



UNFINISHED ADULTS AND DEFECTIVE CHILDREN: ON THE NATURE AND VALUE OF CHILDHOOD

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Unfinished Adults and Defective Children: On the Nature and Value of Childhood

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A PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITION THAT GOES BACK to Aristotle represents childhood as a state of lacking. This is the view that children are imperfect, because not yet finished, adults.¹ On Tamar Schapiro's recent version of this view, childhood is a *predicament* because children lack full moral agency.² Being a child is to find oneself at a lower stage of development, a stage that normal individuals are expected to leave behind in due course to move on to the *superior* stage of adulthood. Arguably, this view dominates not only the philosophical tradition, but also current, everyday thinking about childhood. Traditionally, developmental psychology³ assumed that children become adults by going through successive stages of intellectual and moral development, with each subsequent stage being superior to the former.⁴ I refer to this view of childhood as the "children as unfinished adults" view.

Over the past few centuries, this view of childhood has been compensated by the Romantic view of children as natural geniuses, human beings not yet morally corrupted by civilization and having privileged access to truth by means of intuition. Some of the same features that mark childhood as an inferior stage of development in the neo-Aristotelian tradition are responsible for the superior standing of children in the Romantic one, according to which children's lack of full instrumental rationality is valuable because it allows them to remain connected to the rest of nature and humankind, and their emotional nature makes possible a degree of spontaneity and creativity usually lost in adulthood.⁵ Here I refer to this view of the relationship between childhood and adulthood as the "adults as defective children" view.

I defend the view that childhood is intrinsically valuable rather than

¹ According to Gareth Matthews, this conception still dominates much of the thinking about children. See "The Philosophy of Childhood" (2014) in E. Zalta, ed., *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, plato.stanford.edu/entries/childhood. Recent philosophical work on childhood confirms that the few major philosophers who have addressed children-related issues did not depart from this conception of childhood. See S. Turner and G. Matthews, eds. (1998) *The Philosopher's Child: Critical Perspectives in the Western Tradition*, Rochester: University of Rochester Press.

² T. Schapiro (1999) "What Is a Child?" *Ethics* 109(4): 715-38.

³ The classic work is by Lawrence Kohlberg. See, for instance (1981) *Essays on Moral Development, Vol. I: The Philosophy of Moral Development*, San Francisco: Harper & Row.

⁴ For instance, G. Matthews (1980) *Philosophy and the Young Child*, Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, and G. Matthews (1994) *The Philosophy of Childhood*, Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press.

⁵ For the Romantic image of the child, see, for instance, D. Kennedy (2006) *Changing Conceptions of the Child from the Renaissance to Post-Modernity: A Philosophy of Childhood*, Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, especially pp. 20-23. Recently, James Dwyer put forward a case for the moral superiority of children over adults that is, in spirit, Romantic. See (2011) *Moral Status and Human Life: The Case for Children's Superiority*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

having value only to the extent to which it leads to a good adulthood. Neither the “children as unfinished adults” nor the more extravagant “adults as defective children” view is by itself convincing because both are incomplete ways of telling the story of childhood and adulthood. A short article cannot settle the issue of the relative value of childhood and adulthood, but I suggest it is plausible that some kinds of value that we can *fully* enjoy as children are, in the case of most people, different from those that we can enjoy as adults. As we turn into adults we improve our knowledge and abilities: We accumulate experience and gain better control of our emotions. Thereby, we become capable of full moral agency. Moreover, we become more purposeful and acquire the executive abilities necessary to pursue our aims effectively, and thus new types of achievements become available to us. At the same time, in the transition to adulthood we lose, on average, not only desirable physical skills such as agility and flexibility, but also much of the mental plasticity, imagination, curiosity and vivid, sometimes synesthetic perception of the world (that is, an ability to experience the world through more than one sense at a time). In the process, the ability to imagine radically different worlds and the philosophical and artistic abilities we had as children are on average lost or at least greatly diminished. Therefore, the change from childhood to adulthood may not *in every way* be either progress – as the view of “children as unfinished adults” would have it – or regress – as suggested by the view of “adults as defective children.” Rather, it is a transformation from one intrinsically valuable kind of human being to a different intrinsically valuable kind of human being.⁶ My account draws on work in philosophy with children and on new research in developmental psychology. While I speak about children in general, it goes without saying that claims about children’s abilities apply differently to different age groups; yet, I assume that the distinction between “childhood” and “adulthood” is, as such, pertinent.

In the next section I elaborate on the “children as unfinished adults” view, explaining its plausibility and normative implications. The third section introduces and discusses a heuristic device for investigating the value of childhood. The subsequent section explores the reasons why childhood has intrinsic and special value: Children possess certain valuable abilities to a significantly higher degree than adults and childhood is a time when we can fully reap the intrinsic benefit of experimentation and variety. For these and other reasons children can lead good lives on several understandings of well-being: as a pleasurable state, as the satisfaction of simple desires or as the realization of certain objective goods. (But I do not commit to a particular conception of children’s well-being.⁷) The fourth section addresses the objection that children’s lack of moral agency precludes them from leading good lives, and therefore that childhood cannot have intrinsic value. A short

⁶ And whether it is progress, regress or neither depends on whether the value of adulthood is greater, lesser or roughly equal to that of childhood. I do not discuss this issue here but I come back to it toward the end of the paper.

⁷ See, for instance, A. Skelton (forthcoming) “Two Conceptions of Children’s Welfare,” *Journal of Practical Ethics*.

discussion of the view that adults are defective children follows in section five, and I conclude by sketching a conception that acknowledges the truth in both the “children as unfinished adults” and “adults as defective children” views – and thus transcends both.

1. The “Children As Unfinished Adults” View

According to Schapiro’s influential account, the condition of childhood is, essentially, a predicament. A child is an underdeveloped human being, unable yet to act on reasons of her own and therefore lacking in moral agency. Unlike an adult, who can “speak in her own voice, the voice of one who stands in a determinate, authoritative relation to the various motivational forces within her,” a child is an agent who “is not yet in a position to speak in her own voice because there is no voice which counts as hers.”⁸ This is because children have not yet undergone the process of “becoming themselves,” that is, of settling on reasons for action, reasons that the child herself endorses and with which she identifies. On this (Kantian) view, moral agency requires precisely this kind of identification with one’s reasons for action. Therefore, children necessarily lack moral agency, which makes paternalistic behavior toward them legitimate. According to Schapiro, childhood is a time of experimentation – mainly through play – aimed at creating such a self, or voice, of one’s own. The essential task of children is to turn themselves into agents capable of moral agency, and adults have a duty to help them in this process. Shapiro thinks we adults ought to make “children’s dependence our enemy”⁹ – that is, to help children get over childhood as quickly as possible, for instance, by encouraging (or perhaps demanding) that children take on adult responsibilities as early as possible as long as we do not require children to perform tasks that are beyond their abilities. Requiring too much of children, on this view, is objectionable merely because it is likely to entrench dependence instead of curing it.

An extreme form of the view that a child is an unfinished adult represents childhood as a misfortune, and explains the duty to help children grow up as a duty to avoid such misfortune. Loren Lomasky’s account suggests that children are morally on a par with cognitively incapacitated adults because neither such adults nor children can be proper project pursuers. In a section about “defective human beings,” he writes that:

were one condemned ... to remain a child throughout one’s existence, or to grow in bulk without simultaneously growing in the capacity to conceptualize ends and to act for their sake, it would be a personal misfortune of the utmost gravity.¹⁰

⁸ Schapiro (1999: 729). For a similar view, see N. Richards (2010) *The Ethics of Parenthood*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁹ Schapiro (1999: 737).

¹⁰ Lomasky (1987) *Persons, Rights and the Moral Community*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 202.

Non-Kantians, too, have seen childhood as valuable only as a path to adulthood. According to Michael Slote, “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.”¹¹ Thus, Slote discounts the achievements of childhood, which he thinks are of trivial importance compared to adult achievements; while the failures of childhood are so insignificant that they count for nothing in determining how good one’s life was overall.¹² Neo-Aristotelians like Slote have several reasons to think that childhood has value only as preparation for adulthood: Human beings are biological organisms whose good is partly determined by biological aims and adulthood is the only period of life when one is capable of biological success measured by an ability to reproduce. Similarly, if moral value is to be identified with the exercise of virtue, only adults can aspire to moral goodness since they have had the time to acquire and perfect the exercise of virtues.

If either of these accounts of childhood were correct, they would entail that childhood has only extrinsic value, that is, that childhood’s value depends on whether or not it performs the function of preparing individuals for a good adulthood – whether the goodness of adulthood is given by the acquisition of (moral) agency, or by reproductive fitness, or by the mastery of virtues. Without denying the truth in the view that children are unfinished adults, I challenge its completeness. Children display some valuable features to a greater extent than adults, and while, on average, they may lack the ability to accomplish the same valuable goals as adults, children are better able than adults to engage in processes that are valuable in themselves.

But first it is worth explaining the normative importance of this issue. Any view of childhood and of its relative value compared to adulthood has important practical implications. If childhood was indeed merely an inferior stage of development then it would be desirable to overcome it as quickly as possible; *ceteris paribus*, it would benefit individuals to quickly turn into adults. If, instead, childhood had intrinsic as well as extrinsic value, then demanding children to grow up as quickly as possible might be a mistake. (Whether or not it would be a mistake will depend on how the value of childhood compares to that of adulthood. It is possible that both stages of life have intrinsic but very unequal value.) It could also be an injustice, assuming that one of the duties owed to children is to make sure that they can have a good childhood and that having a good childhood requires enough time to enjoy it. It may be possible to help children learn how to set and pursue adult-like goals for themselves efficiently by sacrificing the enjoyment of childhood – that is, to help turn them into adults quickly. One way of doing this is by training children to successfully assume very early on the responsibilities and

¹¹ In M. Slote (1983) *Goods and Virtues*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 14.

¹² At least, if the adulthood is successful. This belief is explained partly by Slote’s belief that, in general, later successes make earlier failures irrelevant and partly by his belief that the successes and failures of childhood are as unimportant as dreams (which he thinks are unimportant).

freedoms of adulthood. This, however, would probably require shortening the time when they can just be children, that is, to experiment for the sake of experimenting, to enjoy learning without worrying about mastering knowledge and to pursue beauty without embedding this pursuit in larger, goal-oriented projects. Yet, childhood goods such as experimenting, enjoyment and process-oriented pursuits seem to have value in themselves. In this case, helping children grow up as quickly as possible would mean depriving them of something of intrinsic value. Doing this is especially objectionable if, as I will argue, childhood also has *special* value, that is, if during childhood we are likely to experience and realize valuable things that are a lot less likely to be available to us during adulthood. Elsewhere¹³ I argue that the goods of childhood are good for adults, too, and that they are not typically entirely out of adults' reach. However, given biological facts about children (such as underdeveloped prefrontal cortices) and other factual constraints (such as the need for someone to work in order to ensure survival), adults cannot hope to enjoy these goods to the same extent as children. In this sense, childhood can have special value although its goods are not themselves special.

Leaving aside the question of its ideal length, we need a conception of childhood in order to determine the entitlements of children and adults' duties toward them. It is noncontroversial that children are inevitably more vulnerable than adults, and dependent on them; hence, their lives are significantly shaped by the individual adults who raise them as well as by the rules and institutions that adults design collectively. Children's vulnerability, together with the inescapable power asymmetry between them and adults, constitute a reason to believe that adults are collectively responsible for children's well-being. But, without knowing whether childhood ought to be valued as more than mere preparation for adulthood, it is impossible to fully specify what is good for a child, how important the goods of childhood are for a life well lived and what we owe to children. These questions have mundane policy implications, most obviously for the ethics and politics of education. Consider, for example, two incompatible models of early education that are currently in dispute. One of them introduces formal schooling sooner and encourages the early acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills, with the explicit aim of preparing the future adults to fare better in social and economic competitions. The second insists on delaying formal schooling until age 6–7 and is also concerned with children's enjoyment of the process of learning.¹⁴ Beyond their practical recommendations, the two models differ in their rationale: The first treats childhood as mere preparation for adulthood; the second acknowledges that difficult trade-offs between an optimal childhood and an optimal adulthood may be necessary. (Incidentally, the second model may also prove better suited to advance the interests of children as future adults; this is partly an empirical

¹³ A. Gheaus (2014) "The 'Intrinsic Goods of Childhood' and the Just Society," in A. Bagattini and C. Macleod, eds., *The Nature of Children's Well-Being*, Dordrecht: Springer, pp. 35–52.

¹⁴ B. Casalini (2014) "The Early Childhood Education and Care Policy Debate in the EU," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Family Studies* IXX(1): 77–94.

matter.)

As we have seen, philosophers who assume the conception of children as unfinished adults tend to hold that the goods of childhood are of little, if any, relevance to the overall goodness of a person's life. Yet, some contemporary philosophers reject the "children as unfinished adults" conception and argue that having a good childhood is not valuable merely because it contributes to a good adulthood. They think that we owe children above and beyond what it takes to prepare them for good adulthoods.¹⁵ The rest of this paper argues that they are right.

2. Brennan's Thought Experiment

Samantha Brennan has suggested a way to test the assumption that childhood is a state of deficiency, valuable only inasmuch as it prepares one for adulthood. She asks us to consider "whether one would, if one could, simply give children a pill to have them grow up."¹⁶ I assume Brennan's thought experiment is based on the presumption that the pill would instantly turn one into the same adult one would have been if she had become that adult by natural means – with the same skills, capacities and knowledge that one would have normally acquired during the course of one's childhood.¹⁷

Those who endorse the view of children as unfinished adults, especially the more extreme version of it, will answer positively: If childhood is like a severe disability, it may be rational to skip it. Consider the usual intuition that it is regrettable to decline from adult to infant mentality. Kamm notes that, if this intuition holds, it may also be regrettable to be in a state of infancy for longer than necessary in the course of normal species development. But then, it follows that "[i]f science ever makes it possible to bypass infancy, we may feel sorry for those who go through it."¹⁸

The question is whether Brennan's experiment is to be interpreted as inviting the individual to choose an overall shorter life as a result of skipping childhood. I assume that few believe that childhood has zero or negative value such that existing as a child is worse than, or just as good as, not existing at all. Therefore, I suggest focusing on the following interpretation of Brennan's question: "Would it be rational for the

¹⁵ S. Brennan (2014) "The Goods of Childhood and Children's Rights," in F. Baylis and C. McLeod, eds., *Family-Making: Contemporary Ethical Challenges*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 29-48; C. Macleod (2010) "Primary Goods, Capabilities, and Children," in H. Brighouse and I. Robeyns, eds., *Measuring Justice: Primary Goods and Capabilities*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 174-92; H. Brighouse and A. Swift (2014) *Family Values: The Ethics of Parent-Child Relationships*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

¹⁶ Brennan (2014).

¹⁷ But if one's childhood is a constitutive part of one's adult self, taking a pill cannot, by definition, turn one into the *same* adult one would have been if she had become that adult by natural means. I believe this criticism indicates the limited, purely heuristic, value of the question.

¹⁸ In F. M. Kamm (1998) *Morality, Mortality, Vol. I: Death and Whom to Save from It*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 24, n. 18.

individual to skip her childhood and have it replaced with an equal span of prime adulthood?” A positive answer to this question could indicate one of the following two beliefs: that childhood’s value is entirely dependent on it being a necessary path to adulthood, or that the value of childhood is intrinsic, but lesser than the value of adulthood.

Several caveats are necessary. First, the question should be understood as an offer to exchange a *reasonably good* childhood for an equally long period of reasonably good adulthood. Without this qualification, any answer may merely indicate that people who answer had rather bad childhoods. It makes perfect sense that someone with a bad childhood may prefer to never have been a child. Also, a complication would arise from comparing childhoods and adulthoods of different qualities. For instance, it is conceivable that a good childhood is better than a good adulthood, and that, at the same time, a bad childhood is worse than a bad adulthood because children have much less control over their lives than adults have – being in a bad state one cannot hope to change may be particularly bad. In assuming that the comparison is between reasonably good childhoods and adulthoods I leave this complication to one side. Finally, a related complication comes from the fact 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.¹⁹ In general, adults collectively decide the rules of living together of both children and adults (including how much adult supervision children need in order to flourish). So one may want to distinguish between two interpretations of Brennan’s question. That is, between:

Q1: Would it be rational for the individual to skip her reasonably good childhood and have it replaced with an equal span of reasonably good prime adulthood, in a world biased toward making possible good adulthoods, but relatively disinterested in enabling good childhoods? (Some may find that this description approximates the world as is now.)

and

Q2: Would it be rational for the individual to skip her reasonably good childhood and have it replaced with an equal span of reasonably good prime adulthood, in a world that is socially structured to respect both the value of childhood and the value of adulthood?

One may answer Q1 positively because she thinks that childhood, as it is possible in that society, is not sufficiently valuable, thus leaving open the possibility that she would answer the question negatively in a world that shows proper respect to childhood.²⁰ If the heuristic device is to work,

¹⁹ As both Matthews (1994) and Dwyer (2011) argue, the first with respect to what kinds of intellectual and artistic achievements get social recognition, the second with respect to the social organization of childrearing.

²⁰ There can be significant disagreement about the extent to which leading a good life as a child requires adults’ active involvement and help. For an account of what it is for a child’s life to go well that assumes that much adult involvement is needed, see L. Ferracioli (2014) “The State’s Duty to Ensure that Children Are Loved,” *Journal of Ethics*

Q2 is the relevant question.

It is tempting to answer Brennan's question positively, for reasons explained in the previous section. Although I shall argue that children *are* rational and possess some valuable cognitive abilities to a uniquely high degree, I do not question here that children are unlikely to have their own self or be fully competent (moral) agents, nor the relevance of these facts for judging the value of childhood. As subjects to legitimate paternalism, children cannot be the creators of their own lives to the same extent that adults can. But, whatever children lack in comparison to adults, they have access to some goods of intrinsic value that are largely unavailable to adults.

3. What Makes Childhood Intrinsically Valuable?

In spite of its limitations, a reasonably good childhood can have intrinsic and special value. I advance the following argument:

- (a) Children are not *merely* unfinished adults – that is, children are likely to possess abilities that adults are likely to have largely lost. These are not trivial abilities, but important elements of widely endorsed understandings of a good life which, moreover, qualify children for some degree of both rational and moral agency;
- (b) The experiencing of a variety of goods is itself a good;
- (b1) childhood is a time of intense experimentation with a variety of interests and relationships, which is itself a good; and
- (b2) children and adults have privileged access to different goods, hence the experience of having been a child contributes to the overall value of a life above and beyond its contribution to a better adulthood.
- (c) In virtue of (a) and (b), children are capable – especially in a world that properly accommodates childhood – to enjoy well-being understood as the realization of some objective goods to which adults have little access. This is not to deny that the range of goods achievable by children may be more limited than the range of goods achievable by adults.

(a)

The view of children as unfinished adults draws plausibility from an assumption that very young children are irrational, older children are imperfectly rational and, as they grow up, children become increasingly more rational. This assumption is present outside philosophy, too. Gareth Matthews has argued that Jean Piaget's theory of children's development methodologically assumes children's imperfect rationality and hence the conception of children as unfinished adults. According to Matthews, Piaget's methodological commitments explain why he discounted the philosophical remarks of his child subjects and, in general, children's ability to engage – sometimes better than adults – with basic philosophical questions.²¹ It is difficult to deny that children's minds seem at times very different from adults' minds. But is this difference best understood as merely one of *degree of rationality* – such that older children

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²¹ See n. 4.

can at best only approximate adult rationality – or are children usually in possession of different cognitive abilities than adults? Below I sketch the case for the latter view.

Research in philosophy and developmental psychology suggests that children are endowed with cognitive abilities that most individuals inevitably lose to a large degree as they grow up. Taken together, these theories show that and explain why children are very fast and imaginative learners, capable of raising basic philosophical questions and sometimes of coming up with solutions to these questions. According to these theories, children are also generally better than adults at imagining alternative worlds.

In the '70s, Gareth Matthews started to engage, systematically and self-consciously, in philosophical conversations with children – first informally, then in school programs. He also collected anecdotal evidence about children's philosophical questions and remarks in conversations with other adults. According to Matthews, some children – without prompting from adults – raise questions, make comments and even engage in reasoning that professional philosophers can recognize as philosophical. The abundant examples discussed by Matthews in his various works include ontological questions ("If there was a big bang or something, what was the big bang *in*?"), epistemological questions ("How can we be sure that everything is not a dream?") and moral questions ("Why is it better for three people to be selfish [and get what they want] rather than only one [and get what he wants]?"). Even more strikingly, Matthews noted that, until the onset of puberty, children are, on average, *better* able than adults to engage with, and sometimes generate, basic philosophical questions about the nature of reality, knowledge and morality.²² His claim is that young children produce more interesting philosophical questions and remarks, partly thanks to the breadth and vividness of their curiosity and to the fact that their thinking has not yet been too affected by conventional views. Before reaching puberty, we are, on average, easier to interest in philosophical exchange, and the nonconforming responses of young children are "much more likely to be the fruit of honest reflection"²³ than the more conventional things that older individuals say. Matthews (like others) also notes, but discusses less, the possibility that children's artistic abilities are, on average, superior to those of adults; children are better able to produce aesthetically worthwhile drawings than adults who are not professional artists. Some art historians seem to agree: They observe that many (adult) modernist artists appreciated, and claimed to be inspired by, children's art.²⁴ This, of course, does not mean that the highest philosophical or artistic

²² Matthews' views on children's ability to engage with philosophy have been challenged, mostly on grounds that children are incapable of the complex and relentless enquiry that we often praise as the main philosophical accomplishment. His critics, however, do not deny children's unusual ability to generate genuine philosophical questions, which is the relevant claim in this paper.

²³ Matthews (1980: 38). See also remarks at 73.

²⁴ J. Fineberg (1997) *The Innocent Eye: Children's Art and the Modern Artist*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

achievements tend to come from children; rather, the claim is that those individuals who do not grow up to be philosophers or artists (that is, the majority of people) are likely to have been better at raising philosophical questions and pursuing beauty as children than as adults.

Recent work in neuroscience and developmental psychology provides a plausible explanation of why children have different valuable abilities than adults. In a nutshell, the message – in Alison Gopnik’s words – is that:

We used to think that babies and young children were irrational, egocentric, and amoral. Their thinking and experience were concrete, immediate, and limited. In fact, psychologists and neuroscientists have discovered that babies not only learn more, but imagine more, care more, and experience more than we would ever have thought possible. In some ways, young children are actually smarter, more imaginative, more caring, and even more conscious than adults are.²⁵

For now, I focus on the first and last of the above features: young children’s cognitive abilities and the peculiarities of their sensorial experience. Not only are children spontaneously good at formulating (basic) philosophical questions but, according to Gopnik, Andrew Meltzoff and Patricia Kuhl, they are also good at spontaneously adopting 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.”²⁶ During childhood, mental plasticity is much higher than in adulthood, that is, children are particularly able to learn in light of new experiences. As with philosophy, children of course rarely break new ground in science.²⁷ They lack the experience necessary for such achievements; they have not yet had time to learn how to build on the work of many generations of scientists. The claim is that, on average, children use scientific *methods* more extensively than adults; they investigate causal relations, make predictions and generally pursue explanations.

Gopnik explains children’s outstanding cognitive abilities by appeal to specific features of their brains. Hers is an evolutionary story: Children’s prefrontal cortices are not yet fully developed and hence they lack strong prefrontal control. Prefrontal control is necessary for the inhibition of information that is not vital to performing a specific task, which is particularly useful if one is trying to accomplish such a task. At the same time, by helping narrow down focus, prefrontal control impedes general learning and free use of imagination. In Gopnik’s words: “To be imaginative, you want to consider as many possibilities as you can, even wild and unprecedented ones. ... In learning, you want to remain open to

²⁵ A. Gopnik (2009) *The Philosophical Baby: What Children’s Minds Tell Us About Truth, Love, and the Meaning of Life*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, p. 5.

²⁶ A. Gopnik, A. Meltzoff and P. Kuhl (2008/1999) *The Scientist in the Crib: What Early Learning Tells Us About the Mind*, HarperCollins e-books, p. X.

²⁷ But see occasional news stories about children like Kathryn and Nathan Gray discovering supernovas, or Jack Andraka devising medical tests.

anything that may turn out to be the truth.”²⁸ The lack of prefrontal control explains why children learn fast and display more of the open mind necessary for philosophical and scientific investigation than adults. Children’s lack of a prefrontal cortex benefits humanity as a whole, because, in order to make progress, human beings need to first acquire enough of the huge amount of knowledge accumulated over generations. At the same time, a developed prefrontal cortex and, with it, prefrontal control, gives adults the benefit of discrimination and focus necessary to accomplish tasks (whether philosophical, scientific or practical). According to Gopnik, we as a species owe our evolutionary success to the mental flexibility, adaptability and creativity that make it possible for us to constantly improve our environment. In turn, these are possible thanks to a division of labor between childhood and adulthood: Imagination is trained during the particularly long and dependency-ridden human childhood and, as adults, we learn how to translate imagination into reality.

If Matthews and Gopnik et al. are correct, children tend to possess or exercise cognitive and creative abilities that in most adults have been lost or significantly diminished. These abilities are not trivial: They give children access to important goods, such as being philosophically and scientifically minded. Being this kind of individual may be valuable even if one cannot make much use these abilities – for instance, if as a child one does not find many adults willing to engage in philosophical discussions or in attempts to explore the causal explanation of the world. The mere intellectual curiosity of children seems valuable independently of how it contributes to knowledge. But it appears to be particularly valuable in a world that makes it possible for children to enjoy the exercise of those abilities that they possess to the greatest extent: curiosity, easy learning and a propensity to enquire into general issues. This provides *pro tanto* reasons against forsaking childhood for more adulthood-time, particularly in circumstances that are conducive to good childhoods, that is, a world in which children’s creativity and learning are being properly accommodated. (Although, in fact, no imaginable social conditions can fully inhibit *some* exercise of children’s learning and creative abilities. According to the developmental picture advanced by Gopnik and others, children would never become functioning adults without some exercise of these abilities. One therefore has reason to answer *even Q1* negatively.) When addressing point (c), below, I argue that, in a world shaped to give children ample opportunities to learn and be creative, children’s unique cognitive abilities give them access to valuable goods – such as engagement with philosophical, scientific and artistic pursuits – that are less accessible to adults.

(b1)

If mental plasticity is indeed a distinctive mark of childhood, this helps explain, and gives credence to, the claim that children do not have “selves

²⁸ Gopnik (2009: 13).

of their own.” Schapiro, for instance, thinks that children are not able to make morally authoritative choices because they are not yet the authors of their own selves; they have not yet decided – or completed the tasks of deciding – upon reflection, *who* they are.

It is sometimes argued that children need to experiment with different selves in order to arrive at a stable self. If so, experimentation is instrumentally valuable. This is how Schapiro, for instance, understands the importance of play: “By engaging in play, children more or less deliberately ‘try on’ selves to be and worlds to be in. This is because the only way a child can ‘have’ a self is by trying one on.”²⁹ Without disputing here children’s limited sense of a stable self, or the value of having one, I suggest that there is also something intrinsically valuable in the experimentation made possible by children’s alleged lack of such a self. More generally, it may be valuable for an individual to enjoy a variety of goods.

Consider the following analogy: Some people try out various occupations before they decide on a stable, long-term career. They experiment with temporary jobs, at times doing very different things. (A variation on this theme is teenagers or young adults taking a “gap year” before continuing studies or before embarking on a career.) This can be instrumentally helpful because it lets people know where their strongest interests and abilities lie, and hence helps them optimize their future professional success. But it also seems to have intrinsic value by contributing to a more complete life, in one respect, than the life of someone who has only done one kind of work throughout their entire life. In the same way, many adults who eventually settle in a long-term relationship have had several transitory lovers. Many think this is a desirable *path* toward eventually settling down – perhaps a variety of lovers helps one discover through firsthand experience what one is really seeking from intimate relationships. But the good of experimenting need not be limited to advancing to more successful, stable relationships later in life. There also may be something intrinsically valuable in having experienced intimacy with several people before deciding what one mostly wants to pursue; experimentation and variety may be constitutive of a flourishing life. It is not just that a long-term relationship is more likely to be good thanks to previous, more experimental ones; independently from the instrumental value of having had several relationships, the relational aspect of one’s life, as a whole, is richer and thereby better all things considered. Experimenting with work and intimacy not only may generate the *security* that one really knows what one wants but also a sense of having lived a more complete life in these respects than somebody who settles right away into a long-term job or relationship.

Similarly, the intense experimentation with sensations, ideas and selves of a well-lived childhood has intrinsic value because it can make the overall life of the individual more complete than it could possibly be if one took the “instant adulthood pill.” The value may consist in

²⁹ Schapiro (1999: 732).

experimentation itself, or perhaps it is a constitutive element of experimentation that has intrinsic value. Children's experimentation, as Andrew Franklin-Hall suggests, affords "a form of freedom much scarcer in adulthood, namely, a freedom from having to make certain decisions with long-term consequences."³⁰ Adults, too, can experiment, but the choices that they can make that have few long-term consequences are typically restricted to trivial matters – what to eat, or what to wear, on a particular day. By contrast, children are free to experiment with important things like commitments or relationships without having to face the same long-term consequences as adults. Even if the pill turned the individual into the *best* adult she could have possibly become, the life of that person, on the whole, seems poorer for its lack of childhood experimentation.

How persuasive this claim is will depend not only on how apt one thinks the analogies are, but also on the relevance of the following, perfectionistic objection. One may think that *attaining* various forms of excellence – as in exercising a skill to perfection, uncovering new knowledge or producing a beautiful work of art – is the highest good; it is also a very time-consuming one. On this view, experimenting is desirable only to the extent that it is instrumental to attaining excellence, but undesirable insofar as it distracts from its pursuit. If one could have more time as an adult – that is, as an individual better able to successfully attain excellence – then it would be rational, on this account, to take the "instant-adulthood pill." A conception of the good in which *attaining* excellence is the only good seems unavoidably inimical to the idea that childhood has intrinsic value. For those who hold a more pluralistic view, in which attaining excellence is only one of the things that makes lives go well, there is the following rejoinder: Most lives are sufficiently long for achieving some excellence without having to forsake experimentation. In this day and age there is room for both in a human life of average length.

(b2)

Even without thinking that there is intrinsic value in the unique experimentation of childhood, one may see that children have privileged access to some goods, made possible by their unique abilities to get involved in processes of discovery and in aesthetic pursuits. In this case, if it is valuable for an individual to enjoy a variety of goods then the experience of having been a child contributes to the overall value of a life above and beyond its contribution to a better adulthood.

(c)

Drawing on (a) and (b1), I suggest that it would be irrational to forsake childhood because, on average, children's lives seem to be at least as fit for well-being as adults' lives. I will consider three competing understandings of well-being: as a pleasurable state, as desire-satisfaction

³⁰ A. Franklin-Hall (2013) "On Becoming an Adult: Autonomy and the Moral Relevance of Life's Stages," *Philosophical Quarterly* 63(251): 223-47, at 246.

and as the realization of objective goods.

Childhood is often portrayed as a golden age. Some of this may result from a general tendency to glorify the past, but the tendency is not absolute. Some stages of childhood, such as the difficult part of puberty, are sometimes ranked as less happy than later stages of life.

Another explanation is that 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. They do not seem bothered by a sense of their own and others' limitations and by the unavailability of death, which often poison adults' lives. Even when they understand that they will die one day, children – at least the popular wisdom goes – tend to live as if they are going to be around forever.³¹

Patrick Tomlin thinks we ought to be suspicious of the above claim because children also tend to show more misery than adults.³² Yet, there might be an asymmetry between the face value of children's and adults' expression of (un)happiness: (Young) children tend to show almost all emotions, so we can take them at face value. Adults have been socialized to express mostly pleasurable emotions – indeed, sometimes to exaggerate expressions of subjective well-being and to repress those of ill-being. That children show more misery than adults does not mean that adults experience less misery than children.

Again, neuroscience provides an explanation for some of children's hedonic abilities. Gopnik reports that very young children perceive the world a lot more vividly and in a less organized way than adults; their experience is often synesthetic. This state, which is conducive to learning and creativity, is also pleasurable and makes it easier for children to live in the moment.³³ Her own comparison for what it is like to perceive the world as a baby or young child is “being in love in Paris for the first time after you've had three double espressos.”³⁴

Alternative conceptions of well-being equate it with desire-satisfaction or the realization of objective goods. On a simple version of the desire-satisfaction view, children seem just as likely to enjoy well-being as adults if they live in a world that is conducive to a good childhood. (However, if the view requires the satisfaction of desires that are stable over time and autonomously endorsed, it will exclude children.) Like adults, children have desires and even projects – for instance, they actively pursue pleasure, knowledge or friendships. It is true that access to

³¹ Brennan (2014) also discusses children's sense of timelessness, possibility and absolute trust as bonuses of childhood. It seems plausible to me that all of these features protect children from some of the misery to which adults are vulnerable.

³² In P. Tomlin (manuscript in progress) “Saplings or Caterpillars? Trying to Understand Children.”

³³ An interesting question is whether children are more likely to be happy than adults, other things being equal. For instance, are they more likely to enter and remain in the so-called state of “flow”?

³⁴ From Gopnik's research profile, at: research.universityofcalifornia.edu/profiles/2012/05/alison-gopnik.html

some of the things that children desire can be (legitimately) restricted by adults, but, at the same time, access to some of the things that adults desire are, inevitably, out of adults' reach. Again, commonsense wisdom represents children's desires as geared toward simpler goals and, as such, easier to satisfy than adults' desires.

Finally, some believe that well-being is the same as the realization of objective goods. Some of the goods most widely acknowledged, such as the attaining of various kinds of excellence, are likely to be less easily reachable by children than by adults. Yet, the opposite is true about other goods. Above I mentioned that young children may be better able than adults to engage in scientific and philosophical enquiry (especially if philosophy is understood as critical thinking rather than the development of complex theories). The same argument is sometimes made about children's ability to engage in artistic pursuits.³⁵ Matthews, for instance, writes:

For many people the art or philosophy of their childhood is never equaled, let alone surpassed, by the art or philosophy of their adult lives. If painting or doing philosophy has any non-instrumental value for them, it is their child art and their child philosophy that have such value.³⁶

Neuropsychology suggests that children's special artistic talent is due to their atypically high levels of general creativity, vivid awareness of the world and capacity for synesthetic experience.

Even if Matthews is right, this does not imply that either children or most adults are ever successful at creating knowledge or beauty. The skeptic may ask what the value (other than pleasure) is of philosophical, scientific and artistic pursuits if one lacks the technique, discrimination and tenacity necessary to produce outstanding results. I assume that exercising a propensity to enquire into the causes of things and into the meaning of concepts as well as trying to create beautiful or surprising objects are valuable activities, independent of their outcome. Here is, in the words of Bertrand Russell, one explanation of why it is good to engage, for instance, in the activity of philosophy even if one does not get any closer to truth: Philosophy,

while diminishing our feeling of certainty as to what things are ... greatly increases our knowledge as to what they may be; it removes the somewhat arrogant dogmatism of those who have never travelled the region of liberating doubt, and it keeps alive our sense of wonder by showing familiar things in an unfamiliar aspect.³⁷

To children, these states of mind – of diminished certainty about how things are and vivid imagination of possibilities, of lack of arrogant dogmatism and of a sense of wonder – come naturally. If there is intrinsic value in being the kind of person who regularly enjoys such states of

³⁵ Some artists seem to agree with this. Picasso is said to have claimed that "Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once we grow up."

³⁶ Matthews (1994: 123).

³⁷ B. Russell (1999) *The Problems of Philosophy*, New York: Dover Publications, p. 114.

mind, then childhood is intrinsically valuable. The goods easily available to children, and only rarely to adults, may or may not also be instrumental – for instance, they may shape future scientists or political reformers – but even when they fail to be instrumental they remain valuable.

4. Children's Moral Agency

An obvious objection to the view I defend is that children cannot lead good lives, and therefore childhood cannot have intrinsic value, unless children have moral agency.³⁸ The view that children are unfinished adults represents children as deficient in both rational and moral agency. Some of the discussion above explains why children have more rational agency than traditionally ascribed to them. I assume that *full* moral agency presupposes a degree of knowledge about the world that is out of very young children's reach, as well as a higher ability to accurately imagine oneself in the future than most children have.

Yet, even small children have some knowledge of the world and progressively acquire self-control and a sense of their self as extended in time. Moreover, being a moral agent also requires an adequate level of empathy, altruism and understanding of moral demands. Moral agents should be capable of understanding how other people feel and be disposed to help for non-self-interested reasons. This sense of "empathy" is sometimes discussed as "sympathy": "sympathetic concern for a person involves some concern for her good and some desire to promote it."³⁹ I employ the term "empathy" since this is more widely used in the empirical research to which I refer.

The same research that shows children as more imaginative and better learners than adults also indicates that children as young as 2 are capable of altruistic action and that they have *higher* levels of empathy than adults.⁴⁰ A 2-year-old can understand that others feel pain that she – the child – does not feel, or that others desire things that she – the child – does not desire. The explanation for this, according to Gopnik, lies in part with children's heightened curiosity about other people's minds, which also makes possible children's attempts to impose their will on others (and which has an obvious evolutionary explanation, given that children depend on others' willingness to advance their ends). Writes Gopnik: "This kind of empathy demands the same sophisticated understanding of other people that we see in the terrible twos."⁴¹ Moreover, a 2-year-old is capable of caring about another person's pain that she does not feel, or about another person's desire that she does not share, and to try to soothe the pain or help fulfill the desire.

Gopnik's findings with respect to children's empathy and altruism align with Matthews' experience with children doing moral philosophy.

³⁸ For the view that morality is a precondition for leading a good life, see C. Korsgaard, "Two Conceptions of Goodness," *The Philosophical Review* 92(2): 169-95.

³⁹ S. Darwall (1998) "Empathy, Sympathy, Care," *Philosophical Studies* 89(2-3): 261-82.

⁴⁰ Additional, older empirical research with the same conclusion is referenced in A. Jaworska (2007) "Caring and Full Moral Standing," *Ethics* 117(3): 460-97.

⁴¹ Gopnik et al. (2008/1999: 55).

He, too, notes that children are more likely to exercise empathy and pay attention to others than adults, although his explanation is social rather than biological:

People become overwhelmed by, or increasingly preoccupied with their own, personal agendas. When that happens, even a very young and inexperienced child can catch us adults up short with a direct, emphatic response to, say, a homeless person trying to keep warm in a cardboard box under a bridge.⁴²

As in the case of children's cognitive abilities, the relevance of these findings about children for their status as moral agents is not straightforward. The role of empathy in ethics is disputed. Few would deny that some ability to feel empathy is necessary for moral agency. Yet, there is disagreement concerning its importance relative to that of understanding, and acting on, principles. According to some philosophers, empathy as an emotional capacity to care for others is a sufficient condition for the possession of full moral standing.⁴³ Theories of moral development inform the debate between Lawrence Kohlberg and Carol Gilligan concerning the stages of moral development.

Kohlberg, who drew on work by Piaget, influentially argued that moral judgment develops through six stages, that moving from one stage to the next represents improvement and that one can only reach a stage after having been through the previous ones. Kohlberg called the first two stages pre-conventional to stress that somebody at these stages is mostly motivated by fear of punishment and desire for reward. Being in one of the next two stages, called conventional, is to be motivated by interpersonal relationships, to seek social approval and to desire to maintain social harmony. Subjects reaching the last two stages, called post-conventional, are motivated by their understanding of abstract principles, like those upheld by social-contract theory or by a Kantian-like requirement of universalizability. Kohlberg and his followers believed that children before adolescence find themselves at one of the pre-conventional stages. If both this theory of moral development and the empirical beliefs about children's motivation were right, this would indeed be reason to disqualify children from consideration as moral agents. I wish to indicate three plausible lines of resisting this conclusion.

First, according to Gopnik and others, children as young as 2 turn out to be capable of motivation that best fits Kohlberg's conventional stages: interest in other people's well-being. Kohlberg himself believed that most adults remain at one of these intermediate levels of development. This means that one cannot deny some moral agency to children unless one is willing to deny it to most adults.

Second, Kohlberg's theory has been thoroughly challenged by Carol Gilligan within the field of psychology and by the subsequent tradition of the ethics of care, drawing on Gilligan and sometimes on the 18th century tradition of moral sentimentalism in ethics.⁴⁴ The core of the

⁴² Matthews (1994: 65).

⁴³ Jaworska (2007).

⁴⁴ C. Gilligan (1982) *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*,

challenge is that it is just not true that moral motivation in terms of other people's needs and of the importance of preserving relationships is inferior to moral motivation in terms of universalizable rules. I cannot enter here into the details of this debate, but much of it turns on the belief that responding to people's needs, independently of whether this advances the greatest good or respects deontic constraints, is what morally good people actually do. (And so, the ethics of care is often considered to be a form of virtue ethics.) If this belief is true, it means that being at the so-called conventional stages – as children often are, according to Gopnik and Matthews – does not mean that one is morally deficient. To the contrary: It means that one displays fully adequate moral reactions. This is in line with common morality and the tradition of moral sentimentalism. Moreover, the idea that others' needs and our relationships with them should motivate us morally can be accommodated by some theories that ground morality in impartial principles, such as versions of utilitarianism, that acknowledge the gap between moral motivation and the understanding of what actually makes a particular action moral.

A third line of reasoning is even more persuasive. It is misguided to pitch responsiveness to people's needs against acting on impartial, universal moral principles. If so, Kohlberg's taxonomy of stages of moral development, at least beyond the pre-conventional stages, is deeply flawed. It is theoretically possible, and desirable, to simultaneously act on moral principles *and* in response to others' needs. (This is, indeed, suggested in Gilligan's own later views; she often uses metaphors from gestalt psychology to say that we can switch between the perspective of impartial reasoning and the perspective of care in evaluating one and the same problem.)

It remains to be shown that children are capable of understanding moral principles and, indeed, this is what research in developmental psychology indicates.⁴⁵ Experiments reported by Gopnik⁴⁶ suggest that toddlers know what conventional rules mean – that is, that there are social conventions that they should follow, and that rules issue permissions, obligations or interdictions – *and* that the rules can be changed. Children as young as 2 ½ understand that the mere fact that an authority figure makes a rule does not mean that that rule is morally acceptable. They distinguish rule breaking from what is morally acceptable, as suggested by the fact that toddlers answer positively the question: "Would it be OK to talk at naptime if the teachers all said so?" and negatively the question: "Would it be OK to hit other children if the teachers all said so?" If someone believes that rules can be changed and that their moral value derives from a source that is independent from the authority figure that makes them, that person may be said to have, if only implicitly, the concept of a principle in light of which conventional rules

Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

⁴⁵ The path-breaking work on understanding the distinction between conventional rules and moral principles was done by E. Turiel. See (1983) *The Development of Social Knowledge: Morality and Convention*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁴⁶ Gopnik (2009).

can be judged.

All this is not to say that children's moral agency is as *robust* as that of adults, nor that they should be attributed the same levels of responsibility and autonomy as we attribute to adults. Children lack the relevant experience and self-control. For these reasons, the range of situations in which it is appropriate to hold children responsible is inevitably much narrower than the range of situations in which it is appropriate to hold adults responsible because children can be held responsible, even if, in a narrower range of cases than adults, it seems that their moral agency deserves respect just like that of adults. Children, then, are not morally deficient in a way that would make it rational for an individual to want to skip childhood. Moreover, if it is true that children are more capable of caring about others than adults, as Gopnik and Matthews suggest, the transition from childhood to adulthood is likely to involve a loss in moral, as well as in cognitive, value.

5. Adults as Defective Children?

I have tried to vindicate an image of children, including very young children, that is familiar from many sources, starting with the Romantic tradition with its emphasis on children's creativity and moral sensitivity. Modern-day neuroscience and developmental psychology provide a good basis for rejecting the image of children as mere unfinished adults. In a nutshell, and, again, in Gopnik's words:

Children aren't just defective adults, primitive grown-ups gradually attaining our perfection and complexity. Instead, children and adults are different forms of *Homo sapiens*. They have very different, but equally complex and powerful minds, brains, and forms of consciousness, designed to serve different evolutionary functions.⁴⁷

This is an exaggeration. What Gopnik in fact shows is that children and adults excel at different things. Still, the flip side of rejecting the view that children are unfinished adults is that one has to accept the idea that adults are, in some ways, defective children. If children are better explorers of the world, more creative and more empathetic, this means that adults have lost some of children's valuable abilities. In the relevant respects adults are, compared to children, defective.

The extreme form of the Romantic view is illustrated by Peter Pan, who never wants to grow up. If the view of "adults as defective children" were both true and complete, growing up would be regrettable and Peter Pan's desire the only rational attitude with respect to growing up.⁴⁸ Yet, it is highly unconvincing that the Romantic view is both true and complete. Adulthood, too, has intrinsic value and affords access to goods that are

⁴⁷ Gopnik (2009: 9).

⁴⁸ We would also need to radically rethink our social world, including the distribution of resources between children and adults and the demands that come with being a parent. James Dwyer's (2011) thesis that children have higher moral status than adults is the closest defense of this view that I know.

only very rarely, and some of them not at all, available to children.

Unlike the traditional view of children as unfinished adults, the Romantic view of adults as defective children was never meant to capture the full truth about the nature of childhood and adulthood; Romantics did not imply that adulthood is all things considered inferior to childhood, because they did not adopt the unlikely view that we can, during childhood, have access to *all* the range of goods available to human beings. Rather, they highlighted the best features of childhood in order to explain why we ought to protect children from too much responsibility.⁴⁹ The belief that adults are defective children just like children are unfinished adults also gives credence to the view that it is desirable for adults to retain childlike qualities to the extent to which this does not interfere with adult responsibilities.⁵⁰

6. Conclusions

If both childhood and adulthood have intrinsic and special value, it would not be irrational to choose one over the other unless one was of much *greater* value. Consider: There is value both in becoming a doctor and in becoming an artist, and the two activities afford access to very different goods. Therefore, other things being equal, it is rational to choose either of these. Similarly, taking the pill in Brennan's experiment, or being Peter Pan, would both be rationally justifiable. This conclusion is not incompatible with the belief that adults have a duty to help children grow up and assume adult responsibilities. The contingent fact that adults grow old and frail means they are unable to care for their children endlessly. Even if there would be no tragedy to remain a child if one could receive adult care forever, in the real world it is good for children to turn into adults, but not by forgoing the enjoyment of childhood's goods.

Some will, indeed, remain convinced that the value of adulthood is much greater than that of childhood. They may value, above all, end results – a new discovery, an artistic masterpiece, the saving of thousands of individuals. Childhood is not the time when one can reasonably hope to accomplish any of these. One can believe that, whatever intrinsic value childhood may have, it is easily outweighed by the value of adulthood.

But I contend that even someone who holds such a perfectionist conception of the good has reason to be interested in protecting the goods that make childhood intrinsically valuable. Childhood may be a predicament in some senses, but in others it is a privilege: the privilege of superior abilities to learn and experiment. The protection we give children – sometimes in the form of denying them the responsibility that comes with adult freedom – can and should serve a double purpose. We ought to advance their good *qua* future adults (children need protection

⁴⁹ See, for instance J. Rousseau (1779/1762) *Emile: or On Education*, A. Bloom, trans., New York: Basic Books, p. 79: "Love childhood; promote its games, its pleasures, its amiable instinct. ... Why do you want to deprive these little innocents of the enjoyment of a time so short which escapes them and of a good so precious which they do not know how to abuse?"

⁵⁰ I argued for this conclusion in Gheaus (2014).

to reach adulthood and to bring to fruition some of their childhood potential) but also to advance their good *qua* children. Forcing children to work too much and play too little will not only make for poorer childhoods but probably also for worse adulthoods by interfering with optimal development. Moreover, a good adulthood includes the memory of a good childhood. The relationship between the two stages of life is in this sense asymmetrical: The badness of an individual's adulthood does not take away from the value of a good childhood; while a bad childhood can always cast a shadow on the goodness of one's future.

On a conception of the good that includes more than the above-mentioned perfectionist goals, then, *contra* Lomasky, for someone to mysteriously remain in the state of childhood would not be a tragedy; theirs would be a life very much worth living because childhood is intrinsically valuable. While this would not be a tragedy, it would likely be a loss: Since both childhood and adulthood give privileged access to specific goods, they are both inherently integral to an optimal life.⁵¹

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⁵¹ Exchanges with Patrick Tomlin improved my understanding of what is at stake in the claim that childhood has intrinsic value. Thanks to audiences in Sheffield and London, Christopher Bennett, Brunella Casalini, Christine Bratu, Luara Ferracioli, Tim Fowler, Colin Macleod, Lindsey Porter, Sara Protasi, Norvin Richards, Anders Schinkel, Maria Schwartz, an anonymous reviewer of this journal and an anonymous reviewer of the *Journal of Moral Philosophy*. Work toward this article was also supported by the Swedish Research Council, grant no. 421-2013-1306.