3 Children's Prudential Value

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Introduction

Until recently, the nature of children's well-being or prudential value remained all but unexplored in the literature on well-being. There now exists a small but growing body of work on the topic.[1] In this chapter, I focus on a cluster of under-explored issues relating to children's well-being. I investigate, in specific, three distinct (and to my mind puzzling) positions about it, namely, that children's *lives* cannot on the whole go well or poorly for them, prudentially speaking; that the prudential goods of childhood *count for less* than the same goods of adulthood towards the prudential value of an individual's life as a whole; and that children's prudential goods (or goods more generally) are (at least in some cases) in some way *special*.

This chapter is divided into four main sections. In the first section, I briefly describe some accounts of the nature of children's well-being. In the next three sections, I address the three somewhat puzzling positions mentioned above.

Children's Well-Being

What is non-instrumentally or basically prudentially good for a child? Recent literature on well-being has produced a range of answers. The most well-developed seem to fall into two categories.

The first category comprises so-called objective list views of well-being. The distinguishing feature of such views is they hold something (friendship or play) is non-instrumentally good for a child (or other individual) independently of whether the child possesses a pro attitude towards the item in question. In line with this, Guy Fletcher describes objective list theories as including 'all and only those that specify particular things as non-instrumentally prudentially good (or bad) for people whether or not they have any pro (or con) attitude towards them' (Fletcher 2016, 151; Lin 2020). For example, spending time engaged in sport may be good for a child even if it is not, for her, enjoyable or what she wants. True, it might be better were she enjoying or satisfying

[1] For treatments of what is non-instrumentally prudentially good for children, see Alexandrova (2017), Brennan (2014), Brighouse and Swift (2014), Gheaus (2015a; 2015b), Kraut (1994; 2007), Lin (2017), Skelton (2015; 2016; 2018), and Skelton, Forsberg, and Black (2021).

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a desire for sport, but enjoyment or desire satisfaction is not necessary for sport to be good for her. To take another example, it might be non-instrumentally bad for a child to be in some way ignorant or in the possession of false beliefs even if she enjoys it. Ignorance need not be painful or frustrate a desire to be non-instrumentally bad for her.

Samantha Brennan adopts an objective list view of what is good for children. The items she thinks basically prudentially good for children include:

> Unstructured, imaginative play. Relationships with other children and with adults. Opportunities to meaningfully contribute to household and community. Time spent outdoors and in the natural world. Physical affection. Physical activity and sport. Bodily pleasure. Music and art. Emotional well-being. Physical well-being and health. (Brennan 2014, 42)

Anna Alexandrova also appears to adopt an objective list view of what is basically prudentially good for children, on which the following two items are good for children:

> Develop those stage-appropriate capacities that would, for all we know, equip them for successful future, given their environment . . . And engage with the world in child-appropriate ways, for instance, with curiosity and exploration, spontaneity, and emotional security. (Alexandrova 2017, 69 [emphasis removed])

Included in the so-called stage-appropriate capacities are the ability to reason, to make decisions, and to use one's body (Alexandrova 2017, 69). These are basically good for children in part because they develop skills for use that (it is reasonable to expect) will be useful when one is an adult. Included in child-appropriate ways of engaging with the world are both psychological states (pleasure, happiness, awe) and behaviours (spontaneous action) and many of the goods on Brennan's list (Alexandrova 2017, 74).

Into the second category fall so-called hybrid views of well-being.[2] Hybrid theories of well-being (putatively) combine aspects of objective list views with aspects of so-called subjective views of well-being, the distinguishing feature of which is that some item is non-instrumentally or basically good for an individual only if that individual has a pro attitude toward the item in question, for example she wants it or values it in some way (Sumner 1996, 34ff).

The idea behind hybrid views is that one fares well only when one possesses or engages with something, for example a friendship, *and* one has a pro attitude towards that something, for example one wants it or finds it satisfying. In one hybrid view of well-being for children, well-being consists in happiness or satisfaction in play, intellectual development or activity, and valuable relationships (including friendships with peers) (Skelton 2015; 2016). According to this view, neither happiness alone nor play, intellectual development, and

[2] For detailed general discussion of hybrid views, see Woodard (2016).

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valuable relationships alone have non-instrumental, basic prudential value. If a child experiences happiness in the absence of the other items, her happiness will at best be instrumentally good for her. Similarly, if a child develops intellectually in the absence of happiness, such development will at best be instrumentally good for her.

The views discussed so far are articulated explicitly for children. Alexandrova is most clearly committed to advocating for a distinct view of well-being for adults. She bears the burden, therefore, of showing that children's well-being is distinct from adult well-being. Proponents of the other views may at least in principle leave open whether children's well-being is distinct from adults' well-being.[3]

Not all views of adults' well-being are silent on the nature of children's well-being.[4] Richard Kraut defends a hybrid view of well-being applying to all (human) welfare subjects, which he calls developmentalism (Kraut 2007). According to this view, 'a flourishing human being is one who possesses, develops, and enjoys the exercise of cognitive, affective, sensory, and social powers (no less than physical powers)' (Kraut 2007, 137). Kraut thinks his view contains the flexibility to explain why different things are good for different human beings at different stages in their life and development. According to Kraut's view, then, a child is faring well when she is flourishing, and she is flourishing when she is enjoying or taking pleasure in the actual development or exercise of her physical, social, sensory, cognitive, and affective capacities or powers. As with the other hybrid view, Kraut maintains that pleasure in the absence of the development or the exercise of one's capacities or powers is not basically or non-instrumentally good for a child (Kraut 2007, 124–5, 129, 137, 166, 176) and (similarly) that the development or exercise of a capacity in the absence of pleasure is not basically or non-instrumentally good for a child (Kraut 2007, 128, 165).

These prominent theories of children's well-being face challenges. Take the hybrid view. It might be implausible to claim that happiness by itself or intellectual development by itself is at best merely instrumentally good, as the hybrid view implies. Happiness alone may seem basically good for a child; the same may be true, for example, of intellectual development and valuable relationships. If this is right, the objective list view may be the better account of children's well-being, provided the list includes happiness and goods like intellectual development.

In reply, the proponent of the hybrid view may urge that if the happiness in question really is not taken in one of the objective items the particular hybrid view favours, and the possession of objective items really does leave one cold, it

[3] For arguments in favour of the view that children's well-being is distinct from adults' well-being, see Skelton (2015); for doubts, see Cormier and Rossi (2019).

[4] Of course, hedonism and desire-fulfilment views of well-being may provide accounts of children's well-being; for discussion and criticism, see Kraut (1994; 2007) and Skelton (2015; 2016).

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may not be all that implausible to deny them non-instrumental, basic prudential value. Most views of well-being will have to declare that at least some items *appearing* non-instrumentally good will turn out in fact to be merely instrumentally good (e.g., hedonism). The hybrid view of well-being is not unique in this respect.

We shall want to know which of these views to accept, if any. I will not adjudicate the dispute here. Instead, I focus on what seem to be matters of agreement between the views. These views agree that their favoured basic prudential goods contribute to making a child's life go well, or at least that a sum or other combination of the goods determine how well a child's life is going. Children's lives as a whole can go well on these views. In addition, these views do not (on the face of it) claim that children's prudential goods contribute less in themselves to the non-instrumental prudential value of one's life as a whole. They do not, that is, discount children's prudential goods when thinking about how well one's life is going or has gone. Some of these views of children's well-being suggest, as noted, that children's well-being is distinct (or possesses features that are distinct) from adult well-being, but they seem not to hold that there are special prudential goods in childhood because, for example, certain goods are accessible only (or more readily available) to children.

In the remainder of this chapter, I explore the following positions rivalling those agreed to by the views of well-being discussed so far: that children's lives cannot go well or poorly for them on the whole, prudentially speaking; that the prudential goods of childhood count for less than the prudential goods of adulthood towards the prudential value of an individual's life as a whole; and that children's prudential goods (or at least some of them) are special.

Do Children's Lives Go Well?

David Velleman defends a conception of prudential value implying that children (at least when young) may fare well or poorly at a time but not over time (Velleman 2000). Children may be able to fare well in a moment; their lives as a whole cannot go well or poorly for them.

This conclusion follows from the premises of an argument Velleman relies on to show that the lives of certain non-human animals (e.g., cows) cannot go well or poorly for them. He argues non-human animals can 'fare well or ill only at particular moments' (Velleman 2000, 83). This is because a cow is able to care only about what happens to it at a time or in a moment. A cow cannot care about what happens to it over time or in a period of time or in its life as a whole, because a cow is unable to conceive of itself 'as persisting through a sequence of benefits' or ills (Velleman 2000, 81). And since a cow is unable to care about how well or poorly its life is going over time or across time or as a whole, what happens to it across time or in a period of time or in its life as a whole is not 'intrinsically good for' it (Velleman 2000, 81).

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By contrast, because 'a person can care about what his life story is like' or her life as a whole, what happens to her across time or in a period of time or in her life as a whole is intrinsically good for her (Velleman 2000, 84). In addition, like non-human animals, persons can care about what is good for them in a moment or at a time. Persons therefore, according to Velleman, can fare well at a time and across time; that is, they have both synchronic or momentary welfare interests and diachronic welfare interests (Velleman 2000, 71).

Velleman contends further that, in the case of persons, the value of a life as a whole is a not a matter exclusively of the sum of the momentary goods comprising it. The value of a life has to do in addition with the meaning of various events in the life. The meaning of an event is determined by how it figures into the narrative structure or story of the life. There is value to be found in the sequence of harms and benefits (Velleman 2000, 81 and 83). The value of the life or meaning is not reducible to the sum of the values of the moments comprising it.

To illustrate, imagine two different lives. One involves a troubled marriage of ten years ending in divorce, which is quickly followed by a very happy second marriage to someone else. A second life involves a troubled marriage ending not in divorce, but in 'eventual happiness as the relationship matures' (Velleman 2000, 65). Velleman says even if the sum of momentary well-being in the two lives is equal in value, the second life is basically prudentially better for one as it includes a better sequence of events. In the first marriage the struggle is a 'dead loss' whereas in the second the struggle is 'redeemed' (Velleman 2000, 65). The (better) story of redemption adds value to the life beyond what (the sum of) momentary values contribute.

What does Velleman's view imply for children? It is unclear whether Velleman means to include children in the category of 'persons'. Like much work in well-being, his focus seems to be on adults in full possession of their faculties (Skelton 2016). But it appears to follow on his view that, like cows, children, especially when young, can fare well or ill only at particular moments. This follows presumably in part because children, at least when young, can care only about what happens to them at a time or in a moment. Such children cannot, it seems, care about what their life story is like or about extended periods in time or about their life as a whole.

Of greatest significance for Velleman is the 'value of a particular sequence' of harms and benefits, for example struggle in a marriage followed by reconciliation and redemption. Children cannot care about such sequences because they cannot take up the diachronic perspective from which they may be valued. They cannot conceive of themselves persisting through a sequence of benefits or ills and so cannot care about the relations between them. Since they cannot care about their lives as a whole, their lives cannot go better or worse for them. They appear, then, like non-human animals, to have no diachronic prudential interests; they have only synchronic prudential interests.

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Key to Velleman's position on non-human animals and on children is a form of internalism: 'unless a subject has the bare capacity, the equipment, to care about something under some conditions or other, it cannot be intrinsically good for him' (Velleman 2000, 81). The variety of internalism is weak, requiring only that subjects have a 'bare capacity' to care about something rather than that they actually care about something or have the disposition to care about something under some (possibly counterfactual) condition(s). But, still, it has bite. If children lack the capacity to care about their life as a whole or the relationship between sequences of events in their life, children cannot be said to have good or bad lives, prudentially speaking.

The implications of Velleman's view seem highly counterintuitive. We speak of children's lives going well or of individuals having had a good childhood. Velleman himself at points suggests one can have a good or 'happy' childhood (Velleman 2000, 73, also 72, 60, 68). It is part of common sense that a child's life can go well or poorly for her. News items frequently report, for instance, some children's lives have gone less well (or badly) for them during the pandemic because lockdowns and school closures have had a negative impact on their mental health. A child soldier might be said to have had a bad childhood or lived a bad life while she was a soldier.

Such claims are not, it seems, the same as the claim that children have suffered or things have gone poorly for them only in various moments or at discrete times in their life. The claim seems to be that their lives have on the whole, taking into account all the relevant bits, gone less well for them or did not go well for them during the worst parts of the pandemic or during their time as a child soldier. We, of course, speak in similar ways about non-human animals. We might say, for example, that Melanie's cat Taz has a good life on the whole, taking into account all she does, frolicking, napping, and eating. Or that abused dogs or cows in factory farms have lives that go poorly for them on the whole.

In what sense do we make those claims? There is a natural sense in which we may be talking about a cat having a good life. The cat's life, it seems natural to suppose, contains on balance more positive experiences than negative experiences (Bradley 2015). A life is going well when the benefits outweigh the harms. We might think something like the same is true for children. It is not implausible that in the case of at least some (young) children, their lives are going well in the sense that on balance they have more of what is non-instrumentally, basically good for them than they have what is non-instrumentally, basically bad for them.

Velleman denies this kind of summing or aggregating in the case of non-human animals, because

> any method of combining the values of a cow's good and bad moments will be purely arbitrary and consequently defective, insofar as it fails to represent what

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values things have specifically for the cow rather than for some other perspective. (Velleman 2000, 83)

It seems to follow that, for children, this way of determining what makes their lives good on the whole is not acceptable because it is arbitrary 'insofar as it fails to represent what values things have specifically for' the child.

This is too strong. It does not follow automatically that a judgement about how well a child's life is going on the whole or as a whole would be arbitrary given Velleman's supposition. It is not clearly arbitrary that the value of a life as a whole or over some period in a life is equivalent to the sum of the values of the moments in that life or period. It might be wrong. It might be true that the sum of the values of the parts is not the whole story. Perhaps the distribution or arrangement of goods matters, too. In this case the value of a life as a whole would in part be a function of how equitably prudential goods (e.g., happiness, friendship) are distributed in this life (Sen 1979, 470–1). This view does not seem arbitrary, either. In any case, it is not as if we lack intuitions about what makes lives good or bad on the whole for children, for example, that other things being equal, a life containing surplus prudential value on balance is better than one containing surplus ill-being on balance. Insofar as we rely on such intuitions, we seem well suited to avoiding the charge of arbitrariness.

Velleman's worry must be that it is dubious to make judgements about the prudential goodness or badness of a child's or non-human animal's life as a whole without reference to their perspective, for without reference to that we can no longer be certain we are talking about prudential value anymore.

But it is not clear this follows. We seem to have intuitions about what makes a life good or bad for a child. A child would certainly live a bad life on the whole were they forced into sexual or slave labour. This life would be worse on balance than a life lived as member of a loving, protective family. Our judgements about what is basically prudentially good or bad for children will have to rely on intuitions like this rather than about what they can care about from their perspective. It is not clear that we think one's perspective is of the utmost importance in the case of (especially young) children and animals in any case.

We have a clash, then, between internalism and the idea that children and non-human animals can have lives that are good or bad on the whole. Since it seems clear that (young) children can live good or bad lives, we should reject internalism (or Velleman's version of it) for them.

The point might be reached in another way. Velleman thinks that it is only in cases in which a non-human animal or a child has the bare capacity to care about something that we can say something is non-instrumentally good for or bad for them. But this assumes without argument that the only relation determining whether something is prudentially good or bad for one is that of being something one has the bare capacity to care about. It is possible there may be other relations in which an individual may stand to something for it to

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count as prudentially good or bad for them. It is possible that having the capacity to care or caring about something makes a difference to how prudentially good or bad for you it turns out to be. However, there may be other relations. It is possible in the case of children that something contributing to flourishing or development is the right relation a thing must bear to a child to make her prudentially better or worse off.

In any case, requiring that one could care is too strong in the case of children and of non-human animals. Suppose a very young child does not care about taking happiness in valuable relationships with family members. It is just not clear such relationships fail to contribute directly to making a child prudentially better off. So we must search for some other relation to make sense of the relation something must bear to a child to make her prudentially better or worse off. It is more plausible that such a relation exists than that young children cannot have momentary or lifetime well-being. It seems plausible to reject internalism for the purpose of thinking about children's well-being, or at least for the purpose of thinking about the value of their lives as a whole.

Now, of course, at some point children will, as they mature, develop the capacity to care about their lives as a whole and in particular to care about the narrative structure of the life. In this case, Velleman's form of internalism will apply to children. Should we think in this case (let's focus here on adolescents) that narrative structure or meaning in Velleman's sense matters in the way he suggests? It might matter to a degree. It might be good for a young person, say, to struggle at a sport or at school and then after a period emerge as a success or a leader in the sport or at school. It might be better to succeed at one's current sport or in one's current study than to fail and move on to another sport or vocation even if the momentary well-being of the life with success is the same as the life with failure.

But I am not convinced that narrative structure has the importance Velleman suggests it does for adolescents, for two reasons. First, once an individual can care about something, what she cares about (at least under certain circumstances) will have an important role to play in determining what is basically prudentially valuable or not for her. The idea is that once she can care, her schedule of concerns determines to a significant degree what is basically prudentially good (bad) for her. If an individual (whether an adolescent or not) does not care about narrative structure or the way in which sequences of events in her life fit together, it is plausible that it matters or seems to matter much less to how well her life is going. The extent to which it does is largely (though perhaps not solely) up to her.

Second, to the extent that what matters to an adolescent's lifetime well-being is not a matter purely of her schedule of concerns, it is plausible that things other than narrative structure matter directly to her well-being. What seems to be good for adolescents more than narrative structure is quite the reverse. It is a near platitude that among the important basic prudential goods

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of relevance to adolescent well-being are not pleasing stories or narratives but rather plentiful experimentation with different identities involving, almost as a matter of course, trying on new identities, jettisoning some, failing at others, and having only partial success at yet others. In short, a good bit of organized chaos. Adolescence involves dropping some things one has worked hard on and taking up others, and so on. It is far from clear whether it is better for an adolescent to stick to a sport she has worked hard at than to drop the sport and move on to a musical instrument. In light of the importance of experimentation in adolescence (Schaprio 1999; Franklin-Hall 2013; Gheaus 2015a) and – yes – failure, it seems narrative structure, as Velleman understands, is of (limited) non-instrumental prudential value for children.

Do Children's Prudential Goods Count for Less towards Lifetime Well-Being?

Michael Slote agrees children's lives can go well or poorly for them, prudentially speaking (Slote 1983). Momentary goods in childhood play a role in determining the value of a life as a whole, but they play a lesser role compared to the goods of adulthood. Slote makes this remark about discounting the goods of childhood in the context of his quarrel with Henry Sidgwick's claim that the temporal location of an individual's perfection or happiness is not directly or intrinsically relevant to its value (Sidgwick 1981 [1907], 381). Sidgwick is a proponent of temporal neutrality. For Slote, location in time (pace Sidgwick) can make such a direct, intrinsic difference to something's prudential value. More specifically, the stage in life in which a prudential good occurs is directly relevant to the value it contributes to the life as a whole. A good (success) or ill (misfortune) counts for less when it falls in childhood.

Slote's argument runs as follows. Individual lives can be carved up into periods by reliance on 'natural and socially influenced facts about the typical human life cycle' (Slote 1983, 13, also 14). Roughly, there are three periods: childhood, including adolescence; the prime of life; and senescence or old age. Slote defines the prime of life as the period 'containing precisely those goals, strivings, miseries, and satisfactions, that are to be taken most seriously in human life' (Slote 1983, 21).

Slote goes on to argue that we tend to treat with 'lesser seriousness . . . the successes and misfortunes of childhood' (Slote 1983, 14). There are, he says, pursuits 'typical' or 'characteristic' of childhood (Slote 1983, 16, 17, 20, 23), including 'membership of the school team, scout merit badges', 'honour-roll marks', and 'captaincy of the basketball team' (Slote 1983, 16, 17, also 18). Successes or failures in these 'don't enter with any great weight into our estimation of the (relative) goodness of total lives' (Slote 1983, 14, also 20). In other words, he says, the 'successes and misfortunes' of childhood are less weighty when we are considering 'how fortunate someone has been in life'

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(Slote 1983, 14). These count for less in determining the overall value of a life simply because such successes and misfortunes took place in childhood.

In support of the discounting of childhood goods, he offers as evidence that we do not think glories in childhood make up for, or in some way compensate for, adult misfortunes, and nor do we think that the misfortunes of a schoolboy or a schoolgirl by themselves make a life worse or much worse (Slote 1983, 14). For example, Slote says

> A statesman known to have led a very happy and successful life may be discovered to have had a miserable childhood, but unless we imagine that that embittered his adulthood in ways not immediately obvious from other biographical facts, I don't think the discovery will make us wonder whether we haven't been over hasty in supposing the man (or his life) to have been fortunate, enviable. Within a very wide range, the facts of childhood simply don't enter with any great weight into our estimation of the (relative) goodness of total lives. (Slote 1983, 14)

The best explanation of this normative claim is, Slote says, that the successes and misfortunes of childhood are period relative goods: these are things that are valuable for children in childhood but not valuable 'from the perspective of human life as a whole' (Slote 1983, 17). This serves as a better explanation of their status than does an explanation according to which the typical pursuits of childhood lack value as irrational desires or addictions might (Slote 1983, 16, 21). Slote concludes from this that the value of the successes and misfortunes typical of childhood count for less towards determining the value of a life as a whole because they occur in childhood. Therefore, contra Sidgwick, the contribution a success or misfortune makes to the value of a life as a whole depends in part on when in time it occurs in a life.

It is not obvious the goods of childhood are to be discounted in the way Slote suggests. Slote's way of carving up life into discrete stages is problematic. He groups infancy, toddlerhood, pre-adolescence, and adolescence together into one category, thereby ignoring the vast intellectual, emotional, and physical differences between very young children and teenagers. It is not a stretch to suggest differences between children might affect the value their successes or failures contribute to lifetime well-being. An adolescent's failures or misfortunes may be much worse than a younger child's failures. Even if we concede that in general children's misfortunes are less significant in determining life's value, it does not follow that they are equally insignificant. The misfortune an adolescent experiences in being treated in an excessively paternalistic way may detract more from lifetime well-being than the misfortune a very young child experiences in being treated paternalistically.

Slote might grant this objection. He might simply suggest all he has to do is carve out another period of life – adolescence – and make claims that are distinct from but similar to those he makes about childhood. He could, for example, argue there are four periods in life, and that the goods of childhood

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are less important than the goods of adolescence, which are less important than the goods of the prime of life.

It is unclear if this reply on Slote's behalf does complete justice to the kinds of successes of which adolescents are capable, however. Some triumphs of adolescence and especially later adolescence seem not to be that remote from those indicative of the 'prime of life'. They seem to be precisely those things that are 'to be taken most seriously in human life' (Slote 1983, 21).

Consider an example to illustrate. In the 2012 Olympic games, a fifteen-year-old American, Katie Ledecky, won a gold medal in the 800-metre free-style swimming event. The fact that Ledecky was fifteen, and therefore by Slote's standards a child, does not by itself lead me to regard her success with 'lesser significance' when comparing it with the same success had later on in life. It appears to make as big a contribution to the overall value of her life as would the same success had in the 'prime of life'.

Indeed, this success seems (to me) to be 'determinative of what one's life has, for better or worse, been like' (Slote 1983, 21). In Slote's view, this is an important feature of the goods of the prime of life. This sort of triumph may well make up for future failures in coaching or in other pursuits relating to winning a gold medal.

Slote might reply to this by reiterating he does not think his claim about discounting applies to all the misfortunes or successes in childhood. His view is not that 'all, or even most, of the satisfactions . . . of childhood, are merely (period-)relative goods' (Slote 1983, 20). Rather, only some of the successes and misfortunes are discounted. Slote is concerned only with the successes and misfortunes that are 'characteristic' or 'typical' of childhood, for example captaincy of sport teams in school, honour-roll marks, scout merit badges, and the like. It is only to these successes and their corresponding misfortunes that his claim about the lesser significance with which we treat the successes and misfortunes of childhood applies. His claim is, if a success or misfortune is 'characteristic' or 'typical' of childhood, it is treated with less significance when we are thinking about how fortunate a person has been in life.

This reply weakens Slote's position. First, Slote relies on a distinction between goods (ills) that are characteristic or typical of childhood and goods (ills) that are not. He does not cut the distinction in a principled way. He offers only examples of what he has in mind. His examples of what seem to be typical or characteristic successes or misfortunes of childhood are very narrow and risk trivializing his main claim about the successes and misfortunes of childhood. We might grant that what he regards as typical or characteristic do not count for much and then argue that we ought to focus on other, more important goods in childhood instead (e.g., unstructured leisure and play and the opportunity to pursue them).

Second, what he characterizes as 'typical' or 'characteristic' seems not to exhaust all of what we think of as typical goods of childhood. Consider, for

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example, one very typical or characteristic pursuit of childhood, namely, the rich, intimate, and very enjoyable relationships children often or typically have with children (roughly) their own age or with their siblings or older adults (e.g., grandparents). Such friendships often involve knowing, loving, and interacting with others in very focussed, very intimate ways. It is very difficult to imagine this kind of typical or characteristic good as being one to be discounted in any way simply because it occurs in childhood.

Slote's point about typical or characteristic goods is more easily accepted if we focus exclusively on his examples. But in line with the point just made, it seems harder to concede his point if we look behind the various successes on which he focusses to the more basic goods they might serve to promote, including happiness, intellectual development, friendship, companionship, and so on. These seem not to be obvious candidates for discounting in themselves. It is less than obvious that we have reason to discount happiness taken in a close, intimate relationships simply because it takes place in childhood. Such friendships might count for a lot in thinking about how well or not one's life has gone. They may even compensate for the lack of successful relationships in adulthood.

Third, we might grant in some cases that what Slote deems typical or characteristic goods of childhood are in some way of less significance, but on grounds other than their location in time or the fact that they occur in childhood. We might agree with Slote that, for example, captaincy or academic success is better when had in the prime of life, but for reasons other than having to do with where they fall in the typical human lifespan. The reason the goods located in the prime of life may be better and contribute more to the value of a life may have to do with certain of their nature, not their location in time.

Let's suppose the successes constitute the achievement of a worthwhile aim. For adults this may well be a matter of one's 'choices and reactions . . . of how well the ends are selected and how successfully they are pursued' (Scanlon 1998, 125). Because features like choices are less prevalent in childhood successes or worthwhile aims, we may be inclined to discount the value of the successes as a result. Let's suppose, slightly differently, that the successes of childhood count as achievements, where, roughly, an achievement involves one competently causing something through a difficult activity. One sets out a plan for getting high marks, effortfully executes and works diligently on the plan, and succeeds in getting high marks. According to one influential view, the value of an achievement is a matter of how much effort and will one exerts to achieve it and how competently or knowingly one caused it using one's theoretical and practical rationality (Bradford 2015). Such features may be present to a lesser degree in the typical or characteristic successes and achievements of childhood, making them (seemingly in themselves) less valuable than similar achievements in adulthood. Factors such as the ones highlighted above

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seem better at explaining the difference in value of the successes and misfortunes in childhood than does mere temporal location in the lifespan.

Are Children's Prudential Goods Special?

Slote sometimes puts his position more bluntly:

> 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. (Slote 1983, 15)

Based on what has been argued so far, this seems implausible. Certain things are non-instrumentally good for children whether or not they have a positive or negative impact on mature individuals. And they do not seem to be the sorts of things it would make sense to discount merely because they happen in childhood.

Recently, a more extreme version of Slote's view has attracted the attention of (mainly) political philosophers. It is the view 'that having a good childhood is ... valuable merely because it contributes to a good adulthood' (Gheaus 2015a, 6) or that 'childhood is a period of life in which the person is waiting and preparing for adulthood' (Brighouse and Swift 2014, 65). Some attribute this view to Slote (e.g., Gheaus 2015a). But it is not obvious, as we have seen, that this is his view, hence the 'principally' in the above-quoted passage. Indeed, it is rare to see the more extreme view explicitly defended in the literature, though it is certainly implied in at least some views in political philosophy.[5]

The main thrust of the response to the position that children's goods are merely instrumental is to argue there are certain things that are basically, non-instrumentally (or intrinsically) good for children. Not all the goods of childhood or the things good for children are good merely because they are conducive to a good adulthood or produce states that are basically, non-instrumentally good for the adults the children will become (Macleod, 2010; Brennan 2014; Gheaus, 2015a; Gheaus 2015b; Macleod 2015).

It is undeniable there are certain things that are basically, non-instrumentally good or bad for children, prudentially speaking. That said, it seems to be a matter of debate, at least amongst some political philosophers, whether there are such goods. That this requires debate is, perhaps, indicative of the undue influence Aristotelianism and Kantianism have over (especially) contemporary political philosophy.[6]

Those who reject the extreme view fashion themselves as defenders of intrinsic goods (or bads) of childhood. Typically, a defence of this takes the

[5] For discussion of this view's sources, see Macleod (2010) and Gheaus (2015a).

[6] For discussion of what Aristotle and Kant think about children's well-being, see Skelton (2018).

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form of developing a list of non-instrumental goods, the value of which 'doesn't follow from their contribution to the goods of adult life' (Brennan 2014, 35). Brennan defends a list of intrinsic goods of childhood, which we noted above. Colin Macleod offers a slightly different list:

> a valuable childhood will have its share of frustration, difficulties, and even emotional and physical pain . . . we should think of the [intrinsic] goods [of childhood] as emerging from various forms of creative stimulation of distinctive human faculties. To realize the goods, we engage and activate the physical, emotional, aesthetic, cognitive, and moral faculties of children by exposing them to circumstances in which they can experience and give expression to their faculties and face challenges involved in using these faculties. (Macleod 2010, 187)

The specific goods realized include, Macleod says, 'adventure, and aesthetic exploration and experience', and a secure and loving family (Macleod 2010, 180, 181, 182).[7] Neither Brennan nor Macleod (at least in this paper) suggest these goods are in any way special. Their point is that certain things are good for children not only when and because such things enhance one's future good in adulthood. These may be good for children even when they are, to use Macleod's phrase, 'developmentally inert' (Macleod 2010, 182).

Some want to go further and argue in response to the extreme view not only that certain things are basically, non-instrumentally good for children, but are in addition 'special' to children (Brighouse and Swift 2014, 65; Gheaus 2015a, 2015b). Brennan and Macleod are correct that at least some items are basically, non-instrumentally good for children. We do not have to agree with their particular lists of non-instrumental goods to agree with their general position that there are things basically, non-instrumentally good for children.

Is there compelling reason to think at least some of the intrinsic goods of childhood are special? Brighouse and Swift think so:

> some goods may have value only, or much more readily, in childhood. We do not have a full list, but we think that innocence about sexuality, for example, is good in childhood . . . [a] certain steady sense of being carefree is also valuable in childhood but a flaw in most adults . . . [o]ther goods are just more readily available in childhood than in adulthood: the capacities to feel spontaneous joy, to be surprised, and to be thrilled seem to diminish a good deal with age. (Brighouse and Swift 2014, 65)

Gheaus expresses a similar view in at least some places. She suggests a list of goods to which, she thinks, children have 'privileged access' (Gheaus 2015a, 8, 13), and which are easily available to children but 'largely' unavailable to adults (Gheaus 2015a, 8).[8] She lists goods such as 'intellectual curiosity', 'experimentation', and 'variety' (Gheaus 2015a, 11, 8, 12).

[7] Macleod also mentions 'fun', 'amusement', and 'pleasure' (2010, 187).
[8] Gheaus is not consistent in this view; for her doubts, see Gheaus (2015b).

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In more recent work, Macleod says certain things non-instrumentally good for children are such that 'children as juvenile agents have privileged and perhaps unique access' to them (Macleod 2015, 59). His two examples are innocence and imagination (Macleod 2015, 59–62).

The articulation of these so-called special goods is key, in the mind of many of these thinkers, to defeating the claim that the goods of childhood are merely instrumentally good, good merely because of their role in promoting non-instrumental goods for adults (e.g., Macleod 2015, 59; Gheaus 2015a). It is not clear, however, why one would need to defend special goods for children in order to defeat this extreme view of children's goods (or bads). To defeat this position, it is sufficient to defend the claim that there are things that are basically, non-instrumentally good for children, for example happiness or satisfaction taken in valuable relationships or intellectual development, that may or may not be good for adults. It is enough to say it would be intrinsically bad for a young child to be deprived of playing sport even if it meant she would be a bit more rational in adulthood.

There is good reason to be chary of the idea that there are special goods of childhood. First, the claim there are such goods of childhood is controversial. Sarah Hannan has argued that in some cases sexual innocence and carefreeness can lead to bad outcomes and be bad for a child (Hannan 2018). For example, she argues that in some situations sexual innocence may have very bad outcomes for children; it may leave them vulnerable to exploitation. I am not entirely convinced by Hannan's arguments, but I am convinced that if we can get away without appeal to special goods in combating some of the positions discussed above it would be better. It seems better to abandon talk of special goods of childhood and focus on the idea there are certain things that are basically, non-instrumentally good for children.[9]

Second, we can make many of the points that special goods advocates want to make without the language of special goods. We can accommodate such goods in two ways (and in so doing perhaps deflect some of the worries Hannan raises).

First, most of the candidates for special goods are better understood as at best mere instruments (in some cases) for producing other basic, non-instrumental goods. For example, carefreeness or lack of anxiety seem merely instrumentally good, good for promoting other things that are uncontroversially good (e.g., happiness taken in play or in valuable relationships). And sexual innocence may facilitate certain kinds of relationships or be a source of happiness.

Second, the 'special' goods, insofar as they seem more than instrumental, seem more like elements or parts of wholes that are good for children. For example, carefreeness might add to the value of a whole consisting in happiness taken in intellectual development even though it is not clearly good on its

[9] For critical discussion of Hannan's position, see Skelton (2018).

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own. The lack of anxiety or worry or concern may add to the value of a whole of which it is part, even if it is alone not good or of only very minor value when taken by itself.

Finally, we do not need talk of special goods to defeat the extreme view or the views of Slote or Velleman. Argument about special goods is a distraction and may involve merely parochial assumptions about what makes for a good or valuable childhood. We want a broad-based view for the purpose of articulating our ethical and political obligations to children. It is more beneficial to the cause of greater acknowledgement of children's goods in moral and political philosophy to focus our attention on matters other than special goods. What is important for ethical thinking and social justice with respect to children is clarifying the general basic, non-instrumental children's goods and the instruments most effective in producing or enhancing them.

Conclusion

In this chapter, my focus has been a cluster of under-explored issues relating to children's well-being or prudential good. I examined, in particular, three distinct (and to my mind puzzling) positions, namely, that children's lives on the whole cannot go well or poorly for them, prudentially speaking; that the prudential goods of childhood count for less than the same goods of adulthood towards the prudential value of an individual's life as a whole; and that children's prudential goods (or goods more generally) are (at least in some cases) in some way special.

In reply to these views, I argued that children's lives can go well for them, prudentially speaking; that there is no good reason to discount children's prudential goods in themselves; and that defending the claim there are non-instrumental goods for children does not require defending special intrinsic goods of childhood.

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