

Child

Bernadette Baker¹

(1)Queensland University of Technology and University of Wisconsin-Madison, Brisbane, QLD, Australia

Bernadette Baker

Email: bernadette.baker@qut.edu.au

Without Abstract

This entry concerns ruptures and continuities in the modern Western child as it shifts from what is now called natural philosophy to political philosophy to psychology, a shift which enabled developmental psychology to become the dominant discipline for inscribing the child in educational discourse over the twentieth century.

In Sight and Out of Mind: Descartes' Child

And here the first and principal cause of all errors can be recognized. For in childhood, our mind was of course so closely bound to the body that it did not apply itself to any thoughts other than those by means of which it was aware of those things which affected the body: and it did not yet relate those to something situated outside itself; but merely felt pain when something disagreeable occurred to the body; and pleasure when something agreeable occurred (Descartes [1983](#), p. 32, art.71).

For Descartes (1596-1650), the first and principal of all errors (in arriving at Truth) lay in a near mind-body fusion inscribed as an obviousness of childhood. Children did not move their thoughts beyond bodily sensation and could not attribute sensations to "something situated outside itself." For there to be an analytical space called "outside" to which a child was incapable of making an appeal, there had to be a perceiver aware of such distinctions and able to patrol the borders. The Cartesian perceiver was an adult mounted on a pivot, a turnable knower who, like its early Christian counterpart, e.g., Augustine's, could see both within and without. What is "outside" in a Cartesian epistemology is complex and perhaps best illustrated by what was no longer outside post-Scholasticism.

Unlike Platonist traditions, Descartes did not accept that the World was an ontic logos which was already meaningfully embodied in the correspondence between the form of things. He did not accept that moral order and vision of the Ideas were unavoidably synonymous because for Descartes there were no Ideas in the Platonic sense. Once cosmic order was no longer seen as embodying either the Platonic Forms or Aristotelian species and forms that which lay outside the early Christian "inner man" had to be rewritten.

This rewriting saw the external as an extended substance, "World or Universe." The human body marked the judicial horizon between interior/exterior realms. The World as extended substance did not hold pre-existing Ideas and Goodness that one journeyed through the inner man to arrive at. Aspects of the whole were not borne into the parts and the integrity and meaning of the parts did not

carry forward to become an integral part of the whole. The body and the World were quantities open to theorization as to what they did or did not hold or as to what laws structured them. Exterior and interior realms were not homologous a priori forms although the exterior existed by virtue of what "ideas" humans could have of it in the mind. Interiors (e.g., mind and the processes of reason) and exteriors (body/World) were separately identifiable substances with different principle attributes that made them so.

One gained certainty and Truth about the exterior World only when one subjected bodily sensation or the everydayness of personal embodiment to rigorous standards for evidence. The standard or norm for Truth now lay within the procedures themselves, not on a shelf waiting for the person to turn toward it. Conformity to the method would secure the substantive Truth that would be the outcome and conformity to the correct order of thought now constituted "reason." Reason was no longer a vision of order but the order for arriving at a different vision, a disengaged and disembodied one that took distance from bodily sensation and the immediacy of the "empirical" World as its benchmark. The outside for Descartes did not dismiss Godly omnipotence even though humans were now admitted to constructing and deductively verifying the terms of His brilliance. God was the original divine authority and constituted the greatest certainty of all but in a crucial shift there was "in those matters about which divine faith teaches us nothing" space for a method that would establish the Truth beyond a bodily sensation. The advent of matters about which divine faith teaches us nothing was pivotal to the Cartesian cogito. Adults, i.e., humans, could make the interiority of thought present to itself without an ontic logos and yet with the continued presence of God because there were matters about which divine faith did not instruct. Discursive space for controlling the resolution of doubt (now "scientific" rather than "confessional") had been opened to human conjecture and it was the rigorous Cartesian method toward clear and distinct ideas that indicated the uptake of that opening. Humanity could understand itself not just in terms of being a mirror of God's image or just as an effect of a spiritual entity but as the source of its own effects as well. Conformity to the correct methods for discerning truth was necessary because other methods had the potential to lead humans into erroneous judgments about the best choice to make. Cartesian rationalism required at a crucial juncture the failure of faith in divine matters to instruct in everything and the possibility for failure in human method. Descartes' resolution for the possibility of imperfection was the procedure for certitude that he called reason. It is in his obsession with procedures, and with the earth's motion as an inciting object of analysis, that the child and childhood were given meaning as error personified, that is, as the bodily magnified.

The rejection of Scholastic teachings saw a rejection of Aristotelian binaries of natural and unnatural Beings, of natural and unnatural motion, of celestial and terrestrial bodies. Beings were not categorized according to an innate potential to actualize as something we might understand almost as its opposite. Nature was not variegated at the level of "matter" or "essence" insofar as matter had been given a universal nature and assumed constitutive of all Beings. For Descartes and for Newton after him, this appeal to matter as universally composing all things meant that all extensions (bodies) could become subject to the same laws of motion.

The rewriting of matter and the mechanization of the cosmos enabled a different kind of wedge to be driven between "mind" and "body" than in Platonic and early Christian theology. In presenting the human body as extension and as subject to forces beyond its control, the mind was generated as a space free from the banal everydayness of particle/force interactions. The mind could become the new perceiving locus of reality and it was within this locus that reason's movement could operate and therefore operate to exclude the child from that which it helped to construct.

Reason did not just operate to divide children from humans but to divide the subject internally. To be distant from one's body via the correct procedures for coming to certainty was to establish the

Cartesian process called reason, a process which made “subjective” space objective and which reorganized empirical sensation into different meaning. The mind’s ability to travel beyond the body’s physicality was thus reason’s requirement. And it was all the more so because what belonged to “our nature” and what one came to know first was mind. “The faculty of thinking” was “known prior to and more certainly than any corporeal things; for we have already perceived this [thinking], and yet are still doubting the rest” (Descartes [1983](#), p. 5, art. 8).

To rewrite reason in this way was to provide the pathway for a circular consciousness that has subsequently been rallied as the epitome of a metaphysics of presence. Human beings were considered human because we were capable of moving without running; the mind could evade what the body urged it to believe. The inscription of reason as a distance from bodily sensation secured the (analytical and physical) space necessary to view something (conceptually) as a movement, a move beyond or away from something else. It was movement to a point from which the mind could then spin back and view where it had once erroneously been as a child (i.e., close to the body) that would suggest reason’s presence. Reason was no longer the uniform circular motion of the divine aspect of the universe. It was a metaphorical and analytically linear movement away from possible erroneous bodily sensation. Humanity’s presence to itself was thus inscribed into a concept of mind-body distance via physics. Without distance, movement, space, and time that structured the procedures for certitude one could not become conscious of one’s humanness, one was without reason, was not fully human, and was therefore a child.

Locke and Rousseau’s Children

John Locke’s (1632-1704) acceptance of what is now called empiricism does not generate the same textual use of the child as Descartes and nor does it indicate that he meant the same thing by reason. The Lockean child depicted in the letters comprising *Some Thoughts on Education* was intimately and analytically bound to the texts now treated as political philosophies and epistemologies, i.e., *Two Treatises of Government* and the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* respectively. In the *First Treatise*, the child, particularly the boy, and his place in the family relative to the patriarch are the objects on which a new kind of Utopian civil society predicated on a social contract is carved out. Arguing against Sir Robert Filmer’s *Patriarcha, or on the Natural Power of Kings*, Locke recommended a form of social organization based on democratic elections in which men would give up some of their powers in order to belong to a civil society which secured their freedom (where freedom meant conformity to the laws of a civil society which protected one’s life, liberty, health, and property).

Within the ideal family for Locke, the child’s treatment is based on contract-like arrangements. Locke attributes the child with a Willpower that is on its inside and because the child is now given possession of its own internal powers that have Newtonian motive and resistive qualities, it is problematized as one who must be dealt with in a particular way. If the child is to become the kind of English gentleman that Locke would like to see inhabiting his ideal civil society then the question remains as to how to have a new human join in a social contract which it did not initially authorize. Parents and tutor, the sources of education for Locke, must reason with a child and use explanations pitched to its level of understanding rather than whip or beat a child into submission. This is because parents do not possess the child even though they have temporary authority over their offspring. In return, the child has a duty of obedience to the parents for protecting and feeding it – the contract writ small in the home. In order to raise a child, then, parents must first bend the child’s Will early, i.e., deal with its inherent powers rather than any notion of its original sin. If an infant cries, it is

expressing its Willpower and if parents give into unreasonable demands that the infant is making through such cries then they are creating the kind of man who loves dominion and who cannot sustain self-denial. Therefore, through a system of permissions and denials called health the infant is prepared early through the treatment of its body for becoming a reasoning gentleman, i.e., one who can eventually discern between those desires and impulses that it would be gentlemanly to honor and those that it would not.

Because education makes all the difference between men for Locke, the child undergoes formal tutoring that is less concerned with what is today thought of as subject matter recall and more with a quality that Locke calls "vertue." Reason has a moral inscription and the equivalent of the curriculum is to facilitate vertue's development through gradually preparing different faculties of mind for reason's full unfoldment. Rather than rote Latin lessons, for instance, the child learns, i.e., gains a stock of Ideas which it is in a natural condition to differentiate, by "experience" which is all the interactions with things, with others, with books, and with symbols that will be encountered over time. Unlike Descartes' child, the Lockean one was admitted to being human and to having consciousness, i.e., awareness of that humanity. This is because for Locke the child was not the bodily magnified and the human body admitted of fact. We receive Ideas through the power of objects acting on our sensory mechanisms. These are natural events and therefore outside claims to truth or error. Whereas Descartes' body was inherently sinful and could not be considered a site of knowledge, Locke's body was the first positive step to the formation of different kinds of knowledge that he explicates in the *Essay* (i.e., intuitive, demonstrative rational, and sensitive knowledge). This different orientation to human body, to powers, to learning, and to reason allowed a different inscription of the child and announced what is thought of today as its modernness (Baker [2001](#)).

Jean-Jacques Rousseau both drew on and departed from Locke's delineation of the child. In the tradition of high romanticism, Rousseau's child is assertively modern and countermodern. Rousseau's imaginary orphaned character called Émile in the novella, *Émile, or on Education*, who is tutored through to manhood is again made legible by a wider political philosophy and prescription for Utopia (e.g., *First and Second Discourses*). As for Locke, Rousseau writes a countermemory to human history. He does not rely on the Biblical tale in Genesis to explain from whence humans, and different kinds of humans – natural, savage, and civil Man in Rousseau's words – came. Rousseau's hypothetical history of human nature as it has ended up and evidenced itself in civil society slaps present-day notions of progress in the face; the evolution of the species toward life in civil society is a form of disintegration, hence natural and savage states are held up as ideal and civil man as degraded, dependent, torn between dueling realms of spirit and matter, embroiled in unequal power relations, and therefore far removed from what was natural in the past.

This produces a different kind of child amid a different version of the social contract. Rousseau's child is given possession of a Will, but not of power for power in what might be thought of as its social forms (including sexual and mental kinds) is a commodity and an artifact of human evolution out of a state of nature. When an infant cries for Rousseau it is expressing its Will, not its power as for Locke. It will learn social power if the adults around it give it what it wants. Just as in Rousseau's *Social Contract* the Will of the people is distinct from the executive, the government, so, too, is the child's Will made distinct from its ability to do anything about it. The having of Will does not mean the having of power to execute it. Rousseau's child is therefore subjected to a different kind of education-for-reason and morality. It is a form that does not assume that the child has any initial ability to reason and rational explanations are thereby discredited. Instead the tutor, especially during childhood, must set up situations in which the young Émile must come to the realization of something for himself or so it seems for "doubtless your pupil should do only what he wants...but he ought to want only what it is you want him to want." Émile is often led to believe one thing only to learn the

lesson of the opposite, a lesson communicated through interactions with self, with things, and eventually with others that relies less on sermons and more on active involvement in seemingly random situations. Thus the different inscription of power as an executive tool, its separation from Will in the child, and the lack of reasoning ability attributed to the young writes its education differently.

From Mathematical to Developmental Psychology

Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776-1841) was one of the earlier theorists to depart from the Faculty Psychology reminiscent of Locke and Rousseau toward mathematical psychology. He argued, in a noticeable departure from his predecessors, that a child was not born with a Will and that there were no such things as separate "Faculties" of mind (Herbart 1804/ [1977a](#)). Mind was a single entity and the Will, feelings, and desires were made via "presentations" to the child's consciousness, preferably those organized by the family tutor. Objects in the exterior world and the interior mind possessed souls or powers. These "Reals" in the world which had their own powers clashed like Newtonian forces and each Real tried to self-preserve its soul in the process. The outcome of such perturbations was mathematically calculable; the stronger would win out and remain above the "threshold of consciousness" and be stored in memory, a threshold that unwittingly became a precondition to Freud's future rendition of the child and its subconscious. What resulted for Herbart were ideas and a large, increasing stock of ideas called an apperceptive mass. The aim of education for Herbart was morality and amid the narrative tropes of the German *Bildungsroman*, an emergent Prussian nation-State, and a reaction against Kantian idealism, the child would be built out of systematically screened and organized presentations chosen by the tutor. In an ever-increasing upward spiral that signaled a move toward "civilization" and away from the signifier of "barbarism" the child's five internal relations of the Will would be constructed to stand in good alignment with each other. Thus, both mind and Will would be built and the widened circle of thought that resulted, which was comported from diverse stimuli, would be the precondition to a stable, homogeneous, and consistent identity required by the intuitively moral man.

By the early 1800s, therefore, it was possible for Herbart to disarticulate philosophy from psychology, ends from means, and thereby to assert that pedagogy was a distinct science (Herbart 1806/ [1977b](#)). Pedagogy was that science focused on the act of instruction and it was intimately interrelated with other sciences, specifically that branch of aesthetics he called ethics and the study of consciousness called psychology, where psychology was not experimental but calculable and related to the observation of the young and an estimation of which presentations they had already been exposed to. By the late 1800s, psychology was raising different questions regarding the "development" of humans than those posed earlier by Herbart in Germany and was beginning to "experiment" with experimenting (Herman [1995](#); Taylor [1994](#)). Psychology had begun to make use of scientific methods of observation and aggregation of data to investigate problems like Will in children, criminality in adults, delinquency in juveniles, and degeneracy in "races." Methods drawn from physical anthropology, statistics, and medicine infused the research techniques of the first generation of self-proclaimed psychologists such as Granville Stanley Hall (1846-1924).

Education's uptake of psychological methods for posing and answering questions was also facilitated by an appeal to science as a means for truth production. In the late nineteenth century, the New Scientific Pedagogy and the New Psychology were often synonymous terms in educational discourse and were deployed rhetorically to assert a truth claim. The interdependency of education and psychology was enabled by education's provision of the subjects (e.g., children) necessary for data

gathering and by psychology's production of new strategies for monitoring and changing those subjects (e.g., teaching techniques). It was partly because of an institutional and intellectual interdependence that developmentalism could take hold, creating a new kind of "developing child" through techniques of study that emerged in/as a variety of public school reform efforts. Some developmental theorists such as the radical branch of German Herbartianism emphasized the "ontology recapitulates phylogeny" argument, suggesting that children develop in stages marked by the evolution of "the race" and that this was primarily a genetic unfolding. Others, like the American Herbartianists, reinscribed the child's Will as inborn and not built, thereby positing development more singularly as a widening of the child's circle of thought rather than as a form of implanting Will. Still further, Froebelians [proponents of Friedrich Froebel (1782–1852) and the kindergarten movement] focused on very young children particularly within the context of the family and preschooling and did not assume that scientific observation of a child was necessary to helping a child "develop." In sum, development did not mean one thing, but developmentalism was a wide variety of movements which converged around a belief that the child did in fact develop through set stages (e.g., kindergarten, transition, juvenile, adolescence) that were scientifically verifiable and linked to Darwinistic, and sometimes Social Darwinistic, assumptions about the evolution of humans in the form of races. In continental Europe, the UK, and the United States, developmentalism was a controversial description of the young that was contested in curriculum debates. In conversations surrounding public schooling and more indirectly in teacher training, the idea that schools and lessons should be built around the child's developmental stages as opposed to the organization of classical content, such as Latin and Greek, was a radical move that had echoes of Locke's shift within it (Hall [1901](#)). What had become of the child in such debates was in part explicable by a new theory of and orientation to the child's powers as in service to racial evolution and nation-building. In Child-study, for instance, only some of the young were considered to have the biophysiological powers to evolve to the next level of development. The body's internal cellular and genetic powers were given moral and intellectual meaning, generating castes of educability and humanness that lent to racial supremacist discourses a different, but familiar, rationalization for the construction of whiteness in particular as though it was a "deserved privilege." At the turn of the twentieth century, "the child" bore these wider relationships within its status as a noun, as one who was an exclusive and restricted site and as one who was subjected to welfare reasonings based on a belief in delivering to the young what they were thought "fit for" or "adapted to" (Hall, [1904](#))." The rationalizations that secured both developmentalism and normalized a belief in racially sexed children (i.e., children as those who are raced and sexed prior to sex) have over the course of the twentieth century taken different, yet similar forms, mutating from the antirecapitulation theories of Piaget which still privileged belief in the staggered development of psychobiological "powers" to the later twentieth-century Vygotskian constructivism that posits a "zone of proximal development" on the way to "becoming" the privileged and participatory adult of liberal democracies to the biologized child of brain-based learning and educational neuroscience whose form and content of Being are pinned to an organological locus (Baker, [2015](#)).

References

Baker, B. (2001). *In perpetual motion: Theories of power, educational history, and the child*. New York: Peter Lang.

Baker, B. (2015). From 'somatic scandals' to a 'constant potential for violence': The culture of dissection, brain-based learning and the rewriting/rewiring of "the child". *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy*, 12(2), 168–197.

Descartes, R. (1644/1983). *Principles of philosophy*. Dordrecht: Reidel.

Filmer, R. (1680/1887). Patriarcha; or, the natural power of Kings. In I. J. Locke's (Ed.), *Two Treatises on Civil Government* (pp. 11–73). London: George Routledge and Sons.

Hall, G. S. (1901). The ideal school as based on child study. *The Forum*, 32(1), 24–29.

Hall, G. S. (1904). *Adolescence: Its psychology and its relation to physiology, anthropology, sociology, sex, crime, religion, and education (Vol. 1)*. New York: Appleton and Co.

Herbart, J. (1977a). Aesthetic revelation of the world. In D. Robertson (Ed.), *Significant contributions to the history of psychology, 1750–1920* (pp. 57–77). Washington, DC: University Publications of America (Original work published 1804).

Herbart, J. (1977b). The science of education. In D. Robertson (Ed.), *Significant contributions to the history of psychology, 1750–1920* (pp. 78–268). Washington, DC: University Publications of America (Original work published 1806).

Herman, E. (1995). *The romance of American psychology: Political culture in the age of experts*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Locke, J. (1689/1965). *Two treatises of government*. New York: New American Library.

Locke, J. (1692/1975). *Essay concerning human understanding*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.

Locke, J. (1692/1989). *Some thoughts concerning education (edited with introduction, notes, and critical apparatus by John W. and Jean S. Yolton)*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Rousseau, J. J. (1973). *The social contract and Discourses / translation and introduction by G.D.H. Cole ; revised and augmented by J.H. Brumfitt and John C. Hall*. London: Dent & Sons.

Rousseau, J. J. (1979). *Emile or On Education. Introduction, Translation, and Notes by Allan Bloom*. no place of publication given: Basic Books (Original work published in 1762).

Rousseau, J. J. (1992). *Discourse on the origins of inequality (second discourse), polemics, and political economy* (R. D. M. Judith R. Bush, Christopher Kelly, and Terence Marshall, Trans. Originally published 1755 ed. Vol. 3). Hanover: University Press of New England.

Taylor, E. (1994). An epistemological critique of experimentalism in psychology: Or, why G. Stanley Hall waited until William James was out of town to found the American Psychological Association. In H. Adler & R. Rieber (Eds.), *Aspects of the history of psychology in America 1892/1992* (pp. 37–61). New York: New York Academy of Sciences.