

# Childhood: Value and duties

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## Abstract

In philosophy, there are two competitor views about the nature and value of childhood: The first is the traditional, deficiency, view, according to which children are mere unfinished adults. The second is a view that has recently become increasingly popular amongst philosophers, and according to which children, perhaps in virtue of their biological features, have special and valuable capacities, and, more generally, privileged access to some sources of value. This article provides a conceptual map of these views and their possible interpretations, and notes their bearing on issues of population ethics and on the duties that we are owed during childhood.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

What, if any, are the bad things that children cannot avoid, bads to which they are subjected merely by dint of being children? Are there any good things to which children have unique, or privileged, access, and enjoyment of which is particularly valuable? If so, how important are these goods for the overall goodness of a person's life?<sup>1</sup>

Answers to these questions bear on axiological and deontological issues. First, the answers matter for evaluating population policies. Second, they matter for thinking about how we ought to treat children: most prominently, for establishing standards of parental adequacy, educational policies about school curricula, the desirability of giving children the right to vote, or the freedom to be gainfully employed. Third, and closely related to the second point, the answers matter for decisions concerning a just distribution of resources across the lifespan. The present article elaborates on these questions.

To explore the issue of value in childhood, I start by sketching two competitor (families of) views about the nature of childhood, where "childhood" refers to the stage of life during which young human beings are still developing the physical, emotional and rational abilities which are typical of adult people (Brighouse & Swift, 2014a). The two competitor views differ in how they identify and assess those goods and bads of childhood that are integral to being a child

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– which is to say, goods and bads flowing from children's typical abilities and inabilitys that are independent of the particular social context in which children live. I call some, but not all, of these goods "special" to indicate that they also are age-specific; thus, a "special" good of childhood is one which children can enjoy either exclusively or in a privileged way in virtue of being immature human beings. There is no talk, in the literature, of the special bads of childhood. Here is an illustration of the difference between a good or a bad being integral to childhood and it being special, illustration which also anticipates some of the analysis below. If undeveloped rationality is a bad, it is integral to childhood; but it is not special in the sense used here if adults, too, can suffer from this bad.<sup>2</sup> But an ability to learn very fast, or to derive very high levels of benefit from unstructured time, are goods not only integral to childhood but also special to it, assuming that only children can enjoy them or have privileged access to them.

In spite of the wide differences between various stages of childhood, I discuss them under the common heading of "childhood", but when an argument applies only to a particular stage of childhood I make this clear.

The two competitor views of childhood differ in what they say about two matters: (1) whether there are any special goods of childhood; and (2) whether any such goods significantly contribute to wellbeing, and, in particular, whether the special goods of childhood are weighty enough to make childhood no worse than adulthood. The traditional account, which I call "the deficiency view" attributes significant weight to the bads that are integral to childhood, and denies (2) (prominent versions of it also deny [1]). The second account, which I call "the special goods view", endorses both (1) and (2).

The next two sections detail different versions of these two views, and flag their bearing on population ethics and on the ideal length of childhood. The fourth section is a brief examination of how the nature and value of childhood bears on duties towards children.

## 2 | THE DEFICIENCY VIEW

Traditionally, philosophers saw children as "deficient" (Matthews, 2008), or, as I put it elsewhere (Gheaus, 2015b), mere "unfinished adults"; this is because, according to a contemporary way of framing the issue, childhood is a "predicament" (Hannan, 2018; Schapiro, 1999<sup>3</sup>). The deficiency view says that children's immaturity entails significant illbeing for children and that either there are no special goods of childhood or that such goods cannot offset the bads integral to childhood; together, these considerations indicate that the overall significance of childhood for an individual's life is, in the best case, preparatory. I attribute explicit endorsements of the deficiency view to Michael Slote and Sarah Hannan, discussed below.

This account draws on the general philosophical consensus about the limitations of children's agential abilities: their rational and psychological immaturity, which impairs their ability to engage in practical reasoning as successfully as typical adults, their modest ability to foresee and properly appreciate the long-term consequences of their own choices, their failures to control their emotions and direct their will at what is best for them, and their lack of stable commitments to values and aims. Each of these features significantly limits children's ability to self-govern, and thus make it permissible to paternalise them in ways in which we usually find it impermissible to paternalise adults. (Although there exist different, and incompatible, ways of explaining how these features warrant paternalism over children, as elaborated, for instance, by Tamar Schapiro, 2003). Children's lack of global autonomy is compatible with the fact that they enjoy an ever-expanding ability to self-govern (Bou-Habib & Olsaretti, 2015), and it may also be compatible with acknowledging that many children enjoy local autonomy (Mullin, 2007).

The fact that most children lack the same normative powers that adults have to make authoritative choices over their lives is seen by some philosophers – in particular, by Kantians – as a predicament<sup>4</sup> (Schapiro, 1999). If the capacity to self-govern has the objective, and unconditional, value that Kantians attribute to it, childhood is not only an undesirable state to be in, but it is also a state out of which adults have the duty to emancipate children.

Non-Kantians, too, can explain why it is in one sense bad for an individual to be a child: even small children have desires and plans, and being subject to legitimate paternalism makes it more likely that their desires will be frustrated

and their plans thwarted and this is seen in itself as a significant source of illbeing (Hannan, 2018). (One may doubt that when children's desires are rightfully frustrated there is any non-instrumental value in fulfilling them; still, frustration is most often instrumentally bad because it is unpleasant.) And, as both Sarah Hannan (2018) and Patrick Tomlin (2018b) put it, children's need for guardians leaves them more open to domination, assuming that it would be undesirable, and maybe impermissible, to subject the parent-child relationship to the kind of public scrutiny needed to eliminate any risk of arbitrary uses of parental power. All things considered, eliminating domination from children's lives seems impermissible because it would entail the elimination of the intimate aspect of the parent-child relationship, in which children have a powerful interest (Gheaus, 2021).<sup>5</sup> Yet, even if children's domination is all things justified, the fact that they are under the rule of others means that, even when children enjoy good fortune, they do so less robustly than adults: if her custodian had a very bad day, for instance, a child might just as well not have enjoyed the same amount of wellbeing; and some believe that it is prudentially worse to enjoy a good less, rather than more, robustly (Hannan, 2018). So, according to the deficiency account of what is a child, children are subject to specific, and significant, bads.

On the deficiency view, while children can of course have access to a variety of good things – most obviously, enjoyment or learning – these goods are not special to childhood. This is the case, first, because the view is that all the things that are good for children are also good for adults; defenders of this view, for instance, claim that fantasy play is good at any age, and sexual innocence or carefreeness are bad at any age (Hannan, 2018), against claims to the contrary (see Macleod, 2015 on fantasy play and innocence in general, Brighouse & Swift, 2014a on sexual innocence, and Ferracioli, 2020 on carefreeness.) And, second, because, on this view, all the goods to which children have access are also, in principle, accessible to adults, subject to particular social arrangements and norms. For example, if societies were to encourage adults to be more open to future possibilities, or to enjoy plenty of unstructured time, then adults could partake in these goods just as much as children typically do in existing societies.

Further, on this view, one's achievements during childhood do not count for much by way of contributing to the overall goodness of that individuals' life, unless they pave the way to future success: Michael Slote (1983, 14) writes that "what happens in childhood principally affects our view of total lives through the effects that childhood success or failure are supposed to have on mature individuals." (He also thinks that the failures of childhood are insignificant and do not matter non-instrumentally for the overall goodness of one's life.) Because it sees children as subject to unavoidable bads that don't visit adults, and as lacking access to any special goods, the deficiency view says, in a nutshell, that, other things equal, it is prudentially worse for an individual to be in the state of childhood than in the state of adulthood.

Exactly how bad is childhood deemed to be is a subsequent question that admits several answers, each of which with different practical implications. Philosophers of childhood don't always make their precise view explicit; it is, nevertheless, worthwhile to map the logical space that the deficiency view can occupy.

On a radical interpretation of the deficiency view, the bads of childhood are so weighty, in absolute terms, that the inherent disvalue of childhood to an individual outweighs any net value of subsequent adulthood to that individual, and so the mere fact that one is a child for a while means that one's life has negative value. If so, it would be rational not to exist at all if one must first be a child. Should this, perhaps highly implausible,<sup>6</sup> picture be correct, bringing children into the world would raise both deontic and consequentialist objections: procreation would impose on the procreatees net harms, and thus it would wrong them; it may also amount to making the world a worse place.<sup>7</sup> The radical interpretation of the deficiency view would, therefore, justify anti-natalist policies on non-consequentialist and, possibly, on consequentialist grounds alike. But on any interpretation, appeal to the special bads of childhood provide grounds for anti-natalism given a particular view about the normative significance of imposing harms: Assume that the bads of childhood, which prevent children's ability to self-govern, are significant harms, that the imposition of significant and not consented-to harms is impermissible unless necessary to avert even greater harms (Shiffrin, 1999), and that non-existence itself is not harmful. Together, these assumptions amount to a strong reason against procreation. (On the bads of childhood and anti-natalism see also Hannan, 2018).

A second, more moderate but still counterintuitive, interpretation of the view is that it is usually better for an individual not to exist than to exist in a state of childhood (short perhaps of having an extraordinarily fortunate childhood<sup>8</sup>), but not as bad as to necessarily make one's life on the whole not worth living. If so, being a child could be a price worth paying for the privilege of eventually become an adult, but it would also be rational to skip one's childhood entirely, and live a shorter lifespan entirely as the adult one would have become at the end of that childhood. If a childhood-skipping pill existed – as in Samantha Brennan's (2014) thought experiment – we would be required to give it to newborns. While this pill doesn't exist, there may be other, less extreme, ways of speeding up children's intellectual and emotional maturation: for instance, concerted education aimed at equipping them to become self-governing more quickly than it is the case in existing societies (or, at least, in economically advanced liberal democracies). On this version of the view, we have decisive reason to assist children in being emancipated, as soon as possible, from childhood. Further, this interpretation seems to imply duties to painlessly help out of existence those children who will never be self-governing, either because they suffer from diseases that will prematurely kill them or because an impairment prevents them to outgrow psychological immaturity. This version of the deficiency view can also offer an explanation for some people's belief that a young adult's prudential interest in continuing to live provides more reason to save the young adult than an infant's prudential interest in continuing to live provides reason to save the infant. That is, the view can appeal to personal value in order to make sense of the belief that dying early – for instance, during one's infancy – is less bad than dying later – for instance, during one's late teens. Some philosophers find this belief highly intuitive (Broome, 2019; McMahan, 2019), although it is not easy to make principled sense of it.

A third, and final, version of the deficiency account is comparative: it claims that childhood is a prudentially worse state to be in than adulthood, but that it doesn't have net negative value. If correct, this would be reason to give newborns a different kind of pill, one that instantaneously turns them into the adults they would have become at the end of their childhoods, without thereby shortening their lifespan (Brennan, 2014).<sup>9</sup> In the absence of such a pill, we would have a duty to emancipate them as soon as possible from their immaturity.

All versions of the deficiency view can acknowledge that a child's life may go better or worse for her: children can, for instance, enjoy more or less pleasure, and a better childhood will make a larger instrumental contribution to the overall value of an individual's life by preparing the person for a good adulthood. But, in Hannan's words, "[c]hildren who flourish in the period of their childhood do so, not in virtue of being in the state of childhood, but despite that fact." (Hannan, 2018, 3). A hallmark of the deficiency view is the belief that there are no significant "special goods of childhood": that is, goods which are accessible only to children (or to which children have privileged access) and which are sufficiently weighty to compensate for the special bads that visit children. It is this last claim that seems implausible to several contemporary philosophers.

### 3 | THE SPECIAL GOODS VIEW

The alternative account of childhood need not deny that children are "unfinished adults" - that is to say, that some of their valuable capacities are less developed than adults'. Indeed, I assume that any credible account of childhood must acknowledge children's underdeveloped rationality and unstable practical identity and see them as warranting paternalism over children. Some, but not all, authors who endorse the special goods view explicitly deny that these features of children are disvaluable (Brighouse & Swift, 2018; Macleod, 2015); thus, the special goods view, too, allows for several interpretations, which turn in part on the evaluation of children's incomplete development as autonomous agents.

Overall, the special goods view differs from the deficiency account because it includes the belief that children can benefit from a number of goods that adults either cannot access, or from which they cannot derive the same benefit, to an extent that offsets the disvalue that any bards of childhood impose on children.<sup>10</sup> In other words, this account of childhood sees it as having net and special value, such that skipping childhood would be prudentially bad for the individuals. Philosophers who endorse the view in this very general form include Gareth Matthews, Samantha Brennan, Colin Mcleod, Harry Brighouse and Adam Swift, Anca Gheaus and Luara Feraciolli. Some philosophers who argue for

the special goods view stress the valuable capacities that we possess as children and tend to lose as we approach adulthood. If the exercise of these capacities contributes uniquely and significantly to a well-lived life, then it would be prudentially bad to skip, or rush, one's childhood. Children's access to the special goods of childhood is explained by appeal to those capacities that they tend to possess to a much higher degree than regular adults.

So, what are the special goods of childhood? Some philosophers note that children, unlike adults, can be spontaneously self-disclosing and, more generally, trustful of others' good will, which facilitates unique relational goods – at least in cases when children relate to people who are worthy of their trust (Brighouse & Swift, 2014a). These features make possible a unique, and highly valuable, quality of intimacy in relationships with children; by contrast, "intimacy requires a considerable act of will on the part of adults interacting together" (Brighouse & Swift, 2014b, 16). It is plausible that spontaneous intimacy, alongside its potential for instrumental disvalue (Hannan, 2018), has non-instrumental value. What is hard to discern is whether children's ability to create the good of spontaneous intimacy – for themselves and others – really is a function of being immature, rather than of having been spared the relational harms and hence being less self-guarded as adults tend to be. If the latter explanation is more apt, appeals to the good of spontaneous intimacy give reason to protect children from abuses of trust (by making adults less likely to engage in it). But they give just as much reason to create, more generally, social worlds where adults can safely be emotionally close to each other in spontaneous ways. In other words, it is not clear whether children's spontaneous trustfulness is a special good of childhood or, instead, a non-instrumental good of human relationships, which may be possible to realise for people of all ages.

But other capacities that children, on average, display to a much higher degree than adults, do indeed appear to depend on their biological immaturity. These are intellectual and creative capacities which we highly admire in the more rare instances when they are exercised by adults (Gheaus, 2015b). It is generally known that children are very fast learners; their brains are extremely plastic. Children are also generally seen as better than adults at exploring possibilities and being open to the future; for these reasons, they tend to be more creative than adults. Over the past decades, research from various disciplines started to provide a systematic picture of these capacities: Neuropsychologists and developmental psychologists who engage in close observation of how children acquire knowledge note that these processes are very similar to those in which scientists engage: formulation and testing of hypotheses. Children spontaneously adopt a scientific frame of mind in looking at the world. Babies and toddlers "think, draw conclusions, make predictions, look for explanations, and even do experiments" (Gopnik et al., 1999/2008, X), and their learning is driven by relentless curiosity and ability to enjoy themselves in the process. Very occasionally, older children come up with genuine scientific discoveries, which is in itself astonishing given the current level of knowledge specialisation (Gheaus, 2015b, 10.) The same curiosity makes younger children interested in, and particularly good at, asking (sometimes sophisticated) philosophical questions and pursuing them to a certain extent – abilities that wane with the onset of puberty, never to be recovered (nor to be retained) by most adults (Matthews, 1994). Artists and art critics noticed a similar phenomenon with respect to aesthetic creativity: with the exception of those who make art-creation a life-long endeavour, childhood is one's most artistically creative period of life. And many full-time artists and art critics hold in great respect the results of children's artistic efforts (Feinberg, 2018).

There is a case for attributing children's intellectual curiosity, learning ability and general creativity to their still-developing prefrontal cortices and the ensuing weaker prefrontal control (Gopnik, 2009). Prefrontal control is necessary to inhibit information that is redundant for performing a specific task, and this explains adults's superior executive abilities. Its downside is that it impedes a propensity to be imaginative and consider new possibilities, and hence also creativity. In addition, very young children perceive the world more vividly and in a less organized way than adults, which is itself conducive to creativity (Gopnik, 2009). I have argued (Gheaus, 2015b) that, to the extent to which this explanation is correct, children have unique access to important intellectual and aesthetic abilities. In this case, the goods that are necessary for the exercise of these abilities are special goods of childhood: their value to children is significantly higher than their value to adults. Such goods include sufficient freedom from care and unstructured time for children to explore the world, their minds and aesthetic possibilities. They also include permission,

and space, to play freely, and with other children, and, for the exercise of aesthetic and philosophical capacities, some competent guidance.

The next question, then, is how valuable these capacities are, that is, what contribution they can make to the overall value of a life. This depends, in part, on one's view of what can make a life go well for its subject. I speculate that a general tendency to look at children's achievements with condescendence (illustrated by Michael Slote in the discussion above), together with the fact that individual children rarely achieve feats on a par to those achieved by adults, can lead to the underestimation of their special abilities. Children lack the experience, practice and control over their lives that allow an extremely small minority of adults to break new ground in science, write good philosophy and create important works of art. But quite apart from the value of particular end-results of children's creativity, it seems objectively valuable to engage in epistemic, philosophical and artistic activities and to make progress with such endeavours. And it seems particularly valuable to do these things while taking general pleasure in doing so. If it is true that the vast majority of adults have access to these objective goods only as children, then childhood's contribution to a prudentially good life could be very significant. A recent account of achievements and their value provides grounds for an even stronger claim: that, in virtue of their creativity and drive to explore the world, children in general are more capable of genuine achievements than adults in general. Gwen Bradford (2015) believes that the value of an agent's achievements depends not on the value of the final product, but on the agent's full exercise of their characteristic human capacities – of being, in this respect, "all one can be". I suggest that achievement, at least in this specific sense, comes easier to children than to adults. Finally, if the key to a meaningful life is to take joy in objectively worthwhile activities and projects – as some philosophers argue (Wolf, 1997) – then childhood is a time during which we tend to be well-suited to access to important sources of meaning. Whether or not children actually have opportunities to access value is of course a separate matter, and is likely to depend on adults' fulfilment of their duties towards children.

Childhood is likely to make a potentially significant contribution to the goodness of one's life on other metrics of value, which I will merely mention here. Friends of objective list theories of wellbeing may think that philosophical, artistic and generally intellectual creativity belong to the list. Moreover, they may think that experimentation itself – which, on some accounts, is part and parcel of being a child (Franklin-Hall, 2013; Schapiro, 1999) – is good for an individual. Hedonists, too, may be persuaded to think highly of childhood's potential for wellbeing if, on average, children are more capable of pleasure and joy than adults (Gheaus, 2015b, but for doubts see; Tomlin, 2018a, 2018b). Further, one may embrace a moralised view of prudential value, and think that a life devoid of moral goodness, or of virtue, can never be a life well lived. Some philosophers see children as being generally more capable of compassion and empathy (Jaworska, 2007; Matthews, 1994). But children are also traditionally believed to be stuck at a pre-conventional level of moral development (Kohlberg, 1981); if so, this would significantly diminish their moral agency and also the significance of their compassionate and empathic attitudes. Yet, relatively recent psychological experiments reveal that even very young children understand the difference between moral principles (e.g. the wrongness of hitting someone) and conventional rules (e.g. about keeping quiet during certain intervals) (Gopnik, 2009).

If the special goods view of the nature and value of childhood is correct, it, too, is open to different normative interpretations. A radical interpretation would say that childhood has the potential of making a greater contribution to one's wellbeing than adulthood, and hence that being an eternal child – Peter Pan, for instance – could be prudentially good for an individual. A moderate interpretation, which I favour, sits well with an objective list theory of wellbeing: perhaps the best life is one in which a person enjoys a variety of objective goods. If so, it is good for an individual to partake in child-like, unbounded, creativity and experimentation, but also in the adult-like ability to focus and carry more complex projects to completion. The ideal human being would simultaneously display both sets of characteristics. Yet, as it happens, hard-wired, biological, features make it impossible to be fully child-like and adult-like at the same time, and this is a reason to wish that one goes through both childhood and adulthood; as children, we may be, in one sense, "unfinished adults", but as adults we become, in another sense, "defective children". The question of the ideal length of time to be spent in each is a separate, downstream issue.

The deficiency and the special goods views bear differently on various practical issues of childrearing.<sup>11</sup> The next section briefly explains these differences with respect to specific goods that children are owed by their parents and

by educational institutions, and *qua* members of the political community in terms of rights to vote, to work, or to be gainfully employed.

## 4 | DUTIES TOWARDS CHILDREN

Irrespective of the correct view of childhood, children's developing autonomy, and their lesser normative power to direct their lives in comparison with adults make it plausible that the metric of justice for children differs from the metric of justice for adults (Fowler, 2020; Macleod, 2010). In particular, children can't be expected to take responsibility for their choices to the same extent as adults, and therefore what they are owed cannot be restricted to all-purpose means; they are owed not mere opportunities, but also certain outcomes (Lindblom, 2018). Defenders of the special goods view claim that the metric of justice for children includes unstructured time for play and exploration, chances to exercise their fantasy and the protections needed not to worry about their future (Brighouse & Swift, 2014a; Ferracioli, 2020; Gheaus, 2015a; Macleod, 2015). This claim has direct implications for the design of two main institutions through which duties towards children are discharged on a regular basis: the family and the school.

Everybody believes that children have a right to be protected from parental abuse and neglect. It is likely that they are owed more: adequate parents (Brighouse & Swift, 2014a). What counts as "abuse", "neglect" and "adequacy" depends on what makes a child's life go badly or well. Currently, if a child wants to sleep and her parent never allows the child to do so, the state interferes on grounds of parental abuse. If a child is hungry and the parent systematically fails to feed her, the state interferes on grounds of parental neglect. But if a child wants to play, and the parent never allows her to – say, if the parent always fills up her program with structured activities meant to educate her – this doesn't usually even attract criticism for inadequate parenting, let alone the coercive intervention of the state. If the special goods view is correct, maybe it should.

This is a good illustration of how the two views on childhood sketched above may generate radically different verdicts in the case of the parent depriving his child of free time. The defender of the deficiency view will, presumably, be more inclined to argue that the best use of childhood is to prepare the individual for a successful adulthood; assuming that parental concerted cultivation of the child is likely to optimise the child's wellbeing as an adult, the parental behaviour is an instance of parental excellence.<sup>12</sup> In contrast, those persuaded by the special goods view, will worry about the child's loss of opportunities to engage in creative discovery of the world and to genuinely explore possibilities. If a person's ability and desire to enjoy these goods are time-indexed, the worry is that missing out on them during childhood cannot be fully compensated by adult success.

It is, of course, possible that some unstructured time, used for free play and exploration, also has developmental value. In this case, for the person who sees children as mere unfinished adults the real action is in the weighting, against each other, of the negative and the positive effects of concerted cultivation on the future adult. For the special goods view, the action is in identifying the trade-offs, if any, between an optimally good childhood (perhaps of more freedom than discipline) and optimal preparation for a good adulthood (requiring, perhaps, more discipline than freedom).

A similar analysis pertains to schools and, especially, to school curricula. If the value of childhood is mostly as preparation for adulthood, then schools will serve children's interests to the extent to which they equip them to become autonomous and suitably resourceful adults. To do so, schools may need to provide children with more than academic training; activities such as sports, for instance, have obvious developmental value and other non-academic disciplines such as home economics are likely to help one prepare for adulthood, too. But if children can greatly benefit from artistic, athletic and exploratory activities above and beyond the ways in which these contribute to their wellbeing as adults, there is an egalitarian case for ensuring that all children attend such schools (Macleod, 2018.) Schooling is mandatory, and children are required to spend a very significant proportion of their time in school-related activities. If so, then there is a *prima facie* case that schools should provide all children with access to the special goods of childhood, including doing music, arts philosophy and sports.

Finally, the correct account of childhood matters for debates about children's civil liberties. A view about childhood alone may not settle these debates, but it determines some of the reasons that apply, and their force.

Philosophical treatments of children's right to vote are centred around the deficiency view, with much of the debate turning on whether children's immature agency warrants their disenfranchisement. When they consider how having the vote might be beneficial for children themselves, philosophers point to the developmental advantages of an early exercise of this power. But if the special goods view is correct, a powerful consideration concerns the protection of children's access to the special goods of childhood. The one philosopher who makes an argumentative move in this direction is Ludvig Beckman (2009), who notes that giving children the vote would impose on them burdens of responsibility. His worry is that children's responsible exercise of the right to vote would limit their play time, thus setting back important interests of theirs. "Let them be children!", one may say. If the second view of childhood is correct, we need a detailed account of whether, and how, disenfranchisement during childhood makes a difference to lifetime wellbeing.

A few philosophers who took up the issue of children's right to work adopt the deficiency view, presenting children as undeveloped human beings (Pierik & Houwerzijl, 2006, 198; Satz, 2010, 156 & 157) and no more than that. They present the harms of child labour as strictly developmental: it deprives children of "the capacities that they need—literacy, numeracy, broad knowledge of personal and social alternatives, communication skills—to effectively exercise their agency as adults." (Satz, 2010, 165). The benefits, too, are seen as strictly developmental; for instance, Debra Satz notes that child work "may allow children to develop skills they need to become well functioning" (Satz, 2010, 164.)

But if childhood is a privileged time for enjoying important goods, missing out on them makes the individual worse off above and beyond the ways mentioned by Satz. The opportunity costs, in terms of special goods of childhood, of engaging in child labour, may or may not outweigh the benefits of doing so – this is highly circumstantial; yet, if children are more than unfinished adults this makes the evaluation of child labour more complex. The right view of childhood also matters for establishing appropriate regulation in cases when children do have a legal right to work, concerning for instance working hours and the kinds of work open to them.

A general point seems to apply across children's different political and civil rights: On the special goods view of childhood, we have grounds to deny or limit some of these rights for children – to vote, to work, to associate, to participate in civil society, to marry and have children of their own – partly in order to enable their access to the special goods, which they can only enjoy if we protect their free time and ability to remain carefree. In some contexts this reason will be decisive and, in any case, it is a consideration that deserves proper consideration.

## 5 | CONCLUSIONS

I have provided a map of two different views about childhood, and how they bear on some practical normative issues. In particular, I identified a group of goods to which several philosophers claim that children have a right, because their enjoyment makes a significant contribution to how well one's life goes overall, and failure to enjoy them during one's childhood cannot be compensated for later in life. Such a fact has distributive implications, providing reasons in favour of child-centred spending.

The question of how we ought to distribute goods across the different stages of life cannot be fully settled by adopting a particular view about childhood. Both views discussed here can yield the conclusion that children ought to be provided with various goods to which adults are not entitled and the provision of which may be quite expensive, but for different reasons and, possibly, to different extents. The traditional, deficiency, view, is compatible with the claim that (many of the) goods of childhood that the alternative view identifies as "special" have significant developmental value. Being deprived of them during one's childhood makes one worse off *qua* future adult. For instance, Tim Fowler doesn't commit himself to any of the above views about childhood, but nevertheless believes that children have claims to a variety of potentially expensive goods on developmental grounds: childhood is "the most important life stage, be-

cause gains in childhood are by their nature longer lasting and likely to lead to further advantages later in life" (2019, xi).

If so, the precise identification of children's claims of justice will turn on three questions. First, we need to identify the developmental value of the goods that children can enjoy. Second, we need to know whether some of these goods have significant value above and beyond how they prepare us for a good adulthood. The third question is whether missing out on them during childhood can be compensated during adulthood. While empirical work is needed in order to answer these questions, answers to them also depend on the correct account of wellbeing.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> The general assumption, in this paper, is that the goodness of a life depends on the total of the well-being that the person enjoys in the various periods of her life (Broome, 2019). For the purpose of this overview I don't distinguish between instrumental and non-instrumental value, nor do I assume any particular view of (children's) wellbeing, although I briefly mention some possibilities.

<sup>2</sup> It is, of course, possible to deny that undeveloped rationality is bad for children while thinking it is bad for adults. Note that if underdeveloped rationality was bad for adults, but not for children, then underdeveloped rationality would be a special bad of adulthood. There is no literature discussing the special bads of adulthood; yet, an analysis of such bads, if any, would be necessary for a proper comparison between childhood and adulthood.

<sup>3</sup> I am not attributing to Schapiro the deficiency view of childhood. She calls childhood a "predicament", but is silent on the question of what, if any, special goods may be available to children. As the next subsection explains, this is where the crucial difference between the two views lies.

<sup>4</sup> Unlike this chapter, Schapiro's work on childhood (or, at least the 1999 article) takes "child" as a status, rather than as a biological, term. Her concern is not to describe what is special about the period of life when we are not yet biologically mature, but to identify the normative condition of people who lack a stable practical identity. Nothing in her account rules out the possibility that some biological children have graduated from childhood understood as a status concept (i.e., have acquired a stable practical identity), while some biological adults are still in it. Here, however, I assume that "child" understood as a status term maps sufficiently closely on the biological sense of the term.

<sup>5</sup> It might also be impossible, on some accounts of what it takes to eliminate domination. If non-domination requires that political power is forced, by the democratic process, to track the interests of children, then perhaps this could not be achieved even by giving children the vote. Following Gheaus (2021), I assume, however, that this is not the interpretation of non-domination that is most appropriate in the case of children. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for raising this possibility.

<sup>6</sup> But not unheard-of: David Benatar (2006) proposes an age-inclusive version of this view.

<sup>7</sup> "May" because it is possible for human beings to have impersonal value and for such value to be sufficiently great to offset the disvalue of life being bad for them. More complicatedly, it is possible that the existence of some individuals alleviated the disvalue that life has for people who already exist (without thereby making it the case that the latter's life has positive value.) I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for these points.

<sup>8</sup> And this only assuming that it is possible to fully compensate the special bads of childhood by providing enough of other goods.

<sup>9</sup> Admittedly, the instant adulthood pill is a particularly contestable thought experiment. One may think that going through childhood is conceptually necessary for becoming an adult, where "adult" is to be understood not as a biological term but as "having a stable practical identity" (hence, as a status term). Here, the thought is that a stable practical identity requires individuals to form their aims and values in a particular way – by experimenting and finally endorsing (Schapiro, 1999) them rather than acquiring them instantaneously (Weinstock, 2018). The thought experiment, however, was initially designed by Samantha Brennan to tease the intuition of whether childhood has any non-instrumental value, not to suggest that it may possibly lack instrumental value.

- <sup>10</sup> One may believe that childhood can contribute special goods to one's overall wellbeing, but has a lower potential for net goodness than adulthood, making it rational to wish for shorter childhoods. On the taxonomy that I propose, this would be a version of the deficiency view.
- <sup>11</sup> I leave out of this analysis the possibility that different accounts of what is non-instrumentally good apply to children and adults (see Skelton, 2016 and, for criticism, Cormier & Rossi, 2019; Tomlin, 2018b). I assume that a theory of wellbeing applies universally, although the particular goods that generate wellbeing can vary across types and tokens of individuals. For a defence of this assumption see Lin (2018).
- <sup>12</sup> Annette Lareau (2003) describes the life of a large number of children, those raised by North American middle classes, as highly structured and allowing for little freedom for exploration and unorchestrated learning. Parents' aim is to increase children's competitive advantage and adult success.

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