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Histories and Philosophies of Childhood

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Introduction

Is this a holy thing to see
In a rich and fruitful land,
Babes reduced to misery,
Fed with cold and usurious hand?
William Blake (1757–1827, in Warwick 2000 p.71)

These words of the poet Blake were written almost 200 years ago but as this book is going to print, the British public are reeling once again from the disclosed information concerning the family life of baby Peter Connelly, better known to the public as Baby P. As increasingly more information is being made available about the case of Baby P, what is emerging is the extent of the entrenched relentless repetitiveness of generational abuse and neglect and the social fragility and personal inadequacies of the adults concerned. As Andrew Anthony wrote in his investigative report for *The Sunday Observer*:

The savagery was the culmination of generations of abuse and dysfunction, a dreadful violation that was far from inevitable but that had none the less been incubating for decades. The scene of the crime itself seemed to contain

all the potent symbols and sordid realities of the feckless, desensitised version of contemporary life.

(Anthony 2009)

At the same time as details of Baby P's life were being put into the public domain, we were being informed about the systematic abuse carried out over 30 years ago by the carers of children in the Haut de la Garenne children's home on the island of Jersey (Byers 2008), while in April 2009 the death of an 11-year-old schoolgirl, Shano Khan, following physical punishment from her primary school teacher sent shockwaves across the Indian subcontinent (BBC News 2009). Meanwhile in the USA, a young woman who was kidnapped as a child has turned up after many years with a tale of confinement, abuse and brainwashing (Moore 2009). No wonder contemporary parents feel justified in saying that they will never let their child out of their sight, stating, I will not let my children ever play or be alone. Finally, a 14-year-old girl in Holland is attempting to be the youngest yachtswoman to circumnavigate the globe. She is contesting the verdict of the courts that she is too young for such feats and should be attending school instead (Watson 2009).

The question to ask is whether childhood was ever any different for children; that is, were children treated differently in the past? Indeed what did past generations think about children and youngsters? Are our present-day concerns about the quality of life, as experienced by the children of Great Britain and around the world, overly excessive and verging on sentimentality and overprotectiveness? Finally, and most crucially, does the way that we think about childhood influence the way we interact with children – a major concern for all those who work with children (Postman 1982; Druin 1996; Mayall 2002; Jenks 2005; Darbyshire 2007; Towner 2008; Layard & Dunn 2009). This chapter will attempt to address some of these issues giving a general outline of the history of childhood in Europe while acknowledging some of the more prevalent theories, philosophies and models of childhood, and how these may affect our approach to the care of children and young people.

SECTION ONE

Historians' craft or how historians put together the evidence

...Winds of summer fields
 Recollect the way,
 Instinct picking up the key
 Dropped by memory.
 Emily Dickenson
 (1830–86, in Brinnin 1960)

Most contemporary scholars of the history of childhood are quick to distance themselves from the work of Philip Ariès (1962) and his assertion that the notion of childhood is a modern invention, and from his assertion that historically children were either not considered in the greater scheme of things or that when they were noted, they were taken advantage of and often abused. It would appear that social, cultural and religious practices of adults conspired to create an image of childhood which, to the twenty-first century observer, looked as if the children permanently lived in suboptimal conditions, were socially disregarded and most certainly were not included in the familial affairs of adults. Adults did not seem to be concerned with

the fate (or even the existence) of children. However, contemporary research undertaken by historians of childhood and family life tends to disagree with this extremely bleak picture (Shahar 1990; Cunningham 1995; Hanawalt 1995; Alexandre-Bidon & Lett 2000; Orme 2003, 2006). True, for very many people – if not the majority of people at times – life was hard and brutal. Additionally, life expectancy was low, especially for women, and many children died at birth or prematurely from hunger and infectious diseases. But this harshness of life was shared by everyone (Shahar 1990). It was not specific to children and when life was a bit more bearable there are plenty of evidences that children led a most interesting and varied life (Opie & Opie 1959; Keville-Davies 1991; Kiste 2003; HICD 2006; Orme 2006). There is also plenty of evidence that there was an accepted and well-understood concept of childhood from antiquity up to the present times – even if for most of recorded history the beneficial aspects of childhood, as we know them today, were limited to the ruling classes and the better off children in society. Rebecca Krug (2002) states that by the late Middle Ages there were three Latin definitions relating to that time of life measured from birth to adulthood, namely – *infantia* for infancy; *pueritia* for childhood and *adulescentia* for adolescence. Hardly evidence for an absence of a concept!

To the delight of historians of childhood, various individuals, and by no means all of them famous and wealthy, have managed over the course of the centuries to write down for posterity memories of their own childhood experiences (Holliday 1995; Gold 1997; Fox & Abraham-Podietz 1999; HICD 2006 among many). Many writers in the course of their narratives mention various aspects concerning childhood or the life of children. Hidden away among texts and letters about other matters, they have commented on issues pertinent to our understanding of the lives of children. From the richness of these documents, diaries, novels and tracts, an image emerges of the life of children and the nature of childhood as experienced by children in the distant and near past (Zimler & Sekulović 2008). What is also clear is that while for many children, as for many adults, life was indeed extremely hard, disease was rife and food was scarce, there was not necessarily as much widespread, wanton and

vacuous violence and hatred directed specifically *at children* as some commentators would have had us believe (Aries 1962). Of course violence directed at children has unfortunately always existed, and it may have been more prevalent or even more accepted as an inevitable social phenomenon in the past (Hanawalt 1976; Rahikainen 2004); however, it is crucial to remember, as already noted, that violence directed at children still exists today (Amnesty International British Section 1995).

In the process of describing the nature of childhood from the past it is therefore necessary to be careful to avoid unqualified generalisations. The very combination of grinding poverty, lack of parental education and the obligatory and culturally condoned invisible labour of most working women conspired against most of the urban and rural poor in all but preventing them from demonstrating appropriate familial affection and concern for the welfare of their children (Shahar 1990; Cunningham 1991). Unfortunately, almost all of the conditions that were once suffered by European children are still tolerated by some children somewhere around the world today.

Just as in cases of war, where it is accepted wisdom that histories of battles are recorded by the victors, so the vast majority of descriptions of childhood and its events are written by those who have survived into adulthood. The maturation process from childhood to adulthood involves, however, some necessary selectivity of remembered and recallable facts, a phenomenon which Matthews (1994) calls childhood amnesia, and which Catriona Kelly (2007), in her excellent account of the life of Russian children in the waning years of Imperial Russia and through the unbelievably harsh years of the Soviet system, considers as selective 'evocations of the "boxes" or "envelopes" in which children lived' (Kelly 2007:13). No doubt we do tend to predominantly remember the best and the worst of our childhood experiences – and it is often because of such subconscious selectivity of facts, which overly highlights and emphasises certain events, that we unwittingly in the process skew all our remaining memories. The concern here is not for the well-documented psychological trauma following an unpleasant event – the recollection of which is pushed back deep into the subconscious, resulting in various

degrees of mental distress – but, as Matthews (1994) and Kelly (2007) so eloquently point out, the simple and natural growing-up amnesia that is necessary if humans are to function as well-adapted adults. Shahar (1990:5) also observes that: '...As for the writing of adults it is well known that they have difficulties in reliving some of their childhood experiences on the conscious level', since they inevitably describe experiences 'through the filter of selective memory'.

Meanwhile, adults writing about their own childhood often apologise to their readers for sounding boring or sentimental, as Heywood (2001) observes in his study of the history of childhood. Philip Larkin (1922–85) articulated this feeling succinctly in the poem *Coming* adding that he saw his own childhood as 'a forgotten boredom'. Fortunately, historians do not rely solely on what has been written and spoken – such as autobiographies, biographies, novels, school textbooks, medical records and physicians' accounts, judgements handed down in court cases, the legal system itself, parish council and founding home accounts and such others – to create an image of childhood past (Keville-Davies 1991). To the historian of childhood, childcare professionals and subsequent generations of casual readers, everything from the past is of potentially of great interest and sometimes descriptions of the most simple aspects of daily life seem to later generations of readers to be exotic and worthy of comment (Keville-Davies 1991).

In the recent past, dedicated historical linguists have even managed to retrieve from encroaching oblivion, children's playground lore and language by studying the oral traditions of children's games, which included children's rhymes and children's slang. Researchers began to describe and record the existence of these children's games and their accompanying doggerels, many of which were on the verge of being lost to present generations of scholars and future generations of children (Opie & Opie 1959). The celebrated work of the Opie's in the UK is part of this long scholarly tradition, both in Europe and in the USA, of documenting and recording children's songs and games and is part of the rich and growing scholarly body of knowledge concerning the welfare and social life of children. The little song that the children in Lydney, UK, composed in the 1950s to the tune of *Frère*

Jacques speaks more to us about the children's attitude to school meals at the time, than any lengthy dissertation on the nature of children's diets:

What's for dinner? What's for dinner?
 Irish spew, Irish spew,
 Sippy semolina, sippy semolina,
 No thank you, no thank you.
 (Opie & Opie 1959:162)

Historians and antiquarians also look at and collect ancient domestic artefacts such as children's furniture, for example, high chairs or cradles, toys and children's books, clothes, books on advice to parents, etc. They also examine depictions of children in portraits and paintings, on carvings and on ornaments or as illustrations in ancient manuscripts and in historical books and primers intended for children's use (Shahar 1990; Keville-Davies 1991). Together with archaeologists and anthropologists, historians attempt to reconstruct ancient dwellings, and they study the layouts of ancient homes and children's institutions (including foundling hospitals and institutions for orphans and workhouses) to judge and evaluate the nature of the space put aside for children's use. Many ancient artefacts can be seen today in general museums, from Egyptian dolls in the British Museum to Roman sandals in the London Museum. There are also museums dedicated to childhood, such as the rightfully acclaimed Museum of Childhood in London's East End and the Foundling Hospital Museum in Coram Fields, which stands near Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children in central London built at the insistence of nineteenth-century philanthropists and social reformers. Additionally, a trip today to a stately home or a reconstructed Anglo-Saxon village or medieval castle would not be complete without a glimpse of the ancient child's world. This multi-pronged and interdisciplinary approach to assessing the life of children from the past has enabled scholars of childhood to recreate ever-more accurately the social history of family life and paint detailed pictures of forgotten childhoods (Keville-Davies 1991; Cunningham 1995).

It is only fairly recently, however, that we have begun to ask children themselves about their lives and their childhood experiences, and started to listen to what children have to say (Mayall 2002;

Alderson 2008; Layard & Dunn 2009). It is only recently that we have begun to value what children have to say, as evidenced by adults taking seriously the Sixth article of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and to listen to the child's own tale be it for legal or for social purposes. This legal obligation can sometimes be difficult to sensitively put into practice, as evidenced by the potential trauma that a 4-year-old witness had to undergo at the Old Bailey (Criminal Court in London while giving testimony against her abuser (Bennett & Fresco 2009). As Katherine Bennett comments in a fairly comprehensive (American) overview of the use of CCTV in American courtrooms for cases involving young children:

... protecting the rights of accused persons while guarding against the potential of the criminal justice system to do harm to the child victims of crime continues to be a balancing act.
 (Bennett 2003:268)

We urgently need to find more sensitive and appropriate ways to listen to what children have to say – since for too long we have assumed they were incapable of objectivity or of reliably recognising the difference between truth and fantasy, and we considered them to be fickle-minded – if not upon occasion being spiteful towards their adult carers (Alderson 2008). This was certainly the problem in the past when children's accusations against their carers were not taken seriously enough, as in the notorious case of the Haut de la Garenne children's home on the island of Jersey (Byers 2008). All too often children were simply not listened to or believed (Hallett & Prout 2003; Archard 2004; Leeson 2007).

Children of course can comment most reliably and creatively about many aspects of their lives and fortunately not only about the desperate or criminal aspects of some of their experiences. The Iowa Historical Society together with the University of Iowa have recently launched the *Historic Iowa Children's Diaries Project* (HICD 2006), where they have made available to the public a digitalised collection of diaries written 150 years ago by children and youngsters in rural Iowa. This opportunity to look into the mindset of children of American pioneers is an excellent example of folk history

being presented in such a way that it can enlighten and inform subsequent generations of children and adults. Children today are actively encouraged by their teachers and carers to have their say and to express themselves which today is more likely to be via the computer than in the form of diary entries; nonetheless, this gives them a platform to state what they are experiencing for all who have the inclination to hear them or read what they have to say. Professional historians are also aware that the voice of children needs to be heard, and it is therefore heartening that Beryl Rawson, in her excellent and exhaustive account of the lives of children in ancient Rome, states that she was actively searching for evidence of ancient reports written by children themselves concerning their childhood experiences (Rawson 2003). She says that unfortunately none have come down to us, but at least she highlights that crucial distinction in perspectives – the difference between narratives delivered by children about their childhood experiences as it is happening and narratives generated by adults concerning children.

Finally, it needs to be emphasised, that there is not one history of childhood, but many histories of childhood. Apart from obvious differences between any set of individual children's life-experiences, there are other overarching societal and cultural differences which separate children's lives even when they are living at the same time and in the same country, creating experiences of parallel childhoods which often could not be more disparate. Historians and anthropologists have looked at children's lives from all perspectives ranging from the childhoods of aristocratic and noble children, such as John Van Der Kiste's work on *Children at Court* (2003) to Cunningham (1991) who specifically looked at the lives of poor children in Europe. Meanwhile Kelly (2007) looked at the more recent past commenting on the daily life of children in the former Soviet Union, and Laurel Holliday (1995) looked at the recent past when editing the wartime diaries of Central European children from the 1940s. Cultural anthropologists such as Margaret Mead (1901–78) have looked at the lives of children in as far-flung places such as Papua New Guinea while trying all the time to compare the lives of children from different cultures – an endeavour which is necessary to undertake even today, especially with the number of issues arising out of the

complexities of our multi-ethnic and multicultural societies. Thus, historically as well as in present times, children, alongside their parents, inhabited various and richly diverse socio-economic worlds – and sometimes even crossed over from one to the other – as did the present-day children involved in the production of the recent Indian film *Slumdog Millionaire*. But for those of us involved in children's nursing it is the fact that these various worlds coexisted at all and that the children of the past have left us legacies of their various worlds, or 'boxes' and 'envelopes' as Kelly (2007) refers to them, which is of prime interest.

SECTION TWO

A review of European childhoods from antiquity to the present

... See the pictures on the walls,
Heroes, fights and festivals;
And in the corner find the toys
Of the old Egyptian boys.

Robert Louis Stevenson
(1850–94, Stevenson 2000a)

As noted, there are almost no extant records from antiquity of what children thought about their own childhood, but there is evidence that from the very earliest of times, once civilisation started to shape family life, this sociobiological institution became important in confirming the stabilisation of society itself and in promoting and transmitting the dominant cultural values of society (Segalen 1986; Clayton 2001). It was also important very early in the history of family life for families to be able to account for themselves and their members, as families needed to know who was a member and who was not a member, and this pivotal distinction had many societal and legal implications – as indeed it still does today. Historically (and in some cultures, even till this day), the sheer number of words for the various levels of consanguinity and kinship acknowledged and recognised within a family was quite astounding, reflecting the importance given to wide-ranging social ties among members of an extended family. In ancient Rome, a child once born had to be formally accepted into the family and the patriarch of the family or father had to

decide immediately after birth whether the child would be brought up as *his* son or daughter, or perhaps (for a variety of reasons) left to be brought up outside the family or even abandoned (Marys 1993; Corbier 2001; Rawson 2003). Once the child was formally incorporated into the family, however, family and societal values needed to be transmitted to the child, and the child needed to be taught a skill or trade or some method of survival. There is some debate about the actual extent and widespread use of this *acceptance* ritual in ancient Rome but it does illustrate the significance, at least for some families, of Roman family law and the importance of legal and social obligations towards those children acknowledged as your own (Dixon 1990; Rawson 1991, 2003).

In ancient Roman society, according to contemporary historians, there clearly was a concept of childhood, and there was recognition of the needs and concerns for the education of children, and a large section of Roman law was concerned with children and their hereditary rights (Rawson 1991). Although not too much funeral art represents children, where this does occur it is most beautifully and tenderly represented (Dixon 1990; Rawson 2003:18). Additionally, from the careful reading of Greek and Latin literature, a picture emerges of children who enjoyed playing games, although the teacher-philosophers Plato and Aristotle would have liked to curtail some of the playtime of children and have them study more. There is even evidence of a toymaking industry present in ancient Rome (Rawson 2003:19).

This childhood world in late antiquity was present and real for the children of city dwellers, the Greek and later Roman elite, and children of the relatively well to do. But the ancient world also practised the institution of slavery, and poor peasants (both free and enslaved) worked the land for their master, while free labourers and tradesmen supported the infrastructure of the state – and for all of them life could be hard. Women would have looked after small children, but with the high mortality rate associated with childbirth, this meant that many children were orphaned, and an orphaned child's fate was uncertain at best (Dixon 1990; Rawson 2003). There is some recent research on the art of mothering and the lives of women in ancient Rome and some interesting insights into the early life of newborns (Dixon 1990;

Rawson 2003). For children without families, however, the usual fate was being sold into slavery or being left to a life of prostitution or begging. In many ways, not much has changed in this respect over the centuries. There was (and still is) a huge economic divide between the life of the rich and well off and the life of the poor and infirm – a distinction not just relevant to developing countries. In the ancient pagan world of antiquity, a concept of *societal* responsibility for the welfare of these orphaned children and their families, should they fall on hard times, was all but unknown (Rawson 2003). Within the concept of an extended family adoptions of children and taking-in of impoverished relatives did occur, but this was more likely to be the case in the more affluent sectors of society. In Europe, it was the acceptance of Christianity as the state religion by the Roman Emperor Constantine in the fourth century AD which heralded the start of a church- and state-sanctioned provision of a safety net for the poorest and most destitute of society – but even this activity did not stop some the worst aspects of child neglect and cruelty.

The advent of Christianity meant that all children (in the eyes of God) were seen as important and deserving of our respect, not only the children of the well to do. The writings of some of the early Fathers of the Church shed some light on what educated early Europeans of late antiquity thought about children and how they formulated a theology of childhood, family life and marriage. We have some interesting insights therefore about family life and children in late antiquity from the writings of St Augustine (354–430). Augustine initially considered the child to be an innocent, but he modified his tone substantially when he reflected on his own rather adventurous youth and childhood (Chadwick 1986). In his famous autobiography, writing about infancy in general terms he observed:

He was not old enough to talk, but whenever he saw his foster-brother at the breast, he would grow pale with envy. This much is common knowledge. Mothers and nurses say that they can work such things out of the system by one means or another, but surely it cannot be called innocence ...

(Augustine 1961:28)

Augustine, prior to his conversion to Christianity, had a son, Adeodatus, and he was amazingly faithful to him over 14 years and to his concubine even though under Roman law this was not a necessity. Augustine in his autobiography describes his childhood and the life of children, generally, accurately and often quite tenderly, but when he describes, as above, scenes from the nursery it is as a fifth-century-male, uninformed as we are today of infant and child psychology (Chadwick 1986). As a result, to Augustine even an infant's tantrums were an indication of the non-innocence of children, something that seemed contradictory to the spiritual idea of the 'innate innocence of children'. Augustine proceeds to describe in his autobiography several discrete stages of child development, commenting on all of these and many aspects of his own childhood, such as the often-quoted reference to playing games and unfair punishments:

... But we loved to play, and punishments were imposed on us by those who were engaged in adult games. For the amusement of adults is called business. But when boys play such games they are punished by adults, and no one feels sorry either for the children or for the adults ...
(Augustine 1961:30)

Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo, was busy fighting the Pelagian heresy and, as a result of his renewed thinking about baptism and especially infant baptism, concluded that all humans including newborns are burdened with sin, and only baptism can remove the burden of this sin and ensure their eternal life (Chadwick 1986). Augustine believed that when children are naughty or bad, they are showing sinful tendencies, and it is the original sin of Adam which accounts for these tendencies. He also believed that it is only the child's physical immaturity which can be considered innocent, for a newborn child's soul has the same burden and tendency to evil as that of any un-baptised adult (Stortz 2001). The effects of such thinking, in regards to infants and small children has led many Christian educationalists (down the centuries) to see in the misdemeanours and youthful errors of many young children resurgences of these evil tendencies, which, in turn, they feel need to be curtailed often by harsh punishment. Although Augustine had himself been physically punished

as a young boy, his comments and recollection of the events do not seem to inform future generations of educationalists and parents to be more moderate and refraining:

... Though I was small my devotion was great when I begged you not to let me be beaten at school ... our parents scoffed at the torments which we boys suffered at the hands of our masters. For we feared the whip as much as others fear the rack, and we no less than they, begged you to preserve us from it.

(Augustine 1961:30)

As Martha Stortz notes, Augustine's influence on the understanding of children in theology '... formed and informed, transformed and deformed Christian attitudes towards children' (Stortz 2001:79). The cumulative effect of his writings, even allowing for the context of his times, was that subsequent pastoral teaching concerning children was effectively overly condemning of human nature and prone to advocating punishments (often physical punishments) as a mechanism to correct the natural exuberance and behaviours of children. Moreover, as a pastor he was aware of the marital problems of many members of his diocese in Northern Africa, and although he was aware of the practice of infanticide and abandonment of infants, he did not condemn the parents too harshly. Some of his more angry outbursts were reserved, however, for condemning the consequences of human nature and sexual activity, stating in a tract, *De peccatorum meritis*, that, 'the very root of sin lies in carnal generation' (Chadwick 1986:113).

Early medieval (Christian) thinking about children as represented by the writings of Thomas Aquinas (1225–74) acknowledged that loving a child and acceptance of a child was something natural to humans – and being part of our nature, was therefore a good thing. Additionally, Aquinas saw a difference between simply nature-generated concern for one's children and genuine care for children that also involves volition and intellectual reflection. Aquinas thought that care of children continued all through a child's life which had the effect of binding families together for life and promoting mutual responsibilities. Following Aristotelian arguments, Aquinas assumed that well-adjusted parents would care for their children

and would strive to protect them against assaults from outsiders, thus having complete control over the child. However, as Traina (2001) points out in her review of Aquinas's approach to children, Aquinas considered respect and love towards one's parents to take precedence over love and concern for one's children on the basis that your parents have already given you life and love and protection – for which you need to be grateful and owe them respect in keeping with the third commandment – while your children are as yet an unknown entity and quite likely to die anyway (Traina 2001:121)!

Regardless of the actual longevity of children's lives, Aquinas certainly realised that loving one's children was a strong primal emotion and part of our basic nature, and he knew that whether or not our parents were still alive, and in need of care, we would certainly not stint love and affection on our children. Accordingly, apart from the provision of spiritual care, he considered the main tasks of parenthood to be the provision of material welfare for one's children and providing for their education (Traina 2001:121). Moreover, Aquinas's recommendation that parents educate their children was not just a pious wish, for he as many others put much emphasis on education and the need for knowledge and scholarship to underpin moral and social decision-making (Copelston 1955).

There is increasing historical evidence that post-antiquity Europe had an unbroken tradition of basic schools designed to teach children to read and write (Cunningham 1995; Orme 2006). There is documentation that these schools existed in ancient Greece, and we know that both Plato and Aristotle were involved in forms of teaching. Schools functioned throughout the Roman period and various artefacts that were used by Roman schoolboys are now displayed in museums. Schools that were attached to royal courts and cathedrals also existed until recent times. Moreover, contrary to the public myth, not all medieval schools were attached to monasteries, and many schools in cities were run by lay masters of varying intellectual abilities as noted by Orme (2006). Medieval schools were run predominantly for boys, since girls, if the parents chose to educate them, were educated at home, or sometimes even in a nunnery, though this was discouraged (Shahar 1990; Cunningham 1995; Meale 1996; Orme 2006). It was not till several centuries later that the state in

England and other European countries saw it fit to educate all children – including girls – from every economic background. Even this endeavour was considered a controversial move at the time, and it took the vision and effort of many social reformers, parliamentarians and even philosophers – such as John Stuart Mill (1806–73) – to bring the notion of universal education for children to fruition.

Aquinas himself as a boy had been sent by his parents to be educated by the Benedictines at the Abbey of Monte Cassino, and as a young man he had studied at the universities of Naples, Paris and Cologne spending most of his time as a Dominican friar engaged in scholarly activities (Copelston 1955). His childhood was comfortable and his education for the times was one of the best. In keeping with the prevailing thinking at the time, however, Aquinas also saw a distinction in the needs and requirements between boys and girls, and he completely justified parental preferences for boys over girls. There is evidence that right through the Middle Ages girls tended to be abandoned at birth more often than boys, that they were weaned earlier in favour of boys, that they were denied the educational opportunities which was offered to boys – even among the relatively well-off families – and in order to be married (or enter a convent) they required a dowry. Some parents may have even felt blessed to have had daughters, but even these so-called open-minded parents did not want too many of them! Above all, medieval society reflected a rigid hierarchy, and as Traina (2001), observes,

Nearly everyone spent a significant portion or even all of life under the power of others: nuns under abbesses; slaves under masters; peasants under nobles. Yet unlike adults, who normally both submitted to and exerted control, children were always at the bottom of the heap.

(Traina 2001:126)

Aquinas was aware of this well-structured social hierarchy, but without advocating immediate social change or reform he insisted instead that parents should take their familial responsibilities towards their children seriously (Copelston 1955).

Fascinating as this review of medieval thinking about children may be, it is not Aquinas's thinking on family obligations that had the most lasting

effect on European society's attitudes towards children but his religious ideas that helped formulate a medieval theology concerning the child's soul and spirituality. For Aquinas, as for Aristotle, the child was essentially an incomplete and immature adult, lacking in full wisdom and virtue, but the child did have all the necessary potential to become a mature and wise person and an honest virtuous citizen who would ultimately, if he or she led a good life, share in the Sonship of God – a Pauline theological concept which to the contemporary reader, as Traina observes, was articulated unfortunately in a 'troublingly gendered' format (Traina 2001:128). She continues that it was precisely Aquinas's recognition of the child's developmental capacities, however, even allowing for their presentation in a medieval theological context, which makes his theories about the nature of children acceptable to educationalists even today. Finally, it is important to note that the reason why one is looking at the life of children through the prism of religion is that for much of this period the majority of people who would have written and commented on the world around them were men of the clergy or monks and nuns, who have left us the bulk of documentation concerning children's lives.

Meanwhile, as already noted medieval children could be married off very early and sent to monasteries and obliged to work from a very early age. They were also given enormous responsibilities at an early age, such as running huge monasteries, defending their kingdoms in battle and ruling city states (Orme 1984; Heywood 2001; Woosnam-Savage 2008). There are of course many instances of adults acting as regents to boy-kings and rulers, but there are also cases of very young people who were simply burdened with the affairs of adults and who even found themselves on the battlefields (Orme 1984; Woosnam-Savage 2008). For children of noblemen, preparing for knighthood and warfare was a major undertaking and some youths undoubtedly looked forward to their lives as knights. Training for the role, however, included the wearing of (heavy) armour and learning all the martial arts necessary to be effective in combat, such as the skill of being able to jump 'on and off horses while armed and even while holding a naked sword' (Orme 1984:188). As Robert Woosnam-Savage (2008) curator of Leeds Royal Armouries observes:

The play and practice was for the battlefield and not just the 'playground'. Even in death some children could not escape the association of the sword. Children, presumably of royal birth, could be buried with swords as the finding in 1957 of the grave of a Frankish youth of about six years of age under Cologne Cathedral showed.

At the other end of the social spectrum were the children of peasants and poor city dwellers who were also sometimes pressed into warfare and who would probably have gone to the battlefield without any training whatsoever (Woosnam-Savage 2008). These young people were also expected, however, to help their parents financially at a trade or skill, or work the land and thereby contribute to the household economy. It would appear from the many records available across all of Europe that children and young people were forced into early social maturation and they took up their place in society much earlier than children do today (Cunningham 1995; Heywood 2001). As already noted, a young girl recently requested her school to give her permission to be absent for over a year in order to be able to undertake a solo trip around the world in a boat (Watson 2009). This case brings into sharp focus yet again the ongoing debate about when childhood begins and when it finishes and what are the obligations of adults and society towards children (Hanawalt 1992; Mayall 2002; Alderson 2008). See also Chapter 9 in this book for a review of current thinking surrounding the notion of adolescence and its relevance for health-care workers.

Somewhat later, the comfortably well-off children of the English chancellor and Renaissance man of letters Thomas More (1478–1535) were being lovingly educated and cared for in a manner which we would consider to be a privilege even today (Bridgett 1892; Kenny 1983)! More enjoyed his family life and provided his children, including his daughters, with the highest standards of education of the day which consisted of Latin and Greek, logic, philosophy, astronomy and mathematics (Kenny 1983:18). In a letter to one of his daughter's tutors, More says that he wishes them to be well educated in letters and virtue because 'erudition in women is a new thing and a reproach to the idleness of men' (Kenny 1983:18). More's eldest daughter Margaret wrote letters to her father in such

excellent Latin that her writings won praise even from Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466–1536), the great advocate of Renaissance humanism, who was a good friend of More (Kenny 1983:19). More strove to educate his daughters with humour and paternal concern, ever solicitous that they should not only be well behaved, genteel and lead virtuous lives but also be capable of sound reasoning and logic. As More commented in a letter to his daughters in 1522:

How can a subject be wanting when you write to me, since I am glad to hear of your studies or of your games, and you will please me most if, when there is nothing to write about, you write about that nothing at great length. Nothing can be easier for you, since you are girls, loquacious by nature, who have always a world to say about nothing at all. One thing, however, I admonish you, whether you write serious matters or the merest trifles, it is my wish that you write everything diligently and thoughtfully. [Letter of Thomas More to his children, 1522]

Bridgett (1892:133–134)

More, was quite open with his affection towards his children, as observed in his letter (in Latin) to his daughter:

You ask, my dear Margaret, for money with too much bashfulness and timidity, since you are asking from a father who is eager to give, and since you have written to me a letter such that I would not only repay each line of it with a golden philippine, as Alexander did the verses of Cherilos, but, if my means were as great as my desire, I would reward each syllable with two gold ounces. [Letter of Thomas More to his daughter Margaret, 1520]

Bridgett (1892:135)

Well might we wonder how common was this type of family life and interaction with children. As already noted, More himself was well aware that the extent of the formal education which he gave his daughters at that time was still a novel undertaking. However, we do know that throughout the Middle Ages some girls were educated and were therefore literate, since nuns (at least) in mon-

asteries were expected to read scripture and devotional prayers, and many women have left for posterity their letters and papers not to mention poems and ballads and religious tracts which they wrote *themselves*, that is, were not dictated to clerks or chaplains (Wilson 1984). More recent scholarship in this area has confirmed this supposition and historians of medieval literacy even go further suggesting that women read not only for their own immediate needs and pleasure but also wrote texts which helped them in managing their homes and estates (Marchand 1984; Williard 1984; Boffey 1996; Meale 1996; Krug 2002). What is new in the More household is the extent of education he provided for his daughters – an undertaking noted by other scholars of the day such as Bishop Cuthbert Tunstall (1474–1559) who dedicated his textbook on arithmetic (*On the Art of Calculation*) to More's children (Kenny 1983:18)!

Meanwhile, children of peasants, labourers, merchants, and artisans, as well as professionals – such as lawyers and physicians – also experienced a childhood, but that childhood, especially in the context of rural poverty, did not extend much beyond the seventh or eighth year of a child's life. After that time, the child was increasingly expected to financially help out its parents and contribute in some form to the family economy (Cunningham 1995; Heywood 2001).

Needless to say, in an agrarian economy there tended to be more work in the summer than in the winter and there were longer working hours in the summer; but the work had its own pastoral rhythm, which some historians in the past have tended to romanticise. Seamus Heaney (the Irish Nobel Prize-winning poet) writing in the 1930s could well have been articulating the sentiments of countless rural children from previous centuries when he wrote about a father working the fields with a horse-plough while a child followed him in the furrows. The poem written from a child's perspective observes accurately the bond between the child and the parent, the child dreaming of following literally and figuratively in its father's footsteps, since the child muses, 'All I ever did was follow, In his broad shadow around the farm' (Heaney 2000).

Katrina Honeyman, however, reflecting contemporary research notes, that '... the romantic

view, which juxtaposes the harshness of factory life with a pre-industrial golden-age, is a minority position' (Honeyman 2007:175). Work on the land could be as dangerous and hard for a youngster as work on medieval construction sites – such as building city walls and cathedrals and latterly in factories – but on the whole, rural work lent itself to a slower pace of living and certainly small children could be better supervised by their family, as Heaney's poem implies. From various reports in chronicles and diaries and even paintings, we can surmise that much of this agrarian-based rhythm of work, involving rural children's contribution to the family purse, changed very little over the centuries up to the advent of the Industrial Revolution. As Honeyman (2007) states concerning the debate surrounding child labour in the eighteenth century:

That children should work was hardly the question. The nature of work conducted by children was hotly contested ... Until the later eighteenth century, however, the consensus was that children should be productive for both economic and moral reasons.

(Honeyman 2007:3)

The Industrial Revolution, therefore, did not throw children into paid work or even work outside the home, as that was already familiar practice, but it did change the nature of the work that children did (Horrell & Humphries 1995; Honeyman 2007). For the first time children were deliberately commercially *exploited* on a large scale. They worked inhumane hours from an incredibly young age, in unhealthy environments, for ridiculously low pay or, as in the case of parish poor children, for no pay at all, but in return for some food and clothing and, with some luck, a learnt trade or skill (Cunningham 1995; Honeyman 2007).

Towards the end of the eighteenth century and at the beginning of the nineteenth century as the new steam-propelled technology to produce cloth in a fast and inexpensive way was being introduced by entrepreneurs and businessmen, the exploitation of children (and women) who were hired to work in these cotton and silk mills began (Cunningham 1995; Honeyman 2007). Initially, mill owners sought to utilise existing adult labour from

the surrounding areas, which explains why the mills tended to be located in or near towns and cities. But as the adult labour force from the surrounding areas dried up, ever-younger children of the existing labour force were also utilised and encouraged to find employment in the mills. As noted, these children were paid a pittance. There is quite a lively scholarly debate as to the actual economic and social significance of the labour of these children and the monies paid to them, and its effect on their family life (Horrell & Humphries 1995; Rahikainen 2004; Honeyman 2007). That the mill owners grew incredibly rich from the cheap labour of their workforce is well documented, but did parents send children to work in the mills because they brought in much-needed cash to augment the meagre family budget – even though we know it was a tiny contribution to the overall family income – or did the parents actually strive to have more children and thereby increase their potential earners so that the extra children could bring in extra cash? Finally, did the parents actually have a choice about how and where and when their children worked?

In 1843, the Victorian poet, Thomas Hood, sent anonymously to *The Punch* the ballad *The Song of the Shirt*, in which he described the timed labour of seamstresses.

... With fingers weary and worn,
With eyelids heavy and red,
A woman sat in unwomanly rags,
Plying her needle and thread ...

The woman had little choice about her work and only dreamed about going out into the country – of having a break just for 1h. Most parents sent their children into the mills and to the mines in order to bring in extra money. No doubt the parents were taken in by the sales pitch of the supervisors and mill owners, but their own working lives in the mills were not necessarily that much better off either (Cunningham 1995). Exploitation of children in factories and mills was occurring not only in Great Britain but also in the USA and other major industrialising countries of Europe. In Rhode Island, on the East coast of America, Samuel Slater opened his first textile mill and the majority of his first employees were children

between the ages of 7 and 12. By 1830, 55% of all the millworkers on Rhode Island were children (Buhle *et al.* 1983)!

There were two groups of children exploited in the factories and mines. One group consisted of children who had families and who were paid wages, however small; and the other group consisted of children who were orphans and came from the poor houses. In eighteenth-century Britain, poor, abandoned and orphaned children were the responsibility of parish councils. As more agrarian families were becoming impoverished and moving to the cities and as more children were being abandoned, the finances of the parishes which looked after these children in special homes and workhouses were also increasingly being stretched. Rather than have the children become a long-term burden to the parish it was thought more appropriate to teach the children a trade or skill and give them the opportunity of becoming an apprentice. Sending children to be apprenticed to learn a trade was nothing new of course – this was common practice. It was considered a good economic solution for the children and also a sound moral approach as laziness was considered by society to be a great social wrong. It is not surprising, then, given this moralising approach to the welfare of the children, that there were a fair number of non-conformist entrepreneurs at this time who genuinely considered the work of the children in the mills and factories as good for the children themselves and as helping in building character.

Soon after the articulation of this theory of moral labour, there was the wholesale deportation of poor parish children from their workhouses in small towns and rural areas to the textile mills and mines. These children were not paid wages, and any money from the transaction went to the parishes from which they came. Initially, some of the mill owners were not aware of the conditions under which the children had to work, but this soon changed. It is to the merit of some of the Evangelical and Quaker non-conformist reformers that they were among the first to protest about the working conditions for children in the mills and agitated for reform and change. As early as 1802, the Factory Act was designed in England to stop this exploitation of the pauper-apprentice work system, but the law was only aimed at improving the life of children

from the workhouses who had no parents and therefore were the legal concern and responsibility of society. Meanwhile, children who had parents were not included in the recommendations and continued to work in the factories and mills (Bowditch & Ramsland 1968).

Joshua Drake from Dundee, a father who had a daughter working in the mills, stated to the Sadler Committee in 1832, which was set up to look into the working conditions in the mills, that he himself had worked in the mills since he was 5. In the summer he worked from four in the morning till ten or eleven at night – or ‘as long as we could stand on our feet’ (Bowditch & Ramsland 1968:86). Corporal punishment was frequently meted out to the children and they (especially the children from the parish workhouses) often tried to escape from the mills but were forcefully brought back and severely punished. He noted:

There was a boy taken and tied upon another man’s back, and they flogged him round the place ... If the law could do anything for it, I would have them punished by law as for assault, where assault leaves a visible mark ...

(Bowditch & Ramsland 1968:82)

In 1833, a royal commission established by the government recommended that children aged over 11 be allowed to work a maximum of 12h per day, but that younger children should work less hours and that those under 9 years of age were no longer permitted to work at all. But this too was just a recommendation, and not all factories followed suit immediately and, most crucially, it only applied to the textile industry. There were very many industries that were not included in the various subsequent factory acts, most notably the work of chimney sweeps whose fate was immortalised by the writers and social activists Charles Dickens and Charles Kingsley in their works of fiction. Only after much further lobbying, the 1847 Factory Act limited the working hours for adults and children to 10h daily.

Meanwhile, in 1842 the Ashley Mines (Royal) Commission was set up to look into the welfare of workers, especially children, in the coal pits and mines. A 10-year-old boy Alexander Gray, who worked a pump, was interviewed and he stated to the Commission:

I pump out the water in the under bottom of the pit to keep the men's room (coal face) dry. I am obliged to pump fast or the water would cover me. I had to run away a few weeks ago as the water came up so fast that I could not pump at all. The water frequently covers my legs. I have been two years at the pump. I am paid 10d a day. No holiday but the Sabbath. I go down at three, sometimes five in the morning, and come up at six or seven at night.

To the same commission, 18-year-old Ann Egglely who worked in a coal mine since she was 7 stated:

I am sure I don't know how to spell my name ... the work is too hard for me ... father said – it was both a shame and disgrace for girls to work as we do.

(Bowditch & Ramsland 1968:87)

A 6-year-old girl testified to the committee that she had been down the mines for 6 weeks already and that she carried 'a full 56lbs. of coal in a wooden bucket. I work with sister Jesse and mother. It is dark the time we go'. We learn from her that she was working down the mines with other members of her family.

Not until the 1860 Mines Regulation and Inspection Act, however, were all females and boys under the age of 12 prohibited from working underground. Interestingly, in order to be able to prove that a young person was of a certain age and therefore could legally work in the mines and factories, young people needed birth certificates. The 1837 Registration Act made it compulsory for all births, marriages and deaths to be registered at a registry office which was a separate document from a church record. Now, younger children who had previously only attended Sunday Schools (most of which taught some basic reading skills not only scripture) because they had been engaged working in mills and factories and mines had time to attend formal schooling during the week.

The first Elementary Education Act was not passed till 1870, however, which was 10 years after the 1860 Mines Regulation Act! This act made basic education obligatory for all 5- to 10-year olds. Slowly, over the years the school leaving age has risen. The school leaving age in Great Britain was only raised to 16 in 1973, although present

governments are trying again to increase the obligatory leaving age. It is upon a youngsters 16th birthday that town/parish councils could relinquish their responsibilities towards the young people in their care. This too is slowly changing; councils and professionals working with youngsters are beginning to realise that a 16-year old – especially one who has been in care for most of his or her life and was looked after by local councils and lived in children's homes – is hardly in a position to be capable of being left entirely alone in the world to fend for itself (DCSF 2006; Leeson 2007; RCN 2008). Meanwhile, at 16 a youngster can legally marry and join the army but still may not buy alcohol or cigarettes or vote in national elections. (See Chapter 9 for some of the current ethical issues concerning work with adolescents.) Over the centuries, the lives of children and adolescents have changed a lot in many respects but have changed very little in others.

SECTION THREE

Thinking about childhood – reflecting on children

The contemporary child and youngster in the UK is perceived in several different ways, depending upon which school of thought the observer adheres to (Mayall 2002; Hallett & Prout 2003). Moreover, contemporary society has well-developed and entrenched ideas about the nature of children and young people and, depending upon the social context, changes and adapts its thinking and subsequent child-directed activities (Mayall 2002; Alderson 2008). There are at least three prevalent current images of children, which society readily recognises: the image of the innocent child, the image of the child as a threat to present and future society and the image of the child as a potential contributor to society (Larkin 2000; Mayall 2002; Towner 2008). Philip Darbyshire (2007) in his recent article on the nature of contemporary childhood picks up on some of the concerns and issues embedded in these classifications of contemporary children, adding suggestions as to how to *normalise* their childhood and bring back some joy into their lives.

The image of the child as being innocent is quite prevalent however throughout history, and as we saw with the thinking of Augustine and then Aquinas this image has had much popularity in church circles up to this day (Brueggemann 2008; Towner 2008). But the innocence of the child is not just due to the absolution of original sin following baptism, as Augustine originally suggested, which would have been a rather fragile situation at best. Prepubertal children were considered innocent and pure (of sexual knowledge and activity) and therefore holy, and should they become the unfortunate victims of slaughter and murder (martyrdom) as the Holy Innocents in the Bible story – who fell at the swords of Herod’s soldiers – they were much admired and venerated as saints. Devout children who died young were also venerated and often canonised, their cult spreading across medieval Europe as examples of saintly innocents. It was also considered significant that in the New Testament children were portrayed positively and with compassion (Gundry-Volf 2001; Brueggemann 2008).

Medieval society admired and strove to emulate the *innocence* of children and children saints in varying ways, with some practices being rather endearing, for example, the tradition of the Boy Bishop enacted in many parts of Europe (till this day) on the feast of Saint Nicholas. Constructing hagiographies of saintly children shaped in turn the way that society subsequently conceptualised the *good child*. This perspective easily alters into seeing children as potential *victims* of a bad world, and therefore requiring society to have a tighter control over the life of a child so that the child would *not* fall prey to those intent on corrupting its innately good morals or otherwise harming the child/youngster (Darbyshire 2007). Even today, the public often refer to and conceptualise children as being innocent individuals and their innocence becomes all the more true and precious should a child or young person become the victim of a crime such as rape or murder. This is only too evident in how the media portray children who are the victims of various crimes, and goes some way to explain the confusion the public have over children who start to bond with their abusers, as noted in the recent case of Jaycee Lee Dugard (Moore 2009).

The perspective that children are seen as innocent players in the social life of adults contributes to the adult approach which disallows and dismisses the child’s attempt to break out of conformity and social expectations of accepted childhood behaviours with the admonition ‘that good children do not do behave like that’, demonstrating a lack of understanding of even normal children’s behaviour (Mayall 2002; Hallett & Prout 2003). The perspective that children are innately innocent can also, as a consequence, potentially demonise adults, since if the child is innocent and pure (and can do no wrong), the adult must be at fault. The compromise position that children might at any one time be somewhere on a scale between being totally socially and morally innocent, as the newborn child, and demonstrating the conniving awareness of a savvy adolescent is usually forgotten or overlooked. As children mature so does their awareness of the world around them and the formalisations of their interactions with the world; this is a long process (Mayall 2002). Very young children can (technically) operate computer chat sites, but this does not mean that they are socially ready or even aware of some of the potential consequences of their actions (Mitchell *et al.* 2003).

Children can also be seen as threats. The unruly child can be seen as a threat to society – to the established order. Since children are often unaware of societal norms and potentially ill adapted to living in our society, they need to be acculturated into its ways and norms. This is most commonly done through parents explaining societal values to children and through schools imparting moral education. Schools were founded as much to transmit to children prevailing societal and cultural values and norms as teach children how to read and write. Most parents still want schools to transmit certain moral values to children, but some parents who disagree with the prevailing norms and values expressed in contemporary schools want their children to be educated at home. The present rise of children being educated at home in Europe and the USA – assuming it is not just a middle-class passing fad – is an interesting social statement concerning the level of disquiet some parents have expressed concerning contemporary schooling. More importantly and worryingly, it reflects a serious level

of non-sharing of prevalent societal values and a subsequent lack of social cohesion.

Children are seen as threats because they often demonstrate counterculture behaviours and some adults can feel threatened and rendered helpless by their actions. Youth workers comment, however, that most young people are totally unaware of the extent to which many adults are intimidated by them – a complete mismatch of perspectives. The contemporary poet, Gareth Owen, in his poem *All the Sad Young Men*, echoes concerns that had been raised by the child rights campaigner Janusz Korczak (Efron 2008). Abused and misunderstood young boys tend to grow up to be themselves abusing and *still* misunderstood adults (Owen:1995:17).

There are of course a lot of troubled children, and children who in their disrupted lives act out and often damage or destroy much that they come into contact with (see Chapters 9 and 10). Whether there are currently more emotionally disturbed children and whether the antisocial behaviour of some of them is worse than in the past is the work of child psychologists, sociologists, children's lawyers and the juvenile justice system to assess (Bradshaw & Mayhew 2005). Suffice to say here that such emotionally disturbed and socially disruptive children do exist, and that they too need to be seen as children and young people first – in need of expert help – and only as social offenders later, however unacceptable their actions. The UK justice system was reprimanded by children's rights lawyers when the two youngsters who killed Jamie Bulger were not treated as juveniles by the UK legal system. There is nothing new in the phenomenon of children killing children, but every time it occurs it is an indication of societal, familial or emotional problems. Children can also appear as threats to each other, for example, the current fashion among some youngsters of carrying knives and increasingly being prepared to use the knives against other young people, with all-too-often fatal consequences. Even more prevalent are cases of youngsters bullying and harassing other children, including cyber harassment. Children are not only increasingly being targeted by adults but also by other youngsters on the computer and they find themselves threatened and vulnerable. Mitchell *et al.* (2003) sums it up succinctly stating:

...threatening and offensive behaviours have been directed on the Internet to youths, including threats to assault or harm them, their friends, or their property and efforts to embarrass or humiliate them. Once again, the concern of parents and other officials is that the anonymity of the Internet may make it a fertile territory for such behaviours.

(Mitchell *et al.* 2003:9)

Finally, children can be perceived as potentials, that is, potential adults and basically not representing much in themselves at the present time but considered to be of great worth as future adults and future contributors to society. Thinking of children as *potentials* is the preferred conceptualisation of children by governments and states – children are the future tax-paying citizens of the nation and are necessary to continue the many long-term plans of society, such as work and pay for the future state pensions of the retired. This pragmatic conceptualisation of children need not completely negate the present worth of a child, but it has had some interesting consequences in terms of how some adults have approached children in the past and continue to approach them to the present day. By regarding the child as representing a future adult, there is an implicit understanding of the developmental aspects of childhood, but it also represents a conceptualisation of children where the child's current childhood concerns can be easily overlooked as being transient and therefore lacking in social and economic weighting. Since children are only children for a short period in their lives, society is sometimes ambivalent as to whether it is worth investing in and promoting this transient phase of young people's lives.

All too often one hears statement such as 'children's concerns are not weighty and important like those of adults', 'they will grow out of their concerns', 'they will forget their pains'. This had been the situation in the late 1800s in regards to the need to build specific children's hospitals and children's wards in general hospitals in order to accommodate the large number of sick children. It then became an ethical and medical issue to convince hospital governors, paediatricians and children's nurses that these sick children needed their parents

around them if they were to be well cared for and to thrive. Unfortunately, there is no room here for a review of the history of children's nursing and the history of children's health-care provision; it is a fascinating and separate chapter in the social history of childhood (Hutchinson 1999; Bradley 2001; Kelsey 2002).

The Victorian poet R.L. Stevenson (1850–94) portrays an idyllic picture of the sick child convalescing in bed:

When I was sick and lay a-bed,
I had two pillows at my head,
And all my toys beside me lay
To keep me happy all the day ...
(Stevenson 2000b)

This is not that dissimilar a picture to the one drawn for us by children in British hospitals in the early 1900s (BJN 2007), but these rosy pictures of convalescing youngsters were unfortunately not the whole story. Most children were inadequately cared for by staff who were ill equipped to care for them, and at some point in the nineteenth century up to the middle of the twentieth century, it was even considered appropriate in hospital circles to keep hospitalised children separated from their families. Attempts were made, however, to improve the health of children and reduce infant mortality, and much effort was put into improving the quality of life of children both in Europe and in North America and Australia (Warsh & Strong-Boag 2005). At the present time, children have their own designated hospitals and qualified professionals who work with them, and most importantly they are not separated from their families. Indeed, they go to hospital only when their care and treatment is not possible in their home, and then they go accompanied by their parents or familiar carers.

Meanwhile, orphaned and poor children in the early 1900s were sent thousands of miles away to what was considered a better life and future for them, such as the famous railway children in the USA, or the children sent from the UK to Australia – all done with little regard to the emotional impact on the child (Holt 1992). When children themselves are asked about their needs and requirements for a good childhood, they often mention the presence of a reasonably harmonious family life, attendance

at school and a lack of grinding poverty. This seems to suffice. A young girl during World War II, pondered in her diary about her schooling, even though there was a war going on'... I wondered what will happen to our school, but Mama said that when a country is fighting for its survival, there is no time for schooling' (Holliday 1995:3). It is rare, that children and youngsters should mention specifics such as brand name toys or games, types of clothing or even the absence of disease, as vital prerequisites for a good childhood. Obviously, the response depends on the age of the child or young person, their educational and social background, personal experiences with the health-care and educational system and, most significantly, the actual year when the question is posed, that is, the political and sociocultural context in which the question is posed. When children were recently asked in the UK what for them constituted a good childhood, a 9-year-old girl in the first instance did note the absence of wars...

I think the things that stop children and young people from having a good life are: wars, unkind people, parents that argue and split up, not having parents, not having enough food and water and not being able to live feeling safe.

(Layard & Dunn 2009)

Children are traumatised by the presence of violence, whether between nations or among family members, and would, if they only could, avoid being confronted with the results of this violence. Currently, the presence of child soldiers in parts of Africa and Asia is a distressing phenomenon – and one that NGOs and aid agencies are attempting to address. Unfortunately though, as we have noted in this chapter, children down the ages have been caught up in the affairs and wars of adults and more often than not have fallen victim to the horrors of these adult conflicts (Amnesty International British Section 1995).

Conclusion

It has taken an awful lot of political and social campaigning over many decades, and taken the efforts

of many scholars, child psychologists, paediatricians, children's nurses and concerned individuals to reach the point where we are today, where children are respected as individuals for what they are, with rights and privileges conferred on them precisely because they are children and young people living in the present; not in some distant future state and time.

In this chapter, I have reviewed the histories and philosophies of childhood and demonstrated how the daily lives of children have changed over the centuries. It is clear that many aspects of children's lives have changed for the better, but that unfortunately other aspects have changed little – for at least some children. Moreover, the quality of life for all children depends heavily on adults understanding the nature of childhood and the needs of children if they are to flourish and develop in an optimal fashion.

Some social reformers working for the welfare of children have even sacrificed the joys of having their own children in order to care for and promote the interests of other people's children, such as the legendary Polish paediatrician and child psychologist, Henry Goldszmit (pen name Janusz Korczak) (Veerman 1992; Efron 2008). Concerning the dedication of Korczak for his orphaned children, Veerman (1992) notes:

Korczak served the child and his rights as no one else in history did. Not only did he formulate ideas about the rights of the child, but he put them into practice for more than thirty years.

(Veerman 1992:93)

While reviewing the history of childhood for this book, the enduring image of the good doctor Korczak has stayed with me. Like him I dream of a world in which children's nurses and health-care workers will stay committed to furthering the welfare of the child and never grow complacent for there is always so much more that can be done for the children and young people we work with. But this work will be more efficacious and rewarding if we do not lose sight in our endeavours of the essential nature of the child and do not neglect the needs of the small child present within each of us. As Korczak noted, it is important to:

... know yourself before you attempt to know children ... first and foremost you must realize that you too, are a child whom you must first get to know ...

(Korczak 2007)

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