INTRODUCTION
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It is not always the case that good scientists are also wise. Even when scientific talents and wisdom reside in the same body, these qualities are not always found throughout the individual’s curriculum vitae. In empirical studies, and contemplative writing alike, our lecturer today, Professor Jacqueline Goodnow, is a happy exception to these norms. Good science and wise thinking are pervasive in the entire range of her scholarly work. Most impressive to me in the many times I’ve heard her speak or read what she has written, are the clarity and elegance of her approach to the study of human development. On each of these occasions, I’ve had the distinct feeling of being in the presence of a master thinker, one who may not always be right, but one whose intellectual discourse is a model of clarity and logic.

Among Professor Goodnow’s values to her discipline are the uncanny insights that she expresses for knowing what the important problems are. She’s understood the necessity for learning more about the basics of perceiving and knowing. From early in her career, however, she understood that these processes couldn’t be revealed without an understanding of the context in which they occur. Perceiving, understanding, and reasoning are the connections made by the human beings to the world around them. These are processes of adaptation to the environment and means of coping with it. Among those developmental psychologists who have studied the cognitive processes over the last several decades, Professor Goodnow has been completely consistent in arguing that we must know mainly about children’s growth of knowledge within the context in which they live. She’s been especially ingenious in her selection of specific windows through which to study the child’s mind. The child’s use of objects in coping with simple problems, its drawings, its stories, have all seemed to this scientist the best window through which to learn about those basics of cognitive development. And while interested in the formal ways that society shapes children’s psychological development, such as schooling, she’s also been interested in the informal, intuitive and implicit processes occurring in everyday life that bear on these abilities in children and adolescents.

Most recently, she’s been interested in simple, but basic questions about what ordinary adults, rather than psychologists, know about the minds of children, from whence this knowledge comes and how it is put to use in the socialization of the child. This is better to study such homely phenomena as aphorisms, folk tales and myths. Few scientists connect with the world of the child more effectively than our speaker today. Given her interests in the context of cognitive development, Professor Goodnow learned years ago that one cannot study either formal or informal processes in cognitive socialization within a single culture. Thus her bibliography is marked by extensive studies of children in diverse cultural settings, both western and eastern. Again, her strategies are reasoned and wise. One uses windows on the child’s mind that are appropriate to the society in which the child lives. This does not mean abandoning the technologies of science, but rather using those so that one can clearly focus on perceiving and knowing as these connect to society. Her interest in the social context have led Professor Goodnow in recent years to broader concerns with child and adolescent development and social policy; the basis on which society makes decisions that affect the course of cognitive and social development. These works dominate her latest writings that will figure in today’s presentation.

Professor Goodnow’s personal and professional experience is broad. Born in Queensland, Australia, educated at the University of Sydney and Harvard, she’s held a wide range of appointments with the U.S. Army, The Walter Reed Research Institute in Washington, the George Washington University, the University of Hong Kong. For the past nine years she’s been professor of psychology in the School of Behavioral Sciences at Macquarie University in New South Wales where she is currently dean of that school. She’s also an old friend of the University of Minnesota having lectured here a number of times and having been visiting professor in the Institute of Child Development in the spring of 1980. It’s thus a great pleasure for me to welcome you back Jackie, to one of your many homes away from home. Professor Goodnow ....

[Dr. Goodnow is Professor of Psychology at Macquarie University, New South Wales, and Australia. The primary focus of Dr. Goodnow’s work has been in the area of child and adolescent development and their relationship to social settings and social policy. Dr. Goodnow was instrumental in designing a Master’s degree program which integrates child development and social policy. Her work in Australia, Hong Kong and the U.S. leads a valuable crosscultural perspective to the field of human development.]
SOME ASPECTS OF SOCIAL POLICY IN AUSTRALIA AND BEYOND  
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Speaking at Minneapolis today completes a circle for me. I first met Gisela Konopka when she spoke in Australia. I was a cospeaker on the same programme and we were delighted to discover that many of our orientations to social issues were alike. Since then, we have kept in touch, with today as a culmination. I am delighted to be here, and delighted to honor someone I admire both as a person and as a “member of her profession.”

My talk today has, like Gisela’s worldwide travelling, an aspect of a journey to it. In recent years psychologists have increasingly been urged to take an active interest in social issues and social policies. That is a challenge some of us at Macquarie University have begun to explore: in my own case, in the company of a colleague—Alisa Burns (Burns & Goodnow, 1979, Goodnow & Burns, 1980).

“Taking an interest in social policy,” however, turns out to be advice that is easier to give than to follow. It is relatively easy to get a grasp on single studies: for example, a study I heard described recently in Boston reporting that for teenage mothers the factors contributing most to their satisfaction and effectiveness with the baby were the emotional support from the family, particularly the mother, and the possibility of being away from the baby two or more hours each day (Colletta, 1981).

Once away from specific studies, however, we have encountered two particular difficulties. One is the general lack of clarity to discussions of social issues. Much of the discussion is decidedly murky. The effect at times is like watching a battle-taking place under a collapsed tent. Clearly, a great deal is happening but the precise nature of the action and the argument is often difficult to determine, difficult to disentangle from the overlay of rhetoric.

A second difficulty lies in the sheer diversity of social issues and social policies. Even if we consider only one age group—the youth group, for instance, with which Gisela Konopka has been so concerned—you may still find yourself reading and thinking about topics that range from employment, television, recreation and schooling to teenage pregnancies and juvenile justice. The range is almost overwhelming, especially if you wish to add some historical depth. Any single social issue—the length of compulsory schooling, for instance—has varied over time both in the way it has been regarded and the policies that have surrounded it.

Faced with these difficulties—diversity and a lack of clarity—we took two steps. One was the relatively straightforward step of digging into specific topics (child abuse, working mothers, television), asking for each what the psychological evidence was with regard to the effects of doing nothing or following various forms of action. The second step was to ask increasingly: What is the nature of the problem here? What is this discussion all about? Why do some solutions seem more likely than others to be proposed or accepted? What is the underlying view of human nature or human development? A good set of questions, we hoped, would help us both cut through the discussion and cut across a variety of social issues.

My plan for today is to work towards some general points by way of three specific episodes. Each of these is a burst of discussion in the media, centering on a proposed change in a particular social policy. One episode is a proposed change in unemployment benefits. Another concerns the punishments given to “juvenile offenders.” The third concerns the age of consent. The discussion of each is drawn from Australian newspapers, primarily those published in Sydney and the state of which it is the capital (New South Wales). A Sydneysider’s view of Australia is somewhat like a New Yorker’s view of the United States. I can only concede the bias, and point out that New South Wales is the most populous of the eight states, and that Sydney is both the site of the first colonial settlement and the largest city (“metropolitan” or “greater” Sydney has a population of over three million, close to a fifth of the population of the whole country). These Australian incidents will give some sense of how policies can vary from one country to another. I think you will agree, however, that the tenor of the discussion and the underlying issues would be very similar in the United States. And with one episode—unemployment—I hope to convince you, by way of a little historical material, that some aspects of the discussion have been constant over the last two or three hundred years.

Note that the three episodes all deal with proposed changes in social policy, and with the arguments raised for and against. We are drawing material from the preliminary skirmishing that goes with a proposed change. The skirmishing provides us with a guide to whether a proposed change is likely to take place, at least in the very near future. Political parties in Australia have a narrow electoral edge and the “swinging vote” has to be carefully watched. The skirmishing also provides us with a guide to assumptions that are linked to a proposed change, helping us with the question: What is going on here?

Let us leap into the first episode, one dealing with “crime and punishment.”

Crime and Punishment

In March of 1981, Sydney newspapers carried the story of draft legislation for a new Community Welfare Bill, to replace the Child Welfare Act framed 41 years ago. This specific legislation is at a state level. Part of it concerns punishments for offences committed by “children under 18.”

For the first offenders, some new steps were proposed. One was the establishment of a “Children’s Panel” as an alternative to a preliminary to the Children’s Court. This Panel could assess charges and complaints and could decide to squash the complaint, refer it on to the Court, or ask the Policy Department to “caution the child.” A second proposal was that the Children’s Court be given the option, provided “the child” consented, to recommend as an alternative to being sent to a corrective centre—up to 100 hours of supervised community work.

These proposals raised no public storm. What did give rise to strong comment, however, was the retention of two forms of punishment: solitary confinement (“confinement to a room”) and
This section of the report drew some strong comment, in part because the new Welfare Act has been under discussion for at least the last three or four years and the community has responded with vigor to the current Minister’s request that people or agencies with recommendations for change submit them to the drafting committee. Few had expected that some of these earlier penalties would remain. Even fewer expected that some would become harsher (the maximum length for confinement was in fact proposed as a move up from 24 to 72 hours). The exceptions to those surprised were probably lobbying staff members at corrective centres.

The kind of change proposed will, I think, be familiar to many of you. Certainly, from Australia we see reports from within the U.S. press of juveniles being tried in adult courts, especially for major or repeated offences. What appears to be happening in such cases? Can we describe it in a way that will also be applicable to other problems?

Let me start by saying that much of the “juvenile-adult” discussion concerns putting people into “boxes” or categories. We use many categories based on age: (“infant,” “child,” “teenager,” “minor”) or upon some developmental progression (baby, toddler, adolescent, young adult, or “young-old” and “old-old” to mention some at the other end of the age scale). These boxes are important because they often determine the way people are treated. That treatment, however, depends not only on the particular box but also on some features of it.

**Fixed versus Fluid Categories**

That question is tied to a set of possible others such as: What are the possible categories? What are the criteria for being placed in a particular category? In the 14-18 year group, for instance, age alone may allow you to become a school-leaver, but age plus competence is required for a driving license. I have started with the “fluidity” aspect because this seems to be such a major feature to the categorization of 14-18 year olds. They are variously described as “children,” “teenagers,” “adolescents,” “young people,” “young adults,” “youth.” One might expect that the categories would be fixed at least in law. But that is not so. In the N.S.W. case, serious misconduct by a minor who is already an “offender” may bring a shift to being punished as an adult. In the cases noted in the U.S.A., the criterion for a shift to an adult court appears to have been a major crime: murder in the cases we have read about. Here, an “adult” crime—one that violates all assumptions of “childhood innocence” or “teenage mischief”—wipes out the criterion of chronological age.

“Fluid” categories may seem to you an abstract way of describing part of a social problem. It is, however, a far from abstract feature. When categories are not firmly fixed, then the possibilities are easier—for better or for worse—of bouncing people from one category to another. For the people we often describe as youth, the possibilities of such “bouncing” seem especially great. They may be at times bounced into an “adult” category, at times bounced back to being treated as “children.” In times of a tight budget or a shift to a position strongly emphasizing parents’ rights and responsibilities, we might even expect to see a category such as “youth” disappear altogether, with policies cut back to dealing with two developmental levels only: childhood and adulthood.

I shall come back to that possible bounce in talking about unemployment benefits. There is another kind of category-change, however, that needs to be considered. This is the possibility that people can stay in the same category as before but lose the rights or protections that have in the past gone with being in the category. In effect, they forfeit there past rights. We may take that as a second feature to category placement.

**Losing Categorical Rights**

Can people forfeit the rights that usually category membership? The answer is clearly yes, at many age levels. “The state” may move, for example, to declare children “incorrigible,” parents “in-competent,” minorities “ineducable.” In turn, an individual may consider that “the state has forfeited all claims on my loyalty.” Similar events can also occur at a less official level. A neighbourhood, for instance, may decide that a particular teenager has forfeited the protection or the tolerance that would normally be extended. In effect, the possibility of forfeit is constant. What changes from context to context or from time to time is the set of conditions regarded as sufficient to justify forfeit.

Let me suggest two that seem to recur. One is that you do not “act your age.” That seems to be a particular hazard if you are already close to being in another developmental category. Children who commit murder at the age of six, for instance, are not likely to be given adult punishments in our culture. A youth of 17, however, is close to the legal category of being an “adult”; an “adult” crime speeds up a process about to take place. That concept has its limits, one should note. It would fit the possibility of “senior citizens” being moved into the category of “being senile.” But it would not fit parents being placed in the category of “unfit” or “incompetent.” That category leads to a forfeiting of rights, but it is not part of any regular developmental progression.

A second recurring condition, we consider, has to do with the violation of an expected exchange. A number of sociologists make widespread use of exchange theory, describing many interactions as an exchange of resources, with resources covering everything from money, property and power to the less tangible goods of affection, patience, tolerance or loyalty. In particular, they have been interested in exchanges felt to be unequal, with inequity re-
A lawyer’s comment was given as a condition that may lead to disaffection or to the breaking of a contract. Such concepts have most often been applied to interactions within marriage (e.g., Scansion & Scansion, 1976). They are equally promising, however, when applied to the breaking of other informal contracts. We may provide patient support to our minors, for instance, to the extent they are likely in exchange to be our support in old age, a sign of our prosperity, an index of our competence as parents, the justification of our sacrifices, the hope of our future as a family or a nation. When these expected exchanges seem likely not to occur, then people may be tempted to alter their part of the unwritten agreement—tempering the degree of protection or support, or doing so with less patience and goodwill.

Note that these two conditions (violation of an age expectation and violation of an expected exchange) have both been looked at in terms of forfeiting rights one once had. We need to recognize, however, that some individuals or some groups are never accorded the usual rights in the first place. Some are ruled out from the beginning as “undeserving,” “ineducable,” or “unhelpable.” In many countries, for example, education described as “compulsory and universal” has not been extended to some groups, especially in the initial stages. And “juvenile justice,” at least in Australia, has always had its exceptions. It has seldom been extended to Aborigines, for example, especially in the Northern States, in the same way it has been extended to middle-class white youth in city areas. It is only recently that we are seeing expressions of public concern about Aboriginal youth being routinely treated as criminal adults—held in prison with adults while waiting trial, for instance, or having records of past offences being kept readily available.

For the conditions that give rise to a group being “read out” from the beginning, the concept of expected exchange may give us part of the set we need. The concept of “limited good” may provide a further part: the notion that the good things of this world are limited and one should act towards preserving what there is for people like oneself. The presence of power is a likely further contribution: goods and services are provided only to those who can back up a demand for them. We might add also the simple perception of some groups as “not having the same needs,” and the failure to even be aware that a group exists, or has been excluded. I myself have the feeling that the forfeiting of rights is a simpler case than the nature of the initial granting of rights, but that may not be true.

These several conditions take us beyond the usual reaches of exchange theory. I wish to come back to the notion of exchange, however, in raising the third general point stemming from the “punishment” episode.

**What is the Nature of the Counterattack?**

We find it useful to try to analyze the nature of the counterresponse to a proposal, especially when the counterresponse consists of resisting a change in category. The original SMH report gave prominence to two kinds of comment. From “several child psychiatrists” came the concern that the proposed punishments might well be counterproductive. Solitary confinement, for instance, might make young people worse, possibly pushing them into a psychotic state. A lawyer’s comment was given more attention: “A young boy or girl who is sent to prison is the most prized sexual object in the jail—he or she can be and is easily and frequently raped.” That comment was of interest to us for two reasons. One is that it threatens an outcome that the general public now believes is highly probable: more probable than psychosis from 72 to 100 hours of solitary confinement. The other is that it faces people with an exchange that few will feel to be equal to the crime. In effect, the counterattack asks: “Is this particular exchange what you had in mind? Do you still feel that “the punishment fits the crime?”

We could continue with the question of juvenile justice. I wish to leave it at this point, however. It has been useful in bringing out three questions that can be asked about any social policy: How fluid are the criteria for being placed in a particular category? What are the conditions under which one may forfeit the rights that usually go with being in a particular category? And what makes an effective counterattack?

Some aspects of the same questions—plus some further questions—are brought out by the second episode, one dealing with unemployment benefits.

**Unemployment Benefits**

This time the proposed change is at the federal level. Towards the end of 1980, the current Federal government of Australia floated the idea of eliminating unemployment benefits for people aged 16 and 17 (the legal age for leaving school is 15).

Now in Australia, there are some special features to unemployment benefits. First, the age criterion: the possible age is lower than in the United States. Second, the criterion of first being employed. You can apply for benefits within two to three months of leaving school, without holding any employment in-between, but with evidence of having sought employment (e.g., having registered with your local Employment Service and gone out to assigned interviews). Third, there is no time limit for receiving benefits. In fact, there are some negative incentives to taking on waged work and having it reported. If you take a job that turns out to be temporary, it will probably take 6 to 8 weeks to get back on to unemployment benefits. And if you take on part-time waged work, you begin to lose benefits on a dollar to dollar basis very quickly. As you might expect, there is said to be a large amount of waged work that is “black” : unreported to the Employment Service or to the Internal Revenue Service.

As you might also expect, young school-leavers have a higher unemployment rate than does the rest of the population. To an individual, the total amount of benefit may not seem massive: around U.S. $40 for a single person, with additional amounts if you have dependents. To a government eager to cut its welfare budget, however, unemployed 16 and 17 year olds have clearly appeared as a group that could allow a sizeable saving and that might be lopped without courting too much political unpopularity, especially among the middle-income group that forms the current government’s major base.

Here then we have an official agency, with the Prime Minister as a defending spokesman, leading the battle to have a particular
briefly, the three lines of argument all proposed a change in category. (a) sixteen and 17-year olds, it was first said, should be supported by their parents rather than by the government. in effect, they should move out of the category of “autonomous working adult” and back into the category of “dependent children.” (b) sixteen and 17-year olds, it was argued, should still be at school, i.e. be in the category of “students.” if they were still at school, they would be out of the workforce, off the dole, and—so it was said—would be more attractive to employers when they finally emerged. along with this argument came the claim that schools were failing to do their “proper” job, turning out people who were too academic or could not spell, etc. (c) sixteen and 17-year olds, it was proposed, are “undeserving.” they are either unwilling to acquire the skills the job market requires, or they are uninterested in work. they leave school in order to go on the dole. they are “dole bludgers,” “bludger” being the Australian term for people avoiding work or responsibility. they should be ashamed to go on the dole, and no right-minded citizen should be upset if their unemployment benefits disappeared.

a fourth line of argument, you may note, was missing from this burst of discussion about unemployment benefits for the young. this was that teenagers are unemployed because their mothers are working or responsibility. employers that they had no intention of ceasing to hire these reliable older workers and that the jobs likely to be held by the two groups were not strictly comparable.

some of these comments echo the conditions proposed earlier for forfeiting rights. so also do some of the counterresponses. briefly, the proposal that forfeiture was o.k. because the young were “undeserving” was met by interviews with individuals who were interested in working, and by the concession from some that a minority of “dole bludgers” did exist but was a minority, and by the counterclaim that it was the government that was venal (breaking its election promises, attempting to hide the true unemployment figures, disguising the reality that jobs were simply unavailable). the proposal that all 16 and 17-year olds should still be enrolled in school was responded to by pointing out that a number of 17-year olds had finished the full six years of high school, and that schools were not, in any case, designed or funded to hold all pupils for six years or to teach them marketable skills, assuming these could be pinned down in a changing market. both these types of arguments may be found in the following “letter to the editor” written by an articulate 17-year old.

sir,

the federal government’s defense of the proposal to abolish unemployment benefits for 16 and 17-year-olds has shocked me into realizing just how out of touch the government is with the realities of being an unemployed youth. mr. fraser may be right in suggesting that a number of youths leave school when 16 or 17 to take advantage of the dole. i would suggest that these particular school-leavers constitute a minority. to abolish the dole simply to fool those who would take advantage of it would do a gross disservice to the majority of honest, unemployed school-leavers.

mr. fraser hopes that abolishing benefits for 16 and 17-year olds will encourage them to remain at school. i am 17 and i have just completed my hsc. i cannot remain at school, and i would be ineligible for benefits until june, 1981.

the realities are that most teenagers cannot get jobs and thus depend on the dole for survival. to abolish the dole would place an incredible strain on the families of unemployed 16 and 17-year olds.

i would like to remind readers of two particular statements mr. fraser made when campaigning for votes in 1975: first, “under a liberal-national country party government there will be jobs for all who want to work” (november 27, 1975). second, “(we) will be generous to those who can’t get a job and want to work” (november 27, 1975).

i want to work. where is the generosity in disallowing the life source that thousands upon thousands rely on? abolishing the dole isn’t the answer mr. fraser is seeking.

the third line of response was more novel. this was in answer to the prime minister’s suggestion that parents should take over the job of support. parents are not usually a group organized around such issues, and it is in any case a little awkward to say you are not willing to support your “child.” the reply came instead from counsellors and social workers who dealt with unemployed youth. in a series of letters and interviews, they argued that many parents expected their 16 and 17-year-old to be either financially independent or to be contributing to the family income. the increasing number of “homeless youth” was pointed to, and the possibility raised that some of these were driven from home by unsympathetic parents. at the moment, interestingly enough, a television short—sponsored by the commonwealth employment service—starts with an unsympathetic father blaming his daughter for not being able to find work and goes on to sketch some possibilities: father to recognize that the daughter is trying, daughter to come into classes to improve her interview and job skills, and employer, to give the young a break, with starting wages paid by the government, in order to break the double-bind: no job unless you are experienced, and no way to gain experience.

the unemployment episode, then, picks up the themes of the crime and punishment episode: criteria for membership in a category, conditions for being bounced out of it, and ways of resisting. in addition, it brings up some further questions we have found
worth asking for any social policy. One of these is the double question: What solutions are likely and unlikely to be proposed for a problem? Why? The other is: What is the nature of the objective? In this particular episode, what is this goal called ‘work’? What are some of its features, features that might help us understand what it is that people are trying to achieve or protect?

**Likely Solutions**

Under this heading I wish to raise a condition that might be called “the state of the see-saw.” I shall be brief, because the best account of the argument comes in a superb two-volume work by two historians, Pinchbeck and Hewitt (1969, 1973), documenting the way children were treated in England from Tudor times on. In many ways, their work is closer to home for us than the historical accounts given by Ariès (1962).

The care of poor children, Pinchbeck and Hewitt consider, oscillates between the notion of help from others and the notion of self-help. In Tudor times, the state of your neighbour’s ox was expected to be your concern. If we take education as an example, schools were established for poor and orphan children that offered a complete grammar-school education to children with ability, opening up a route to social mobility. In later times the Puritan period, for instance—education is provided only to the extent that uneducated labour is a drain upon the parish and the critical measure of any social action is cost. It was in the general impoverishment after the English Civil Wars that the Puritan virtues of work, thrift, and self-help flourished. And it was in such a climate that John Locke was able in 1697 to offer one of his own “modest proposals” for reducing cost:

> The children of the labouring people are an ordinary burden to the parish, and are usually maintained in idleness, so that their labour is generally lost to the public, till they are twelve or fourteen years old. The most effectual remedy for this is that working schools be set up in each parish, to which the children of all such as demand relief from the parish shall be obliged to come. By this means the mother will be eased of a great part of her trouble in looking after and providing for them at home, and so be at more liberty to work; the children will be kept in much better order, be better provided for, and from their infancy be inured to work which is of no small consequence to making them sober and industrious all their lives after... It may reasonably be concluded that computing all the earnings of a child from three to fourteen years of age, the nourishment and teaching during the whole time would cost the parish nothing (cited by Pinchbeck & Hewitt, 1969, p.p. 310-311).

The notion of a seesaw need not be limited to accounts of earlier times, or to England. Welfare policies in today’s United States are currently showing a marked swing back to the notion of self-help. Contemporary Australia is another example. We have currently a conservative federal government that succeeded a labour government that introduced within a short span of time a number of social changes: abolishing University fees, for instance, and establishing a national medical scheme. As you might expect, one of the current government’s concerns is how to dismantle some of these changes without losing electoral support.

**Unlikely Solutions**

If we return to the debate on unemployment benefits no one suggested that the age limit for leaving school (currently 15) or for starting school (currently five years) be raised. It was argued - by people in the department responsible for social welfare but not for education - that schools should change their curricula and their methods in order to teach skills that were more immediately marketable, but how this was to be done was extremely vague.

Why do such solutions seem unlikely to be proposed or accepted? In this specific episode and in other contexts also, one strong factor appears to be the demand for structural change. What is involved is not only the degree of change required but also its type. We may distinguish, for instance, between change within an existing structure and change that takes the form of adding a new and relatively independent structure. The development of Head Start outside the regular school system is an example of the latter. Such additions may even be welcomed: they may create a new bureaucracy or a new career field. Examples of change within are busying or a change in entry requirements or credentials (e.g., setting up a specific quota for members of minority groups).

To gain some sense of the degree of change within an existing structure that would be involved of schools trained directly for the labour market being held out for them, and to give you a sense of the stresses faced by 16 and 17-year-olds and their reasons for not being in school, let me give you a quick picture of the Australian school system. I shall use the New South Wales version as an example. It is a model very similar to that in most other states.

Children begin school at age five, registering for school when they turn four years and nine months. They proceed through six years of primary school and either four or six years of secondary school. They can legally exit at tenth grade, with a “school leaving certificate,” based now partly on school-based assessment and partly on statewide tests (these are restricted to two areas: English and Mathematics and yield only a score on a five-point scale, corresponding to various percentile points). I say “based now” because until about ten years ago, all assessment was based on state-wide tests. The change came in with a shift from a five-year secondary school (three plus two years with exit points at ninth or eleventh grade) to a six-year system (four plus two). One of the goals behind that examination change was a climate in which schools could - up to the tenth grade - have more flexibility in what they taught and how they taught, rather than teaching for the exams.

Completing eleventh and twelfth grade provides you with a “Higher School Certificate.” The content of these grades is heavily academic, geared towards the statewide exams at the end that determine entry into what is called “tertiary” education. Universities, colleges, institutes of technology. These exams are highly competitive. The aggregate score you get from that is—for all but one experimental medical school—the only criterion for entry into various forms of tertiary training. Each year, for example, the Sydney
The nature of the structure, nonetheless, helps explain why some solutions are less likely than others. Why, for instance, in the present case, was the first attempt to shift the cost and responsibility for unemployed 16 and 17-year olds in the direction of parents rather than schools? *What is the Nature of the Objective?*

I have been commenting so far on the question: What makes some solutions more or less likely than others to be proposed or accepted? I have been arguing that in addition to expected factors such as cost or an organized counterlobby - one factor is the degree and type of structural change required.

I now wish to turn to a more complex problem asking: What are people trying to achieve? Clearly different people are often trying to reach different goals. They may even use different languages to describe their objectives, one talking, for instance, in terms of needs, one in terms of “rights, and another in terms of “costs.” In addition, some objectives seem peculiarly complex, coming with a large hidden agenda or unsuspected features packed into a seemingly innocuous and simple phrase. The objective labeled “work” seems to fall into that category.

Such complexity might be regarded as one more condition that affects the likelihood of various solutions. It has, I think, a life other than that and deserves its own section. Giving a separate section to the complexity of an objective with “work” as the illustrating case also gives me the opportunity to bring in some historical material. It turns out that “work” has always been a complex objective, and that some aspects of 1981’s discussions about unemployment go back at least to the 1600’s and 1700’s. Let me raise some of these:

(a) One is an opposition offered between “working” and “being a burden on the State.” The quotation from John Locke, already given in the previous section, is an example of the long life of that concern.

(b) A second is the search for a balance between “work”—“waged work,” that is—and “education.” Consider the argument offered by the English philanthropist Firman in 1678, cited by Pinchbeck and Hewitt, (1969, p. 162). Poor children who spend all their time “in play or poring upon a book,” he wrote, “by such means get such a habit of idleness, that many times they will never take to any labour at all... whereas, if whilst young they were taught to work, they would fall in love with it, and when old would not depart from it.”

That concern with a “balance” starts, we may note, from a sensed opposition between the two activities.

(c) A third is the concept of working as a habit, preferably acquired early, and always in danger of being lost to the alternate habit of idleness. Firman’s comment expresses this view. So also do some contemporary arguments for unemployed youth to be involved, on a regular basis, with unwaged community work. At the moment, at least in Australia, such regular involvement interferes with one criterion for proving willingness to work, namely being on call for interview on any job considered suitable. Some of the arguments for community work, I hasten to add, do not have the same flavour of concern with the habit of idleness. They start instead...
with the unemployed young needing to avoid isolation and to acquire some sense that what they do and who they are is valued.

(d) A fourth feature is the concept of labour as valuable in its own right for the individual. Let me quote from a comment in 1720 on the proposal to set up a workhouse in Kent, with the articles produced to be sold and set against the cost of maintaining the workhouse poor. The material is again from Pinchbeck and Hewitt (1969, p. 167). Little monetary gain might result, one citizen warned: “The Men and Women are generally old and helpless, and the children perfectly new and inexperienced in everything.” Nonetheless, the work “is something not to be despised. And what is still of greater Consequence is, that by keeping them employed you keep them in Health and from Idleness, the Parent of most Disorders in Society.”

(e) A final feature is the fear of threat to the social order. Beyond immediate cost, and beyond the disorders of the individual’s mind and soul that may attend idleness, is the kind of fear noted by the historian Carey Goodman in his account of the movement to bring children into organized recreation groups and to set aside parks for recreation. This account—to make an abrupt leap into the 20th century—deals with New York City in the early 1900’s. In Goodman’s somewhat revisionist account, the movement had two primary goals: to develop in the young the habits that could make them good workers (being part of a team, being on time, respecting the property of others), and to keep them from developing the habit of being “on the streets,” a hazard to traffic, a ready audience for soapbox orators—and a ready force for demonstration.

Overall, we might rephrase the question: What is the nature of the objective? and ask instead: What is the underlying view of human nature and human development? Objectives of any daphth9 we suspect—along with proposals for how objectives may be met—are usually linked to some general models of what people are like at various ages

That notion is probably familiar to you by way of Hoffman’s (1970) argument that the way we bring up young children varies with some general models of childhood: one of original sin, one of original innocence (“trailing clouds of glory”). The former model—original sin—is usually linked to the notion that we should drive sin out, the latter is usually linked to the notion that we should protect the young from corruption.

For older children, or for young adults, the discussion of “work” suggests another dimension. This is the notion that virtue—whether present as a given or achieved only after a struggle—is precarious. It is maintained only by the force of habit and by controls against tasting any alternate form of life. If we go back to the case of unemployment, a working life is made feasible only by habit and by no tasting of the hedonistic joys of not working, of gaining “money for nothing”. Many unemployed 16 and 17-year-olds might find that description of not working difficult to recognize.

I have used the unemployment episode as a way of taking a little further the two general concerns in this paper: one a concern with asking why the discussion is often so murky, the other a concern with finding some general features to social policy issues that cut across a variety of specific contexts.

The unemployment episode picks up one of the themes in the discussion on “crime and punishment,” namely that it is in many contexts worth asking what the “boxes” or categories are into which people are being placed, and what the possibilities are for being bounced back and forth among these. In addition, the unemployment episode suggests that we might in general group proposed solutions into “likely” and “unlikely,” “heard” or “not-heard,” and then ask what the factors are that raise or lower the probability of a particular proposal being made or accepted.

Finally, the unemployment episode points to an aspect of policy discussions that may help account for some of the confusion. This is the fact that often the objectives as stated frequently have attached to them a number of unstated assumptions and connotations. It is these that cloud the issue. And it is these that the real battle may be about.

The final episode—a discussion about the “age consent” shall be used to propose a further way grouping social actions, and to take somewhat further question: What is the argument all about? What is that people are trying to protect or achieve?

In many cases, I propose, what is being argued about is an underlying view of human nature and human development. Part of that underlying view consists of ideas about age-categories (“proper” ages for various behaviours) but more than that is also involved. With that forewarning, let us turn to “the age of consent.”

The Age of Consent

The last example of an outburst of discussion concerns the age of consent: more precisely, the age below which a girl’s consent to sexual activity cannot be assumed to be valid, placing the male involved open to the charge of unlawful carnal knowledge or statutory rape. The female may also be open to the charge of being “in moral danger.” This discussion was the liveliest of all, at least in the sense of producing the most purple prose.

The tempest started from an unlikely source. The state of New South Wales now has an Anti-Discrimination Board. In January of this year (1981), it produced a 264-page report on age discrimination, based on its own investigations and on submissions invited from any interested agencies or individuals. The report singled out “the old” and “the young” as being the most discriminated against. For “the young” (ranging roughly from 12 to 21), the report recommended to the Premier that:

- A children’s legal service be established;
- Corporal punishment in schools be abolished;
- Pupils be given the right to appeal against expulsion from school;
- The age of consent be lowered from 16 to 14 - provided that the girl’s partner was no more than two years older than the girl was.

The first three recommendations were listed in the press but received no response. The fourth put the cat among the pigeons.

Now the Anti-Discrimination Board had a number reasons for recommending the lowering of the age consent:

- Fourteen is now the age at which consent can be directly given for many forms of medical and dental treatment.
At 14 and 15 (or earlier), many teenagers are seeking advice on contraception from family planning services. In most cases, they are given advice without parents being informed. All such help, however, places the people who give it in an awkward situation. Strictly speaking, they may be regarded as going along with what is officially a crime. They should, it might be argued, be pressing for the name of the client’s partner and passing it on: a sure way to lose the client and the possibility of giving help. Lowering the age of consent would put both the teenagers and the professional services in a more comfortable and more legal position.

A restriction on the age of a partner for girls under 16 would be a protection against exploitation by older males. It would also recognize the reality that most sexual activity at this age is with peers.

To its credit, Sydney’s major newspaper (the Sydney Morning Herald) produced an editorial pointing out that there was “nothing outlandish or subversive of morality about the proposal” (SMH, January 27, 1981). The editorial added the arguments:

- Age limits are not sacrosanct. They vary in fact from one Australian state to another. In five of the eight States, the limit is 16. In two others—Queensland and Tasmania—it is 17. And in one—the Northern Territory—it is 13. As the SMH noted, “all this suggests that age limits are arbitrary, and that they are merely attempts to legislate morality.”
- The current age limit “is divorced from social reality.” “It is hard to find even the slightest biological justification for it.”
- “The law is being flouted, and for that matter, is rarely enforced.”
- “There is a danger that young people of 14 or 15 will be exploited by sexual predators.” There are, however, the SMH noted without further specification, “other legal safeguards which apply to minors in other situations” if exploitation is the case. I assume that laws against procuring and against “undue influence” would certainly apply.

With the exception of the last comment, the SMH’s arguments do not deal with the age of male partner. The SMH noted that the limitation of “plus two years” “may suggest an unnatural limitation on a person’s choice of a sexual partner.” But it does “recognize the dangers of exploitation” and might make legislators feel “less timid.”

Now the SMH is by and large a conservative paper, with a relatively staid and serious image. It is not a tabloid. That editorial, however, was about the only voice of sanity for a few weeks. As the SMH itself noted in a survey of opinions, “the Anglican Dean of Sydney was appalled, and the Acting Head of the Opposition said any decent member of the community would be against it.” Moreover, a mini-poll of parents and grandparents, reported front-page on the same issue of the SMH, showed parents and grandparents to be uniformly horrified. The SMH did manage, however, to give even its front-page story a twist, giving the largest print to the line: “What’s the age of consent? asks 13-year old.”

Most of the responses and articles brought in an assortment of arguments:

- “I can’t help but wonder how the Board found itself discussing sex and teenagers” (columnist Ita Buttrose, Editor-in-Chief, Sunday Telegraph, February 1, 1981).
- The impression would be given that “as a community we condone sex at 14. Who would blame our children for thinking otherwise?” (ibid)
- Girls of 14 are not ready for pregnancy
- Girls are not ready for sex
- Girls will now be unprotected: “now it is suggested we fling our 14-year olds into the street for the use of any males (provided he is not over 16)” (signed letter to editor of SMH, January 27, 1981)
- the moral fibre of the nation will collapse

This argument was superbly expressed by the writer of the following letter:

January 27, 1981

Sir,

One wonders at the audacity of an anti-discrimination board to expound on morals

The use of overseas statistics in the Herald’s editorial (January 27) to support a case on the moral standards of teenage girls is, in my opinion awash with muddled thinking

By our continued undermining of our moral standards we are now hellbent on destroying what little protection our daughters and our sons have.

First we have flooded our films with the notion that sex is always love; we have misled our daughters to accept the self indulgence of the male as their key to freedom; we have told them in our schools that they must express themselves (before they have had the opportunity to absorb anything); and now it is suggested that we fling 14-year-olds into the street for the use of any male (provided he’s not over 16)

If we destroy the potential mothers of this nation—we destroy it. A great part of Australia’s national heritage has been the direct result of the deep care and real love of its womanhood

Many girls are immature at 15, let alone at 14.

Law changes nothing, but if we don’t change our values Australia will no longer be a lucky country.

Why be interested in this particular round of discussion? It certainly illustrates the ease with which discussion can depart from a specific point, moving rapidly to asking whether “we condone sex” for girls at 14. More than that, however, it brings out two recurring features to social policies.

A Possible Grouping for Social Policies

In several contexts—including the context of age of consent and contraceptive advice to teenagers—we have found it useful to think in terms of “an eternal triangle,” formed by “the child,” “the parents,” and “the state” (using “the state” to cover whatever level of the outside community has the power to take actions that affect members of a family).

There are occasions where “the state” deals with the young
only through parents. Family support systems provide an example. In Australia, for example, a form of support termed "child endowment" is paid directly to the mother for each offspring: support that can extend to the age of 25 if the dependent is a full-time student living at home. That support, incidentally, goes directly to the mother, reflecting a concern—quite explicitly stated in the 1920's—over the young, consulting or considering only the parents, primarily the mother. "Parent education" is a third example. "The state" is concerned with the welfare of the next generation, but concentrates its action on the rearing adults.

In contrast, there are occasions when "the state" bypasses the parents and interacts directly with the young. It may remove children from a family setting without parental consent. It may allow the young direct access to legal or medical services. It may provide sex education as an automatic part of a school curriculum. A similar route—through parents to children—has usually existed in the past for all custody decisions: "the state" made decisions for the young, consulting or considering only the parents, primarily the mother. "Parent education" is a third example. "The state" is concerned with the welfare of the next generation, but concentrates its action on the rearing adults.

In contrast, there are occasions when "the state" bypasses the parents and interacts directly with the young. It may remove children from a family setting without parental consent. It may allow the young direct access to legal or medical services. It may provide sex education as an automatic part of a school curriculum.

Under what conditions is one route likely to be favoured over another? Three associated arguments seem to occur. If we take the form of these that accompanies the route of direct access, the arguments are:

(a) That "the child" is more competent than was thought. In effect, "the child" is in this respect to be treated as an adult.
(b) That the young—whether they are "children" or "young adult"—have rights. They are individuals. This argument seems to fit with those offered for rights to decision on behalf of other individuals often considered in need of having decisions made for them: Women, for instance, or minority groups.
(c) That the parents have forfeited their rights to be the funnels or the gatekeepers in actions that affect children. They are "unfit," "incompetent," or "have abdicated their role" (a phrase often heard in justifying sex education in schools). Such comments may be applied to individual parents or to whole groups. Children have been removed wholesale, for instance, from Aboriginal Australian or American Indian parents, on the grounds of parental inability to bring up children in a way that meets the "future needs of a nation." The group of parents does not need even to be ethnically different from the parties that take over the children. One of the intriguing parts of New South Wales' history, for example, consists of the relatively wholesale taking over, by the state, of the rearing of the first generation born to the initial group of convicts. The provision of full day-care and residential care for that generation exceeded by far what was available later; and the level of health and literacy exceeded by far that of equivalent cohorts in England.

The discussion of consent, then, brings out the possibility of two routes for social action, together with questions about what accompanies a shift from one route to another. The option of two routes, and the initiative, need not always rest with "the state," we should note. The young may use "the state" or the community as an intermediary or buffer in dealing with parents, rather than dealing with them directly. Parents may also choose an indirect route, calling on state agencies, for instance, to have their children declared "incorrigible." We are some distance from unraveling the conditions under which one route is taken rather than another.

The notion of alternate routes with a range of accompanying arguments, however, does help us create categories for a wide variety of social actions.

**Bases for Action: Beyond Monetary Cost**

A second interesting feature to the discussion about consent is that the central basis for taking or avoiding action appears not to be one of financial cost. Some analysts of social welfare are inclined to see all decisions as based on monetary considerations. In the present case, however, money might well be saved by giving advice on contraception to 14 and 15-year-olds. "The state" might be saved both the cost of a child who may need later help and, on a shorter-term basis, the cost of paying supporting parents' benefit (an allowance, roughly equal to unemployment benefits) to a non-working parent who is the sole support of a child. That benefit, incidentally, has a touch of irony to it. Some of the young, it has been reported, are "having babies because they fear they will leave school and not be able to get a job...social workers...said some of the girls think having a child and getting supporting parents' benefits has less stigma than being on the dole" (report of a Queensland study of unmarried teenage mothers, Sunday Telegraph, February 1, 1981).

If money costs are not the central issue, what is? In the present case, people appear to be expressing and protecting a particular view of the way development should proceed, with a special focus on the way transitions should occur from one developmental category to another. Part of our cultural heritage appears to be a set of assumptions about the way development should proceed, buttressed by the argument that this particular way is most in line with morality, with nature, with what "the best" people do, or with the needs of the nation. Such views of development typically contain some form of age-grading, some set of categories that one progresses through by virtue of age. Such age-grading, it has been argued, is part of the social order of cultures. It also provides a form of social control: there is an "appropriate age" for certain behaviours and departing from that age is labeled or felt to be deviant.

Such points about age-grading have been made with particular force by sociologists such as Neugarten, with primary reference to adult development. They apply equally well to "the young," to those regarded as on the verge of adulthood. This is a group that meets with constant reminders that they are "too old" for some "childish" pleasures but yet "too young" for some of those enjoyed by "full" adults, "too much in a hurry to grow up," too unaware that "if you start doing that at your age, little will be left for you when you are older."

The ubiquity of age-grading, and its functions as a form of social order and social control, help explain two aspects of behaviour. For one thing, it is small wonder that many of the negotiations between teenagers and adults with power centre around the setting and the changing of age-limits, especially if there is any degree of "give" or "fluidity" to those limits. For another, it is not
surprising that people will react with anxiety to what they perceive as a change in the usual developmental progression. A change in age-grading signals a change in the social order, about to begin or already occurring and about to be formally recognized. And change may well be disturbing, especially if one has the feeling that social order and the maintenance of social control is—like virtue—precarious at the best of times.

The discussion about consent brings out two further assumptions about development that many seem eager to protect. One is of the young—especially those who are on the verge of adulthood—as adult-oriented and future-oriented. The Board’s proposal that sexual activity with a like-aged partner is different from that with a clearly older partner comes close to the explicit recognition that the primary orientation of the 14 and 15-year-old group is towards their peers and towards the present. The second aspect concerns a particular relationship between men and women. The letter I cited—expressing fear for the future of the nation if women are not protected—contains part of this feeling. For a fuller statement of what many regard as the proper relationship between genders, let me reach back into history again. This time, the quotation comes from a description of a school founded and managed by a group of charity-minded women in Sydney in the 1830’s. The Sydney Orphan School and School of Industry. The aim was to benefit not only girls but the whole community:

If the female part of our community—the humbler sort of industrious housewifery, just in proportion will the male part of the colonial population become benefitted...Marry Darling’s School...will not only be...the academy for producing “virtuous wives and pious mothers” but this lady will have the enviable felicity of making good husbands and tender fathers. (original 1836, cited by Windschuttle, 1978, p. 57)

That general expectation—females as a civilized virtuous influence upon more brutish men, men who need to be restrained both by the gentle influence of women and by law—seems still to be with us. There may well be some accuracy in the argument that is a “natural” relationship between two genders. Accuracy or “naturalness,” however, is not my concern for the moment. What is at issue is the way people infuse the discussion of a specific issue with their concern that a broader aspect of “proper” objectives and “natural” or “best” ways of moving our “children” towards these?

I have also ended with the suggestion that these arguments about “nature” are often based on custom what we are used to comes to seem “natural”. That is not simply an observer’s cool comment. It is also a reminder to us that the people who differ from our preferred ways of solving problems may not be simply diabolical. They may instead be working from a view of development that seems to them as “natural” as ours does to us. That does not mean that I would not argue and fight for a particular approach to problems. I would hope to do so, however, with some respect for my antagonist, with a constant effort to keep in mind the humanist statement of Gisela’s with which George Albee (1980) ended his address last year:

I have stood for the idea that no person, no group, no one is ever superior to any one else. That, in a nutshell, is my belief. (Konopka, 1978).

We may not always live up to Gisela’s belief. But we can try.

REFERENCES


