

14 Morality and the goals of development

Ethical-political dilemmas of developmentalism as inscribed within models, and some proposals

It has been clear that an underlying project of developmental psychology has been to produce moral citizens appropriate to the maintenance of bourgeois democracy, but it has been less clear what notion of morality it subscribes to. This chapter addresses the treatment of morality in developmental psychology. The debates and criticisms generated in this area can be regarded as encapsulating in a microcosm the limitations of current developmental models. While the moral assumptions permeating models of moral development have attracted some critical attention, their exhibition within this arena should be understood as only one particular instance of what is a general problem. In this chapter the moral status of models of moral development is located within the broader cultural and political landscape within which developmental psychology functions. The remaining questions about whether developmental psychology can outgrow rather than simply process, mature and recycle the conservative and culture-bound presentations of early twentieth-century privileged men are complex. But a prerequisite for this is to understand what these theories are and do.

Piaget's rules on children's games

In *The Moral Judgement of the Child* (1932) Piaget describes his investigations of children's developing appreciation of morality. He conceived of morality as systems of rules, and his aim was to understand how we acquire these rules. In line with his paradoxical model of the child both as asocial and party to insights that civilisation has knocked out of us, Piaget held that most of the moral rules we learn are imposed and enforced on us ready-made by adults. However, he saw in the 'social games' played by children the opportunity to see how these rules are constructed and interpreted by them. By asking children to teach him how to play the game of marbles and asking questions about who had won the game and why, Piaget built up a picture of characteristic ways in which children of different ages both practised and accounted for the rules.

Piaget traced a development in children's play from regularities or rituals that an individual child devises to amuse herself which are full of idiosyncratic habits and symbols, to an imitation of some aspects of what others are doing in terms of rules she has devised but assumes hold generally. At this point, he argued, children may believe themselves to be playing together, but may in fact be playing entirely different games in parallel, without seeing the need for a shared set of rules. This clearly ties in with Piaget's ideas about childhood egocentrism. By about seven or eight years of age, he claimed, children began to see the game of marbles as a competitive game structured by rules. The success of the game depends on mutual cooperation between players according to collectively upheld rules. By 11 or 12 years (in what he later termed formal operational thinking) Piaget argued that children

are interested not only in rules governing the particular game or version of the game they are playing, but in reflecting upon the total set of possible variations that might be called upon in a given case – in other words a hypothetico-deductive approach characteristic of formal reasoning. At this point we should note that, for Piaget, it is the appreciation and engagement with *competition* that is taken as the indicator of sociality.

This work formed the basis for a wide-ranging exploration of children's moral understanding. He explored children's awareness of rules by asking them such questions as 'Can rules be changed?', 'Have rules always been the same as they are today?' and 'How did rules begin?'. At the second stage (which would be called 'pre-operational' in his later work), children's imitation of rules was based on a perception of rules as sacred and unalterable, despite violating these rules in their own play. Once again childhood egocentrism is used to account for this paradox. Piaget identified a developmental progression from *heteronomy*, where the self is undifferentiated from the (social, moral, physical) context, to *autonomy*, where the individual chooses to engage in particular social contracts. He traced a change in approach towards rules from an initial *unilateral respect* (where rules are obeyed due to adult constraint) to *mutual respect* (where rules are social conventions operating to maintain fairness). He went on to pose stories involving minor misdeeds to children, investigating their ideas about responsibility in terms of moral questions he considered relevant to children, such as stealing and lying. The outcome of his 'clinical' interviews with children was that he claimed that, in contrast to older children and adults, young children judged the naughtiness of an action by its results rather than by the agent's intentions – that is, the magnitude of the damage is treated as the index of the scale of the misdeed.

Kohlberg on Piaget

Lawrence Kohlberg (1969a, 1969b, 1976), a US developmental psychologist, elaborated on and developed Piaget's work on moral reasoning to put forward a series of six stages and three levels in the development and articulation of moral judgement from childhood to adulthood. He based his work on the classification of the kinds of moral reasoning displayed by individuals of different ages when they were confronted with hypothetical dilemmas. The most celebrated 'dilemma' used to elicit the underlying structure of people's moral reasoning was about a penniless man, Heinz, who urgently needs an expensive medicine to save his wife's life, and which the pharmacist refuses to give or supply on credit. Should he steal the drug? Here there is a conflict between the values of property and life. We should pause to note that, in the transition from Geneva to the USA and from the 1930s to the 1960s, a process of methodological and taxonomic rigidity has taken place. The ascription of moral level has become a question of classification according to age or stage; from premoralism, to conformism, to individual principled morality.

A number of claims underlay the framework. First, the stages were said to be universal and fixed. Second, the sequence was seen as invariant, with variation only in rate of progression or fixation at a particular stage. And, third, each stage was understood as a structured whole, with characteristics of reasoning associated with a stage related together into a total worldview. All this is reminiscent of Piaget's model of the relations that hold between the organisation of cognitive operations. In terms of evidence used to support this model, there was fairly widespread support for the claim that the stages occur in a fixed order (Colby *et al.*, 1983). There was also cross-sectional support, in that higher stages are reported among older subjects. In addition, some longitudinal studies suggested that over a period of years, individuals tend to advance to higher stages (Walker, 1989). Even some cross-cultural

work lent support, with Kohlberg (1969b) identifying the same sequence of stages (with the stories slightly adapted) in the USA, Britain, Taiwan, Mexico and Turkey, and the stages and sequences confirmed in other societies by Edwards (1981). So it seemed as though the arena of moral development had been pretty well sorted out. Or had it?

Kohlberg's dilemmas

From the 1970s some critical voices emerged which suggested that the sorting process was on a less than equitable basis. It seemed that the ascription of the moral high ground was of uncertain validity, of contested value and unfair distribution.

In terms of methodological criticisms, a first problem arises from basing a classification of moral level on verbal reports. Unlike Piaget's early work, Kohlberg's model relied exclusively on what people say about what (other) people should do, based on hypothetical situations. But being more thoughtful, circumspect, taking more factors into consideration does not necessarily mean that people behave more morally. Further, the practice of investigating moral reasoning via hypothetical situations made the moral problems posed even more detached and distanced. In this context Carol Gilligan's (1982) work on women's reasoning about the real-life dilemma of whether or not to terminate a pregnancy provided a particularly striking contrast.

Second, corresponding to the work challenging what is seen as Piaget's rather pessimistic view of children's abilities, there was work analysing and minimising the linguistic and narrative demands of the task. Stein *et al.* (1979) reformulated Heinz's dilemma into a story about a lady who had a sick husband and had to steal some cat's whiskers in order to make the only medicine that would save his life. Despite the fairy tale genre and simplicity of the story, they reported young children as having difficulties understanding it. They suggested that the children do not draw the obvious inference that the medicine will save the man's life since they cannot maintain the major goal in mind while trying to pursue the subgoals of securing the whiskers and making the medicine. In order to engage with the dilemma, the task presupposes the ability to understand a complex narrative and to think through alternative courses of action, both of which may be more complicated than the process of making moral judgements alone.

Criticisms addressed to the theory rather than the procedures by which it was arrived at also took a number of forms. In the first place, it was claimed that it addressed only a very restricted notion of morality. While this is not the place to go into alternative (such as behavioural or psychoanalytic) models of morality, the Kohlbergian model of morality as moral reasoning cannot engage with issues of moral commitment, individual priorities or differences of moral salience of particular issues. Nor does it address the subjective experience of feelings of guilt and shame which, as Kagan (1984) noted, children exhibit from an early age. Once again we see that a cognitive developmental model which prioritises rationality cannot theorise its relation with emotions except insofar as emotions are regarded as subordinate to, or at best byproducts of, cognition.

The rigidity of the representation of morality also fails to deal with domain specificity, familiarity and, further, the reality of the conflicting moral codes and priorities we are subject to (Turiel, 1983; Song *et al.*, 1987). Moreover, not only did this model treat talk about moral behaviour as equivalent to moral activity, it also failed to address how accounting for the morality of one's behaviour tends to follow rather than precede the actions. Hence it was argued that these accounts measured moral rationalisation rather than reasoning (Hogen, 1975). Yet subsequent research has continued the trend towards treating morality in cognitive terms.

Dodge's (2006) review applied the whole gambit of ethological and neurophysiological as well as social psychological approaches to the study of 'antisocial' behaviour, taking attributional processes as the primary analytical device responsible for young people's 'externalising' (i.e. aggressive or hostile) behaviour. Determinants of moral (or immoral) actions thus become a subset of other decision-making and reasoning processes or skills of emotional regulation (see also Griffith Fontaine *et al.*, 2002). Or as we saw in the discussion of the explanatory frameworks mobilised to account for youth and popular unrest – in full circle – we return to assessments of the 'quality' of parenting (e.g. Lansford *et al.*, 2003).

Double standards: gender-differentiating rights and responsibilities

One of the most influential criticisms of Kohlberg's model was that the stages did not fit female development. Carol Gilligan (1982) pointed out that both Piaget and Kohlberg derived their stage norms from studying boys and men. She questioned the capacity of the model to express women's psychological development. She reinterpreted boys' and girls' accounts of Heinz's dilemma, where in terms of Kohlbergian criteria the girls were scored as reasoning at a lower moral stage of development. Instead she pointed out that the girls' and women's reservations about stealing the drug were based on additional considerations arising from an engagement with the context, such as the effect on the wife if the man was imprisoned for the crime and the worry about who would care for her if she fell ill again.

Although it remains unclear whether she was advocating improving or abandoning it, Gilligan therefore threw the model of moral development that Kohlberg proposes into question. In tracing a linear progression from undifferentiation or attachment to autonomy, she argued that it subscribes to a model of morality based on individual rights and freedoms of the kind enshrined in Western legal systems, whereas, she held, women's moral development is characterised by a much more contextualised morality concerned with conflicting responsibilities and care – that is, concerned with responsibilities and relationships rather than rights and rules. Overall, she argued that Kohlberg's model emphasised separation rather than connection by taking the individual rather than the relationship as the primary unit of analysis.

Gilligan tied these different conceptions of morality to the different roles traditionally accorded to men and women. Since typically women have defined their identities through relationships of intimacy and care, the moral issues that women faced are to do with learning to assert their own needs without seeing this as 'selfish'. For both sexes, she argued, the issues that we face are to do with the conflict between integrity (separateness) and care (attachment), but that men and women approach these issues with different moral orientations. For men the emphasis was on 'equality', based on an understanding of fairness, equal respect, balancing the claims of other and self. In contrast, women's morality, she claimed, was more oriented to issues of responsibility, with recognition of differences in need that an equal rights approach cannot address – an ethic of compassion and care and not wanting to hurt. Gilligan called for the necessity for these contrasting moral orientations to be seen as complementary rather than one being systematically downgraded, and ultimately for them to be integrated into a more adequate vision of moral maturity. While there are problems with the idealisation of women's qualities within this account (see Spelman, 1990; Elam, 1994), the value of this work lies in demonstrating the limited application to and far-reaching devaluation of women structured within the cognitive developmental model. Indeed, Gilligan's account remains widely influential in discussions of the relational ethics of care across various practice settings (e.g. Stensöta, 2010; Pettersen, 2011; Lawrence and Maitlis, 2012; Noddings, 2012) that extends from discussions of feminist philosophy (e.g. Pettersen, 2012) to interspecies relationships (Warkentin, 2010).

Culture and the goals of development

A further serious difficulty with Kohlberg's model lay in the status of the sixth stage, which represents individual moral conviction as the most advanced morality beyond the respect for democratically arrived at and contractually maintained rules (Stage Five). First, few people were designated as attaining the higher points on the developmental ladder (with Jesus Christ, Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King named by Kohlberg as among the lucky few – he also included himself!). This raises questions about the theoretical status of the highest point of development. Second, some cultures were recorded as not reaching even beyond the second stage. There are clearly methodological difficulties involved in the study of people from one culture by those of another. These are issues that anthropologists routinely address, although some have been known to rely on psychology with disastrous results (see e.g. Hallpike, 1979). The suggestion made that Kohlberg's stages can be related to the 'complexity' of societies (Edwards, 1981) set up a hierarchy from 'primitive' to 'complex' which simply reflected a Western cultural bias. However, a distinction between rural and urban societies may be relevant, with Stage Five reported much less frequently in the former (Snarey, 1985). But this calls for an analysis that connects cognitive/moral development with culture and context.

However, a further issue comes into play when researchers measure indigenous people's abilities and interests by means of a test devised outside their own culture. Here developmental psychology reproduces and bolsters the dynamic of imperialism by offering tools that produce a picture of inferiority and moral underdevelopment through the ethnocentric and culturally chauvinist assumptions that inform both theory and tool (Joseph *et al.*, 1990). Kohlberg later reformulated some of his claims about Stage Six portraying this as an ideal, rather than a necessary endpoint of development (Levine *et al.*, 1985). This, however, seems to offer a rather cosmetic change which leaves the methodological, and moral-political, problems intact.

In this we can see played out problems common to all developmental psychological theories that claim to hold generally. The postulation of a starting state and an ending state involves the prescription of the endpoint, the goal, of development. We talk in terms of 'progressing', 'advancing' from one stage to the next (indeed these stages have precisely been applied to develop a tool of moral assessment for people with learning disabilities, Langdon *et al.*, 2010). But the norms by which that development is evaluated may be far from universal. In particular, as we have seen, the individual autonomy of conscience of Stage Six fitted well with the modern, Western ideology of individualism. But it has been suggested that this is not the highest point of moral development for all cultures, many of which have traditionally valued obedience and respect for elders and tradition over personal conviction. Kagan (1984) noted that in Japan the guiding principle of social interaction was to avoid conflict and maintain harmonious relationships. While we should beware of the dangers of essentialising cultural-political practices (McGillion *et al.*, 2013) (i.e. treating these as if they are static, unchanging and somewhere 'inherent' properties) and overestimating the coherence of national identities (which are, of course, always fractured by, for example, class and gender relations as well as racialisation and regional differences), we can at least note that with such a different value system and contrasting view of the relationship between individuals, we could expect that a Kohlbergian Stage Six person would be considered aberrant and amoral in Japan in according personal principles more importance than societal expectations, as outlined by Doi (1973, 1986). Similar claims are made mobilising African-centred relational norms that privilege harmony over individual desires (Metz and Gaie, 2010), although in both cases there may be problems of reification of moral

orientations abstracted from socio-economic conditions which render these designations more temporally specific than these 'cultural' explanations would suggest.

Further, the model of 'man' prescribed in Kohlberg's (and by implication Piaget's) model derives from particular social interests, based on a liberal model of society seen as functioning by means of social contractual arrangements between people (Simpson, 1974; Sampson, 1989). Key arguments here included how the rationality that has been so highly valued in the cognitive developmental model ties in with a bourgeois conception of the individual which either accepts class divisions or denies their existence (Buck-Morss, 1975; Sullivan, 1977). In its celebration of autonomy, Kohlbergian theory therefore partakes of a liberal view that sees society as composed of independent units who cooperate only when the terms of cooperation are such as to further the ends of each of the parties. This also clearly recalls Piaget's definition of social interaction in game playing through competition. Not only does this lead to an asocial view of the individual, in terms of the ascription of pre-social interests, but it also sets up a form of conceptual imperialism in its application to cultures which do not share this underlying model. Sullivan treats this model as a case example of the political and conceptual problems wrought by an inadequate theory of the social: thought is severed from action, form from content, the abstract from the concrete and, ultimately, emotion from intellect. More recent work has drawn on other theoretical resources to offer a more nuanced and social account. For example, Woods (2004) draws on post-Vygotskian frameworks emphasising the performativity of utterances and interactions, through the work of Bakhtin and Vološinov, to inform her ethnographic research investigating moral accounts provided by schoolchildren in relation to their setting and the relationships they are embedded within. Singer and Doorenebal (2006) applied Vygotskian perspectives to analyse children's narratives of being betrayed by a friend, while Mitlenburg and Singer (2000) used these principles to inform a therapeutic approach to the analysis of the moral development of survivors of child abuse.

These questions about gender, emotions and the interrelations between models return us to the key themes of this book, and the key strategies mobilised to 'deconstruct' developmental psychology. In particular, we have seen how developmental psychological models abstract the individual from social context, to render class, culture and gendered positions as merely supplementary attributes to, rather than as constitutive of, the developing subject. Not only is the social reduced to the individual, then, but – as we have seen – the development of the individual (child) is increasingly targeted as a site of intervention and manipulation for the production of flexible, autonomous and especially economically self-sufficient citizens (Fendler, 2001; Lister, 2006). Thus conceptions of the developing child connect with models of national development (Burman, 2008a; Twum-Danso Imoh and Ame, 2012; Henderson and Denny, 2015). This 'development' works as a key term in policy links made to connect the individual child to national and international change. As we have already seen throughout this book, developmental models also foster particular contemporary understandings of the relations between what are sometimes still called the 'First' and 'Third' worlds, or the minority and majority worlds, or the North and South, or indeed simply richer and poorer countries, as well as having historical links with colonialism (see Chapter 1). While these issues are elaborated upon more extensively in the companion book to this, *Developments: Child, Image, Nation* (Burman, 2008a), the last part of this chapter reconsiders such questions.

Developmental psychology and the developing world

Some of the methodological and moral difficulties described above have been reflected in the failure of the project of cross-cultural psychology (Burman, 2007b). On practical grounds researchers have been forced to recognise that the cultural assumptions held by research

'subjects' about the nature of the task demanded of them did not always correspond with that intended by the researchers. In a telling study, Cole *et al.* (1971) found that the African Kpelle consistently failed Piagetian classification tasks when asked 'how a wise man' would organise piles of foods and household items together. It was only when in despair the researcher asked how 'a fool would do it' that they exhibited the typical Western classification based on type (sorting similar items together) that had been defined as task success, rather than functional relations that reflected the ways the items were used. Such findings paved the way for the generation of alternative, more contextually attuned models focusing on cultural specificities and communities of practice (see Lave and Wenger, 1991; Nelson *et al.*, 2000; Rogoff, 2003).

Such examples highlight that the problems are more than mere practical or technical difficulties, and cast doubt on the entire project of developmental psychology. The presentation of a general model depicting development as unitary irrespective of culture, class, gender and history has meant that difference can be recognised only in terms of aberrations, deviations – that is, in terms of relative progress on a linear scale. The developmental psychology we know is tied to the culture which produced it. While such insights have had some impact within academic psychology, they are maintained in policy and in popular representations of childhood and child development.

As examples discussed throughout this book have highlighted, the image of the active, natural, innocent child functions within the economy of cultural representations of children in so-called developing countries in ways which castigate poor people for their poverty, lapse into racist assumptions about child neglect and penalise the children of the poor rather than promote their welfare (see also Burman, 2013b). Claire Cassidy (1989) discussed how, when poverty and ignorance lead to malnutrition in Third World countries, this was sometimes treated by welfare workers as an example of parental neglect. There is a failure to distinguish between culturally normative and deviant forms in evaluating child development in 'other' cultures. In purveying what is advertised as a general, universal model of development, developmental psychology is a vital ingredient in what Jo Boyden (1990) termed the 'globalisation of childhood'. While, as we saw in Chapters 4 and 5, sentimentalised representations of children generated from the rich countries and contexts of the global North work to deny children's agency (notwithstanding the claims of child-centredness) and prevent social unrest, the key dimensions that have come to structure the organisation of childhood are being inappropriately imposed in so-called 'developing' countries. The division between public and private was central to industrialisation, but it should be recalled that poor people the world over have less privacy, and street children may have none at all (although many children of the street are not actually children living *on* the streets (Glauser, 1990; Burr, 2006). But conceptions of children as unknowing, helpless and in need of protection from the public sphere may actually disable and criminalise children who are coping as best they can (see e.g. Kleeberg-Niepage, 2005). All too often, policies and practices developed in the North function more in punitive than protective ways for poor children of the South – even in literal ways by being dispensed by the police, who in some Southern countries have also been responsible for the murder of children in their custody.

Similarly, as discussed in Chapter 5 (and more extensively in Burman, 2006a; Liebel, 2015; Gasson *et al.*, 2015), while regulating child labour is clearly important attempts to abolish this in line with supposed Northern practices frequently ignore the extent to which families (and children) are dependent on the incomes children generate, and therefore need to be provided with compensation and support to enable their children attend school. Further, the schooling which is on offer is often of varying quality, and may take the form of enforced

assimilation to a colonial language. The schooling experience may therefore be one which fails rather than enables children.

The undifferentiated, globalised model of childhood not only fails to address the varying cultural value and position of children (Zelizer, 1985), but also ignores gender as a structural issue in development (in both the senses of individual and economic development). Aid agencies have recognised that specific priorities need to be set up for girls and women (e.g. Wallace and March, 1991), while the role of gendered meanings in structuring not only entirely different subjectivities and livelihoods, but also actual nutrition and survival, is gradually emerging through the efforts of women's organisations (Scheper-Hughes, 1989b; Batou 1991). Indeed, as was also discussed in Chapter 5, the 'girlchild' is now central to international economic development policies (Koffman and Gill, 2013; Switzer, 2013). Substituting one gendered model of development with another does not solve the overall problem of normalisation and instrumentalisation of people's lives.

In general, the argument that the concept of childhood on offer is a Northern construction incorporated, as though it were universal, into aid and development policies has gained considerable circulation across a range of disciplines but such critiques have largely remained in the academic arena (even if they are widely subscribed to by practitioners). Associations between the development of the child and the development of the nation or state remain all too familiar, now bolstered by complex econometrics. Indeed, many aid policy documents present their rationale for promoting child survival and development in terms of the future benefit to the state (e.g. Myers, 1992). But there are other resonances I want to mobilise here. Tim Morris opened his account of his experiences as an aid worker with a critique of the cultural chauvinism, complacency and personal investments set up within aid work, as follows:

Developmentalism is a beguiling creed, to be a developer of backward lands an attractive vocation. We all want to see ourselves as bearers of aid, rectifiers of past injustice. To be sent among a distant nation as a conveyer of progress can only make one feel good It boosts self esteem. It is to regain certainty and purpose, to cast away the ennui and despair of decaying industrial society and to restore bracing faith in the goodness and charity of one's fellow men and women.

(Morris, 1992: 1)

Just as he was exposing the problems inherent in defining goals for societal development, so too the same problems arise within the determination of the direction and endpoint of individual development. The notion of 'progress', whether attached to societies or 'the lifespan', implies linear movement across history and between cultures. Comparison within these terms is now being recognised as increasingly untenable. In particular, the implication that there is a detached, disinterested set of devices or techniques for this purpose, such as developmental psychology has purported to provide, illustrates the extent to which we have come to believe in the abstract disembodied psychological subject, and dismiss all it fails to address as merely either supplementary or inappropriate. In this regard, it should be noted that the main focus within this book on literature and interpretations produced by researchers in Britain and especially the USA is not, or not merely, a reflection of my own parochialism. Anglo-US psychology extends its influence much further than its own linguistic and cultural domains through the dynamic of imperialism. Developmental psychology therefore functions as a tool of cultural imperialism through the reproduction of Euro-US values and models within post-colonial societies and within international government organisations.

Assumptions about child development and adjustment also play a key role in psychosocial interventions provided by international agencies following humanitarian emergencies, with the very distinction between ‘natural’ and ‘humanitarian’ disasters itself an artificial construction (Middleton and O’Keefe, 1998; Duffield, 2001). Rodriguez Mora’s (2003) analysis of the UNICEF-led response to the humanitarian emergency caused by the massive mudslides in Caracas, Venezuela, in 1999 offers a case in point. This was a participatory study in the sense that she and the other psychologists in Caracas worked alongside the international agencies in delivering aid and support. Her study generates questions and reflections relevant to the project of aid as a mode of international governance that not only consolidates pre-existing inter- and intra-state power inequalities but also obscures their analysis in structural terms (see also Rodriguez Mora, 2010).

Three areas are of particular relevance here. First the expectation that the population would be traumatised, alongside particular ideas of what behaviours and consequences this should involve, led the aid workers to be particularly shocked and disapproving when some people were found to be having sex in the temporary shelter accommodation (a commandeered former barracks – itself marking the continuity of militarisation, and the connections between military and humanitarian intervention in these people’s lives). Second, the international aid organisations approached their interventions with the erroneous expectation that their work would be to deal with children who were abandoned, whereas in fact children were multiply claimed by families – thus illustrating the inappropriateness of Western representations of children as burdens rather than of value to families. Third, Rodriguez Mora discusses the use of the ‘knapsack of dreams’, a play therapy tool for children developed in Guatemala and incorporated into UNICEF practice, which worked to impose a particular understanding of what children were supposed to be like and how they should react to disaster and disruption in their lives but did not reflect the experiences and responses of these children.

Needless to say, although such effects have arisen despite the good intentions of individuals and organisations, they still demand critical reflection and response. In particular, the focus on trauma can work to prescribe how people should react to disasters in their lives (Summerfield, 2001, 2013; Kumar and Mills, 2013; Mills and Fernando, 2014). Moreover, it can work within neoliberal politics as a rationale to limit aid to short-term interventions (such as psychosocial support or training) rather than investment in rebuilding infrastructure or capacity building (Palmary, 2006), while the general assumption of damage and vulnerability can diminish the credibility of political claims (Pupavac, 2002a, 2002b, 2004). Indeed as discussed in Chapter 4, humanitarian relief can itself be regarded as a performance whose particular models and subscription to practices that I called there the ‘child as celebrity’ require critique and revision.

Developmental psychology and the production of childhood

Miriam Tag (2012) notes that child welfare, care and education programmes that emerged across Europe, while inspired by the moral universalism of Enlightenment (romantic and rational) ideas, were in fact focused on differentiating children on the basis of age and social class that took different forms in different places. The emergence of wider models of development (of species, of nations) helped to naturalise claims about childhood and child development, but a key assumption of this was that these claims were universally applicable, that is, equally relevant to all contexts. Tag’s analysis of the dynamic and practice of universalism shows how this relies on a circular and mutually reinforcing logic that not only installs a culturally specific set of agendas and assumptions masked as universal but also works to ‘define

features, ontologize entities, assign responsibilities and legitimise action' (p.50). Importantly, though, her analysis goes beyond denunciation of what is by now a well-known issue to pressurise this notion of universalisation as neither as coherent nor as complete as the discourse would suggest, in order to disrupt this cycle of mutual confirmation, and to show how local, contingent conditions transform as well as install these universal norms. In this sense, therefore, the equation of 'universalisation' with 'homogenisation' overlooks the performance of such local practices:

Different levels of 'homogenizing' effects have to be distinguished, and on each of these levels, universalized early childhood semantics, indicators and initiatives allow for manifold and divergent interpretations – and render the particular visible. In this understanding, processes of universalization and particularization are intricately linked, two sides of one process, one constituting the other. Referring to 'early childhood' means making references to a universal frame – and to assign particular meaning to it at the same time. (p.52)

Closer to home, analogous issues arose within discussions of child abuse, in particular the recognition of child sexual abuse. Part of the reason why this issue commands such media attention lies in the challenge to the image of the safe, happy and protected child. As we saw in Chapters 5 and 8, not only do the family, or trusted parental figures, no longer necessarily provide a safe, caring environment for children and so warrant greater scrutiny and intervention from the state, but the model of the child as innocent can render the 'knowing' child as somehow culpable within her own abuse (Kitzinger, 1990; Burman, 2008a, Chapters 3 and 4). Issues of power that constitute the abuse are eclipsed within the effort to ward off children's agency and sexuality and maintain a romantic sentimental image of the passive, innocent child (Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers, 1992).

Once constituted in such ways, children's assertion or aggression becomes very hard to acknowledge or deal with except in pathological terms. The British case of the two Liverpool boys who murdered a three-year-old boy in 1993 attracted worldwide attention. This was remarkable not only because the perpetrators were regarded as legally responsible for their actions despite being minors, but also for the general vilification directed towards their familial, class, community and regional backgrounds. The fact that they were given 'new identities' on their release from prison some 10 years later further underscored how their actions were seen as so uniquely personal and their personal responsibility such that their societal readmittance could only be predicated on the surrender of who they previously were. At work here is therefore a key effect of the abstraction of childhood from sociopolitical conditions: it seems that they could be excised from the body politic at will. That this was not the only possible response to such events was illustrated by the legal and social response to an equivalent case of child murder happening at a similar time in Trondheim, Norway, where the specific community and the state in general saw this as a matter of general responsibility, with the focus of intervention on rehabilitation rather than punishment (see BBC World Service 'When children kill children', www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/people/highlights/001109_child.shtml).

While developmental psychology plays a key role in the legitimation and perpetuation of these dangerously limited and sometimes plainly false conceptions of childhood, they mesh with dominant cultural imagery which glorifies and markets childhood as a commodity. While children may sometimes signify as icons of simplicity and naturalness, as an accessory for soap advertisements or caring (especially male) figures, yet according intrinsic, natural qualities to children gives rise to representations of gender and sexual orientation as somehow

essential and inherent, as where child models are portrayed engaging in heterosexual dating postures as a means of selling clothes that are simply scaled down versions of their parents' (Burman, 1991).

The twenty-first century appears to be acquiring a rather more ambivalent view of children's aggression and sexuality. Children's knowingness attracts complex responses, as 'digitally native' children have to teach their parents how to use their electronic gadgets, and increasingly embrace the position of societal participation through consumption that the market offers them (Burman, 2011, 2012a). This includes children's own relation to their sexuality. In a culture that eroticises little girls (and sometimes little boys), the strength of the demonisation of paedophiles surely betrays how their crimes merely take a culturally-incited theme to a particular, but problematic, conclusion. Although we should take care to read such texts as indices of social anxieties rather than reflections of actual children's understandings or actions, films such as *Hard Candy* (2006) expressed the complex possibilities and interrelations of adult-child, male-female relationships. Not only as in *Lolita* (the film of Nabokov's novel, made in 1962 and remade in 1997), could the little girl mobilise the knowledge of her attractiveness seductively, but in *Hard Candy* she could use it to entrap and exact revenge.

Ethics and politics

Similar problems have attended discussions of ethics in psychological research with children, as we have seen throughout this book, where the larger question of consultation over the nature of the investigation, and its relevance to the lives and interests of children, gets scaled down into a set of bureaucratic procedures for ensuring 'informed consent'. In general, as Gallacher and Gallagher (2008), Powell and Smith (2009), Moss *et al.* (2000) and others have pointed out, we are better at protecting children than facilitating their participation in constructing our models about them. Since, as also discussed in Chapter 2, the question of which factors ensure or are relevant to 'informed consent' effectively restates the whole project of developmental psychology, the reduction of such key issues to a procedure for ensuring compliance is surely an example of how defensive practice obscures the formulation of genuine psychological inquiry. Perhaps more than anywhere else, such practices justify dismissal of developmental psychology by sociologists of childhood and childhood studies researchers as working with a deficiency model of what children can do and know.

Discussions of the impact of developmental psychological knowledge often flounder on the issue of whether it reflects or produces the practices it describes. While it would be naive to accord too much significance to a relatively minor arena of academic and popular culture, nevertheless the act of reproduction of both common-sense and technical-political understandings within the seemingly objective arena of scientific research functions to recycle existing historically and culturally specific ideas as legitimised, eternal knowledge (and we might note the drift to qualify psychology with the explicit name of 'science', as in 'psychological science' or 'developmental science'). Models about children and childrearing achieve a reality in part because they comprise the fabric of both professional and everyday knowledge about ourselves and our relationships. We cannot easily get outside them since they have constituted our very subjectivities, and in that sense notions of 'reflection' and even 'production' fail to convey their reality within our lives.

In an early treatment, Baker and Freebody (1987) discussed how a particular cultural form, in this case, children's first reading books, acted to 'constitute the child' by presenting a particular, school-endorsed set of representations of child, family, school and social relations within the materials. While purporting to reflect the children's development, these function to

organise it. They map out their school and personal careers and ambitions as pupils, boys and girls, with class positions (see also Rose, 1985), and relay sets of ideas about the positions and rights of adults and children. The consequences of this may even enter into the children's abilities to engage with educational processes. As they put it:

Young readers, whose identities as children differ from the images embedded in the texts, may have particular difficulties in relating to these books. For all children there may exist the practical problems of knowing how to treat these images while taking part in a reading instruction based on them, in such a way as to appear to be concurring with school-endorsed portraits in the texts.

(Baker and Freebody, 1987: 57)

Morality and change

We have moved very fast in this chapter from a discussion of Piaget's work on morality to the role that developmental psychology plays in the new world, and now the new world order. What developmental psychology has all too often neglected, even when it studied morality, has been its own moral status and positions in the world. We have seen how developmental psychology has functioned as an instrument of classification and evaluation, as a tool for 'mental hygiene', a euphemism for the control and surveillance of populations deemed likely to be troublesome or burdensome – working-class children, single parents, minoritised groups and poor people the world over. Clothed in the rhetoric of scientific rigour and detachment, it has worked in very partial ways. The denial of moral-political assumptions underlying developmental psychology has merely worked to maintain reactionary practices. Now it is time to recognise that the 'science' of development is not separate from concerns of 'truth', and therefore of ethics, politics and government.

This book started with an account of how developmental psychology arose, and the moral-political agendas it served and expressed. From the constitution of the isolated, individual 'child' as its unit of study, to an equivalent focus on families, mothers, and now fathers, developmental psychology remains a key resource for legislating upon and distributing welfare interventions, and for making moral-political evaluations of families. As Judith Suissa (2014) comments:

[P]arenting is increasingly spoken of as a skill. When the 'ends' of good parenting are specified in narrow, empirically-defined terms, what gets ruled out of the discussion of parenting is the irreducibly moral dimension to questions about human flourishing: questions about what it means to live well, what we want for and with our children, and why. There is no room, in this discussion, for questions of meaning and value, for ambiguity and uncertainty. Such questions, though, are as central to our attempts to live well and our understanding of human flourishing as they are to our attempts to be good, or perhaps just good enough, parents. (p. 122–3)

Parts I and II of this book demonstrated how development is portrayed as either divorced from social and material circumstances, or within so oversimplified and sanitised a conception of the 'social' that it diverts and proscribes critical evaluation and colludes in the pathologisation of individuals and groups on the basis of their failure to reflect the Western, middle-class norms that have structured developmental psychological research. In Parts II and III we saw how these assumptions have structured not only the explicit accounts of how to care for, and

who should care for, children, but also enter in less direct but equally evaluative ways into accounts of language and learning. ‘Sensitive’ mothers are not only better mothers in the ways that they respond to and look after their charges, but they also maximalise (Rose, 1990) their children’s learning. We may claim, as the theories of cognitive development and education discussed in Part IV do, to deal with the ‘whole child’, but this child is endowed with a false unity conferred by its abstraction from social relations. These last chapters have argued that the rationality, relationality and individualism that ‘he’ (or even ‘she’) is accorded construct an image of mental life which mirrors market demands for skills and efficient functioning. The costs of accounting for development in these ways are that, beneath the facade of the whole, adjusted and integrated self, the subject of developmental psychology is fragmented, alienated and split.

In 30 years of teaching a wide range of undergraduate, postgraduate and professional groups – across disciplines as diverse as nursing, youth and community work, education, counselling, psychotherapy, early years, childhood studies and social work – within each group I have encountered two sorts of reactions to developmental psychology. One is that it is mystificatory and jargon ridden, which creates some hostility on the grounds of its exclusivity and inaccessibility; the other is to dismiss it as simply common sense. Significantly, both reactions are correct. What should be clear from this book is that dressed up in its claims to present some particular expertise (of which it devotes considerable energy to maintaining sole control), developmental psychology (like the rest of psychology) imports ideological understandings into its theories that are incorporated into ‘science’. As I have shown, the methodologies as well as the theories reflect these assumptions. Further, coded at a deeper level through the relation between science and modern states, advanced capitalism demands more elaborate and specialised modes of individualisation.

Disciplinary tensions

In contrast to developmental psychology’s model of the child development as stable, regular and uniform, the discipline of childhood studies is devoted to the understanding of children and childhoods. This has subscribed to a model of the child as competent social actor (e.g. James *et al.*, 1998). Informed by sociological, anthropological and historical approaches (among others), it has challenged what is seen as developmental psychology’s deficit or inferiority model, that focuses on what children cannot do relative to adults, and positions children as passive (Alderson, 2002). While developmental psychological work makes claims for children’s needs, childhood studies has offered rich descriptions of the complexity and diversity of children’s lives. It connects with but also stands in tension with child rights and advocacy movements, both claiming universal rights for children but refusing to be limited to and by their (developmental psycholegal, Cordero Arce, 2015) models of children’s capacities and agencies. An attention to children’s agency, constrained and enacted in particular cultural-political contexts, prompts a way of reconciling culturally relativist and universalist rights-based approaches. As Nieuwenhuys (2008) put it:

...between the Scylla of inaction and the Charybdis of an implausible children’s rights agenda the way out is to reject both childhood and culture essentialism in favour of a focus on children’s agency. The popularity of abstract universalism and the disgust that cultural relativism may inspire should not obfuscate the point that, as Bourdieu suggests, universal values need not necessarily be viewed as eternal, abstract truths. In short, limiting our understanding of children’s rights to legal codes, however widely endorsed,

would severely limit, not increase, both children's entitlements and our understanding of children's subjectivity in the making of both culture and childhood. Foregrounding children's subjectivity entails a non-essentialist notion of culture and childhood. If children can act ethically and be the subjects of their own history, then there is nothing in either culture or childhood that is enduring or unchangeable. Cultures or childhood are more than constraining structures that shape children's subjectivities. Both are also children's making. Culture and childhood are conceptual domains in flux: they are not 'things' or natural phenomena, as in the essentialist approaches, but practices that adults and children have the power to discard, adapt and transform. To understand how, an ethics of children's rights that views children as subjects of their own history, acting on their situation and attempting to change the conditions of access to universalism may hold an important clue. (p. 7–8)

Childhood studies therefore stands as a useful corrective to and commentary upon psychological models, challenging the naturalisation and abstraction of children and notions of childhood by emphasising children's active engagement in and transformation of social practices. In this sense we can see something of the division of labour between these approaches, as each appears to address a different, but equally significant, area of social policy. Developmental psychology has been accorded (or rather, as we have seen, managed to wrest away from medicine) the role of arbiter of normality, while other disciplines have addressed the cultural context of children's activities, including the situated character of the evaluation these attract. Both function politically, and none are innocent in terms of the broader agendas they contribute to. For example, both developmental psychology and child rights approaches can mobilise instrumental accounts of children and childhoods (i.e. to inform social policy on national development). Both are implicated within current economically instrumentalising discourses of investment and citizenship. Moreover, however justified such critiques may be, and however valuable it may be to see children's lives as cultures (rather than as abstracted from culture and engaged in some quasi-biological natural process, as Clark *et al.* 2005 also point out), there remains a problem to conceptualise just what it is that makes children different from adults – other than social status (although this clearly is very important). This is not to say that sociologists and historians are naive about developmental changes associated with age; rather it was a key analytical strategy to 'bracket' out such notions, to allow room for other considerations to emerge. In this sense, however, the two approaches remain deeply connected, if only by virtue of their structural antagonism. While of course developmental psychology does not, and should not, have the franchise on models of change and development, it remains our task to engage with and reformulate these models in the light of critiques from elsewhere; and vice versa. Barrie Thorne (2007) commented on what she called 'the continuing wall of silence between the "new social studies of childhood" and the field of child development', claiming

I believe that the complex articulation of different types of temporality – historical, generational, chronological, phenomenological, developmental, biological – should be central to the study of children and childhoods. *Questions about individual growth and the shifting constitution of persons over time, which are central to the study of human development, have the potential to enrich the anthropology, sociology, geography and history of childhood. But this will only happen if approaches to human development are more fully historicized, informed by meaningful attention to culture and social structure, and enriched by close attention to the ways in which children negotiate the process of*

growing older and participate in a range of social institutions. It will take extensive mutual dialogue to transcend this particular wall of silence. It's a tall order, methodologically and conceptually, but surely no one believes that understanding the whole of children's lives will be a smooth and easy task. (my emphasis, p.150)

My text here should be read as a preliminary effort to bring these perspectives into closer dialogue. Indeed, this third edition has drawn extensively on new educational, childhood studies, child rights, children's geographies and critical development studies literatures. Given the circulation and permeation of psychological culture under the 'psy complex', at the level of public policy as well as 'personal' lifestyle (i.e. consumer 'choice') and popular culture, clear disciplinary distinctions are not tenable. Indeed, psychologistic assumptions can lurk in models that are not explicitly psychological, just as psychologists are also as much consumers as producers of psychology – with developmental psychology probably a key culprit in this area. Normative ideas about children, families and relationships cannot simply be expunged or dispensed with. We cannot suspend or wish them away. Rather we have to interrogate them and reassess them, as we encounter their ambiguities. Nor can we substitute one set of certainties (critical or otherwise) for another. Instead we have to deal with the inevitably insufficient and underspecified character of our theories (whether in the form of assessment of psychological capacities or application of child rights policies) and consciously address the interpretive activity we engage in to make those theories applicable. As the various commentaries reviewed in early chapters suggested, policy responses to failures of state responsibilities towards children have typically taken the form of imposing further bureaucratic structures of regulation. But these cannot in themselves guarantee appropriate practice; they only specify minimum standards. The human qualities required for work with children and families cannot be legislated for, even if such legislation must document the consequences of their absence.

My primary aim in this book is to support those practitioners inside and outside psychology, many of whom have already generated their own suspicions of the partiality and inadequacy of current psychological models by making more accessible a range of critical tools and analyses. Thus the critiques of developmental psychology put forward here have emerged from within psychology (through what has become known as discursive and critical psychology), as well as from outside. Together, they offer a wide-ranging and coherent set of resources to challenge the prevailing ways in which assumptions about children and development are mobilised in national and international policies. They also, hopefully, can support alternative pedagogical practices (see Carolan and Zeedyk, 2006). Perhaps we could reclaim the multidisciplinary focus of 'child development' to trouble the narrower concerns of developmental psychology. At any rate, we can insist on the privilege and partiality of mainstream developmental psychology, and so better contest its insertions within, or 'application' to, social policy as offering only one version of the truth, rather than 'the' truth. Claims about what children are like have far-reaching effects, so that the basis of such claims – often currently rooted in supposedly scientific developmental psychology – demands particular vigilance. The project of prefiguring minds and bodies capable of revolutionary social change and the transformation of structures and relations of oppression remains as pressing as ever. But we will not find the answers in developmental psychology, now or ever.

Currently, neuroscientific explanations threaten to eclipse even these approaches that at least accord some psychological influence (whether conscious or unconscious) to parents, peers and societal norms. We saw in Chapters 3 and 7 how neuromythologies have arisen as culturally dominant ways of framing effects of psychological experiences on young children.

As was discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, these effects are thereby sometimes seen as installed before conception and reverberate on to subsequent generations. As various commentators have noted, this neuroscientific discourse has come to substitute for ethical-political debate about children and childhood, and threatens to evacuate the domain of the psychological altogether (De Vos and Pluth, 2015), As Suissa (2014) argues:

It is no longer enough to say that we shouldn't hit children because it shows a lack of respect for them as moral agents, or even simply that it is unkind: we need to look at evidence of the effects of these actions on the child's brain, or of a correlation between the use of physical punishment in certain population groups and the prevalence of anti-social behaviour. The disappearance of our moral language from discussions of parenting has the effect, I argue, of painting an impoverished picture of what it means to be a parent, and of moral life in general. (Suissa, 2014: 129)

As discussed in Chapter 5, the return of the notion of 'character' (as in character education programmes now flourishing in the US and being introduced into the UK) evokes both moral and static personality qualities, while the rise of the discourse of resilience that accompanies it seems to provide not only a value-neutral but also and situated, contextual account of adversity. Nevertheless the tension between these two terms dissolves, as 'adversity' folds back into individual developmental history which becomes abstracted from socio-material conditions to become questions of attachment history.

I suggest that the discourse of resilience displaces responsibilities at five levels: from context to child factors; from sociostructural to developmental; from 'us' to 'them' – that 'they' should do the optimising, not 'us'; from historical (sociocultural, political) time to individual chronological time; and finally, from political conditions (poverty, racism, injustice) to notions of individual wellbeing and agency. We need to replace the bounce-back hardness and singularity of current frameworks of resilience with some other, more relational, understandings of solidarity and support so that 'resilient children' and 'resilient communities' are not treated in abstraction from the circumstances that require such qualities.

Bonding for beginners? From home to school to the state

As we have seen, discourses of attachment and bonding consistently mix up questions of directionality and intergenerational roles, and confuse 'active' agents (whether biochemical or interpersonal) with their correlates or reflections in other domains and at other (conceptual-political) levels. Whether mixing up theory with its measures (in attachment and the 'strange situation'), or technical with popular and political readings or deployments (as in the claims about neuroscientific evidence), psychological models of the dependencies and interdependencies between adults, children and the state function powerfully. While the importance of consistent and secure relationships (in early but also later life) is unlikely to be in question, what is consistently not interrogated is the increasingly discretionary status of the state's commitments to those living within its borders (Bhattacharya, 2013a, 2013b). Alongside national and international economic policy incitement of detached, mobile, flexible and individualised workers whose residency, citizenship entitlements and jobs are increasingly insecure, there is mounting scrutiny and pressure on the micropolitics of ever earlier caregiving relationships to compensate for and protect against those wider – current and future – challenges, insults and state disinvestment in its own populations. This is, as we have seen, how the discourse of resilience emerges as a poor substitute for state retrenchment and reconfiguration of its social bonds with children, families and communities.

Copyright © 2016. Routledge. All rights reserved.

Moreover, some (especially poor, minoritised and refugee) communities are accorded less secure status than others, are deemed less trustworthy and less worthy or deserving of support. Here the discourse of security shifts from the first fantasies of foetal sonography to the domain of transnational relations and geopolitical conditions. The ties that bind us together, forged from early experiences of helplessness, dependency, vulnerability, gratitude and affection may reverberate throughout our lives. They are perhaps reworked (depending on models of therapy), and are certainly in need of reconfirmation in our daily lives. They are central to ideas about mental health and wellbeing, and they are the basis of capacities to care. But at the level of the state, the 'secure base' of support for consistent housing, health and social care, for continuity of networks of relationships in communities, for reliable experiences of mutual engagements, appears not only to be sorely lacking but is also being actively undermined. The discourse of social bonds ushers in as its complement other, less explicit, configurations: of neglect, of exclusion; but also of violence, of bondage. This violence, as we have seen, has been structured into the psychological debates on attachment in literal, symbolic (epistemological and representational) ways.

It should be noted that attachment theorists have also pondered these issues and called for a reflexive and committed engagement with the wider political and philosophical commitments implied by its theory (of care, commitment and relationship), rather than as a technology than can be applied to address prevailing social imperatives (Carr and Costas Batlle, 2015). Further, while the affective turn in social theory has brought emotions to the fore, it has also rendered them open to some critical scrutiny. As we saw in Chapters 4 and 5, empathic identifications with children, and sentimentalisation of their positions or conditions, can work unhelpfully as much as to support practical programmes of intervention. Instead, there are calls to explore 'alternative empathies' that '... do not view emotions instrumentally as sources of – or solutions to – complex social and political problems, but rather examine diverse and shifting relations of feeling for what they might tell us about the affective workings of power in a transnational world' (Pedwell, 2013, p. 18). Indeed, the cultivation of emotional sensitivities (of the kind incited by the neoliberal, so-called affective capitalist, turn) may work to support the development practitioners rather than those they aim to support: 'Empathy may function here less to produce more intersubjective relations and ways of knowing than it does to augment the moral and affective capacities of development professionals' (Pedwell, 2012: 163). Nevertheless, in a specific discussion of aid and development practice, Pedwell suggests 'it is in the ambivalences, tensions and contradictions of both emotion and neoliberalism that spaces for thinking and feeling transnational encounters differently might be cultivated'. (ibid.)

Constructing and deconstructing

This book has attempted to identify and evaluate the central themes that have structure contemporary developmental psychology. In part the journey has been a historical one, in aiming to understand the specific conditions that prompted the emergence of, and agenda for, what has come to be a central agency for the regulation and control of individual and family life. It has been necessary to look both within and beyond the theories to understand the cultural and political role that the academic practice of developmental psychology fulfils. Both home and school are informed by developmental psychology, as also it is mobilised to narrate political debate about children, communities and families. It enters into the ways we talk and reflect upon our feelings and intellect and, more than this, produces 'us' in its image.

The process of delineating and commenting on these discourses is part of the process of deconstructing, of dismantling the power of this apparatus for the construction of subjects by which we are disciplined and constituted. This book has reviewed how inequality and differential treatment on the basis of class, culture, gender, age and sexuality have permeated the deep structure of developmental psychological practice. Both in its terms of formulation and via its insertions in social policy, developmental psychology has therefore contributed to the maintenance of the social formation which gave rise to it.

These problems are increasingly acknowledged within, as well as outside, the discipline. The range of proposals put forward includes the need for a greater diversity of theoretical resources, and for espousing a set of moral-political commitments that lie outside the discipline with which to reinterpret grandiose (universalist, ahistorical) developmental claims (both as formulated from within developmental psychology and as ‘applied’ within social policies). It is important to note that this does not necessarily mean jettisoning all the models and methods of developmental psychology, but it certainly means tempering the claims made for them and understanding better which perspectives they privilege and which they exclude. For some commentators, perhaps the same kind of developmental questions remain, but we should expect to get multiple answers; while for others, such as Woodhead *et al.* (1999), cultural psychology has come to offer a key alternative resource (see also Crafter, 2015), or dialogical approaches (Bertau, 2014). Nelson *et al.* (2000) produced one such reformulation of the project as follows:

To state that we must understand a particular child’s developmental history and specific life experiences does not mean to deny commonality in the developmental process and product. Rather, the expectation is that particular applications of a common process may result in different pathways toward understanding and different constructions of a general model. Commonalities in psychological understanding arise because people, including children at all ages, are engaged in *making sense* of their worlds, and in particular of making sense of self and others in the social milieu in which they find themselves. The job of the researcher is to articulate this process of making sense and apply it to the problems of psychological understanding.

(Nelson *et al.*, 2000: 77)

This project of weighing up the generality of claims in relation to the specificities of local contexts and conventions surrounding childhood is also just as much an issue in the application of child rights legislation, where equivalent problems of cultural imperialism in the imposition (or equally withholding!) of particular understandings of children and childhoods come to the fore. There is now a significant literature addressing this set of problems (see e.g. Burman, 1996c; Franklin, 2002b; Ansell, 2005; Burr, 2006), while Hanson and Nieuwenhuys (2013) conceptualise the process of translating children’s rights into specific arenas of practice. Overall the project of decolonising psychology has a long way to go and there are particular problems – to do with psychology’s deep implication in the Anglo-Eurocentric order – that make this a complex and perhaps impossible endeavour (Strauble, 2005), while the figure of the child can work within colonial and perhaps also anticolonial discourse (Burman, 2016c, 2016d, 2016e, 2016f). Hopkins and Sriprakash (2016) end their collection with a challenge and call:

The tendency towards simplification, categorisation and universality appeals to a desire for development to be a process that is coherent, linear and commensurable, and whose technical success can be easily measures in the face of such complexity and contingency ... For those working the space of education and international development, there is a task and

an opportunity at hand: to keep the discourse of universality open, 'to keep it as a contested site of persistent crisis and not let it be settled' (Butler, 2004, 340).

(Sripakash and Hopkins, 2016, p. 201)

I have been using the term 'deconstruction' as a mode of analysis which invites scrutiny of the limits and presuppositions that have guided research. While deconstruction threatens to disallow absolute justification of any position (Burman, 1990, 1993) – including mine here – nevertheless there can be no fully practising deconstructor. In this sense Woodhead *et al.*'s (1999) depiction of a relativist constructionism that refuses to take a moral-political stance is not a necessary consequence. In his words: 'A point must be established where diversity becomes deprivation, where variation becomes violation, plurality becomes pathology, by any standards' (p. 16). This also echoes the tensions between childhood studies and child rights approaches, noted above. Rather, the deconstructionist project aims to bring to light, to acknowledge, the investment and hidden subjectivity that lie beneath the claims to disinterested, true knowledge. To move too swiftly from deconstruction to reconstruction may foreclose the emergence of other interpretive and political possibilities that could come from a more sustained interrogation of hidden presuppositions of developmental reasoning. Beyond this, it inevitably risks replacing one exclusionary disciplinary apparatus with another – for there is no innocent or neutral position. Hence the impetus behind this book reflects Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's (1990) characterisation of the 'corrective and critical' role of deconstruction:

In one way or another academics are in the business of ideological production Our institutional responsibility is of course to offer a responsible critique of the structure of production of the knowledge we teach even as we teach it, but, in addition, we must go public as often as we can.

(Spivak, 1990: 103)

What is achieved by such a process of deconstruction? I would like to hope that at the very least some caution about the indiscriminate application of general models should follow, and in particular how these are 'applied' or interpreted to inform policies and models of childhood, with their implications both for service provision and for practices of 'development' more generally.

Ideas are tools for change, and they are certainly used to prevent change. The purpose of this deconstruction is to lay bare, to make public, the parameters by which our own change and development has been structured. The domain of developmental psychology is a modern, Western construction, which is itself contested and under revision, though currently often continually reinvented. Taking apart, challenging its scientific certainty and grip on common sense, may help us to recognise other ways of talking about those issues that currently are dealt with within the terms of developmental psychology, and perhaps other developmental psychologies to formulate. Exploitation and oppression suffuse the structure of developmental psychology. Our task is to deconstruct it.

Further reading

Burman, E. (2008a) Between two deaths: Reconfiguring metaphors and ethics of childhood, Chapter 12, in *Developments: Child, image, nation*, London: Routledge, pp. 257–77.

Burman, E. (2010) Between two debts: Child and international development, in N. Yelland (ed.) *Contemporary perspectives on early childhood education*, Buckingham: Open University Press/McGraw Hill Education, pp. 33–49.

- Burman, E. (2016e) 'Fanon's Other Children: psychopolitical and pedagogical implications', *Race, Ethnicity & Education*, DOI: 10.1080/13613324.2016.1150832
- Burman, E. (2016f) 'Fanon, Foucault, Feminisms: Psychoeducation, theoretical psychology and political change', *Theory & Psychology*, DOI: 10.1177/0959354316653484
- Burman, E. (2016d) 'Fanon and the child: pedagogies of subjectification and transformation, *Curriculum Inquiry*, 46:3 (2016), 265–85.
- Gibbs, J. C. (2014) *Moral development and reality: Beyond the theories of Kohlberg, Hoffman, and Haidt*, 3rd edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Klein, E. (2017) *Development studies and the psychological domain*, London: Routledge.
- Nieuwenhuys, O. (2008) Editorial – The ethics of children's rights, *Childhood*, 15(1): 4–11.
- Suissa, J. (2014) Tough love and character education: Reflections on some contemporary notions of good parenting, *Kultura Pedagogiczna*, 1: 115–31.
- Tag, M. (2012) Universalizing early childhood: History, forms and logics, in A. Twum-Danso Imoh and R. Ame (eds.) *Childhoods at the intersection of the local and the global*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, pp. 34–55.

Suggested activities

1. Take any developmental psychology test or assessment task (whether of infant development scales, conservation tasks or childrearing styles) and consider:
 - its claims to generality
 - the extent to which the categorisation of behaviours reflects or refers to specific cultural practices
 - the extent to which the definition of positive parenting behaviours addresses culturally specific understandings of children's qualities and corresponding models of caregiving activities.
2. Explore Boyden's (1990) notion of the 'globalisation of childhood', alongside Tag's (2012) analysis and also alongside representations of childhood as discussed in *Disability and the Global South* (www.dsgjournal.org). What are the dominant cultural images of childhood? Whose childhood do they reflect? How do these engage with debates about competence and ability (and disability)? How does poverty structure childhood and what counts as disability? Collect a corpus of images of children from different national contexts and explore:
 - whether the children are used to express the same or different sets of qualities
 - to what extent the children are represented within or as separate from their cultural and familial context. What implications can be drawn from this about (a) models of development and (b) the symbolic functions played by images of children?