

Pre-Conference Workshop “Political Philosophy and Child Poverty”

University of Salzburg, August 24th

Venue: Centre for Ethics and Poverty Research, Address: Mönchsberg 2a, 5020 Salzburg

9:00	Welcome	
9:15	<i>Serena Olsaretti</i> (ICREA-Universitat Pompeu Fabra) Comment by <i>Monika Platz</i> (Munich)	The Diversity of Objections to Child Poverty
10:30	Break	
10:45	<i>Nico Brando</i> (Leuven Centre for Global Governance Studies) Comment by <i>Mar Cabezas</i> (Salzburg)	A Childish View of Justice: Rawls, Nussbaum and the Problem of Assumed Agency
12:00	Break	
12:15	<i>Colin Macleod</i> (Victoria) Comment by <i>Johannes Drerup</i> (Koblenz-Landau)	Justice, Moral Urgency and Child Poverty
13:30	Lunch	
14:30	<i>Ortrud Leßmann</i> (international research center Salzburg) Comment by <i>Gunter Graf</i> (Salzburg)	Child Poverty – On Definitions and Disciplines
15.45	End of Workshop	
18:00	Dinner	

Abstracts:

The Diversity of Objections to Child Poverty (Serena Olsaretti)

The title takes its lead from T.M. Scanlon’s piece on “The Diversity of Objections to Inequality”. At the moment, I am thinking of the paper as having two main aims. First, it identifies the variety of justice-based objections to child poverty, and asks which of these, if any, is fundamentally egalitarian. Contrary to what has been argued by Scanlon where the claims of adults are at issue, and where the various objections to inequality are not themselves fundamentally egalitarian, the paper tests the idea that, where children are involved, *inequality* as such is unjust. This thought is related to the idea that there is something especially bad, and politically most urgent, about child poverty. Second, drawing on the analysis of the objections to child poverty, the paper asks what directions they point us to in terms of *who* has an obligation, and *of what kind*, to respond to child poverty.

A Childish View of Justice: Rawls, Nussbaum and the Problem of Assumed Agency (Nico Brando)

In this paper I will compare how principles of justice are defended by John Rawls’ and by Martha Nussbaum’s approaches to Political Liberalism from the perspective of children’s interests and needs. My intention is to show that, although Nussbaum’s critique of Rawls, and her amendments to Political Liberalism provide a more ample protection of children (and of other vulnerable groups; i.e. women, the disabled, and animals), her reliance on Rawls’ strong principle of toleration may have negative effects on many of the basic capabilities that she endorses. First, I introduce Rawls’ approach to social justice (Rawls 1999, 2005), looking at how his principles are justified by appealing to the agency and reasonableness of the contracting parties.

Following Nussbaum (2000, 2006), I consider that the assumption of agency does not ensure that the fundamental interests of many vulnerable and dependent individuals are taken fully into account (see also Brennan and Noggle 2000; Bojer 2000; Schweiger and Graf 2015). Second, I present the capabilities approach as a relevant alternative (and adjustment) to Rawls' Political Liberalism (Nussbaum 2004, 2006; Sen 1985; 2009; Dixon and Nussbaum 2012). Although I agree with Nussbaum regarding the fundamental role that capabilities could play for human development and for the pursuit of social justice, I consider that she fails to pay sufficient attention to the well-becoming of children (O'Neill 1988; Macleod 2003, 2010). Her defence of national autonomy and her expansive protection of the freedom of each tradition to decide over how (and to what extent) should capabilities be implemented within their society, restricts children's potential capabilities by allowing present-day adults' (and the status quo) conception of the good to prevail over the interests and potential agency of children (Feinberg 1992; Noggle 2002; Macleod 2003). Childhood development is fundamental for an agent's future scope of preferences, objectives, choices and freedoms; and, because the capabilities approach stands on each individual's entitlement to choose her life and exercise her rights without unjust binds, it seems that allowing adults to freely decide over the potential capabilities of children, would lead to children being bounded by the previous generation's conception of the good, and by having their preferences adapted to the tradition's status quo. Because Nussbaum is strongly concerned with the issues that arise from adaptive preferences (especially in the case of women), I consider that her expansive toleration and protection of a tradition's right to decide almost entirely over the future of their children can negatively affect the capabilities they can potentially develop when they grow up (Feinberg 1992; Macleod 2003; Uprichard 2007). If the aim of capability theory is to ensure that individuals have the substantial freedoms required for choosing over their own life and their conception of the good, then the development process during childhood should be maintained as unaffected as possible by the restriction of potential capabilities, so that, once the present child has her agency fully cultivated, she can choose for herself over the path she wishes to take in life.

Justice, Moral Urgency and Child Poverty (Colin Macleod)

There is widespread agreement that existing child poverty in the world today is a grave injustice and that addressing child poverty has special moral urgency. The failure to eradicate such poverty, especially in contexts where there are ample resources that can be effectively deployed to reduce poverty, is a serious moral failing on the part of those individuals and collectives who have moral duties to help alleviate suffering. However, there is less agreement both about how duties to eliminate child poverty are to be understood and about the degree to which justice requires more than the elimination of child poverty. This paper will consider how considerations of distributive justice are relevant to understanding the moral urgency that attaches to eliminating child poverty and why full justice for children requires more than the elimination of poverty. In pursuing justice, it can be appropriate to assign priorities to the achievement of certain urgent ends but justice need not be defined in terms of the achievement of those ends. Moreover, less urgent demands of justice

can assume moral greater moral urgency once more fundamental dimensions of justice have been realized. So urgent moral demands grounded in the justice-based entitlements of children would remain even if child poverty was eliminated.

Child Poverty – On Definitions and Disciplines (Ortrud Leßmann)

Most of the concepts and definitions used in the measurement of poverty stem either from economics (Sen 1979) Seidl 1988, Zheng 1997) or sociology (Rowntree 1980 [1910], Townsend 1957, Grusky and Kanbur 2006) or they are “political” definitions made for monitoring poverty (Orshansky 1965, Blackwood and Lynch 1984, Atkinson et al. 2002). At first the method employed to measure poverty relied on determining a basket of good necessary for subsistence and estimating the cost thereof. Today income still serves as the dominant measure of poverty despite all its difficulties. Yet, as early as 1988 Seidl noted that a growing number of scholars involved in the field agree that poverty is best seen as a multidimensional phenomenon and the methods for measuring it accordingly have developed further since then (Garzia Diaz 2003, Alkire and Foster 2007, Rippin 2012). In the case of children poverty is mostly measured in terms of income, too, but in this case there are even more compelling reasons to measure poverty multidimensionally than in the general case since children neither earn nor dispose of an income (Leßmann 2014). Recently, many such multidimensional measures have been proposed and used (Roelen and Gassman 2008, UNICEF 2012, OECD 2009, European Commission and Eurostat 2012). Hence it comes as a surprise that Schweiger and Graf (2015) have chosen to understand child poverty in terms of income alone. They argue that child poverty “is mainly an issue of social sciences” (p. 71) and that they *as philosophers* need to focus on the significance of child poverty for questions of social justice. They refer to ill-being in various dimensions such as health, education, and social inclusion (p. 67) as *consequences* or effects of poverty. At the same time they say that they are not interested in the *causes* of these deprivations other than poverty (p. 70). It seems that the main reason for using this conception of child poverty in their book is that they want to show the injustice of poverty they see in denying children to get what they are entitled to as a matter of justice. I will argue that the distinction Schweiger and Graf make between poverty and ill-being is an artificial one they need in order to build up their argument: If (income) poverty is the cause of ill-being and ill-being means that children do not get what they are entitled to as a matter of justice, then poverty is unjust. They gain this analytical clarity at the cost of ignoring major developments in the conception, definition and measurement of poverty (in the *social sciences*). They also gain it by denying the contribution of the capability approach they refer to for defining social justice (Chapter one) to the conception and measurement of poverty. Schweiger and Graf (2015) have made a contribution towards developing a capability approach to child well-being and rely on functionings as the currency of justice, but disappointingly relinquish developing a capability conception of child poverty.

Child poverty and autonomy in the capability approach (Tanja Munk)

The capability approach provides a suitable framework for a normative understanding of adult poverty. A core element of the approach is respect for individual autonomy: Adults should be able to choose their particular way of life from a broad range of options and their freedom of choice should not be restricted except for the sake of the legitimate claims of others. Following the capability approach, then, poverty should be conceived of as a morally unacceptable restriction of a person’s capability set, i.e. the set of valuable alternatives that a person has to choose from given her internal and external conditions. It seems difficult, though, to simply extend the idea of protecting and fostering autonomy to children. Children typically lack the prerequisite ‘moral capacities’ deemed necessary for an autonomous life, in particular the capacities for rational foresight, planning, and action. Therefore, we believe, it is justified to restrict the autonomy of children and their freedom of choice to a much greater extend than that of adults. In spite of this, I shall argue, that it is possible

and instructive to conceptualize a normative conception of child poverty in terms of the capability approach. Furthermore, I shall show that the capability approach is helpful to specify in greater detail the conditions under which external interference with a child's freedom of choice seems to be justified, be it for the sake of the child's well-being (present or future), be it for the sake of fostering and protecting the child's future autonomy.