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Anca Gheaus, Gideon Calder, and Jurgen De Wispelaere, eds., THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF CHILDHOOD AND CHILDREN

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BOOK REVIEWS

The Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Childhood and Children, edited by Anca Gheaus, Gideon Calder, and Jurgen De Wispelaere. Routledge Press, 2019. Pp. 424. \$220 (hardback).

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As Anca Gheaus argues in the introduction to *The Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Childhood and Children*, it's puzzling that children and childhood have been relatively neglected as a philosophical topic. I share this puzzlement. Motivation for the silence, Gheaus goes on to argue, "can perhaps be explained through the belief that childhood is a state of being inferior to adulthood" (1) or that "children's moral status is clearly inferior to adults" (1). The present handbook was developed, in part, to show the importance of sustained reflection on children for a wide range of philosophical tasks. And the volume succeeds nicely in this goal.

As one would expect from a handbook, this volume covers a wide variety of topics. And as one would likewise expect from a review of a handbook, there's no way to engage with the whole of the volume's breadth in a review of reasonable length. Attention will have to be selective. The volume comprises five parts: "Being a Child," "Childhood and Moral Status," "Parents and Children," "Children in Society," and "Children and the State." A number of the chapters focus on ethical issues, including Carolyn McLeod and Andrew Botterell's chapter which explores why there's so much opposition to licensing biological parents when we already license adoptive and foster parents. Other topics in ethics include David Archard's chapter on consent, Jonathan Seglow's chapter on parent partiality, and the related issue of filial duties toward parents addressed by Diane Jeske. Unsurprisingly, social and political topics are also well represented. Numerous chapters focus on issues of both professional and cultural interest to Christian philosophers qua Christian philosophers, including Albert Atkin's chapter on childhood and race, Serena Olsaretti's chapter on who in a political community should bear the various costs of children, Matthew Clayton's exploration of political neutrality as it relates to childrearing, and Mianna Lotz's insightful discussion of vulnerability. The heavy emphasis on ethical and political issues could be justified by



the fact that children are typically more vulnerable than adults in a number of ways that, according to many Christians, should be taken seriously in both our ethics and politics.

But the volume also includes a number of issues in epistemology (Fabrice Clément and Melissa Koenig's chapter on conceptions of child knowledge), aesthetics (Jonathan Fineberg's chapter on the history and value of children's art), and ontology (Daniela Cutas's chapter on the composition of the family, which discusses "family" as a cluster concept, some aspects of which are socially constructed). In the remainder of my review, I specifically engage only a few of the 36 chapters as representative of the volume as a whole. This restriction is in no way intended to suggest that the other chapters are less valuable, but is simply required by the limitations of a review.

As described in the introduction, the volume's stated purpose is to "[introduce] readers to various debates about the nature of childhood, children's moral status and its direct implications, duties owed to children by various agents and the ways in which society ought to treat children. Our aim is not merely to present the state of the art, but also to draw attention to the many issues that are still under-explored and, therefore, to encourage future research" (2). The volume unquestionably succeeds with respect to these aims. It maps a large terrain of philosophical issues and draws on empirical and theoretical work from other disciplines (e.g., neurological understandings of children's cognition and political rights) as appropriate. Most of the chapters go beyond just offering an overview of the debates and also advance, even if only modestly, the literatures they engage with. Sometimes these positive aspects of the project weren't as robust as some readers might hope, but this is an understandable limitation of such a volume.

Suparna Choudhury and Nancy Ferranti's chapter on "The Science of the Adolescent Brain and Its Cultural Implications" is an instance of the volume's many good interactions with relevant non-philosophical literatures. They summarize current neuroimaging and functional studies about how adolescent brains differ from adult brains and how the differences in structure and functioning can explain decreased executive functioning in children. They also discuss "neuromyths" that emerge from problematic attempts to bridge brain science and policy-making, as one sometimes finds in educational policy. One factor that contributes to these neuromyths is the seductiveness of "the neuroscientific turn" that fails to properly "acknowledge the importance of social context and environment" (37). Careful attention to more recent work in social neuroscience, they argue, can help correct this imbalance.

Jennifer Epp and Samantha Brennan's chapter on childhood sexuality exemplifies how broadly some of the individual chapters range. Sexuality, they argue, is about far more than just sex acts in general, and certainly more than just intercourse:

What else might sexuality encompass? Feelings and emotions including love, jealousy, and desire (both romantic and sexual); activities like flirting,

dating, hand-holding, and cuddling; curiosity about bodies and sexual activities; gender, especially as it affects one's sense of self as a sexual being or one's behaviors in relationships; sexual and romantic orientation; and more (274).

A substantial part of their chapter focuses on sex education. Such an activity, they argue, has two aims. The first, which often receives the majority of attention, is forward-looking, seeking to protect and shape the kinds of sexual activities that children will engage in once they're adults. (While they mention a number of criticisms with abstinence-only education, I was surprised that they didn't mention its documented general ineffectiveness.) But the second aim seeks to recognize children as presently sexual beings—that is to recognize children as beings whose present existence includes aspects of sexuality (broadly conceived, as indicated above), even if it is developing. Epp and Brennan draw on social theorist Jeffrey Weeks's notion of a "sexual citizen" to argue that sex education can be justified not just on the basis of forward-looking concerns, but also on the basis of a right to access information about their own present sexuality. Here they argue that curriculum could address how sex, gender, and identity are shaped by other social categories, including sex education for disabled teens.

Quite a few chapters note that philosophical reflection about humans can be skewed insofar as the views in question don't apply equally well to all humans. Lars Lindblom's chapter on "Childhood and the Metric of Justice," for instance, holds that standard views of agency are problematic insofar as they do "not apply to children" (320). By largely leaving children aside when engaging in philosophy, we often end up with more limited views than we intend—and often without noticing what's been truncated. Anthony Skelton's chapter on "Children and Well-Being," for instance, begins by noting that consciousness, agency, cognition, comprehension, and manipulation of information change radically throughout childhood and into adulthood. Aristotle famously claimed that children aren't able to achieve eudaimonia: "a child is not happy . . . [since] happiness requires both complete virtue and a complete life" (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1100a2–5). Skelton argues that the best way to reject this argument is to deny the underlying implicit assumption that "there is only one way to fare well" (92). As with a number of issues this collection addresses, the philosophical literature on children's well-being is underdeveloped. After canvassing a number of alternatives including subjective accounts and objective-list theories of well-being, Skelton argues for a hybrid view. On his view, to oversimplify, children have well-being to the degree that they experience the proper subjective attitudes toward the items on the objective list. Well-being is also central to certain questions about paternalism (Kalle Grill's Chapter 11) and to what Anca Gheaus, in her excellent chapter, calls the "question of the content of the right to parent" (159).

Perhaps the most notable gap in the volume is that it lacks a chapter focused on the metaphysics of what it is to be a child. Many of the chapters

note that the issue of the demarcation is really important for what aspect of childhood that they're considering. Consider, for instance, the following passage from David Archard's discussion of consent, which he describes as "power that a person has inasmuch as exercising it expresses her will that something normative be the case":

When an age of consent is spoken of, it is intended to serve as a reliable marker of when an individual has developed her cognitive and volitional capacities to that point at which she has and may exercise the requisite normative power. There is of course nothing about the reaching of any age *as such* that effects the change from incompetent to competent person. To claim as much would invite a charge of arbitrariness. . . . Rather, conventionally marked chronological points serve as rough and ready signs of the progressive acquisition of abilities. (135).

In order to avoid objectionable arbitrariness and issues related to vagueness, an explicit engagement with the ontology of childhood would have been helpful. Furthermore, it could also be that "being a child" is context-dependent as well; what it means to be a child in regards to education (ch. 31), and what it means to be a child in regards to the composition of the family (ch. 17) might well be different in important ways.

Such a treatment of the relevant metaphysics would have helped clarify some of the other issues. For instance, Patrick Tomlin's chapter on "The Value of Childhood" explores both the instrumental and intrinsic value of childhood. But if there's no hard and fast distinction between childhood and adulthood, so that both "being a child" and "being an adult" are graduated properties, then the values will perhaps be graduated as well. Granted, Tomlin acknowledges the underlying metaphysical issue: "as everybody recognizes, 'childhood' is in fact an amalgam of several quite varied life-stages" (86). And he's not the only contributor to do so. In her chapter on autonomy, Sarah Hannan admits something similar: wherever we draw the line between childhood and non-childhood in relation to a particular philosophical issue, "it is hard to maintain that those falling on either side are different in *kind*, rather than merely in *degree*" (116).

Another virtue of the volume is that it can help us recognize that what we take to be non-standard cases (which we might, following David Shoemaker's discussion of "marginal agency," call "marginal cases") can show us something about idealized or typical cases. What can we learn about the nature of the good life or flourishing from reflection on facts about children (e.g., their dependence, the volatility of their moods)? Different items on objective-list theories of well-being might be more or less important at different times in a person's life (86). If we only think about well-being in terms of what it looks like in adults, and especially if we fail to notice how non-marginalized identities such as being non-disabled impact how we think about what "adult human well-being" is supposed to look like, then our views of well-being might be problematic. Skelton's discussion here illustrates something important about the book—that it can serve as a corrective to a certain kind of idealization that

affects much philosophy, not just ethical or political philosophy but also metaphysics and epistemology.

A number of chapters deal with the intersection of childhood with various identities: gender, race, and disability. Religion comes up most in Clayton's chapter on political neutrality. It's absent in other cases where one might think it could come up, such as Gina Schouten's chapter on schooling, which focuses almost exclusively on the aims and methods of public education. A few times when religion comes up in the volume, it's treatment was critical (though this isn't to say unfairly critical), as for example Colin Macleod's discussion of how some religious fundamentalists who "falsely claim that LBGTQ persons are, in virtue of their sexual orientation, bad parents are themselves responsible for creating a social environment that harms children" (171).

In a few of the canvased debates, Christian philosophers (and religious individuals more generally) may have particular considerations that aren't fully treated in the volume, such as religious reasons for becoming parents, how to understand parental partiality, or issues related to the composition of the family (a topic covered in Daniela Cutas's chapter). But these limitations are, as indicated earlier, inevitable given the nature of such a volume. And these omissions can serve as an opportunity for Christian philosophers to develop distinctly Christian work on these issues in the future.

As someone who's edited a large handbook/companion before, I'm aware that it's very difficult but incredibly valuable to get the contributors to make connections across their respective chapters. On this score, the editors have succeeded well.

While *The Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Childhood and Children* is neither a work in Christian philosophy nor philosophy of religion, there is much in it that Christian philosophers will find engaging. Indeed, I believe the editors have succeeded in putting together an incredibly worthwhile volume that has the potential to expand the range of projects the Christian philosophical community is collectively engaged in.

God, Existence, and Fictional Objects: The Case for Meinongian Theism, by John-Mark L. Miravalle. Bloomsbury, 2018. Pp. 192. \$114 (hardback).

MARY BETH WILLARD, Weber State University

In *God, Existence, and Fictional Objects: The Case for Meinongian Theism*, John-Mark L. Miravalle marshals an unexpected soldier, meinongianism,

