and what one believe is possible as well.

4 Persistent Poverty Can Cause Resignation

Poverty can also influence normative agency. We saw that normative agency can be exercised by thinking of oneself as a certain kind of person, with certain possibilities. When people find themselves in hostile environments with very few opportunities to improve their situation, their external situation can shape their self-concept and their beliefs concerning what is possible for them. Our image of our ideal future self needs to be accompanied by certain fundamental beliefs about our agency. In order to exercise self-control we need to believe that our future self is available to us: we need to believe in our own capacities to achieve the desired outcome, and we need to feel reasonably safe from 'disastrous misfortune' (Calhoun 2008). When we constantly meet with persistent adverse circumstances, we can resign from our normative goals: we stop believing that the life we find worth living is available to us, and we stop trying. In narrating the life story of her mother Sally, Blackser shows how poverty can make people resign from their normative goals.

Sally grew up in poverty as one of five children. Their father was an alcoholic. She left school in the tenth grade, and married when she was 17. She got three children. Her husband also was a school dropout, and they both worked in unstable, low-paid jobs. Her husband, like her father, had a drinking problem and was abusive. Blacksher highlights that her mother has many capabilities: she is creative, she works hard. Why, Blacksher wonders, did she not tried harder to improve her life?

Sally could have, for example, studied for and obtained her GED, left a bad husband, and found a place in the workforce that would have welcomed her work ethic and creativity and helped her achieve economic independence. But she didn't.

One explanation for Sally's lack of motivation to improve her life could be that under scarcity people tend to develop a more short term perspective rather than a long term one. They cannot spare the resources to make small sacrifices now for a better future. Their main priority is to survive to see another day (Summer [forthcoming](#)). It might be the best strategy to save the day rather than invest in the future when we are not sure whether we will survive to see the future (Chisholm [1993](#)). However, Blacksher suggests that something else is also preventing her mother from improving her life. Scarcity can also have a profound effect on people's self-concept and what they think they can hope for in life:

Children born into these circumstances, not unlike those born into more advantaged circumstances, learn how and what to be, what to expect of themselves and others, what to hope for and aspire to. (...) The deprivation stealthily settles in, coming to characterize not only one's circumstances but one's sense of self, possibility, and aspirations. (Blackshers [2002](#), 465; 459)

Blacksher suggests that this is what happened to her mother: 'She did not know she was capable; she did not think she deserved a better life.' (p. 467) Self-control is not only about capabilities and opportunities, her mother did have those to some extent, self-control is also about belief in self-efficacy. Belief in self-efficacy is the belief that one can succeed in a specific situation (Bandura [1978](#)). If people do not believe in their self-efficacy, they will not take opportunities or use their capabilities.

Poverty can erode people's belief in self-efficacy. Take the following example. I am saving money to buy a bicycle so I can save money on commuting. However, just before I have enough money, my washing machines breaks down, so I need to spend the money on repairing the washing machine. In this example adversity only postpones the enactment of my plan. But if adversity is persistent, it can make us give up on our goals all together. Imagine that I save money again, but just before I have enough money the family dog needs to go to the vet. Next time when I nearly have enough money there is a dental emergency. And so on, until I give up on my intention to buy a bike or to save money all together.

Chronic adversity can have a persistent effect on reasoning, making people bound to a short term perspective, even when their circumstances improve and it should be best for them to start thinking more in the long run. Mullainathan and his colleagues conducted another experiment among street vendors in India to test this hypothesis. Most of vendors had debts over which they had to pay high interest rates. The researchers gave half of the vendors an amount of money that made them debt free. After a year however, there was no difference between the group that got a cash infusion and the group that did not. The street vendors who got a clearance of debt, still prioritised handling short term pressing problems instead of focusing on being debt free (Mullainathan and Shafir [2013](#)). People who experience chronic scarcity often stop trying to change their circumstance because they lose hope (Morton, Summer [forthcoming](#)).

5 Case Studies: The Resigned Addict

Resignation is often caused by a set of interacting factors. Below I will describe a case study of how complex the relationship is between substance use, poverty, and belief in self-efficacy, and how hard it is to break the cycle. The case study is drawn from a larger longitudinal, qualitative study among alcohol, opioid and methamphetamine dependent people ($n = 69$) in Australia. Of the sample, 64% were parents. The aim of the larger study was to evaluate how people with addiction perceived their self-control.² One of the findings was that some people experienced so much adversity (connected to poverty or other adversity) in trying to turn their lives around that they eventually gave up on themselves.

Many respondents found themselves in a Baron von Munchhausen-like situation, in which they had to drag themselves out of the swamp by their own hair: they had to rebuild their lives with practically no means – no money, no opportunities, no social support, and ill physical and/or mental health. Although some of their problems were caused by substance use, poverty made it especially hard to change things around after someone became clean. Poverty seems to increase a sense of hopelessness that make people give up.

Take for example John, a gentle man in his early forties who is battling a heroin addiction. He lives with his partner, his daughter and his stepson. He got addicted as a teenager, he experienced very little family support after his parents divorced and started new families. He left home early because he could not get along with his stepfather. He tries to fend for himself as a bouncer, but he gets caught up in a life of substance use and violence. In his early twenties, he first tried to turn his life around. He gets on maintenance treatment, stops drinking, and quits his job as a bouncer to break with the scene of substance use. He decided to become a professional K1 fighter, however, when he tries to obtain his professional license, he finds out he cannot because he has hepatitis C. He feels demoralized for a while, but decides to invest in a new career as a tattoo artist. Things seem to go well, he finds a job and he enjoys developing his skills. However, his history as a substance user, and the fact that he is still on methadone makes him insecure. He tries to hide these facts, but he is afraid that his appearance gives him away as a former user, or that he will run into someone from the methadone clinic at work.

² Study participants completed a life-line interview at baseline in which they narrated their life story, and were followed up over a 3-year period (baseline in 2011, and successive 12 month follow-up episodes in 2012, 2013, and 2014). At baseline all participants were asked about their goals for the following year and any plans they had made to achieve their goals. During the follow-up interviews they were asked whether they succeeded in their plans, or what got in the way of their plans. Recruitment and interviewing took place in a public detoxification treatment and an opioid substitute treatment facility. Most people were from poorer socio-economic backgrounds. Interviews were recorded, fully transcribed verbatim, and analysed in NVivo. The studies were approved by the Human Research Committee of St Vincent's Hospital and Macquarie University. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants. They were reimbursed for their time and expertise.

Then new regulations are announced. In order to continue his job as a tattoo artist, he needs a license, and he is probably not eligible for that because of his criminal record. The license is also very expensive, 900 dollars, which will not be refunded if he turns out not to be eligible. Another problem is that he lives in subsidized housing. If he earns too much, he risks losing his place. Many respondents struggled with this as well, whenever they found a job, the job was often unstable, yet they risked losing their pension or subsidized housing. John's family is not supportive of his plans as well due to this fear.

whenever I get a job ... whenever I go and go for a job it's not like 'oh great, that's good', it's like 'oh what would you want to do that for, oh you'll lose your housing commission' (...) they just sit there and watch cable TV all day and I reckon it's a big waste of time, waste of life you know. (...) it does wear off on you and I just think sometimes I wish they had more ambitions.

I know that whatever I'm doing everyone else is just going to be lying there watching telly or whatever like not really interested (...) I didn't get off drugs just ... well, like I'm still on drugs but I'm not getting off them to just sit there and watch telly or whatever all day and sit in bed, you know?

He is sad that his children have started experimenting with substances as well. He wants to be a good role model for them.

At the time of the third interview John seems to start to lose confidence in his plans. He feels like he has a lot more to offer than he is allowed to give. He gets increasingly fatalistic about whether he will be able to fulfil his plans. While in the years before, John was very clear about the steps he needed to take in order to achieve his ideal future, during the third interview, he is very vague about his steps, or the future. Although he ordinarily makes a list of things he wants to achieve, he has not done so this year.

I've been trying to change my life heaps but I haven't ... I always end up back on ... back here, you know?

I'm still kind of ... and I guess no matter how much I feel like I've changed my life, I haven't ... like on paper I'm still bad, I'm still ... like I don't know what it would say on paper but it wouldn't look very good and I don't know I just ... look, it's hard sometimes like really I've been thinking about it and as good as I think I go or whatever I'm dependent as well on other things like on Centrelink and stuff like that.

I think that's just life, there's always something that's going to nag at you or get you down. (...) But that's just life, isn't it? Like you feel fear all the time or like ... don't know, doesn't sound like it's pretty good world really you know like it probably is for some people, maybe I just attract it to myself, you know?

John's story shows how people can resign from their normative goals, and that poverty, or in general aversive social circumstances play an important role in this.

John is not the only respondents I have spoken to who showed signs of resignation from their normative goals. Who stopped hoping and trying for a better future. Many other respondents also describe their lives as a revolving door, a merry-go-round that they cannot get off. Let us look at some other quotes from people who have resigned from their normative goals –people who express that the life they value feels unavailable and unachievable.

I don't know, since about 30 onwards I've just sort of given up, I've just gone fuck it, I'm going to be an addict, I'm just ... my life's stuffed, I haven't spoken to my kids in four years or something. (R58)

When I'm in the throes of addiction and I'm trying to stop and I can't stop, my head's going: 'this is who you are.' I can accept that, you know what I mean? That's ... as weird as that sounds I can accept that I'm a junkie. I'm ... my life is over and this is what I'll be until I die. It's the only way I can stop is to die. (R2B)

I: You have any ideas about the sort of person that you want to be these days, things that..?

M: Not really no. I don't think I really care all that much. Yeah I just go from day to day basically, just whatever happens, happens and because I spent so long struggling with mental illness and alcohol and other substance addiction, and I've got ... not really got anywhere, that I just don't bother having any aspirations or anything because I can't really do anything and I can't hold down a job because of my mental illnesses and my drug use. The same with study so anything ... if there was really anything that I did want to do, I wouldn't be able to do it anyway and hence why I'm on DSP (disability pension) yeah. (...) No there isn't really anything I can do so I don't bother having goals because it will just be disappointment 'cause I can't achieve them so. (P01)

Yeah, got tired of thinking and tired of coming up with all these ideas, I just somehow deep down knew they weren't going to happen and I don't know why but so I just gave up. (R14)

I don't want to keep making goals and then have to break it 'cause then I'm setting myself up for failure and it's just no good me doing that, so I've been doing ... a lot of that's been happening through my life. (...) [I] don't try to do something that I can't do otherwise I'll basically fail. (R29B)

It just seems like a circle. Like my mind in one part of me says to me 'oh well it's going to happen again eventually'. Because when I look in my past for 15, 18 years ... 20 years, it's just been the same thing. So I tell me ... my mind tells me 'well how long's it going to be before something happens?'. (R50)

I've thought that by this time in my life I'd have it together, but I seem to start to get it together and then it slips back. (...) just every time I get to a good stage in my life, I think things are starting to happen, and something happens and then I'm back into it. (R50)

I: Where do you see yourself in 1 year's time?

R: Maybe dead, dead or still doing this same bullshit in and out of places, on methadone, using. Or clean or in a rehab, clean doing the right thing or just on the methadone, picking up, going there each day picking up. There's a few images I see and I don't ... a lot of them I don't like but when you're doing ... when you've been doing this for so long you just think well that's the reality, come on, don't bullshit yourself, don't sugar coat it, let's just get to real. (R58)

We can infer, on the basis of these extracts that addicted substance users cease long-term planning because the life they value living seems unachievable to them. They see themselves as a certain kind of person: a person who is set up for failure. I will argue that this loss of self-control often occurs when addiction is accompanied by poverty (either as cause or result of substance abuse).

People often fail to understand how the resigned addict loses self-control, and hence fails to understand how we can support this group of people. What is confusing about resigned addicts is that they do not describe a struggle with substance use. This lack of struggle with their substance use makes it easy to confuse them with the willing addict, to view them as people who endorse their substance use. Hence, a punitive approach is still maintained. I hope that by showing how resignation is a

form of loss of self-control that there will be more compassion with people struggling with substance abuse and poverty.

6 The Motivational Force of Becoming or Being a Parent

Above I described different ways in which poverty can influence people’s self-control. And I showed how these ways in which poverty influences diachronic and normative self-control also makes people vulnerable for substance dependency. The most invasive way in which poverty can influence self-control is by making people resign from their normative goals. I would like to focus on this type of loss of self-control, because I think in the current literature it is underexamined, and because it is the most severe type of loss of self-control.

Now when someone who is struggling with poverty and substance dependence is also a parent, there is an important opportunity to break resignation. And there is also a risk if the resignation is not broken, that the resignation will be transmitted to the next generation. I will discuss both this opportunity as this risk in further detail.

Although children should never be a mean to an end – initiating their parents recovery, becoming a parent carries a huge motivational force with it. Health care professionals can tune it with this motivational force. Children represent hope and a new chance in life. Research among low-income women in Philadelphia found that becoming a mother stimulated them to either return to school or seek a job, and to become abstinent from substances (Edin and Kefalas 2005). Balan and colleagues also found that motherhood reduces the rate of alcohol disorder in women (Balan et al. 2014). My own research among alcohol dependent parents showed that not only becoming a new mother, but also having children in general stimulated people to seek treatment. A few of my respondent described how their addiction and the sense of hopelessness in improving their situation often driven them to despair, up until the point of contemplating suicide. However, the fact that they had children motivated them to seek treatment rather than kill themselves.

Or take for example Hien’s story. Hien is a middle aged Vietnamese man. Growing up in Australia as the son of immigrants, he got a sense of hopelessness from a very early age. He started experimenting with drugs as a teenager, and when his heroin use got out of control, he left home. For 15 years his life looked like this: he used drugs and did small crime to finance his use, once in a while he would get caught and spend some months in jail. He met his wife at a methadone clinic. They fell in love, and when she discovered that she was pregnant, they both radically stopped using heroin, and tried to turn their lives around. His daughters, who are now eight and ten, are everything to Hien.

If I didn’t have the kids or the family, I’d be still sleeping on the street, using drugs, going in and out of jail. (...) But the children changed me. (...) Without the kids I wouldn’t care for my life, I would still be using.

When I ask Hien what his plans for the future are, he states that he does not see a future at all for himself. There is nothing he hopes for, except for his kids to have a better life than he had.

So me and my partner don't wish for much, except for our kids.

However, this motivational spark in itself is often not enough to help sustain the change. For substance dependent people really to turn their lives around, they often need a lot of support in many areas of life. Hien's life not miraculously turned good when he got children. Because of his heart condition he cannot work, even walking uphill is exhausting for him. His wife is a former substance user as well, and she could not find work either. They have very little money. Yet, Hien made an important step forward to turn away from a life of crime and substance dependency, and to seek support.

In order for people to be able to seek support because they want a better life for their children, it is essential that they feel safe to seek support. That there is not a punitive attitude towards them, or that they feel stigmatised. When we fail to support these parents in a non-judgmental way, we risk the intergenerational transmission of resignation, which can result in more poverty and substance abuse.

7 The Risk of Transmitting Resignation to the Next Generation

Blacksher has already outlined it: growing up in certain circumstances influences what we believe is possible in our lives. Hence there is a risk of intergenerational transmission of poverty and low belief in self-efficacy. Oyserman studied how children from low socio-economic backgrounds could be motivated to perform better in school. She found that many children struggled with a low belief in self-efficacy, and had negative self-images, children seemed impaired with regard to their normative self-control (Oyserman 2015). These findings could be a sign that children from poor socio-economic backgrounds copy their parent's resignation.

Oyserman highlights that it is important to see the desired future as achievable, and that the path towards it must be seen as fitting for 'people like me' (Oyserman 2015). Oyserman noticed that many of the children from low-income families that she researched perceived their desired future as unachievable, hence, they did not even try (King and Hicks 2007; Pizzolato 2007). Now of course our plans need to be realistic, e.g., if I have bad eyesight, I cannot become a pilot. However, many of the children Oyserman studied did have a good chance in life; they only needed to believe in it. Because they had very few positive role models in their lives, however, they found it hard to see their desired future as achievable. Oyserman points out that when we have low belief in self-efficacy, we have a different response to obstacles compared to people who have a high belief in self-efficacy. We can perceive obstacles as a sign that our goal is unachievable and give up, seeing our efforts as a waste of time. We can also perceive obstacles as a sign that our future self will be more

valuable because it is harder to achieve: we come to the conclusion that 'important things are difficult', and double our efforts (Oyserman 2015, 19). We need to believe in our self-efficacy, especially when confronted with misfortune.

Programs that try to alleviate child poverty should not only focus on creating opportunities for children, but also restoring belief in self-efficacy. This could be done by helping children to focus on positive role models, people like them who made it.

8 A Punitive Approach Versus Responsibility Without Blame

I argued throughout this whole paper that a punitive approach towards substance dependent parents is counterproductive if we want to help these parents and their children. Punitive approaches are for example the incarceration of women who use drugs during pregnancy, a stigmatising attitude of healthcare professionals, or even in some cases the removal of children from their homes is described as a way to punish the parents rather than benefit the children. However, research has also shown that excusing people for their behaviour can work counterproductive (Vohs and Baumeister 2009; Morse 2011; Pickard 2012). Hanna Pickard, however, comes with an interesting third approach, which she calls 'responsibility without blame' (Pickard 2017). Pickard argues that recovery always starts with one's belief that change is within the person's control. If the agent believes he is powerless, he will see no point in exercising his agency. A key approach in treatment is to hold people responsible for their behaviour and choices. However, often responsibility is accompanied by blame. When we hold people responsible for their behaviour, we blame them when things go wrong. But, Pickard argues, responsibility and blame are not necessarily linked. We can hold people responsible for their behaviour, yet acknowledge the factors that diminish their agency, and not blame or punish them for failure. This approach of responsibility without blame will help substance dependent parents to use the fragments of agency they still retain, while showing compassion for their adverse circumstances.

9 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to reduce a punitive approach towards substance dependent parents, especially substance dependent parents struggling with poverty, by outlining the complex ways in which poverty can shape reasoning, and hence capacities for self-control.

I have outlined different ways in which poverty can impair self-control, and I mostly focused on resignation, as this is the most invasive one, and is often poorly understood. Addicted people are often described as mad, bad or sad. But, as one of the respondents said: 'we are just normal people living very complicated lives'.

I have argued that when people with addictions become resigned, it is especially important to not hold a punitive approach, but to treat them with compassion while simultaneously bootstrapping their sense of agency. I have showed that having children can be an important turning point for people struggling with addiction, and possibly resignation. In order to successfully turn their lives around, they must feel comfortable to seek professional support without fear for retribution or stigma. This paradigm shift in how we treat substance dependent parents will be an important contribution to breaking the circle of intergenerational transmission of resignation, poverty and substance abuse.

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Disability and Child Poverty



Sarah Gorman

Abstract In this chapter I discuss the particular situation of being at the intersection of disability and child poverty. I then give a thick description that shows what it is like to be a nondisabled white girl living in poverty with two parents with disabilities—I give my own story. Then I offer some empirical facts to demonstrate the problems distilled from the thick description: custody challenges, child as carer, unemployment, charity, and lack of choice. I then discuss stigma from a theoretical point of view. I put forward a view of ontological vulnerability that is more expansive than Martha Fineman's or Catriona Mackenzie's using Judith Butler's and Jackie Leach Scully's work on vulnerability. After that I offer some ways to combat stigma of children in poverty and disability. It is upon this that I construct an alternative political vision that would value human need and be responsive to vulnerabilities without erasing or assimilating difference.

Keywords Disability · Poverty · Child · Vulnerability · Oppression

1 Introduction

In this essay I discuss the complex relationship between child poverty and disability.¹ Much research is being done in Europe on childhood poverty itself, and on the way it interlocks and compounds with other kinds of oppression, but this is not

¹Notably, I want to retain a positive view of disability in this chapter, although I will mostly be discussing the way in which adults and children are oppressed with regards to their disability status. I affirm it as a political identity with its own rich sociocultural and political dimensions. This will be tricky because the issue of becoming-disabled comes up in this piece, as something that is a result of other kinds of oppression—for example, socioeconomic status and race. So how do we maintain a positive disability identity while still naming and recognizing the fact that certain other intersecting oppressions make one more susceptible to becoming disabled, implying that it were

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really the case in the US—especially so in the discipline of philosophy.² First I will discuss some important terms then I will demonstrate the complex and entangled relationship between poverty and disability in the US. I will give an account of poverty and disability from my own experience of having grown up in poverty with two parents with disabilities.

After that I will discuss some empirical studies to fill in the gaps that a case study leaves. Then I will discuss some of the problems associated with child poverty and how it is conceived of and attempted to be remedied, demonstrating that current programs are insufficient for accommodating the lives and interests of people in this particular intersection of oppressions. Last, I will discuss the role of stigma in disabled people’s lived experience and the role that narrative may play as a means for combating stigma. I will bring attention to Julia Kristeva’s essay, “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, and... Vulnerability” as the beginning of a political model that values human need and responds to vulnerability without erasing or assimilating difference.

Here I will begin by asking two basic but very big questions. ‘What is a child?’ and ‘what is disability?’ I think once we analyze the social position and oppressions each face, we will see some common ground. Many disabled people report being referred to or treated like children, seen by the normate as dependent and extra-vulnerable beings.³ This translates to rights being denied under the guise of ‘protection;’ this happens both to children and to adults with disabilities.⁴ Children and disabled people often are subject to regulation and surveillance that nondisabled adults are not subject to because of their superior social, political, and legal status. We shall soon see the relationship between disability and poverty is complex and entangled.

2 Defining Childhood, Disability, and Their Intersection

I will begin with the question: what is a child? Philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau admits in his work on childhood and education, *Emile*, that “Childhood is unknown. Starting from the false idea one has of it, the farther one goes, the more one loses one’s way” (Rousseau 1979 [1762] 33). He emphasizes that children are different from adults and that childhood is a state one cannot know without discovering it

something that no one would want to have come upon them? I’m not sure if I’m graceful enough a scholar to do this. Therefore I note it as a tension in this work at the outset.

²There is some current philosophical research being done about childhood, see the Special Issue of *The Journal of Applied Philosophy: On the Nature and Value of Childhood* (2018). Also see Schweiger and Graf (2015).

³See Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (1997) for use of the term ‘normate’ to describe the gaze of those whose bodies are unmarked by stigmatized identities such as disability, race, or gender.

⁴In the United States we have a department of Child Protective Services and an Adult Protective Services as well. Both of these departments are social services that pertain in the former, to children and, in the latter, to the elderly and adults with disabilities. These services do work well sometimes but can also be exploited by people with interests in institutionalizing children or adults with disabilities and the elderly.

with the child. He says of others “they are always seeking the man in the child without thinking of what he is before being a man” (Rousseau 1979 [1762], 33). In much of the literature about childhood, children are, at least in part, constructed as becoming-adults, rather than considering the possibility that the child is a different kind of being—as Rousseau posits.⁵

It is true that children are biologically and socially in transition. The common emphasis on child ‘development’ rather than ‘being in transition’ belies the notion that it is only children who are developing. Adults are seen as wholly developed persons—except disabled adults who are constructed as lacking or deficient in some way. But this is surely not the case, as we continue to age into older adulthood, we see biological transitions such as menopause; and, if we are lucky enough to age into elderly status, we face transitions in our social lives, when death generally takes partners, friends, and siblings. I argue that a life has many stages—if we want to think of it in terms of stages—one of which is childhood and that what it is to be a child is a different than what it is to be an adult.⁶ Children have different needs, different projects, different knowledges and capacities, different ways of learning, different social dynamics, and different outlooks on the world. They are also subject to different oppressions, surveillance in the educational system, and their rights are often suppressed under the guise of ‘protection.’ Children have a level of agency that society refuses to admit.⁷

All of this said, there is no one thing that it is to be a child. For example, in the US, in light of our white supremacist political, social, and economic system of domination over people of color, white childhood is idolized as a time of innocence and vulnerability, white children are seen as needing to be protected and cared for.⁸ Black American children are, however, *really* the ones who need to be protected: from bullets shot by police officers, from the juvenile “justice” system, and from the school-to-prison pipeline. They are in need of protection from the violence that the state inflicts upon them, yet they are not constructed as innocent and vulnerable beings, as white children are.⁹ So we see there is no single experience of what it is to be a child, to be a child is to be at the intersection of a number of different privileges and oppressions that mutually shape and compound upon one another. I will be conducting an intersectional analysis of child poverty and disability in this paper because it is important to understand the way that oppressions mutually shape one another, making the lived experiences of different social locations very different

⁵ See Prout and James (1997) for an explication of the “dominant framework” theory in sociology and psychology regarding children’s development. Childhood is seen as a time of developing or becoming, until adulthood when we move to being considered developed fully. See Michael Wyness (2012) for sharp critique of the problems with the dominant framework.

⁶ Susan Wendell (1996) theorizes that disability is a stage of everyone’s life, if we are lucky enough to live that long.

⁷ See Wyness (2012), Oswell (2013), Berridge (2017).

⁸ See Charles Mills (1997) for an account of the United States’ system of white domination over people of color.

⁹ See Shedd (2015) for an account of how the school to prison pipeline developed. See Michelle Alexander (2010) to see how this fits in with the problem of mass incarceration in the US.

from one another. I aim to give as full a picture of disability and child poverty as I can that does not put whiteness at the center of the analysis,¹⁰ a common problem within the existing literature on disability studies (Bell 2006).

Now that we have discussed a bit about what it is to be a child, I will ask the question: What is disability? Disabilities can be cognitive, sensorimotor, developmental, psychological, physical, intellectual or some combination thereof. Everyone experiences their disability in a unique and singular way. Disability is complex, dynamic, multidimensional and contested. Disability can be visible or invisible; temporary or long-term; static, episodic, or degenerating; painful or pain-free (WHO 2011, 3). Historically, disability has been highly medicalized, yet now some scholars have come to understand disability as something that arises at the nexus of the biological and the sociocultural.¹¹ Other scholars argue it is purely social, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson describes disability as “the attribution of corporeal deviance—not so much a property of bodies [but rather] ... a product of cultural rules about what bodies should be or do” (Garland-Thomson 1997, 6). Disability is an attribution, a social marking that labels certain body-minds as deviant or non-normative. It is a product of social norms that privilege the normal and mark disabled people as people who look or act a certain kind of non-normative way.

I support the view that everyone experiences their disability in a unique and singular way, that sometimes disability is simply social—a label attached to a person seen to be abnormal or deviant—but also that some disabilities cause pain and suffering that should be acknowledged, so embodiment is important to my analysis of disability. I affirm disability as a political identity that a person can claim and around which a community can form and create its own cultural material and political activism. In sum I think disability is a biopsychosocial phenomenon that some people experience as ‘healthy’ and others experience with pain—both physical and psychical; and that disability can be a means of empowerment for an individual if they take it on affirmatively as part of their identity.

Race and ethnic group are also factors in disability status. A National Academy of Sciences study of ethnic representation in special education programs indicates that, “in that year [2002], across ethnic groups and disability categories, this number placed African American children at the highest risk of receiving a disability label—a risk index of 14.28% as contrasted with 13.10% for American Indians/Alaska Natives, 12.10% for Whites, 11.34% for Hispanics and 5.31% for Asians” (National Research Council 2002). Language about ‘risk’ and ‘risk factors’ aside, this is prob-

¹⁰ See Rich (1986) for an explanation of the problem of centering whiteness in analyses.

¹¹ See Wendell (1996) for an account that lies neither on the social model or the medical model, but is a hybrid view of both. The social model posits that impairments are health problems residing within the body or mind, but disabilities are a social phenomenon—they arise from the social environment. For example, a wheelchair user is only disabled in places where there aren’t adequately cut curbs or ramps for wheelchair access. For more information on the social model see Shakespeare in Davis, ed. 2017, Oliver 2004, and Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation 1975. The medical model, which is largely outdated in the literature, though still quite in when it comes to common opinion, posits that disabilities are wholly biological phenomena, which need to be treated or cured through modern medicine.

lematic because children with disabilities have lower transition rates to higher education levels (WHO 2011). So structurally, since many children of color are more likely to become disabled with labeling of learning disabilities or behavioral disorders, those children are less likely to achieve higher levels of education.

Nirmala Erevelles and Andrea Minear situate the overrepresentation of Black children in special education programs in a historical context and argue:

The New South replaced ... outmoded mechanisms of segregation with more modern systems that were more appropriately in keeping with the times. Thus, for example, in educational contexts the special education bureaucracy with its complex machinery of pseudo-medical evaluations, confusing legal discourses, and overwhelming paperwork administered by a body of intimidating professionals now performs tasks that are not very different from Jim Crow and eugenic ideologies. To put it more simply, special education, instead of being used to individualize education programs to meet the special needs of students, is instead used to segregate students who disrupt the "normal" functioning of schools (Erevelles and Minear 2010, p. 130).

Erevelles and Minear argue that special education programs are segregation in another name. The bureaucracy, medicalization, and implementation of special education programs in the US echo back to Jim Crow de jure segregation and eugenic ideologies. Rather than offering an education tailored to a child's unique needs in order to nurture an environment where students can flourish in their education, special education programs are being used to segregate students who interrupt "normal" classroom functioning. These students wind up receiving an education that is not tailored to their needs; they are merely being quarantined from the rest of the student population. Lack of education—or poor education—at an early age has a significant impact on opportunity and poverty in adulthood.

Disability and poverty are deeply entangled. The World Health Organization says that the relationship between the two is 'bidirectional,' which is to say that disability increases the risk of poverty and poverty increases the chances of becoming disabled (WHO 2011, p. 10). Disability is therefore a crucial issue to investigate when concerned with child poverty. Disability can be a factor in a child's life as in the child has a disability, or the child's parents or siblings have a disability, or any combination thereof. In any case, the link is clear: poverty and disability often come together, and mutually affect one another. That said, poverty discriminates. 19% of children in the US are classified as poor, 41% as low income. Black, Native American, and Hispanic children are disproportionately classified as poor (Koball and Jiang 2018). Children of immigrants are also more likely to be classified as low income (Koball and Jiang 2018).

In the US, poverty and disability are entangled phenomena. I already noted that the relationship between poverty and disability is bidirectional, which is to say, poverty increases the chances of becoming disabled and disability increases the risk of poverty (WHO 2011).¹² As of 2012, research reveals that there are 4.1 million parents with disabilities in the United States, about 6.2% of all American parents

¹²It is not only in the US that we see poverty having a bidirectional relationship with disability. WHO states this is the case worldwide and thus argues that disability is a development issue.

with children under the age of 18 (National Council on Disability 2012, p. 12). Data from 2000 shows 2.8 million families—or 3.9% of all families—had at least one child with a disability (Wang 2005). 17 percent of families with a child who has a disability were under the poverty line (Wang 2005). For families with adults and children with disabilities, the poverty rate was 28% (Wang 2005). Having disability in the family in any form thus increases the risk that the family must maneuver living beneath the poverty line.

Iris Marion Young says “the concepts of domination and oppression, rather than the concept of distribution, should be the starting point for social justice” (1990, p. 16). To be poor is in a very basic sense to lack resources, but it is also to be subject to domination and oppression. Social justice has a broader scope than the distributive paradigm admits. The distributive paradigm cannot address domination, a social phenomenon where one group of people is subjugated by another group, nor can it begin to address oppression, which comes in many forms,¹³ and is systematically reproduced in major economic, political, and cultural institutions (Young 1990, p. 41).

When coming from a social justice perspective, it is important to begin with oppression and domination because it can have an effect on institutions and their rules, mores, norms, and prejudices. Social justice aims to preserve difference and to promote institutions that advance reproduction of and respect for group differences without oppression (Young 1990, p. 47). Now I look to a particular case study—which happens to be my own childhood—in order to demonstrate some of the oppressions particular to childhood poverty and its intersection with disability. I’m going to give a thick description¹⁴ of some of my own experiences of being a child living under poverty with two disabled parents. After that I will pull out some of the salient elements and discuss them from an empirical point of view.

¹³Young says there are five ‘faces’ of oppression: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence. I prefer her definition of oppression because it emphasizes the systematic nature of oppression and how it reproduces itself through cultural and political institutions.

¹⁴A thick description is an account from one child, individual, or family that describes their lived experiences, in this case, of a child living in poverty with parents with disabilities. Schweiger and Graf say “a single story of a family or individual is not more than that, but it is ‘thick,’ as is every individual life and it also makes the injustices of living in poverty more visible and tangible.” (Schweiger and Graf 2015, 108) Thick descriptions can capture the particularities of a social phenomenon that make the description more robust, salient, *felt*, in the reader. Though no thick description can give a full account of what something is like, individual detailed accounts are helpful in that they show rather than straightforwardly tell (as numbers can in statistics) what the experience of living under such and such kind of circumstances is like. They convey some of the differences of experiences and ways oppression can manifest itself in the story of a single person or family.

3 What Does It Feel Like to Be at the Intersection Between Poverty and Disability as a Child?: A Thick Description

My experience with this issue is having lived as a white girl under child poverty with both parents having disabilities. Though privileged in virtue of my whiteness and my nondisabled status, living in poverty was difficult because stigma attached to that, and the stigma of my parents' disabilities—my mom's neurological trauma from being choked almost to death by an old partner, and my dad's schizophrenia and COPD—affected me as well. It wasn't until adulthood that I became disabled, perhaps in part because I grew up in poverty. Along with stigma, instability in the home life was a source of anxiety, the intrusion of the state and its surveillance apparatuses into our lives was a source of anxiety, and, though this seems rather trivial, the lack of choice was a source of anxiety for me while growing up. I became disabled during graduate school. I experienced my first episode of psychosis between comprehensive exams and the prospectus. I currently manage with medication and therapy.

Before my brother was born, when I was just an infant, police officers showed up at our apartment. It seems that one of the neighbors called them on my mom. In any case, the officers reported to Child Protective Services (CPS) that I was being fed feces—though it was really carrot baby food—and I was taken out of my mother and father's custody to live in foster care. Both my parents have mental illnesses so getting custody restored took a lot of work. Luckily, I got a black eye in the foster home which made matters more urgent, and extended family and family friends were able to help out. Eventually, custody was restored to my parents; though my mother was not able to spend time alone with me until after she completed a course with Parents Anonymous, which is a support group for parents who have allegedly abused their children. Later on, after my brother was born, we were always scared that we were going to be "taken away," it was a constant refrain of my childhood.

Food insecurity was always a problem as we lived off of various government payments that did not adequately cover the expenses of a four person household. Moreover, we lived in a food desert—a geographical space that lacks a proper grocery store—and so most of our groceries were purchased at a store that did not have much in the way of fresh fruits and vegetables; it was little more than a convenience store. We did not have a car most of the time, so getting to the real grocery store was an hour's walk away. We took that walk sometimes, and sometimes we ordered frozen groceries from a truck that took food stamps—called Schwann's—which sold overpriced frozen food but delivered to my neighborhood. When the food stamps ran out we went hungry. Though occasionally, Abdul, the man who owned the convenience store let my mom have credit until the next month when the food stamps were refilled.

Another common anxiety-producer was how my family was going to pay the bills. The phone was always the first to go, then the electricity, and sometimes even the heat. In those situations sometimes the neighbors would gift us their electricity,

with a big orange extension cord stretched across the street, or if it was the gas that was off, we would go stay with my uncle until my mom figured out the HEAP (Home Energy Assistance Program). We were privileged in that we had extended family that would help out in desperate times, not so much with money, but they'd open their homes to us and bring us dinner or groceries on occasion.

There was a lot of instability throughout my childhood because my parents have mental illnesses that get exacerbated by excess stress and lack of sleep. So it is that poverty causes excess stress which in turn causes lack of sleep which caused their symptoms to worsen. They were hospitalized countless times. Some voluntary, some involuntary. Once the neighbors called the police because my dad was walking down the street singing opera—he was involuntarily committed that time. Again, we would go and stay with family while our parents were institutionalized.

There were times when my parents weren't doing well and we wouldn't tell anyone about it for fear of one or both of *them* being "taken away," which could in turn cause us to be "taken away." Matt would often walk up to the corner store to buy food and I would stay home and make sure things were okay there. I missed a lot of school trying to make sure that my mom took her medicine regularly, generally taking care of her and keeping her company, and taking care of the house as best I could. That care-giving was not burdensome, though it was abnormal for my age. It enabled me to exercise a level of agency that children do not usually get to exercise, since they are the ones who are doted upon and cared for.

We were subject to yearly home inspections by the Belmont Housing Authority for state-subsidized rent. They were more about the safety of the house but the cleaning production that happened before it was always a big one. We didn't want the housing inspector to come in and see how messy the place was because they might call a social worker or CPS in and Matt and I might be "taken away".

My brother always had lots of friends, but I was a little more introverted and cared about reading. A few times I remember being made fun of for reasons related to poverty. Once I tried to brush my teeth with soap because we didn't have toothpaste, but the soap didn't work and my teeth were still filmy, a girl friend made fun of me for it. Once because my clothes weren't clean—a boy pointed out "you have poop on your back." We didn't have a working washing machine at that time.

Though I didn't get made fun of that much there was still stigma attached to poverty. My neighborhood was a "bad neighborhood," I lived in project housing. When I was at the age when I started making friends who didn't live down the street from me, some friends weren't allowed to come to my house because it "wasn't safe." It "wasn't safe" in a couple of ways, because it was considered to be the hood, but also because my parents weren't always recognized as someone you'd want to let your children near—because of stigma associated with their mental illness.

As a child, I got frustrated because I felt like I couldn't have choices about certain things. We had used or hand-me-down everything—toys, clothes, books. I didn't care much about those things being previously used but I remember vividly receiving charity school supplies and crying alone in my room about it. When my dad was still at home (he was eventually hospitalized long-term due to COPD) he always walked me to Vix and we picked out my school supplies together. They were

one of the few things we bought new, and I had very strong preferences about pens and crayons and paper. Wide-ruled paper was an abomination and the church sent wide-ruled paper. Though it seems trivial, I remember it so vividly because I was struck by the thought that since I was poor I did not get to choose my college-ruled paper, I was subject to the charity that made that choice for me.

One last thing about stigma associated with my parents' disabilities was that I was often treated as the adult when we were in public situations together. This infuriated me when social workers would talk to me like my mom wasn't present; or when she'd ask for directions, adults would tell them to me; or change was always put in my hand rather than my mother's. I was fine being a child carer in the family, but I was consistently disappointed by nondisabled adults who saw my parents as incompetent. I was happy that my parents had a vibrant community with lots of other people with disabilities who worked or did advocacy at the Mental Health Association in town; they'd often come over the apartment to chat and drink coffee, so at least I knew that not all adults were as disappointing as the nondisabled ones were.

4 Thinning Out a Thick Description

Issues of distribution aside—food scarcity and the inability to pay the bills—there are many salient elements that need to be unpacked from this description. I'd like to emphasize that my story is the story of a white nondisabled child in poverty with two parents with disabilities. Notably, someone in a different social location might find other salient elements of their experience to discuss. I will discuss five topics: (1) custody (2) child as caregiver (3) unemployment (4) charity and lack of choice and (5) stigma.

4.1 *Custody*

When people with disabilities do have children, there is a likelihood that they will face custody difficulties or that they will lose custody of their children. Removal rates of children whose parents have psychiatric disabilities are as high as 70–80%; rates for adults with intellectual disabilities having children removed from their custody are on some estimates at 40%, but on others, as high as 80%; and 13% of adults with physical disabilities reported facing discriminatory practices in custody cases (Powell 2014). In every single state, a parent's disability status may be considered in determining the best interest of the child in family or dependency court (Powell 2014). In fully 2/3 of states statutes, a parent's disability may be the determining factor in the decision about whether or not the parent is "fit" enough to retain custody of the child or children (Rochman 2012). The language of 'fitness' echoes back to a past colored by the influence of eugenics.

We see that instability in family life is a form of oppression that families with disabled parents face pretty routinely. This possibility of having the family split up can result in reluctance or fear of accepting or seeking out certain state benefits because of requirements that the family submit to regular surveillance. Inviting an agent of the state into the home always carries with it the risk that the family will be split up and the children will be “taken away.”

4.2 *Child as Caregiver*

This is when a child has taken on some level of responsibility for caring for their parent(s) or sibling(s). Michael Wyness, sociologist of childhood says “Carers and recipients are concerned that any fine distinctions made between intervention and help might be overridden by agencies in attempts to ‘rescue’ children” (Wyness 2012, 127). The dominant way of seeing children is not as carers themselves, but as the ones that need to be cared for. In circumstances where the child is doing care work, there is a chance that outside agencies might think the child is being abused or neglected since the traditional model of care has been reversed in some ways. Again, this can result in reluctance or fear of inviting representatives of the state into the home.

Child caregiving can become a problem if the child ends up missing a lot of school or is depended on to do too much of the domestic work. The UK has a program that takes into account the perspective of the child carer and their rights and even gives that child the chance to receive compensation for their labor if they are over 16 and no longer in school.¹⁵ This can help alleviate some of the stresses of poverty for the family.

4.3 *Unemployment*

Fewer than 1 in 5 disabled adults are employed (Fessler 2015). This often leaves those adults reliant upon US government subsistence programs such as Supplementary Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability (SSDI) for their income. SSI is for adults with less than \$2000 in assets who have rarely or never been employed. SSDI payments are for those who have been in the workforce, paying in to the social security program; their monthly payment amount is determined by how long they worked and how much money they made.

SSI payments as of 2018 max out at \$8830.84 USD for an individual recipient—and that is per year (Social Security Administration 2018). This is hardly enough to live off of, so often recipients will receive food stamps (SNAP, Supplemental

¹⁵ See <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/social-care-and-support/young-carers-rights/> for an explanation of the rights of the child carer and for more information on eligibility for compensation.

Nutrition Assistance Program benefits), rent subsidies, TANF (Temporary Aid for Needy Families, the result of welfare reform in 1996) and other subsidies to attempt to make up for shortfalls. Oftentimes even with all of the subsidies available families still struggle to scrape by from month to month; this is most notable in southern US states, where payments are typically lower (the states are often in control of how much one receives for TANF, for example).

4.4 Charity and Lack of Choice

Often, families must rely on charity to supplement a too-meager income from state benefits and payments. Charity does not tackle the causes of poverty or its oppressions; it only alleviates the symptoms temporarily. It also avoids putting the onus on the state for changing the distribution of money and resources in a more systematic way. Indeed since the 1970s and especially during the Reagan administration, laws, tax code changes and decreasing availability of state services and payments have caused the number of charities and food banks to rise and have left poor people more reliant on charity than before.¹⁶

This leaves those who are made to be vulnerable dependent on the whims of charity, what kinds of things they see as worth giving, how much, and what they assess is needed for those receiving charity. For example, my brother was often ashamed as a kid because we could not afford regular haircuts for his short hair. All my parents needed was \$12 extra per month and his bangs would not be either hanging down well over his eyes or chopped by my mom, who has many skills, but haircutting is not one of them. There was no charity that provided haircuts for people living in poverty. Perhaps haircuts were considered a luxury, or perhaps it just has not occurred to charities that that is something poor people might want access to.¹⁷

Additionally, as we saw in the thick description, charity does not allow people to have choices. This is a small issue some might say, especially about my preference for college-ruled paper. But for children, style and the way they present themselves is the one form of self-expression they have and tend to be judged by. Additionally, children may have to face stigma due to the fact that their clothes are previously used or charitably donated. Charities generally do not think of individuals as having needs beyond subsistence (food, shelter, clothing) nor do they see individuals as individuals. For the most part, charities see “the poor” as an amorphous group without the resources to have a choice and perhaps in some cases without the right to

¹⁶ See Parson 2014 for a critique of neoliberalism and its entanglement with charity. See specifically, the change in tax code that has made it profitable for corporations to give food waste—unused food—to food banks and charitable organizations who distribute food to people in poverty.

¹⁷ See Wolff in this volume for a discussion of these kinds of deprivations and problems with lack of choice.

‘luxuries’ such as haircuts.¹⁸ In the next section, I will discuss stigma from a theoretical point of view and some positive ways of conceiving of these social problems and relationships.

4.5 *Stigma*

Stigma is a social phenomenon that attaches itself to some kind of difference that is considered to be abnormal or undesirable. People experience stigma differently depending on where they are socially located, at the intersection of different privileges and oppressions. Here we will be dealing with the stigma of poverty and disability, but we can not make any headway without acknowledging that the kind of stigma a white girl with a learning disability will face compared to the kind of stigma a Black girl with the same disability would face inside of the US educational system. They might have the same diagnosis but they will undoubtedly face different kinds of oppression inflected by differing kinds of stigma.

Research indicates that society falsely perceives Black children as being less innocent than their white peers—even as toddlers (Chakara 2017). So Black girls are more likely to be punished for their actions, and the punishment they receive is likely to be harsher. These harsh disciplinary practices in turn harm their social-emotional and behavioral development and may fail to address any underlying issues. The excessive discipline Black children experience for offenses such as disruptive behavior and tantrums—normal childhood behavior—makes them 10 times more likely to face discipline, retention, or even incarceration later in life (US Department of Education).

So we see stigma has real, material implications not just in the present, but also in the trajectory of a person’s life. Moreover, depending on where someone is socially located, the effects of their particular combination of oppressions and stigmas can be radically different—it is not enough to simply layer or add one kind of oppression to another to understand a person’s unique social position. Nor is difference accounted for by merely increasing the magnitude of one oppression when trying to understand another that seems on its face similar or of the same kind. Scholar Angela Harris calls this way of looking at oppression ‘nuance theory’ and says “nuance theory constitutes Black women’s oppression as only an intensified example of (white) women’s oppression” (Harris 1997, 15) The problem with nuance theory is that, in the case of black women, there’s no way of accounting for how blackness affects the way gender is perceived. Race and gender, rather, combine

¹⁸There is a lot of discourse about what poor people need versus what they might want or enjoy, with the implication that they do not deserve any little luxuries in life. Just google ‘food stamps lobster,’ ‘food stamps steak,’ or even ‘food stamps birthday cake’ and dozens of sites and videos show up, many of them using the term ‘welfare queen,’ which is a derogatory term usually implicating a woman of color on welfare who is ‘too lazy’ to work and ‘just has lots of children’ who ‘live off the system.’

and compound upon one another producing a particular kind of oppression that black women must negotiate daily. Lerita Coleman Brown offers a way of looking at stigma that is multidimensional. She argues that stigma has behavioral, cognitive, and affective components—rather than simply being a property of individuals—and that stigma is a “response to the dilemma of difference” (Brown 2013, 147). It is important to think of stigma as having a relational dimension, rather than thinking of it as a property that adheres to certain individuals. Stigma is determined by social norms that under- or devalue certain differences and cite them as things to be feared, abhorred, or avoided. Stigma therefore negatively affects a person’s social relationships.

Some of the effects of stigma are psychological, some social. Psychological effects have to do with internalizing the stigma and believing the inferior status is actually the status one occupies. This can result in feeling totalized by the perceived negative identity trait and may: “inhibit the stigmatized person from developing other parts of the self” (Brown 2013 154). If the perceived negative trait is seen as totalizing, this may result in the individual not cultivating their interests, having problems in education, and lacking a positive self-image.

Brown says “social rejection or avoidance affects not only the stigmatized individual but everyone who is socially involved, such as family, friends, and relatives. This permanent form of social quarantine forces people to limit their relationships to other stigmatized people and to those for whom the social bond outweighs the stigma, such as family members” (Brown 2013, 154). Stigmatized individuals are relegated to a lower place in the social order and this form of quarantine limits their possibilities for having relationships with the normate. Stigmatized individuals are more likely to socialize only with other stigmatized individuals as the social out-casting also attaches itself to others associated with the stigmatized individual—sort of on the model of a contagion.

We want to avoid perpetuating oppressive practices and systems, and so, it is important to expand social knowledge about families with disabilities. Narratives about disability and child poverty could help combat stigma. An emphasis on disability’s link with poverty and narratives of what poverty and disability are like when they intersect could in turn transform the organization of society and result in increased social support for disabled parents and children with or without disabilities. In the next section I will discuss vulnerability and its role in constructing an alternative political vision that reduces stigma and increases accessibility for children in poverty whose situation intersects with disability in some way.¹⁹

¹⁹To quickly give a sketch of an answer to three, four, and five I’ll say 3. Turn nonpermitted dependencies into permitted dependencies (see below for definitions of permitted and nonpermitted dependencies); 4. Access and accessibility, dignity, and care are other ethical concepts that an ethics of vulnerability must address and; 5. Involve the subjects in knowledge production and planning in attempts to ameliorate their situations. For example, if you’re studying how to respond to child poverty, ask the children who are poor. Involve them in creating solutions and that will avoid problems with unwarranted paternalism or coercion.

5 Vulnerability

Vulnerability is a condition of being human and mortal. We are vulnerable to fire, to words, to institutions, to our lovers, to our teachers (and our students); we are vulnerable to animals in the sense that they may maim us and also in the sense that our worlds can turn upside-down upon their loss. We are vulnerable to things and to others in the sense that we may be harmed or killed by them, yet also we are vulnerable insofar as we love. Vulnerability is often represented as a bad thing, a weakness, but I hope to show that it can suggest an alternative political vision. Vulnerability is the thing we share in common and in difference that can bring us together to recreate the world in a more inclusive, responsive form.

Catriona Mackenzie, Wendy Rogers, and Susan Dobbs enumerate the central theoretical challenges for constructing an ethics of vulnerability. They say a view requires five components: (1) outlining the scope of the concept, (2) explaining why vulnerability generates political and ethical obligations, (3) clarifying the nature of these obligations, (4) elucidating its relationship to other ethical concepts, and (5) addressing the danger of unwarranted paternalism and coercion (Mackenzie et al. 2014, 2). Though I do not have the space to thoroughly account for each of these requirements in this section of the paper, I will at least answer one and two, giving an expanded account of ontological vulnerability. Then I will discuss vulnerability, need, and stigma in terms of child poverty and disability.

5.1 *Scope*

Vulnerability is an ontological component of the human experience, rather than a status that applies only to certain groups named as vulnerable populations. It is important to emphasize the universal character of vulnerability because it sets us all in a class together as a certain kind of being who is open to their environment and to others in particular ways. Jackie Leach Scully articulates why we might want to conceptualize vulnerability as ontological rather than focusing on particular groups as vulnerable. She says “concentrating only on the special vulnerabilities of defined groups reinforces the notion that although some people need special protections, the norm of human life is to be, or to aspire to be, invulnerable” (Scully 2014, 206). It is important to acknowledge that invulnerability should not be a goal, is perhaps seen to be a norm, and yet, it is in principle impossible. For embodied beings, invulnerability is a fantasy.

Martha Fineman puts forward the view that all subjects are vulnerable insofar as they are embodied (Fineman 2008, 9). Mackenzie makes the appeal that “despite the importance of the notion of ontological vulnerability, many forms of vulnerability are caused or exacerbated by social or political structures” (Mackenzie 2014, 33). Judith Butler argues that we are ontologically vulnerable in light of political

and social factors: “we cannot understand vulnerability outside this conception of social and material relations” (Butler 2016, 16).

I argue for a more expansive view of the ontological form of vulnerability. In virtue of being embodied, speaking beings that live together socially in an environment that can be enabling or disabling, we are vulnerable to many things, and we are each vulnerable in different ways. Scully, who writes from a critical disability studies perspective, says, “a more comprehensive notion of ontological vulnerability, which includes the vulnerabilities that develop through all forms of dependency, may be ethically and politically preferable.” (Scully 2014, 206). I agree that a more expansive conception of vulnerability is ethically and politically preferable because it can lead to a system which sees the good based not in profit, but on human need (Lorde 2007 [1984], 55). In other words, our systems and institutions should have the aim of supporting and empowering people rather than fixating on profit.

5.2 *Why Does Vulnerability Generate Political and Ethical Obligation?*

Scully also argues that ontological vulnerability has a wider scope than it has been said to have. She says some vulnerabilities are “generated intersubjectively; they are ontological not because they derive from biological embodiment but because the need to live in groups where members support and care for each other is ... intrinsic to being human” (Scully 2014, 216). There are many obligations that are generated simply in virtue of the fact that we are social beings. We have sewage systems because all of that human waste—formerly dumped in city streets—was making people sick. The problem with certain obligations arising from vulnerability is that they have been rendered invisible because of their ubiquity, their constancy in supporting our lives. Scully characterizes these as obligations arising from ‘permitted dependencies’ such as transport, health care, education, fire departments, trash disposal, and communication, to name just a few.²⁰ These obligations that arise from dependencies have become ‘naturalized and normalized’ and so, are not seen to be responses to vulnerability (Scully 2014, 217).

She contrasts permitted dependencies with nonpermitted dependencies, ones that fall outside of the norm. She says “[Nonpermitted dependencies] are figured as abnormal and classed as rendering those people as especially vulnerable” (Scully 2014, 217). A more expansive view of ontological vulnerability would not do such a thing. Since everyone is vulnerable to the social and material world in different ways, these vulnerabilities would not be seen as exceptional; rather, they would be seen as legitimate claims to respond to for making a more inclusive world.

Children living under poverty represent an important case to explore. They are often seen as exceptionally vulnerable beings. They have not yet transitioned into

²⁰Healthcare is actually *not* a permitted dependency in the US.

beings with autonomy; though they do have agency. They are also not able to get jobs so they are subject to poverty, but do not often have the means to ameliorate it. There are permitted dependencies we have ensured against for children; for example, we have free education available through high school. We put this in place as part of our infrastructure because children are newcomers in the world and they need some guidance and knowledge in order to find their way about in it (Arendt 1961 [1954], 185).

Certain cities in the US have transitioned into giving all students in public schools free breakfast and lunch; this is the case in New York, Boston, Chicago, Detroit, and Dallas (Piccoli and Harris 2017). Schools were seeing that children who received free or reduced price lunches on the old policy²¹ would often go hungry rather than face the stigma of being “the poor kid” who gets discounted or free food from the school. By universalizing the policy, city schools have made things better for all children, especially in light of the food insecurity many children face at home. Something that was previously considered to be a nonpermitted dependency (resulting from being poor or low income) has now become a permitted dependency—to the benefit of all students. This is a great example of vulnerabilities being responded to by structures in order to be more inclusive, that take human need into account when working towards a vision of a better system.

5.3 *Human Need; Combating Stigma*

Human need is not simply a matter of resources, to be addressed through distribution. The need to be heard, the need to be recognized and their corresponding vulnerabilities of silencing and misrecognition or “misfitting” the built environment²² can be really harmful to a person. This kind of treatment can be seen as resulting from stigma about poverty and disability.

One step towards correcting stigma and the mistreatment that results from it is that people studying the effects of poverty or trying to mitigate the effects of poverty, such as social workers and public policy makers, should always consult people who are poor, *including children*, to gauge what their needs are. The same goes for people with disabilities; in the disability rights movement in the 1990’s the political slogan “Nothing About Us Without Us” was—and still is—commonly used to express that we are the experts about what our needs are and how best to address them (Wolff and Hums 2017). Additionally, this is one way to prevent unwarranted paternalism or individual coercion in a system’s response to vulnerability. Making the subjects the agents of knowledge-production amplifies their voices and recognizes them as knowers; solutions should be pursued in response to their input.

Another step towards reducing stigma is to share narratives of what it’s like to be at the intersection of age, class, disability, gender, and race. There is no one-size-

²¹The “old policy” of offering free and reduced priced lunches is the policy still in place in most communities in the US.

²²For more on the term ‘misfit’ see Garland-Thomson (2011).

fits-all narrative because all of these identity groups are heterogeneous, that is to say there is no story anyone can tell that captures “the essence” of the disabled indigent girl’s experience living in poverty, for example. It will be different for each child depending on where they are socially located, how they are individually, socially, historically, and politically constructed and how they are self-created. Therefore, the more narratives given representation—in books, on TV, in films, in the news, or on the Internet—the more likely stigma is to be reduced.

One last step towards combating stigma is to transform nonpermitted dependencies into permitted dependencies while preserving—and not assimilating—difference. In making the world more inclusive to “abnormal” body-minds, it is likely that many will benefit from the changes. For example, curb cuts for wheelchair users and Blind people have benefitted mothers with strollers, aged people with walkers, people shopping with their carts in tow, and children in those shoes that have pop-out wheels. Building access is not so simple, though. Aimi Hamraie, in *Building Access Universal Design and the Politics of Disability* demonstrates that “how we structure knowledge, interact with material things, and tell stories about the users of built environments matter for belonging and justice.” (Hamraie 2017, 3). To be a “misfit” is to bump up against the boundaries of the built environment. That environment was designed with certain kinds of bodies in mind. The knowledge produced around design and the body-minds that design is based on is a matter of feeling at home in the world and of justice for people with disabilities.

6 Conclusion

What promise does vulnerability hold when we add it into our guiding ideals along with liberty, equality, and fraternity, as Julia Kristeva asks in her piece “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity... and Vulnerability”? The transformative power of having vulnerability as a core social and political value may result in bolstering the status of those already on the margins, women for example, and children who have no right from the government to economic security. If we can see vulnerability as central to the political, generating different obligations based on different vulnerabilities, our system may be transformed to include care for those lives that are vulnerable in different ways—Black lives, and the lives of other people of color who are subject to the enduring system of white supremacy and police brutality.

Simone de Beauvoir says “It is by concentrating one’s efforts upon the fate of the most unfortunate, the worst-used of all, that one can successfully shake society to its foundations”²³ (Beauvoir 1970, 6). I have tried to demonstrate the vulnerability of families for whom disability is a reality—be it as parents or as children—and the

²³I do not intend to make claims about who is *most* vulnerable, as in which social location faces the most oppression. Such questions don’t come with generative answers. I just mean to note that focusing on populations and intersections of oppression that are made to be very vulnerable by our social configuration is something that is generative for thinking politics in new ways.

role that poverty nearly inevitably plays in their lived experiences. It is by focusing on disability and its intersections with poverty, race, and the effects it has on children, that I attempt to offer an alternate way of thinking about ourselves and our relations with others; it is through this that I construct an alternative political vision.

If care for vulnerability could inflect our social relationships and political practices, I think that it will generate environments where people can flourish, rather than merely subsist or survive, or worse, live in constant fear for their lives or their children's lives. It could transform our current political landscape and make it one that's responsive to the worst-used and the invisible, that reduces stigma associated with these social locations, and that understands vulnerability as something that unites us: in commonality and in difference.

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Precarious Childhood



Jennifer Mei Sze Ang

Abstract Judith Butler argues that when we start to ask critical questions about which socio-political contexts may make human lives more viable to flourish and which may not, we find that some live lives outside a frame furnished by a norm that does not recognize them as a life and hence impossible for us to imagine, and to grieve and mourn their loss. This chapter uses Butler's ideas on precariousness and liveability to discuss the social and political conditions and cultural contexts of children in poverty. It first outlines Butler's notions of precariousness and the precarity of life as the violent contexts in which certain lives are not recognised. Next, it examines how the framing and reframing of poverty according to the notion of 'liveability' helps improve the social and ecological wellbeing of those living in poverty in ASEAN member states (AMS). Finally, it investigates why the precariousness for children born into poverty in AMS continues to rise, in spite of economic growth and political pledge to protect the rights of children by examining the context of child exploitation. It argues that the idea of 'childhood' as we know it does not exist in some of these AMS and this contributes to the increased precariousness for children born into poverty. These children are only able to make their lives liveable by embracing the absence of 'childhood' and are only recognized as living valuable lives when they contribute to the family income. This requires community effort and political will to challenge the framing of children as resource and assert the right of children to have a right to live viable lives.

Keywords Judith Butler · Precariousness · Livability · ASEAN member states

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1 Introduction

To apprehend how poverty affects children, we must first examine how poverty is understood and how the idea of childhood is conceptualised. In taking a constructivist view, I introduce Judith Butler's lenses on 'recognition' to understand how the framing of these ideas is a product of unequal social and political power. I first outline what Butler means as living a precarious life using the concepts of precariousness, liveability, and grieve, and discuss the vulnerability of the human condition as an existential inevitability and also one that is the result of social and political neglect. From this understanding of what framing constitutes, I demonstrate how the switch from a money-metric frame to a rights-based approach using a multidimensional measure can reframe our conceptualisation of poverty to include previously unrecognized lives that were equally vulnerable to injury, violence and death. By reframing, governments, international organisations, and non-governmental organisations are able to focus their efforts at minimizing precariousness for vulnerable groups who are not considered income-poor but nonetheless lived with deprivations that compromised their opportunities and abilities to live viable lives. The result of this reframing is clear for ASEAN member states (AMS).¹ The World Bank has reported Southeast Asia to be higher in actual number of impoverished people than Africa's and with the most malnourished children in the world, yet it has made substantial improvements over the past 20 years to have only moderate levels of poverty by improving their social and ecological wellbeing.

However, in spite of these improvements, children in these AMS live in a state of heightened precariousness – their lives have become more vulnerable to the possibility of violence, injury and destruction. As the increasing number of child exploitation cases shows, a child born into poverty live an unliveable life. I argue that the reason why their lives are unliveable in spite of the economic growth and government pledges to child protection is due to the fact that these societies lack the normative conditions that frame 'children' as a life that counts. And this is due to the fact that in these countries, 'childhood' is not recognised as a separate space from adulthood which defines what is inappropriate and unsuitable for a child. In fact, powerless children find that they are only able to make their lives liveable precisely by accepting this absence of what we conceived in contemporary literature regarding childhood – children as in need of support and protection, and with a right to play. Instead, they must cease to be children in order to live lives of value, that is, take on adult roles in situations of forced labour, child marriages, and child prostitution. Finally, I conclude that this heightened state of precariousness can be overcome by individuals in these AMS by first making 'childhood' intelligible through questioning the socio-cultural framing of childhood, and secondly, by moving into

¹The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was established on 8 August 1967 in Bangkok, with the signing of the ASEAN Declaration. Its founding members were Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Brunei Darussalam joined ASEAN in 1984, Vietnam in 1995, Lao PDR and Myanmar in 1997, and lastly, Cambodia in 1997, forming ASEAN's tenth member.

the public space to demand their society to recognize the right of children to have the right to live liveable lives.

2 Recognizing Lives, Liveability, and Preciousness

In *Frames of War* (2016), Butler suggests that we are unable to apprehend certain lives as injured or lost if they were not apprehended as living in the first place. Apprehension, in general terms, refers to a mode of perception, and we organize our perceptions around familiar historical schemas to make them intelligible. Take for example, our perceptions about the conditions necessary to support the life and rights that need to be protected for foetuses have changed over time and understood differently. To understand these issues, we need to first rely on our understanding of what qualifies as a life, which is informed by the changing historical schemas of religion, culture, and science. By being able to grasp the life stages of a foetus, we are able to better comprehend when a life is lost and when to grieve, and consider the conditions it needs and the rights it has. In other words, our understanding of what constitutes a life (beyond what constitutes a living thing) is conditioned by the different schemas we have developed over time.

Given that these schemas are norms constituted over time by others socially and politically, the ontology of being for Butler has to be historically contingent and necessarily social and political. Butler's ontology also focusses on the social in the concrete sense of the embodied existence – the experience we have as living and interacting with and among others-in-a-world like us through our bodies – or what Butler terms as the “being of a body” as we see in her works on gender. In both her social ontology and her discussions on concrete human experiences, Butler introduces the notion of power by making references to the Hegelian understanding of human relationships as one that is dialectical in nature. For Hegel, consciousness seeks out other consciousness to achieve self-certainty, forming a relationship of mutual recognition of self-consciousness with others. This relationship is conflictive in nature because consciousness has to struggle against being circumscribed by others in order to be recognized as an independent self-consciousness. As Jean Hyppolite explains, the initial encounter between Hegel's first men is a fight, “to prove to others as well as to oneself that one is an autonomous self-consciousness” (Hyppolite 1974, pp. 164–5).

Working with Hegel's idea that the mutual recognition of consciousness is potentially hostile, and influenced by Michel Foucault's concept of power, Butler introduces her idea of power as defining all political and social relationships in her work on precariousness. We find this in her post-9/11 work on the unequal power relations in world politics where some nations in power can “maximize precariousness for some and minimize precariousness for others” (Butler 2016, pp. 2–3). She uses the term ‘precarity’ to refer to the “politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence and death” due to the “heightened

risk of diseases, poverty, starvation, displacement and exposure to violence without protection” (Butler 2016, pp. 25–6). In doing so, she distinguishes precariousness to mean our human vulnerability that is inherent in the human condition for all, from precarity as referring to the broader operations of power where the lives of certain groups of people are recognized as worthy of protecting while others are not. Through the lenses of recognition, we are able to see that there are times and conditions where some subjects “are not quite recognizable as subjects, and there are ‘lives’ that are not quite – or, indeed, are never – recognized as lives” such that they experience lives as being more precarious than lives that are recognized (Butler 2016, p. 4).

Using the idea of framing, Butler explains this phenomenon of ‘recognition’ further. To frame something is to organise and present, contain and convey what is seen in order to implicitly guide the audience to an interpretive conclusion about the object being framed. But at the same time, having a frame exposes the framer – as the audience reflexively calls into question who the framer is, what the frame means, and how the process of framing came about that puts some inside the frame and leave others outside of the frame. Framing, understood in this way, can never quite determine “precisely what it is we see, think, recognize, and apprehend” because those outside of the frame “troubles our sense of reality” when they do not “conform to our established understanding of things” (Butler 2016, p. 9). In short, who we recognize as worthy to be alive is influenced by how the idea of who this person is when they are being framed, and when we realize the existence of the frame, it reveals to us that these ideas are subjected to socio-political forces that created the contexts we live in.

This hegemonic framing and terms of recognition can be challenged. Butler uses the examples of photos of the Guantanamo prisoners and images from Abu Ghraib to demonstrate what it means to break out of the frame. She argues that both photos and images were breaking out of the context that framed the event of the war by providing the condition for horror and outrage that was to eventually facilitate the widespread turn against the war (Butler 2016, pp. 10–1). When the hegemonic framing came under question, it immediately opened up multiple possibilities of how the war can be understood and challenged the powers of the hegemon. The international community began to question the conditions that inform the framing of recognizability, the violence against Muslim and Arab lives, and demand for a more egalitarian redistribution of resources for shelter, food, water, medical care, work and legal status.

Butler also mentions public grief as a political act – an act of the powerful in determining who to grief for or whose lives count as lives further demonstrates the unequal power relation of recognition. According to Butler, when we grieve over the loss of a life, we first assume that it is a life that would have been recognised as lived. In fact, “the apprehension of grievability precedes and makes possible the apprehension of precarious life” because grievability presupposes that there is a life that matters in the first place (Butler 2016, p. 15). On the other hand, an unrecognised life will never have been protected, with “no testimony and ungrieved when lost” (Butler 2016, p. 15). In other words, when we question the frame of recognition,

it becomes “possible to apprehend something about what or who is living but has not been generally ‘recognised’ as a life” (Butler 2016, p. 12). We also question why precariousness has not been recognized for everyone equally on an existential level (in relation to death), and as a fundamental human condition where lives can be lost, destroyed, injured, and neglected, and hence, also lives that we should grieve when they are lost (Butler 2016, p. 13). And when we see precariousness as a shared human condition of vulnerability, we find it an obligation to attend to them such as demanding “a more robust universalizing of rights that seeks to address basic human needs for food, shelter, and other conditions for persisting and flourishing” through the political and ethical decisions we make (Butler 2016, p. 29). In this way, while Butler only touches on the idea of public grief as a political act, we can also understand our grief as revealing our social relations with others and reasons as to why we recognize certain people as living lives whose injury and loss we mourn.

This brings us to the second use of the Hegelian idea of recognition by Butler that is characteristic of her earlier works on gender – how ‘gender’ is being recognized in the contexts of unequal social and political power. She argues that the basis of recognizing certain modes or ways of living is built on social forms of power. For instance, in *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler discusses how the gender identity we assume stems from the social and cultural norms we are born into and conditioned by our everyday encounters. Our ideas of masculinity and femininity are socially constructed; they are categories that have their own cultural history and their own social and political dynamics. By performing these gender norms in our everyday actions, speech, gestures and representations, dressing, behaviours, and observing certain taboos and prohibitions, we are reproducing the established and mainstream conceptualisation of masculinity or femininity, and hence also the political dynamics underlying these conceptualisations. At the same time, in understanding that gender identity is a socially constructed category, we are able to grasp how some gender identities such as the drag queen and homosexual lies outside of the mainstream framing of masculinity and femininity and are as such, living unrecognized ways of living.

For those whose lives are not recognized, that is, either because they do not conform to established norms or belong to a marginalized group in the society, they live unliveable lives – unliveable because they lack the social conditions that support their lives. For Butler, this idea of ‘liveability’ captures the aspect of living socially that cannot be properly captured in the phenomenon of recognition in the political sense of the term. When we grasp what is required for a life to be regarded as a life, we see that whether certain lives are considered worth protecting or deserving to be grieved when injured or lost depends on a social network that conditions if certain lives are recognized as living in the first place. When people adopt certain ways of life that are unintelligible according to socio-cultural viable notions of human lives, they are living in ways that are not recognized as ‘living’ and hence find that their bodies are violated on a daily basis because they lack social protection and their injury and loss are not remembered or grieved. And for those belonging to marginalized groups that are neglected by the society, they lack protection and support because they did not have rights to begin with. Thus, what we see here is that

depending on the normative frameworks at work, certain kinds of life will be established to be a life worth living, some kinds of life will be established as a life worth preserving, and other kinds of life will become worthy to be mourned (Butler 2016, p. 53). Only by questioning what a life is (as a shared human condition of vulnerability) and what liveability means (as a social condition that accepts and supports the way of living), are we able to form a basis for critiquing the norms of recognition (Butler 2016, p. 5).

Precarious life thus first refers to the idea of precariousness – the sense of human vulnerability that defines our common existential condition. It also means an increased precariousness for some more than others because they lack the power to be recognized socially and/or politically. Those who are powerless live unrecognized lives where they are more vulnerable to violence, injury and death as a result of the lack of social protection or support, and are neglected by the state in the provision of needs that support lives. In all these situations, the fact that their enhanced precariousness is not publicly grieved is demonstrative of what liveability means – that we all need to live socially, conforming to ways of living that are supported by the norms established by those with social power and be recognized with rights that need protection.

For Butler, our responses lies in politics as well as ethics. She emphasizes, along similar lines as Hannah Arendt, the need to assert the right to have rights. To do so, we need to exercise our right to have rights by joining others in concerted resistance to the terms of recognizability by claiming public spaces through public gatherings, assemblies, and mass demonstrations (Butler 2011). And because Butler believed in embodied existence, she maintains that politics take place only when bodies appear, and this requires having a space which each appear to the other. We appear as a body-for-other in these public spaces to acquire a perspective other than our own and to fully grasp what it means for the human to be a relational and social being. Thus, even for those who were “abandoned to precarity or left to die through systematic negligence, concerted action still emerges” since no humans can be human alone (Butler 2011). When we turn to Butler’s ethics, it is also always relational given that the “I” is already social; beginning “its reflection and action from the presumption of a constitutive sociality” (Butler and Athanasiou 2013, p. 107). In fact, if we agree with the Hegelian idea that our lives are interdependent and mutually implicated in one another, we see that ethics is not a personal morality or individual disposition, but already established as a principle of equality and connectedness in our conceptualisation of “I” (Butler and Athanasiou 2013, p. 107). She argues that if we keep ourselves open to the world, to become an “I” who can question and demand change, we will be moved to act when we are sufficiently impressed by the injustice of some situations. One example she gives is the shifting of the problem of poverty to the socio-economic and political level by posing the question of why and how poverty is being augmented and how it can be countered (Butler and Athanasiou 2013, p. 106).

3 Recognizing Children's Lives and Liveability in Poverty

When we turn to the complex phenomenon of poverty, our understanding of what constitutes poverty has been framed and reframed in the public discourse – from defining extreme poverty according to income levels, to a wider definition with a substantial focus on the availability and accessibility of basic social and ecological needs – that will enable the poor to build capabilities and break out of poverty. This redefinition of money-metric framing of ‘U\$1 a day PPP’ was put in place with the establishment of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), where the MDGs were already set within the historical schema of a rights-based approach which was officially captured in the 1997 Human Development Index. In this way, the historical schema of rights-based approach enables the international community to apprehend lives that live outside of this money-metric frame, leading to a change in the framing of how poverty is conceptualised and studied through research and dialogue.

One development in this reframing of poverty is to focus on reducing child poverty as key to overall poverty reduction. In 2000, UNICEF highlighted the fact that because poor families generally have more children, the latter are more likely to experience poverty (UNICEF 2000, 2). It argued that poverty affects children in a different way from adults, causes damage to their mental and physical health, and also leaves permanent effects on them physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually. Furthermore, children are transmitters of poverty – they become malnourished parents who give birth to underweight babies, lack access to information to optimally feed and care for their children, and as illiterate parents, they cannot support their children in their learning (UNICEF 2000, 2–3). UNICEF thus concluded that poverty reduction must start with children in order to break this vicious cycle. To this end, it proposed a distribution of a modest share of global wealth estimated at \$80 billion per year to provide a minimum standard of living, including access to adequate food, safe water and sanitation, primary health care and basic education. It also highlighted that the protection of the rights of children is a pre-condition for reducing poverty given that “poverty constitutes a denial of human rights and dignity” and incorporated the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) and other human rights treaties into its operations (UNICEF 2000, 19).

More specifically, scholars like Alberto Minujin in his 2011 UNICEF Global Study on Child Poverty and Disparities in seven countries in East Asia and the Pacific showed us that the monetary conceptualisation of poverty is derived largely from an adult's perspective, and in so doing, underestimates the impact of poverty on children. The experience of poverty is intensified for children when they are deprived of the seven internationally agreed dimensions and standards of wellbeing – shelter, food, water, sanitation, education, health, and information – and these have long-term effects on their development and also leads to intergenerational poverty (Minujin 2011, 6). The report concluded that measuring non-income dimensions can provide us with “greater insights into the dynamics of child poverty, that children can be income-poor and not deprived, deprived but not income-poor, or both income-poor and deprived” (Minujin 2011, 21).

By adopting a multi-dimensional approach with a focus on child poverty, these studies registered an immediate increase in the number of children as ‘poor’ compared to previous records. For example, as many as 75% of children in Laos were assessed to be living in poverty based on this multidimensional measure, when only 38% were assessed as income-poor. This means that previously, children who were deprived but not income-poor were living lives outside a frame furnished by the norm of poverty defined solely as income-poor, and hence, were not recognised as a life that too required support to achieve basic standards of wellbeing. We have also hitherto failed to imagine their injury and loss as something we should grieve when they too were left vulnerable to the lack of social and ecological environments that would have constituted their liveability.

In reframing our understanding of poverty this way, it reveals how we have conducted our discourse and research on poverty in a limited and biased manner when we only focus on household income. It also helps us to focus on the other social, political and ecological conditions that help support and make life liveable for those in poverty, and acknowledges that when we do not recognize these needs, we are contributing to the increased precariousness for children. This has direct impact on how principles surrounding social and ecological factors supporting liveability are determined and how resources are being distributed. Furthermore, by recognizing that vulnerability is constituted by poor social and ecological conditions that have sustained long-term impacts, the normative implications on what it means to reduce poverty has changed – not merely to boost incomes, but to also develop local community involvement, and protect and fulfil human rights. Governments and developmental agencies are now able to better establish networks that can prioritize resources and tend to those with the most urgent needs such as enhancing social protection schemes to reduce income poverty and inequality (Ortiz et al. 2012, pp. 103–11).

In the AMS for example, we can see noticeable improvements in their state of poverty, demonstrating how effective recognizing child poverty beyond income levels can be. ASEAN declared in 1990 and adopted the 1993 Resolution on the ASEAN Plan of Action for Children that outlined three areas of concern: child survival, child protection, and child development. Between 1990 and 2012, it was reported that the region’s population living with less than US\$1.25 per day fell from 53% to 14% when its population has increased by almost 50% (ASEAN MDG 2017, 17). Ahead of the rest of the Asia-Pacific region in reducing poverty, it is also ahead in “reducing the prevalence of underweight children, under-five and infant mortality as well as improving access to drinking water and improving basic sanitation” (ASEAN MDG 2017, 18).

However, even though economic growth has improved the situation of poverty in AMS, this growth is not pro-poor as it has not been distributed to the poor as much as other groups. There is evidence of a widening welfare gap in general, with a small group of at risk people who are chronically poor and vulnerable such as the ethnic minorities, and there are also widening gaps among rural and urban populations, growing gaps in terms of skill-levels, and persistent gender inequalities (ASEAN 2015, 33). In fact, economic growth brought about exploitation of the poor with increasing cases of slave labour and sexual exploitation. Sexual exploitation of chil-

dren for example are not only on the rise in traditional tourist destinations such as Thailand and Philippines, but countries such as Cambodia, Vietnam, and Indonesia are also fast becoming popular destinations for paedophiles. Even countries that were less affected by sexual exploitation of children in the past such as Laos and Myanmar are beginning to see an increase in the number of cases (Davy 2017, 16–8).

We can thus conclude, using Butler's lenses regarding the recognition of child poverty that firstly, the money-metric frame of recognizing poverty we have been using did not recognize other contributing factors to liveability and in so doing, those who were not considered income-poor continued to live unliveable lives without access to a network of social and ecological support. As a result, they are susceptible to injuries and their lives remain precarious. Second, some effects of poverty on the lives of the poor are fully not recognized, such as the psychological experience of living in poverty for children. Only in recent years, do we see studies on what living socially in poverty means for children (such as those conducted by Alberto Minujin) and understanding the depth and nature of poverty among women and men by using 'gender' as a serious analytic category of measurement of poverty. Third, governments are beginning to recognize that precariousness for children in poverty is the result of their rights being neglected thus making them more vulnerable to abuses and exploitations. The increased exploitation of children living in poverty in AMS in spite of these economic and social developments show that there are more fundamental factors contributing to what make lives unliveable and more precarious for these children.

4 Recognizing Unrecognized Childhood: The Case of ASEAN Member States

One of the greatest factors contributing to the sexual exploitation of children in AMS is volunteer tourism. Cambodia, one of the poorest countries in the region is a case in point. With increased international capital and volunteer resources going into orphanages and community-based care facilities, Cambodia has seen a 60% increase in the number of orphanages between 2005 and 2015, and in a 2017 UNICEF survey, the number stands at 406 orphanages with 16,579 children living in them even though about 80% of these children still have a living parent.² Many poor families started placing their children in residential care centres, some children were 'recruited' with the promise of education and a better life, and some others were trafficked. The adverse impacts of residential care of the orphanage tourism business on children is obvious – children suffer from physical abuses, lack adequate love or warmth, develop dependency and symptoms of indiscriminate affection, may not receive the education they were promised, and are put more at risk of sexual abuses by short-term volunteers due to the lack of security checks. Thus,

²Parents cited their inability to provide education for their children as the single largest contributing reason why they place their children in residential care centres, besides other socio-economic reasons such as remarriage, single parenting, large families and alcoholism.

economic progress may have brought improvements to the lives of poor families, but the increased trade, mobility, and technology have created new precarious conditions for the exploitation of children by sex and labour traffickers.

Furthermore, the complex historical, social, cultural and religious schemas in Asia's patriarchal societies continue to contribute to the prevailing negative attitudes towards girls. A recent study in Philippines shows that poverty played a major role in perpetuating a patriarchal society where girls play the stereotypical subordinate role at home; tending to household duties and 'parenting' their younger siblings instead of attending school (Medina 2015, 66–8). Parents also tend not to invest in their daughters since they will eventually marry and leave the family, and this leads to girls being less likely to complete schools to find jobs, and thereby further increases their chances of ending up in the sex trade. Their lack of self-worth is also exacerbated by their lack of standing at home and their sense of filial piety cause them to feel an extra sense of duty to want to contribute to the family and repay their parents.³ In income-poor families, their disadvantaged and powerless situation explain for their eagerness to work to support their families which makes them easy targets to traffickers for sexual and labour exploitation.⁴ It also translates into their willingness to enter into early marriages, and when the marriage falls through, their lack of education and work experience cause them to become trapped in the sex trade as a means of survival. Thus, poverty may have given rise to sexual and labour exploitation and child marriages, but it is apparent that this socio-cultural expectation of girls to provide for and support their parents and families created by patriarchal beliefs has created a permissive environment for them to occur (Davy 2017, 26–7).

In fact, families play an active role in sending their children – both girls and boys – into prostitution for the promise of financial gain (Davy 2017, 33–4). While the end of childhood may be defined biologically as the onset of puberty, or the age of eighteen in official documents, and in many cultures as the commencement of work and marriage, to these parents and guardians, 'childhood' as a separate space that defines what is appropriate and unsuitable does not apply. They are seduced by the relative wealth that prostitution can bring, and many parents and guardians grow dependent on their children's income to alleviate their poverty or to better their standard of living. In Philippines, parents actively force or entice their children to take part in sexual activities (sometimes online) to keep up with the financial contribution to the family. In Vietnam, 8 in 10 child prostitutes are sold into it by a family member for economic survival (Davy 2017, 25). In Thailand, Philippines, Laos and Vietnam, sexual exploitation is also at times disguised as child marriage, where families force their children into marriages with adults in exchange for financial rewards. It is thus no surprise that the apathy of parents who benefitted from

³In Filipino society, Christianity introduced by the Spanish colonizers has been one of the major sources of patriarchal beliefs and practices. Media portrayal of women as simple housewives who are weak and submissive and dependent on men, or as sex objects are prevalent.

⁴In Surakarta Indonesia for example, 7 out of 10 children exploited in the commercial sex sector do so because they hoped to make money to support their families. See Deana Davy's report *Regional Overview: The Sexual Exploitation of Children in Southeast Asia*. http://www.ecpat.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Regional-Overview_Southeast-Asia.pdf

‘paedophile generosity’ was found to be one of the barriers to tackling paedophilia, which is a problem now perpetuated by child pornography which is made even easier with the increasing speed of internet penetration in these countries. To them, the loss of childhood and innocence is not something to be grieved or mourned, since children are not recognised as a valuable life in-and-of-themselves to begin with but a commodified resource.

Hence, the impact of poverty on children in AMS goes beyond economic, social, and ecological deprivations. While it may appear that their exploitation is a direct result of the economic needs, the complex and deep-set historical, social, cultural and religious schemas played a major role in enabling and encouraging this situation. Socio-culturally, parents and guardians do not recognise ‘childhood’ as a special space that needs to be protected, because filial obligations is not mutual and reciprocal in that children have the duty to obey and provide for their parents, but parents do not see themselves as having the responsibility to raise their children to live independent and fulfilling lives as adults. Furthermore, in many of these cases of sexual exploitation, these children are unrecognized because they were orphaned or left to extended families, sent to work away from the family, and considered ‘lose-able’ since their lives do not matter in the first place. And in other instances, children are invisible in national planning because they were not registered at birth. Indonesia for instance, has in 2012 more that 30% of children that are unregistered and because they do not have an identity, they have no access to education and health services, as well as social protection.

The perpetuation of these harmful socio-cultural norms, beliefs, and practices thus explains why there is increasing numbers of forced labour, sexual exploitation, child pornography, and trafficking even when these countries are experiencing economic growth and have child protection laws in place. For the individual child, his/her liveability is solely dependent on her parents and the family, but instead of protecting and sustaining the liveability of the child, the families in the given examples contribute to and worsen their precariousness. But with inadequate criminal laws and insufficient governmental efforts at putting the necessary systems and capacity in place, there is little repercussions for these families. In the Philippines for example, the age of consent remains extremely low (at 12 years), corporal punishment at home is not reported, and criminal responsibility for rape may be expunged if a perpetrator subsequently marries the victim (UNICEF Philippines 2016, 27–8).

From the perspective of children born into poverty, their unliveable childhood means that they must cease to be children in order to live lives of value, that is, to take on adult roles. They have to first accept that there is an absent space between childhood and adulthood in their circumstances of poverty and take on adult functionality by performing the role as income-contributors to their family. This helps them to demonstrate their filial piety and achieve some standing in and recognition from the family.⁵ And often, in their desperate situations, this means they do what-

⁵ See Karen Coates. 2007. Cambodia’s culture of child labour. *Sydney Morning Herald*. Dec 23. <https://www.smh.com.au/news/world/cambodias-culture-of-child-labour/2007/12/22/1198175409303.html?page=2>. This report highlights an example of the cultural attitude of child workers.

ever they can, including entering into early marriages, hustling, or working in harsh environments. Thus, for children in poverty living unrecognized lives, their powerlessness means they are unable to resist being made unrecognized or contest the terms of recognizability. All they can do is to make their lives liveable precisely by accepting the absence of a separate space between childhood and adulthood.

In light of the fact that the idea of childhood does not exist as a schema that can guide their responses, how do these societies begin to recognize unrecognized lives? Firstly, Butler does not tell us exactly how we can begin to think about lives that we are unable to recognize beyond the frame we live in except to be open to what challenges the frame. As the reframing of poverty shows, our recognition of whose lives we should grieve for is limited to what our current frame of references find intelligible in the first place, requiring us to challenge the framing of how poverty is experienced for different groups of people time and again. In the same way, Asian societies need to break their socio-cultural framing of their conceptualisation of values, rights, and roles of women and children, which require a concerted effort aimed at a deeper socio-cultural mind-set change.

Secondly, Butler's resistance politics does not take into account those who are incapable of contesting the terms of recognisability such as children. In *Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street* (2011), Butler argues that even the destitute outside the sphere of politics has political agency because the right to have rights predates and precedes any political institution. However, children fundamentally do not have political agency. As Colin Macleod observed, "children are vulnerable, impressionable, and dependent on adults" (Macleod 1997, 118). They require special care and live lives that are unrecognizable without their parents, who are incapable of contesting their terms of recognisability within their families, and even more powerless in challenging the societal framing of childhood in the public sphere. Furthermore, "[t]he moral, emotional, and cognitive capacities that are necessary for prudent and meaningful exercise of such rights" are inadequately developed to warrant a full extension of such rights to them (Macleod 1997, 119). Thus, to safeguard and promote their present and future interests, it is necessary for someone other than the child to assume responsibility for them since they could not and should not assume political agency to contest for their own rights.

In this context, to recognize the bodies of unrecognized lives of children, Asian societies need to first challenge the deep-set socio-cultural and religious beliefs surrounding the value of lives of women and children in a patriarchal society. It will require sustained local efforts, involving religious, civil, and political organisations, to change the current practices of child-rearing from the ground-up. Education and counselling, setting up of social safety nets, and social services are some preventive ways of achieving an understanding of the types of exploitation they are vulnerable to. Local community efforts and non-government organisations will also need to challenge the current cultural and societal understanding of childhood as there is a need for families living in poverty to rethink their children as resource, and instead, protect their innocence, dignity and lives as much as they can because they are obligated to do so as parents.

Efforts from non-governmental organisations, charities, civil society organisations and government agencies in Cambodia for instance came together to generate knowledge through research and have been documenting experiences and practices on issues of human trafficking, and different forms of abuses and exploitation for the purpose of sharing and training communities as part of their preventive measures.⁶ NGOs such as APLE international is also another example of how their efforts have grown from providing social service to co-chairing the Law Enforcement Working Group (which is a joint initiative between the government and civil society organisations). They have begun to monitor and report on modus operandi of offenders and factors that facilitate human trafficking, sexual abuse and exploitation. In the Philippines, the government has committed robust efforts at preventing human trafficking by conducting public campaigns to raise awareness of the dangers and teach individuals to seek help, as well as conduct anti-trafficking training for government officials and community leaders. The NGO End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes (ECPAT) International has also begun work in building child-protective communities, given the fact that many of the members of these communities are complicit in related services involved in sex tourism (ECPAT 2016). These efforts at documentation, research, education, monitoring and reporting, and provision of social services such as counselling and providing safe houses ensure that child victims are not forgotten and neglected, and their documented lived experiences go on to help others.

These efforts are a step in the right direction in building a social network of support and capability-building to make lives more liveable for vulnerable children within the communities. As Butler argues, how the body is encountered and protected “depends fundamentally on the social and political networks in which the body lives,” including how bodies are regarded and treated and how “that regard and treatment facilitates this life or failed to make it liveable” (Butler 2016, p. 53). However, it will take generations for Asian societies to reframe their socio-cultural beliefs regarding the value and role of women and children underlying the patriarchal family structure. As these examples have shown, at the personal level, individuals have yet to recognize that these exploitative relationships are unjust or intolerable because the idea of providing support and protection for their children is not part of their historical schemas. This does not necessarily point to a cultural defect, but highlights to us the need to pay attention to and challenge the historical schemas and current power relations affecting the terms of recognizability.

The terms of recognisability is informed by the Asian patriarchal belief that is complex and deeply-rooted, and also formed by different historical schemas of religious beliefs, superstitions, and values of filial piety. Part of the reason why any reframing of the terms of recognizability is met with resistance lies with the low levels of literacy and educational levels in these Asian countries, and the lack of

⁶Chabdai, set up in 2005, is an example of advocacy work by pulling together other organisations to conduct research and develop training in human trafficking and abuses issues in Cambodia. See <http://chabdai.org/about/>. Action Pour Les Enfants (APLE) Cambodia is another example of an NGO that worked closely with the government to provide social service.

political maturity of these societies. The power relations in these countries are also multi-faceted and complicated. Corruptible government officials mean that laws are not duly enforced, and in terms of political will, Asian countries remain slow to adopt and enforce fully what they considered Western democratic values coaxed in the form of international standards of human rights. Currently, NGOs in these societies use images to invoke outrage so that individuals will question the socio-cultural norms, beliefs and practices that contribute to the precariousness for children in poverty. But to overcome such societal resistance, these organisations need to make a more concerted civil effort to move into public contestations. This is because, to change entrenched cultural framing, the governments and civil society need to first change the way the society see children as resources and instead for them to understand the vulnerability of children and grieve the loss of their innocence. They will also need to learn that it is their parental obligations to raise their children to live independent and fulfilling lives as adults. Returning to Butler, this means coming together in resistance against the hegemony of patriarchy, and claiming the public space through public demonstrations, assemblies and gatherings. Appearing in a public space will also pressurize these governments to enforce the legislative framework that is already in place given that these movements will draw international attention and support.

Lastly, these movements must demand the right of children to have the right to live liveable lives, before demanding for the right of children to live their lives as children in the way contemporary literature frames childhood to be – as needing support and protection and having a right to play. Terre des Hommes for instance, defined realistically the liveability for children by distinguishing between child work and child labour. It gives priority to eradicating child labour given that labour is exploitative, but looks at the participation of children in economic activity that is not detrimental to their health, mental and physical developments (Terre des Hommes 2014). This means involving them in light work for limited hours, according to their age and abilities without interfering with their education or leisure activities. This approach ensures that these children are kept off the streets, have a source of fair wages, and are given an opportunity to learn skills that can enable them to take on self-sustaining employment in the future. This investment into their future can improve their likelihood of living liveable lives and perhaps see their own children enjoying their rights to live as children.

5 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has discussed what it means to live a precarious life for a child born into poverty through Butler's lenses of precariousness, grief and liveability. Precariousness describes a human condition of vulnerability – first as an existential vulnerability, and second, as a situation of vulnerability in our living conditions created by unequal social and political power where certain lives are neglected and forgotten. It has also examined how a reframing of 'poverty' to include

unrecognized lives can help to minimize precariousness for those who are not considered income-poor but nonetheless lived with deprivations that compromised their opportunities and abilities to live viable lives. And in recognizing that children experiencing basic deprivations live more precarious lives than others, we are moved to act by addressing economic, social, ecological, and political gaps where precariousness can be minimized and prevent intergenerational poverty.

However, as the case studies of AMS show, the socio-cultural framing of childhood is a more fundamental contributor to precariousness for children born in poverty. The idea that children are resources has created a more permissive environment for child labour and sexual exploitation to occur, and it is also a factor directly responsible for the perpetuation and worsening of precariousness for these children. What is thus required for these societies is to break this socio-cultural barrier and ensure that 'childhood' as a protected space is made intelligible at the personal level by recognizing that children's innocence can be lost and that this is something to be grieved, and that children's liveability as children matters for breaking poverty cycles. Parents will also need to learn that filial obligations is reciprocal – they must assume parental responsibility to raise their children to live independent and fulfilling lives as adults. The responsibility of challenging the socio-cultural hegemony of viewing children who are poor as lives not worth living primarily lies with individuals in these Asian societies – to move into public spaces and demand that the society recognize the right of children to have the right to live liveable lives. This is because a precarious childhood is one where the idea of childhood itself is unrecognized.

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Children in Liminality: Case Studies from Ireland and Iran



Annie Cummins and Amin Sharifi Isaloo

Abstract Children living in poverty are excluded from certain opportunities and are susceptible to a range of cognitive, social and emotional problems. This chapter addresses the institutionalisation of enforced poverty experienced by children who are asylum-seekers and refugees in Ireland and Iran. It cuts across the disciplines of philosophy, sociology and anthropology in order to re-think the approaches to child poverty. Drawing on Victor Turner's concept of liminality and Vittorio Bufacchi's three-dimensional approach to social injustice, this chapter addresses the institutional practices of social injustice that perpetuate child poverty for children living in liminality. It consists of a comparative analysis of the governmental practices and policies that extend poverty for children who are living in Ireland and Iran. While both these countries have divergent approaches to addressing the needs of young asylum seekers and refugees, the children have similar experiences of vulnerability, poverty and social exclusion. Thus, the aim of this chapter is to examine how children of asylum seekers and refugees experience poverty while in a transition stage in their host country. In turn, it aims to rethink the relationship between institutional practices and global child poverty.

Keywords Child poverty · Exclusion · Injustice · Liminality · Policy

1 Introduction

To study child poverty, we must not only take into account the child's immediate connections, but also the interaction with the wider environment. This is what Bronfenbrenner (1979) calls the ecological approach. Children's well-being and well-becoming (Schweiger and Graf 2015) are affected by their face-to-face interactions (microsystem), the social connections between actors in the microsystem

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(mesosystem), the political, economic and social institutions in society (exosystem) and finally, the cultural ideologies and attitudes (macrosystem) (Bronfenbrenner 1979). Drawing on Victor Turner's concept of liminality and Vittorio Bufacchi's approaches to social injustice, this chapter focuses on how asylum-seeker and refugee children experience poverty, social exclusion and disempowerment in Ireland and Iran.

Child poverty is a global issue with wide-ranging consequences. A general discussion on child poverty is beyond the scope of this chapter (see Schweiger and Graf 2015). Focusing on Ireland and Iran, this chapter attempts to compare the differences and convergences between the institutional practices and policies that perpetuate child poverty among asylum seekers and refugees. In attempting to construct a comparative analysis of child poverty among refugees and asylum seekers in Ireland and Iran, we are aware of the vast disparity in the number of people seeking asylum or refugee status in each country. According to the UNHCR (2016), Iran hosts 979,400 registered (documented) refugees and it is estimated that an additional 1.5–2 million unregistered (undocumented) refugees are also living there. In comparison, Ireland hosts an overall total of 10,152 registered refugees and asylum seekers. Furthermore, Iran has an intertwined political system operating under the framework of Islamic (Shia) theocracy. The Supreme Leader holds the ultimate authority, and publicly elected (such as the president, the parliament and the Assembly of Experts) and unelected institutions (such as the Supreme Leader, the Head of Judiciary and the Expediency Council) influence each other in the power structure. In contrast, Ireland has a representative political system and as a member of the EU, must respect, protect and promote children's rights and implement EU policies, which are developed in line with the best interests of the child. Despite their differences, Ireland and Iran are both signatories of the 1951 Refugee Convention, the United Nations Convention on the rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). According to Dershowitz (2005, p. 8), human rights emerge from experiences of social wrongs and 'are essential to avoid repetition of the grievous injustices of the past'. Therefore, the ratification of human rights treaties should reflect a common commitment to safeguarding children against social injustices. However, Ireland and Iran have been criticised for failing to protect children seeking asylum or refugee status from child poverty. In fact, national policies and practices negatively impact on children's well-being and well-becoming.

Ireland has a long and tragic history of institutionalised care for children experiencing poverty (Maguire 2009). A recent report on the experience of asylum-seeking children living in institutionalised care in Ireland highlighted the continuing practices of enforced poverty by the State (Arnold 2012). Despite the rhetoric of children's rights in State policies, children living in Direct Provision in Ireland are subjected to dehumanising practices such as inadequate living conditions, malnutrition, social exclusion and prolonged detention, which constitutes a social injustice (Bufacchi 2012).

As a member of UNHCR's Executive Committee (ExCom), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic,

Social and Cultural Rights, Iran is obliged to provide a significant range of rights to refugees within Iran's jurisdiction. The Iranian government has also committed to ensuring that all refugee children benefit from primary rights, education of a satisfactory quality and receive appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance. However, contrary to international standards and Iran's obligations, refugee children, particularly unregistered children, are facing poverty. The system provides only minimal state support for refugee children and the institutional exclusionary practices target both registered and unregistered refugee children to encourage repatriation, which constitutes an enforced social injustice.

2 Social Injustice

Vittorio Bufacchi (2012) recognises the lack of attention social injustice has received in academic scholarship, which he argues is, in part, due to lack of clarity that surrounds the term. Many political philosophers regard injustice as 'simply the absence of justice' (Skhlar 1990, p. 15). Pogge (2008, p. 263) conceives social injustice as 'any institutional order [that]...foreseeably produces an avoidable massive human rights deficit'. Social institutions, according to Pogge, are actively causing poverty through their practices of inclusion and exclusion. However, Bufacchi (2012) believes that Pogge's definition is too narrow as it only focuses on institutional practices and therefore, posits a three-dimensional approach to social injustice: maldistribution, exclusion and disempowerment. Brand et al. (2013) argues that political and economic power determines access to basic resources. Asylum seekers are marginalised within society and their vulnerable and powerless status 'make it possible for partial distribution of resources to arise' (Bufacchi 2012, p. 11). The maldistribution of resources perpetuates child poverty by preventing to safeguard children's well-being and well-becoming (Schweiger and Graf 2015). Therefore, it is the authors' contentions that child poverty can be best understood as an infliction of social injustice that is perpetrated on them.

In addition to the maldistribution of resources, social injustice occurs when exclusionary practices prevent individuals from participating fully in society. Most asylum seekers experience a number of traumatic events before reaching their final destination (Goodman et al. 2013). However, their arrival is often met with suspicion and distrust (Lynn and Lea 2003). Harsh asylum policies restrict access to resources, impact on human rights and contribute to practices of social and geographical isolation. The social construction of the 'bogus asylum seeker' (Lynn and Lea 2003) legitimises the silencing and exclusionary practices that perpetuate the vulnerability of marginalised groups. Bufacchi (2012, p. 14) believes that being silenced 'is one of the most effective ways of being excluded from the benefits and burdens of social cooperation'.

Victims of social injustice experience 'powerlessness and vulnerability' (Bufacchi 2012, p. 14) as they are blamed for their own fate, rather than the policies and practices of government (Brand et al. 2013). Due to biological immaturity and

the modern social construct of childhood, children are conceptualised as vulnerable and in need of protection (Cunningham 2006; James and Prout 1990). Injustice occurs when a person's vulnerabilities are exploited (Bufacchi 2012). The exploitation of children's vulnerability can have a disempowering effect and impact on 'emotional health, self-esteem, agency and self-confidence, positive affect, ego resiliency and social competence in interactions with peers, teachers, camp counselors, romantic partners and others' (Schweiger and Graf 2015, p. 27). Asylum-seeker and refugee child poverty contain all three dimensions of social injustice.

Poverty itself is difficult to define (Walker 2014). In political discourse, poverty is understood in relation to the 'inadequate *access* to basic living resources, such as, food, water, housing and health care' (Brand et al. 2013, p. 274). However, living standards vary across the globe and therefore, the measurements of poverty relates to the conventions of a given society (Sen 1981). As Adam Smith (1849, p. 393) pointed out more than 200 years ago, material deprivation is 'not only the commodities which are indispensably necessary for the support of life, but whatever the customs of the country renders it indecent for creditable people, even the lowest order, to be without'. Currently, the EU measures poverty in relation to material deprivation (Schweiger and Graf 2015). However, there is growing philosophical support to redefine poverty in relation to capability deprivation (Sen 1981). Poverty negatively influences a child's wellbeing in the present and their opportunities for future wellbeing (Schweiger and Graf 2015). Thus, the capability approach provides a framework for conceptualising child poverty as a social injustice.

Although politicians are reluctant to consider their actions as perpetuating child poverty, governmental policies and practices set the standards for the power relations between individuals and groups within society. The deliberate maldistribution of resources maintains power structures and renders some groups as less deserving than others. Children from refugee and asylum seekers families are amongst the most vulnerable in society. Their liminal status within society has a detrimental impact on their access to material resources, which contributes to their exclusion and disempowerment within society. When combined, these three outcomes of poverty form the 'worst type of social injustice' (Bufacchi 2012, p. 16).

3 Liminality

The term 'liminality', which is developed by Victor Turner (1967) from the 'transition' stage of the rites of passage introduced by Arnold van Gennep in 1909, refers to any situation or object being 'betwixt' and 'between'. This transition period is an inter-structural situation and process moving from one stage to another. The rites of passage in Gennep's (1960) work, mobilise beliefs, hierarchies, values and stages in social life that are significant in any culture. In such ritual performances, three stages may be recognised: separation (pre-liminal), transition (liminal) and reincorporation (post-liminal). 'The transitional stage, as a liminal moment or period, is a break from the normal, daily and everyday activities. This liminality (break) can be

temporary, such as the short-term unemployment and poverty; prolonged, such as the long-term unemployment and poverty, and permanent, such as health issues caused by the unemployment and poverty. For example, studies of both the United Nations Development Programme¹ and the Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime² show the long-term and permanent consequences of poverty, particularly child poverty, such as health issues, violence, and crime. Thus, liminality is inconsistent with ordinary day-to-day life' (Isaloo 2017, p. 18). If this break in time and space becomes unlimited, then, according to Szokolczai (2000), a permanent liminality occurs. The term 'permanent liminality' was introduced by Szokolczai in his book *'Reflexive Historical Sociology'* (2000), which aimed to discover areas in social science that were affected by modernisation. According to Szokolczai, the term enables us to perceive the way in which uncertainty can emerge and helps us to find answers to questions such as, why and how such liminal periods can be used and even artificially provoked (Szokolczai 2013).

The terms 'liminality' and 'permanent uncertainty' help us to understand Bufacchi's (2012) three-dimensional approach to social injustice for examining child poverty among refugee and asylum-seeking children in Ireland and Iran. 'Liminality is a temporal interface', which provides a public breach to the normal and regular activities of society (Turner 1982, p. 10). This breach can be a grave transgression of the code of manners, which may lead to acts of violence. As 'children born in poorer household are more likely to experience poverty as adults than those born into higher income' (Lansley and Mack 2015, p. 76), the liminality concept reinforces the argument that poverty is a crucial cause of uncertainty. If the uncertainty in a liminal period (temporary liminality) develops into long-term uncertainty, a permanent liminality becomes established, which may increase violent crimes or at least lead to pathological mental health consequences. Indeed, uncertainty affects the individuals in their knowledge-acquiring or organising activities, economic and social practices, and basic existential condition (Bonatti 1984). 'A childhood history marked by poverty, for example, is often associated with a perception of marginality and uncertainty about one's worth' (Kagan 2002, p. 191). Growing up in poverty and in an age of uncertainty not only cause different forms of physical problems and illnesses but also create mental illnesses (Weigersma et al. 2011; Gitterman 2014, p. 252). 'Mental illness can lead poor people to further level of poverty, which might work similar to the theory of vicious cycle of poverty' (Costello et al. 2003). In contrast to classical liminal situations, whereby society stands at the threshold of transition for a limited time, asylum seekers and refugees child poverty now seems to be endless and permanent.

In liminal periods encompassing war, revolution, economic disaster and immigration crisis, children experience more social injustice than a normal period because of their limited capabilities and social vulnerability. Even in a normal time, children are unable to take care of themselves in the same sense as adults because

¹ <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/news-centre/news/2017/09/07/vers-1-extremisme-violent-en-afrique.html>

² <http://www.esytc.ed.ac.uk>

they are not permitted to work or make decisions. Up to a certain age, their parents or guardians support them and have control over their income and expenses. If parents become unemployed during liminal times, such as an economic crisis, children can immediately experience a lack of income and become victims of this liminal situation. As studying all liminal periods is out of the scope of this chapter, we focus on a liminal time that children of asylum seekers and refugees face maldistribution, exclusion and disempowerment to introduce a more comprehensive perspective, through an interdisciplinary study, on the current child poverty.

Children of asylum seekers and refugees, who are growing up in a liminal time and space or in state-sanctioned poverty, are left without enough care and their parents, who are struggling with uncertainty, are under the strain of mental-health problems (See Weigersma et al. 2011). Liminality is regarded as an in-between state of being that is particularly applicable to those seeking asylum or refugee status and is, therefore, an important concept for analysing corresponding policies (Hynes 2011). Asylum seekers and refugees are 'regarded as being in transit, being between statuses and occupying liminal spaces' (Hynes 2011, p. 42). The temporariness experienced by those who are dispersed is made worse by 'policy-impose liminality' (Hynes 2011, p. 94). The experiences of hundreds of children living in Direct Provision and those who are refugees have been documented over recent years by campaign groups and human rights bodies (such as Irish Refugee Council, Nasc Ireland, UNHCR and UN Human Rights Council) in different parts of the world. All have reported the damage done to children living in institutional accommodation, far removed from the atmosphere of a family home. In other words, being in liminality leads children to experience injustice in so-called 'modern societies'. For example, income poverty experienced by parents only adds to children's exclusion from society.

Despite overwhelming evidence showing that asylum seekers and refugees are living in liminality (Malkki 1995; Hynes 2011, p. 30; see also Nasc 2008; UNODC 2018), States have failed to reform the system and improve conditions to a certain level of quality and equality (Tazreiter 2004). Indeed, living in liminality raise concerns that the States are in breach of human rights treaties because of the length of time children spend in such a liminal situation. Considering this, the following case studies will introduce a comparative analysis between the governmental practices and policies that extend liminality for children who are asylum seekers in Ireland and children who are refugees (registered and unregistered) in Iran. These case studies will highlight dimensions of social injustice to provide insights into child poverty and to understand this phenomenon better in order to tackle it.

4 Introduction to Child Poverty in Ireland

Child poverty is not a contemporary Irish issue, but one that has plagued the state since its formation in 1922. Widespread poverty, sub-standard housing and limited infrastructure had a profound effect on poor families in Ireland since the 1920s and

1930s (Maguire 2009). The nationalist vision that underpinned social conditions and policies during this time, unfairly disadvantaged and penalised poor families (Maguire 2009; Kennedy 2001). As a direct result of the extreme poverty experienced between the 1920s and 1950s, up to ten thousand children were removed from their families and placed in industrial schools. The plight of these children suggests that the care and well-being of families, who did not conform to the middle-class ideals of the time, were of secondary importance to the state.³

Since the 1990s, child poverty had become one of the most pressing concerns in public debate in Ireland. In 2016, *The Survey on Income and Living Conditions* (SILC) found that 11.1% of children in Ireland were experiencing consistent poverty, which meant that this vulnerable category of people was more likely to experience poverty than their adult counterparts. In fact, child poverty in Ireland was among the highest in the OECD states (Fanning and Veale 2004; Nolan 2000). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) addresses the issue of child poverty and calls on governments to offer social protection to children experiencing deprivation (Nolan 2000). However, despite Ireland's ratification of the UNCRC in 1992, issues of child poverty continues to undermine children's rights (Nolan 2000).

Research has shown that children who experience poverty 'do less well educationally, are more likely to suffer ill health, are vulnerable to homelessness and delinquent behaviour and fewer opportunities in life' (Government of Ireland 1997, p. 47). Poverty operates as a barrier to well-being and future development and therefore, should be considered a social injustice (Schweiger and Graf 2015). However, poverty is not just something that is experienced but also something that is orchestrated. The Irish government actively contributes to child poverty by placing limitations on asylum seekers opportunities to develop economic and social ties (Loyal and Quilley 2016; Breen 2008; White 2012).

4.1 Analysis of Liminality and Child Poverty in Ireland

In contrast to the hegemonic construction of Ireland as a friendly and welcoming country, children from families that are seeking asylum in this country experience exclusionary practices (Loyal and Quilley 2016). Prior to the introduction of Direct Provision and Dispersal (DPD) in 2000, nationality was not a prerequisite for the allocation of social assistance payments and all asylum seekers were entitled to access the social welfare system such as housing maintenance allowance (Breen 2008; Arnold 2012). While asylum seekers were entitled to access private accommodation, they were not 'permitted to work, access third-level education, or carry out any form of business' (Loyal and Quilley 2016, p. 72).

³The Ryan Report (2009), Murphy Report (2009) and Cloyne Report (2001) found that many children suffered physical, emotional and sexual abuse during their confinement in Industrial schools.

Since the introduction of DPD, asylum seekers are no longer entitled to supplementary welfare allowance (Breen 2008). Instead, Direct Provision provides asylum seekers with bed space and meals (Arnold 2012). Initially, asylum seekers received a weekly allowance of €19.10 per adult and €9.60 per child.⁴ However, since 2018, the cash payment has increased to €21.60 for every adult and child living in Direct Provision. While children living in Direct Provision are entitled to receive primary and post-primary education, they are generally not entitled to progress to tertiary level. However, a pilot scheme that was introduced in 2016 allows those who have attended post-primary schools in Ireland for a minimum of 5 years to seek educational assistance. Since 2018, asylum-seeking adults in Ireland can also apply for a work permit in order to access the labour market. However, the cost of the permit (€1000) and the restrictive stipulation of securing a job with a starting wage in excess of €30,000 will prevent many asylum seekers, especially women, from accessing the labour market. By placing punitive restrictions on asylum seekers educational development and access to the labour market,⁵ the Irish government actively contributes to the poverty experienced by those living in direct provision.

Loyal and Quilley (2016, p. 76) identify three rationales behind the Irish government's introduction of Direct Provision: to ensure the cost of asylum was kept to a minimum, to segregate asylum seekers from the general population, and to maintain records and surveillance of all asylum seekers. The State actively enforces social closure practices that construct asylum seekers as 'Other', which impinges on their integration into Irish society. In 2004, an overwhelming majority of the Irish electorate voted to implement the Twenty-Seventh Amendment into the constitution, which reinforced the distinction between citizen and 'other'. The removal of 'jus soli' constitutional rights from children born to non-Irish parents coincided with other stringent measures placed on immigrants (Fanning and Mutwarasibo 2007). The narrowing of rights and welfare entitlements reflected a history of economic, social, cultural and ideological 'othering' that constitutes a social injustice and reinforces asylum seekers 'unwanted liminal presence' (Loyal and Quilley 2016, p. 78).

Asylum seekers are disadvantaged due to the maldistribution of resources, the geographical and social isolation experienced by living in direct provision, and the enforced disempowerment. From the perspective of the state, asylum seekers are outsiders and therefore, not entitled to the same opportunities or protections as citizens (Hynes 2011). In contrast to Irish institutional practices in the past, Direct Provision is not a 'regime of transformation' (Foucault 1977, p. 108) but confinement of forced idleness (Loyal and Quilley 2016). The sense of temporariness that is imposed on asylum seekers is a form of 'policy-imposed liminality' (Hynes 2011, p. 94).

⁴In 2016, the welfare payment for children in Direct Provision was increased to €15.60. This was the first increase since the introduction of DPD in 2000.

⁵Asylum seekers who have resided in Ireland for a period of 9 months or more will have unrestricted access to the labour market from July 2018, but their work permit expires after 6 months and they must apply for a work permit at the end of every 6 months.

4.2 *Analysis of Social Injustice and Child Poverty in Ireland*

Around two thousand children are currently living in Direct Provision, which accounts for 35% of all asylum seekers in Ireland (Arnold 2012). Initially, Direct Provision was intended as a temporary accommodation solution during the asylum determination process. However, asylum seekers spend a mode average of 4 years in Direct Provision (Arnold 2012), which imposes liminal conditions on them. Children living in Direct Provision face many challenges and are more likely to experience material deprivation than other welfare-dependent children (Fanning and Veale 2004). The maldistribution of resources constitutes a social injustice and directly contributes to asylum seeker child poverty.

Direct Provision accommodation in Ireland is unsuitable for children and their families (Fanning et al. 2001). In 2007, inspection reports on some Direct Provision centres highlighted a number of sub-standard living conditions, including insect infestation, fungi growth along corridors and lack of adequate hygiene practices in the kitchen (Arnold 2012). The inadequate physical environment of Direct Provision puts children at risk of physical harm and ill health.

Generally, families in Direct Provision do not have access to cooking facilities or control over meals prepared⁶ (Nasc 2008; Fanning et al. 2001; White 2012). A private catering company is commissioned to supply three meals at set intervals throughout the day. Residents in the centres are generally dissatisfied with the quality of the food provided (Nasc 2008; Arnold 2012). Fanning et al. (2001) found that the lack of appropriate and nutritious food subjected asylum seekers to malnutrition, weight loss, stress, hunger and ill health. According to Arnold (2012), young children who slept through mealtime were not entitled to eat once they woke. Moreover, the substandard quality of food meant that some children arrived at school hungry (Arnold 2012).

Children in Direct Provision live in cramped and overcrowded rooms. Families of four and more are often confined to one-roomed accommodation or share room-space with other families (Arnold 2012; Fanning and Veale 2004). The cramped living conditions are in conflict with Section 63 of the Housing Act 1996, which defines overcrowding as a situation when ‘any two of those persons, being persons of ten years of age or more of opposite sexes and not being persons living together as husband and wife, must sleep in the same room’. Furthermore, Breen (2008) identifies overcrowding as a contributing factor to the exposure to physical and mental harm. Prolonged overcrowding can have a detrimental effect on children’s well-being, as it is a contributing factor in the development of conflict within the family and subjects children to an extended period of dependency (Arnold 2012). The maldistribution of adequate accommodation exploits the vulnerability of asylum seekers and serves to exclude them from forming social ties with the wider community.

⁶ While a small number of self-catering direct provision centres exist around the country, the meagre weekly allowance makes it difficult for families to buy nutritious food.

Direct provision centres are located outside communities: in former hostels or hotels, caravan sites or former holiday sites and in purpose-built accommodation (Arnold 2012). The geographical location of these centres creates a demarcation between asylum seekers and the general population (Nasc 2008). Fanning et al. (2000, p. 15) contend that ‘those who have been accommodated under Direct Provision are subject to a form of apartheid whereby they are compelled to live apart from the majority without the social and material support structures to interact with the native population’. Geographical distance and material deprivation reinforce social distance (Bourdieu 1984) between asylum seekers and their community. According to Fanning and Veale (2004, p. 243), children’s experience of social exclusion impacts their ‘health, well-being, education and development’. While children have the opportunity to develop intense friendships with their peers in Direct Provision, they have little opportunity to socialise with children from outside the centre (White 2012).

Material deprivation limits the opportunity for children living in Direct Provision to participate fully in the community. Child-specific deprivation examples include limited playdates with children from the community (White 2012), lack of transport available between accommodation centres and local towns or cities (Arnold 2012), and the lack of resources available for school uniform, books, outings and after-school activities (Fanning and Veale 2004; Arnold 2012). Although the right to education may be enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, participation is contingent on the ‘level of social exclusion and child poverty’ (Arnold 2012, p. 27).

Children living in Direct Provision also experience disempowerment due to their status and material deprivation. The extended state of dependency that is enforced due to inadequate living conditions means that children are ‘constantly surrounded by others and without privacy’ (Arnold 2012, p. 25). Most centres do not have adequate play spaces (Vanderhurst 2007) and communal common areas are deemed unsafe for children (Fanning et al. 2001). In addition, it is against the rules of the Direct Provision centres to allow visitors into bedrooms and therefore, children are unable to invite friends from outside the centre to their room (Arnold 2012). Despite play being recognised by the UNCRC as a human right,⁷ Direct Provision centres do not cater for play activities and therefore, children generally spend their free-time sleeping or watching television (Arnold 2012). The lack of access to safe play spaces, which puts children living in Direct Provision at a developmental disadvantage, should be considered a social injustice (Government of Ireland 2015, 2017; Arnold 2012).

According to the Children’s First Guidance (2017), neglect occurs when children experience material deprivation that damages their health, development and welfare. The lack of adequate housing, substandard food, social isolation, economic deprivation and enforced dependency constitutes a form of institutional neglect,

⁷Article 31 in the UNCRC (1989) states: States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

which renders children living in Direct Provision with unequal access to resources, excluded from society and disempowered. As Bufacchi (2012, p. 16) notes, ‘The worst type of social injustice, and the most difficult to correct, is when all three dimensions [maldistribution, exclusion and disempowerment] are present’.

4.3 The Future of Child Poverty in Ireland

Children in Direct Provision experience poverty as a direct outcome of the state’s practices and policies. The ‘othering’ of people living in Direct Provision and the elimination of the ‘jus soli’ entitlement from the constitution has rendered the needs of children living in these centres mute and has left them in liminality. Keeping asylum seekers’ children in liminality means living between being and becoming, which can have a long-term consequence and a permanent liminality can occur. In 2011, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (UNCERD) highlighted:

The negative impact that the policy of ‘direct provision’ has had on the welfare of asylum-seekers who, due to the inordinate delay in the processing of their applications, and the final outcomes of their appeals and reviews, as well as poor living conditions, can suffer health and psychological problems that in certain cases lead to serious mental illness.

Direct Provision violates international and domestic law and subjects children to inhuman living conditions (Breen 2008; Arnold 2012). The prolonged isolation and the loss of liberties actively are damaging to children’s well-being and development. Arnold (2012, p. 29) concludes:

Direct Provision is an example of a government policy which has bred discrimination and indifference to social exclusion, enforced poverty and neglect. The harm suffered by children living in government run or supported accommodation has become banal and those having to carry out the work have become blind to its inhumanity ... Children are paying the price of an ill-conceived policy. This price will prove to cost children their youth.

Since its inception in 2000, international and national organisations have lobbied the government to recognise the damaging impact Direct Provision has on children and their families. Direct Provision is not suitable for children and the restrictive policies enforce idleness for all ages. Political will is needed to change practices of social injustice that contribute to the extreme poverty, social isolation and disempowerment experienced by children living in policy-imposed liminality.

5 Introduction to Child Poverty in Iran

Iran is host to one of the largest and most protracted urban refugee populations worldwide, with approximately three million Afghan refugees living in the country (UNHCR 2018). They reside mainly in urban areas and only 3% live in refugee

camps (Khonsari and May 2015). Iranian Bureau for Alien and Foreign Immigrant Affairs (BAFIA) estimates that two million Afghan refugees are unregistered and the rest are formally registered. It is estimated that at least 800,000 of them are children (Khonsari and May 2015). According to Mahmoodi and Abbasyan (2012), child poverty is not studied in Iran. Child poverty has a direct connection with inequality and injustice in our society such as inequality in education, health, housing and employment as well as the inequitable distribution of opportunities such as access to food, services and resources.

Refugee children in Iran, who are experiencing social injustice, are living in liminality. Practically, they are unable to access education, healthcare, housing and opportunities similar as to Iranian (native) children. Indeed, they are left in between and betwixt. Even registered and documented refugee children are never fully excluded and never fully included. For example, Afghan registered refugees are entitled to health care and education but have usually encountered barriers when they wanted to access them. During the 1980s and 1990s, Iran could provide Afghans with the same benefits as poor Iranians such as free public education, healthcare, and food subsidies. However, since 2001, Iran began introducing discriminatory education policies and escalating the maldistribution of resources, particularly in 2012, that dramatically affected Afghan children (Khonsari and May 2015).

Poverty in Pakistan, Bangladesh and other countries, force socially and economically disadvantaged families to seek food and shelter in Iran. Most of them, who are unregistered refugees, do not receive any support from the Iranian government and they are excluded from mainstream society. Children of unregistered refugees experience extreme poverty for a long (unknown) period. There are no practical supports, policies or regulations to protect them. Thus, the ambiguities of the age of uncertainty and growing up in uncertainty has left children of refugees in a permanent liminality.

5.1 Analysis of Liminality and Child Poverty in Iran

5.1.1 Registered Refugees

The Iranian authorities have only allowed about one million Afghans who arrived before 2001 to register under the so-called Amayesh registrations and have legal residence in Iran. Thus, Afghans who have arrived after 2001 are considered unregistered and illegal refugees by the Iranian state. The UNHCR offices in Iran and their mandate only includes the Amayesh-registered part of the Afghan refugees (Landinfo Report 2012, p. 5). ‘There is a broad consensus that Afghans are subject to widespread and systematic discrimination in Iran’ (Landinfo Report 2012, p. 6). For example, some schools have separate times (morning or afternoon shift) for Afghan children to attend school. In this way, they are segregated from Iranian children.

The Iranian authorities routinely deport Afghans to Afghanistan irrespective of their period of residence or family connections living in Iran (Landinfo Report 2012). UNHCR has claimed that the Iranian authorities are reticent about deporting women and children (Landinfo Report 2012). Obtaining an Amayesh card only entitles Afghan children to education. Indeed, it does not mean that the children are actually able to attend school. There are many of the Amayesh-registered children who are deprived of education because of its costs and expenses (UN Human Rights Council 2009). According to Landinfo Report (2012), registered Afghans with health insurance have access to public health services. However, health insurance is expensive and only covers 80% of the overall cost. As a rule, families and children who do not have insurance must pay the full cost of treatment themselves.

Iran adhered to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in September 1991, and ratified it on July 13, 1994, but in comparison to Iranians, Afghans and their children enjoy fewer rights than Iranians and their children (Zand and Rahimi 2011) and they do not have access to or have reduced access to health services and public educations. Adverse economic conditions, unemployment and segregation of Afghan migrants are the main causes of child poverty in Iran. Almost all studies related to children of refugees in Iran, emphasize these adverse conditions and its effects.

5.1.2 Unregistered Refugees

To understand refugee child poverty in Iran, we need to critically examine the institutional practices that create or increase poverty and enhance its effects. There are different potential policies related to child poverty, which are widespread throughout the world (Mahmoodi and Abbasyan 2012). To understand reasons behind the poverty that undocumented or unregistered children experience in Iran, we will briefly review their life only in a particular and limited area called 'Poll-e Kureh'.

According to Jam-e Jam news (2017), Poll-e Kureh, which is located after the cement factory in Shahre Ray (south of Tehran) in the middle of the military road of Firoozabad, is a place where Pakistani immigrants and refugees have been living for many years. They have built their own homes under the shade of furnaces. Their homes do not have drinking water, proper electricity or gas lines. These Pakistanis came from one of the poorest areas of Pakistan and they had to live in this part of Tehran, which is one of the poorest areas in Iran. They believe that their life under the shade of brick-burning furnaces, where the extreme poverty is visible, is better than Pakistan. The border between the one-roomed houses is not clear. There are no kitchen, bedroom or dining room and all contain the same four wounded, cracked and smoked walls. They do not have a bathroom or a toilet. Children are washed in the same water or unclean water and the adults go to Firouzabad and Shahre Ray for baths. The bathroom is also shared between several houses; a smaller four-chamber that is made farther away from the houses, without electricity, with a thick curtain that is used instead of a door.

Children of Poll-e Kureh do not have a birth certificate or identity card. They work miles away from their home on the farm fields or join street children under the hot sun during the summer. After the summer, some are fortunate and go to school with the help of the Imam Ali charity, but some do not. Even, for children who can go to school, the shadow of work is still heavy on their head and some of them cannot leave their work because of their financial situation (Jam-e Jam News 2017).

According to Jamalipur, the governor of Shahre Ray, there are nearly 150,000 registered and unregistered refugees only in Shahre Ray, of which about 60,000 are registered, and about 90,000 unregistered (Jam-e Jam News 2017). Unregistered refugees are forced to live on the outskirts of the city due to unauthorized entry. They do not even have basic resources for a simple life, and this is detrimental for children and future generations. Many refugees who are living in places such as Poll-e Kureh are usually ignored by UNESCO, human rights organisations, national and international institutions and governments, as they are considered illegal. As illegal refugees and their children are not allowed to register, there is no possibility of counting them and addressing their problems. Therefore, it is unclear how many illegal refugee children are working, have health issues, suffer abuse or are unable to attend school. The Iranian government, responsible institutions and the parliament have left these refugees and their children in permanent liminality, instead of providing them with education, health care and a basic standard of living in Iran.

These liminal conditions, which are created by institutional practices and policies, have led registered and unregistered refugees and their children to experience social injustice and to feel uncertain about their future and to find themselves living in a place where they do not feel like they belong. In other words, living in liminality has forced them to miss a sense of belonging, which is a human need, and has left them feeling they have no place where they belong. Living in long-term liminality or permanent liminality can be detrimental to children's wellbeing and well-becoming as it makes children vulnerable to sex traffickers, drug dealers and other criminals (Leiten 2011, p. 59) and it also has a major effect on children's psychiatric disorders and mental health, which perpetuates further levels of poverty (Costello 2003).

5.2 Analysis of Social Injustice and Child Poverty in Iran

In May 2015, the leader of Iran, Ayatollah Khamenei, declared that no Afghan child, not even immigrants who have arrived in Iran illegally and without documents, should be denied the right to education and all should be allowed to register in public schools (Khonsari and May 2015). Three years after his declaration, refugee children, mostly Afghans, still encounter barriers for registration in schools. The schools' requirements of fees, birth certificate, age of children and presence of parents on registration day are serious barriers for undocumented children. As these children were unable to register for school before 2015, they are over-age for the classes they are allocated. Unaccompanied minors or children whose parents do not

want to be present during the registration day because of their illegal status are unable to register for school. Unregistered refugees are afraid that authorities will deport them to their country of origin once they give their personal details to the schools and therefore, are reluctant to register their children into the education system. Indeed, they usually do not have a birth certificate or they do not want to provide it due to their circumstances.

The significant number of Afghan refugees in big cities face widespread social injustice and discrimination. This, together with lack of proper policies and legal rights related to the children's poverty, indicate that 'the existing approaches towards child poverty have failed; mostly due to a localized and micro-level approach to a problem that surpasses Iran's political geography' (Rahbari 2016, p. 350). The current approach of the government is to ignore the problems facing unregistered refugees. The government needs to review this approach and its current policies on unregistered refugees as well as extending the time needed for accepting the legal status of refugees (Hosseini Divkolaye and Burkle 2017).

The decades of political intervention by the West in Afghanistan have created social and economic unrest for Afghan asylum seekers and refugees to return to home (Rahbari 2016). As part of the implemented policies, the Iranian government has put much attention on repatriation policies. From 2002 to 2014, the number of Afghan refugees who returned to their homeland voluntarily was 920,161.9 (Hosseini Divkolaye and Burkle 2017). This policy has a negative effect on refugee children as it can wrongly target documented refugees. For example, in the reception camps of Chamany Babrak in Kabul, most deportees had refugee cards. Iranian authorities reportedly evicted entire refugee settlements without checking for status (The Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland 2010). Iran's arbitrary deportations of Afghans, particularly since 2001, have separated Afghan families from each other. In this wave, children and women, who have lower social status in Afghanistan, pay the highest price. Significantly, the rights and needs of the most vulnerable unaccompanied minors have been violated and ignored. Iranian authorities overlook the current situation of Afghanistan and continue their arbitrary deportation. In this way, children of refugees and asylum seekers are mistreated and most of them are forced to live in extreme poverty conditions. Iran recognised these problems, but never addressed them. Iran's policies and institutional practices resulted in a process of increased maldistribution, exclusion and disempowerment.

Due to economic mismanagement, corruption, and international sanctions, unemployment, which is a major problem in Iran, affects poor families more than others. A well-known problem, which has been highlighted by recent research and reports, is the issue of street children in big cities (see Leiten 2011). Both registered and unregistered refugee children suffer from being street children in Iran. They experience abuse, homelessness, violence, discrimination, insults, bullying and psychological distress. Up to half of the street children are Afghans refugees and migrant children (Rahbari 2016). The rest of them come from other immigrants and Iranian families who have slipped, through unemployment, drug addiction or illness, into the populous ranks of the urban poor (UNODC 2018). These children are

excluded from the rest of society and they have faced the highest-level risk of physical and psychological harm and ill health.

There are two groups of street children who are experiencing social injustice in Iran. The first group includes children who are in temporary liminality, which means they are periodical and part-time on the street. This group is itself divided into two categories: children working on the street during the day but who return home at night, and children who are on the streets for limited periods (summer break) and return to school and daily life after working as much as they need. Usually, it is unclear whether they will go back to the street or not. The second group includes children in permanent liminality. They are children who live permanently, day and night, on the street hiding in the parks, under bridges, in gutters, and in rail/bus stations at night (Rahbari 2016). Mainly, street children's work is listed as begging, selling goods such as Kabab skewers, flowers, cigarettes, cleaning cars' screens and playing musical instruments in big cities, particularly in Tehran. According to Moradi et al. (2016), more than 70% of street children in Tehran are immigrants, Afghan refugees being the most prevalent group. Both groups of street children are living under extreme poverty conditions, but the living condition of refugee children living in temporary liminality is obviously somehow better than refugee children living in permanent liminality. While children in temporary liminality suffer from unacceptable housing and health conditions, children in permanent liminality are deprived of any kind of shelter and health care.

Iran usually ignores street children and their poverty. They introduced and implemented special short-term projects planned to take street children to centres run by the State Welfare Organisation. 'These projects, however, have so far failed to effectively address the issue of street children and child labour, and reduce the number of street children in the capital city' (Rahbari 2016, p. 347). The ignorance of inequality, as well as short-term plans, leave street children in Iran in permanent liminality. Gradually, inadequate policies and regulations of Iran lead street children to switch from a temporary liminality to a permanent liminality. As a result of maldistribution and exclusion, these children experience social injustice every day and live under especially difficult and hazardous circumstances that expose them to the risk of different types of crime, abuse and illness.

Book 2, particularly Articles 976 and 984, of the Civil Code (Qanun-e Madani) of Iran, which defines who is an Iranian national, explains that children receive the citizenship of their fathers regardless of their birthplace. In this way, it limits circumstances under which children can attain the citizenship of their Iranian mothers. As a result, thousands of children of registered and unregistered refugees, who are under 18 years old and are born in Iran to Iranian mothers and refugee fathers, do not have the opportunity to attain Iranian citizenship (Nikou 2015). This disempowerment has excluded children of refugees and asylum seekers from accessing basic social services.

Policies and institutional practices in Iran keep asylum seekers and refugee children segregated and isolated. Unregistered refugee children, particularly street children, become even more exploitable through their disempowerment.

5.3 *The Future of Child Poverty in Iran*

Iran is a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which safeguards children against all forms of abuse, neglect and exploitation, and includes specialized care for refugee children. It considers safeguards for children in the criminal justice system, protection for children in employment and protection and rehabilitation for children who have suffered exploitation or abuse of any kind. Although there are grey areas defining the rights of refugees and unregistered immigrants, Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stresses that all children, regardless of their legal status, have the right to education. This declaration together with the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights also put the emphasis on adequate and equitable access of refugees and their children to health services, education, housing and other services.

In 2013–2014, about 350,000 Afghan refugee children were registered in Iranian schools (UNHCR 2016), while some 48,000 undocumented Afghan children were allowed to enrol for the first time in Iranian public schools in 2015 (IRIB News Agency 2016). Although Afghan children without documentation are permitted to enrol in public schools, the Iranian government should guarantee that children with or without documents attend school and reduce their costs and expenses as much as possible. There are two groups of children that are in liminal phase for a long period. First, there are children that their parents or themselves are unable to pay fees and expenses for education, therefore, they do not go to school and their parents prefer to send them to work. Second, there are children who attend school, but because of working for long hours (or until late at night) they sleep in their classes (see UNODC 2018), miss their classes and do not do their school works.

Everyone has the right to enjoy the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health (Hosseini Divkolaye and Burkle 2017). Providing healthcare and education to registered and unregistered refugees and their children will prevent the increase of the potential risk of spreading some communicable disease, particularly among children, and will decrease the crimes. Hosseini Divkolaye and Burkle (2017) acknowledge that the current initiative of the government to provide health insurance for registered Afghans was a big step forward, but they argue that the plan has some major shortcomings. They highlight that the plan entails the financial support of external donors which has always been a controversial issue and it ignores unregistered refugees whose legal situations has not yet determined, who are significantly at higher risks of contracting diseases and developing mental health problems due to their living situations. The gap between evidence and policies indicates a considerable social injustice that refugees and their children face in Iran. For example, child employment is prohibited until they are 15 years old. However, a loophole exists for domestic workers, meaning that many children who work in the home or in domestic workshops and farms are not protected. Refugee children in Iran deserve to have the protections of the International Labour Organisation, which Iran ratified in 2002, covering them from the different forms of child labour.

Iran has left both registered and unregistered refugee children in liminality and do not formulate a comprehensive policy to address fully the different health risks, education issues and financial problems that they face. Exclusion of refugees from these services, which are basic human rights, prevent their children from integration and development and lead them to live in permanent liminality.

6 Comparison Between Ireland and Iran

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the number of people being forcibly displaced due to conflict, persecution and human rights violations has hit a record high. Ireland and Iran have both adopted international refugee and human rights laws, which provide a legal framework for equality and fairness. However, the rhetoric of equality has been lost in the policies and practices affecting asylum seekers and refugees. The plight of asylum seekers and refugees in Ireland and Iran has caused international attention and concern (UNCRC 2016; UNHCR 2014). Children living in liminality in these countries are particularly vulnerable.

In Ireland, the Direct Provision centre operates as a system of surveillance, control and forced idleness (Loyal and Quilley 2016). Children are geographically and economically separated from the general population, which negatively affects their wellbeing and well becoming. The draconian practices and policies enforced in Ireland, limit children's access to basic living standards (Arnold 2012), contribute to stress-related illnesses (Fanning and Veale 2004), perpetuate social isolation (White 2012) and place unnecessary barriers to education (Smith and Whyte 2005). The maldistribution of resource, social exclusion, and disempowerment experienced by children seeking asylum in Ireland will carry with them throughout their childhood and into adulthood (Atkins 2015).

Iran does not operate a similar Direct Provision system as Ireland. Instead, there are registered and unregistered refugees. Contrary to Iran's obligations and International standards, most unregistered refugee children, particularly street children, are denied access to education, health care and social services. Even, those registered refugees in Iran face discrimination and exclusion (Centre for Human Rights in Iran 2018). United Nations organisations and agencies are cautious to speak to the press, fearing repercussions from the Iranian government and foreign aid agencies work under close government supervision (Nawa 2018).

Iran is falling short to ensure that all registered and unregistered refugee children benefit from education and health care of a satisfactory quality. Poor refugee children have either never been to school or have their schooling seriously interrupted. Hundreds of thousands of refugee children in Iran remain out of school because they are required to pay fees (Centre for Human Rights in Iran 2018) or provide additional information and documents.

Many refugee children in Iran are living in insufficient shelters or spaces, such as in old brick factories, that are hazardous living conditions. They do not receive appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance. Unregistered refugee children,

particularly street children, in Iran have serious difficulties accessing education and healthcare. About one million Afghan children face an uncertain future in Iran (Nawa 2018). Without citizenship, which can only be passed through Iranian fathers, they live in liminality for a long-term or in permanent liminality. In big cities, particularly in Tehran, refugee children may go to school, but they also must work in places with unacceptable conditions. They are often exposed to physical and sexual abuse, drug addiction and deportation (Rahbari 2016). Iran's policies and institutional practices, which shape much of the social injustice, have led refugee children in Iran to experience severe maldistribution of resource, social exclusion, and disempowerment.

Despite the differences between Ireland and Iran's political ideology, geographical profile and state policies, asylum seeker and refugee children experience their liminal status in similar ways. Policies that perpetuate liminality places people on the margins of society. Asylum seekers and refugees are treated with mistrust (Lynn and Lea 2003) and subjected to dehumanising conditions. Policy-imposed liminality (Hayes 2011) has a detrimental effect on children's wellbeing and well becoming and constitutes a social injustice (Bufacchi 2012).

7 Conclusion

This chapter has drawn a comparative analysis of child poverty experienced by asylum seekers and refugees in Ireland and Iran. Despite the political and demographic differences between Ireland and Iran, their policies and practices related to children of asylum seekers and refugees do not show considerable changes towards politics of altruism and humanitarianism, and they do not address current issues of poverty that these children face. In fact, the asylum and refugee policies in these countries have increased the sense of liminality experienced by those who are displaced. Liminality, which is a state of being between and betwixt, is particularly applicable to asylum seeker or refugee children. As these children are living between being and becoming, liminality is a key concept for analysing corresponding policies and institutional practices, which legitimised the maldistribution of resources, social exclusion and disempowerment of those seeking asylum or refugee status. Thus, the state of being between statuses makes this vulnerable cohort susceptible to social injustice.

As this chapter has highlighted, social injustice is the deliberate act of exploiting one's vulnerabilities. Policy-imposed liminality serves to 'other' communities from fully participating in society. Bufacchi's (2012) three-dimensional approach to social injustice adequately captures the institutional practices and policies that perpetuate child poverty. Children of asylum seekers in Ireland and refugees in Iran are excluded from opportunities, services and entitlements in their host countries. Indeed, they live in poverty, which has both short-term and long-term consequences on their health, educational achievement and life chances. In other words, children of asylum seekers and refugees experience liminality and social injustice that shape

their future life. All children, who are immigrants, are forced to stand at the threshold of transition for a limited time. However, if this period becomes long-term and endless, a permanent liminality occurs, which makes it difficult to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty. The longer a child experiences liminality, the greater the social injustice they are likely to suffer over their life course.

Being a member of international and human rights organisation, such as UNHCR's Executive Committee (ExCom), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, obliges governments and states to provide a range of rights to asylum seekers' and refugees' children. In theory, these governments and states are required to ensure that all children benefit from primary rights, health and education to a satisfactory quality and receive appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance. However, contrary to national and international laws, children of refugees and asylum seekers are denied access to appropriate education, health care and basic rights. Most of them, particularly undocumented refugees' children, are facing extreme poverty. Governments provide little support against the exclusionary practices that target these children. This carelessness is particularly evident when governments introduce a temporary solution to a permanent issue such as child poverty. As a matter of fact, it is similar to other types of temporary solutions which have been proposed for other serious and contemporary issues that refugees face, such as work permits and unemployment.

A world without child poverty is possible. If we re-define social injustice in a liminal time and place, we can find a permanent (at least a long-term) solution to child poverty. This is different from reducing justice to meanings such as fairness, efficiency and legitimacy. After finding a permanent or long-term solution, an action must start by implementing laws, policies and decisions made for the solution. For this, governments must be held accountable and responsible. The accountability of governments can help the expansion of social justice from the domestic to the global level. In this way, policy makers and decision makers in developed, developing and poor countries will be obliged to make meaningful advances in their policies and procedures that will improve the wellbeing and well-becoming of children living in poverty.

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Part III

Rights, Responsibilities, and Policies

A Duty-Based Approach to Children's Right to Freedom from Extreme Poverty



Stamatina Liosi

Abstract In this chapter, I examine the grounds of the right of children to be free from extreme poverty, the content of this right, and who the duty-bearers are. In particular, I argue that the socioeconomic right of children to freedom from severe poverty: (1) is grounded in the specific perfect moral duty of right to protect children from extreme poverty (grounds); (2) consists of the right to claim the omission of any act that restricts children's freedom from extreme poverty (negatively); as well as the right to claim the performing of acts that guarantee children's freedom from extreme poverty (positively) (content); and (3) is based on a duty which is not of *all* others, but of *specific* others, e.g. the relatives or/and the friends of the child, the local authorities, states, and organizations (duty-bearers). In addition, I respond to three possible objections against the proposed philosophical foundation. Within this context, I first point out the moral priority of duties over rights; second, I explain why the socioeconomic right of children to be free from extreme poverty is not a *human* right; and, third, I explain the reasons why Kant is not a moral constructivist.

Keywords Children · Duties · Rights · Extreme poverty

1 Introduction

The extreme poverty of children is one of the most severe problems in the world today, as well as one of the most urgent ethical issues. Globally, almost 385 million children are living in extreme poverty (World Bank Group and UNICEF 2016). Extreme or severe or absolute poverty differs from poverty. According to the World Bank, the global *extreme* poverty line is about US \$1.90 a day per person (Revengea 2016). This kind of poverty is when one cannot sustain even a basic acceptable standard of living. Hence, contrary to children's poverty, children's *extreme* poverty

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is a direct life-threatening situation. It is not only in developing countries, such as Ghana, that children suffer from extreme poverty, but also in developed countries, such as the US and the UK (United Nations Human Rights, Office of the Higher Commissioner 2018). The situation is not better in other European countries today; for instance, in Greece, especially after the migration crisis. The conflicts in Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Kosovo have led to high growth in immigration, which has further increased children's extreme poverty rates in the Continent. According to the 2017 Annie E. Casey Foundation report, children of immigrants are more likely to live in extreme poverty (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2017).

However, despite the urgency, the extreme or severe child poverty is only tacitly addressed within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Specifically, according to the UNCRC, a child is defined as a 'human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier' (United Nations Human Rights, Office of the Higher Commissioner 1989). Within the UNCRC special attention is paid to the right of children to survival and physical development. For instance, in article 6 of the UNCRC, it is mentioned that States parties have the duty to ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival of the child. Also, in article 19 it is written that States parties shall take all appropriate measures to protect the child from all forms of neglect or negligent treatment. Additionally, according to article 24, States parties have the duty to combat malnutrition through the provision of adequate nutritious foods and clean drinking-water. Finally, according to article 27, States parties must recognize the right of every child to a standard adequate for the child's physical development. In the same article, it is also stated that States parties must in case of need provide material assistance and support programs, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing.

Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that attention has been paid to children's right to survival and physical development, nowhere, within the UNCRC, is clearly stated a right to children's freedom from extreme poverty. All the aforementioned articles do not actually translate specifically into 'freedom from extreme poverty'. Hence, even though children's freedom from extreme poverty is a general concern both in political practice and legal structures, the relevant right: (1) is not explicitly declared; (2) its content and grounds are not delineated; and (3) the allocation of the relevant duties, either to individuals, or to states, institutions, and organizations is not at all clear. Therefore, a more comprehensive analysis is required. It is imperative that we formulate specifically a clear and unambiguous right of children to freedom from extreme poverty as soon as possible. Even though there are many other rights whose compound might be seen as equating to freedom from extreme poverty, e.g. the right to water, food, shelter, and so forth, only the right of children to be free from severe, or extreme, or absolute poverty can protect their life in all its aspects simultaneously.

Consequently, in this chapter, I philosophically examine (1) the grounds of children's right to freedom from extreme poverty, (2) its content, and (3) who the duty-bearers are. Surely, philosophical discussion cannot be in the agenda of everyday law and politics. When a kid dies in circumstances of extreme poverty somewhere

in the world, there is no time for philosophizing. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the philosophical questions and investigations are legally and politically meaningless. I suggest then that, although independent, justice and politics should be supplemented and enhanced by their philosophical justification. Hence, in this chapter, I first provide a new objective, duty-based, grounding of the indeterminate and unstated right of children to freedom from extreme poverty (Sect. 2); and, second, I respond to three possible objections against the proposed philosophical foundation (Sect. 3).

2 Justifying the Right of Children to Freedom from Extreme Poverty

The new duty-based justification of children's right to freedom from extreme poverty, which is proposed in this section, is formulated *indirectly*, that is, by the justification of the relevant duties first, and then the derivation of the right of children to freedom from extreme poverty, from these duties. The starting point of this duty-based account is the Kantian supreme principle of morality, that is, the autonomy of the will, or the good will. According to the Kantian definition of autonomy in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, one of the basic characteristics of the autonomous or good person is that she *freely self-legislates, yet requires the same legislation from all others*. Kant writes in 4:440, in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, that 'autonomy of the will is the property of the will by which it is a law to itself' (Kant 1996a, 89). Here the question arises as to what exactly is meant by 'self-legislation', 'law to itself', or 'lawgiving function of morality'. Kant does not answer this question, in full, in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*; yet he does explain it in the *Metaphysics of Morals* (Kant 1996c, 383–385).

More specifically, Kant starts in 6:218 by generally claiming that there are two elements in lawgiving: first, a law representing objectively an action that has to be done, that is, a law which makes the action a duty; and, second, an incentive, whose role is to connect subjectively a ground for determining choice to the action with law's representation (Kant 1996c, 383).¹ Kant then distinguishes between two types of lawgiving with respect to the incentive. He writes:

All lawgiving can therefore be distinguished with respect to the incentive... That lawgiving which makes an action a duty, and also makes this duty the incentive is ethical. But that lawgiving which does not include the incentive of duty in law, and so admits an incentive other than the idea of duty itself is juridical (Kant 1996c, 383).

Apparently, the exercise of the lawgiving function by the *morally* autonomous person is identified not with the 'juridical' but with the 'ethical' lawgiving, according to which an action is made a duty, and this duty is also made the incentive of the

¹Translations from the *Groundwork* and the *Metaphysics of Morals* are from Gregor (1996).

action. Eventually, the Kantian autonomous or good person is the ethically lawgiving person, who does not simply *presuppose* that everyone else gives the same law, but also *requires* the giving of the same law from all others, according to the Formula of Universal Law (Kant 1996a, 73).

Moreover, the autonomy of the person, who exercises her ethical lawgiving, directly refers to the idea of moral duty, whose fulfillment transcends her limited human powers. As Kant writes in 5:80 and 5:81, in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, the autonomous person is impelled to an activity or action, which is called ‘duty’ (in Kant 1996b, 205); a duty (action) which, according to Kant, is fulfilled or performed by someone who, being bound to it, acts not *in conformity with duty* (mere legality), but *from duty*, that is, for the sake of the moral law alone (Kant 1996b, 205, 377). Eventually, the Kantian autonomy of the will leads to the realization of one’s moral duties, and the ‘good’ in general, towards oneself and others. Now the question arises as to *what kind* of duties the autonomous person, who is exercising her ethical lawgiving, is impelled to.

According to Kant, on the one hand, duties in accordance with the juridical lawgiving are *external* duties, as this type of lawgiving does not require the idea of duty to be the determining ground of the agent’s choice, but it needs an incentive suited to the law (external incentive) [Kant 1996b, 383–384]. On the other hand, from 6:219 to 6:221, Kant explicitly argues that the ethical lawgiving refers both to *internal* and *external* duties. In particular, he says that ethical lawgiving does not exclude external actions, but applies to everything that is a duty in general (Kant 1996b, 384–385). Within this context, the autonomous person, who is exercising her *ethical* lawgiving, is impelled not only to *internal*, but also to *external* actions and duties, or to *enforceable* duties. The question here arises as to *which are*, in particular, these ‘external moral duties’ that derive from the aforementioned ethical lawgiving. In order to answer this question, one needs first to recall Kant’s general division of duties in the *Metaphysics of Morals* (Kant 1996c, 394–395).

More specifically, in 6:239–240, in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant claims that ‘all duties are either *duties of right* (*official iuris*), that is, duties for which external lawgiving is possible, or *duties of virtue* (*official virtutis s. ethica*), for which external lawgiving is not possible’ (Kant 1996c, 394). On the one hand, duties of right are claimable by those who have the *right* to be protected by others’ wrongdoing against them, or the right to positive action by the duty-bearers; hence these are externally enforceable. On the other hand, duties of virtue are non-claimable; thus, in this case, there are no right-holders. Eventually, given that in the Introduction of the *Metaphysics of Morals* Kant has explicitly argued that all duties, including the external duties of right or juridical duties, just because they are duties, belong to ethics, one can conclude that both duties of right and duties of virtue are in effect *moral* duties. Incidentally, in the Doctrine of Virtue in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant similarly argues that even in the case in which law lays down a duty of right, the action or duty springing from it can be moral (Kant 1996c, 525).

Consequently, we may divide the Kantian duties, in general, to ‘moral duties of right’ and ‘moral duties of virtue’. This is the first Kantian general division of duties. In addition, Kant distinguishes between ‘moral duties to oneself’ and ‘moral duties to others’; as well as between ‘moral perfect’ and ‘moral imperfect’ duties, that is,

duties which cannot be overridden and require actions or omissions, and duties which require only the setting of ends allowing for freedom concerning their fulfillment, respectively (Kant 1996c, 395). Here are the Kantian divisions of moral duties (Kant 1996c, 395):

Perfect duties of right:

- Duty to oneself → The right of humanity in our own person
- Duty to others → The right of human beings

Imperfect duties of virtue:

- Duty to oneself → The end of humanity in our own person
- Duty to others → The end of human beings

Overall, the Kantian moral *external* duties deriving from the ethical lawgiving, as it has been described above, are divided into three main categories: First, into duties of right and duties of virtue; second into duties to oneself and duties to others; and third, into perfect and imperfect duties. Now, the Kantian *duties of right*, the duties towards *others*, and the *perfect* duties are of great importance here, given that, as it is shown below, socioeconomic rights –including the right of children to freedom from extreme poverty– are grounded in them. To the above triple Kantian division of duties, I add a fourth division, namely the division between *universal* and *specific* duties; that is to say, between duties which require actions or omissions by *all*, and duties requiring actions or omissions by *specific* duty bearers, respectively. Clearly, this division has not been on Kant's focus. However, it is important in view of the distinction between human and socioeconomic rights which is suggested in the present chapter. That is to say, contrary to human rights, I see socioeconomic rights, including the right of children to be free from extreme poverty, as not owed to someone by *all* others; rather, they are owed to someone by *specific* others: individuals, or/and states, or/and institutions, or/and organizations. The reasons why the relevant right is (and should be seen as) a socioeconomic right are thoroughly explained in Sect. 3.2 below. Here the fundamental question arises as to *how* from specific duties towards children, the socioeconomic right of children to be free from severe poverty is eventually developed or justified in *Kantian* or *deontological* terms.

Initially, I argue that there is an 'external, moral, specific, perfect duty of right to protect children from extreme poverty'. This duty is derived from the ethical law-giving function of morality. That is to say, the fulfillment of the aforementioned duty is, to speak in Kantian terms, the result of the positive response of rational human beings, to the categorical 'voice' of reason, or the common to all rational human beings' genetic basis, or intrinsic capacity, for moral agency (rationality). This 'voice' of reason 'commands' compliance with the moral law, according to which children must be protected from severe poverty because this is a moral duty, or for the sake of moral law alone, independently of any other concerns.

Incidentally, the pure practical reason 'commanding' compliance with the moral law is not an absolute ruler, or despot. If reason was a tyrant, then there wouldn't be millions of people who do not respect it. For example, there wouldn't be children

living in cramped, polluted, and diseased conditions in Old Fadama, an informal settlement in Accra (United Nations Human Rights, Office of the Higher Commissioner 2018). Hence, the pure practical reason is better understood in Aristotelian terms as the ‘right reason’ (*orthos logos*), or rational inner ‘voice’ which can only be ‘listened to’ by those whose opposite ‘voices’ of natural inclinations, personal interests, wishes, desires, and so forth, are not ‘screaming’ (yet they do exist).

Further, I claim that the aforementioned duty, namely our ‘external, moral, specific, perfect duty of right to protect children from extreme poverty’, is divided into our duties to: (1) *abstain* from any action that prohibits children’s freedom from extreme poverty, and (2) secure through intentional *act(s)* children’s right to freedom from extreme poverty. From these two (negative and positive, respectively) duties, through Kant’s thesis in 6:239 in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, the socioeconomic right of children to be free from extreme poverty is afterwards *generated* or *developed* (*entwickelt*). More specifically, in 6:239 in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant argues:

But why is the doctrine of morals usually called (especially by Cicero) a doctrine of *duties* and not also a doctrine of *rights*, even though rights have reference to duties? – The reason is that we know our own freedom (from which all moral laws, and so all rights as well as duties proceed) only through the *moral imperative*, which is, the proposition commanding duty, from which the capacity for putting others under obligation, that is, the concept of right can afterwards be [explicated]² (Kant 1996c, 395)

What Kant argues here is in effect that we experience our freedom through a moral imperative which commands the fulfillment of our duties. Specifically, we experience our freedom as *autonomous or good* persons when we *freely* self-legislate. In the same passage, Kant claims that moral duties and rights *proceed* from, or are *grounded* in the ethical lawgiving which is freely conducted by the autonomous person. However, this derivation of duties and rights from the ethical lawgiving does take place in a particular order. Kant argues that rights, namely the capacity one has to put others under obligations, do not have just *reference to duties*, but they are straightforwardly *generated* (*entwickelt*) from them. In other words, Kant seems to argue that our moral duties, as well as those rights, which are further generated or developed from them, are grounded in the ‘ethical lawgiving’ function of morality which is freely conducted by the autonomous person. Therefore, rights do not simply *correspond* to duties, but their relation to duties is much stronger, in the sense that they are *generated*, or *developed*, or *originate* (*entwickelt*) from duties. That is to say, without duties, Kant implies that there can be no rights, or that rights do *not exist*. Overall, duties have (foundational) priority over rights.

Consequently, our awareness of the right of children to freedom from extreme poverty, either in the form of (1) children’s right to claim the *absence* of any action that restricts their freedom from extreme poverty, or in the form of (2) children’s

²What must be pointed out here is that Mary Gregor’s translation of the German word ‘entwickelt’, in the original text, as ‘explicated’ is not correct (Kant 2013: 346). ‘Entwickelt’ means ‘generated’ or ‘developed’, that is, ‘grounded’, and not just ‘explicated’.

right to claim the *protection* of their freedom from extreme poverty, does not actually exist without the moral imperative commanding us to protect children from extreme poverty ('specific perfect duty of right to protect children'). We may represent the proposed *duty-based* justification of children's right to be free from extreme poverty in the following list:

Specific perfect duties of right to protect children from extreme poverty:

- Specific perfect duty of right to abstain from any action that prohibits children's freedom from extreme poverty → The right of children to claim the absence of any action that restricts their freedom from extreme poverty
- Specific perfect duty of right to secure children's right to freedom from extreme poverty → The right of children to claim the protection of their freedom from extreme poverty

Overall, the (socioeconomic) right of children to freedom from extreme poverty:

- is grounded in the 'external, moral, specific perfect duty of right to protect children from extreme poverty' (grounds),
- consists of the right to claim the omission of any action that restricts children's freedom from extreme poverty (negatively); as well as the right to claim the performing of intentional act(s) that guarantees children's freedom from extreme poverty (positively) [content]; and
- is based on a duty which is not of all others, but of specific others, e.g. the relatives or/and the friends of the child, the local authorities, states, and organizations (duty-bearers).³

3 Three Possible Objections

In this section, I respond to three possible objections against the new Duty-Based Approach. Within this context, I first show the moral priority of duties over rights; second, I explain why the socioeconomic right of children to be free from extreme poverty is not a human right; and third, I explain the reasons why Kant is not a moral constructivist.

3.1 A Paradigm Shift: From Rights to Duties

A possible objection against the proposed justificatory account in the present chapter might be that, through the priority given to the notion of 'duty' over the notion of 'right', the notion of 'right' is degraded. Also, it could be asked why duties are more fundamental than rights, or why duties must be seen as more basic than rights

³More on this on Sect. 3.2 below

in the case of the right of children to be free from extreme poverty. In this section, I respond to these claims.

Initially, contrary to the prevailing twentieth century ethical approach, according to which rights have priority over duties, and similarly to some prominent Kant scholars, such as Onora O'Neill, I argue that it is a mistake to emphasize rights without integrating them with duties or obligations (O'Neill 2016). Incidentally, although the term 'obligation' is more often associated with law, while the term 'duty' is typically related to morality, in the present chapter the terms 'duty' and 'obligation' are used interchangeably as approximate synonyms. Hence, I use both the words 'duty' and 'obligation' to denote the 'ought', that is, something that *has* to be done by someone.

Now, simply to argue that duties are more basic or fundamental than rights does not automatically render the latter less morally important than the former. Only within the Kantian duty-based ethics a moral priority of duties over rights is *justified*; specifically, through the passage 6:239 in the *Metaphysics of Morals*.⁴ Based on the aforementioned passage, my claim concerning the relation between duties and rights is stronger than the claim that rights have *correlative* obligations (O'Neill 1996). Through the justification of the right of children to freedom from extreme poverty, in the present chapter, is clearly shown that what is effectively meant by the statement that 'duties are more fundamental than rights' is that in the absence of the former, the latter alone *do not exist*.

Further, a duty-based justificatory approach, such as the one suggested in the present chapter, is absolutely necessary especially in the case of children, given that, by reason of their physical and mental immaturity, they *depend* on others. That is to say, their incapacities, in particular their lack of reason and agency, make it extremely difficult for them to claim a right. Schweiger and Graf argue that the particular condition of children as developing beings imposes relevant duties to protect them and ensure that they are not harmed (Schweiger and Graf 2015: 9). Thus, in my view, the language of 'duties of others towards children' is more essential than the language of 'rights of children'.

Consequently, I suggest changing our way of dealing with children's right to freedom from extreme poverty. Instead of focusing on the right itself, I think we should focus on individuals', states', institutions', and organizations' obligations to protect children from a state of extreme poverty either by *preventing* it, or by *suppressing* it. I am convinced that a duty-based approach, such as the one suggested above, does ensure better than a rights-based approach the relevant objective, that is, the protection of children from extreme poverty. What also must be stressed is that the UNCRC is actually a duty-based treaty rather than a rights-based one. It is true that most of its articles are framed in the form of duties that the State or guardians have towards children, rather than as rights that children have themselves. However, the problem of the UNCRC is that it does not explicitly mention the right in question, that is, children's right to be free from extreme poverty.

⁴See Sect. 2.

Of course, my approach does not mean or imply that we should ignore the *right* of children to be free from severe poverty. I only suggest that, because of the particular condition of children, as incapable enforcers of rights, we should put their right to be free from severe poverty aside for a while, in order to see the issue of their protection from extreme poverty today from another angle, that is, from duties' point of view; from which (duties) the relevant right is afterwards generated, or developed, in Kantian or in broad deontological terms. Eventually, the objection according to which, through the priority given to the notion of 'duty' over the notion of 'right', the proposed justification degrades the popular concept of rights is not correct. Under the new justificatory account, rights are not rejected or degraded. Rather, they are put aside for a while, in order to strengthen the old category of duties, so that eventually both rights and duties could be seen as equal parts in a contemporary account of international justice.

3.2 *Human and Socioeconomic Rights*

Another possible objection against my account is that the right of children to be free from extreme poverty is mistakenly considered as a *socioeconomic* right. Rather, it might be argued that the aforementioned right is actually a *human* right. In what follows I explain the distinction between these two categories of rights.

Initially, my own view is that human rights, for example the right to life, are moral rights (with political connotations, further protected by law) owed to human beings by *all* others: individuals, states, institutions, organizations, and corporations. Contrary to human rights, I understand socioeconomic rights, for example the right to work, as rights which generally provide the conditions necessary for our prosperity and wellbeing. Similar to human rights, socioeconomic rights are moral rights, with political connotations potentially protected by law. Also, as human rights, socioeconomic rights cannot strictly be seen as *natural* rights, namely as entitlements independent of the existence of other's duties. Further, socioeconomic rights are understood and treated as rights which derive from the duties of individuals, states, and institutions. Incidentally, these duties of others derive from their moral and rational reason, which 'commands' them to act or not act in a certain way.

Nevertheless, contrary to human rights, I do not see socioeconomic rights as *human* rights in the above sense. This is a strong claim that must further be explained. Initially, even though, as moral rights, socioeconomic rights exist prior to any political recognition, and codification and ratification by law, they still cannot be considered as human rights, because they are not owed generically to people by *all* others. Instead, they are owed to people by *specific* duty-bearers, either individuals, or states and institutions, which are responsible for their fulfillment and enforcement.⁵ Thus, I am not responsible for feeding each hungry child in the world. Understanding

⁵In the same vein, Onora O'Neill claims that 'welfare rights must have necessarily specific duty-bearers; see, for instance, O'Neill (1996), pp. 130, 131, 134.

socioeconomic rights as rights owed to people by *specific* duty-bearers, I think, would render their protection more effective.

For example, the right to health care of a child in a poor country can better be protected if it is understood or declared as a right owed by specific others rather than a right owed by all others. In the last case, the Government, or any other *specific* Organization responsible for the protection of the right to children's healthcare in that country, could easily refuse their duties on the pretext of the *universality* of the relevant duty, and ascribe their *own* responsibilities to *all others* in the world who can actually do nothing in praxis to protect the health of children in that particular country. Consequently, because of the *nature* of the so-called socioeconomic rights, as rights presupposing social and economic support that in principle cannot be given by everyone, we cannot speak of universal duties in this case. What must also be stressed is the fact that even in the case of civil and political rights, in which the first-order obligations to *respect* them are universal, the second-order obligations, that is, the obligations to *ensure* that the first-order obligations are respected, still have to be allocated (O'Neill 2005: 427–439). In what follows, I focus on children's right to freedom from extreme poverty in particular.

To begin with, contrary to the claim that children's right to freedom from extreme poverty is a *human* right, I regard it, or I suggest we should treat it, as a *socioeconomic* right.⁶ Surely, children are human beings with human rights, e.g. the right not to be tortured (Sect. 2 above). However, children's right to be free from severe poverty is not a typical *human* right, but a right specifically belonging to *socioeconomic* justice. One reason why the right of children to be free from extreme poverty is a socioeconomic right is that the relevant duties, from which this right is effectively derived, are not owed to children by *all others*, as in the case of human rights (O'Neill 2005: 427–439). Instead, following an agent-centered approach, I see children's right to freedom from extreme poverty as a right derived from *specific* –and not universal– duties of *specific* actors-duty-bearers, either individuals, or states, institutions, and organizations, which are responsible, either to action or omission. It would be implausible, non-feasible, and non-practical *all others*, individuals, states, institutions, and organizations to have the duty to protect (action), or being accused of abstaining from the protection of each child in the world from extreme poverty (omission).⁷ Instead, the allocation of duties to *specific others* leads eventually to more effective protection of children. Therefore, as a UK resident, I do not typically have the duty either to feed each child living in extreme poverty in Ghana (praxis), or abstain from any act (omission), e.g. enjoying all my meal, in order to offer half of it to that child in Ghana.⁸ That may sound a bit harsh. Yet, I am convinced that the allocation of duties (positive, negative) to *specific* others, either individuals, or states and institutions, in the case of the socioeconomic right to children's

⁶For the moral damage in the case of child poverty, see further Cabezas and Pitillas, in this volume.

⁷Although, *all others* can be accused of acting against the fulfillment of the relevant right.

⁸However, I still have the duty not to act against the fulfillment of the relevant right in some way, e.g. to prevent those who are willing to provide food to the children in Ghana from doing so.

freedom from extreme poverty, leads eventually to more effective protection of children.⁹

Moreover, I am afraid that the non-identification of specific duty-bearers, the non-determination of their duties, and the non-specification of the content of these duties as well as the consequences of their non-fulfillment, would render the right of children to freedom from extreme poverty itself an indeterminate 'manifesto' right, for which no one would actually take the responsibility of its infringement in certain circumstances. But this apparently must be avoided –especially in the case of children who are not able to fully protect themselves. It could also be argued here that the lack of precise determination of duty-bearers in the case of *human* rights too is one of the reasons why these rights are poorly observed.

Furthermore, what must be stressed is that the characterization of some rights, including children's right to freedom from extreme poverty, as *socioeconomic rights*, does not render them less important than *human* rights. It is only in the respect of the allocation of specific duties to specified duty-bearers, that is, the requirement which is a condition sine qua non for a more effective protection of children from extreme poverty that this right differs from typical children's human rights, e.g. the right of children not to be tortured by *all* others.

Last but not least, I respond to one more possible objection. It could be counter-argued that my approach is not purely Kantian in the sense that effectiveness arguments, such as the one developed in this chapter, do not seem Kantian. That is true. Kant and effectiveness do not typically go together. Hence, from the very beginning (see p. 3), I have stressed the fact that it was *my* decision, and not Kant's, to add to the Kantian triple division of duties a fourth division between *universal* and *specific* duties. The question here arises as to whether my decision renders the whole argument less Kantian. Apparently, the decision to add the fourth division renders my argument less Kantian. However, it does not render my argument for children less deontological; hence, the title of the chapter is not a 'Kantian Approach to Children's Right to Freedom from Extreme Poverty'. Instead, the title of my contribution to the present volume is: A Duty-Based Approach to Children's Right to Freedom from Extreme Poverty'. Although the proposed justification is inspired by the Kantian opus, it cannot be seen as a purely Kantian justification. Instead, it is clearly a deontological justification. Why? Because I think a deviation from a strictly Kantian approach and an inclination to a broader deontological approach inspired by the Kantian opus is preferable in the case of children, towards which we have the duty to offer more pragmatic and effective rather than idealistic and non-effective solutions.

⁹Incidentally, this might also apply to *some* human rights which typically straddle the division between 'civil and political' and 'socioeconomic' rights, e.g. the right for freedom of association. For example, as a UK resident, I do not have a duty (negative, positive) to provide, or abstain from providing the Ghanaian with the resources required for freedom of association, e.g. by providing (or not providing) a public arena, or organising meetings for them. However, I still have the duty not to restrict a Ghanaian's freedom of association.

3.3 *Constructivism vs. Foundationalism*

In this section, I focus on and respond to the third possible objection against my account. It could be argued that Kant, from whom the aforementioned justification is inspired, is not actually a foundationalist, but a constructivist, who would oppose my idea of a *foundation* for rights, including the rights of children to freedom from extreme poverty. There are indeed some significant Kant scholars who argue in favour of *constructivism*. In their view, a Kantian foundation of rights cannot plausibly be supported and proposed.¹⁰ My aim here is to show that Kant is not actually a moral constructivist, but there is room in his opus for legitimately arguing that he is a foundationalist.

To begin with, a prominent constructivist Kant scholar is Onora O'Neill. O'Neill has worked a lot on duties and rights from a Kantian point of view. Generally, I agree with her approach regarding the issue of human rights in general, namely her thesis that the fulfillment of duties or obligations is more basic than the fulfillment of rights; and that any rights' claim is no more than rhetoric, unless the counterpart duties or obligations are justified and allocated accordingly to individuals and institutions. (O'Neill 2016, 35). That is to say, we cannot actually know what a right amounts to until we know: (1) who is the duty-bearer, (2) what exactly is the content of his or her obligation, and (3) to whom (right-holder) the fulfillment of the relevant obligation is owed. As O'Neill argues, if we take rights seriously, we must take the counterpart duties or obligations even more seriously; otherwise, rights remain only aspiration claims with high cost. That is to say, when rights are violated, there is no way one to see who has infringed the relevant right, and who owes redress (O'Neill 2016, 196–197). However, although I generally agree with O'Neill's claim that duties have priority over rights, I disagree with her constructivist reading of Kant.

More specifically, one of the weighty claims of O'Neill is that, recognizing that a plurality of agents may lack antecedent principles of coordination, Kant eventually *builds* an account of reason, ethics, politics, and justice on this basis (O'Neill 2015, 77, 84). Hence, in her view, Kant introduces the Formula of Universal Law, according to which there is a categorical imperative, namely to '*act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law*' (Kant 1996a, 73). That is to say, given the plurality of agents, and the need of an agreement of all with some principles, O'Neill claims that Kant introduces, or *constructs*, or *builds* the Formula of Universal Law through which he eventually aims the principles adopted not be ones that could not be willed by all agents. Eventually, O'Neill characterizes the Formula of Universal Law as 'the best-known version of Kant's procedure of construction', and Kant's accounts on reason, ethics, politics, and justice as pure constructivist accounts without foundations (O'Neill 2015, 23–24, 77, 84).

Yet, even if the Kantian Formula of Universal Law is a construction, still a construction needs foundation. A foundation or base is the most crucial element of an architectural structure that connects it to the ground. There are either shallow or

¹⁰ See for instance, O'Neill, O. (2015); also, Flikschuh (2015).

deep foundations, but, in any case, the crucial point is that *all* building structures should not lack a specific foundation. This is a pragmatic claim that directly opposes O'Neill's moral constructivist thesis that there can be constructions without foundations (O'Neill 2015, 24). Consequently, even if it is indeed a Kantian construction, the Formula of Universal Law needs a deeper foundation. I see the foundation of the Formula of Universal Law to be the following: As a formulation of the Categorical Imperative (CI), the Formula of Universal Law (FUL) is grounded in the Moral Law (in singular) commanded further by Pure Practical Reason (Kant 1996a, 164–165).

Moreover, throughout his opus, Kant does not essentially show anything about the *construction* of reason, ethics, politics, and justice. Rather he directly points to *foundationalism*. We could focus on passages such as the passage 4:439, in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, in light of which Kant does not seem to be a constructivist or antirealist. Kant writes: 'The essence of things is not changed by their external relations; and that which, without taking account of such relations, alone constitutes the worth of a human being is that in terms of which he must also be appraised by whoever does it, even by the supreme being' (Kant 1996a, 88). Also, one must consider the notorious passage in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, in which Kant describes the moral concept of human dignity. Kant writes in 4:434–5 in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*: 'that which constitutes the condition under which alone something can be an end in itself has not merely a relative worth, that is, a price, but an inner worth, that is, *dignity*' (Kant 1996a, 84–85). He then argues in 4:436 that '*Autonomy* is therefore the ground of the dignity of human nature and of every rational nature' (Kant 1996a, 84–85). Apparently, here the role of the fundamental moral principle of autonomy as the *foundation* of the dignity of human beings does not allow for attributing to Kant the characterization of the constructivist, or non-foundationalist, philosopher. Finally, one must also take into consideration the 5:47 passage in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, in which Kant argues that '... the moral law is given, as it were, as a **fact** of pure reason of which we are a priori conscious and which is apodictically certain, though it be granted that no example of exact observance of it can be found in experience' [emphasis added]. (Kant 1996b, 177). Here again, Kant expresses his foundationalism or moral realism. Consequently, because of these passages, and many other ones in his opus, I cannot see Kant, as O'Neill does, namely as a constructivist or antirealist philosopher.

4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have philosophically examined (1) the grounds of the right of children to be free from extreme poverty, (2) the content of the aforementioned right, and (3) who the duty-bearers are (Sect. 2). More specifically, I have argued that the socioeconomic right of children to freedom from severe poverty:

- is grounded in the specific perfect moral duty of right to protect children from extreme poverty (grounds);

- consists of the right to claim the omission of any act that prohibits children's freedom from extreme poverty (negatively); as well as the right to claim the performing of acts that guarantee children's freedom from extreme poverty (positively) [content]; and
- is based on a duty which is not of *all* others, but of *specific* others, e.g. the relatives or/and the friends of the child, the local authorities, states, and organizations (duty-bearers).

In addition, I have responded to three possible objections against the proposed philosophical foundation (Sect. 3). Within this context, I have emphasized the moral priority of duties over rights; I have explained why the socioeconomic right of children to be free from extreme poverty is not a typical human right, but a socioeconomic right; and, finally, I have explained the reasons why Kant is not a moral constructivist; hence the foundations of rights as we understand them today in a Kantian or deontological mode is feasible.

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Towards an Ontological Approach to Care and Child Poverty



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Abstract My aim in this chapter is to analyse the notion of care from an ontological point of view and to examine how it could be instrumental when confronting the phenomenon of child poverty. Basing my approach on the thought of Martin Heidegger, especially his work *Being and Time*, I attempt to highlight that true care can be understood only through being with the others in solicitude, which in the case of child poverty can be manifested both by fulfilling their basic material needs and by opening ways for them to face this critical situation by themselves.

Keywords Care · Child poverty · Death · Heidegger

1 Introduction

The aim of this article is to outline an ontological approach towards care in order to interpret and confront, from a philosophical perspective, the issue of child poverty. More specifically, by basing my methodology and terminology on Martin Heidegger's work *Being and Time*, I investigate what 'care' means, its significance for the human being, and how the latter's relationship with the ultimate possibility of death incites us to act in solicitude for the victims of child poverty.

In the first section, emphasis is placed on the ontological analysis of death according to Heidegger and the connection with child poverty. I try to show how children's incapacity to perceive death as an ontic/ontological event, or even as a possibility within their poverty, calls for our active solicitude in their lives.

In the second section I form a definition from all the parts that Heidegger considers as constituting care and discuss how this definition paves the way for positive solicitude towards children in poverty. Such solicitude is intended to liberate children in need of help, both through the fulfilment of their basic material needs and by enabling them to actualise their own possibilities when encountering problems.

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Finally, I introduce a philosophical proposal concerning care and solicitude founded on the momentous event of a human being's preparedness to bring close in solicitude all those suffering due to child poverty through an ontological *de-severance*, the core of which lies in the redefinition of the perception of distance in urgent situations, such as the suffering and possible death of all victims of child poverty. Seeing distance from an ontological perspective, I highlight the importance of our coming to understand and interpret the human being as a constant actualiser of care through concerned solicitude.

2 Child Poverty as the Burden of Death's Inevitability

In this first section I comment on death in connection to child poverty, because both phenomena are closely related, the difference being that children cannot understand death as an adult human being can, even though their living in poverty is a constant ontic summoning of death in their lives. For adults and adolescents, death is probably perceived as the end of our finite life and as the future-related end which may make us reconsider what we have done or inherited from the past; whereas for children, although death is a possibility, it is actualised every day due to poverty which ensures it remains present in their lives. While I do not intend to trespass upon the field of psychology in its analysis of children's perception of death, the goal of this article is to show how children are trapped in a situation where death is an ontically actualised reality; hence, their lives acquire the tragic shape of endless suffering in conditions of hunger and a lack of the most basic aid and comfort. These children have no other possibilities than to constantly struggle to remain alive, and to find food and shelter against the ever-present threat of death and suffering.

Even though there is no doubt that there are different forms of child poverty which do not, at least imminently, threaten children's lives, the emphasis in this section is on those forms which pose a real and immediate threat. The reason for this is the belief that when poor children are confronted with death, because of their miserable life conditions they are not aware of it. Consequently, they cannot realise the inevitability of death in the same way an adult does, which makes death and its meaning a mysterious fact for children. I consider that when a human being, let alone a child, is faced with death as a result of an incapacity to fulfil the most primary necessities, then this is a tragedy that needs to be addressed, given the irreversibility of the event of death. The number of children who die in conditions of extreme poverty is daunting: according to UNICEF (2017) 'every day in 2016, 15,000 children died before their fifth birthday, 46 per cent of them – or 7,000 babies – died in the first 28 days of life.' UNICEF (2016) reported that in 2013 a total of 385 million children were living in extremely poor households. In addition, the fact that children are unaware of their proximity to death and do not even properly understand what death is or what its consequences are, calls for our direct and effective participation in their lives. When children are one step from dying, then our most humane responsibility is not only to prevent this from happening, but also

to ensure that children will be given the necessary help to develop their own tools to utilise against the threat of death.

My analysis of death in this section, as well as in the whole paper, is founded on Heidegger's interpretation of it. After a presentation of the German philosopher's ideas, I set forth how it is closely related to both child poverty and to our tackling of this problem. Even though the analysis of death by Heidegger is ontological, I nevertheless believe that child poverty is as close to death as it is possible to be. While, particularly in the Western world, most of us live decently and have the privilege of interpreting death from an ontological perspective, many children around the world, not excluding those in Western countries, are living their final months or year.

Heidegger's interpretation of death notes:

Death is the possibility of the absolute impossibility of Dasein.¹ Thus Death reveals itself as that *possibility which is one's ownmost, which is non-relational, and which is not to be outstripped [unüberholbare]*. As such, death is something *distinctively* impending. Its existential possibility is based on the fact that Dasein is essentially disclosed to itself, and disclosed, indeed, as ahead-of-itself. This item in the structure of care has its most primordial concretion in Being-towards-death. As a phenomenon, Being-towards-the-end becomes plainer as Being towards that distinctive possibility of Dasein which we have characterized. (Heidegger 2008, pp. 294–295)

Death is an event of primordial weight according to Heidegger; as explained in *Being and Time* in "Division ii", where our stance towards death and our (not) fleeing towards the nullity of every possibility of ours is what makes a human being be

¹The term Dasein, literally translated as "being-there", is used by Heidegger in order to designate the human being and its special relation to Being. Dasein is to be understood as the being whose Being is an issue for it. In a passage from his work *Being and Truth*, Heidegger investigates what the human being is and says:

This fundamental characteristic, that its own Being is an issue for it, itself belongs to the Being of this being. We designate this Being as *care*. This care has nothing to do with some sort of irritable surliness, but designates the fundamental characteristic of the self, that its Being is an issue for it. How-this is left to the choice and mission of man. (Heidegger 2016, p. 166)

The fact that human being, as Dasein, is concerned for its own Being is the reason why it struggles to find the meaning of its own life and actions in this world starting from the premise that it, as Dasein, is. It finds itself in a world surrounded by and related to other human beings and objects; this possibility to relate with other beings is one of the essential characteristics of Dasein. The significance of this possibility of relatedness is also highlighted by Heidegger in the following definition of Dasein:

What I call Dasein is essentially codetermined—not just through what we describe as spirit, and not just through what we call living. Rather, what it depends on is the original unity and the immanent structure of the relatedness of a human being which to a certain extent has been fettered in a body and which, in the fetteredness in the body, stands in a particular condition of being bound up with beings. (Heidegger 1997, p. 203)

Even though the definition of Dasein cannot be limited to the above presented extracts, the latter can function as introductory steps to better comprehending some important issues to be developed in this chapter, such as the ontological relation of human being to death as well as the meaning of caring about other human beings.

in an authentic way or not.² Death is our own most possibility and the event of dying is non-relational, exclusive and proper. We die alone, not because we have no-one at our side when we take our last breath, but because we are the ones who experience this last breath. We feel how it is to approach death, and in this feeling we are alone because no one else can experience what we are experiencing at the moment of our dying. Death is our most personal and unique possibility, and one which cannot be outstripped, overcome or evaded. It is 'ultimate' and expresses the fact that our life is the passage of a finite being towards the unavoidable reaching of the impossibility of its possibilities.

For an adult, death is understood as a possibility, one which can be run away from, but still a possibility. We know that life is not eternal, and even though we do not want to think about death during every single moment of our lives, we do understand that our life ends with death. Desperate parents, when seeing their children deprived of the most elementary goods, will literally do anything and everything to help them. For parents, who as adults can understand the suffering of their children, the worst kind of anxiety is feeling impotent to provide them with what they need to remain alive. In the same way an adult living in conditions of extreme poverty may be pushed into acting illegally when they consider that there are no other options and that their life depends on it. Adults understand both the finality and the irreversibility of the possibility of death, which is not an ungraspable and an unthinkable event, but on the contrary, a ceaseless threat against us and the ones we love. However, children living under conditions that bring them every day closer to death do not comprehend that death will eventually come if nothing changes drastically. Children's perception of death varies depending on their age, and it is only when they are 9–10 years old that they start developing an adult's understanding of death.³ Until they reach this age children do not conceive death as an event that could possibly happen to them, and which would put an end to their lives. Their incapacity to comprehend death does not make their situation less tragic, since their life is one of suffering due to both the lack of the most basic goods and the impotence to effectively react in order to change the situation. Extreme child poverty is harsh, and probably one of the worst situations children could live in, and however seriously we try to deal with this issue, we can hardly comprehend the suffering of these children. Our attempt to understand the conditions in which they live and the fears they face fall significantly short when compared to their actual circumstances. It is not simply the lack of goods that makes their situation tragic, rather it is their inability to predict what this lack may mean for them and their loved ones. We can deduce that children in extreme poverty may die and that their life is a constant interplay with death, veiled by their ignorance of the actual event of death. Consequently,

²Heidegger coins the term *anticipatory resoluteness* in order to define the authentic potentiality-for-Being of the Dasein in the face of death. In this article, however, there isn't space to comment on this insightful ontological analysis of death. For more information, see: Pattison 2013; Demske 2014; Ireton 2007; Edwards 1975.

³For a more detailed explanation of children's understanding of death depending on their age see also: Krepia et al. 2017; Kenyon 2001.

they are trapped in a situation of physical and psychological suffering from which not even death can be thought of as the last escape, since they cannot perceive the event of death as even a possibility.

The relationship between child poverty and death is founded on two fundamental ideas: first, unlike adults, children in conditions of extreme poverty lack the capacity to contemplate the possibility of death in general; and second, children are powerless to do anything to ameliorate their own situation or that of their parents. Adults, whether they are parents or not, when faced with the possibility of death as a consequence of extreme poverty can (re)act in various ways in order to confront it; whereas children lack both an understanding of death and its nearness, as well as the physical/mental capacities to face the dire situation in which they live. While adults may have developed some survival skills, children are instead doomed to pass through a life where death, still unknown to them, comes closer every day. I would like to stress here that even when poverty conditions are not immediately threatening to the lives of children and adults, they remain very harmful and may have disastrous effects on both children and their families in the long term. To know that thousands of children die every day because they lack the bare means of subsistence, despite the very low cost, is both frustrating and insulting to our humanity, as these deaths could and can be prevented without ‘bleeding’ the economies of our States. We need to start caring about these children in a new way, whereby we take on their problems as our own, thus enabling them to adequately face all the relevant challenges on their own. Their perception of death, even hidden in their unawareness of its existence, should be viewed not as an inevitability of the miserable conditions of their actual life, but as a struggle which can be won through our being alongside them in solicitude. Caring about the children in extreme poverty requires a deeper understanding of what a human being is, and the necessity to comprehend what other human beings mean to us. It is only when we understand that caring for the other is what fulfils our own essence as human beings that we will be able to take serious action against child poverty. This necessity of caring for the other whenever they are in need is ontologically interpreted in the next section.

3 (Human) Being as Care: Being-With in Solicitude

Having presented the issue of death in relation to child poverty and children in general, my purpose in this section is to further examine how we can better comprehend what care is and the way care can be fruitfully actualised into actions, always in connection to the problem of child poverty problem. This is accomplished using the concepts of Heidegger’s *Being and Time*.

The moment we are born we are a member of a society that we have not chosen. From the first moment of our lives we are acting, reacting and thinking in a world which has already been given to us *a priori*. It is exactly in this world where we will become older, develop our personality and search for the meaning and prospects of

our lives. Heidegger coins the term *thrownness* in order to describe this phenomenon of our not choosing the place where we are born:

This characteristic of Dasein's Being-this 'that it is'-is veiled in its "whence" and "whither", yet disclosed in itself all the more unveiledly; we call it the "*thrownness*" of this entity into its "there"; indeed, it is thrown in such a way that, as Being-in-the-world, it is the "there". (Heidegger 2008, p. 174)

George Steiner interprets *thrownness* in the following way:

We are "thrown" (geworfen) into the world, proclaims Heidegger. Our being-in-the-world is a "thrownness", a Geworfenheit. There is nothing mystical or metaphysical about this proposition. It is a primordial banality which metaphysical speculation has long overlooked. The world into which we are thrown, without personal choice, with no previous knowledge (pace Plato), was there before us and will be there after us. Our Dasein is inseparable from it and, as we shall see, there is a sense in which the world derives meaning from our Dasein. (Steiner 1991, p. 87)

When we find ourselves thrown into the world we realise that we are surrounded by human beings with whom we can communicate and by things which we can use to fulfil our goals. There is no doubt that our relationship with things and other human beings is essentially different; things are utilised, while human beings speak to us, help us, hate us, try to solve our problems, or create, whether willingly or not, even more problems than those we have already. Our whole life is lived alongside people and entities, and even if we decide to go to the desert and abandon everything, then this too is another stance of ours towards human beings and things.

Despite acting and reacting to everything and everyone surrounding us, we still endeavour to determine what our role is in this world, who we are, and what the world means to us. In other words, we are constantly seeking a meaning in the world, the meaning of our own existence, and our own Being is an issue throughout our whole life. However, our search for our Being is not a solitary quest whereby everything around us disappears and we enter a deep state of contemplation, rather we understand what our Being is through our caring for everything that surrounds us, be it people or things. Heidegger comments on our Being and our *potentiality-for-Being* as follows:

But ontologically, Being towards one's ownmost potentiality-for-Being means that in each case Dasein is already *ahead* of itself [ihm selbst... *vorweg*] in its Being. Dasein is always 'beyond itself' ["über sich hinaus"], not as a way of behaving towards other entities which it is *not*, but as Being towards the potentiality-for-Being which it is itself. This structure of Being, which belongs to the essential 'is an issue', we shall denote as Dasein's "*Being-ahead-of-itself*". (Heidegger 2008, p. 236)

Being-ahead-of-ourselves and having a *potentiality-for-Being* are deeply social phenomena because they can only be grasped and understood within a living matrix of relationships amongst things, people and everything that surrounds them. Making an effort to find out what our Being is entails a search which takes place in the world and can never be conducted in isolation. In this respect Heidegger states the following:

“Being-ahead-of-itself” does not signify anything like an isolated tendency in a worldless ‘subject’, but characterises Being-in-the-world. To Being-in-the-world, however, belongs the fact that it has been delivered over to itself -that it has in each case been thrown *into a world*. The abandonment of Dasein to itself is shown with primordial concreteness in anxiety. “Being-ahead-of-itself” means, if we grasp it more fully, “*ahead-of-itself-in-already-being-in-a-world*”. (Heidegger 2008, p. 236)

Being-ahead-of-ourselves, is a concept of crucial importance for Heidegger’s understanding of care and can be understood as the projection of possibilities for the future⁴ with the goal of finding out what Being means to us. Being human beings we have the ability to think about the future, contemplate different future outcomes relating to our actions, and realise that all of our possibilities are nullified by the future event of death. The ontological significance of *being-ahead-of-ourselves* is tremendous, since it opens up an almost infinite variety of possible actions in the future. By projecting our possibilities into the future we are trying to see who we would like to be and which actions would be closer to who we really are.

Being-ahead-of-ourselves and our *potentiality-for-Being* are two key concepts for Heidegger’s understanding of care. In our everyday life we care for things and people because they both matter to us, and we realise that they play a significant role in our lives and in our better understanding of who we are. We find ourselves in the same world with other entities and are capable of understanding that their being alongside us affects us in many different ways. We care about many different things, even when their way of affecting us is clearly different; we care about family, our home, and our pets, but we also care about climate change, wars in Africa, child poverty and the future of the world. Caring is always present in our lives because things and people matter to us. We realise that we do not live alone in the world and that our not caring about what is happening around us goes against our understanding of what being in the world means. When we care about the future of our children, then we are comprehending the fact that we live alongside our children and the things that matter to them, and we also realise that we are capable of projecting different possibilities for our children’s future. Thus caring about someone or something is both *Being-ahead-of-ourselves*, as a projection of possibilities, and *Being-alongside* our children or everyone/everything they care about. These two elements are highlighted in one of Heidegger’s definitions of care:

The Being of Dasein means ahead-of-itself-already-in- (the world) as Being-alongside (entities encountered within-the-world). This Being fills in the significance of the term “*care*” [*Sorge*], which is used in a purely ontologico-existential manner. (Heidegger 2008, p. 237)

However, we do not care in the same way about things and people, as there is an unbridgeable ontic and ontological difference between them, which has to do with being humans. We care about other people because we realise that we share the same being; we mourn for the loss of a friend or relative, just as we feel happy when a friend gets married or becomes a parent. We are sad when by accident we happen

⁴For more on the relationship between care and temporality see: Käufer 2013; Blattner 1999; Wagner 2011; Scott 2010; Escudero 2013; Wu 2016.

to shatter a precious gift (a vase, for instance) from our grandparents or when a favourite jacket becomes stained, yet in both cases this is neither purely materialistic nor confined to the loss of a material object, rather it is related to the significance we attribute to the object as being related to another person or even to our own selves. In this world we are always alongside other people, and often things reflect the relationship we have with others.

Heidegger explains the difference between these two types of care, namely care for objects and care for people, in terms of concern and solicitude⁵:

Concern is a character-of-Being which Being-with cannot have as its own, even though Being-with, like concern, is a *Being towards* entities encountered within-the-world. But those entities towards which Dasein as Being-with comports itself do not have the kind of Being which belongs to equipment ready-to-hand; they are themselves Dasein. These entities are not objects of concern, but rather of *solicitude*. (Heidegger 2008, p. 157)

Our caring about other people should therefore be understood as solicitude, although this is not always expressed in the same way. Even though there is no doubt that different people in different situations may understand solicitude in various manners, I hold to the following distinction made by Heidegger concerning the two different types of solicitude of the human being:

With regard to its positive modes, solicitude has two extreme possibilities. It can, as it were, take away 'care' from the Other and put itself in his position in concern: it can *leap in* for him. This kind of solicitude takes over for the Other that with which he is to concern himself. The Other is thus thrown out of his own position; he steps back so that afterwards, when the matter has been attended to, he can either take it over as something finished and at his disposal, or disburden himself of it completely. In such solicitude the Other can become one who is dominated and dependent, even if this domination is a tacit one and remains hidden from him. This kind of solicitude, which leaps in and takes away 'care', is to a large extent determinative for Being with one another, and pertains for the most part to our concern with the ready-to-hand. In contrast to this, there is also the possibility of a kind of solicitude which does not leap in for the Other as *leap ahead* of him [*ihm vorausspringt*] in his existential potentiality-for-Being, not in order to take away his 'care' but rather to give it back to him authentically as such for the first time. This kind of solicitude pertains essentially to authentic care—that is, to the existence of the Other, not to a "what" with which he is concerned; it helps the Other to become transparent to himself *in* his care and to become *free for it*. [...] Everyday Being-with-one-another maintains itself between the two extremes of positive solicitude—that which leaps in and dominates, and that which leaps forth and liberates [*vorspringend-befreienden*]. (Heidegger 2008, pp. 158–159)

This thorough and deep reaching distinction between the two types of solicitude provides a clear perspective of how the Other can be helped. In the first type when we 'leap in' for the Other then we actually make them dependent on us to find the solution for their ontic and existential issues. Consequently, help and care come in the form of dependency on a 'saviour', who bearing the brunt for the sake of the Other, when freed from this commitment puts the Other back in the place from where they had left their own life, in order to be able to restart by themselves. No matter how subtle the help may be, and despite the fact that it could actually aid the

⁵For an analysis of the relationship between care, solicitude and concern, see Inwood 1999, pp. 35–36.

‘care receiver’ to identify a solution to their problem, the issue could reappear in the same or a different form because the basis of the difficulty/challenge has not been addressed and properly confronted. Instead, the issue has simply been evaded with the hope that it will not reappear. The potentiality for solving the problem has been taken over by another agent, thereby leaving the person who had to attest it in the full dependency of the Other, as they would consider their own solution to be hard, or even worse, impossible.

The second type of solicitude is expressed as ‘authentic care’ because it is a liberating form of solicitude and a sincere actualisation of *Being-along-with-the-Other*. In this instance the one who offers their help does not replace the person who has to face the problem; on the contrary, they step ahead in order to solicit a range of possibilities to which the Other can respond to. In this case solicitude takes the form of an opening of the way so that the seeker of help can finally grasp through the projection of their own understanding the different possibilities that exist for their final *free* acting/responding when faced with a problem that calls for their own answer. A person is thus liberated, as by leaping ahead of the Other, far from being replaced, this enables a moment when there is a renewal of their vision of the whole situation, including the problem, which enables them finally to be able to react to the situation by themselves via freely chosen understanding and deciding.

Having established the basic concepts of Heidegger for our understanding of care, how this conception of care relates to child poverty through solicitude by leaping ahead of the Other so that the Other can freely become who they want to be through their own contestation of the problem, is considered. This type of solicitude should be guiding the way for our proper understanding and tackling of the issue of child poverty, since it takes into account both the significance of (not) having possibilities and the role of the human being as being alongside the Other. When considering ‘leaping-ahead’, the meaning of care arises through the merging of our *Being-ahead-of-ourselves* as having the possibility of future projections, while simultaneously opening the way for the Other’s future potential possibilities. Especially in the case of children, the proof of our being authentically alongside them is not that we are simply helping them to deal with their current problem of poverty, which is indisputably of great importance, but that we also care about their future, where they will hopefully be able through our solicitude to project their own possibilities and their own idea of what their Being is.

Following the ontological analysis of care proposed by Heidegger, one of the essential elements is the human being as *ahead-of-itself* while *Being-along-with-Others*. In the case of children in poverty, solicitude is not merely a moral obligation but is required for reaffirming who and what we are as human beings. Children in poverty are restricted to a mode of understanding which deals with the search for possibilities that might make the everyday burden of suffering less heavy. Their understanding is concerned with the fulfilment of the children’s and their relatives’ most essential necessities. Even if death is close by in the inhumane phenomenon of child poverty, it is perceived by children as neither a possibility nor a projection. For this reason, we, adults, who perceive and understand death differently from children- ontologically, as the projection of the end of all possibilities, and, practically,

as the end of our lives- should bring closer to us their suffering and pain, directing our care towards them via our acting in solicitude; a solicitous acting coming about through our leaping ahead of them in such a way that would safeguard their possibilities of remaining alive, and, at the same time, lay the foundations of a better future not only for the children but for all those co-suffering around them as well.

4 Bringing the Other Close in Care: Child Poverty and the Ontological *de-severance*

Before proceeding with this section I want to clarify the reason for focusing my analysis on child poverty and not on other areas, such as child abuse or children during war, among others. I believe that the problem of child poverty, especially that of children living in extreme poverty, is a life or death issue which could actually be dealt with. UNICEF's goal (2015) is to halve child poverty by 2030, which is a hard but not impossible goal to achieve. Children dying in conditions of poverty could be saved without spending an incredibly large amount of money. Making accessible food, water and housing to these children and their families is significantly different to helping children who are experiencing abuse or living in a war situation. In these examples what is needed is a radical reconstruction of the social, political and familial matrix in which children live and grow. This change requires deep knowledge of the culture of the children's countries and of the existing infrastructure and its functionality, although this presents a daunting challenge. Nonetheless, changing a country's infrastructure and saving children from dying in poverty are two very different things. While in the first case we must deal with a long-term radical change, where the outcome is unknown, in the second case much can be done without reconstructing the entire political and social matrix of a country. The goal is far simpler, namely to reduce the number of children dying in poverty by meeting their essential needs in material goods. This assistance represents another chance for them to go on with their struggle for survival; therefore we should also offer them the possibility of having a future. In my opinion, this can be done and it is up to us to make this change happen. What is necessary in order for this to occur is a bringing closer to us the children's needs, in other words, caring about these children as if they were our own family and friends, despite the huge distances separating us. The way this bringing closer could happen is discussed below, where an emphasis is placed on how the problem of child poverty can be brought close to each one of us in our everyday life, and why our capacity to bring it close is a way of acting with care and solicitude.

As previously stated, we are *Being-in-the-world* and *Being-along-with-Others*, yet often when we speak about Others we limit our concern and solicitude to groups we can relate to, such as family, city or country. When a child is dying of hunger or begging for food right across the street then we are deeply touched. Hearing these children cry, seeing them lose weight or suffering from cold, stirs pity in our hearts

and we would try to help them. However, when the distance becomes greater, the numbers much larger, the situation much worse, then our interest to effectively engage into action declines. From my point of view, one of the most effective ways to tackle child poverty would be to reduce the distance barrier, as this creates a lack of interest, or even apathy. What we seek is to understand our *Being-along-with-Others* not in terms of ontic proximity, but in terms of an ontological co-belonging and co-existing. One way to address this aim would be the founding and developing of an ontological *de-severance*. Heidegger, when analysing the idea of *de-severance*, sees it in the scope of our relationship with *ready-to-hand* items and entities. His definition states:

‘De-severing’ amounts to making the farness vanish—that is, making the remoteness of something disappear, bringing it close. Dasein is essentially de-severant: it lets any entity be encountered close by as the entity which it is. De-severance discovers remoteness; and remoteness, like distance, is a determinate categorial characteristic of entities whose nature is not that of Dasein. (Heidegger 2008, p. 139)

Thus, when confronting child poverty, we are not dealing with an object which can be used, replaced or discarded. We are dealing with a purely personal issue, both ontically and ontologically, because we have to help fellow human beings who seem to be doomed simply through *having-been-thrown* in a place and in conditions which are suffocating every potentiality of actualising their possibilities. This very personal character of the relationship needs to be taken into account in order to let us understand the gravity of the problem we are faced with. Whenever children die or suffer we cannot content ourselves with schemata of numbers, figures and objectives by simply witnessing the death/suffering of human beings who are not given the slightest possibility of actualising their *potentiality-for-Being*. Their being trapped in a dead-end while chased by the actualisation of death in their lives is a deep wound for every human being convinced that care is indeed founded on our *Being-along-with-Others*. However, this wound has to be deeply felt and not just visualised via social media or the news packed in-between other items. If we ever want the situation for victims of child poverty to be truly changed, then we should be able to suffer alongside them, as if the same suffering was happening to us.

From the above we can easily understand why the issue of child poverty requires a much more personal approach than the usual professional contribution/actions of specialised NGOs and international institutions who deal with it, mainly on the basis of logistical calculations, systems and methods. An approach is needed which emerges from our own feelings of dejection due to the fact that there are vulnerable human beings who are denied even the possibility of realising the situation in which they live. Their constant striving to survive in such an atmosphere is so desperate that death is not felt by them as a future possibility but as an everyday ontic companion. Leaving such human beings un-provided for in the claws of death is the greatest harassment against our own conception of care.

Thus our dealing with this problem should be twofold: first, to experience in a personal way what child poverty means for us as members of a community and as human beings, and second, to try to make this personal understanding of children’s

suffering a matter for our own community and State. If we manage to achieve these two goals then we will have made one step further towards a more profound understanding of our own essence, of our own being human; a human being which is successfully struggling to understand its own being through its being solicitous to those who find themselves in need.

The main problem that would probably arise here is the issue of distance. Many people could probably grasp and promote plans to address child poverty in their own community and country; however, when it comes to helping children thousands of kilometres away then the situation may change. Distance is a really strong factor when it relates to feelings of interest and empathy for others. This is the reason why our conception of care should be able to bring down the barrier of distance.

From the above emerges the necessity of our developing an attitude of ontological *de-severance* with regard to the issue of child poverty.⁶ The ontic distance is very powerful and can easily provoke an ontological distance from all those suffering in the farthest corners of our country, let alone in Africa or Asia. What needs to be done is to interpret their suffering not as an attack against human rights but against our own comprehension of what being human means. Quoting Heidegger:

Being with Others belongs to the Being of Dasein, which is an issue for Dasein in its very Being. Thus as Being-with, Dasein 'is' essentially for the sake of Others. This must be understood as an existential statement as to its essence. Even if the particular factual Dasein does *not* turn to Others, and supposes that it has no need of them or manages to get along without them, it *is* in the way of Being-with. (Heidegger 2008, p. 160)

If being alongside Others is so important for the understanding of our own being in the world, how could we assume that Others lose their importance when they are away from us? On the contrary, their being away from us is what should oblige us to bring them closer, not ontically by installing them in other countries, but by making them the constant receivers of our solicitude. This solicitude transforms each single suffering human being into its main concern and is a rallying cry for active participation and actualisation of care. No matter how far away Others are, no matter if the suffering children and their families are not citizens of our State, this should never hold us back from making them our main concern. Helping NGOs and international institutions is only one way of providing assistance. Human beings should from the first moment consider their own existence through the act of caring; namely through being able to *be ahead-of-themselves* and *alongside-Others*, especially if the Others are children who are suffering and probably unable to deal with the heaviest burden of their *being-thrown* in the worst possible conditions. There can be no distance barriers when it comes to solicitude and helping those suffering from child poverty, and there can be no real pretext for evoking national, religious or cultural boundaries. Their suffering is a constant assault against our being human, since all the obstacles set by distance are obstacles which disable us from reaching a better understanding of how we can act in care in this world. The fact that we are

⁶For a very interesting approach concerning the mobilisation of society towards child poverty issues through the development and expansion of the emotion of a *civic tenderness*, see: Clardy, Chap. 16, in this volume.

able to care about them and are concerned about their well-being, is proof that we are not lost in apathy. What this care needs is to actualise itself in solicitude, no matter the distance. Being able to care about them is the beauty of our *potentiality-for-Being*; therefore doing something about it through acting in solicitude is the activation of this potentiality as care and concerned *Being-along-with-Others*.

Acting in care requires sacrifice and the will to eventualise the ontological *de-severance* to its fullest extent. When speaking about children suffering and dying, it does not matter whether they are related or not, compatriots or not; they remain human beings that have not developed their capacity for understanding and they probably do not even know that death is closely following them. For us, who understand the possibility of death, what is interpreted as the absolute anxiety of our existence coming to an end, for these children is the macabre hiding of their own abrupt end stalking them at every step. If as human beings we are not able to demolish the walls of distance that separate us from the children who are suffering from poverty, then we will probably face the existential danger of our being alienated from our own essence and from our own *potentiality-for-Being*, and we would then be restricted to a new distorted and alienated version of care that would be interpreted as *Being-along-with-some-Others*. The fact that we will only care for some Others will be the greatest and most dangerous assault against our own being human, and is against our own possibility to be something more than a spatially restricted concerned being.

5 Conclusions

Having reached the end of this chapter, one question which may arise is what does philosophy have to offer when dealing with issues such as child poverty? Is it not obvious that we all have to succour those in need? The answer is that philosophy can, and must, offer a constant challenge to the way we comprehend what human being is.⁷ Through the analysis of the ideas of Heidegger it has been shown that concepts such as care, death and solicitude, are brought into light and that they set forth possibilities to be grasped and followed, or not. We, at the very least, should take this opportunity to be in a constant dialogue with our own selves and our own convictions about the world.

Child poverty is a very practical and urgent issue, and there is no doubt that drastic and immediate measures are required to confront it. Nonetheless, such measures, if not based on a profound analysis of our *Being-in-the-world*, could never reach the core of the problem. This world is shared by all of us, and we all share either in caring or not about what happens. When some situations and problems bring children and their families into a constant struggle with death, then we should all try to understand why this has come to pass and our responsibilities in addressing this

⁷For the necessity of the philosophical ground for the establishment of laws and politics see: Liosi, Chap. 14, in this volume.

situation. The issue of distance has to be reinterpreted and ontologically scrutinised. The fact that those suffering are not located in our countries or on our continent does not justify our not acting in solicitude; acting not only to ease their pain, but, primarily, to open the way for their possible reinterpretation of the world through the horizon of the possibilities opened to them after our leaping ahead of them. Our struggle is not limited to the present, but goes deep into the future and faces the possibility of death. Only through coming face-to-face with our own most impossibility do we understand the importance of our possibilities in the present and the importance of the past.

If indeed human being is to be conceived through the acting of care then there is no doubt that our most sincere way of *Being-along-with-Others* is through our solicitude, through our own demolition of all the obstacles that distance sets between us and the suffering of the victims of child poverty. Human being is never going to be able to decide its *thrownness*; however, it can fully actualise its *potentiality-for-Being* via its incessant strife against all those conditions that work towards nullifying the potential of having possibilities for all the Others that are suffering and who are actually living every day with death as their own potentiality.

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Civic Tenderness as a Response to Child Poverty in America



Justin Leonard Clardy

Abstract This chapter presents a portrait of American children as situationally vulnerable and introduces the public emotion of *civic tenderness* as a response to the indifference that is routinely directed toward this vulnerability. Discussions of pro-social empathic emotions typically prioritize emotions like sympathy and compassion. While they are important in their own right, these pro-social emotions are responses to situations of current need. Civic tenderness is a response to situations of vulnerability. Insofar as a person or group is now in a situation of need, they had to have first been vulnerable to experiencing that need. Since vulnerability is conceptually prior to need, civic tenderness is prior to these other pro-social emotions. Through the process that I call tenderization, I explain how tenderness for poor and impoverished children's vulnerability can be expanded to a society's members, institutions, and systems.

Keywords Civic tenderness · Compassion · Indifference · Vulnerability

1 Introduction

The American society sometimes falls short in its pursuit of justice. Its high child poverty rates are evidence of this failure because it shows how American treats its most vulnerable citizens. About, 1 in 5 or 21% of American children live under conditions of poverty (National Center for Child Poverty). Additionally, children's racialized identities can make them even more vulnerable as African American and Latino children are twice as likely to grow up in a low-income household than their white counterparts (Santiago 2015, p. 3). Life for many American children living in poverty is marked by suffering from inadequate nutrition, fewer learning opportunities, poor schools, exposure to toxins, family violence and homelessness. These

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circumstances represent a mode of being to which many Americans are indifferent.

As Bagattini and Gutwald note earlier in this volume, children are inherently vulnerable (Bagattini and Gutwald, Chap. 6, this Volume). But children are also made more vulnerable by the societies of which they are a part. I argue that the alleviation of child poverty requires that we target and reduce this indifference by cultivating a public emotion that I call *civic tenderness*. On my view, civic tenderness is the appropriate orientation of concern a society's members, institutions or systems should have toward a person's or a group's situational vulnerability. Importantly, I maintain that civic tenderness is an orientation of concern that provides an impulse toward caregiving and protective behavior. This chapter proceeds in three steps. First, I illustrate a broad portrait of child poverty in America by highlighting conditions of poverty that children find themselves in and the consequences it has on their life's prospects. My portrait draws on the different sources of vulnerability made out by Catriona Mackenzie to show that in addition to being inherently vulnerable, American children are also situationally vulnerable—vulnerability that is “caused or exacerbated by the personal, social, political, economic, or environmental situations of individuals or groups” (Mackenzie et al. 2014, p. 7). Next, I describe a kind of societal orientation of indifference that is directed towards people in poverty. I maintain that this indifference prevents us from encountering issues of poverty in a candid way. I then turn to a discussion of civic tenderness and the process of tenderization. On my view civic tenderness is an emotional disposition that involves the expansion of tenderness among a society's members, institutions, or systems. Since civic tenderness is an expansion of the emotion of tenderness, my discussion then turns to a process that I call tenderization—the process of expanding tenderness among a society's members, institutions, and systems—to work toward achieving this end. In an attempt to start a conversation about the kinds of programs that a more tender American society would adopt, I present, very briefly, two “unfinished” measures that I believe would be consistent with this vision.

2 American Children as Situationally Vulnerable

For all of us, the conditions of vulnerability and sociality are present at birth. The societies that we are born in to are vulnerable too. For one example, high rates of child poverty can make it difficult for a society to produce the skilled workers that it needs in sufficient quantities—ultimately, making that society vulnerable to demise as it “(1) affects our short- and long-term ability to compete internationally; and (2) diminishes our capacity to address the needs of an aging population” (Santiago 2015, p. 9). As a result, a society's children are indispensable assets to its future. Gone unchecked, childhood poverty can have harmful consequences for both children as well as the societies of which they are a part. Since, on my view, civic tenderness is a response to situational vulnerability, it is this kind of vulnerability that I focus on in this section.

In their introduction to a collection of essays of vulnerability in *Vulnerability: New Essays in Ethics and Feminist Philosophy*, Catriona Mackenzie et al. provide a crisp taxonomy of the sources and states of vulnerability. Their taxonomy of vulnerability identifies three sources of vulnerability—inherent, situational, and pathogenic. I do not have the space here to devolve into each of the three sources so for the sake of brevity I will focus my discussion on inherent and situational vulnerability. Suffice it to say, here, that pathogenic vulnerability is the result of interventions that aim to ameliorate or mediate vulnerability but instead has the results of exacerbating vulnerability (Mackenzie et al. 2014, p. 9). As I am particularly interested in highlighting situational vulnerability, my discussion of inherent vulnerability in this section is limited too, prioritizing its relation to situational vulnerability.

Universally, human embodiment makes it such that, for us, vulnerability and sociality are inescapable but through death. As long as we are alive and have bodies, we are vulnerable. Our bodies have material needs for food and drink for a continued existence. As Catriona Mackenzie et al. write, at differing times over the course of our lives we “are exposed to physical illness, injury, disability, and death” (Mackenzie et al. 2014, p. 1). As hurricane Katrina, one of the costliest natural disasters in American history, demonstrated in 2005, our bodies are also prone to threats that are posed by our natural environment. These vulnerabilities, according to Mackenzie, are “intrinsic to the human condition” (Mackenzie et al. 2014, p. 7). As such, our being vulnerable in relation to these factors are inherent.

We are social creatures too. Martha Nussbaum points out that “we live for and with others and regard a life not lived in affiliation with others to be a life not worth living” (Nussbaum 1992, p. 219). When we are born, we always and already find ourselves in a social relationship. Both of these conditions—vulnerability and sociality—exist for children at the moment of birth and they persist through childhood. As infants, we must rely on others for food and shelter amongst other things. Over the course of our lives we exist within a variety of relations with members throughout our society that make it possible for us to be loved, cared for, exploited, neglected, abused, or oppressed.

The condition of sociality begets yet another source of vulnerability—situational vulnerability. For Mackenzie et al., situational vulnerability is vulnerability that is mediated by social context. Situational vulnerability and inherent vulnerability bear a categorical connection to one another. One’s inherent vulnerabilities are products of “genetic, social, and environmental influences” (Mackenzie et al. 2014, p. 8). Take for example, a child born with the rare genetic disorder severe combined immunodeficiency (SCID). Because of an underdeveloped immune system, children born with SCID are far more susceptible to catching colds, having ear infections, and in general, having their illnesses recur over their lives than children without it. It would make sense to say that children with SCID are inherently more vulnerable than children without it. Pertaining to situational vulnerability, just how situationally vulnerable one is will depend a person’s “resilience” which is itself also the product of genetic, social, and environmental factors too (Mackenzie et al. 2014; Bagattini and Gutwald, Chap. 6, this Volume). To illustrate, as children with SCID are more inherently vulnerable than children without it, children with SCID

whose families have health insurance are less situationally vulnerable than children with SCID and whose families do not have health insurance. While there is a line between situational and inherent vulnerability, it is thin. Each involves reference to the other; inherent vulnerability contains an implicit reference to one's situation and a person's situational vulnerability could not be affected if it were not for their inherent vulnerability.

Like SCID children whose families do not have health insurance, vulnerability for children who are born in or live in poverty is exacerbated precisely because of the social situation they find themselves in. In 2015, 23% of American children were in poverty; that's nearly one in every four children. (Santiago 2015) At the time of this writing, roughly 21% of American children are in poverty (National Center for Children in Poverty 2018). This means, despite some incremental progress in child poverty rates, for roughly one in five American children, poverty is still a problem. In her paper "Fifty Years Later: From a War on Poverty to a War on the Poor", social scientist Anna Maria Santiago writes that American children living in poverty

are more likely to experience violent behavior and gang activity; are more likely to be incarcerated; have limited access to fresh produce and healthy foods; have fewer supporters and services; attend inferior schools; and have few, if any, safe places to play (Santiago 2015, p. 8).

She also notes that many American children are living "in families that experience deep poverty, who are poor during early childhood, are more likely to have lower levels of academic achievement; drop out of school; have lower employment outcomes; and experience more health, behavioral, and emotional problems" (Santiago, p. 9). For many American children, then, to live in poverty is to be vulnerable to suffering from inadequate nutrition, poorer health prospects, fewer learning and job opportunities, poor schools, family violence and homelessness.

Santiago is right to point out that children are situationally vulnerable to things such as inadequate nutrition and the health concerns that are related to being less than adequately nourished. Sadly, however, poor children are also vulnerable to having their quality of health threatened by external and structural factors as well. Take the Flint Water Crisis for example. In Flint, Michigan in 2015, the city's water supply was reported to have high levels of lead and other harmful bacteria (Hill 2016, p. 161). In 2016 Kristi Tanner, a Detroit journalist, wrote that "every Flint child under 6 years of age—8657 children, based on an analysis of Census data—should be considered exposed to lead" (Tanner 2016). In spite of the city's residents listing complaints to the city about the poor quality of the water they were receiving, the city ignored the complaints and took no effective steps toward addressing this problem (Hill 2016, p. 161). Sociologist Marc Lamont Hill puts this poverty-as-lived-experience into perspective in his book *Nobody: Casualties of America's War on the Vulnerable from Ferguson to Flint and Beyond*, Hill writes that every day, the residents of Flint, adults and children alike, "continued to drink, bathe, clean, and play in water that carried toxins into their bloodstreams." (Ibid.) In case readers are unaware, lead poisoning creates neurological complications and the poisoning is

irreversible. (Ibid.) The fact that 54% of Flint’s residents are Black, reinforces Santiago’s claim that “there are considerable racial and ethnic differences in children’s exposure to poverty” (US Census Bureau; Santiago 2015, p. 3). Inevitably, children of Flint are placed in a situationally deprived spot complete with exposure to toxins that generate “learning disabilities, difficult[ies] in fine motor skills, problems with memory and speech articulation, and [may] develop a greater tendency toward violence” (Hill 2016, pp. 162–3). So in addition to the current state need that these children find themselves in, their futures too are potentially compromised as these problems usually persist into adulthood.

To date, this crisis is ongoing (Eric Levenson 2018). These circumstances reflect the extent to which many people are *civically indifferent* to the situation of poverty.

3 Civic Indifference and American Poverty

In spite of the portrait above, many Americans are vastly indifferent to the situation of child poverty. That is, many Americans act as if poor families and child poverty do not exist. The case is exacerbated with children; We learn from Katarina Pitasse’s piece earlier in this volume that children are regularly omitted from direct measurements of poverty (Pitasse [this volume](#)). This omission is dangerous because it masks the fact that “children have needs, vulnerabilities, unequal access to the family income that are different from the adult condition” (Pitasse [this volume](#)). In cases where their existence is acknowledged, children in poverty are usually stigmatized (Hall et al. 2014). This stigma includes being perceived as incompetent, feeling shunned and disrespected. Because of the assumption “that if a family is below a poverty line, every member is considered poor; and if the family is above it, their individual members are as well,” (Pitasse [this volume](#)) children who live in poverty are relegated to a realm of social invisibility because the stigmas of the poor as lazy, incompetent, and responsible for their own situations, tend to be all encompassing.

On my view, civic indifference is the lack of an appropriate orientation of concern a society’s members, institutions, or systems may have toward a person’s or group’s situational vulnerability. Specifically, civic indifference has a fixed subject and object that both pertain to the civic aspects of human life. In kind, civic indifference is a composite of both exclusionary and negating forms of indifference. In effect, I suggest that this indifference increases the distance between ourselves and others and creates social division, and as a result impairs our abilities to make the cognitive judgments that are thought to be attendant to pro-social emotions like compassion.¹ This indifference, I maintain, is generated and sustained by at least three kinds of mechanisms—psychological, political, and social (Clardy 2017).

¹For an interesting discussion of Compassion as a certain kind of reasoning attendant that is mediated by our cognitive judgements readers should see Martha Nussbaum’s “Compassion as a Basic Social Emotion”.

Hallvard Lillehammer's two works "The Nature and Ethics of Indifference" and "Who is my neighbor? Understanding Indifference as a Vice" develop a useful framework for understand this kind of indifference (Lillehammer 2014; Lillehammer 2017). My analysis builds on Lillehammer's analyses of indifference to depict the peculiar kind of indifference I take civic indifference to be. Although Lillehammer introduces four categories of indifference altogether (apathetic indifference, blinkered indifference, exclusionary indifference, and negating indifference), I exclude discussion about two states of indifference here, blinkered and apathetic. I discuss about apathetic indifference because this category of indifference is not characterized by the adoption of a substantial negative judgments about its target in the way that I take civic indifference to be. (Lillehammer 2014, p. 562) When one is civically indifferent, they take-up negative judgments about the object that they are indifferent toward. This means that civic indifference is in fact object sensitive. The object sensitivity that civic indifference involves, is also why I exclude discussion about blinkered indifference as it is not object sensitive in a way where the object one is indifferent toward factors necessarily as a means to the ends one is trying to advance (Lillehammer 2014, p. 565).

On my account, civic indifference is a composite of the exclusionary and the negating states. Exclusionary indifference occurs when there is a failure to cultivate or sustain an appropriate orientation of concern to some aspect of ethical relevance in the world and this "failure plays a strategic or otherwise instrumental role in the pursuit of one's own ends, or in the pursuit of the ends of some collective which they are a natural part; and where the nature of the object that is excluded plays a significant role in that pursuit" (Lillehammer 2014, p. 568). For example, we sometimes orient ourselves indifferently towards homeless people as we pass them by when exiting a freeway off-ramp. In doing so, we fail to demonstrate the appropriate orientation of concern to their situation; this exclusion instrumentally advances our ends of saving or hoarding our own monies. Negating indifference occurs when there is a failure "to either cultivate or sustain an appropriate orientation of concern towards some ethically significant feature of the world because of the wrongful denial of [the] ethically significant status merited by that feature." (Ibid) Importantly, this kind of indifference needn't play a pursuit in an agent's own ends.²

On my view, civic indifference is, for the most part, facilitated by a cognitive error closely akin to attribution errors and implicit biases. For example, implicit biases are widespread (Kelly & Roedder 2008; Greenwald et al. 1998; Kang et al. 2012; Gendler 2011; Green et al. 2007; Payne 2006). Psychological research on implicit biases reliably show our cognitive capacities can be impaired even in cases where we have little to no access to our own cognitive impairments. Implicit and

²When it does, it is proper to say that the indifference is both negating and exclusionary. Examples of such attitudes could come about when the loyalties that tie you to your own social group is enhanced if you systematically ignore the suffering you cause to people outside your group and where you justify your ignorance of this suffering by denying the legitimacy of the claims from the people suffering; this is often the case with American Police officers in regard to the victims of police brutality.

other biases like the attribution bias—a tendency to overstate the role of personal characteristics and understate the role played by environmental factors in other’s successes or failures—increase the likelihood that we misrelate to our fellows and their situations of vulnerability by failing to give them proper respect and acknowledgments (Blum 2004, p. 262).

When we are indifferent to our fellows, our cognitive distortion may increase the likelihood of scrutiny, stigmatization, and exclusion from our circle of concern people who are situationally vulnerable. This may raise some concern about the nature of civic indifference—namely, civic indifference motivates us to actively misrelate to these groups, how is it that we are indifferent toward them? The response is that, however else we might behave toward the situationally vulnerable (with hostility, invalidity, etc.), it is precisely the vulnerability of their social positions (which is partially responsible for shaping their current situation of need) that is failing to make a claim on us and that is why we are indifferent.

In its effect, civic indifference creates and sustains psychological and moral distance by creating and intensifying a sense of social division between others and ourselves; it also damages our ability to decrease this distance. When we restrain ourselves from closing this distance either by being or by making ourselves indifferent to other’s situations, we damage our capacity for perceiving ourselves as similar to others; a thought that, according to philosophers like Martha Nussbaum, that is attendant to experiences of the pro-social emotion of compassion. Civic indifference is an orientation of not being concerned about. To say this is to say the state of a society’s members, institutions, or systems do not change in response to the state of the object of indifference (person, group, social justice cause, etc.). To move from a state of indifference is to take up an attitude of being concerned about, whether that concern is positively or negatively valenced. That is, indifference is flexible enough to allow for someone to non-indifferent so long as the state of some other person makes a difference to how they think, feel, or act, at some point in time. Through its legal and political institutions, states can be responsible for expanding and sustaining indifference (Anderson 2010). Recall, for the moment, the earlier anecdote about Flint, Michigan. The city’s officials ignored the complaints made by its residents. If people in power in Flint actually took the claims of its citizens more seriously, the crisis could have been brought to an end quickly. Intermediate steps could have been taken to assuage the blow Flint was hit with. For example, as Hill notes, Flint could have used anticorrosion treatments in the water or looked to partner with other neighboring cities for instance. (Hill 2016) Instead, they were indifferent to the complaints and insisted that the water was safe for drinking, prolonging the search for a solution.

Often working in conjunction with these structural mechanisms, in America, are the social mechanisms that sustain civic indifference. One such social mechanism are the reports about the world that we get through media. It is uncontroversial to say that the reports that we get about the world primarily come through mass media. Our reliance on media for our information about society, in turn, shapes our social perceptions and our political attitudes about our world. When the of the situationally vulnerable are distorted, public misperceptions that reinforce existing biases and

stereotypes are likely to result (Hall et al. 2014). According to Martin Gilens, “Whatever public sympathy might accompany the perception that the poor are trying to work their way out of poverty is unlikely to emerge from [our society’s] newsmagazines” (Gilens 1996, p. 524). A distortion occurs because media representations of poor people “are much less likely to be employed than their real-world counterparts”, for example. (Ibid) These distortions are exacerbated when personal contact with their situations are drastically reduced because of political mechanisms like spatial segregation³ (Anderson 2010).

Civic Indifference towards situational vulnerability prevents us from confronting issues of justice in a candid and critical way. Now that there is an understanding in place of what civic indifference is and what it does, a society replete with this kind of indifference needs a way to target it if it wishes to eliminate it. I maintain that the cultivation of civic tenderness—the appropriate orientation of concern a societies members, institutions, or systems should have toward a person or group’s civic vulnerability—can target this indifference by responding to situational vulnerability. Civic indifference can be effectively addressed by means of the very psychological, political, and social, mechanisms that sustain it. We can move out of a state of civic indifference by being made more aware and thus attuning our orientation to one of concern as it pertains to the ways our children who are situationally vulnerable to falling into or currently living in conditions of poverty.

4 Civic Tenderness

Some works in political philosophy about political emotions have prioritized the pro-social emotions of sympathy, empathy, or compassion while overlooking the role of tenderness almost entirely (Hume 1978; Smith 1822) (Nussbaum 2013; Darwall 1998). This constellation of emotions make up empathic concern—other-oriented concern that is regarded as a potent source of altruistic motivation (Batson 2011). In his book *Altruism in Humans* empathic concern is the primary focus of psychologist Daniel Batson. Batson says that empathic concern “includes feelings of sympathy, compassion, softheartedness, tenderness, sorrow, sadness, upset, distress, concern, and grief.” An Important feature of empathic concern is that it is other-oriented. Its orientation emphasizes that this concern involves feeling for others. While some emotions like compassion and sympathy are inherently other-oriented, others such distress can sometimes be oriented toward ourselves. When emotions like distress are self-oriented, they do not belong to the class of empathic

³Other social mechanisms such as a norm of civic inattention—the attention we are encouraged not to pay to one another when sharing civic spaces—also contribute to sustaining civic indifference. However, to explore each of the mechanisms in detail and how they work in sustaining civic indifference would take us too far afield and would be best left for another time. This kind of analysis would be best suited for an explicit concentration on civic indifference in its own right. Under the constraints of the current chapter and guided by our current goal, it is sufficient to introduce each mechanism that sustains civic indifference.

concern. While each of the empathic emotions Batson lists are important in their own right, these pro-social emotions are responses to situations of current need. Civic tenderness is a response to situations of vulnerability. Insofar as a person or group is now in a situation of need, they had to have first been vulnerable to experiencing that need. Since vulnerability is conceptually prior to need, civic tenderness is prior to these other pro-social emotions.

Civic tenderness is an emotional disposition that involves the expansion of tenderness among a society's members, institutions, or systems.⁴ It is an orientation of concern, brought about in response to situational vulnerability that provides an impulse toward caregiving behavior. Tenderness has not been the object of much concentrated attention in the philosophy of love or political philosophy. Tenderness functions as a response to perceived vulnerability. Insofar as occupying a situation of suffering implies having been vulnerable to occupying that position, vulnerability is prior to other empathic emotions that are responsive.⁵ Since civic tenderness is an expansion of the emotion of tenderness, its features reflect the features of tenderness. I maintain that tenderness is an emotion that is cognitive and affective and is a distinct emotion that is responsive to perceived vulnerability (Batson 2011; Bertocci 1988; Dijker 2001, 2010; Dijker and Koomen 2007; Kalawski 2006; Kalawski 2010; Lishner et al. 2011; McDougall 2015; Niezink et al. 2012; Sherman et al. 2009). As tenderness is a source of altruistic motivation, it also motivates protection and a variation of pro-social behaviors such as care (Dijker 2014; Kalawski 2006; Kalawski 2010).

Our experiences of tenderness are facilitated by an appraisal of vulnerability. This means that vulnerability is a perceptual and cognitive antecedent of tenderness (Dijker 2014, p. 176). It is helpful to call to mind a distinction between kinds of need made by David Lishner et al. Although both vulnerability and suffering can be characterized as some form of need, suffering is a *current* need whereas vulnerability is a *dispositional* need. "Perception of need", Lishner states, "involves perception of a negative discrepancy between a person's current state and what one desires for that person on one or more dimensions of well-being" (Lishner et al. 2011, p. 615). When we perceive need we perceive a deficiency in well-being. A current need "involves perception of an existing discrepancy on one or more dimension of well-being" (Ibid). When one sees rows of tents populated by homeless and displaced persons, a sight much like Skid Row in Downtown Los Angeles, what we are

⁴I understand an emotional disposition in the same way as Kalawski in "On the Subjective Distinction between Tenderness and Joy". Emotions differ from emotional dispositions in that the former have a shorter duration than the latter. Further, dispositions are expressive of tendencies toward. To say that one has a tender disposition toward some object, then, is to say that one is oriented toward that object in a way that one is sensitive and responsive to it in situations of vulnerability.

⁵It is worth explicitly exploring the relationship between tenderness and other empathic emotions such as fear, compassion, anger, pity, sympathy, and empathy. However, to elaborate the relationship between tenderness and these emotions would take us too far afield and so shall be left for another time.

seeing is existing discrepancies, current suffering, across the dimensions of security, danger, physical pleasure, and disease, for example.

Contrasting current need, vulnerability is a kind of need such that “Even when no discrepancy exists between what is and what is desirable, a person may be seen as vulnerable to future discrepancies” (Ibid). Lishner continues that, “one must be vulnerable to a given need to experience it, current need is evidence of vulnerability” (Ibid). Thus, current need implies vulnerability. If someone now finds themselves in a situation of suffering or current need, they had to have first been vulnerable to experiencing that need. When I perceive someone as vulnerable, although they might not now be in a situation of suffering, to perceive them as vulnerable is to judge their situation as one that might soon change.

Cognitive appraisals of vulnerability, however, are only one part of this emotion. Tenderness is also a potent source of motivation to help relieve empathy inducing need (Kalawski 2010). Suffice it to say here that the extent to which tenderness motivates protective, pro-social, and caregiving behavior is well documented.⁶

Tenderness is generated and sustained by engaging certain cognitive mechanisms—a perception of vulnerability. If we can engage the mechanisms that sustain tenderness then we can gain a more accurate perception and recognition of the vulnerable situations others are in. Doing so may increase the range and frequency of experiencing empathic emotions toward them ultimately prompting us to alleviate their situations of suffering. On my view, tenderness does this by decreasing the distance between ourselves and others. In other words, tenderness “draw us near to the suffering...seeking to alleviate their distress” (McDougall, p. 81). When we are positioned closer to the situation of vulnerability that the other is in, it allows us to make for the good of the other—to give them the benefit of the doubt in other words. As a result, the likelihood that we are motivated to intervene in a situation of need is also increased.

As a political emotion, civic tenderness involves the expansion tenderness among a society’s members, institutions, and systems. It is an orientation of concern that is responsive to situational vulnerability and provides an impulse toward caregiving behavior. So much of civic tenderness depends on whether we can target the indifference directed toward those who are civically indifferent—in this case, children who are in poverty—and extend this emotion throughout our society.

⁶Kalawski calls tenderness the emotional ‘surge’ that corresponds to love as caregiving (Kalawski 2010); Nico Frijida states, “tenderness can be regarded as the impulse toward tender—that is caregiving—behavior” (Frijida 1986, p. 83); Sherman et al. found that tenderness “is more than just a positive feeling state—it can literally make people more physically tender in their motor behavior” (Sherman et al. 2009, p. 285); Bertocci says that tenderness involves an “impulse to protect” (Bertocci 1988, p. 263); William McDougal talks about tenderness in constant conjunction with its “protective impulse” (McDougal 2015, p. 78).

4.1 *Tenderization*

Civic tenderness can be brought about by strengthening the capacity to respond in sensitive and protective ways to the situational vulnerabilities that people or groups may find themselves in. If tenderness is generated when we perceive or interpret situations of civic vulnerability, then the *tenderization* process—the expansion of tenderness among a society’s members, institutions, and systems—is sustained by continual engagement of our capacity for experiencing tenderness for people and groups who are vulnerable. But how does this process work?

First, I remind the reader that civic tenderness is an orientation of concern brought about in response to situational vulnerability, that provides an impulse toward caregiving behavior. Next, tenderization is the process of raising societal awareness of vulnerability in the hopes of cultivating a civically tender disposition. Last, the behaviors, legislation, social programs, etc. that the tenderization process might produce what I like to call *tender* outcomes. I resist searching for a unidirectional causal relation because in an interactional process, one and the same event can be a cause, effect, or reinforcement, depending on at what point in time the process begins.

My view is that the disposition, the process, and tender outcomes all operate as interlocking determinants of each other. The process involves a triadic reciprocal interaction rather than a dyadic conjoint or a dyadic bidirectional one. For example, the disposition influences tender outcomes and the tender outcomes created by the disposition, in turn, through the tenderization process cultivates a civically tender disposition. Now, the relative influence exerted by the disposition, the process, or the outcomes will vary in different societies and under different circumstances. In some cases, the process constrains what outcomes will be, and so the process emerges as an overriding determinant in this context. If, for example, over the tenderization process children in poverty are depicted as vulnerable to becoming severely malnourished or as having their life chances reduced due to external health factors like poor quality of water, then we might expect many to think that the tender outcome should involve satisfying the nutritional needs of children who are and might potentially be undernourished or having a higher risk of exposure to toxins like lead poisoning.

In some cases the outcomes are the central factors in the interlocking and the process and a civically tender disposition are not much involved in the process. The tender outcome is self-regulated over time by the effect it produces. For example, consider Affirmative Action—programs that are meant to break down barriers, both subtle and overt, and try to ensure that all people get a fair break. Affirmative Action programs are not meant to guarantee equal results, but rather to buttress the notion that if equality of opportunity were a real thing, then Black Americans, women, people with disabilities and other groups facing discrimination would be fairly represented in the nation’s work force and educational institutions—might sustain the process of tenderization by mitigating the effects of racial and gender biases in hiring and college admission practices, for instance.

In other cases, one's default disposition is highly influential in the process. Indifferent dispositions can prevent the generation of tender outcomes by callousing one's orientation from the influence of prevailing corrective tenderization mechanisms, thus creating a strong reciprocal interaction between the disposition and tender outcomes. In extreme cases, the possibility of generating a tender outcome is so controlled by one's default disposition that neither their disposition nor the actions proceeding from them are much affected by even the most intense or aggressive forms of the tenderization process. On the other extreme, it also seems true that for someone who's disposition is already very tender, tender outcomes might be constrained in a way as to not lead to outward helping behavior, but rather being overcome with warm, fuzzy feelings in our selves.

The status of same events can change from being viewed as merely a part of the tenderization process to at different entry points in the flow of interaction, for example. One can reasonably expect that the status of a outcome may shift from tender outcome to tenderization depending on the point in time from which we are asking the question of which of the two it is (an outcome or a part of the tenderization process). For example, when the Women, Children, and Infants (WIC) program to serve low-income families with children with high nutritional risks was permanently established in 1974, WIC was a tender outcome. As the program has remained in place over time, the WIC also has the subsequent effect of perpetually tenderizing citizens who enter the society beyond the point WIC programs became normalized. They are tangible objects for us to engage in the process of offering and receiving reasons for its support or removal. These reasons cannot escape references to the vulnerability of the groups that they set out to help. Ultimately, one cannot speak of tender outcomes and tenderization as if the two were fundamentally different events. People are constantly engaged in the process of appraising the progression of events. Their thoughts about the probable effects of prospective tender outcomes partly determine how tender outcomes are effected by tenderization.

The process of tenderization has a caveat. Depending on one's default dispositions, people may attribute different meaning to tender outcomes and they may develop different expectations for tender outcomes— this explains why, for instance, there seems to be a polarization of attitudes surrounding Affirmative Action, for instance. This enlarges the fact that tender dispositions are not developed and shaped in a vacuum. Our dispositions are shaped by what we believe about the effects we observe from other's behavior that we believe to be tender. If we see them harmed, it may decrease our willingness to cultivate a tender disposition. Dispositions are also developed and shaped by judgments voiced by others. Even more, dispositions are developed and shaped by external influences including outcomes and tenderization. External influences also activate the disposition as well. Different inputs will elicit quite different responses. Therefore, while a civically tender influences outcomes, civic tenderness, is fashioned from or mediated by transactions with tenderization.

5 Civic Tenderness as a Response to Child Poverty in America

In this section, I endorse a reform that I believe is consistent with the process of tenderization that I elaborate above. I intend for the discussion here to serve as a prognosis for tenderly reforming our society in ways that can positively impact children and their families who are poor or in poverty. The suggestions that I offer invite feedback and input from people and families that are subject to child poverty. Additionally, the reform that I offer is unfinished, partial and in process. The unfinished nature of my proposal is inspired by the work of legal scholar Allegra McLeod.

In her paper, “Confronting Criminal Law’s Violence: The Possibilities of Unfinished Alternatives,” McLeod proposes criminal law reforms that she calls “unfinished” (McLeod 2013). McLeod argues that “this unfinished quality ought not to be denied as a source of critical strength and possibility” (McLeod 2013, p. 113). Unfinished alternatives aim to confront the mechanisms of society that, on my view, sustain civic indifference. They provide a ““sketch,” a beginning, an attempt to change the existing state of affairs through an intervention that is partial, incomplete, and in process” (Ibid, p. 119). While, the proposed reforms should be cautious of relying on the mechanisms sustain indifference toward children in poverty they must simultaneously be able to be articulated in terms that are recognizable and conceivable to those who are embedded in the existing state of affairs. The proposed reforms then should be both unlike existing arrangements and also legible within them because our public imagination is constrained by the status quo and existing social arrangements.

Doubtless, it can be challenging to maintain a sketch as a sketch in political life. People want to know “how do we get there from here?” Given the reciprocally determined nature of the process of tenderization, we should resist discounting the ‘pioneering stages’ as life itself; viewing it only as a beginning. Ultimately, even if readers come to reject what I have to say here, I hope, at least they might find what I have to say here useful in thinking about how we might bring about a society that is more tender and concerned about protecting its most vulnerable citizens. Taking this task seriously we must be wary of being prematurely prescriptive in the precise direction that we need to go and so dialogue is welcomed and revision should not be resisted. It is also more likely that creative solutions to these issues require collective rather than individual effort and so readers should not rely on my own words as a godsend. However, I will do my best to get us started down what seems to me to be a promising path.

The program offered below for protecting vulnerable children from having their life chances restricted by the American economy can be defended in more ways than one. In this way, viewing my suggestions through a lens of tenderness and tenderization offers a companion justification for their adoption and implementation in our society. Still, if some of the economic reform measures that civic tenderness prescribes can be justified in a number of ways then so much the better for those

programs as we would have more reason to do it. My endorsement of the measure proposed below is because it, aside from whatever else it might achieve, would achieve the goals of raising awareness of the vulnerability of the poor and protecting them.

5.1 Universal Savings Account for All Children

Some regions of America have embarked on more progressive solutions toward ending poverty such as the establishment of savings accounts for children which are aimed at accruing savings over the course of childhood to facilitate children's ability later on to attend college. Santiago states that "The city of San Francisco was the first county in the United States to offer a publicly funded, universal children's college savings account (kindergarten to college). In the fall of 2013, Cleveland began the March into Kindergarten College Savings Accounts for 15,000 public school children" (Santiago 2015, p. 10). To make my proposal legible, I focus on the Kindergarten to College (K2C) piloted in 2010–2011 and implemented in 2012 by the city of San Francisco.

The City of San Francisco's K2C initiative was the first program in the nation to open college savings accounts universally to all children entering in to kindergarten. The program's aim is to help with and motivate families to save money for their children's post-secondary educational costs. Every incoming kindergartener in 2012 received a seed deposit of \$50 from the city into their own sub-account under the City of San Francisco's omnibus account held by Citibank (Centre for Public Impact 2016). Additionally, for students who come from low-income households, the city makes an additional "equity" deposit of \$50 (San Francisco Office of Financial Empowerment, March 2018).

The accounts are both custodial and publicly funded. The custodial character of these savings accounts means that the accounts are loosely "deposit only" and city of San Francisco holds the accounts of behalf of the children. According to a report on K2C published by the New America foundation, withdrawals from the account can be made in the case that they are "qualified withdrawals which include, tuition for college, community college, or other kinds of training programs. The account can also be used for books and other education-related expenses" (Phillips and Stuhldreher 2011, p. 8). So, better understood, the accounts are only deposit only insofar as students are unable to meet the qualifying spending criteria. Additionally, once children become eligible, all withdrawals must be made before the age of 25, with an exception for persons who enter the armed services before 25; in this case extensions may be made for delaying college attendance (Ibid.).

Insofar as K2C is a response to children's situational vulnerability, it can be understood as consistent with the cultivation of civic tenderness; and indeed it is. The program responds to a social situation of vulnerability that American children in poverty face. For example, children in poverty have difficulty accessing education as they are more likely to both attend poor schools and drop out (Santiago 2015,

p. 8). One of K2C's primary aims is to prevent students from leaving the education system, especially those who come from low-income families and to put them in a position to go to college. Aiding impoverished children to reach, and pay for, higher education has important consequences for the economic livelihood of these children's futures as "The salary of someone with a bachelor's degree or higher is nearly three times (\$1,150 per week) than the earnings of a high-school dropout" (Cisneros 2014). Furthermore, K2C includes contributions not only from the city of San Francisco, but the program also engages all parts of the city's civil and business communities, crystalizing its function as a tenderization mechanism (TZ).

A more tender program in response to child poverty would recognize, however, that children's situational vulnerability extends beyond just the vulnerabilities they face educationally. The children in Flint, Michigan are being poisoned by lead daily, drastically reducing the chances that they make it to college. Lead exposure not only creates complications with children's physical health, but it also plays a role in stunting the development of key skills needed for success in schools such as speech articulation and memory. For these children, and others like them, a custodial savings account with ends that are tethered to higher education needs seems too far removed from more immediate threats to their lives and education to be of any use or to hold much meaning. These children, and their families need savings accounts that have broader and more flexible access points that include using monies to secure general well-being (especially in the absence of universal healthcare), even if they remain custodial.

Beyond the educational vulnerabilities that are generated by their health concerns, there are structural challenges to accessing education as well. For example, black children and children who speak English as their second language, are often vulnerable in elementary schools to things like teasing, bullying, and stigmatization when their speech does not conform to mainstream American English. Even more, for these children, when learning academic language there are larger hurdles to jump over than students who fluently speak mainstream American English (Alim and Smitherman 2012). Students who fluently speak African American Vernacular English, for example, have their language treated as illegitimate instead of receiving the specialized attention that dialectal variation require. These conditions can work to reduce access to higher education in their own right. Until structural problems with educational institutions are remedied, I maintain, again, that universal savings accounts for children be broadened and made more accessible. After all, if these kinds of experiences characterize the totality or majority of one's educational experiences, one might not have the desire to continue one's education passed society's compulsory point (K-12). Universal savings accounts for children might be broadened in a way that enables these children to access funds for the entrepreneurial purposes, in order to be made more tender, for example. Establishing a national savings account for all children or a mechanism of financial matching the savings that localized governments accrue for their children could provide all of our nation's children a legitimate opportunity for success in our society's labor market.

6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I provided a sketch of the vulnerability that children in poverty face. In the sketch, I showed that for many American children, to live in poverty is to be vulnerable to suffering from inadequate nutrition, poorer health prospects, fewer learning and job opportunities, poor schools, family violence and homelessness. The situation of vulnerability that children in poverty face is one that many Americans are indifferent to. That is, many Americans act as if poor families and child poverty do not exist. When their existence is acknowledged, it is usually through stigmas and tropes of the poor being irresponsible, lazy, and having made poor life choices. When this happens, children in poverty are made social invisible because the stigmas of the poor as lazy, incompetent, and responsible for their own situations, tend to be all encompassing. To target and eliminate this kind of indifference, I suggest that we cultivate the public emotion of civic tenderness—an emotional disposition that involves the expansion of tenderness among a society’s members, institutions, or systems. I maintain that it is an orientation of concern, brought about in response to situational vulnerability that provides an impulse toward caregiving behavior. Additionally, I provided a sketch of the process society’s must undergo to achieve this end.

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Parenting the Parents: The Ethics of Parent-Targeted Paternalism in the Context of Anti-poverty Policies



Douglas MacKay

Abstract Governments often aim to improve children’s wellbeing by targeting the decision-making of their parents. In this paper, I explore this phenomenon, providing an ethical evaluation of the ways in which governments target parental decision-making in the context of anti-poverty policies. I first introduce and motivate the concept of *parent-targeted paternalism* to categorize such policies. I then investigate whether parent-targeted paternalism is ever pro tanto wrong, arguing that it is when directed at parents who meet a threshold of parental competency. I next explore the factors that affect the degree of pro tanto wrongness of paternalistic anti-poverty policies targeting parents, and provide an account of the conditions under which such policies are on balance permissible, and when they are not. Finally, I illustrate the plausibility and usefulness of my framework by considering a case.

Keywords Paternalism · Ethics of parenting · Poverty · Welfare state · Basic income

In recent years, scholars have suggested that governments act paternalistically not only when they (1) ban or mandate the use or purchase of particular products, or (2) structure choice contexts to “nudge” people to make certain choices, but also in the ways they design welfare or anti-poverty programs (Mead 1997; White 2003; Anderson 2004; Schubert and Slater 2006; Fiszbein and Schady 2009; Zwolinski 2014; Molander and Torsvik 2015; MacKay Forthcoming). The placement of conditions on access to benefits, these scholars argue, aims to direct citizens to lead ‘traditional bourgeois lives;’ and the provision of in-kind goods and services rather than cash expresses the judgment that recipients cannot be trusted to use cash transfers wisely to promote their interests. Matt Zwolinski (2014) puts the point nicely:

The conditional welfare state is not only invasive, it is heavily *paternalistic*. Restrictions on eligibility are imposed in order to encourage welfare recipients to live their lives in a way

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that the state thinks is good for them: don't have kids out of wedlock, don't do drugs, and get (or stay) married. And benefits are often given in-kind rather than in cash precisely because the state doesn't trust welfare recipients to make what it regards as wise choices about how to spend their money.

While these scholars focus on the ways in which governments aim to promote *adult recipients'* wellbeing by designing welfare policies through the use of conditions and other interventions, governments also use a similar set of measures to improve the wellbeing of recipients' *children*. That is, governments also design welfare or anti-poverty policies in ways that influence parents to make decisions that are in *their children's* best interests. For example, Brazil's *Bolsa Família* cash transfer program places a number of conditions on low-income parents' receipt of cash transfers that aim to incentivize them to make decisions that promote their children's wellbeing – e.g. enrolling them in school and ensuring they receive regular health and nutrition check-ups. Similarly, in the U.S., the *Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children* (WIC) provides food assistance to pregnant and postpartum women, infants, and young children, but places significant restrictions on the food parents may purchase with WIC benefits.

In this paper, I explore this phenomenon, providing an ethical evaluation of the ways in which governments target parents' decision-making in the context of anti-poverty policies. I refer to such policies as examples of *parent-targeted paternalism*, by which I mean laws and policies that aim to promote children's wellbeing by targeting the decision-making of their parents. My aim is to identify the conditions under which the use of such interventions in the context of anti-poverty policies is on balance permissible, and when it is not.

In part 1, I provide a definition of parent-targeted paternalism and provide an example of a policy that satisfies it. In part 2, I investigate whether parent-targeted paternalism is ever pro tanto wrong, arguing that it is when directed at parents who meet a threshold of parental competency. In part 3, I explore the factors that affect the degree of pro tanto wrongness of paternalistic anti-poverty policies targeting parents. In part 4, I provide an account of the conditions under which such policies are on balance permissible, and when they are not. Finally, in part 5, I illustrate the plausibility and usefulness of my framework by considering a case.

1 Parent-Targeted Paternalism

One might question the basic premise of my paper on the grounds that the concept of parent-targeted paternalism (PTP), at least with respect to anti-poverty policies, is likely to be empty. After all, paternalistic laws and policies are traditionally understood to involve interference with people's liberty, and anti-poverty policies, at least on prominent understandings, do not have a prohibitive or restrictive

structure. For example, according to Gerald Dworkin's (1972, 2017) influential understanding of paternalism,

X acts paternalistically towards Y by doing (omitting) Z if and only if:

1. Z (or its omission) interferes with the liberty or autonomy of Y.
2. X does so without the consent of Y.
3. X does so only because X believes Z will improve the welfare of Y (where this includes preventing his welfare from diminishing), or in some way promote the interests, values, or good of Y.¹

Anti-poverty policies don't seem to satisfy (1) since they *provide* people with goods and services – e.g. cash, food, health insurance, housing assistance, etc. – rather than restrict their choices.

If interference with liberty is understood to be a necessary condition of paternalism, PTP is likely to be an empty box, at least in the context of anti-poverty policies. However, a number of scholars have persuasively argued that interference with liberty is not a necessary condition of paternalism. First, some scholars argue that it is enough that an action or policy is *motivated* by a negative judgment about people's decision-making abilities to count as paternalistic (Shiffrin 2000, 218; Quong 2011, 80; Groll 2012, 718; Tsai 2014, 86–87; Le Grand and New 2015, 22–23; Cholbi 2017, 127). For example, suppose my friend asks for a \$5000 loan to start a small business. My financial position is such that the loan is inconsequential to me, but I refuse because I believe my friend will make a mess of the opportunity and so be worse off as a result. Scholars committed to the motivational view of paternalism hold that my action is paternalistic since it aims to promote my friend's wellbeing and is motivated by a negative judgment about his decision-making abilities. In virtue of my motivation, I am treating my friend like a child who cannot be trusted to manage his affairs, and whose will, at least with respect to the decision at hand, should be replaced by my own.

Still others argue that it is enough that an action or law express a negative judgment about people's self-governance abilities to count as paternalistic. Nicholas Cornell (2015, 1316), a proponent of this view, motivates it with the example of a father who buys a business suit for his daughter, thinking she will enjoy it. However, the daughter has no need for such a suit, and does not aspire to have a life in which she would have need for such a suit. Cornell (2015, 1312) argues that the father's action is paternalistic since, regardless of its motivation, it expresses a negative judgment about his daughter's ability to make good life choices.

Scholars committed to either the motivation-based or expressivist account of paternalism therefore reject (1), replacing it with something like (1*):

Z's implementation is motivated by or expresses a negative judgment about Y's decision-making abilities – i.e. practical reasoning, emotional management, and willpower.

¹A number of scholars offer competing conceptions of paternalism, including Bernard Gert and Charles M. Culver (1976, 49–50), Dan Brock (1983, 238), Seanna Shiffrin (2000, 218), and Jonathan Quong (2011, 80).

Although many anti-poverty policies will not satisfy (1), they may satisfy (1*). The fact that many parent-targeted anti-poverty policies do not restrict people's liberty is not therefore a reason to think that the category of PTP anti-poverty policies is an empty one.

However, there is still the remaining problem that parent-targeted anti-poverty policies do not satisfy (3). While many such policies are motivated by or express a negative judgment about parents' decision-making abilities, such policies do not aim to promote parents' good or wellbeing but instead the good or wellbeing of their children.

Fortunately, Seanna Shiffrin (2000, 217–219), a prominent proponent of the motivational view, argues that (3) should be revised to accommodate cases like this. She claims that a park ranger who does not permit a mountain climber to tackle a risky climbing route due to concern for the climber's spouse, not the climber, still acts paternalistically (Shiffrin 2000, 217–218). The key point here, she argues, is that the park ranger's action is motivated by a negative judgment regarding the climber's decision-making abilities, and so still treats the climber as a child who cannot be trusted to govern her life on her own. Similarly, in the case of WIC, the U.S. government arguably treats parents as lacking the decision-making abilities to make nutritious food choices for their infants or young children.

Shiffrin has a compelling point here. If the defining feature of paternalism is one agent's treatment of another as a child – i.e. as an agent whose decision-making abilities are deficient in some respect – then it follows that agents act paternalistically whenever they treat others in this way, regardless of the aim of their action. After all, parents do not only direct the actions of their children so as to promote their wellbeing, but also to ensure that their children treat others appropriately.

Still, some scholars suggest that Shiffrin's rejection of (3) stretches the concept of paternalism too far. Indeed, although I find Shiffrin's line of argument largely persuasive, I think there are methodological reasons against expanding the concept of paternalism in the direction Shiffrin suggests. Historically, the concept of paternalism has identified a type of intervention that concerns a person's self-regarding actions and so has a high justificatory burden. As such, it has served a valuable methodological function in identifying a set of laws and policies that are particularly controversial and often hard to justify. By contrast, laws and policies that force people to treat others appropriately – e.g. respect their rights – are much easier to justify.

On the one hand therefore, Shiffrin's proposed revision is reasonable and would allow us to identify many parent-targeted anti-poverty policies as examples of PTP. On the other hand, Shiffrin's proposed revision risks expanding the concept of paternalism too far.

My solution to this set of considerations is to introduce a stand-alone conception of parent-targeted paternalism. This conception revises the traditional definition of paternalism in accordance with the recommendations of Shiffrin and other proponents of motivational or expressivist conceptions of paternalism.

Parent-Targeted Paternalism: Government A acts paternalistically towards parent B by implementing law or policy C if and only if:

- I. C aims to improve the good or wellbeing of B's children;
- II. C is implemented without B's consent; and,

III. A's implementation of C is motivated by and/or expresses a negative judgment about B's decision-making abilities in the parental sphere.

According to this definition, PTP policies aim to improve the wellbeing of children by targeting the decision-making of their parents; and are motivated by and/or express a negative judgment about parents' decision-making abilities. The WIC program in the U.S. would appear to satisfy these conditions since it places significant restrictions on the food parents may purchase with WIC benefits with the aim of promoting their children's health. This policy's use of food restrictions also expresses – and is likely also motivated by – a negative judgment regarding parents' decision-making abilities regarding nutrition.

By presenting this concept of PTP as a 'stand-alone' concept, I mean to separate it from ongoing debates concerning the nature of paternalism, debates that I cannot hope to resolve here. The concept is 'stand-alone' to the extent that it is not understood to be a species of some broader conception of paternalism. This solution, I think, gives adequate weight to the above-mentioned considerations. On the one hand, it recognizes the theoretical reasons I cite above for extending the concept of paternalism in the direction that Shiffrin suggests. On the other hand, it expands the concept in a limited and principled way. The extension is limited, since it only concerns the state's laws and policies governing how parents treat their children. The extension is principled since it only extends the concept to govern an additional sphere of action in which people are granted a good deal of freedom and discretion. Although parental decisions are not self-regarding, parents are granted a wide range of discretion regarding the decisions they must make with respect to their children and how they are raised. It is thus common to refer to both self-regarding choices and parental decision-making as belonging to the 'private sphere.' Parent-targeted laws and policies, like laws and policies governing self-regarding decisions, are thus also typically understood to face a high justificatory burden.

My definition of PTP does not take a position on the debate amongst motivational and expressivist paternalists. I don't deny that this debate is an important one, however I simply don't think it is necessary to resolve it for the purposes of identifying policies that satisfy PTP. The reason is that with respect to laws and policies (rather than the actions of individuals), there is likely to be a strong overlap between the *motivations* for a particular policy, and the judgments that it expresses. As Cornell (2015, 1318–1319) himself recognizes, to identify the judgment that a particular law or policy *expresses*, we need to examine the possible reasons legislators may have had for enacting it. That is, we need to look to the *motivations* of legislators.

I also recognize that there is a further question here regarding the conditions under which a law or policy can be said to be motivated by a particular judgment. The puzzle is that law and policies are often motivated by any number of considerations. Fully addressing this question is beyond the scope of this paper. However, I do develop an account elsewhere (MacKay [Forthcoming](#)). In brief, I suggest that for individual legislators and policymakers, a law or policy counts as paternalistic if a negative judgment about people's self-governance abilities makes a significant and decisive contribution to their support for the law or policy. For legislative bodies, a

law or policy counts as paternalistic if such a judgment makes a significant contribution to a significant number of legislators' support for it, and if the law or policy would not pass absent this judgment.

Regarding condition (II), I suggest that people consent to a law or policy when they authorize it, that is, voluntarily endorse it by means of some explicit act. People authorize a law or policy, I suggest, when they vote in favor of it in a referendum, or, vote for a political representative explicitly promising to work to implement it if elected. This way of understanding consent, I suggest, is the political equivalent of the notion of valid consent that is used in interpersonal settings. In the latter, after all, *valid consent* is widely understood to involve an explicit act of authorization – i.e. giving a token of consent (Faden and Beauchamp 1986, 274–275).

Many state policies would no doubt satisfy the above definition of PTP. However, our focus here is anti-poverty policies, by which I shall understand policies and programs that aim to raise people's standard of living or quality of life above some poverty threshold. Anti-poverty policies may therefore provide impoverished people with cash transfers, housing, health care, food vouchers, job training, and education. Importantly for our purposes, anti-poverty policies need not be limited to raising people's standard of living or quality of life above some poverty threshold in the short term, but also in the long term. Anti-poverty policies can therefore include educational interventions aimed at low-income children which aim to ensure that they have the human capital necessary to be successful in the labor market as adults.

Let me now turn to an example of an anti-poverty policy that arguably satisfies the definition of PTP: Brazil's *Bolsa Família Program*. *Bolsa Família* is a *conditional* cash transfer program, that is, a policy that provides individuals or households with a cash transfer that is conditional on their satisfaction of certain requirements – e.g. school attendance. *Unconditional* cash transfer programs, by contrast, simply provide low-income individuals or households with a cash transfer. There is currently a lively debate about whether unconditional or conditional cash transfers are more effective in realizing certain outcomes. However, I hope to show that there is also an important question regarding the ethics of conditional cash transfers, given that the imposition of conditions would seem to be motivated by a negative judgment about recipients' ability to use an *unconditional* cash transfer wisely.

Bolsa Família was created in 2003 by the first Lula administration through the merger of four pre-existing cash transfer programs (Lindert et al. 2007, 6). The objectives of the program include: (1) alleviating current poverty and income inequality; and (2) breaking the inter-generational transmission of poverty (Lindert et al. 2007, 15). To achieve (1), *Bolsa Família* offers *extremely poor* families a base unconditional cash transfer (Lindert et al. 2007, 16). To achieve (1) and (2), it offers *extremely poor* and *moderately poor* families cash transfers that are variable on the number of children in the family and whether the mother is pregnant or breastfeeding; and conditional on family members satisfying the following requirements (Lindert et al. 2007, 16–17):

1. For all children ages 0–7:
 - (a) Compliance with vaccine schedules; and
 - (b) Regular health check-ups and growth monitoring.
2. For all children ages 6–15:
 - (a) Enrollment in school; and
 - (b) 85% minimum daily school attendance.
3. For all women pregnant or lactating:
 - (a) Pre-natal check-ups;
 - (b) Post-natal check-ups; and
 - (c) Participation in locally-offered educational health and nutrition seminars (Lindert et al. 2007, 17–18).

The aim of these conditionalities is to promote investments in human capital. Although the assistance unit is the family, Bolsa Família requires that payments be made preferentially to female rather than male heads of the family on the grounds that female heads are more likely to invest additional income into the health, education, and welfare of the family (Lindert et al. 2007, 17).

Bolsa Família is an example of an anti-poverty policy that likely satisfies PTP. Bolsa Família satisfies (II) since not all parental recipients of the program publicly authorized it. One might argue here that recipients of this program authorize it simply by enrolling in it. The problem with this suggestion is that acceptance of a program's benefits is not sufficient for authorization. In the context of anti-poverty policies in particular, people may enroll in them not because they think the policy is a good one and so deserving of implementation, but because they are desperate for the benefits. For example, participants of Bolsa Família may be in urgent need of the cash transfer, but object to the imposition of conditionalities on them.

Whether Bolsa Família satisfies (III) depends on legislators' reasons for implementing it, since, as I note above, a policy's motivation and the message it expresses is ultimately a function of policymakers' reasons for implementing it. I shall not perform the empirical legwork necessary to conclusively identify these reasons. However, on one highly plausible understanding of the justification for the conditionalities of Bolsa Família, the program would seem to satisfy (III). On this understanding, the conditionalities are intended to *incentivize* decision-makers to make certain choices. If legislators think that family heads will not, for example, vaccinate their children even if they have the resources to do so, then they may think that family heads will vaccinate their children if doing so promises a cash transfer. If the justification for Bolsa Família's use of conditionalities is of this nature, then Bolsa Família clearly satisfies (III) and so counts as an example of PTP. In this case, the design of Bolsa Família as a *conditional* cash transfer program is justified by a negative judgment about at least some recipients' ability to make good decisions regarding the welfare of their children. If legislators were not relying on this judgment then it would make sense to design Bolsa Família as an *unconditional* cash transfer.

2 Is PTP Pro Tanto Wrong?

For scholars who adopt the traditional conception of paternalism as liberty-limiting action aimed at improving the wellbeing of its target, paternalism is wrong principally because it is liberty-limiting. However, those who adopt motivational or expressivist conceptions of paternalism also think paternalism is pro tanto wrong, even though policies need not be liberty-limiting to be paternalistic. For these scholars, paternalistic policies are morally objectionable because they involve government treating competent adults as children, that is, as agents who cannot be trusted to govern their own lives. More specifically, paternalistic policies are disrespectful of people considered as equal autonomous agents. Shiffrin (2000, 220) puts the point this way:

Even if no distinct autonomy right is violated, the paternalist's attitude shows significant disrespect for those core capacities or powers of the agent that underwrite and characterize his autonomous agency...Those who value equality and autonomy have special reason to resist paternalism toward competent adults.

Cornell (2015, 1314–1315) explains the wrong of paternalistic actions in much the same way:

Paternalistic actions imply that the actor knows better than the subject with regard to a matter within the subject's sphere of control, and paternalistic actions are impermissible insofar as this expression is offensive. That is, paternalism is impermissible to the extent that it expresses something insulting.²

Shiffrin and Cornell's accounts of the wrongness of paternalism, in my view, are largely correct. They are also relevant to the question of the wrongness of PTP for people exercise their autonomous powers not only when they make self-regarding choices, but also when they decide how to treat others, including their children. Policies directed at people's other-regarding actions can also therefore be disrespectful of them qua equal autonomous agents, just like policies directed at their self-regarding actions. As I note above, parents not only direct their children to act in certain ways for their own good, but also for the good of others – e.g. their siblings.

PTP policies are also therefore pro tanto wrong when and because they are disrespectful of people considered as equal autonomous agents. To put the point in more precise terms, governments that target parents with paternalistic policies disrespect them qua *autonomous* agents, since such policies express the judgment that they lack the self-governance capabilities necessary to make good decisions regarding the wellbeing of their children; and they also disrespect parents qua *equal* autonomous agents since these policies express the claim that the judgment of those in government regarding their children's wellbeing is superior to that of parents targeted by the policy. To capture these two distinct ways in which paternalistic policies fail to respect people qua equal autonomous agents, Jonathan Quong suggests that such policies involve both a

²Quong (2011, 100–106) and Cholbi (2017, 128) defend similar accounts.

comparative and *non-comparative* wrong. The comparative wrong lies in the paternalist's treatment of their target as having an inferior status, thus failing to accord them equal status (Quong 2011, 101). The non-comparative wrong lies in the paternalist's treatment of their target as a child, that is, as lacking the self-governance abilities to safeguard their wellbeing (Quong 2011, 101).³ While PTP policies wrong their targets in both these ways, I argue below that some policies may also exacerbate the comparative wrong by singling out certain populations.

It does not follow from this however that all policies that satisfy the conditions of PTP are unjust. As Shiffrin (2000, 220) notes, paternalistic actions or policies are only disrespectful when directed at competent adults. Some policies may satisfy condition (III) of PTP, namely, they may be motivated by or expresses a negative judgment about B's decision-making abilities in the parental sphere; however, when this negative judgment is warranted, the policies in question are not disrespectful. That is, when a policy satisfies (III) but concerns some sphere of parental decision-making with respect to which the parents targeted by the policy lack competency, then the policy is not *pro tanto* wrong.

I shall use the term *soft* PTP to refer to policies that satisfy the conditions of PTP, but that target parents whose decision-making capacity with respect to the sphere of policy in question is sufficiently impaired to count as incompetent. Hard PTP, by contrast, refers to PTP policies that target parents whose decision-making capacity with respect to the sphere of policy in question is not sufficiently impaired to count as incompetent. Impairments may be due to a lack of information, deficiencies in cognitive abilities or abilities to understand and/or reason about central features of the decision in question, or deficiencies in abilities to carry out a chosen plan of action. To count as soft PTP, all parents targeted by the policy must lack capacity to make the decision or decisions in question. To count as hard PTP, all parents targeted by the policy must have capacity to make the decision or decisions in question. This means that the vast majority of policies will count as neither soft nor hard PTP, but rather as mixed policies.

3 Degrees of Wrongness

Policies that satisfy the conditions of PTP and are non-soft – i.e. apply to at least some competent parents – are therefore *pro tanto* wrong. In this part of the paper, I explore the principal factors that affect such policies' *degree* of wrongness. Policies may be more or less wrong for a variety of reasons and so the following discussion is not intended to be exhaustive. I focus here on the factors that concern the distinctive wrong these policies involve qua examples of PTP.

This investigation matters since a policy that is *pro tanto* wrong may be on balance permissible if the wrong in question is outweighed by competing considerations – e.g. welfare gains to the children targeted by the policy. If policymakers are

³Cholbi (2017, 128) concurs with Quong on this point.

to make accurate judgments regarding the on-balance permissibility of particular policies, they therefore need some principled way of determining exactly how pro tanto wrong these policies are.

I first discuss factors that affect a policy's wrongness along what I call the *horizontal* dimension, that is, factors that affect the *number* of people wronged by a policy. I then discuss factors along the vertical dimension, that is, factors that affect the *intensity* of the wrong committed against those persons wronged by the policy. The underlying idea here is that the wrongness of a policy depends on the (1) the number of people who are wronged by it; and (2) the intensity of the wrong that is committed against them.

3.1 *The Horizontal Dimension*

There are two chief factors affecting the wrongness of a policy that satisfies the conditions of PTP. The first is the number of people targeted by the policy who are competent parents. Since soft PTP is permissible, people targeted by a PTP policy are only wronged if they are competent parents. A policy is more wrong, therefore, if it targets more competent parents than less.

The second factor along the horizontal dimension is the number of parents who have *authorized* the policy. For parents who authorize a policy, it no longer satisfies the conditions of PTP, and so is not wrong for that reason. A policy's wrongness therefore also depends on the number of parents who have authorized the policy.

3.2 *The Vertical Dimension*

The above two factors identify the people who are wronged by a PTP policy: competent parents who did not authorize it. Factors along the vertical dimension affect the intensity of the wrong that a PTP policy commits against these parents.

First, because non-soft PTP policies are wrong because they are disrespectful of competent parents, it is reasonable to think that these policies' degree of wrongness depends on competent parents' decision-making capacity. Competency, as I am using the term here, is a threshold concept such that parents either possess decision-making abilities that are sufficient for competency or not. However, parents who satisfy the conditions of competency, may still have higher or lower decision-making abilities regarding certain types of decisions. It is more disrespectful of competent parents, in my view, to enact PTP policies that target a sphere of action with respect to which parents have high degrees of decision-making capacity, than to enact PTP policies that target a sphere of action with respect to which parents – though competent – have low degrees of decision-making capacity. A PTP policy's pro tanto

wrongness thus also depends on the decision-making capacity of the competent parents it targets.

The second factor affecting the pro tanto wrongness of PTP policies is whether the policies in question are examples of *means* paternalism or *ends* paternalism. Means PTP policies aim to influence their targets to take up those means that will enable them to better realize their chosen values and goals. Ends PTP policies, by contrast, aim to influence their targets to take up means in pursuit of goals and values that they do not share. Ends PTP is more disrespectful of people qua equal autonomous agents since the choice of ends is more important than the choice of means (Conly 2013, 43; Cholbi 2017, 137–141, 149–150). The choice of ends is a value-laden choice, and so, as Cholbi (2017, 137–141, 149–150) argues, more closely tied to people's practical identity. The choice of means, by contrast, is a matter of instrumental rationality. The wrongness of PTP policies therefore also depends on whether it is an example of means paternalism or ends paternalism.

One important consideration to note here is that for a PTP policy to count as means paternalism, it is not sufficient for the parents in question to share the goal or end the policy is directing them to pursue. The reason for this is that some PTP policies may not only express the judgment that a particular goal is worth pursuing, but also express a judgment about the relative value of that goal compared to others – a judgment that the targeted parents may not share. For example, consider a policy that nudges low-income parents to enroll their children in a free after-school reading program that has the aim of increasing the literacy scores of low-income students. All of the parents may share the goal of increasing their children's literacy scores, however the policy may still count as an example of ends paternalism for some of them if they judge that this outcome is less valuable than other activities that their children could be pursuing after school – e.g. taking care of younger children, interacting with elderly family members, or simply playing with their friends. For these parents, the policy in question would count as an example of ends paternalism since the policy expresses a judgment regarding the relative value of the end in question that the parents do not share.

The pro tanto wrongness of a PTP policy depends third on the degree to which it singles out particular populations of parents, for example, groups of parents defined by socio-economic class, race, ethnicity, or religion. By targeting parents belonging to a particular population, a non-soft PTP policy singles these parents out as being deficient in terms of their capacities for decision-making regarding their children. In doing so, such policies express the judgment that the decision-making of those parents targeted by the policy is deficient compared to that of policymakers, but also deficient compared to that of their fellow citizens. As such, these policies exacerbate the comparative wrong of PTP policies and so seriously undermine these parents' status as equal autonomous agents. Cornell (2015, 1327) puts the point nicely:

When a democratic government enacts a general paternalistic policy – for example, seatbelt laws – then at least all citizens are treated the same. And if the government generally respects the autonomy of its citizens, then one or another discrete exceptions may be seen

as simply a recognition of certain limited failings that we all have. But when a government policy singles out a certain group for regulation, then the risk of expressing an objectionable lack of respect is significantly higher. This is especially true when the group is already disadvantaged or marginalized.

The pro tanto wrongness of non-soft PTP policies is therefore also dependent on the degree to which they single out particular populations of parents.

The pro tanto wrongness of a non-soft PTP policy depends fourth on the degree to which those parents targeted by the policy support it. To count as a PTP policy, parents targeted by the policy must not have authorized it. However, even if parents have not authorized the policy, for example, by voting for it in the context of a referendum, they may nonetheless support it. I suggest that a non-soft PTP policy is less wrong if it is strongly supported by the parents who are targeted by it, than if it is only weakly supported or strongly opposed. The underlying idea here is that a policy that is strongly supported by those subject to it is more respectful of them qua equal autonomous agents than one that is strongly opposed.

Finally, the pro tanto wrongness of PTP policies also depends on the degree to which they *infringe* people's autonomy rights, that is, interfere with people's exercise of their autonomy within the spheres in which they are entitled to make choices. Since autonomy is the capacity for rational self-governance, the wrongness of PTP policies depends on the degree to which they *control* people's choices through non-rational means. PTP policies may do so through the use of nudges, coercion, or negative incentives. Although it may seem obvious that coercive PTP policies are worse in this respect than PTP policies that use nudges, I suggest that the pro tanto wrongness of these policies in fact depends on the *effectiveness* of the form of non-rational influence in terms of its control over people's choice. A highly effective nudge is thus worse than a weak nudge; but may also be worse than the use of a small sanction having very little effect on people's choices. Importantly, PTP policies are wrong in this respect only when they employ forms of *non-rational* influence. The provision of reasons and information does not infringe people's autonomy since doing so engages – rather than bypasses – people's capacity for rational action.

A non-soft PTP policy's degree of pro tanto wrongness therefore depends on a number of factors. Along the horizontal dimension, it depends on (1) the number of competent parents targeted by the policy; and (2) the number of parents who did not authorize the policy. Along the vertical dimension, it depends on (1) the decision-making capacity of the targeted parents; (2) whether the policy is ends paternalism or means paternalism; (3) the degree of singling-out; (4) whether the target population supports or opposes the policy; and (5) the degree to which the policy infringes parents' autonomy. In the next part of the paper, I investigate the conditions under which non-soft PTP policies, though pro tanto wrong, may nonetheless be on balance permissible.

Before doing so however, it is worth noting that with respect to the factors along the vertical dimension, it would be ideal if one could develop a systematic way to weigh the different factors for the purposes of determining the overall pro tanto wrongness of particular policies. This could be important in cases where a policy scores high on one factor but low on the others. I'm skeptical that such a system of

weights can be developed and, unfortunately, do not have the space to fully explore this possibility here. In any case, I hope this framework will be helpful for policy-makers in arriving at intuitive judgments regarding the degree of pro tanto wrongness of a PTP policy.

4 Competing Considerations and on Balance Permissibility

Non-soft PTP policies are pro tanto wrong; however, this does not mean that they are wrong on balance. Such policies may be permissible if the pro tanto wrong in question is outweighed by competing considerations (Shafer-Landau 2005; De Marneffe 2006, 81–89; Scoccia 2008, 363–374; Le Grand and New 2015, 147–151; Cholbi 2017, 125–126).

What are these competing considerations? I suggest that there are two. The first is the PTP policy's expected impact on the wellbeing of the children subject to it. PTP policies target the decision-making of parents with the goal of improving the present and future wellbeing of their children. In the case of anti-poverty policies, the goal is to ensure that children are not raised in conditions of poverty and/or develop the human capital necessary to escape poverty as adults. The goals of PTP policies, particularly those of anti-poverty PTP policies, are thus morally weighty.

The second competing consideration, I suggest, concerns the moral status of the parental decisions that PTP policies aim to influence. More specifically, PTP policies aim to influence parents to treat their children in certain ways, and the treatment in question may be: (1) the subject of a perfect duty; (2) the subject of an imperfect duty; or (3) discretionary.

By (1), I mean specific actions that parents have a duty to perform or refrain from performing. Examples of such actions include the satisfaction of a child's basic needs, including needs regarding food, shelter, clothing, physical safety, and health care; the provision of an education; and providing a physically safe and emotionally supportive home.

By (2), I mean actions that are effective ways by which parents may realize the ends that they have a duty to set and pursue. Examples of such ends may include certain threshold outcomes regarding their child's health, wellbeing, education, and opportunity. Examples of actions that are effective means to the realization of such ends (and that could also be the subject of PTP policies) may include: the purchasing of 'healthy' foods; enrollment of children in certain educational or recreational programs; visitation of certain educational institutions such as museums, public parks, or science centers; or moving to a low-poverty neighborhood.

By (3), I mean actions that satisfy the definitions of neither (1) nor (2). Such actions are discretionary in the sense that parents deserve neither moral praise nor moral condemnation for performing them. Examples of (3) may therefore include

buying children certain styles of clothing rather than others; or cooking certain types of cuisines in the home rather than others.⁴

I suggest that under certain conditions, the pro tanto wrongness of PTP policies can be outweighed by these two competing considerations, either on their own or working together. For example, suppose that the pro tanto wrongness of a PTP policy is quite low. Suppose further that it promises to significantly improve the wellbeing of those children subject to it, and that the parental treatment targeted by the policy is the subject of a perfect obligation. Although the PTP policy is pro tanto wrong to some extent, it is reasonable to think that it is on balance permissible since it (1) significantly improves children's wellbeing; and (2) prevents parents from wronging their children.

As an example of a policy that satisfies these conditions, consider the policy of making childhood measles vaccinations the default in physicians' offices. Under this policy, physicians would not ask parents if they would like their children to receive the measles vaccine, but would rather treat vaccination as the default, only giving parents the chance to opt-out. That is, physicians would say in the context of clinical visit: "We're going to go ahead now and give the measles vaccination to your child." Such a policy is an example of non-soft PTP since it presumes that parents require a 'nudge' to make the appropriate choice for their child. However, it is arguably justifiable since (1) the pro tanto wrong in question, based on the factors identified above, is quite small; (2) parents arguably have a perfect obligation to ensure their children receive the measles vaccine; and (3) assuming the 'nudge' is effective, the policy will significantly promote their children's wellbeing.

I recognize that it will be difficult to judge whether a particular PTP policy is on balance permissible. Doing so will require careful consideration of complex normative and empirical considerations. My hope however, is that the normative framework I outline above will help policy makers make such judgments in a sound fashion.

5 A Case

I turn now to consider the permissibility of a particular anti-poverty policy, a proposed revision to the Section 8 housing voucher program that is administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The Section 8 program is the federal government's principal program for helping low-income Americans afford adequate housing in the private market. Recipients receive housing vouchers which they may use to rent any housing that meets the requirements of the program. My aim here is not to render a decisive judgment regarding the permissibility of the proposed policy; but is limited to illustrating how policy makers might use the normative framework I develop above to arrive at such a judgment.

⁴Joseph Millum (2018, 46–77, 107–127) offers a promising account of the rights and responsibilities of parents.

From 1994 to 1998, HUD conducted the “Moving to Opportunity Study,” a randomized controlled trial evaluating an experimental housing voucher in five large American cities (Chetty et al. 2016, 856). 4604 families were randomly assigned to one of three interventions. The first intervention was an experimental housing voucher that required families to move to a census tract with a poverty rate of less than 10%. The second intervention was a Section 8 voucher that offered families a standard subsidized housing voucher with no such requirements. The third intervention was no voucher, though families continued to have access to public housing (Chetty et al. 2016, 860).

A number of studies published from 2001 to 2013 found that adults who received the experimental voucher showed improvements in mental health, physical health, and subjective wellbeing (Katz et al. 2001; Kling et al. 2007; Clampet-Lundquist and Massey 2008; Ludwig et al. 2013). Families who received this voucher were also safer. However, these studies also found no significant impact on the earning and employment rates of adults and older youth. Raj Chetty et al. recently revisited the Moving to Opportunity data, examining the long-term impacts on children who were young when their families moved to low-poverty neighborhoods. Chetty et al. (2016, 857) find that children who were younger than 13 at random assignment had incomes that were \$1624 higher on average than those in the control group in their mid-twenties; and were also more likely to attend college, attend better colleges, live in a low-poverty neighborhood as an adult, and not be a single parent (for females). Since only 48% of families assigned to the experimental voucher actually took it up, Chetty et al. (2016, 857) estimate that those children whose families used the voucher had incomes that were on average \$3477 higher than children in the control group. Children younger than 13 whose families received the section 8 housing voucher experienced outcomes in between those receiving the experimental voucher and those in the control group (Chetty et al. 2016, 857). Chetty et al. (2016, 858) also found that for children who were 13 or older at random assignment, there was no statistically significant difference regarding economic outcomes across the three interventions. Since families receiving the section 8 housing voucher were free to move to a low-poverty neighborhood, Chetty et al. (2016, 857–858) suggest that the experimental voucher’s requirement that families move to low-poverty neighborhoods increases the positive impact of housing vouchers on young children’s economic prospects.

Would it be on balance permissible for HUD, on the basis of this evidence, to revise the existing Section 8 housing voucher such that recipient families with children younger than 13 would be required to move to low-poverty neighborhoods – i.e. to make the voucher usable only in such neighborhoods? Something like this proposal is currently a live option in the U.S. H.R. 5793, the Housing Choice Voucher Mobility Demonstration Act of 2018, which would authorize the Secretary of HUD “to carry out a housing choice voucher mobility demonstration to encourage families receiving such voucher assistance to move to lower-poverty areas and expand access to opportunity areas,” has passed the House of Representatives and is currently under consideration in the Senate (U.S. Congress 2018). While this Act

does not require the Secretary of HUD to implement the above-mentioned policy as a demonstration project, it would authorize them to do so.

To determine if such a policy is on balance permissible, it is helpful to first identify the degree to which it is pro tanto wrong, if it is pro tanto wrong at all. Consider first that this policy is clearly an example of PTP. Recall the definition:

Parent-Targeted Paternalism: Government A acts paternalistically towards parent B by implementing law or policy C if and only if:

- I. C aims to improve the good or wellbeing of B's children;
- II. C is implemented without B's consent; and,
- III. A's implementation of C is motivated by and/or expresses a negative judgment about B's decision-making abilities in the parental sphere.

Given the stated aims of the policy, it clearly satisfies (I). The policy satisfies (II) since it would be implemented without the consent of Section 8 recipients; and it satisfies (III) since it is motivated by a negative judgment regarding parents' decision-making capacities regarding their children's economic prospects. This is so since there would be no need to revise the existing Section 8 voucher if parents could be expected to move to a low-poverty neighborhood absent a requirement that they do so. The policy is also an example of non-soft PTP since the vast majority of parents targeted by it are likely to count as competent to make decisions regarding where they and their children live. As such, the policy would be pro tanto wrong.

How pro tanto wrong is it? To answer this question, we need to consider the factors along the vertical dimension: (1) parents' average decision-making capacity regarding housing choices; (2) whether the policy is means paternalism or ends paternalism; (3) the degree of singling-out; (4) the degree to which the targeted population opposes the policy; and (5) the degree to which the policy infringes parents' autonomy.

With respect to (1), determining the decision-making capacity of parents targeted by the policy is an empirical endeavor. Policy makers could determine this through surveys that assess targeted parent's knowledge regarding neighborhood effects on their children's wellbeing and economic prospects. My suspicion is that low-income parents in the U.S. are fairly knowledgeable about these effects. Along this dimension therefore, the pro tanto wrongness of the policy is likely to be high.

Consider (2). Is the proposed policy an example of means paternalism or ends paternalism? I don't doubt that all parents targeted by the policy share its goal of improving their children's economic prospects. However, the policy presupposes that this should be parents' overriding goal when deciding where to live, and I'm deeply skeptical that all parents agree with this judgment of the relative value of this goal. Parents targeted by the policy likely have a number of goals in mind when deciding where to live, and for many of them, these other goals may be as valuable or more valuable than improving the economic prospects of their children. For example, parents may wish to live close to family and friends, parents may wish to live closer to their jobs, and/or parents may wish to live a neighborhood where they 'feel at home' – i.e. where people of their racial, ethnic, or socio-economic background are not the minority. In short, when it comes to deciding

where to live, parents must make a number of trade-offs regarding their own interests and values and the interests of their children. For the vast majority of parents therefore, the proposed policy is likely to be an example of ends paternalism.

With respect to (3), the proposed policy is also likely to single-out low-income parents to a high degree. To qualify for Section 8 housing vouchers, families must meet a low-income threshold. As such, the proposed policy only targets low-income Americans and, insofar as it expresses a negative judgment about its targets' decision-making in the parental sphere, makes a negative judgment about these parents in particular. With respect to (3) therefore, the proposed policy is also likely to be pro tanto wrong to a high degree.

What about (4)? Are parents targeted by this policy likely to support it? Answering this question of course requires empirical investigation that is beyond the scope of this paper. However, my guess is that parents are unlikely to support this policy, given that it limits their choices.

Finally, with respect to (5), whether the proposed policy infringes parents' autonomy or not is largely a normative matter. One might argue that the policy does not do so since it is simply an offer that parents are not forced to take up. On this interpretation, HUD is offering low-income parents a highly-restrictive benefit and so is not infringing their autonomy in any way. This is too quick however. If Americans have a right to housing, and if the U.S. government is the object of this right – i.e. has a duty to fulfill it – then it is arguable that the proposed policy is coercive. That is, if low-income Americans have a claim on the U.S. government to provide them with housing assistance, then the proposed policy constitutes a coercive threat rather than an offer. In this case, HUD would be threatening to violate voucher recipients' right to housing – i.e. by denying them assistance – unless they use their assistance in the way HUD would like (Goodin 2004, 297). By analogy, suppose you owe me \$1000, and are only willing to pay me back if I do you a favor. In this case, you are coercing me to perform the favor in question since you are threatening to violate my rights if I do not do so.

Now, one might argue that the fact that Americans have a right to housing does not imply that HUD may not place conditions on recipients' use of housing vouchers. For example, if Americans have a right to housing of a certain quality, HUD may require that recipients use their vouchers in a certain way, for example, to rent housing that is safe etc. However, I think it is a stretch to claim that Americans' right to housing is a right to housing in a low-poverty neighborhood. This would imply that the U.S. government is currently violating the basic rights of Americans living in neighborhoods where the poverty rate is greater than 10%.

Depending on whether Americans possess a right to housing or not, and what the content of this right is, the proposed policy will either be highly pro tanto wrong along dimension (5), or not wrong at all.

Under reasonable assumptions therefore, the policy is likely to score as highly pro tanto wrong on dimensions 1–4. The policy also scores as highly pro tanto wrong along dimension (5) if Americans have a right to housing. For the policy to be on balance permissible therefore, the competing considerations must be significant.

Chetty et al's recent study suggests that the improvements to children's wellbeing are likely to be substantial. If HUD implements the policy, children are more likely to be safer as children, more likely to have higher incomes as adults, more likely to attend college (and a better college), more likely to live in a low-poverty neighborhood as an adult, and more likely to not be a single parent if they are female. While I think it is doubtful that parents have a perfect obligation to move to low-poverty neighborhood given the competing values at stake that I identify above, it is reasonable to think that parents have a duty to set and pursue the goal of improving their child's wellbeing along these dimensions. The policy therefore targets a form of parental treatment that is the subject of an imperfect obligation.

Despite these competing considerations, I am doubtful that the proposed policy is on balance permissible. In my view, the pro tanto wrongness of the policy is such that these competing considerations are simply not sizeable enough. As I note above, I do not intend this to be a definite judgment regarding the permissibility of the policy as much depends on empirical and normative questions that I cannot fully address here; but this judgment strikes me as a reasonable one.

Importantly, the normative framework I have employed here not only helps us determine whether the policy is on balance permissible, but also how the policy may be improved along this dimension. This is important, since the Housing Choice Voucher Mobility Demonstration Act of 2018 leaves open exactly what form demonstration projects should take. On my analysis, while it may be on balance wrong for the HUD to implement demonstration projects that take the above-mentioned form, it may be on balance permissible for HUD to implement projects that are designed differently. For example, one way to reduce the pro tanto wrongness of the policy is to soften the requirement to move to a low-poverty neighborhood, for example, by making use of nudges, information provision, or incentives. The framework I articulate above provides HUD policymakers with the resources they require to devise a demonstration project that would be permissible.

6 Conclusion

Governments often implement policies targeting the decision-making of parents with the aim of improving their children's wellbeing. I have argued in this paper that such policies are best understood as a form of parent-targeted paternalism. Exploring the permissibility of these policies in the context of anti-poverty policy, I have provided policy makers with a normative framework to help determine when such policies are permissible and then they are not. As I have illustrated in my case discussion, determining whether such policies are on balance permissible requires careful normative and empirical analysis.

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Is Poverty Eroding Parental Rights in Britain? The Case of Child Protection in the Early Twenty-First Century



Alicia-Dorothy Mornington and Alexandrine Guyard-Nedelec

Abstract In recent years, the UK has been subjected to much attention concerning a practice that has been dubbed “forced adoption”. An inquiry, launched by the European Parliament Directorate general for internal policies, focused on this question. Its object was to inquire to find out whether the UK was violating Article 8 of the European Convention on the right to family life, with regards to its policies on child adoption. Indeed, Britain is the European champion in terms of numbers of children placed for adoption each year, a majority of whom are subject to a non-consensual adoption, meaning they are forcibly taken into care without parental consent and subsequently freed for plenary adoption. The motive for removing children is that they have been harmed by their parents, or since the Children Act was passed in 1989, that they are likely to suffer harm in the future, whether physical, psychological or emotional. Recent evidence suggests that a majority of children who are forcibly removed from parental care come from a background of poverty. The UK might be described as implementing child protection policies that discriminate against the poor, which could suggest the British state is violating their right to family life.

This chapter argues that poverty *per se* should never constitute the basis for removing children from their parents and seeks to understand the British situation, in order to see how poverty is treated in relation to child welfare in Britain. It starts with examining the historical background of social care in the UK in order to make sense of the situation of adoption without consent, and focusing on the new definition of future harm and risk prevention linked to child protection. Further on, it explores the relationship between austerity and adoption, and examines the existence of a bias against poor parents. It concludes by a philosophical discussion on parental rights.

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1 Introduction

In recent years, the UK has been subjected to much attention concerning a practice that has been dubbed “forced adoption”. An inquiry, launched by the European Parliament Directorate general for internal policies, focused on this question. Its object was to inquire to find out whether the UK was violating Article 8 of the European Convention on the right to family life, with regards to its policies on child adoption. Indeed, Britain is the European champion in terms of numbers of children placed for adoption each year, a majority of whom are subject to a non-consensual adoption, meaning they are forcibly taken into care without parental consent and subsequently freed for adoption. The motive for removing children is that they have been harmed by their parents, or since the Children Act was passed in 1989, that they are likely to suffer harm in the future, whether physical, psychological or emotional. According to the European Parliament, England distinguishes itself from its European counterparts in terms of child protection policies with its comparatively high number of children who are adopted without parental consent – a significant number of children who are removed from their families are placed for plenary adoption (Directorate general for internal policies, European Parliament 2016). In England, from 2011 to 2017, the number of adopted children who had been removed from their families surged from 3100 to 4350, with a peak at 5330 in 2015. This is correlated with the general rise in the number of children in care, at 72,670 in 2017 (53,420 in foster placements, up from 50,560 in 2013) (ibid.).

Even in the case of a miscarriage of justice like the Webster case, where it was proven parents were not harming their children,¹ adoption orders are final and can never be reversed (Guyard-Nedelec and Mornington 2019). In this well-known case, B, who was 2, was taken to hospital in 2003 by his parents, with a swollen ankle. According to the doctors, the fractures revealed by the X-ray were unlikely to be accidental, thus B and his brother and sister were placed with foster parents. After an enquiry and despite constant denial by the parents that they had hurt their child, all three children were freed for adoption without parental consent in 2004 and adopted in 2005 by two separate families. In 2006, after having had another child, the Websters managed to obtain fresh medical evidence showing that their son’s injuries were more likely to be due to iron deficiency or scurvy than to abuse. In 2007, the Court of Appeal decided not to grant them permission to re-open the case, acknowledging that there had been a serious miscarriage of justice but underlining the specific nature of adoption orders.

Recent evidence suggests that a majority of children who are forcibly removed from parental care come from a background of poverty (Webb and Bywaters 2018a, b). The UK might be described as implementing child protection policies

¹ *Webster v. Norfolk CC* [2009].

that discriminate against the poor, which could suggest the British state is violating their right to family life. Indeed, according to Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, every person should have the right to enjoy family life, and therefore in theory should be able to enjoy not having their children removed from their care, except in the most serious cases and always as a last resort. Poverty *per se* should never constitute the basis for removing children from their parents.

This chapter seeks to understand the British situation, in order to see how poverty is treated in relation to child welfare in Britain. It starts with (1) examining the historical background of social care in the UK in order to make sense of the situation of adoption without consent, and focusing on the new definition of future harm and risk prevention linked to child protection. Further on, (2) it explores the relationship between austerity and adoption, and then, (3) envisages the existence of a bias against poor parents. It concludes by (4) examining the issue from a philosophical perspective by asking whether forced adoption constitutes a violation of parental rights.

2 The Shifting Meaning of Harm: Towards Risk Prevention

Since the early 2000s, social workers in the UK have faced increasing pressure to protect children from abusive parents. Two cases came to public attention and caused a national outrage. The first was the case of Victoria Climbié, a girl of 8 who was tortured and murdered by her legal guardians in 2000, despite having come under the scrutiny of various branches of social services. Her guardians had to deal with housing authorities, social services departments, child protection teams, etc., yet none of the professionals reported abuse. Social services were incompetent in detecting the abuse and torture undergone by Climbié, which would ultimately result in her death. It led to an enquiry and the publication of a report by Lord Laming in January 2003 (The Victoria Climbié Inquiry 2003), which reads: “The extent of the failure to protect Victoria was lamentable. Tragically, it required nothing more than basic good practice being put into operation. This never happened” (*Ibid.*). The Climbié case was met with national condemnation from the press and the public and social services vowed such a mismanagement of child protection would never occur again and children suffering abuse would not be let down again by child protection services.

However, in 2007, a similar case occurred. Peter Connelly, known as ‘Baby P’, was killed in Tottenham, after suffering abuse from his mother, her violent partner, and his brother. Although the family was visited more than 60 times over an 8 months period, the 17 months old toddler was tortured all throughout this period and eventually died in the hands of his abusers (Williams 2010). Failures in case management that had caused abuse in the Climbié case to remain undetected until the death of the child were repeated in this new case, creating a fresh scandal concerning the incompetence of child protection services. What could explain social

workers' inability to detect abuse? Was it a problem of competence or perhaps that they had been too understanding of the families' difficulties?

These cases led to much stricter guidelines, motivated by what Greer and McLaughlin call "the politics of outrage" (Greer and McLaughlin 2010), where social services were undergoing "trial by media", facing recurrent hostile outraged editorials by the *Sun*, *Daily Mail* or *London Evening Standard*. Politically the situation appeared untenable – the state could not be seen as wildly incompetent as it had been. Perceived inefficiency of social services caused too much of an embarrassment, as lives were needlessly lost, and the rights of children violated. Former Education Minister Michael Gove declared in 2012: "I firmly believe more children should be taken into care more quickly (...) I want social workers to be more assertive with dysfunctional parents, courts to be less indulgent of poor parents" (Gove 2012). Although he was not referring to the Climbé and Conelly cases, Gove suggested child protection professionals were too lenient in the past towards inadequate and poor parents. As a consequence of these scandals, a 26-week maximum for case management was adopted.² Social workers and family courts have 6 months to launch an enquiry to place a child into care. This forces them to act fast, the laudable goal being to ruthlessly detect harm and remove children from abusive parents as soon as possible.

The problem is that the definition of harm is not as straightforward as it could seem. The Children Act 1989 focused on the "best interests of the child". It holds the state must protect children when they are at risk of physical or emotional abuse. Section 43(1)(a) states, "on the application of a local authority or authorised person for an order to be made under this section with respect to a child, the court may make the order if, but only if, it is satisfied that the applicant has reasonable cause to suspect that the child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm".

This means harm that has not been committed but is deemed likely to happen can be and often is the motive for removing children from their families. Such a shift from actual harm to presumptive harm corresponds to a general change in the justice system away from punishing harm *ex post* towards minimising risk *ex ante* (Beck 1992). In practice, this means some children are identified even before they are born as being at risk of future harm and therefore removed from their parents at birth.³

What is specific to the UK, according to the European Parliament, is what the state does with infants once they are removed from their families – they tend to be placed for adoption. This means once children are removed from their families, even in cases where there is only a suspicion of harm, they are adopted. Adoption orders being irreversible, even in the case of miscarriages of justice as mentioned above, families lose all contact with their children. New parents are under no obligation to provide birthparents with any sort of physical or letter contact (Children and Families Act 2014, pp. 8–9; Neil et al. 2013).

²The 26-week time limit became statutory requirement under sections 14(2) and 32 of the Children and Families Act 2014.

³See for instance *Re P (A Child)* [2013 and 2014] (Pacchieri case), *C.Z. & Others v. Kirklees Council* [2017].

This lack of incentive for post-adoption contact or contact with children in care of local authorities may be explained by the fact that regular contact with birth families is perceived as a risk factor for those children. It may reinforce the angst of separation (Loxterkamp 2009), prevent them from experiencing “the settled kinds of caregiving they need” and “compromise [their] development” (Fostering and Adoption 2014). As we shall see, detection and prevention of risk have become paramount as far as child protection is concerned.

Since the coming into force of the Children Act 1989, British courts can place children into care based on the notion of presumptive harm. Section 31(2)(a) reads that “A court may only make a care order or supervision order if it is satisfied that the child concerned is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm”. Harm is defined as physical, psychological and/or emotional. The goal of focusing on likelihood of future harm is obviously to protect children from harm and prevent abuse whenever possible instead of dealing with its consequences *ex post*. As such, child protection is not unique; it is part of a wider shift in the justice system towards risk prevention, away from the mere acting on harm already committed, as described by Parton (Parton 2014). Media outrage to child abuse scandals described above reinforced the argument behind anticipating crime and not waiting until it is committed.

The challenge then comes down to identifying parents who are likely to harm their children, such as medically identified personality disorders for example. Some circumstances also lead to harm committed on children more likely – the chief example being domestic violence. If the mother is suffering abuse, children are seen as being at risk of future physical abuse and understood as suffering psychological harm from the situation, as jurisprudence frequently argues.⁴

The difficulty with presumptive harm is its reliance on general patterns and statistical tendencies. It contradicts the usual principle of being innocent until proven guilty – especially when some parents are declared unfit to have children before their child is born, and the latter is removed at birth. Presumptive harm is based on suspicion which can hardly be demonstrated – it cannot be proven children would have certainly been harmed had they not been removed from their parents. This raises issues of predictability of crime. A past record of depression or substance abuse does not necessarily mean one will be abusive to their children; it may be more likely that they will but it is not certain. This means innocents will be punished by having their right to a family life violated (Art. 8 ECHR). Moreover, removing children does not necessarily appear as a proportionate response. Thinking in terms of presumptive harm means identifying parents as risks, when on the contrary they could be seen as part of the solution if the focus was to try protecting the family unit when possible, and only break it as a last resort.

Attachment theory is one of the reasons behind this risk prevention rationale. Coined by John Bowlby, this theory holds that children need emotional stability to develop in a normal fashion (Bowlby 1999 [1969]). According to him, during a

⁴See for instance the case we shall discuss further on, *Y.C. v. The United Kingdom*, European Court of Human Rights.

critical period starting at birth and lasting to her first year, a child's brain will be significantly and irreversibly harmed if she is not well taken care of. Children rely on their primary care giver for the fulfilment of their basic needs as well as their emotional development. In order to develop normally, they need to feel a secure attachment. Should the primary caregiver be negligent or, worse, harm their child, this would cause irreversible brain damage leaving the child emotionally impaired for life. The consequence of this theory is the belief that time is of essence – children should be removed from their birth parents as soon as there is a shadow of a doubt of harm, otherwise this will leave them scarred for life. The 26 week time-limit for the management of care cases is justified by this theory and aims at minimizing the trauma associated with the indefinite stay in foster placement children go through while their situation is under review. Bowlby also theorised that a child's insecure attachment would lead them to becoming asocial adults prone to violent behaviour. Even though there is evidence that placement changes and delay can lead to sustained stress and negatively impact children (Selwyn and Mason 2014), it is mostly the final period of care for looked after children who are placed for adoption which is problematic and which local authorities have tried to reduce (Department for Education 2017a, b). Featherstone holds that “arguments about the need to intervene with urgency and with a clear focus on the child within a specified age limit, underpinned by the use and abuse of neuroscience, has become influential if not hegemonic” (Featherstone et al. 2014).

Attachment theory also justifies the choice of adoption as opposed to foster care. Because adoption orders are irrevocable in the UK, once a child is adopted they will be able to develop a secure attachment with their adoptive parents, as opposed to a life in care, being transferred from one foster family to another, as is often the case. However, research is not unanimous. For example, Ward and Brown show that contrarily to what attachment theory seems to suggest, children who were permanently separated from their birth families experience what they call ‘double jeopardy’ (Brown and Ward 2013). Children spending a long time in an abusive situation, who then enjoy a short period of emotional stability with an interim carer which is disrupted when they are adopted creates a pattern of distress. Severe developmental and behavioural inadaptation ensues and persists in adults.

Moreover, even if in theory adoption was better for children than a life in care, in reality 60% of children removed from their parents are not adopted because they are not attractive enough to adopters. Adopting couples typically look for healthy white single babies. Children who are non-white, older than the age of two, disabled, who have siblings, are left in care for years if not until they reach majority (Department for Education 2017a, b). According to Selwyn, chances of being adopted are cut by half every year of delay (Selwyn and Quinton 2004). This also justifies social workers acting fast because the younger they are the more likely it is children will be adopted.

Removing children from their families on the basis of presumptive harm certainly protects social services from future child protection scandals. Yet it fails children who are unlikely to ever be adopted and thus will spend a lifetime in care, when it removes them from parents who have committed no harm, and who may

have managed to provide them with secure attachment had they benefited from assistance. There is no easy solution to suspicions of child abuse. Removing children and letting them in the limbo of care or severing all ties with biological parents both have major drawbacks. If adoption is plenary, this means parents do not have the second chance to change and remedy the situation, and if children are left in care they may never be able to enjoy a stable family life. However, we may ask whether a third way should not be envisaged. Why doesn't the UK decide to invest money to help parents through counselling and social work? It would seem logical that all must be tried before resorting to removing children. Yet in some of the cases discussed above, it appears social workers are keen to press for adoption. Thus one may wonder whether British child protection services have ulterior motives for their adoption policy.

3 Forced Adoption Policy and Financial Motives

There is reasonable ground to believe that the second reason, as to why children are placed for adoption instead of being looked after by the state or by foster parents, is financial. To put it crudely, adoption is cheaper. First, austerity cuts in social services' budget, initially implemented following the 2008 financial crisis by the 2010 Coalition government, followed by the Cameron and May governments, have dramatically diminished resources to help struggling families cope. Prevention policies to help children at risk include parenting classes, psychological help, regular contact with a social worker, dietary classes, etc. Prevention measures have several disadvantages. Results are not certain – one can never guarantee a past addict will never relapse, or that a family with issues of domestic violence will be irrevocably healed thanks to counselling. Moreover, prevention comes at a price and since the 2010 austerity turn, means are allocated away from prevention and towards risk minimisation. The PETI report points out British social workers arguing they are not able to function properly for lack of means: “decreased intervention of child protection services may also be a result of austerity measures in place in the United Kingdom. Between 2010/11 and 2012/13, Local Councils cut spending on social services staff by £746 million (adults) and £147 million (children)” (Directorate general for internal policies, European Parliament 2015). A study conducted in 2014 showed 88% of social workers who participated declared “austerity measures in their council have left children at increased risk of abuse, while 73% said they lack the time, support or resources to prevent children from experiencing serious harm” (Pemberton 2013).

Ian Culpitt points out a neo-liberal turn in social services in the UK since the 1990s. With the 2010 economic crisis, austerity measures furthered this policy, and led to a focus on risk reduction as opposed to meeting of need (Culpitt 1999). Struggling parents are not helped as they previously were through counselling for example; they are seen as risks. Moreover, according to Parton, this evolution of harm as risk prevention is being combined with a growing trend towards manageri-

alism of the public sector and its increasing privatisation (Parton 2014). As Maggie Mellon, vice chair of the British Association of Social Workers (BASW), claims, austerity has damaged the welfare of the working class and is linked to taking children into care: “austerity measures that punish the poor (...) are undoubtedly fueling the rise in care numbers” (British Association of Social Workers 2015).

The UK resorts to adoption so that children who come from abusive backgrounds can enjoy a stable family life. Yet the pressure for early detection and child removal caused by the Climbié and Baby P scandals suggests that prevention is not the main focus of social workers, whose goal it is to keep children safe, and not parents. In other words, harm prevention in the case of children seems more punitive than preventive. Everything is done to protect children from harm instead of preventing harm from happening in the first place. The aforementioned cuts in social services explain this as well: social work resources are becoming thinly spread. Parents in poverty are left to their own devices until they are suspected of some form of harm, but nothing is done *ex ante* to prevent harm from taking place.

Moreover, it is to be mentioned that nothing is done *ex post* either – children are removed from mothers who are left to grieve alone. No psychological follow up is provided to help them deal with this loss. This leads to a vicious circle – mothers whose child was taken away often have more children to compensate for their loss. According to *The Guardian*, solicitors report cases involving up to 16 siblings placed in to care, removed one after the other from the same mother (Tickle 2015). Each child is conceived with the hope that it will not be removed, and this leads to many more children being born in difficult circumstances. The University of Lancaster published a report saying one out of four mothers who had a child taken away from her will have more children removed and are caught in “a destructive cycle” (Broadhurst et al. 2015). Child removal not only creates parental anguish but has taken a significant financial toll as care proceedings and social work cost taxpayers’ money.

All in all, this suggests some children are removed from their families unnecessarily, for want of prevention measures to help families cope. Social services seem to be focusing exclusively on children and ignoring parents, although helping them could mean less children taken into care. Parents are then seen as a threat to children, as a problem and not as part of the solution.

Second, forced child removal is closely tied with cuts in legal aid. A noteworthy change was presented in 2012, which seems to have affected how care proceedings were managed, with the coming into force of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders (LASPO) Act 2012. The implementation of those cuts led to a significant rise in the number of self-represented litigants, or litigants in person, in the family courts. In a 2016 report, Amnesty International underlined these cuts threatened the core principle of the child’s best interest. If one or both parents cannot understand the evidence requirements in a case, cannot effectively navigate the procedures and processes required, and cannot represent themselves effectively in a hearing by presenting their argument and advocating their position, judges are more likely to lack the necessary information to ensure that the outcome of a case is in the best interests of the child (Amnesty International 2016).

Legal aid cuts were carried out as part of the austerity measures of the 2010 Coalition government. They were implemented by Minister of Justice Chris Grayling, and were contemporaneous to different welfare cuts and reforms which brought greater strain on families.⁵ It could be argued these cuts are undermining the principle of the best interests of the child but also key common law principles. Access to justice and the right to due process are also arguably challenged by LASPO cuts. Mr. Justice Bodey, a senior family court judge, publicly declared that throughout his career he had sometimes felt obliged to assist unrepresented litigants himself, by cross-examining witnesses on their behalf (Bowcott 2017). For him, adjudicating care order cases in which parents are too poor to afford a lawyer to help them defend their right to keep their children was “shaming”. Given the UK’s adversarial system, this testimony is disquieting. Poor parents overwhelmingly tend to have had little formal education after the age of sixteen and have very little knowledge or experience of the legal system. How can they stand a chance to defend their case to keep their children when they face local authorities that use weathered legal experts?

Social workers face pressure to win care order cases they bring to court because this could impact their careers, given social services are subjected to targets, which necessarily implies social workers whose performances are monitored and incentivised to win cases, especially as “scorecards” are then published (Twaite 2015). As was confirmed by a 2015 Freedom of Information request made by the charity The Transparency Project, each year, councils have to place a number of children for adoption; this figure is decided in advance and changes every year, with methodological differences across the councils (Twaite 2016). As the Directorate general for internal policies of the European Parliament claims, councils that do not meet their target see their budget slashed (Directorate general for internal policies, European Parliament 2015). In the recent case *K.C.C. v. M. and O.*, Judge Scaratt declared: “I am not remotely surprised that the parents felt, when the care plan was one of adoption outside of the birth family that the social worker was gunning for adoption, if I might put it so crudely, rather than taking a more balanced view with parents who want their child returned to their care”[§ 59]. Targets that specify the number of children who should be adopted are laudable in intent, as they seek to prevent children spending years in care. However, it could be argued that the push for adoption has had the perverse effect of pressuring social workers into separating children from their parents when perhaps less irremediable solutions could have been found.

The pressure local authorities face due to austerity cuts have led to mismanaging cases and relying on scarce evidence in some instances such as the case of

⁵On the specific impact of legal aid cuts on family justice, see the 2013 special issue “Delivering Family Justice in Late Modern Society in the wake of Legal Aid Reform”, *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law*, 35(1) and the 2017 special issue “The post-LASPO landscape: Challenges for family law”, *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law*, 35(2). The Children’s commissioners’ review called on the Conservative government in 2015 to review its deep welfare cuts, voicing serious concerns about children denied access to justice, as reported in *The Guardian* in July 2015.

Gloucestershire Council. In 2017, it was criticised by the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted), which inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people in the UK. In June of that year, Gloucestershire Council removed a toddler and placed it in foster care for 6 weeks without notice. According to Judge Wildblood, it acted with a “degree of subterfuge and immediacy” that was “plainly wrong” [§ 32].⁶ Social workers swiftly removed a child, circumventing legal procedure and duping its mother. She took her child to a contact centre for it to spend agreed time with its father. There, social workers told her she needed to leave to attend an urgent meeting at the council’s offices. Once at the meeting, she was told the council was placing the child into foster care. The council acted as if there were no other alternatives than separating mother and child, although the social workers in charge of the case had previously envisaged such possibility, as the mother was psychologically vulnerable, and indicated that if the mother became unable to look after her child, it should live with its father, or other relatives. Not only should the council have informed the mother of the decision they had taken regarding her child instead of acting in secrecy, which is illegal, but also should they have respected the decisions that had been previously made so as to secure the best interests of the child, which should simply be seen as proper case management.

This case is not isolated when it comes to local authorities violating the law and procedural guidelines. In February 2017, Kirklees Council had similarly taken a week-old baby into care. Hospital staff had called the council 4 days after it was born to raise concerns about the parents’ “long term parenting capacity” and “it was suggested that the mother had no family support, and that the father was expressing unorthodox views about the need for sterilisation of bottles, and the benefits of formula milk.” [§ 13].⁷ A misevaluation of the threshold test led the hospital staff to start a care procedure, and the judge criticised the local authority’s malfunctioning insofar as the social worker had failed to inform the parents of the hearing [§ 41].

These examples demonstrate procedural malfunctioning on the part of local authorities. Paradoxically, since the 2000s scandals, their responsibilities have increased as they face great pressure to detect harm as early as possible but at the same time, since 2010, their budgets shrank.⁸ In this scenario, social workers, who are employed by local authorities, are facing contradictory injunctions which seem to undermine their efficacy and, in the most extreme cases, perhaps their very ethics.

⁶ *Gloucestershire County Council v. A Mother & Others* (discharge of care order) [2017]. Reported in Tickle, Louise. 2017. Council apologises over unlawful removal of a child from mother. *The Guardian*. 28 July. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/jul/28/council-apologises-over-unlawful-removal-of-child-from-mother>. Accessed first September 2018.

⁷ *C.Z. & Others v. Kirklees Council* [2017]. The press was allowed to report on the case as soon as the approved judgment was released, as is shown by Patrick Foster. 2017. Parents had week-old baby taken away by social services after father heard ‘praising benefits of formula milk’. *The Telegraph*. 16 February. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/02/16/parents-had-week-old-baby-taken-away-social-services-father/>. Accessed 6 August 2018.

⁸ Several reports by the National Audit Office have highlighted the pressures endured by the sector since 2010. See <https://www.nao.org.uk/report/financial-sustainability-of-local-authorities-2018/>. Accessed 6 June 2018.

4 Evidence of Poverty Bias in Child Removal in the UK

After having examined the impact of austerity on the rise of care orders and forced adoptions, we now turn to the question of whether poverty constitutes in itself a risk according to the legal system. In other terms, we ask whether poverty is treated as a source of harm to children. According to data published by the Department of Education, in Britain, a striking proportion of one out of five children has been subject to a report by social services.⁹ What sense can we make of this data? Does this mean that a fifth of UK based families are potentially abusive to their children? More troubling perhaps, according to a study of the Nuffield Foundation, families whose children are taken away from them are predominantly poor; in fact 1 in 60 children from the most deprived areas is taken into care, compared with 1 in 660 from the wealthiest (Webb and Bywaters 2018b; Bywaters et al. 2016). This could imply either that poor parents tend to be more abusive than wealthier parents, or that the criteria used to evaluate good parenting are pitted against poor parents, whether intentionally or not.

A report presented to the House of Commons in February 2018, published by Legal Action for Women suggests children are being unnecessarily removed from poorer parents (Neale and Lopez 2017). This seems to be the case even though, as Baroness Hale argues, “Courts are schooled to avoid ‘social engineering’”.¹⁰ In *Re B*, she construed a well-known dictum in relation to child protection as “public authorities have no right to improve on nature” [§ 179]. Nevertheless, this situation raises questions about whether adoption without consent is subject to some form of bias against poor parents verging on social eugenics. Former Shadow Minister for Children and Families MP Emma Lewell-Buck, herself a former social worker in Tyneside, said no different in 2016: “for some children adoption is the best outcome, but the policy of adoption above all else works on the premise that children will be better off with wealthier parents, rather than on the premise of making all efforts to let them remain with their birth families” (Lewell-Buck 2016).

To make sense of this comment, some historical perspective is useful. Understanding poverty as a pathology is not a recent trend. Indeed, working classes were famously coined the ‘dangerous class’ in 1840 by Honoré-Antoine Frégier (1840). He witnessed first-hand as an administrative official in the French police force the early nineteenth century rise in crime, which he explained in his seminal work as caused by the rise of poverty. He described poverty as the breeding ground

⁹The number of children referred to social services has even reached an average of 1770 per day, as revealed by data published by the Department for Education. See Bulman, May. 2018. Child referred to social services every 49 s amid rising reports of domestic violence. *Independent*, 11 January. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/children-social-services-domestic-abuse-violence-rise-uk-a8154261.html>. Accessed 6 August 2018.

¹⁰The arguments were put forward by Lady Hale and reported by Lord Justice McFarlane in his Bridget Lindley OBE Memorial Lecture 2017. Holding the risk: The balance between child protection and the right to family life. The *obiter dictum* referred to is Lord Templeman’s in *Re KD (A Minor)* [1988] AC 806.

for all sorts of vice, such as gambling, drinking, promiscuity and idleness, which all posed major threats to social order according to him. He therefore advocated punishing the poor for their idleness, oblivious to alternative explanations to their lack of occupation, such as unemployment (Wetzell 2003).

Such an outlook on poverty also has roots in British history. Without attempting to paint a complete picture of how poverty was addressed throughout the centuries by the British state, it is nonetheless relevant to note the UK has known times when poverty *per se* was a criminal offence. For example, during the Tudor era, the Act for Punishment of Sturdy Vagabonds and Beggars of 1536 punished “sturdy beggars” – understood as choosing mendacity – by death. Poverty continued being stigmatised throughout the nineteenth century, with the New Poor Laws of 1834 that tied poverty relief to workhouse residency, in an attempt to monitor the poor, who were seen as a social threat. Children were also living in workhouses, in an attempt to punish their parents but also monitor their behaviour. Moreover, the rise of Victorian values contributed further to the stigmatisation of poverty by reinforcing its representation as a vice (Wood 1991). This paternalistic conception of poverty did not disappear with the Victorians. Almost two centuries later, after the glory days of the British welfare state and its penchant towards egalitarianism, echoes of this conception of poverty as a moral fault can still be heard. For example, Tory MP and party vice chairman Ben Bradley wrote in 2012 that the jobless should be encouraged to have vasectomies. He declared online “Families who have never worked a day in their lives having 4 or 5 kids and the rest of us having 1 or 2 means it’s not long before we’re drowning in a vast sea of unemployed wasters that we pay to keep!” (Asthana and Rowena 2018). Arguably, the introduction of anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs), which were replaced in 2014 by injunctions and criminal behaviour orders, has been interpreted by some commentators as legal tools to criminalise poverty, making working class behavioural patterns criminal (Garrett 2006; Tonry 2010).

Children are taken into care in order to protect them from potential harm but also to protect society from further harm. Evidence confirms children who were harmed or suffered from neglect are much more likely to become criminals, to become unemployed, or simply to remain poor (Widom 1989). According to this reasoning, removing children away from poor parents reduces the number of future delinquents. Yet one could argue that even though the arguments changed, and the focus is now on harm reduction, an anti-poverty bias is still at play. It seems working class parents are vilified, and portrayed as failing parents. This hypothesis is supported by sociological evidence, in particular when it comes to demonising mothers, who are under social pressure to work and be successful parents, that is who meet unforgiving standards of care towards their children. Val Gillies for example argues that working class mothers are criticised for failing to provide their children with cultural opportunities, as if they were the ones responsible for their children’s lack of prospects and their social standing (Gillies 2007). Gillies provides examples of how the media convey this message, for example with the character of Vicky Pollard in the British TV show “Little Britain”. Pollard is the epitome of the selfish, mindless, benefit-seeking, promiscuous “chav” and therefore working-class mother (Tyler

2008). For Gillies, this portrait reveals intrinsic social bias against poor single mothers, whose poverty seems to be deserved. Poor single mothers are depicted as idle, irrational, and ultimately irresponsible parents.

Jurisprudence on care lends itself to this interpretation. Criteria used to evaluate parenting seem correlated with class and financial means and some of the arguments put forward in family court to justify taking children away from their families seem to rely on a form of anti-poverty bias. Similar rhetoric is also used in higher courts, as in the European Court of Human Rights. In *Y.C. v. the UK*, it is stated the following:

However, observations of K.'s behaviour and responses suggested that he had developed an insecure attachment. The applicant's knowledge of the dietary needs of a child were found to be adequate, although in practice it appeared that they ate convenience foods rather than fresh vegetables and that the applicant allowed K. too many unhealthy snacks. The social worker also raised some concerns regarding the applicant's ability to address and treat signs of illness in K. and the lack of attention paid to K.'s dental care. She noted that the applicant showed poor knowledge of the need for visual stimulation, interaction and setting appropriate routines and that she had difficulty interacting with K. and keeping him occupied for any length of time¹¹

Here the court seems to justify an insecure attachment – Bowlby's theory is applied as justification for child removal – by arguing that the parents did not feed their child properly and did not take him to the dentist regularly enough. This is not the grounds for the judgement: a context of alcohol abuse and domestic violence make it clear the child is probably better off living without his parents. Nevertheless, links between eating poor diets, obesity and poverty have been established in the early 2000s and research into nutrition patterns, notably in the US but also in the UK, made it clear that food choices, dietary intake and feeding behaviour were far from optimal well before the 2008 financial crisis. This is especially true of poorer women, who were often the subject of medical studies because of the impact of their dietary habits on maternal and child health considerations – even though their own health is of course vastly impacted by this situation (Anderson 2007). The financial crisis and ensuing recession have only worsened this trend, in a country where thousands if not millions of working poor now rely on foodbanks to survive.¹² Dental care is similarly impacted by poverty and studies dating back to the early 1990s already showed that almost twice as many children from the lower social classes had actively decayed teeth, even though less than half as many from the lower social classes had ever visited the dentist, a trend which continued into the 2000s (Harris and Haycox 2001).

In the light of these socio-medical findings, it may be argued that even if this is possibly only mentioned in passing, in *Y.C. v. the UK* the judgment could be somewhat interpreted as blaming applicants for not having a middle-class lifestyle or

¹¹ *Y.C. v. The United Kingdom*, European Court of Human Rights.

¹² According to the Trussell Trust, over a million 3-day emergency food supplies were handed out over 2016–2017, out of which 400,000 claimants were children. See <https://www.trusselltrust.org/news-and-blog/latest-stats/end-year-stats/>. Accessed 6 August 2018.

means. The same applies for lack of visual stimulation, which could be a reference to over-exposure to television. It seems, reading this quote, that parents are stigmatised not only for being abusive but also in some way for being working-class, having limited access to cultural activities, regular health care and fresh fruit and vegetable. In the jurisprudence on care orders, comments about parents' financial and cultural means are fairly frequent, and although this is never the crux of the judgment, such remarks suggest negative bias against the poor, who appear to be held responsible for the limited options they are able to offer. In an article from *The Guardian* concerning child protection and poverty in the UK, Ray Jones, a professor and social work expert sums up the situation by saying that "we now blame people for their poverty" (Butler 2018).

Working class parents and single mothers may want to provide a better diet and educational opportunities for their children without having the time or means to do so, or they may be simply reproducing an educational and dietary pattern they are used to. On the account of these criteria, most working-class parents would fail this test for good parenting. Maggie Mellon harshly condemns the courts' considerations about children's material conditions: "income, housing and other material factors cannot be used in a judgement about where a child's best interests lie; at least not in a civilised society" (British Association of Social Workers). If courts never take care order decisions based on parents' lack of means, however poverty and its adverse consequences, in particular concerning healthcare and education, does seem to be held against parents.

The criteria used to evaluate future harm are also far from impartial. As Dorothy Roberts argues, "parental conduct or home conditions that appear innocent when the parents are affluent are often considered to be neglectful when the parents are poor. Several studies have found that poor children are more likely to be labelled "abused" than children from more affluent homes with similar injuries" (Roberts 2003). We may thus wonder whether adoption without consent is an expression of a revival of eugenics, seeking to stamp out the poor as a social group by having poor children adopted by middle class parents. The answer is complex because poverty is often perceived as being correlated to several factors which increase the risk of child abuse. Evidence abounds that there is a strong correlation between poverty and forms of child abuse and neglect (Brandon et al. 2014). This raises major questions, as it could suggest that poverty leads parents to becoming abusive towards their children. Another way to interpret this data would be to question what is defined as abuse. As the Legal Action for Women report argues, "what is described as 'neglect' is often a combination of poverty and overwork leaving too little time for caring. Yet in the light of 'austerity' cuts (...) social workers have fewer resources – and nothing financial – to offer families struggling to survive" (Neale and Lopez 2017, p. 38).

Whether intentional or not, and perhaps with the best intentions, the practice of adoption without consent in Britain nevertheless paints a troubling picture.

5 Does Forced Child Removal Violate Parental Rights?

What appears problematic in the cases discussed above is that the British state appears to be violating poor parents' interests. To discuss this further, we now ask whether they possess a form of parental right, and if so whether it is violated by the UK's current policy. It is important to emphasise here again that as we have seen, courts never decide to remove children on the basis alone that they live in poverty, even though, as we highlighted above, poverty is clearly used in the jurisprudence as a means to convey or reinforce an impression of inadequate parenting. However, let us now consider in abstract the argument that poverty would be grounds alone for removing children, and whether this would count as a violation of so-called parental rights.

Do biological parents possess some form of absolute right over their children? Or should decisions concerning children be solely based on their best interest, as opposed to their parents'? In philosophy the question of parental rights has not attracted much discussion over the centuries. Aristotle's view was widely shared until late nineteenth century where children began to be thought of as subjects with rights. Aristotle famously defends the view that children are alike slaves in that they belong to their father and therefore "there can be no injustice (...) towards things that are one's own" (Aristotle 1998, p. 123). The latter quote is caricatured when interpreted to mean fathers are free to maim their children, though. Aristotle argues that precisely because a man's child and slave are his own, they constitute a part of himself so he will never hurt them as "no one chooses to hurt himself" (Aristotle 1998). Evidence concerning child abuse, as well as data on the reality of slavery disproves this assumption of the master's natural benevolence towards his so-called possession. However, it would be erroneous to conclude Aristotle sought to justify a pseudo parental right to harm children. He simply denied the existence of parental duties, asserting fathers are naturally protective.

Over the twentieth century, the topic of children's rights and parental rights and duties has attracted much more attention. The proprietarian view has found few defenders¹³ but was partly renewed by libertarians. They tend to believe parents have rights over their own children, which implies the state can only coercively interfere in the most extreme cases. Murray Rothbard for example argues parents have an obligation not to harm their children, however they do not possess an active duty to take care of them:

The parent should not have a legal obligation to feed, clothe, or educate his children, since such obligations would entail positive acts coerced upon the parent and depriving the parent of his rights. The parent therefore may not murder or mutilate his child (...) but the parent should have the legal right not to feed the child, i.e., to allow it to die (Murray 2002, p. 100).

Deliberate harm such as child beating would then constitute a sufficient motive for the state to interfere but not neglect. The problem with this view is that it fails to

¹³With the noted exception of Narveson, Jan. 2002. *Respecting Persons in Theory and Practice*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

account for the fact that extreme neglect, such as food deprivation, is hardly distinguishable from active harm. Intentionally depriving a child of food when it is available, to the point of starvation, cannot be described as “allowing it to die” as Rothbard claims, and common law judges regularly classify this type of abuse as first-degree murder. The distinction between the two seems fallacious as it obfuscates parents’ shared intent to see the child die in both extreme neglect as in direct harm. The idea of absolute or semi-absolute parental rights that would make it illegitimate for the state to intervene in all but cases of active harm thus appears flawed.

Some minimal level of wellbeing must be provided by the parents to their children, based on the deontological argument that they hold a shared humanity and therefore should be protected from harm as vulnerable beings. Moreover, from a consequentialist perspective, as Frégier argued, harming children has dreadful social consequences. It is thus not particularly challenging to argue that the state does have moral legitimacy to intervene and take children away when their life is at threat or that they are severely beaten or deprived of food to the point that this endangers them. This principle is called in common law *in loco parentis* – when parents fail to meet basic requirements, the state has the duty to act as parents towards children. Children’s basic interests must be considered – this does not necessarily imply parents have no parental rights to decide how to bring up their children, but they owe them to at least attempt to feed them and not actively batter them. Removing children from parents who intentionally and severely harm them is therefore legitimate.

The question would be then how severe does the harm have to be to justify taking children away? And do the cases of forced adoption described above fit the criteria? It would be challenging to argue that expressing unorthodox views about sterilisation of milk bottles counts as severe harm or neglect. In cases such as *Y.C. v. the UK*, living in a context of domestic violence is clearly going to be harmful for the child. Yet the issue is whether removing the child is not disproportionate and whether it would not be more effective to tackle the issue of domestic violence *per se*, by helping the victim break free from her abuser, without breaking the bond between child and parent? Philosophy has limitations and we do not possess the tools of psychologists or social workers to answer this specific issue.

From a philosophical standpoint however, what appears much more straightforward is that considering poverty *per se* as grounds for arguing the best interests of a child are at threat is deeply problematic. In the literature, if we look at the other end of the spectrum, where thinkers defend the idea that biological parents do not possess any right at all, and that the child’s interests only should count, poverty is not considered as sufficient grounds for removing children. In a controversial article, Hugh LaFollette argues in favour of implementing parenting permits. According to him, licenses are distributed for a number of risky activities, and given the stakes of raising a child, it is a matter of common sense to argue for some form of licensing for parents, meaning in practice parents would have to apply to have the right to bring up their own child. The argument relies on the notion of the child’s best interest – parents whose attitude is harmful should not be allowed to endanger children. To be a good parent one needs to be competent – LaFollette mentions having ade-

quate knowledge and energy levels to rear children (LaFollette 1980, p. 185). The goal of licensing parents is not however to determine ideal parenting criteria but simply to “exclude only the very bad ones” (*ibid.*, p. 190).

Even if we adopted LaFollette proposition and applied it to our jurisprudence on forced adoptions, it would be hard to conclude that limited access to middle class cultural goods or regular access to fruit and vegetables would constitute sufficient grounds for removing a parent’s license. Undeniably, having a healthy diet is better for a child, and being only fed industrial foods is harmful. But poor parents, in particular those resorting to food banks, do not possess the economic freedom to choose the type of diet they provide their children. Can they then be held responsible and blamed for harming their children when they are struggling to make ends meet? Few parents choose to live in poverty. Moreover, if an argument was made to say that poverty does constitute *per se* a form a harm that damages children’s interest, this would not in any way suggest the appropriate remedy would be removing a child from his poor surroundings. It simply does not follow that removing children from poverty is the right cure. If the notion of a child’s interest is taken seriously, and if poverty is harmful, then it appears far more proportionate for the state to help reduce this harm by providing financial help, counselling and advice to poor parents. Therefore, poverty, although it does diminish children’s wellbeing, cannot be compared to cases when parents actively seek to molest children or cases of neglect.

Moreover, arguing poor parents should have lesser rights to parent than wealthier ones is an affront to the basic premise of equality on which democracies are founded. A life in poverty is harsher in countless ways, in that it limits access to basic goods such as food and healthcare for example. It is however insulting to suggest that it is not worth living, especially given the fact poor parents can be just as loving as wealthier ones. Arguing the former should not have the right to have children would be a return to Frégier’s social eugenics. It would treat poverty as a hereditary vice that can be stamped out by removing children from the roots of the problem. This view is naive as it does not understand what poverty is nor its causes. Poverty is endemic to human societies. Market economies in particular all feature a class of unemployed and/or working poor on which they depend for cheap labour, and inequality worldwide is growing. In the UK alone in 2018, 4.1 million children were living in poverty, which amounts to 30% of children, an increase of 100,000 children compared to 2017 (McGuinness 2018). It would be highly implausible to conclude that the right decision for these 4.1 million children would be adoption or that their parents somehow should not have conceived them, especially given the fact that more and more people are slipping below the poverty line and could have not predicted it.

Therefore, we can conclude that parents do have minimal duties of care towards their children and that the latter’s best interests should be taken into consideration. However poverty *per se* should not count as harm or neglect because of its involuntary nature. Moreover, if poverty is indeed a form of harm, nothing suggests adoption is the adequate remedy. On the contrary, it could appear that breaking up family units on the basis of poverty alone would only add insult to injury, or rather harm to existing harm. Instead of putting children up for adoption, it seems that the best way

of tackling the harm of child poverty is for the state to move away from austerity and actively help poor parents manage. Finally, removing children from poor families is not effective and will never alone stamp out poverty.

6 Conclusion

To conclude, as we have shown, it seems adoption without consent in Britain predominantly targets poorer families. The financial element is a central motive for taking children away from their families instead of paying for expensive services that would help poorer parents cope. However, the cost issue does seem to backfire, as we have seen that adoption ends up being costlier in the long run, given the high number of children who are not able to find adoptive parents, typically because of disability or ethnic origin. Moreover, we have found evidence of ideological biases, such as when anti-poor criteria are linked to good parenting in family courts. We then discussed the case of poor parenting from a philosophical perspective and concluded poverty alone can never constitute the sole basis for removing children, whether parents do have parental rights or not.

To try and counter the adverse repercussions of the wider conception and discourse on poverty concerning child protection that we have tried to sum up above, some try implementing a “politics of Recognition & Respect” (Lister 2013) so as to focus on “the voices, participation and lived experiences of those who live in poverty”, within a framework of social justice and attention to human rights (Gupta et al. 2018). Such a move may help provoke a change in paradigm as far as child protection is concerned.

Similarly, the implementation of the Special Guardianship Regulations 2005 sought not to make an absolute legal break from birth families whenever possible (Department of Education 2017), which may help secure the welfare of children while avoiding the breakdown of all family ties and history. Special guardians may be a family member or friend (thus carers who have an existing relationship with the child), who have been assessed so to make sure they are able to provide a safe and stable environment to children. As has been identified, there have been issues concerning the assessment of special guardians but measures have been taken to tackle the problem (Department of Education 2015). The increasing use of special guardianship orders certainly is the result of case law, in particular particular the high-profile 2013 cases *Re B* and *Re B-S*, as “courts have focused more intensively on limiting adoption to children for whom ‘nothing else will do’”, contrasting with government policy promoting the use of adoption for children in care (Selwyn and Masson 2014). This is just one of the alternatives that may help recognise and respect poorer families and help them cope with the challenges they face in terms of parenting.

Finally, Brexit may further impact families who struggle to make ends meet and the budgetary allocations of local authorities, as well as undermine legal certainty in the UK. Therefore, it is difficult to try and predict how child protection is likely to evolve in the 2020s and the nature of placements should be monitored closely.

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