

The value of childhood

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The Value of Childhood

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Introduction

Is childhood good? Who benefits from childhood, and how? Are there goods that children experience or bring into existence which would not exist if we were to somehow eradicate childhood? Are children's lives to be judged by the same or different standards from adults'? In this chapter I want to investigate these questions, but before I do, I wish to first separate off some questions about *the value of childhood* from some questions about *the value of new or additional people*.

When we create new children, we create new people (and, all being well, these new children will eventually become new adults). And in order to create new people, we must (in fact, if not conceptually) create new children. Some of the questions concerning whether childhood is good may simply be reducible to the question of whether it is (in general) better to exist or not, or whether it is better to have more people. For example, provided children have lives worth living, the total utilitarian – the philosopher who believes that total wellbeing is what matters (Parfit 1984: 387) – will count their existence as a plus: any additional child with a life worth living is a bonus. And their lives will also be good for them, in the sense that it is better for them to keep existing as children than to cease to exist. Even if children's lives are not worth living, provided the

childhood is part of a life that is overall worth living, then the total utilitarian will approve of their creation. But this has nothing to do with them being *children* per se.

The present chapter concerns the value of *childhood* more specifically. There are many interesting questions we can ask about this issue, and one danger is that they can easily be confused with one another. Let us begin, then, by distinguishing some importantly different questions. According to Anca Gheaus (2015a: 35-37), three different questions are answered under the heading ‘the intrinsic goods of childhood’:

- a. Is childhood intrinsically valuable?

Gheaus describes this issue as being one in which we investigate whether ‘it is worthwhile to have had a childhood’ and whether it would be rational to skip childhood (2015a: 35-36).

- b. Are the intrinsic goods of childhood only valuable for children?
- c. What goods are owed to children?

However, these questions only form a subset of the questions we need to look at if we are interested in the value of childhood more generally. This is because they all focus on whether childhood is *intrinsically* valuable *for children*. That is why Gheaus focuses on whether it would be rational for us to skip childhood. But even that question – of the rationality of skipping childhood – is not quite the same as the question of whether childhood is intrinsically valuable for children. That is because even if childhood is bad *for children*, it may be better, overall, to have a life which includes childhood, or we may have better lives as adults if we were once children. For example, some people believe that how well our lives go overall is not simply a matter of the total amount of wellbeing we experience. They also think that the ‘shape’ of a life matters. Typically, they think that

a life that starts out badly and gets better is better than one which starts out well and gets worse (for example, Dorsey 2015; Temkin 2012: ch. 3; Velleman 2000: ch. 3). If we couple this view with the idea that childhood is (at least in comparison with adulthood) bad for us, then childhood is not *good for the child*, but can be *intrinsically* good for the life overall, since it can help to give it the right “shape”. Daniel Weinstock, on the other hand, has recently argued that even if we view childhood as a “predicament” (that is, as a negative condition to be escaped), it has instrumental value for the adults we become – our adult lives are better as the result of having experienced childhood (Weinstock 2017).

Therefore, I think we can distinguish the following questions about the *personal value* of childhood:

1. Is childhood intrinsically valuable *for children*?
 - a. Compared with not existing
 - b. Compared with adulthood
2. What goods make a childhood go well?
3. Is what makes a childhood go well the same or different from what makes an adult life go well?
4. What do children need to make their lives as children go well?
5. Is childhood an intrinsically valuable part of a life overall?
6. Is having experienced a childhood an instrumentally valuable part of an adult life?

Implicit in many of these questions (or at least in the way that philosophers seek to answer them) is a comparison with adult life. For example, if we ask “is childhood intrinsically valuable for children?” or “is childhood an intrinsically valuable part of a life overall?”, and then seek to answer those questions by testing whether it would be rational

for us to skip childhood, and proceed straight to adulthood, we seem to be asking “is childhood better or worse than adulthood for someone?” But questions of intrinsic value are not necessarily comparative in this way, and even if they are (or if we want to ask a comparative question) adulthood is not the only thing we could compare childhood with. We could compare childhood with being other kinds of being, or with not existing at all. So, while I, too, will often focus on the comparison with adults and children, it should be borne in mind that this only one kind of comparison we can make.

The above questions focus on how experiencing childhood may affect our own lives, but they do not exhaust the questions of the goods of childhood. Childhood may also have two further sources of value – the ways in which childhood makes other people’s lives go better, and the way in which children may have value that is not reducible to childhood being valuable *for* people. Therefore, we can also ask the following questions. Questions 7 and 8 concern the *instrumental value of childhood* for other people. Question 9 concerns the *intrinsic value of children*.

7. Is childhood valuable for those who are not experiencing childhood?
8. What goods does childhood (help to) produce in others’ lives?
9. How valuable are children? How does their value compare with that of adults?

To see how 9 is a distinct question from those concerning the personal value of childhood, we need to understand the distinction between questions concerning how well one’s life is going and the value one has. For example, your life may be going much better than mine, but we may nevertheless think that we are of equal value, and this judgment of equal value may play a role in us deciding that, if a third party had to choose between saving your life and saving mine, she ought to toss a coin.

It is very important to keep these issues distinct: questions of how good a childhood is *for us* are distinct from how we ought to value children. This is not to say that our *answers* to these questions must be fully distinct. For example, Jeff McMahan believes that some beings have greater value than others, and that it is better *for you* to be a being of higher rather than lower value (McMahan 1996: 9).

With these questions on the table, I can be more precise about what I will (and won't) explore in the remainder of this chapter. I will examine only some of these questions, and putative answers to them. In particular, I will examine the instrumental value that childhood and children bring to the lives of others (question 7); whether childhood is intrinsically valuable for children (question 1); and whether what makes children's lives go well is the same as, or different from, what makes adults' lives go well (question 3).

The Instrumental Value of Children

In investigating the value of childhood, several philosophers have posed thought experiments in which we imagine giving children a pill to speed up their development, thereby shortening their childhoods (Brennan 2015; Tomlin 2017; Gheaus 2015b: 6-8). This is used to see whether we think childhood is good for us, in comparison with adulthood. But to test this, we must pose a specific question. We must not ask "would you give the child/children this pill?"; we must ask "would you give the child/children this pill *for their own good?*" For the issue of whether childhood is good or not *for children* is not the end of the story when we think about whether childhood is, on balance, a good thing and whether, if we could, we ought to speed up the development of children. Even

if our own childhood is not valuable for us (in comparison with adulthood), we could still have reasons to keep children as children because, as adults, we value having children in our lives.

The clearest way in which adults appear to benefit from children is through parenting them. According to Harry Brighouse and Adam Swift (2014) most adults have an interest in being parents. Furthermore, they argue, this interest is not one that we can satisfy in any other kind of relationship. This is because of two features of the parent-child relationship: “The relationship as a whole, with its particular intimate character, and the responsibility to play the specific fiduciary role for the person with whom one is intimate in that way, is what adults have an interest in” (Brighouse and Swift 2014, 92). Many will agree with Brighouse and Swift that being a parent often makes people’s lives go better. Many parents are fanatical advocates of parenthood, and believe their lives are greatly enriched by being parents. But the Brighouse and Swift claim is much deeper than this. We might think that being a parent makes our lives go better because it makes us happy, or because it fulfills a preference, or set of preferences, that we hold, but that is not the argument here. The argument is that the relationship is good for many of us in and of itself, aside from whatever preferences it may fulfill or happiness it may bring, and that nothing could replace it. Thus, Brighouse and Swift would most likely be unimpressed by research which shows that parents are not always as happy as we might like to think (Margolis and Myrskylä 2015). For them, we have a *direct* interest in being parents. It is a further question, however, what, if any, role this interest could play in justifying the creation of children (Hannan and Leland forthcoming).

Not only parents benefit from children. Other adults can form valuable relationships with children that it would be difficult to replicate or replace without the particularities of childhood. But even aside from our intimate relationships with children, children just *being around* is important to many of us. Imagine a world without children: it would be a greyer place. As Weinstock (2017) observes, “children are cute, and therefore contribute to our aesthetic enjoyment of the world.” Given this, even if we think childhood worse than adulthood, we may still have reason to hold back those developmental pills. There are two ways this argument could go: existing children ought to be kept (against their own interest) as children, for the sake of existing adults. Here, we may worry that we are *using the suffering of some as a means to benefit others*. Alternatively, we might view childhood as a practice from which we all benefit – a life in which I experience the badness of childhood but get to be a parent, and live in a world with children, can be preferable to a life in which I do not experience the badness of childhood but do not get to be a parent, or interact with children.

Is Childhood good for Children? Thought Experiments

Let us now turn our attention to the issue of whether childhood is good *for children*. I think many of us have conflicting intuitions here. These can be brought out by this pair of cases (Tomlin 2017):

Left as a Child: Erin is given pills to prevent her from becoming an adult. Aged 55, she continues to be a child, both physically and mentally. She is well cared for.

Deprived of Childhood: Dane is given pills to speed up his development. Aged 6, he is physically and mentally a fully-grown man.¹

It seems like something has gone wrong in both of these cases, and, furthermore, something that is bad *for* both Dane and Erin: that is, it seems both are *harmed*. But if childhood is better than adulthood, we should be happy for Erin. And if adulthood is better than childhood, we should be happy for Dane. And if they're just as good as one another, why care? It seems, at least *prima facie*, that we cannot be right to feel bad for both Dane and Erin.

Anca Gheaus (2015b: 7-8) rightly points out that we need to be careful with these thought experiments. She proposes to tighten up *Deprived* (and, I presume, would want to do the same with *Left*) in two ways. First, she notes that, because of the variation within how well childhoods and adulthoods go, we need to pick a *particular* comparison. Otherwise, we may not be comparing fairly (if, for example, we compared a bad childhood with a good adulthood). She suggests reasonably good childhoods and reasonably good adulthoods. Second, she also notes, importantly, that:

individuals do not live in a social void; rather, children and adults live in a social world structured by adults who, arguably, have a bias toward cultivating the goods of adulthood. (Gheaus 2015b: 7).

Therefore, Gheaus argues that we should compare *reasonably good childhoods* with *reasonably good adulthoods* in a society which is structured to respect both the *value of childhood and adulthood*. I agree with Gheaus that these complications need to be taken into account. But it is questionable whether this points toward the particular

comparison she wants to make. For example, why should we favor the comparison within this one possible social arrangement? Here are two particular salient social arrangements we might be interested in: the current one (and nearby ones); and the best, or most just, one. But Gheaus' favored comparison society is not our own, and nor is it necessarily the best, or most just, arrangement. In stipulating that both children's and adults' interests must be served, Gheaus seems to want to test how good childhood and adulthood are "all else equal". But this seems to suggest that we can strip out the question of social arrangements, and how they affect our lives, to find the "pure comparison". Yet Gheaus' point, precisely, is that we cannot do this – we do not live in a vacuum – and we would still need to justify choosing this particular comparison.

Similarly, whilst Gheaus is right to point toward the variance *within* childhoods and adulthoods, it is not obvious that we should privilege the comparison between the *reasonably good*.² Imagine, for example, that very few children have reasonably good childhoods, but that lots of adults have reasonably good adulthoods – it would be misleading to then privilege this particular comparison. Or imagine, as Gheaus suggests (2015b: 7), that bad childhoods are much worse than bad adulthoods – this surely matters to our comparison.

A further reason to worry about trying to find *the* appropriate comparison is that doing so may miss something important. For it seems plausible that it is intrinsically better to be a being who can flourish in a wider variety of environments, and the approach of looking for *the* appropriate comparison misses this point completely. If your wellbeing is robust across a variety of social arrangements, this may be better for you

than if your wellbeing is fragile. But if we just look at one social arrangement, this robustness cannot be taken account of.

Given all this, I propose that we should do one of the following: perform the comparisons at a variety of levels of wellbeing, and in a variety of social settings, or re-think the thought experiment, and make it something like this one:

Choosing a life: Felix is in the original position.³ He does not know what kind of society he will live in, nor does he know what kind of childhood or adulthood he will have. He must choose how much (if any) of his life to spend as a child, and how much (if any) as an adult.

Forcing us to contemplate childhood across a range of social arrangements brings home an important aspect of childhood – since they do not, and have never, made political decisions, they are politically vulnerable to adults (something Gheaus highlights (2015b: 7)), and within most political structures, they are left intensely vulnerable to one or two adults. As Sarah Hannan (2017) observes: “children are extremely vulnerable, especially to the adults that care for them...Even when their lives go well, the contingency of this can reasonably be regarded as bad for them.”⁴ On the other hand, there may be other aspects of childhood that make children’s wellbeing less vulnerable to others. The central point here is that our comparisons are sometimes too simplistic. We should take account of a range of possible social arrangements and levels of wellbeing in trying to compare childhood and adulthood.

Is Childhood Good for Children? Goods and Bads of Childhood.

In order to see whether childhood is good or bad for children (in comparison with adulthood), we need an account of wellbeing against which to measure children's lives. The main question we then face is question 3 from our list: should children's lives be measured against the same standards of wellbeing against which we measure adults' lives? Or does an altogether different standard apply? Standardly, philosophers refer to three general approaches to wellbeing (Crisp 2015). The first is hedonism – the idea that happiness is what makes a life go well. The second is desire-satisfaction – the idea that what makes a life go well is getting what we (in some sense) want from life. The third is an objective list of values or interests that all human beings share. Whether these are good standards to apply to children is questionable (Skelton 2015, 2016), and is covered in greater depth elsewhere in this volume (see chapter 9).

We have, so far as I can see, three options here: 1. Apply these existing theories of (adult) wellbeing to children; 2. Develop new theories of wellbeing to apply to both adults and children which better take account of children's lives; or 3. Develop separate accounts of wellbeing for adults and children. In this section, I will look at the first option, by looking at some of the features of children's lives that philosophers have argued are good and bad for children if we measure their lives against the same standards as adults'. There are some quite obvious ways in which children's lives, if they are measured against adult standards, appear to be going badly. But some philosophers have recently sought to highlight goods which children readily access but which adults either can't, or are less easily able to, access.

Whatever theory of wellbeing we adopt, happiness is generally thought to be, at least, an element of wellbeing. This initially seems to imply that children are (in general) doing well. Gheaus (2015b: 14) observes:

children really have a remarkable ability to enjoy life. They can take more pleasure than adults in their sensations, ideas, bodies, people and places; they are more capable than adults of wholehearted fun and laughter. Also, most children seem less susceptible to some kinds of misery: They rarely, if ever, feel tired with life.

I have challenged this line of thinking (Tomlin 2017). We may like to think of children as particularly happy – and indeed, the great delight that children can take in tiny things is one of the delights of being around children – but the reality is that children are often unhappy. They experience regular lows: sobbing uncontrollably at being asked to put on their shoes; throwing themselves on the floor and pounding their fists because they couldn't do something. Young children cry. A lot. Gheaus suspects that this isn't because children are more miserable than adults, but because adults have been socialized to display pleasure but not distress. I think at most this offers a partial explanation – children are simply more emotionally volatile than most adults. Even if children are, on average, happier than adults, the fact that they swing so violently between delight and despair is itself an arguably bad feature of their lives: imagine an adult with high peaks and low troughs of happiness – wouldn't we think their life worse than an adult who is on a more even keel, and whose average happiness is only slightly lower?

Another way in which hedonism, or a concern for happiness more generally, may not suggest that children's lives are going especially well is if – with Mill (1998: ch. 2) –

we adapt hedonism to take account of the *quality* of the pleasures experienced. On this view, children do not look like they are doing well. If we want to say that poetry is better than pushpin, most of children's pleasures look distinctly pushpin-like. Children are simply incapable of appreciating many of the goods that Millian hedonists usually have in mind – they lack the mental capacity to properly engage with, and appreciate, fine art or music, for example.

Another way in which philosophers have argued that children's lives are going badly concerns interference and liberty. Many philosophers think autonomy, liberty, or freedom from domination is part of the good life for adults. As Brighouse and Swift (2014: 52) put it:

We think of a person as having two kinds of interest. She has an interest in anything that contributes to her well-being or flourishing; anything that makes her life go better is an interest of hers. But she also has an interest in having her dignity respected – in being treated in ways that reflect her moral status as an agent, as a being with the capacity for judgment and choice, even where that respect does *not* make her life go better [in terms of flourishing].

If we apply theories of wellbeing that incorporate these kinds of concerns to children, their lives seem to be going badly, since they are routinely dominated (Hannan, 2017; Hannan and Leland, forthcoming; Tomlin 2017). Such interference is, of course, often justified, but it doesn't follow that it isn't *pro tanto* bad for us. A child may be overall better off being made to go to bed earlier rather than later, but *choosing* to go to bed at a reasonable time may be best for them. Many will want to argue that children don't have the same interests in autonomy that adults have – they lack the capacities

which make this an interest for us. But that is to posit two different theories of wellbeing – one for adults, and one for children.

A related, but distinct, way in which children's lives may be thought to go badly is one we have already touched upon: their vulnerability. Children are dominated, and that is often justifiable. As such, we require childrearing institutions in which adults are given control over children. This is, *ex ante*, in a child's interests (and, according to Brighouse and Swift, in adults' interests too). But this makes children particularly vulnerable to abuse and neglect, and without the resources to realize what is going on or to extract themselves from abusive relationships (Hannan, 2017; Hannan and Leland, forthcoming). Vulnerability is an interesting "bad" feature of children's lives. We may want to say that it isn't *itself* a bad feature – rather children are *at risk* of having bad things happen to them. Or we may want to say that this risk is itself a bad feature of children's lives.

Put together, these kinds of concerns often lead us toward thinking about childhood as a "predicament" – something to be escaped. A group of philosophers, most notably Samantha Brennan (2014), Colin Macleod (2010), and Anca Gheaus (2015a, 2015b) have pushed back against this view. They have sought to highlight good aspects of children's lives. There are three ways this kind of argument can go: there are some fundamental goods that are unique to children in that they're only good for children (in which case we need separate accounts of wellbeing); there are some things that are only good for children, but they are good because they contribute to an interest or element of wellbeing that adults share; or there are some things that are good for both adults and children but which children are uniquely or especially good at accessing. We're looking, here, at the latter two kinds of claim.

Several aspects of children's lives have been highlighted in the literature. These include: children are better reasoners than we give them credit for; children are more empathetic than we give them credit for; children have vivid and remarkable imaginations; children have a remarkable ability to learn and change; children can ask philosophical questions; children can think like scientists; children are physically flexible; children are naturally artistic; children possess a disposition to react with wonder to new persons, objects, events; children, and their relationships, are more innocent and open, and less calculating; children are more present-focused and able to live in the moment.

It is not clear to me that many of these "goods" should be regarded as fundamental sources of, or elements of, wellbeing. At best, many of them seem to be instrumental to a good life. But how much of an advantage in life is being physically flexible? And could it ever compensate for the domination children (often justifiably) suffer? Even if we accept all of these as goods, if we are judging children's lives by adult standards, it is questionable whether this list of childhood advantages is enough for us to conclude that children's lives are not inferior to adults' (Tomlin 2017; Hannan, 2017).

Separate Accounts of Wellbeing?

If we judge children's lives by adult standards, we may well conclude that their lives are inferior to those of adults. Perhaps partly because this conclusion seems controversial, and perhaps partly because it doesn't seem appropriate to force adults norms and values onto children, especially young children, several philosophers have

proposed different standards of wellbeing for children and adults (Brighouse and Swift 2014; Skelton 2015 and 2016).

There are three central problems with this. First, as everybody recognizes, “childhood” is in fact an amalgam of several quite varied life-stages: the 13 year old has more in common with the 20 year old than with a baby or a toddler, so if it is inappropriate to apply the same standard of wellbeing to the 20 year old and the toddler, it is just as inappropriate to lump together the 13 year old with the toddler. As I say, everyone recognizes this, but actually it creates major difficulties for any account in which “childhood wellbeing” is *sui generis*. One reason a simple two-group (children/adults) theory will not do is that there is clearly no precise point at which one wakes up an “adult”. As Skelton (2015) observes, the account he sketches for young children won’t do for older children. So, he suggests that there will be *another* account for older children. But the problem will simply repeat itself here. No matter how *many* stages of childhood we identify, and corresponding theories of wellbeing we come up with, any view which suggests that you go to bed measuring your life by one theory of wellbeing and then wake up measuring your life by another is implausible. What we require then is some view which combines the idea that the two year old and the twenty year old have distinct accounts of wellbeing which apply to them, but without ever offering a sharp break. (Once we do this, we may also want a varying account of wellbeing that applies to different stages of adulthood.)

Here is my suggestion. What we require is a list-based theory of wellbeing (but the list can include both desire-satisfaction and happiness) under which the different elements of the list are more or less important to overall wellbeing at any given time.

Sometimes an item may be *all* that matters to wellbeing, other times it may not matter at all, but its overall contribution to wellbeing will grow or diminish gradually. Think of it like the mixing desk of a recording studio. At the very beginning of life, we might set physical health and physical pleasure at the very highest setting, and have autonomy and sexual relationships set to zero. At the age of two, unstructured play might be set very high. By 13, that may have decreased, with autonomy playing a bigger role. The point is, any plausible view is not actually going to be a view about “the account for children and the account for adults” but rather a set of goods which continuously and gradually vary in importance (including continuing on into adulthood).

The second problem for this kind of account is that once we posit fundamentally differing accounts of childhood and adulthood goods, we potentially lose the ability to compare them. And if we lose the ability to compare them, it becomes difficult to say that either Dane or Erin is harmed in our earlier examples. As I have put it elsewhere (Tomlin, 2017):

if children and adults ... have fundamentally different accounts of wellbeing, then there is no more ultimate account of wellbeing to which we could appeal in assessing whether children or adults have better lives. This is why I believe that once we accept that there are childhood-specific goods, we are required to say that neither Dane nor Erin are harmed (or benefitted) by the pills they are given. That is, we are not harmed, or benefitted, just by being made to continue to be, or turned into, a certain kind of being (unless it were against our wishes, and preference-satisfaction were a kind of wellbeing for that kind of being), since our

wellbeing is to be settled by reference to an account of wellbeing tailored to the kind of thing we are.

This problem is potentially exacerbated by my previous point – that actually we require a constantly and subtly shifting account of wellbeing, which would properly capture our slow development from childhood to adulthood. If each subtle shift creates a new account of wellbeing, and we cannot compare wellbeing across differing accounts of wellbeing, then not only do we lose the ability to compare childhood and adulthood, we also lose the ability within childhood, such that we may not be able to compare wellbeing between a 7- and an 8-year-old.

However, I now wonder if this problem is over-stated. The problem is that differing accounts of wellbeing are incommensurable. I assumed, in the quotation above, that this meant that we could not compare wellbeing across beings to whom different accounts of wellbeing apply. But many philosophers deny that incommensurability implies incomparability (Chang 2013).

At the very least, we can say the following: the idea of harm normally relies on a stable account of wellbeing, such that in order to show that I have harmed you we must show that I have made you worse off *on some particular metric*. In order to make sense of harm in terms of turning people into adults, or keeping them as children, we would need to revise this ordinary understanding, since the action either introduces a new account of wellbeing, or fails to introduce one. If we can live with a notion of incommensurable harm – where the harm in question is not indexed to a fixed account of wellbeing that applies on both sides of the comparison – then perhaps we can still make

sense of Dane or Erin being harmed. But we would still be left with a puzzle: can it be true, as our intuitions suggest, that they are *both* harmed?

The third problem with this view is most forcefully stated by Hannan (2017). One reason to think childhood bad is that some aspects of old age that we think bad for us are actually quite similar to childhood. The “varying accounts of wellbeing view” may imply that we should also have a different account of wellbeing for old age, indexed to the abilities and characteristics of old age. This may then rob us of the ability to declare these aspects of old age bad for us.

Complementarity

The idea of shifting accounts of wellbeing is attractive in various ways, but it still seems to leave us with the idea that at most only one of Dane and Erin is harmed. Daniel Weinstock’s (2017) view that childhood is a predicament, but, crucially, a necessary one (in principle, not just empirically) for being the kind of adult who has a flourishing life enables us to hold on to both intuitions. Dane is harmed because he misses out on forming himself and his “maxims” such that he can properly be said to endorse them or own them. His adulthood is all the worse for this. He may be able to partake in practical reasoning, but the maxims and values he uses to do so must have been imposed upon him from the outside (perhaps by the pill). They’re not “his” in any real sense, because he didn’t develop them in response to the predicament of childhood. Erin is harmed because she is kept in the predicament of childhood. Weinstock says: “it is perhaps true that childhood is a ‘predicament’...But it is a normatively necessary predicament, one in the absence of which we could not possibly become moral agents possessed of endorsed

maxims with which we engage in practical reasoning in an articulate way.” In order to become an adult who owns and understands her own maxims and values, “one needs to have gone through the work that the predicament of childhood represents.”

Against this view, though, we may be concerned that Weinstock’s “predicament” is one we face in virtue of being *new to the world*, not in virtue of *having the body and capabilities of a child*.⁵

Conclusion

There are many interesting questions concerning the value of childhood (and children) and we have touched upon only some of them here. It is important, however, to keep them distinct. In particular, childhood may be valuable for the life as a whole, or for the adult the child becomes, it may be valuable to others, it may have impersonal value, and it may be a valuable stage of life in itself. This last question has largely occupied us here. One crucial issue concerns whether or not the same account of wellbeing should apply across children and adults. If it does, despite some wonderful features of children’s lives, many will think children’s lives are going badly – they are emotionally volatile, dominated and vulnerable. If it does not, then some common intuitions about accelerating or slowing progress toward adulthood may need to be let go. The idea that the stages of life are complementary – that childhood is inferior to, but necessary for, an adult life well lived is attractive, though it requires a particular, and controversial, view about what is good in adulthood.⁶

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Further Reading

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Brennan, S. (2014). The Goods of Childhood and Children's Rights. In: F. Baylis and C. Macleod eds. *Family Making: Contemporary Ethical Challenges*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (Argues that there are goods of childhood).

Hannan, S. (2017). Why Childhood is Bad for Children. *Journal of Applied Philosophy*. (Highlights some seemingly problematic features of childrens' lives).

Weinstock, D. (2017). On the Complementarity of the Ages of Life. *Journal of Applied Philosophy*. (A defense of the idea that a good adulthood is a response to childhood).

¹ Some worry that the issue of manipulation may "pollute" our intuitions in these cases. I am not concerned by this. These are kids. If we can do things that benefit them, we would ordinarily think that unproblematic. For example, if they were sick, we wouldn't think it problematic to give them the pill.

² I myself proposed this particular comparison as a “starting point” in Tomlin 2017.

³ As found in Rawls 1971.

⁴ A parallel argument, against the idea that disability is a ‘mere difference’, is made in Mosquera Ramil 2017.

⁵ I am grateful to Sarah Hannan for this point.

⁶ For useful comments, I am grateful to the editors – Anca Gheaus in particular – and Sarah Hannan.