

## CHAPTER 1

# Introduction

In June 1992 an eleven-year-old, caught up in the siege of Sarajevo, wrote in her diary,

*BOREDOM!!! SHOOTING!!! SHELLING!!! PEOPLE BEING KILLED!!! DESPAIR!!! HUNGER!!! MISERY!!! FEAR!!! That's my life! The life of an innocent eleven-year-old schoolgirl!! A schoolgirl without a school, without the fun and excitement of school. A child without games, without friends, without the sun, without birds, without nature, without fruit, without chocolate or sweets, with just a little powdered milk. In short a child without a childhood.*

Zlata had a clear sense of the ingredients of a childhood: innocence, school, fun, games, friends, nature, sweets. Deprived of them, she and her friends 'can't be children'.<sup>1</sup> For Zlata a child was not simply someone aged between, say, birth and fourteen; a child could be a real child only if he or she had a 'childhood'.

My aim in this book is in part to trace the development of this late-twentieth-century belief that children are real children only if their life experiences accord with a particular set of ideas about childhood. Will we find Zlatas in 1800 or in 1500, distraught that what they have been taught to expect of childhood is so at odds with the reality? Has 'childhood' in the past conveyed a set of ideas different to those which Zlata articulated?

I want also to explore the lives of children. Both 'children' and 'childhood' appear in my title because we need to distinguish between children as human beings and childhood as a shifting set of ideas. Have there been, in the five hundred years since 1500, significant changes in the experience of childhood, and, if so, when did they occur? To put the question thus bluntly is to invite the riposte: it depends on country, on social class, on

gender. That, certainly, is true; it will nevertheless be my argument that there were patterns of change in the experience of childhood in Europe and North America which were broadly similar, and which eventually encompassed all social classes and both genders.

It is in many ways much easier to write a history of childhood than of children. There is an accessible body of literature and of images, such as advice books, fiction and portraiture, which make it possible to piece together the ideas about childhood prevalent amongst particular social groups at particular points in time. It is possible to go further to look at the role played by childhood as an idea in a society's explanation of the world as a whole. It has, for instance, been common to imagine the history of humankind as equivalent to the life cycle of a human being; some societies have seen this as an ascent from savagery/childhood to civilisation/adulthood, others as a descent from primeval innocence/childhood to corruption/adulthood. A view of the world incorporates a view of the nature of childhood.<sup>2</sup>

Ideas about childhood in the past exist in plenitude; it is not so easy to find out about the lives of children. There are sources which can tell us about their numbers in relation to adults, their life expectancy, the ages at which they were likely to start work and leave home, and so on, but those seeking to recapture the emotional quality of the lives of children in the past encounter formidable hurdles. The letters and diaries of parents seem to be one way of surmounting the hurdles, but they tend to be written only by the articulate and well-to-do, and in them our view of the child is mediated through the perceptions of the adult. Children themselves have sometimes left behind written materials, but too often what they write in their diaries tells us more about the genre of diary writing and the desires and expectations of adult readers than about the experience of being a child.<sup>3</sup>

The issue which has underlain much recent historical writing about children has actually been more to do with parents than with children. Did parents in the past, it is asked, love their children? Whether or not children loved their parents is apparently not an issue. The question as posed is impossible to answer, partly because we simply do not know, and can never know, very much about the intimacies of relationships between parents and children, and partly because it assumes that we would recognise love if we saw it, and record its absence if it was not there, as though it were a material object like a table; in fact, of course, it may have expressed itself in very different ways in different societies.<sup>4</sup>

There is, then, a problem for the historian of childhood and children in that it is easier to write with some confidence about childhood than about

children. The challenge is to tease out the relationship between ideas about childhood and the experience of being a child, and to see how it has changed over time. How can the relationship between the two be explored? The answer is that ideas about childhood can be shown to have had some impact in two distinct ways. First, manuals for parents provide us with ideals of child-rearing in the past, and although we know that they were hardly ever followed to the letter by those who read them, and that frequently the advice was totally ignored, we also know that sometimes they were taken seriously; changes in emphasis in the advice books may be both a symptom and a reflection of changes in practice.<sup>5</sup> Secondly, ideas about childhood fed through into the discourses and actions of philanthropists and governments; a major theme of the book will be that public action shaped the lives of innumerable children in the centuries with which we are concerned.

It would be a mistake to fall into a way of thinking which assumes that if we beaver away at the relationship between children and childhood we may come up with some satisfactory history. Childhood cannot be studied in isolation from society as a whole. It is arguable that the factors which have had most impact on it, both as a set of ideas and as a phase of life, have been primarily economic and demographic, and, in second place, political. It has been the economic development of the western world which has allowed for both the shift in the experience of childhood from work to school, and for the emergence of the idea that childhood should be a time of dependency. And concern for the present safety and future needs of the state has often provided the impulse for public action concerning children. If, as we shall see, one of the theories about the history of children and childhood is that they have become increasingly separate from adults and adulthood, that is in fact all the more reason why we need to embed their history in wider economic, social and political developments.

## The historiography of childhood

Until the explosion of publications over the past forty years, someone in search of information about children and childhood in the past would have been dependent either on books which were essentially antiquarian in approach, for example R. Bayne-Powell's *The English Child in the Eighteenth Century* (1939), or on histories of social policy, many of them seeking to make a point about the present by study of the past. Some of the latter endure as scholarship, for example L. Lallemand's *Histoire des Enfants Abandonnés et Délaissés: Etude sur la Protection de l'Enfance aux*

*Diverses Epoques de la Civilisation* (1885), which sought to defend the part played by the Catholic Church in its policies toward abandoned children, or O.J. Dunlop and R.D. Denman's *English Apprenticeship and Child Labour* (1912), which, like many such studies in the early twentieth century in England, was inspired by the pioneering work of Beatrice and Sidney Webb on the history of the Poor Laws. Such books helped to build up a picture of the relationship between children and public authorities over time, and of the economic role of children. In 1926 R.H. Tawney highlighted the potential significance of such studies when he wrote that 'the treatment of childhood' in any society revealed more clearly than anything else 'the true character of a social philosophy'.<sup>6</sup>

In the past forty years historians have shown a burgeoning interest in children and childhood, but have rarely been in agreement with one another. There has been a reversal of opinion on some of the central issues. At the end of the 1970s most people agreed that the history of childhood was a history of progress, that the experience of being a child, and an understanding of the nature of childhood, had improved over time. A decade later the accepted orthodoxy was that, while obviously material circumstances had changed, the vast majority of children in the past had been brought up within nuclear families in which parents had loved their children; continuity replaced change as the *leitmotif* of the history of childhood.

Philippe Ariès's *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime* (1960), published in English as *Centuries of Childhood* (1962), launched the debates on the history of children and childhood which have lasted to the present day. His central theme had, however, been anticipated by Norbert Elias. In his volumes on *The Civilizing Process*, first published in Switzerland in 1939, and reaching an English readership only in the 1970s, Elias argued that 'The distance in behavior and whole psychological structure between children and adults increases in the course of the civilizing process.' This was the precise point underlying Ariès's book. For Elias 'the civilizing process' involved a control of the instincts, something which was hardly under way in the middle ages when, consequently, 'The distance between adults and children, measured by that of today, was slight.'<sup>7</sup> In the early modern period a plethora of advice books told adults how to behave, marking off the distance between adult and child. A French guide in 1714 urged readers to 'Take good care not to blow your nose with your fingers or on your sleeve *like children*; use your handkerchief and do not look into it afterward.' Of course children too were urged to control their instincts, another French advice book of 1774 noting how 'Children like to touch

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clothes and other things that please them with their hands. This urge must be corrected, and they must be taught to touch all they see only with their eyes.<sup>8</sup> The assumption by the end of the eighteenth century was coming to be that adults, in the social classes who might be assumed to read the advice books, would already have acquired good manners, but that children needed to be taught them; the distance between the two was increasing. The recognition in the twentieth century that children should be allowed to develop the manners of the adult world at their own pace did nothing to decrease that distance.<sup>9</sup> For Elias the marking out of the world of childhood from adulthood was inseparable from 'the civilizing process'.

Ariès's book is an extended gloss on Elias's perception. He was not a professional historian, and the evidence on which he drew and the mode in which he presented it bore the marks both of the antiquarian tradition, and of the interest in the present embedded in the histories of social policy. What distinguished the book from the work of other antiquarians was its chronological range – for Ariès covered the period from the middle ages to the present – and Ariès's willingness to point to changes over that time-span in accordance with the arguments made by Elias. He set out hypotheses about the history of childhood, and these have become the benchmark for all subsequent students.

Ariès did not disguise the fact that he was seeking to understand the particularity of the present by comparing and contrasting it with the past. What struck him about the present was the way in which social life and the emotions were centred in the family. From the eighteenth century, first within the middle classes, 'the wall of private life' was raised 'between the family and society'. The old sociability of the community was lost. Children were at the centre of these families, in a privatised world where adults were 'obsessed by the physical, moral and sexual problems of childhood'.<sup>10</sup> Ariès's starting point, then, was his distaste for what he saw as the oppressive and intolerant nature of modern family life.<sup>11</sup> In seeking to understand how this had come about, he chose to focus on childhood for it was changes in ideas about childhood which, in his view, had been central to the making of the modern family. Crucial in this was the development of the idea that children should have an education, which Ariès saw as part of a 'moralization of society' promulgated by reformers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; children came to be subjected to 'a sort of quarantine' before they were allowed to join adult society. Parents were taught that they had a duty to ensure that their children were sent to school.<sup>12</sup> In what, as we shall see in the next chapter, may have been a rather romantic view of the middle ages, Ariès pictured medieval children

as merging naturally into adult society from about the age of seven, retaining only relatively loose ties with their families. By contrast, education, and the responsibilities of parents with regard to it, placed children at the heart of a family which was increasingly in isolation from the rest of society.

Given the importance which Ariès ascribed to education in defining modern concepts of childhood it is not surprising that he devoted roughly half of his book to a study of changes in 'Scholastic Life'. The key change was the development of the idea that schooling was for children only rather than for people of all ages; childhood and adulthood were being separated out. Once schooling became something confined to children, it became possible to impose on it an order and discipline, including corporal punishment, this discipline separating 'the child who suffered from it from the liberty enjoyed by the adult'.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, as schooling spread and was extended, childhood itself lasted longer. Ariès recognised that these changes were of long duration, and took effect on different timescales according to gender, class and nation, but he was in no doubt that the influence of moralists in spreading the idea and practice of schooling was fundamental to the emergence of modern ideas of childhood.

It has been necessary to stress this point because most commentary on Ariès's book concentrates on the essays which make up Part I of the book, entitled 'The Idea of Childhood'. These were exploratory and tentative in their conclusions. Ariès investigated in turn changes in concepts of age, the portrayal of childhood in pictures, children's dress, the history of games and pastimes, and the development of the idea that children were naturally innocent and should be protected from anything which might disturb their modesty. His overall conclusion was that by the seventeenth century there had developed in France two concepts of childhood. The first was to be found within families; parents began 'to recognize the pleasure they got from watching children's antics and "coddling" them'.<sup>14</sup> The second had its origins outside the family in moralists who stressed how children were fragile creatures of God who needed to be safeguarded and reformed. It was these moralists who were increasingly to argue that school must work with the family in carrying out this task.

Ariès stressed that 'it is not so much the family as a reality that is our subject . . . as the family as an idea'.<sup>15</sup> He was more interested in the history of childhood than in the history of children. He set out a trajectory of the development of ideas about childhood, mainly in France, but with references to other European countries. Parts of his argument, as we shall see in the next chapter, are widely criticised, but few would doubt that the task he set himself, without any body of established scholarship as a base,

was a legitimate one. Ariès drew evidence from a wide range of sources, including school records, and drew evidence from the history of schooling for example. He also drew evidence from the history of childhood for example. He drew evidence from the history of childhood for example. He drew evidence from the history of childhood for example.

Ariès's book was a landmark. Few historical journals had become accepted as a part of the day.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the 1960s and early 1970s were on its topic. This was a time when the history of childhood and child development was grouped together as a separate field. Ariès's book (1974); Edward S. Redkey, *Lawrence Stone*, (1977). These three books, however, it was most striking, raised the question of the subsequently alleged 'crisis' in De Mause's book *The Invention of Childhood as a factor in history*. This seventy-page essay does not always fit easily with the rest of the book. The evolution of the concept of childhood is central to what de Mause has to say. This interpretation of the history of childhood for the quality of the child's life; as de Mause would say, technology nor economic conditions occurring because of the technology. De Mause outlines the projective reaction of children to their own unconscious adults' unacknowledged projective reaction. In the reverse

was a legitimate one: ideas or concepts of childhood have not remained constant, and do have a history. In pursuing this theme Ariès inevitably drew evidence from the reality of childhood, from the experience of schooling for example, and he certainly implied that changes in ideas about childhood had radically affected the experience of childhood. His immediate successors in the historiography of childhood tended to reverse the emphasis, stressing the experience of being a child rather than the development of ideas about childhood.

Ariès's book did not immediately achieve fame or even recognition. Few historical journals reviewed it. Within the social sciences, however, it became accepted as important and authoritative, a status it retains to this day.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, when social history began to enjoy a boom in the late 1960s and early 1970s, *Centuries of Childhood* was the only available text on its topic. This was soon to change. A trio of books are now often grouped together as marking a peculiarly 1970s' approach to the history of children and childhood: Lloyd de Mause (ed.), *The History of Childhood* (1974); Edward Shorter, *The Making of the Modern Family* (1976); and Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (1977). These three are also often linked to *Centuries of Childhood*. At the time, however, it was the disagreements amongst these authors which were most striking, rather than the common ground which they were subsequently alleged to share.

De Mause's book is subtitled *The evolution of parent-child relationships as a factor in history*, and this accurately indicates the theme of the editor's seventy-page essay. The other contributions, it has often been noted, do not always fit easily into the schema outlined by de Mause, and are best seen as self-standing case studies in the history of children and childhood. The evolution of the relationship between parent and child was, however, central to what de Mause called the 'psychogenic' interpretation of history. This interpretation had ramifications far outside the history of childhood, for the quality of parent-child relations was seen as the motor force of history; as de Mause put it, 'the central force for change in history is neither technology nor economics, but the "psychogenic" changes in personality occurring because of successive generations of parent-child interactions'. De Mause outlined three ways in which adults can respond to children. In the projective reaction, adults use children as a vehicle for the projection of their own unconscious, that is the children become the repository of all the adults' unacknowledged bad feelings and fears about themselves. It is this projective reaction, de Mause argues, which is behind the idea of original sin. In the reversal reaction, adults use children as a substitute for an adult

figure important in their own childhood, that is the parent becomes a child, and the child becomes a parent. Thus parents look for love from their children. Finally, in the empathic reaction adults empathise with children's needs, and attempt to satisfy them. It is quite possible for a parent to combine both projective and reversal reactions, this dual image of the child as both bad and loving being indeed 'responsible for much of the bizarre quality of childhood in the past'. The key to success in parenting for de Mause is to have the ability to regress to the psychic age of your child, and he believed that each generation of parents was likely to be better than its predecessors in this respect, though the mechanism which drives this evolution is not at all clear. But it followed that one could, in a rough and ready way, periodise parent-child relations, moving through six modes, the infanticidal, the abandonment, the ambivalent, the intrusive, the socialisation, and finally, from the mid-twentieth century, the helping mode. In short, things have got steadily better. Or as de Mause put it at the beginning of his chapter, 'The history of childhood is a nightmare from which we have only recently begun to awaken. The further back in history one goes, the lower the level of child care, and the more likely children are to be killed, abandoned, beaten, terrorized, and sexually abused.'<sup>17</sup>

The psychogenic theory of history has never won much of a hearing amongst historians, to a degree doubtless because of an instinctive hostility on the part of historians to concepts with which most of them are unfamiliar, but also because of the inherent implausibility of a theory which attempted to schematise and explain the course of human history by exploring parent-child interactions; its reach was too ambitious.<sup>18</sup> In any case de Mause acknowledged that his hypotheses were 'subject to proof or disproof by empirical historical evidence', and it is on that ground that historians have chosen to assess his work – and generally found it wanting.<sup>19</sup>

Where de Mause concentrated on the parent-child interaction, Edward Shorter returned to the central concern of Ariès, the rise of the modern family. Unlike Ariès, he did not see a new role for children as central to the making of the modern family, putting much more emphasis on the sexual behaviour of young people and adults. Indeed children, as distinct from babies, hardly feature in Shorter's book. It was Shorter's ambition to move away from reliance on evidence from the elites of society, and to 'find out about the representative experience of the average person'. Moreover, he argued that the shift from what he called the 'traditional' to the 'modern' family was associated with 'a surge of sentiment' in three areas, one of them of direct concern to us, the mother-baby relationship. In essence,

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Shorter agreed with Ariès that the contemporary family was a recent phenomenon both in its internal relationships and in its privacy, but he took issue with the implicit chronology in which, for Ariès, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries marked the turning point. For Shorter, with his emphasis on the mass of the people, the transition was later. In a form of words as much quoted and as notorious as that of de Mause on the history of childhood as a nightmare, Shorter claimed that 'Good mothering in an invention of modernization. In traditional society, mothers viewed the development and happiness of infants younger than two with indifference. In modern society, they place the welfare of their small children above all else.' For Shorter this transition did not begin to take place for the mass of the people until the last quarter of the eighteenth century, and in some regions and classes later than that. Using mainly French evidence, and acknowledging that French experience may have differed from that of other Europeans, Shorter found signs of a surge of sentiment amongst the middle classes in the mid-eighteenth century, marked by maternal breast-feeding and an end to the system of sending children off to a wet-nurse. Other indications were the abandonment of swaddling, allowing a freer interaction between mother and baby. But the revolution in sentiment for the mass of the people was not complete until the beginning of the twentieth century, taking root from about the 1860s.<sup>20</sup>

Shorter was inclined to explain his surges of sentiment by arguing that capitalism fragmented and broke up traditional society, and in matters of romantic love and sexual behaviour he accorded a leading and initiating role to proletarians. He recognised, however, that this pattern did not fit the mother-child relationship, and concluded that capitalism's input in this respect was to allow the possibility of time for well-off middle-class mothers to begin to look after their babies in a 'modern' way. Gradually, as capitalism brought improved family incomes for more and more sections of society, 'women could exchange the grim pressures of production for the work of infant care'.<sup>21</sup> In effect, there was a trickle-down of good mothering from the well-off to the less well-off, an explanation of change sharply at odds with Shorter's overall assessment of the impact of capitalism, and one which makes his account of mothers and infants conventional in its general outline.

Whereas Shorter focused his attention on the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Lawrence Stone, like Ariès, searched for the key changes in the history of the family in the period 1500-1800. The difference is in large part explained by Stone's concentration on the middle and upper sections of society. Stone identified three types of family, the 'open lineage

family' in the period 1450–1630, the 'restricted patriarchal nuclear family' in the period 1550–1700, and finally the 'closed domesticated nuclear family' in the period 1640–1800. Stone argued that one of the central features of the modern family, an 'intensified affective bonding of the nuclear core at the expense of neighbours and kin', was well established in 'the key middle and upper sectors of English society' by the middle of the eighteenth century. But he did not think that this and other features of the modern family spread up to the higher court aristocracy or downwards into the respectable working class until late in the nineteenth century.

For Stone, changes in parent-child relationships were a more important indicator of overall changes in the nature of the family than they were for Shorter, but neither children nor childhood had the centrality in his explanation that had been accorded to them by Ariès. In the 'open lineage family' Stone argued that relationships between parents and children were 'usually fairly remote', marked in the upper classes by sending off babies to wet-nurses, and in the upper bourgeois and professional classes by despatching them to boarding school at about the age of ten. Things were little better in the 'restricted patriarchal nuclear family' where Stone found, especially amongst Puritans, 'a fierce determination to break the will of the child, and to enforce his utter subjection to the authority of his elders and superiors, and most especially of his parents'. Both in the schools and in the home, corporal punishment, often very brutal, was the norm, the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries being 'the great flogging age'. Children were taught to behave with great formality in the presence of their parents, and to defer to them at all times.<sup>22</sup> Change came from about 1660, and over the ensuing century and a half there occurred 'a remarkable change in accepted child-rearing theory, in standard child-rearing practices, and in affective relations between parents and children'. England moved 'towards a child-oriented family type'. Stone did not pretend that this affected the whole of society; indeed he identified six different modes of child-rearing, only one of which, the 'child-oriented, affectionate and permissive mode' within 'the upper bourgeoisie and squirarchy' was fully modern. And even within that social strata there was an alternative 'child-oriented but repressive mode'.<sup>23</sup>

Like Shorter, Stone was concerned to find an explanation not for 'a change of structure, or of economics, or of social organization, but of sentiment'. In contrast to Shorter, he dismissed the idea that it had anything to do with industrial capitalism, finding the explanation in a rise of individualism linked to the decline in aristocratic society and 'the growth of a large, independent and self-confident middle class'. It was this which

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Although Stone used the language of 'evolution' with respect to the family, he also claimed that 'it is wholly false to assume that there can have been any such thing as straightforward linear development'. Rather, Stone was inclined to see 'an unending dialectic of competing interests and ideas' and development in cycles, rather than in a straight line – although with one crucial exception: 'The only steady linear change over the last four hundred years seems to have been a growing concern for children, although their actual treatment has oscillated cyclically between the permissive and the repressive.' Moreover, he argued that there were as many losses as gains in the rise of affective individualism.<sup>25</sup>

Ariès, de Mause, Shorter and Stone had one thing in common, and that was that they believed that there had been, over time, major changes in attitudes to and treatment of childhood. Other less wide-ranging studies, often focused on the eighteenth century as a crucial century of change, reached the same conclusion.<sup>26</sup> Where these writers disagreed was in their evaluation and explanation of that change, in its timing, and in the way they related it to social class. And the disagreements were profound; Ariès described an increasing distance between adult and child where de Mause saw convergence, the latter correctly noting that 'Ariès's central thesis is the opposite of mine'.<sup>27</sup> In the 1980s, however, that ubiquitous focus on a change in sentiment was highlighted to emphasise the common ground rather than the disagreements, and formed the basis for a criticism which seemed to sweep all before it.

Michael Anderson's *Approaches to the History of the Western Family 1500–1914* (1980) was perhaps the first to group these writings together as 'the sentiments approach' to the history of the family, in contrast to 'the demographic approach' and 'the household economics approach'. Although he accepted the validity of the common set of questions which they were addressing, he pointed to the problem in finding evidence to answer them, and to 'a style of writing in which speculation or even pure fantasy is glossed over as if it were clearly established fact'. Moreover, he noted the difficulty these writers had in arriving at explanations for the changes they described, and argued that their method encouraged too much decontextualisation in the sphere of culture, without close examination of economic structures.<sup>28</sup>

A full-blown critique of the existing histories of children and childhood came only with Linda Pollock's *Forgotten Children: Parent–child relations from 1500 to 1900* (1983). It was by this time clear that medievalists

rejected Ariès's contention that 'in medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist',<sup>29</sup> and that English historians disagreed profoundly with Stone's characterisation of parent-child relationships in the seventeenth century. A head of steam was building up which was to criticise the key writings of the 1970s as methodologically unsound, technically incompetent, and in their conclusions wholly mistaken.<sup>30</sup> Pollock established a new paradigm for the 1980s. In its essence this new approach concentrated on the actuality of parent-child relationships, rather than on ideas about childhood, and its fundamental argument, as expressed by Pollock, was that continuity rather than change was the most important fact about those relationships. Thus, whereas Stone had argued that because infant mortality was so high, parents reduced 'the amount of emotional capital available for prudent investment in any single individual, especially in such ephemeral creatures as infants', Pollock found 'no change in the extent of parental grief over the centuries and no support at all for the argument that parents before the eighteenth century were indifferent to the death of their young offspring, whereas after the eighteenth century they grieved deeply'. Similarly on the issue of discipline, Pollock concluded that 'the evidence does not agree with the arguments of such writers as Ariès, de Mause, or Stone that children were harshly, even cruelly, disciplined, but reveals that brutality was the exception rather than the rule'.<sup>31</sup>

On what basis did Pollock reach these conclusions? First, she turned to evidence from sociobiology, studies of primates, and anthropology to argue that 'children require a certain amount of protection, affection and training for normal development', and that parents everywhere try to supply that.<sup>32</sup> The bulk of her evidence, however, was taken from a systematic study of diaries and autobiographies in Britain and North America concerning child-rearing in the period between 1500 and 1900. Pollock had to concede that 'diarists as a class may be exceptional rather than representative of society as a whole', and she was aware that at best she would only have access through this source to the literate; she tried to surmount this problem by turning, very briefly, to other evidence which suggested to her that lower-class child-rearing practices did not differ fundamentally from those of the higher classes. But overall she argued that diaries help to reveal 'the actualities of childhood rather than the attitudes to it'. This ambition indicates the shift that had occurred since Ariès declared his wish to understand the history of the idea of the family. Pollock went further to argue that 'there is little, if any, connection between attitudes and behaviour'. Historians who spend their time reading advice books, or sermons, or general treatises on childhood will, on Pollock's argument, learn

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little of use about the actualities of child-rearing or of child life. The history of childhood as an idea was thus sharply differentiated from the history of children.<sup>33</sup>

Pollock's refutation of the work of the 1960s and 1970s did not stand alone. Keith Wrightson, for example, in his widely-read *English Society 1580–1680* (1982) devoted fifteen pages to children, using, amongst other sources, wills, and concluded, directly contradicting Stone, that 'there seems no reason to believe that parental attitudes towards or aspirations for their children underwent fundamental change in the course of the seventeenth century'.<sup>34</sup> Ralph Houlbrooke, in his level-headed study of *The English Family 1450–1700* (1984), was alert to the variety of experience within and across social classes, but nevertheless noted that there 'is much direct evidence of the reality of loving care in some families and of parental grief in face of the loss of children'.<sup>35</sup>

The work of Ariès, de Mause, Shorter and Stone had placed the history of children and childhood firmly within the overarching category of the history of sentiment; their critics by and large responded within the same terms. Yet there were, as Anderson pointed out, other possible approaches to the history of children and childhood. One of these, the demographic, had at some level informed all these studies. The Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure had been arguing since the 1960s that certainly in England and probably elsewhere – at least in northern Europe – household size had typically been small, with a nuclear family as the dominant norm. This work undermined the old sociological assumption that there had been a transition, generally associated with industrialisation, from extended families to nuclear families; the nuclear family now became the norm. It thus became possible to argue that loving relationships within nuclear families had a perdurance in history and a power to withstand the onslaughts and intrusions of church, of state, and of economic change.<sup>36</sup> More generally, the work of demographers has provided crucial evidence on such factors as age of marriage, number of children born and surviving, the spacing of children, and the age at which they might leave home. These provide essential contours for the history of children and childhood, but, as has often been pointed out, the 'facts' on these matters do not unreservedly speak for themselves; we still need to try to find out what meaning people attached to them.

One way to do this is to locate families within particular economic and social structures, and this is the approach which Anderson described under the heading of 'household economics'. This can be linked to a wider body of studies which examines 'family strategy'. The underlying assumption is

that families make rational responses to the situations in which they find themselves. For example, the number of children born to families may differ considerably according to their socio-economic situation. Thus it has been argued both that the age of marriage fell and the level of fertility within marriage rose in the conditions known as proto-industrialisation which offered considerable employment opportunities to all members of a family including its children. Similarly, as no one can doubt, fertility levels have fallen since the late nineteenth century and at the same time children have become more of an expense to their parents.

The family strategy or household economics approach thus places the emphasis on the economic more than on the sentimental value of children. The most far-reaching of such studies, which aims to bring the two approaches together, is Alan Macfarlane's *Marriage and Love in England 1300-1840* (1986). Macfarlane contrasted societies typically studied by anthropologists in which children are seen unreservedly as a benefit, both economically in their contribution to the family economy, and emotionally as supports to their parents and testimony to their status, and England (and with some reservations other parts of Europe) where, he argued, children have since the middle ages been a cost to their parents; hence the limitations on fertility in England achieved by late or non-marriage and spacing of children within marriage.

Macfarlane has argued for deeply-rooted habits and assumptions which have produced relatively constant behaviour over centuries. Others, with a shorter time focus, have argued that family strategies can respond quickly to changing circumstances. This is the approach of a number of recent studies to what used to be the central question in the history of childhood, the use of child labour in the industrial revolution. It is argued in one such study that it was families who made the crucial decisions about the participation of their children in the labour market, and who later, as economic circumstances improved, decided that it made more sense to invest in their children's education and so withdrew them from the labour market; the work of philanthropists striving to rescue children, or of laws which forbade the work of children, were at best of secondary importance.<sup>37</sup>

Such assertions suggest that it is timely to consider in more depth the role of philanthropy and the state in relation to children. The emphasis on studying the experience of childhood within the family – an emphasis common to the demographic, sentiments and household economics approaches – has led to neglect of the wider political and social structures which had an impact on childhood. A common starting point is the assumption that

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secular agencies in particular only began to play a crucial role in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This, as I shall show in Chapters 4 and 5, is a mistake; the strategies of the vast majority of poor families were shaped by their awareness of the facilities, services and sanctions operated by the state. At the same time, there is also little doubt that the introduction of compulsory schooling, normally in the late nineteenth century, did more than any other factor in these five centuries to transform the experience and the meanings attached to childhood by removing children, in principle if not immediately in fact, from the labour market, now reserved for those who were no longer 'children'. It was this which eventually brought about in the twentieth century an emotional valuation of children much greater than anything accorded to them in previous centuries.<sup>38</sup>

This book, then, will concentrate on three central interlocking themes: ideas of childhood; the actuality of adult-child relations; and the roles of philanthropists and states in regard to childhood. The underlying assumption will be that we will gain an understanding of these only if they are linked to the wider history of western society. As a working guide, 'children' will be taken to mean anyone under fifteen, though in actual fact in nearly all societies people have differed quite substantially in their thinking on the age at which childhood ends. I cannot, of course, hope to provide a history of children and childhood in each and every country of the western world, and make no pretence of so doing. The reason why I have chosen to study such a large geographical area is that, although I will frequently be drawing attention to different experiences in different parts of the west, there is nevertheless an important common pattern of change which concentration on minutiae can obscure. In Chapter 2 I shall be concerned to see what ideas and practices were inherited from or available as models from the classical and Christian traditions, and will then examine the debates about medieval childhood, sparked off by Ariès, as a background against which to measure childhood in the early modern period. Chapter 3 will argue that over the period 1500 to 1900 there was built up a set of ideas about childhood sufficiently coherent to be described as an ideology. In Chapter 4 I shall examine the experience of childhood and attitudes towards childhood in the mass of the populations of Europe and North America, arguing that the major transition that occurred in the centuries between 1500 and 1900 was that from early participation of children in contributions to the family economy to compulsory schooling. Chapters 5 and 6 will examine the relationship between families and children and both philanthropists and the state, paying particular attention to the ways