

CHILDREN AS LEGITIMATE CLAIMS MAKERS ON SOCIETAL RESOURCES

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Introduction

There is in Europe a strong and widespread impression that the state – as the main acknowledged agent of welfare – is a great, neutral patron of cash and services. It is ideally thought of as an impartial and just Maecenas with the best of intentions to serve its people equitably. Indeed, ideally and in our common imagery, it rises over and above major and petty interests to prevent and repair at least some of the damages done by capitalism and the market in terms of exclusion from sharing available resources in society. In this sense the state is seen as a partisan of the weaker and troubled groups in society.

To some extent this imagery is true. Whether one prefers to find the rationale of the welfare state in Bismarck, and thus see it as an instrument for calming down a threatening unrest among the working class; or in Beveridge, and thus understand it as an act of fairness to losers in the marked economy, it is possible to ascertain evidence of re-distributive effects of public interventions, be they in cash or kind. It is possible to establish that societies with strong welfare state regimes makes a difference to those countries that are firmer in their beliefs that the market will, at the end of the day, be a blessing rather than curse. What is demanded, basically, is patience on the side of people. If they wait long enough, fruits will be harvested. This is particularly true for children, who as rights holders and claims makers are latecomers in a double sense.

Historically, they are arguably the single remaining group, which has not yet been recognised as claims makers on current political and societal resources. The political and industrial revolutions of the West, Bendix said, “lead to the eventual recognition of the rights of

citizenship for *all adults*, including those in positions of economic dependence” (Bendix, 1977, p. 66, my italics) – but not for children, who did not as subjects take advantage of these changes. In a sense, following the arguments by Bendix, they still – politically and economically – are part of a feudal system, which accorded no immediate rights “to subjects in positions of economic dependence such as tenants, journeymen, workers and servants: at best they are classified *under the household* of their master and represented through him and his estates” (ibid. p. 66-67, my italics).

It would, of course, be outrageous to suggest that nothing has happened to children over the last five hundred years, but it is interesting to note that formally children remain by and large subsumed the household – or perhaps more precisely: the family – without individual rights as subjects. Despite much progress made, for instance recently due to the Convention for the Rights of Children, it remains to be doubted that children have economic and political rights as autonomous citizens.

Also in terms of a life phase perspective, children are lagging behind. Thus, it has been argued that it is not necessarily unfair if children experience differential treatment; in a life long perspective there is, as it is suggested, a certain justice in such a perspective, since they will sooner or later reach adulthood themselves and therefore, “if we treat the young one way and the old another, then over time, each person is treated both ways. The advantages (or disadvantages) of consistent differential treatment by age will equalize over time” (Daniels, 1988, p. 88). Children will in other words, once upon a time, obtain the right and the opportunity to compete equally with other adults on the market or, eventually, become a target for re-distributive measures, if they should fail. According to this reasoning children are not, as a societal group or a collective, foreseen as beneficiaries of resources, and thus childhood remains a site for missing legitimate rights or claims. An argument in this vein is logically tantamount to proposing that it is the fate of children to be dealt with differentially and thus a failure to recognise child poverty (or riches, for that matter) as a problem. The argument says that one should not bother if children are relatively more exposed to material risks than adults and elderly people: they will get their time sooner or later. In addition, this idea to deprive children of a right to access to necessary resources would of course delay any efforts to include children among the groups with citizen rights on par with other groups.

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Finally, as Sgritta (1994, p. 358) argues, it suggests that society is “immutable, stable, ahistorical” and thus overlooks the reality of rapidly changing conditions which may very well – and in fact do – change so as to leave persons born at different times exposed to varying conditions. The likelihood that conditions will not equalise is in other words overwhelming.

However, children’s missing claims and rights do not necessarily affect their material situation, because resources are in fact channelled to children in a welfare state. There is no doubt that some of the re-distributive effects of welfare state measures are benefiting children. Yet, the question is to which extent this is intended in all cases or if it is merely a derived effect of resources being targeting other groups, such as children’s parents. Typically, one might suggest, this does not ensue from legitimate or constitutional claims that children hold. Persons dispose of such claims only as they become adults, as Bendix said.

This is, I think, the precarious status of childhood in modern society. It may well be an empirical reality that children have access to most relevant available resources in equal manner with other groups, but their precarious situation is highlighted by the fact that their access to welfare measures is not one that is assured by the law. Indeed, their current welfare status is the result of incidental alterations at the discretion of day-to-day policy. Therefore, I am afraid, children are in principle more exposed to market forces than other groups in society. This is only exacerbated by their status as dependants under the almost exclusionary guardianship of their parents, making children by and large a private matter. Indeed, any intervention on their behalf by extra-familial bodies or agencies is typically regarded as unwarranted and illegitimate.

I shall in this chapter discuss the position of children in the modern welfare state – be it as a part of the wider phenomenon of welfare societies or ‘soziale Marktwirtschaften’. In both cases we have to do with a capitalist market society tempered by welfare measures to alleviate the crude effects of a pure market. I shall address questions such as

- Children’s market status before state interventions
- Are children objectively speaking in need of welfare state provisions?
- What is children’s place in welfare state theory and practice?
- Who – in terms of groups, institutions, and agencies – are primarily responsible for children’s welfare?

The market: children's in- and exclusion

All of us – children, youth, adults and old aged – live in a capitalist market society. For the sake of clarification, let me briefly consider children's role in this type of society, i.e. before the state intervenes.

Basically, children are *included* in the market in two ways: Firstly, they – or some of them – occupy a job for wages after their school hours. This is allegedly their only *own* acknowledged contribution to the economic fabric, and adult society looks upon it with ambivalence. Although it may loom large for children involved, for their families and for some niches in the economy, it remains – as I have argued elsewhere (see Qvortrup, 2000) – too tiny a part of modern society's production to be dealt with in this argument.

Secondly, children are included in the market as consumers – by means of their own, but mainly of their parents' and sometimes their grandparents' money. As such childhood is an important target for commercial advertising and a parameter to be reckoned with in the budgets of many trades, but since this is merely a derived effect of incomes available to them, I shall not follow this strand either.

Much more important, I think, it is to make clear that children as persons and as a group are by and large *excluded* from the market. There are four principles according to which goods are distributed in our society (see Rubinstein, 1988):

- The principle of *fair exchange*, which means, in Homans' words, that “the net rewards, or profit, of each man be proportional to his investments” (Homans, 1961, p. 75).
- The *meritocratic* principle, which in our society is established mainly in terms of educational achievements.
- The *entitlement* principle, according to which assets are distributed due to for instance inheritance or seniority.
- The principle of *need*, which has been introduced relatively late in history.

The former two principles pertain to the market in terms of *achievement*. This implies a *de facto* exclusion of children, who are seen neither as investors, nor as contributors that would provide them with claims in terms of reciprocity, nor, yet, do they possess educational merits on the basis of which they would legitimately be demanding a share of societal resources. It is worthwhile in this context to note that children by way of conventional definition of the

situation are effectively prevented from having their efforts in schools assessed as a valuable input into the social fabric (see more below).

As to entitlement, which is not strictly speaking a market principle, children may of course have a right on inheritance, but this right will typically be administered by their adult guardians. Only when it comes to the principle of need, children are foreseen and this principle is the only one, which is definitely beyond the realm of the market. Children do qualify as needy recipients due to their low age, and thus this principle is formulated in terms of *ascription*, as is by and large also the entitlement principle. The question is, however, as shall be discussed below, whether children are really the subject of this principle of need or if even this is delegated to someone else.

Whether an exclusion of children in their own right from a market based distributive system is just or not is another matter. The fact that they are excluded from the market and destined to rely on a needs-criterion does, by implication, classify them as dependants and significantly contribute to portraying them as non-deserving members of the dominant system. Their needs are, accordingly, supposed to be met by other agents among which the most important one is their family, while the welfare state only ranges as a secondary agent when deemed necessary for one reason or another.

Since welfare state considerations and welfare state measures intentionally and in terms of outcomes must be assessed as expressions of distributive justice, let me briefly resume the discussion of justice, alluded to above. As we saw, a philosopher like Daniels did not see a problem in discriminating children, since they would catch up later in life. It is characteristic of discussions of social justice as a legal or economic problem, that children are excluded from considerations, as pointed out by Bojer, who makes a meritorious effort to bring them into a Rawlsian chain of argument, although the word 'child' does not occur in the index of Rawls' famous work (Rawls, 1973).

It is Bojer's view that the Rawlsian contract "implies concern also for children as subjects in themselves" (Bojer, 2000, p. 24), that is a view dealing with children in life cycle perspective. Yet, as I understand it, her major argument is that neglecting distributive justice for children may jeopardise their rational choices as adults, and since no one has had the possibility to choose one's own childhood, a lack of consideration of provisions for children so as to obtain equality of opportunity severely hampers one's ability to involve oneself in risk taking in adult life on equal terms with others. One might add, that the inequality this entails has

implications for children whose fate is tailored on parental choices, that in turn have been determined in and by their childhood conditions. This therefore raises questions about the social arrangements for children – even in such advanced welfare states as the Nordic countries. As Bojer says: “Everywhere, the workplace and production of material wealth command priority before the nurture and rearing of children. Economic incentives are certainly not geared towards making child care a materially rewarding profession. Parental leave is considered disruptive to the workplace” (Bojer, 2000, p. 36).

Bojer is concerned with children’s rights and conditions as children. Due to the interconnectedness of child and adult conditions in a life cycle perspective, she has a point, even if her justification for making primary goods (such as love, security, material resources, opportunities to grow and develop) available to children is that they enhance adults’ opportunities to make rational choices. It is indeed important, as Bojer does, to explicitly bring children into these significant debates; however, the futurity of children remains the decisive yardstick. One might ask: what would distributive justice to children look like without the prospects in terms of human capital building, i.e. without a perspective on their adult future?

In the Rawlsian scheme it remains, in addition, a difficulty to include children as subject, given the facts (a) that the arguments are based on rational choices made by adults, and (b) that children are not considered to possess the ability to make such choices. This discussion I shall not take up here (for an argument, see Mortier, 2000).

Children’s objective needs for welfare measures

Although the needs-criterion does not belong to a market vocabulary, the market does not completely forget children. Partly because the market leaves its imprint on practically every corner and aspect of our life world, indeed including children’s everyday life. Partly, and in this context most importantly, because – in our economic-political system – children are ideologically belongings of their parents, which means that it is parents who are responsible for them, not only morally and existentially but also economically. Since parents’ capacity to care for children is highly dependent on the market, children will logically also be impacted by the market, although indirectly. It follows from this that children’s well being, short of state intervention, is basically a result of parents’ class position, which again is contingent on their ability to obtain a fair exchange for their investments or contributions on the one hand and, on the other, their educational merits.

The market dependence of parents has further implications. To sketch only a few: it is, of course, an economic advantage for the whole family that two rather than one income is obtained; on the other hand double work of parents means another problem to be solved, namely the care of children while parents are working. Merits and high market values conditioning high net rewards seem historically to be connected with individualism and secularisation, which in turn is likely to be one reason for a growing incidence of divorce, and thus releasing a whole new set of needs for children's well being to be covered. Many others can be quoted.

There is ample evidence to document the outcome of the interaction of these factors for the material well being of children. Most dramatically is this observed in current developing nations, as economic problems are sought solved by international bodies such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank by means of austerity measures implying a larger exposure to the market, while cuts in health and educational programmes are deemed necessary. Also in developed countries, evidence is clear. A very useful overview to this effect was published recently by UNICEF (2000). Before taxes and transfers, i.e. in a pure market situation, child poverty ranges from 15.8 percent in Norway to 36.1 percent in the UK. Germany is at 16.8 percent, Sweden a surprising 23.4 percent and France at 28.7 percent. Unfortunately, there is no comparison with other age groups as far as these pre-tax and pre-transfer incomes are concerned.

Parents' labour market participation leaves children – at least up to a certain age – with no other choice than attending one or another institutional arrangement, be it kindergarten, school, after-school institution or the like. This in turn implies a more or less determined time schedule for children and constraints on their movements. At the same time, in countries where the demand for institutions is far from met, parents and children are faced with a no less severe problem of making parents' work schemes comply with children's need for care.

There are in other words a number of internally connected factors that appear as a framework for children's life worlds – even before society enters to ameliorate the effects. It is important to bear them in mind when later we shall be addressing the question of responsibility for children's welfare. As the Canadian economist Harry G. Johnson has reminded us: "... since the society is founded on the belief that individual freedom to introduce change serves the social good, the society and not the individual member should assume the costs that this freedom may impose on other members when these costs become unreasonably high. Beyond

a certain point, the society collectively should bear the economic risks imposed on the family by dependence on the sale of its services, because society itself creates those risks” (Johnson, 1962, p. 191).

So far I have dealt with children’s position as a result of the market. By and large, one can conclude, children are not themselves appreciated as appropriate market agents, but however good the intentions they cannot escape its massive influence in general and in particular because of their dependence on their parents’ market value. Not seldom, the family is sought portrayed as a ‘haven in a heartless world’, as if they were separated from each other. One should certainly not overlook a family’s protective importance for children; I wonder, however, if the danger is not larger in underestimating the impact of the ‘heartless world’ on the family.

To which extent, thus, does society through welfare state measures accommodate the needs of children and their parents, whereby one should not forget the interests society at large has itself of such interventions and indeed, its interests in both family and children.

Children’s place in welfare state theory and practice

Although children are often mentioned, the question still is *how* they are represented in traditional welfare and citizenship theory. A preliminary search in this body of literature shows quite a meagre and ambiguous result. Apart from cases where children are accounted for empirically (see Ringen, 1997, Townsend, 1970, and Titmuss, 1968), one has to say that – to the extent children are thought of at all – the literature exhibits a considerable helplessness in addressing children, whom it must be difficult to completely ignore in any encompassing analysis.

Dahrendorf (1996, p. 35), for instance talks about ‘the vexing issue of children in the scheme of citizenship’, and is apparently unable or unwilling to accept it as a serious issue. In a recent book, ‘Welfare’, meant as an introduction to and overview of the field, the author, Norman Barry (1999) does not mention children at all.

Also for Marshall, children remain invisible, as it is noted in a new book on his classical work *Citizenship and Social Class* (see Bulmer and Rees, 1996). The editors of this book explicitly list children among the ‘omissions from Marshall’s schema’. This schema, as you will know, identifies three main categories of citizenship:

- *legal citizenship* or civil rights such as ‘liberty of person, freedom of speech, thought and faith, the right to own property and to conclude valid contracts, and the right to justice’,
- *political citizenship* in terms of the franchise and right of access to public office, and
- *social citizenship* in terms of social rights ranging from ‘the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in social heritage and to live the life of a civilised being according to the standards prevailing in society’.

To these types of citizenship correspond four sets of public institutions: the first two sets are *the courts* (for protection of civil rights) and *the representative bodies* (to secure access to participation in decision making). The last two sets are *the social services*, which are there to ensure some minimum of protection against poverty, sickness, and other misfortunes, and *the schools*, to make it possible for all members of the community to receive at least the basic elements of an education.

Marshall’s basic scheme

Categories of citizenship	Corresponding institutions
Legal	Courts
Political	Representative bodies
Social	Social services
	Schools

In the wake of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, there is definitely more to say about the first two sets, the political and the legal realms; nevertheless, it is my contention that both of them remain largely insubstantial for children. I shall therefore concentrate on the two last institutions corresponding to the third of the mentioned categories of citizenship – the social citizenship.

As mentioned above the market leaves children vulnerable in monetary terms as well as in terms of services. I do not intend to report in any detail about the comparative situation of children in different countries, if not for other reasons because the space does not allow as much as an approximation of the tremendous complexities in these areas (see for instance Rostgaard and Fridberg, 1998). If one looks at the rules and the realities of children’s ‘social

citizenship', if I am permitted to use Marshall's term, there are at least three striking facts as far as European countries are concerned:

- (1) There is everywhere some basic minimum under which children are unlikely to fall; as far as poverty and deprivation is concerned, data on for instance child mortality rates, nutrition, and health care suggest that some protection is provided compared with a pure market situation (as is occasionally found in the USA, but of course much more to the extreme in many Third World countries).
- (2) In terms of services, schooling is in all countries regarded as a social right, although it is not always clear who is its main beneficiary – is it the family, the child or society? On the other hand, services such as crèches, kindergartens and care arrangements after school hours are nowhere seen as an obligation for the community to provide.
- (3) There are between European countries such huge differences in monetary and service provisions that one is permitted to assume a remarkable high level of political discretion as to fulfil children's social citizenship as a legitimate claim.

Despite trends to privatisation and deregulation since Reaganism, Thatcherism and the dismantling of the socialist world, there remains some belief in the welfare state – not least in continental Europe and with a particular stronghold in the Nordic countries. In most European nations it is part of most influential political parties' programmes to secure a decent standard of life for families with children, and nowhere it is regarded as acceptable to face the reality of child poverty. Therefore there are in all these countries measures to alleviate this burden. The reception in the public discourse of the reality of child poverty is ambiguous: while on the one hand there are few institutionalised and obligatory means to do away with it, public opinion regards the phenomenon as a scandal – even more so than poverty in general. As it has been said by political scientist Christoph Butterwege: "In der öffentliche Debatte gelten Kinder mittlerweile als würdige Arme und arbeitsfähige Sozialhilfeempfänger als unwürdige, die ruhig schikaniert werden können" (see *Die Zeit*, Nr. 51, 13. Dezember 2001, p. 25). The common attitude is thus expressed in clear moralistic terms, while a moral standpoint would be demanding institutional channels to eradication of child poverty.

With huge differences between countries, something is however done to alleviate the burden of poverty. In the quoted league tables the effects of policy measures were given. From a pre- to a post-tax and transfer situation, i.e. as a result of public intervention in a pure market situation, the poverty rate was reduced in Sweden by 89 percent points, in the UK by 45, in

France by 72; in Norway by 75, and in Germany by 36 percent points. This very varied picture reflects not only different policies, often quite efficient, but also – and most importantly – that nowhere states have a clear-cut obligation to abolish child poverty. This fact becomes even clearer when we look at the difference in poverty incidence between children in lone-parent families and children in other families (i.e. families with two parents).

Table 1.

Child poverty: before tax and transfer for all children; after tax and transfer for all children, for children in lone-parent families and in other families.

	Pre tax and transfer All children	Post tax and transfer		
		All children	Children of lone parents	Children in other families
UK	36.1	19.8	45.6	13.3
France	28.7	7.9	26.1	6.4
Sweden	23.4	2.6	6.7	1.5
Germany	16.8	10.7	51.2	6.2
Norway	15.9	3.9	13.1	2.2

Source: UNICEF League Tables, 2000.

There are obviously in each case reasons for this dispersion. As it is well known, there are in each country different administrative units responsible for implementing welfare measures, and it may well be that what is granted at one level is taken away at another level. A well intended decision at the national level, for example, to extend kindergarten coverage may cause problems at the level of municipalities, if they have not been granted sufficient means by the state. Thus at the end of the day, parents may be asked to augment their share of payments, which in turn imply a reduction in disposable family income. This apparent conflict between administrative levels can only be contained as such if families (or children) were secured rights to certain services, for instance kindergartens. But children do typically not have such rights.

The most important example of an apparent right for children is schooling. Thus it is a fact that in all European welfare states children's attendance rate is more or less 100 per cent, and

it is also by and large free of charge. Now, as far as schooling is concerned there are some intriguing problems.

Firstly, it is often said that children have a right to attend schools, or to be more precise: to receive education. In fact, not even this is true in most countries. Parents have the obligation to make sure that children receive education, and children are obliged to receive this education. What is interesting is that not even here are welfare measures targeting children; it is their parents who are targeted. To the extent children have rights themselves, it is a right they are forced to receive.

Secondly, it is a question if schooling should at all be seen as a welfare measure for parents or children. As suggested by the German 5th Familienbericht, expenses for schooling should rather be seen as basic societal investments on line with other provisions for societal infrastructure in general (Bundesministerium, 1994, p. 291). In this perspective, schooling is seen not primarily as an individual's right, but as a collective service for the society as a whole. This view has important implications.

The suggestion seems to be that since educational investments are for the common good, and thus of equal significance for all members and sections of society, these investments must count as a contribution to maintaining and reproducing the society as a whole. By and large this is also the case, since educational investments are borne by the public purse. One has to remember, however, that also the child's parents are heavily involved in his or her educational project and therefore contribute to the reproduction of the labour force, and not merely to the child's becoming an adult. From the point of view of justice, therefore the implication of the German Familienbericht's proposition is a compensation to the family for parents' contributions to the common good. This was in fact also the conclusion drawn, but one that was received reluctantly by the German government, because of the tremendous expenses that it would incur. This is understandable from a political point of view, but hardly consistent with the view that children's welfare and well being are important assets for maintaining and reproducing society.

The argument about schooling as a prerequisite for societal reproduction, and not merely one of individual reproduction serving children in their quest for personal futures, has been raised several times, for instance by Margaret Wynn in her classical book on family policy (Wynn, 1972). More recently Folbre makes the similar point, but in more general terms, that "parents should be compensated for their efforts ... for raising children" (Folbre, 1994, p. 89). Johnson

goes even further, while assuming that schooling – and thus a new relationship between children and adults – is not a responsibility of individual parents and therefore not one that should be shouldered by them alone, but by society in general. He suggests that “society should be ready to assume the financial burden of maintaining school children as well as of paying the costs of teaching them” (Johnson, 1962, p. 190).

Johnson does not explain in detail what he means by ‘maintaining school children’, but actually brings it in connection with children themselves as actors, while stating that “... it needs to be recognized that in the opulent society an increasing part of the real costs of education is the earnings foregone by going to school instead of to work, a cost which may put severe pressure on poor children to drop out of school even though the advantages to themselves and society of further education are great” (loc.cit.). This, being written four decades ago, may sound a bit outmoded. The principle, however, remains true and in accordance also with Kaufmann’s strong dictum, that society has colonised children’s labour and left the costs to be paid by the family (Kaufmann, 1996).

This debate, initiated by Johnson and Kaufmann brings to the fore an argument in favour of compensating not merely parents but also school children themselves. As Johnson indicates, also children may be incurring opportunity costs, but more importantly, the argument has been launched that children are in fact doing useful work in school. As such they are performing as ‘achievers’ in a new societal division of labour, and therefore by implication also candidate as members of society who are deserving a right on a just part of societal resources (see Qvortrup, 1995; 2000).

From the point of view of children it is a significant step forward in recognising them as social citizens that their main activities – school work – are acknowledged as an achievement on par with other achievements contributing to the social fabric. Not least important it is that school work be seen as much as a benefit for the collective as for the individual. This, in fact, is what may change discussions about who logically should bear the costs of investments in children and childhood.

Johnson mentions an additional principle of social policy in modern society – namely that of raising the “standards of services and amenities provided collectively, and of the quality of the environment” (Johnson, 1962, p. 190). An opulent society can hardly claim “to be employing its opulence wisely” (ibid., p. 191) if, among other things, “the schools look like factories used to look and factories like schools ought to look” (ibid., p. 190), i.e. that children’s work

places deteriorate compared with those of adults. Schools are merely an example of institutions for children the buildings and equipment of which do not live up to a reasonable standard. In many countries (for instance Denmark and Norway) there have been complaints about neglected school buildings and the fact that politicians have allowed them to deteriorate in quality. Calculations have been made of required costs for bringing them to a standard commensurate with not only decent living, but also demands of health for children. The example is only another one to demonstrate that no demands on the side of children and parents can be made so as to improve their life conditions; it remains a question of political discretion. In addition it is an example that indicates a generational cleavage. Only old people's homes compete with children's institutions in paucity of standards, whereas such standards would never be allowed for neither public buildings nor corporate offices.

Agents of responsibility for the welfare of children

In terms of our ingrained family ideology there is no doubt that parents are responsible for children's welfare, morally as well as economically. The state has an obligation to safeguard children's welfare merely in cases where parents fail to fulfil their contract, so to say, which in turn is constitutionally based. The question for me is not whether this state of affair is morally defensible or not; the question is much more to which extent it is a rational arrangement in view of certain goals cherished by society, such as sustainability of a social order and balance, safeguarding short term desires for children's and their families' welfare and long term aims to maintaining and reproducing the labour force and pension schemes. What we do see currently in all developed nations are unintended, undesired and even adverse trends in areas such as low fertility rates, ageing populations, children's poverty, and labour market reproduction – to mention only the most conspicuous examples relevant to our discussion.

The family and the state do not always share interests, indeed often they have acted as competitors as far as children are concerned. Nevertheless, it is quite remarkable that merely these two agents seem to be recognised as responsible partners in addressing such questions of importance for the society as a whole. It is my thesis that *the* major problem since the beginning of the 20th century is that for the first time in history we have come to face a situation in which *those who are obliged to care for children do not benefit from it economically, while those who actually are profiting from children being brought up, do not*

contribute to it. It is this major paradox which arguably accounts for the imbalances we are presently facing, and this paradox is the much more astonishing since it runs counter to the very idea of the market principle of fair exchange, according to which, as we saw, each gets in return in proportion to his or her investments.

To resume an appropriate balance again one would therefore suggest a reestablishment of the fair exchange of investments and benefits. That would in the first place imply that families with children are at least compensated for their outlays for reproducing the labour force (see Wynn, 1972; Folbre, 1994; Johnson, 1962). The state is also a partner in making investments, but of course merely in the sense that it is redistributing its incomes. The crux of the matter therefore is through fiscal and other policies to make other potential partners responsible, i.e. the currently duty-free actors who are profiting without making proportional investments.

Among these actors taking a great interest in the results of family and state investments are not least companies, firms, the whole world of business and trade, including its organisations, who are all in the long run dependent on a well educated and healthy labour force. By and large they have been eclipsed from or managed to eclipse themselves from any responsibility for producing this labour force.

A third important group are persons in households without children, in particular childless persons² and others who have not been willing to reproduce themselves. They are eventually establishing themselves as free riders – both in practice and as an interest group (cf. child free zones, gated communities, and the like) – most of whom are likely to be men. As Folbre states, “Increases in the private costs of raising children, ..., are exerting tremendous economic pressure on parents, particularly mothers. Economists need to analyze the contributions of non-market labor to the development of human capital: as children become increasingly public goods, parenting becomes increasingly public service” (Folbre, 1994, p. 86).

It is important for any discussion of children’s welfare to seek to identify both potentially interested parties (whether these interests are perceived or not) and the nature of the interests they hold.

² Involuntary childless couples constitute a particular problem in that they demonstrably wish to share both burdens and joys of having children. It would therefore be inappropriate to include them among those escaping a societal responsibility.

In some countries the conflict between families with children and families without children is an interest conflict that is already open. This is the basis for discussions in Germany about 'equalisation of family burden' (Familienlastenausgleich) eventually enriched with a complementary notion of 'equalisation of family achievements' (Familienleistungsausgleich). What is meant here is that those who are the 'achievers' in upbringing children have a right to be supported in relieving them of some of their burdens.

There are however other conflict areas that need to be discussed. Any discussion about children seems to call forward at least two interest groups: on the one hand defenders of the family (e.g. Kaufmann), on the other hand advocates of gender equality (Folbre). In each of these camps 'the best interest of the child' will of course be postulated, as suggested by Wintersberger (2000, p. 186-187). The question, which needs to be raised by childhood research, is what is meant by this notion. Can we in other words take it for granted that the interests of families, respectively women, are identical with the interests of children or childhood, however these are defined?

It is my contention that the analysis of childhood in the welfare state has a long way to go. As I have sought to demonstrate, children's claims on resources in modern society are weak. In a pure market situation they have only their parents to rely on – and they are themselves not proportionally reciprocated given their investments in children. But even within welfare state regimes, children's rights are doubtful. Seldom they are themselves directly targeted, leading to discretionary policies.

As it has been the case in social science theory in general, children have been neglected also in the theory of welfare analysis. And as it was the case in the new social studies of childhood, there is now an urgency to establish childhood in its own right as an element of welfare state theory.

The view, as it is now, that only a needs criterion is relevant for making welfare provisions available to children has a number of drawbacks. First it is an undue individualisation of the problem; secondly it is reducing children to undeserving persons without legitimate claims in their own right. Only if a dialectics is established between children and their parents as deserving claims makers and rights holders on the one side, and on the other society as being critically in need of children, a rational, intergenerational basis for welfare policies can be imagined.

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