Introduction

Development is one of psychology's given components. Psychologists and consequently the lay public in Western cultures see childhood as well as adult character in terms of what I call here 'the developmental idea', describing a scientific category that exists 'out there' in nature. The human interior, it seems, passes through a necessary series of stages that play out over time. And so the youngest of us are only potential human beings; we do not start to display signs of 'empathy', say, until we are three, or 'logical reasoning' until we are six: or so we are told. Adult character and conduct are the desired outcome of those stages (though a few of us, it appears, never reach them even when we arrive at adulthood by calendar age).

In any science, however, it is axiomatic that starting assumptions be kept under close observation. The existence of 'development' may be taken for granted, but is it truly a fact of nature? This book approaches the question by a historical route. After all, without knowing how the idea of development arrived we can hardly know what the thing itself really is. Historians of psychology often proceed by taking an obvious category like this and searching past literature for an early, primitive awareness of it. They assume that it is what the philosophy of science calls a 'natural kind': something that has been and always will be around, only awaiting an accurate scientific description. Critics of this approach call it 'presentism'. Rather than skip the stage of submitting their starting premises to scrutiny, they have found instead that psychological categories assumed to be natural kinds often turn out to be human creations, arising from the midstream of historical contingencies. Rather than ask where historical concepts are heading, they ask where modern concepts come from. Categories as basic to the discipline as memory, intelligence, emotion, depression and inhibition have been looked at afresh in this way.[1] This book adds development to the list.

[1] Kurt Danziger, *Marking the Mind: A History of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); C. F. Goodey, *A History of Intelligence and 'Intellectual Disability': The Shaping of Psychology in*

To see the developmental idea and even the thing itself as historical creations is to say that there were once and may in future be totally different ways of understanding what it is to be human. Few sociologists have questioned the natural status of development;[2] its social critics in general, by focusing on the power relationships for which the concept has been used, also tend thereby to leave its core premise intact.[3] And it is the historical perspective, more so than any other, that enables us to stand fully outside the formative conceptual ingredients of psychology and make an external assessment of them.

The practical implications of this are vast: for the specific social out-groups it has created such as those deemed to be not yet developed (children), for those who by the same criterion will never develop (developmentally disabled) and ultimately for all of us. However, this book is neither a social nor an ethical critique. Here, if there are judgements to be passed, it is history itself that will be doing the job. It tells us that once upon a time, people did not develop. If this seems for the moment implausible, at least it might be agreed that there was no *developmental idea*: no sense of human individuals being cognitively complete or incomplete, emotionally mature or immature, no sense that full humanity is either merely potential or actual and achieved. The fact that children grow physically did not prompt parallel thoughts about interior growth. Only at a certain point in history did the developmental idea arrive. It belongs to a particular era with a beginning and, who knows, an end.[4]

That era is not just the last century or so, during which developmental and child psychology have become a formal scientific discipline, but also the many previous centuries on which the discipline drew for its content. Seeds of the developmental idea were sown during the first centuries of Christianity and monotheism generally. Later, towards the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, came the notion of a *structured* interior timeline. This notion was modelled on a small number of people: not just the

Early Modern Europe (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011); Daniel Gross, *The Secret History of Emotion: From Aristotle's Rhetoric to Modern Brain Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Matthew Bell, *Melancholia: The Western Malady* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Roger Smith, *Inhibition: History and Meaning in the Sciences of Mind and Brain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

[2] For the rare exception, see Priscilla Alderson, *Childhoods Real and Imagined: An Introduction to Critical Realism and Childhood Studies*, vol. 1 (London: Routledge, 2013); also *Young Children's Rights: Exploring Beliefs, Principles and Practice* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2008), especially chapter 4.

[3] See, for example, Erica Burman, *Deconstructing Developmental Psychology* (London: Routledge, 2016); John Morss, *The Biologizing of Childhood: Developmental Psychology and the Darwinian Myth* (London: Routledge, 1990).

[4] For an acknowledgement from within the discipline concerning the possibility of an end, see William Kessen, *The Rise and Fall of Development* (Worcester MA: Clark University Press, 1990).

social elite but even more importantly the 'elect' – that is, those few whom God had predestined to be saved from damnation. It was this elect minority that would later transition into the 'normal' majority familiar to the modern outlook. The developmental idea, as it emerges in the texts of early modern thought, is part of this shift from explaining human nature in terms of religion to a modern, secular-looking psychology. This book focuses chiefly on the religious beliefs of major historical thinkers in the century prior to the arrival of the word 'development' itself in the mid-eighteenth century.

Early Christian thinkers broke with cyclical ways of reckoning time in human lives. They prescribed for the human individual the sense that time is linear and heading towards an identifiable destination. They structured this linear time into a necessary series of stages. And they shifted the main criterion for division among human beings from their external status and worldly power, or lack of it, to their interior status and their salvation, or damnation. By the late sixteenth century, there was a widespread theory that God had determined everyone's afterlife destination (and therefore their interior status while on earth) before birth. The efficacy of individual effort was thereby marginalized: you could do nothing to alter your destiny. And because in the case of the damned this situation did not seem just, religious writers were forced to look for excuses. It was no longer enough just to quote the Bible. They started to try and defend God's actions by means of a rational theory.

Meanwhile, God was becoming an indwelling power within nature that sustained the universe in its becoming rather than as a spatially hierarchical structure. He was seen as prolonging its motion towards a goal, at the same time as religion set itself to discovering causes for prospective, linear time within the individual. This conception of God would peak in eighteenth-century theories of a rationally explicable or 'natural' religion, from which direct lines to the modern mind sciences can be traced. If, in external nature, being was increasingly studied in terms of its becoming, the human being was increasingly studied as a human becoming. And from this rational religion arose large chunks of modern psychological theory, of modern human sciences and political philosophy.

I have mentioned the contingent character of our history. If modern psychological categories have since gone on to acquire an observable reality of their own, it is because they were not quite fabricated out of thin air. They built on previous conceptual categories which now seem obsolete but which we cannot escape because their previous continual accumulation decided who we would become along the way and who we are now. The

developmental idea had a two thousand years' gestation, its roots roughly coinciding with the start of monotheistic religion and the expansion of empire around the Mediterranean. The study of human interiority – at first in theological and then in psychological terms – began from that point on to assemble its theories and conceptual armoury, and ultimately the labels that now clutter journalistic trivia and everyday talk. Out of that long historical framework, the mind sciences have come to dominate both the staking out of separate group identities and the overall notion of what it is to be human.

Without such historical preconditions the developmental idea would not exist in its present form today. Nor would its own particular way of dividing human beings off from each other, especially through concepts of childhood and developmental disability. What the long-term conceptual history shows us is that 'development' is less a scientific and natural category, than a temporary way of seeing each other. More specifically it is a dummy term for normality. To develop is to be normal, to be normal is to develop. For the adult thus conceptualized, *to have developed* is to be normal, and so for the child, *to be developing* is to be on the way to being normal. But simply *to be a child* is to be not normal, or not fully. Both childhood (in general) and developmental disability (in adults) come under a single rubric. They denote absence in the kinds of ability which humankind in current Western cultures sets for itself as its supreme identifying characteristic.

As a conceptual history the book inevitably follows a rough historical sequence, but it also involves thematic similarities between different periods. It cannot be a matter of choosing between a chronological and a thematic approach; the more one confines oneself to one or the other, the more one distorts. The reader will be following a course that forms *overall* a historical sequence; but they will find at times that I dwell on the structural similarities between one period and another quite distant one within the long period covered overall.

Persevering with the intellectual challenge is a necessity because here is the stuff of which the modern psychological disciplines were made. We cannot understand the mind sciences and the human sciences more generally unless we know what their raw materials were and are. The reader must be prepared to accept, at least as a hypothesis, that human beings – and that includes children – do not develop: they change, of course, but there is no necessary reason why change should be represented as development. A moral acceptance of this hypothesis will make it easier to grasp texts

and explanations of texts that will sometimes lie beyond the reader's usual experience.

Chapter 1 provides an introduction to two general points which may seem unusual to the modern reader and which therefore need to be understood, especially given the historical remoteness of some of the historical texts discussed later: first, that the basic ideas forming developmental psychology proper, educational and child psychology, and cognitive psychology more generally, are the outcomes of historical contingency; and secondly, that they are a modern continuation not only of the social functions of religion but also of the actual content of theological arguments.

Chapter 2 outlines the interdependent first principles underpinning the developmental idea: namely, linear time, interiority and structure. Concerning the first of these I describe 'development' as just one particular way, confined to one historical era, of conceptualizing the more fundamental category of *change*. Its historical specificity means we can compare it, as an anthropologist would, with other ways of conceptualizing change. Developmental change defines the individual in terms of a permanent interiority structured according to stages of linear time and oriented towards a final goal. Christianity was distinctive among monotheistic religions in conceiving 'redemption' as that goal, an idea that would later transition into that of the earthly perfectibility of man. Early Christian theologians already conceived of time as an irreversible arrow, seeing the linear trajectory of the human lifespan as a potentially successful 'recapitulation' of Adam's initial failure. Medieval historians would then begin to draw parallels between individual interior growth and the forward trajectory (later, 'progress') of the species on earth.

The next section in this chapter looks at the principle of interiority. In pre-Christian cultures interiority was conceived in terms of temporary visitation or possession. Monotheistic religion emphasized the *permanence* of the interior status. Augustine defined time itself as a 'distention' of the soul or mind, a necessary deviation from and prelude to being with God. Then, in what became known as the 'faculty psychology' of the late medieval era, labelled subcategories of interiority began to proliferate: for example, abstraction, attention, consciousness, logical reasoning. The detailed description of these cognitive categories was modelled on the professional activities of the era's elite literate administrators and bureaucrats. The increasingly temporal emphases in faculty psychology also accompanied monastic and religious notions of selfhood, as well as humanist ones of the individual.

The final section of this chapter looks at the principle of structure. Augustine's theory of the 'six ages' of man gave the focus on the lifespan a fixed structural dimension. The burgeoning idea of structured interior growth following the Reformation and Counter-Reformation drew on Augustine's once esoteric theory of predestination. The structure of interiority in the elect minority was seen as following a predetermined stadial sequence, with a built-in destination (salvation). When secular notions of interiority started to arrive, still using the language of medieval faculty psychology, they drew on debates about the stages by which 'saving' grace arrives in the elect.

Chapters 3–7 then focus in more detail on the crucial century up to the arrival of an explicit theory of psychological development in Rousseau; the texts under discussion are largely though not exclusively French ones.

Chapter 3 looks at the principles behind the experimental primary schools established by the Jansenist wing of French Catholicism. There had once been no clear distinction between the child's interiority and the adult's, since 'saving grace' could arrive at any point in the lifespan; nevertheless, the rudimentary developmental idea was already suggesting a more sharply defined category of childhood. The Jansenist schools aimed at preserving the purity of the children of the elect from contamination by the surrounding mass of reprobates in thrall to the Devil. The prophylactic was precisely *not* religious instruction but a secular, humanist curriculum based on reason.

Chapter 4 deals with the scientist and philosopher Blaise Pascal, whose hints at a temporal concept of soul, mind and human interiority stand on the cusp of the shift from a spatial to a temporal view of human existence, and were deeply influential on subsequent pioneers of the developmental idea. On the one hand, using spatial analogies drawn from geometry, he considered the most important aspect of the individual's interiority to be 'Order'. On the other, Order was a temporal phenomenon because it had to control the movements of interiority over time, which otherwise had a 'lunatic' unpredictability. Pascal believed it was possible even for the predestined elect to lapse, and elements of a modern, forward-moving and quasi-developmental interiority can be seen in his search for a 'counterweight' that might push back against the likelihood of this.

Chapter 5 looks at the transition from 'elect' to what would eventually become 'normal' in a cluster of key texts around 1700. It is clear that when influential philosophers immediately prior to the Enlightenment such as Leibniz and Malebranche speculate about the interior life of 'Man' they presuppose the *elect*, saved man. These shadows cast by predestinarian

thinking can still be detected even in Locke and Montesquieu, regarded as the founding figures of the Enlightenment. The concept of election would retain a subliminal presence in the nascent human sciences of the eighteenth century. So too would their increasing preoccupation with determinism, first divine then biological, which was attached to the causes of election and reprobation and later of developmental normality and abnormality.

Chapter 6 describes how the normalization of the elect acquired a corresponding theoretical framework. From the late seventeenth century the preferred explanation for physical growth had been 'preformation': that all living organisms have pre-existed from the Creation and are born as miniature versions which 'unfold' through predetermined stages (e.g. caterpillar – chrysalis – butterfly). Leibniz suggested applying this model of staged development to the human mind. It was in this context that the word itself, development (whose first appearances are better translated as 'unfolding'), was first employed. The pioneering naturalist Charles Bonnet went on to apply preformationism to what he now expressly termed 'psychology'. He assimilated it with the stages of regeneration in the elect; this in turn reflected the idea of social progress as the unfolding of Revelation, which is gradual rather than instantaneous.

In Chapter 7 we arrive at the application of the word 'development' to a clear, fully formulated principle of temporal 'Order'. This happens in Rousseau's *Emile*, and is modelled by the childhood of its young central character. The biologist Buffon, the psychologist Condillac and particularly Bonnet all influenced this seminal treatise. But where they had used 'development' only occasionally and in an abstract sense, with Rousseau it becomes ubiquitous and the main descriptor of the structured lifespan of the individual. In the need for human lives to adhere strictly to an ordered temporal structure, the developmental idea finally reaches its own maturity. Man is born free and everywhere he is in the wrong kind of chains; instead, he should be ordered by the temporal determinism of 'stages'. Rousseau retains the older sense of development as the 'unfolding' of an already existing, preformed structure; nevertheless, he also reveals in outline the modern human sciences' presupposition that the child is an incomplete being. Emile is both the last holy child and the first normal child.

Chapter 8 shows briefly how the book's themes launched nineteenth- and twentieth-century debates about child development, and about freedom and necessity, that are still central in education and psychology today. From the mid-eighteenth century onwards not only the more 'psychological' work of Condillac on sense perception but also the broader cultural influence of

Rousseau inspired the founding of the modern disciplines. The book therefore concludes with an overview of some more recent figures, and the threads by which their work can be traced to religious ideas discussed in earlier chapters: in Britain, David Hartley, Joseph Priestley and Francis Galton with his nature-versus-nurture formula; and in France, Hippolyte Taine, Alfred Binet (creator of the 'mental age' test, subsequently IQ) and Jean Piaget himself.