

Gunter Graf and Gottfried Schweiger. *Ethics and the Endangerment of Children's Bodies*. Palgrave Macmillan 2017. 290 pp. \$109.99 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9783319402123); \$109.99 USD (Paperback ISBN 9783319820552).

This is an excellent book which tackles the difficult ethical issues that arise in connection with children's bodily integrity in contemporary developed societies. The authors adopt the theoretical and normative framework provided by the capability approach in order to examine three issues concerning children's bodily integrity: eating, sexuality, and violence. More specifically, they analyze each of these issues through the lenses of three key aspects of the capability of bodily integrity, i.e., 'health, agency, and positive self-relations' (46), in order to illustrate what kinds of injustices children are victims of, who is responsible for those injustices, and what interventions might be put in place in order to counter them.

The book's central argument is that children's bodily integrity involves both natural and socially constructed dimensions, and is the object of empirical and normative disagreement both among experts and between different cultures. Partly as a result of this uncertainty, the authors argue, interventions tackling injustices in this area ought to be multidimensional and involve a range of actors, including but not limited to families and the state.

The book has four general strengths. First of all, it offers what is in my view one of the best examples of empirically informed philosophy, and particularly ethics/political philosophy. The authors draw on an impressive range of empirical research sources concerning eating, sexuality, and violence in relation to children. Second, and relatedly, the authors make policy recommendations based on their ethical analysis, thus displaying the relevance of philosophical debate to pressing real-world policy issues. Third, the book does not simply apply the capability approach to ethical issues concerning children's bodily integrity. It also aims to enrich and expand that approach, by introducing the idea of 'developing capabilities' (15), which acknowledges that children's capabilities, including bodily integrity, develop and change over time, and are accompanied by changing degrees of 'autonomy' and 'vulnerability' (15).

Fourth, the book offers a rare reflection on the methodological dimensions of applied ethics. Philosophers (including ethicists and political philosophers) are notorious for often failing to reflect and/or explicate the methodological underpinnings of their research, as well as the limitations that may accompany it. Graf and Schweiger avoid both shortcomings. More specifically, they explicitly choose 'top-down' over 'bottom-up' methodological approaches (8) (where the former, unlike the latter, start from a theoretical perspective and apply it to real-world issues) and acknowledge the uncertainty that surrounds much of the empirical information they rely on.

Rather than delving into the details of each chapter (a task that could not be accommodated within the limits of this short review), I intend to provide a critical reflection on some specific aspects of the book, which I found especially illuminating, but also deserving of greater attention.

I would like to start from one of the aforementioned strengths of the book, i.e., the authors' explicit acknowledgment of their methodology. While there is nothing intrinsically wrong with the authors' preference for a top-down perspective, especially since they explicitly endorse the capability approach, it is too reductive to argue that '[i]t seems implausible to us that ethical evaluations of social problems such as domestic violence and neglect can be made without a normative theory in the background that tells us what we owe children in the first place' (8). True, this is how much ethical and political theory proceeds, and there are clear advantages in this approach in terms of analytical clarity and rigour. Yet there might also be advantages in starting from the analysis of facts

and experiences on the ground and, through comparisons and generalizations, formulating general ethical principles that reflect ‘empathetic consideration of particulars’ (Michael Frazer, ‘Moral Sentimentalism’, in Adrian Blau (ed.), *Methods in Analytical Political Theory*. Cambridge University Press, 102). The authors seem to dismiss this approach too quickly. Given their awareness of methodological issues, they could have considered more extensively this alternative approach, explained what it might imply for an ethical study of children’s bodily integrity, and provided stronger reasons in defence of their preferred approach.

The second aspect I would like to focus on concerns Graf and Schweiger’s analysis of the important question of what it means to be a child (24-35). More specifically, the authors endorse Anderson and Claassen’s (‘Sailing Alone: Teenage Autonomy and Regimes of Childhood.’ *Law and Philosophy* 31(5), 2012, 495–522) idea of a ‘regime of childhood,’ which should be distinguished from other regimes based on age rather than competence tests, in order to guarantee ‘stable expectations’, avoid ‘competition’, and prevent ‘inequality’ (34). This view presents many points of connection with Joseph Fishkin’s (*Bottlenecks: A New Theory of Equal Opportunity*, Oxford University Press, 2014) ‘bottlenecks’ theory of equality of opportunity, which stresses how people’s opportunities are often constrained by the presence of specific ‘bottlenecks’, i.e., targets, tests, achievements, etc., that everyone is expected to go through in order to enjoy certain opportunities. It is surprising that the authors never mention this influential account throughout the book. Yet it seems to me that the contested nature of the ethical and empirical issues concerning children’s bodily integrity, often highlighted by the authors, raises pressing normative problems also (though not solely) because there are certain social expectations towards children, i.e. certain ‘bottlenecks’ which put them under considerable pressure and prevent the natural development of their capabilities.

A third point I would like to consider is the authors’ analysis of childhood obesity, and more specifically their view that ‘[i]n a culture that idealizes the thin body as the aesthetic ideal, there is even the risk that bodies within the “normal” weight range suffer from the stigma of fatness, should they slightly depart from *being thin*’ (83, original emphasis). But what if a culture values being overweight or even being obese, and sees these as signs of well-being and/or prestige? What kind of ethical issues do these cultural perspectives pose, especially when they exist alongside ‘thin body’ ideals in diverse affluent societies? Should parents who abide by these ideals, for example, be interfered with? How could liberal states design healthy eating interventions (or other related public health interventions) in a way that is respectful of diverse conceptions of health, well-being, body image, etc.? In view of their focus on disagreement, the authors could have explored more extensively the implications of cultural diversity (broadly intended) for the analysis of bodily integrity in developed societies, and its implications for policy-making.

Fourth, and relatedly, cultural diversity also involves linguistic diversity. The authors are right in pointing out that comparative analyses of (and empirical research on) bullying are rendered difficult by the fact that ‘in many languages there is no exact translation for the English term “bullying”’ (233), a point to which they return (236). Beyond the specific issues concerning bullying and violence involving children, this point raises a broader question concerning, once again, the methodological dimension of applied ethics/political philosophy. More specifically, how does linguistic diversity, and the problem of translating key concepts between different languages, affect empirical and normative research? For example, how does it affect the formulation of normative theories, such as the capability approach, and their application to real-world settings in which individuals speak (and conceive the world through the lenses of) different languages? Does this problem also affect the analysis of eating and sexuality, alongside that of bullying and violence?

Finally, there is a theme that implicitly underlies many of the points examined by the authors throughout the book but is not sufficiently discussed: freedom of expression. Such diverse issues as weight stigma (162-3), sexualized media content (174-5), and bullying (233-8) raise pressing issues concerning the limits that liberal states ought to impose on people's freedom to express their beliefs and feelings. Yet the authors only mention freedom of expression once (174), simply stating that this 'is another value that a liberal society must respect' (174). But what normative criteria can help us to balance this value against others, such as bodily integrity? And does the capability approach provide us with useful normative guidelines for carrying out this balancing exercise? More importantly, in relation to the theme of the book, since it is often children who use hateful, stigmatizing and bullying speech against other children, how and when should the state intervene and regulate such speech? And should such interventions take into account the developing nature of children's capabilities, which may require a certain degree of freedom in order for them to be able to express their agency (275)? Addressing these and similar questions could have offered an interesting perspective on freedom of expression in relation to children and their capabilities.

These observations, it should be noted, only intend to critically highlight areas of inquiry which are worth exploring further. They do not detract, however, from the quality of this book, which remains an excellent example of empirically-informed and policy-engaged philosophy.

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