CHAPTER 5

WHAT ATTITUDE SHOULD PARENTS HAVE TOWARDS THEIR CHILDREN’S FUTURE FLOURISHING?

Abstract

This article explores how parents should relate to a particular (ideal) aim of education, namely their children’s (future) flourishing lives. The article asks three questions: (1) what does ‘aiming for flourishing’ mean? (2) In what sense should parents have expectations with regard to their children’s flourishing lives? or (3) is hope a more appropriate attitude for parents? It is argued that, although there is also a place for expectations, an attitude of hope captures best how parents should relate to the educational aim of flourishing. Hope refers to the commitment and desire of realizing the object of one’s hope, but also implies a recognition of the limitations of human powers and of the uncertainties inherent in striving for an ultimate aim.

Keywords

Human flourishing; Aim; Hope; Expectations; Education; Parents; Children.

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5.1 Introduction

‘Perhaps the only happiness we can attain is a hope that it will arrive’

Terry Eagleton, *Hope without optimism*²

In his book *Far from the tree*, Andrew Solomon tells the stories of children who turned out very different from their parents.² There are chapters about deafness, children who became criminals, gay children, and more kinds of apples that fell far from the parental trees. What all these families have in common is that the lives of their children were not what their parents had expected them to be, and Solomon describes with much eye for detail what the parents *had* expected from their children’s (flourishing) lives, which hopes have flown out the window, what parents expect from themselves as parents, and what others (professionals, peers) tell them they should do, or be like, as parents.

The aim of this article is to explore different parental attitudes towards aiming for the flourishing of their children; i.e. the aim that can be described as ‘their children living flourishing lives’. ‘To expect’ and ‘to hope’ are key concepts in this discussion. We will start this article by giving a detailed description of one of the families that were interviewed by Solomon: Emily and Charles Kingsley, whose son with Down’s syndrome was born in 1974 in the United States. The significance of this story lies not so much in the fact that Jason has Down’s Syndrome, but in that it is an illuminating example of what parents’ hopes and expectations can be like.³ Ruth Cigman argues that recent educational theory on human flourishing is often ‘unpopulated’, meaning that real people are being neglected.⁴ By starting with a real life example, as well as by referring to sociological research throughout this article, we hope to exemplify what we intend to discuss.⁵

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¹ Eagleton 2015, p. 45.
² Solomon 2012.
³ We do not want to imply here that we think that parents of children with disabilities do not face other, and often more difficult challenges with regard to their children than parents of children without such disabilities, because generally speaking they do. The point here is that Jason’s story is not exclusively an example of what it is like to have a child with Down’s Syndrome.
⁴ Cigman 2018.
⁵ It must be added that this is a particular ‘lived world’, namely the USA (where Jason was born and the sociological research we use took place), and Western Europe (where the authors live and see a similarity between the American examples and Western-European parenting).
⁶ See also Margalit 2002 on ‘e.g. philosophy’.
5.1.1 **Jason Kingsley**

Jason Kingsley was born in 1974 in the United States and diagnosed with Down’s Syndrome. His parents Emily and Charles were told that Jason should be institutionalized immediately, because there was no chance that he would ever learn to ‘speak, think, walk, or talk’. Emily recalls that they said he’d never be able to distinguish us from other adults. He would never be creative; he would never have an imagination. I was collecting a first edition of Lewis Carroll and putting aside all this Gilbert and Sullivan stuff that I love; I had boxes of things that I was going to do with this kid, all of it sophisticated and terrific. Charles and Emily were devastated. But they heard of an early intervention program that could maybe teach Jason some basic skills and decided to give it a try, in their own home. They were told to stimulate Jason in every way they could, especially his senses.

Charles and Emily ripped apart the elegant, pastel baby’s room they had created, painting it blinding red with stenciled green and purple flowers. Emily persuaded the local supermarket to give her the giant lacy snowflakes they had used as Christmas decorations, and those went up, too. They hung things from the ceiling on springs, so they were always moving and bobbing. They put in a radio and a record player so there was music all the time. They talked to Jason day and night.

And it seemed to work. Jason was able to read when he was four (sooner than most of his peers), and when he was seven, he could count to ten in twelve languages. Jason became famous because he had a regular appearance on Sesame Street, arranged by his mother. ‘Emily felt that she had licked DS; she lived in triumph’. Jason’s parents began to coach other parents with newborns with DS, telling them that they would have to work harder than other parents, but shouldn’t let anybody tell them that ‘it’ is impossible.

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7 Solomon 2012, p. 169.
8 Ibid., p. 170.
9 Idem.
10 Ibid., p. 171.
11 Idem.
12 Idem.
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However, by the time Jason turned eight, regular children caught up with him and went past him.\textsuperscript{13} For Emily, and for Jason too, this was an ‘unbelievably horrible readjustment’.\textsuperscript{14} During that time Emily wrote the text ‘Welcome to Holland’ which describes how someone plans to go on a wonderful vacation to Italy, but the plane lands, unexpectedly, in Holland. Although one can learn to appreciate Holland, it is not, and will never be, Italy, and it is not the vacation one had expected to have.\textsuperscript{15} This is how she felt being Jason’s mother.

Emily was disappointed, because her efforts did not result in Jason leading the flourishing life she imagined. ‘Emily said with a mix of enormous pride and terrible regret: “Jason has no peers”’.\textsuperscript{16} In his twenties, Jason suffers from two depressions, and Emily ‘reflected with concern on her original attempt to make Jason the highest functioning DS kid in history’.\textsuperscript{17} Would she have done it differently, knowing what she knows now? She recognises that lower functioning Down’s children are often happier, but as she says, ‘his intelligence has enriched our relationship so much and I would never want to give that up’, and it is clear that Jason, too, takes pleasure in using his mind.\textsuperscript{18}

5.2 Human flourishing as an ideal aim of parenting; what does it imply for parents?

Philosophers of education John White, Harry Brighthouse, Kristján Kristjánsson, and Doret de Ruyter defend human flourishing as an, or even the ideal aim of education.\textsuperscript{19} Human flourishing can be understood as autonomous, wholehearted and successful engagement in worthwhile relationships, activities and experiences, in which ‘success’ is defined in the broadest sense of achieving what one has aspired to achieve.\textsuperscript{20} In this context ‘education’ is mostly understood as formal education, i.e. the work schools and teachers do, but it also includes parents. The aforementioned scholars thus argue that also for parents human flourishing is an ideal aim of the upbringing they provide.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p. 172.
\textsuperscript{14} Idem.
\textsuperscript{15} See the last sentences from Emily’s text ‘Welcome to Holland’: ‘(…) But everyone you know is busy coming and going from Italy … and they’re all bragging about what a wonderful time they had there. And for the rest of your life, you will say, ‘Yes, that’s where I was supposed to go. That’s what I had planned.’ And the pain of that will never, ever, ever, go away … because the loss of that dream is a very, very significant loss. But … if you spend the rest of your life mourning the fact that you didn’t go to Italy, you may never be free to enjoy the very special, the very lovely things … about Holland’ (Solomon 2012, p. 168).
\textsuperscript{16} Solomon 2012, p. 174.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p. 176.
\textsuperscript{18} Idem.
\textsuperscript{20} See White 2011, and see chapter 2 for a conceptual analysis of human flourishing.
This article is concerned with the question what the notion of flourishing as an aim of education might imply for parents.\textsuperscript{21} Philosophers of education do not tend to write for parents, so the claim that parents ought to aim for the flourishing life of their children is not likely to be intended or read as direct advice to them. Nevertheless, the idea that flourishing is the (ideal) aim of education does suggest that parents should pursue the ideal of a flourishing life for their children, which leads to the question in which way they should do that. The purpose of this article is to explore what would be a good attitude for parents to take with regard to (aiming for) the (future) flourishing of their children. We will do this by answering three questions: 1) What does ‘aiming for flourishing’ mean?; 2) In what sense should parents have expectations with regard to the flourishing of their children?; and 3) Is hope a more appropriate attitude for parents to have with regard to the flourishing of their children? What parents should do, and the attitude they should have, refers to normative claims about what is good of and for parents to do in their child-rearing in relation to the ideal aim of flourishing. This is closely bound up with what is good for children in view of their chances of a flourishing life.

\section*{5.2.1 What does ‘aiming for flourishing’ mean?}

Emily was collecting a ‘first edition of Lewis Carroll’, and looking forward to immersing her child in ‘sophisticated and terrific’ stuff. This is not a desire that every parent sees vanishing into thin air when their child is diagnosed with Down syndrome, but it is rather a desire that is typical for a certain social class position, argues Annette Lareau on the basis of her sociological research.\textsuperscript{22} Lareau observed a difference among families in the USA in what she calls ‘a dominant set of cultural repertoires about how children should be raised’, and she connects these repertoires to the families’ social class positions.\textsuperscript{23} Upper- and middle-class parents, like Charles and Emily, tend to see themselves as ‘developing’ [their children] to cultivate [their] talents in a concerted fashion. Organized activities, established and controlled by mothers and fathers, dominate the lives of middle-class children. By making certain their children have these and other experiences, middle-class parents engage in a process of concerted cultivation.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{21} ‘Parents’ should be read throughout this paper as parents or other main caretakers in the role of parents.

\textsuperscript{22} Lareau 2011.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., p. 4.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., pp. 1-2.
To which end the parents ‘develop’ their children is not specified in Lareau’s study. Neither does Emily Kingsley clarify what she means by ‘it’ when telling other parents that nobody should tell them ‘it’ is impossible. It seems plausible that ‘it’ refers to an implicit conception of aiming for flourishing which is embedded in this particular cultural repertoire of child-rearing: ‘in order to equip my children to be able to live a flourishing life, ‘I’ (as a parent) ought to engage in a process of concerted cultivation’.

Lareau observed that working-class parents and poor parents have a different cultural repertoire, which she calls accomplishment of natural growth.25 Good parenting here consists of caring for children and allowing them to grow. ‘For working-class and poor families, sustaining children’s natural growth is viewed as an accomplishment’.26 In other words, ‘in order to equip my children to be able to live a flourishing life, ‘I’ (as a parent) ought to sustain their natural growth’.27

The middle- and upper-class strategy of concerted cultivation seems reflected in how Dutch psychologist Jan Derksen describes current (Dutch) children growing up as the achterbanksgeneratie [backseat generation], which refers to a generation of children who can be characterised as sitting in the backseat of the family car, driven around by their parents to and from their extra-curricular activities.28 An extreme or excessive form of the strategy of concerted cultivation can be seen in what Frank Furedi calls ‘paranoid parenting’,29 and what in popular literature is called (as a caricature) ‘helicopter-parenting’ or ‘snow-plough-parenting’, in which parents function as a helicopter to monitor the development of their children, or as a snow-plough to take every obstacle out of the way so that their children will succeed in life.30

These examples of ‘parenting strategies’ illustrate that there are different ways in which parents (can) aim for the flourishing life of their children. Even though these are a few examples out of many strategies across the world, we choose to elaborate on these because we recognise this dichotomy from our own lived worlds of parenting and educational research. Moreover, we agree with Lareau that professionals, such as educators, child care workers, social service agencies (and,

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25 Ibid., p. 31.
26 Ibid., p. 5.
27 To be clear, these are clusters of behavior that Lareau (2011) observed that varied according to the social class of the family. As observed clusters of behavior, none of them is argued by Lareau to be intrinsically better than the other. Rather, Lareau endorses the view that both of them have certain advantages and disadvantages. Notably, children raised within concerted cultivation seemed to develop a sense of entitlement (i.e. expecting others to suit their preferences, acting as if having the right to certain things), but also seemed stressed more often, and were granted little autonomy. Children raised within ‘natural growth’ were usually less stressed, and granted more autonomy (and free time), but were not or less equipped to handle other adults, institutions, etc. They generally did not develop this sense of entitlement.
28 Derksen 2009.
29 Furedi 2002.
30 See https://www todaysparent com /blogs /snowplow-parenting-the-latest-controversial-technique/ which describes snow-plough-parenting as the successor of ‘tiger moms’ and ‘helicopter parents’.
we would add, many educational researchers and philosophers as well), tend to endorse the strategies of concerted cultivation.\textsuperscript{31} It remains a question whether it is legitimate for professionals to do so or whether this perhaps reveals a social class related bias. Lareau stresses that it would, in any case, be a mistake to ‘accept, carte blanche, the views of officials in dominant institutions’.\textsuperscript{32} That said, she also observes that children raised within concerted cultivation tend to have particular advantages; the traits fostered in their upbringing are generally of much value in their future work environment, because they are much valued by this environment.

In general, to have a certain parenting ‘strategy’ is (among other things) to believe that doing particular things (e.g. organise piano lessons for their child, setting boundaries) will contribute to their child’s flourishing life. This need not be an explicit or deliberate pursuit. Parents might simply be busy caring for their children’s daily needs, and as such have their flourishing ‘at heart’, without ever doing anything deliberately to contribute to their children’s chances of living a flourishing life. Thus, aiming for flourishing minimally requires that parents have their children’s flourishing ‘at heart’,\textsuperscript{33} meaning that parents act with good intentions without reflecting upon those, as opposed to acting upon deliberate/conscious reasoning. The most deliberate form of aiming is where parents make explicit that they do certain things because that will contribute to their child’s chances of a flourishing life. Lareau observed that across the social classes most parents were not explicit about their parenting strategy, nor about the aim(s) of their strategy; they rather seemed to take for granted that what they did was what they, as parents, should do.\textsuperscript{34}

Both strategies described by Lareau can be practiced more and less deliberately, but they differ in what they require in ‘active involvement’ of the parents.\textsuperscript{35} Parents who adhere to the strategy of natural growth might be very explicit in their conviction that this is the best way to raise flourishing children, but that does not lead to the kind of pro-active structuring of the child’s activities which is typical for the strategy of concerted cultivation. It is in such a case rather a deliberate choice against such active involvement. Emily Kingsley, on the other hand, actively aimed for the improvement of her son’s cognitive abilities; she put in a lot of effort and demanded a lot of herself as a parent in aiming to contribute to a better life (from her perspective) for her son. Also, the examples of hyperparenting, which can be typified as both very active and very deliberate striving for the flourishing of one’s children, are therefore to be seen as extreme forms of the strategy of concerted cultivation.

\textsuperscript{31} Lareau 2011.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., p. 13.
\textsuperscript{33} See White 2011, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{34} Lareau 2011, p. 65.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
White emphasises that flourishing as an aim of education does not necessarily imply aiming for something that might occur in the (far) future, because he is convinced that when schools and parents have flourishing as their overarching aim, what they have to do is embody it, rather than prepare children for a future flourishing life.\textsuperscript{36} Children should engage in worthwhile relationships, experiences and activities now; in the present, and that will hopefully contribute to their flourishing lives throughout, because it adds to their well-being now, and they learn how to continue their life in this way. So, whereas flourishing as an aim of education certainly has a future-oriented aspect in that education also aims to equip children to lead flourishing lives as adults, flourishing is not something that only lies in the future. In this article we focus on the future flourishing (life) of children, in the sense that we focus on what parents might imagine (hope, expect) such future flourishing lives to look like; but these parental images of the future will often take into account the present well-being and potentiality of the particular child as well, as we saw with Emily and Jason.

\textit{Ideal or goal}

In aiming for flourishing it is also important to clarify what kind of aim flourishing is. In educational theory, flourishing is mostly described as an overarching, ideal aim of education. In being an ideal, it is meant to give direction to people’s actions, but it is uncertain whether it will ever be reached.\textsuperscript{37} However, in popular literature, as well as in some policy texts, or in a psychological discourse, it is often presented, or seems to be presented, as a goal. A goal can be defined as something that is understood to be realisable and of which it is clear what needs to be done to achieve it, and how this should be effectively done (as one would follow a recipe when aiming to bake a cake). For example, the title of ‘positive psychologist’ Martin Seligman’s 2011 book reads: \textit{Flourish: A new understanding of happiness, well-being – and how to achieve them}.\textsuperscript{38} This implies that it can be known ‘how to achieve’ a flourishing life. Dorothy Emmet argues that, contrary to goals, what she calls ‘regulative ideals’ have means and ends that are not clearly distinguished.\textsuperscript{39} She clarifies the idea of a regulative ideal by comparing it to trying to do philosophy:

one may get better at it in the course of actually doing it and by following internal critical standards. These standards can be more and less adequately realised in the actual practice. They cannot be specified \textit{ab extra}, nor does the objective which they

\textsuperscript{36} White 2011, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{37} De Ruyter 2007, p. 25.
\textsuperscript{38} Seligman 2011.
\textsuperscript{39} Emmet 1994, p. 8.
promote reach a grand climax where one has successfully done philosophy. One cannot see this (at least I cannot) either subjectively as the perfecting of one’s effort, nor objectively as what a final philosophy would be like.⁴⁰

As with ‘trying to do philosophy’, a standard of flourishing cannot be precisely specified (how many relationships, how healthy should one be); nor does one reach a point at which one says: now I live a complete, flourishing life! As Aristotle said, one can only say about a life whether it is a flourishing life or not, when it is observed as a completed whole (which is only possible at the end of someone’s life).⁴¹ There is no specific point in time at which the aim of flourishing (‘the grand climax’) has been reached. And flourishing is also, like philosophy, something one can ‘get better at’, which can succeed more and less adequately with regard to people’s particular circumstances and capabilities.⁴² The concept of flourishing therefore, due to its significant features such as being an ultimate, multi-interpretable aim, which is never really finished, is the type of concept that is best conceptualised as a (regulative) ideal. When perceived as an ideal, there is no expectation of complete fulfilment, and there is, in principle, no precise prescription available for how one should reach a flourishing life.

Kristjánsson describes human flourishing as a ‘satis concept’, by which he means that for someone to be flourishing, she has to be flourishing ‘enough’ (enough flourishing will ‘satisfy’ the concept).⁴³ This seems also to be in line with how we commonly speak of flourishing: we do say that someone is flourishing even though we at the same time realise that this person is not ‘done’ with flourishing (i.e. can ‘tick the box’ of living a flourishing life). Yet, it is different from the idea of a regulative ideal as defined by Emmet. For instance as a ‘satis concept’ ‘trying to do philosophy’ might be successful ‘enough’ when one for example has been able to write a dissertation, or has been able to publish an article, or something of the like. But, even though Kristjánsson argues that a question about flourishing is usually a question about minimal requirements, what these requirements ought to be is a difficult question.⁴⁴ Human flourishing is such a complex concept, built up out of many ‘satis’ concepts (e.g. happiness, success, autonomy), which in turn have both objective and subjective elements, that it is not possible to determine in advance how much one needs of which aspect, what the subjective ‘effect’ will be of actualizing particular aspects, and how these will (subjectively) affect other aspects.

⁴⁰ Idem.
⁴² See De Ruyter 2015. Flourishing, naturally, is also a different ‘activity’ in important respects. Whereas doing philosophy is an activity, flourishing is better seen as a dynamic state (see chapter 2), which also depends on what happens to a person, as opposed to what this person does or makes.
⁴³ Kristjánsson 2017, p. 97. A ‘satis’ concept is similar to a ‘threshold’ concept, e.g. Curzer 2012, p. 400-401.
⁴⁴ Kristjánsson 2017, p. 97.
Therefore, both as a ‘satis concept’ and as a regulative ideal flourishing is conceived as something which is never entirely achieved (either because ‘enough’ flourishing does not preclude continuing and expanding flourishing, or because an ideal can only be approximated and – in its perfect form – never completely realised), and as something that is difficult, if not impossible, to realise by concrete and determinable steps.

In contrast, to take flourishing to be a goal conflicts with what kind of concept flourishing is. For, setting a goal implies an expectation of complete realisation, and a clear perspective on how this can be achieved. That said, the things that parents generally strive for, which they think will contribute to their child’s (chances of) flourishing, can be goals. There is for example no conceptual conflict in aiming for the goal of getting one’s child enrolled in a ‘top’ university (set aside from the question whether such aiming is desirable, to which we will return). In other words, aiming for flourishing as an ideal aim does not preclude the possibility of aiming for certain goods that are believed to contribute to flourishing as if those goods are goals.

We have discussed that aiming for flourishing can be more and less deliberate and more and less active, and that parents can have different ideas about how they should raise their children with a view to their future well-being. We now turn to the attitudes of parents with regard to the possibility of their children’s flourishing and their contribution to this. We will first discuss expectations.

5.2.2 Should Parents Have Expectations With Regard to Their Children’s Future Flourishing?

We have said in the introduction that we consider expectation and hope to be important concepts when it comes to parents’ views on their children’s flourishing. Having an expectation differs from having hope – they are different types of attitudes. When a person has an expectation about something or someone, she is anticipating that something will happen, in other words, she who expects something believes that that something will probably occur in the future. Parental expectations can emphasise diverse aspects of flourishing (e.g. the success of their children or their subjective happiness, which are ‘satis concepts’ or ideals), which can be distinguished from prioritising objective goods that they believe will contribute to flourishing (a good job, good health, education, etc., which can be considered goals). Parents’ expectations can also differ in other ways.
They can vary on a continuum from low to (too) high, from weakly held to strongly held, and from general to very specific (e.g. be successful as a lawyer).

Also, an important distinction is to be made between descriptive and normative expectations. Consider the following example. In an interview for their university magazine, two children of immigrants tell that their parents saw their migration as a means to give their children a chance of a better life. Their parents chose to give up their familiar life for the benefit of their children in this new country. As a consequence, the immigrant children felt they were expected to be successful, particularly in the narrow sense of getting a good (high) education and a good job. In this example the parents’ expectation would be descriptive if it were simply based upon the idea that now that their children live in Europe, they are bound to be headed for a successful life, like all European children who are as smart as theirs. The expectation would be normative if the parents believed that their children ought to be successful. A normative expectation is not ‘just’ an observation or the conclusion of reasoning, it is an assignment or prescription or even an order, disguised or explicit. Parental expectations can be both (at the same time), and it can, in practice, be hard to distinguish the one from the other. Also, parents can have such strong descriptive expectations that they exert pressure upon the child, in which case the expectations, from the child’s perspective, are prescriptive (and thus de facto normative).

Openness to the unforeseen

Charles Larmore argues that having a rational ‘plan’ in life, is wrong; because

a significant dimension of the human good escapes us if we believe that our attitude towards life must be at bottom one of foresight and control, as the idea of a life plan entails. On the contrary, we live well when we are not simply active, but passive too. (. . .) For the unexpected can turn out to be, not just the mishap that defeats our plans, but also the revelation that discloses new vistas of meaning, new forms of happiness and understanding which we least suspected or never imagined and which may change our lives and who we are in the deepest ways.

Larmore appears to be arguing for an attitude which is not only concerned with planning and anticipating, but which also values simply awaiting what is going to happen. This is similar to what

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45 See De Ruyter and Schinkel 2013.
47 Larmore 1999, p. 98.
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Michael Sandel calls an ‘openness to the unhidden’; an openness to the un-expected. Sandel suggests that parents who have expectations also need the ability to remain open towards their child and their child’s life, because if parents lose this openness to the unhidden, this would ‘disfigure the relation between parent and child, and deprive the parent of humility and enlarged human sympathies’.

It is self-evident that the more strongly held expectations parents have, the more this is likely to interfere with an openness to the unforeseen. If for example a child is expected to take over the family business, and that is seen as the only way that leads to a successful and therefore flourishing life, then one can imagine that the parents are not open to other, unforeseen, options. However, having expectations in itself does not necessarily exclude an openness for the unforeseen; parents may well expect things from their children (in the descriptive and the normative sense), and be open at the same time, i.e. they may be flexible with regard to their expectations and their fulfilment.

Expectations and flourishing as a goal

As discussed, we believe it is reasonable to assume that the more strongly parents hold expectations, either low or high, of their children, the less flexible the parents become. This is problematic if the child has different ideas about what constitutes a (her) flourishing life, or when, as a result of the parent’s inflexibility, it is not possible for the child to explore different – perhaps unforeseen – ways of living a flourishing life. This problem is inherent in (strongly held) expectations.

But what we particularly want to show here is that a combination of (active) striving for flourishing as if it were a goal and having expectations with regard to that flourishing life creates an undesirable way of pursuing a flourishing life for one’s children. When parents have high descriptive expectations, they believe that their children’s flourishing is probable, because they have reason(s) to believe so. Or, when they have high normative expectations, they believe strongly that it should be the case that their children lead flourishing lives. But in either case, they cannot know for sure, which calls for a certain humility and therefore also flexibility. If, in addition, flourishing is seen as a goal, of which it is clear how it can be reached; in other words, the attainment of which can be ensured if only one ‘gets the recipe right’, parents come to believe they have a way of ensuring their expectations come true. This is problematic, as we have seen that it is impossible to predict in advance ‘how to flourish’. Such aiming for flourishing can only lead to overestimating children

49 Sandel 2009, p. 80.
50 In Dutch research on the prevalence of child abuse very high parental expectations that are inappropriate for the child are regarded as a form of ‘emotional neglect’ (Alink, Van IJzendoorn, Bakermans-Kranenburg, Pannebakker, Vogels and Euser 2010, p. 41).
or one’s own parenting skills, high pressure on children, and eventually disappointment on the parents’ side.\textsuperscript{51}

With regard to the things parents do that – from their perspective – contribute to their children’s flourishing (e.g. sports, piano lessons, enrolment in ‘top’ universities) that can be considered ‘goals’, it is important to emphasise that flourishing should not be seen, in advance, as the sum of these achieved goals in the sense that flourishing is a goal built up out of several other, smaller, goals. As argued above, it can’t be planned in advance which activities, and to which extent, will give the child (the best chances to) a flourishing life. That is, to achieve the goal of studying at Harvard might turn out to contribute to a child’s flourishing life, for various reasons, but it would be a mistake to expect that ‘if my child gets into to Harvard, she will come to lead a flourishing life’. In other words, parents can have an attitude of expectation toward getting into Harvard (though that, in itself, is problematic too if the expectations are too high and held too strongly), but they ought not to expect something (i.e. a flourishing life) of it.

In this sense, there is a place for expectations. Not expecting anything of one’s children seems impossible for most parents, and might be equally negative for children, because the child feels unseen or not supported. We can compare this to how May argues that both ‘accepting love’ (accepting the child as she is) and ‘transforming love’ (encouraging the child’s development) are entailed in good parenting.\textsuperscript{52} ‘Accepting love, without transforming love, slides into indulgence and finally neglect. Transforming love, without accepting love, badgers and finally rejects’.\textsuperscript{53}

Therefore, in sum, we argue that parents should have expectations regarding the things that they think contribute to their child’s flourishing, if parents at the same time remain open to the unforeseen. Expecting one’s children to lead a complete flourishing life is, when descriptive, unlikely or, when normative, unreasonable, because in the case of children, the future is too long and too far away to reasonably oversee whether it will probably be a flourishing one or not. An interpretation of flourishing as a goal in combination with such an expectation is very problematic.

Judith Suissa and Stefan Ramaekers show that the current ways of speaking and thinking about child-rearing (in Western culture) are dominated by the language(s) of (developmental) psychology and neuroscience.\textsuperscript{54} We can see this in the strategy of concerted cultivation, which clearly reflects dominant ideas in developmental psychology, for example about the merits of parental involvement.\textsuperscript{55} We suspect that these ‘languages of parenting’ encourage the problematic

\textsuperscript{51} Something Lareau (2011) observed as well.
\textsuperscript{52} May 2005, p. 230.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., p. 231.
\textsuperscript{54} Ramaekers and Suissa 2012.
\textsuperscript{55} An example of the dominant claims from psychology here is the (classic) work on ‘parenting styles’ (e.g. Baumrind 1971) in which the ‘best’ parenting style is a style of active involvement and responsiveness, with respect to the child’s (developing) autonomy. This parenting style strongly resembles the strategy of concerted cultivation.
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combination of high expectations and goal-thinking, because it (a) tells parents what children ‘need’, i.e. how they should develop/be developed, which is susceptible to creating or raising parents’ expectations of a particular kind, and (b) it depicts flourishing as a goal (or isn’t clear about that it can’t be a goal).

But this leaves the question how parents should relate to the flourishing life of their children still unanswered. When Emily learned about early intervention programs that could possibly benefit her son, one could say that she ‘got her hopes up’ and that this activated her ‘transforming love’. According to Patrick Shade, an attitude of hope indeed implies an ‘active commitment to the desirability and realisability’ towards the object of hope; in other words, when a parent hopes, she will do what she can to contribute to fulfilling this hope.56 Or, as Terry Eagleton writes; ‘there is a sense in which hope is performative as well as optative’.57 Hope is not merely a passive desire, but to have confidence in the form of hope may help to commit to the realisation of one’s hope. How then, is an attitude of hope different from an attitude of expectations? We will answer this question in the following, final, section.

5.2.3 A PARENTAL ATTITUDE OF HOPE WITH REGARD TO THE FUTURE FLOURISHING OF THEIR CHILDREN

The parental hope with regard to the flourishing of their children is an example of what Godfrey and Halpin call ‘ultimate hope’.58 Ultimate hope aims at an ultimate aim, which is difficult to achieve, in the sense that often there are obstacles in the way of its fulfilment.59 It can be distinguished from ‘common-or-garden hope’, which is not ultimate (e.g. hope it’s going to rain tomorrow), but also from absolute hope, which is un-aimed, and more like a basic faith in the future.

The concepts of hoping and expecting certainly bear similarities. As said, they are both attitudes of anticipation towards (the possibility of) realising some future object or event. One difference between hoping and expecting, however, is that when one hopes one desires the object of one’s hopes to be fulfilled, whereas with expectations – at least with descriptive expectations – this is not necessarily the case. A parent might expect that their teenager will get into trouble, but not want this to happen, whereas when a parent says that she hopes that the child gets into trouble,

56 Shade 2001, p. 70.
57 Eagleton 2015, p. 84.
she must desire this trouble somehow, for example because it will teach the child a lesson.\textsuperscript{60} Yet, as the flourishing of children is a desirable outcome, parents’ hope and expectation do not differ in that respect.

Parental hopes and expectations with regard to the flourishing of their children do differ in an important other respect. As discussed, expectations involve a belief that their object will (probably) come true. For hope this is not necessarily so. Rather, ‘hope falls within a range of physical probabilities which includes the improbable but excludes the certain and the merely logically possible’.\textsuperscript{61} In other words, to hope that something will happen in the future logically implies the belief that this something is possible, whereas to expect something to happen in the future implies the belief that it is probable. Hope and expectations thus differ (among other things) in the degree to which the agent believes in the probability of the realisation of the future object or event. When the agent has a role to play in bringing the object or event about hope also implies a lesser confidence in her own capacity to contribute to its realisation. Therefore, if it is the case that the agent can contribute to the possible realisation of the object or event (which is true for parents and the flourishing of their children), ‘to say “I hope to do so”’ is to concede that there are limits to one’s power.\textsuperscript{62}

In sum, in comparing hope to expectations, what strikes us most is that an attitude of expectation is easily connected to parental pressure, competitiveness, and terms such as hyperparenting and the like. As we have shown, hope can also be performative; in the sense that when one hopes, one not only desires that the object of one’s hope comes true, but is also actively committed to contributing to its realisation. But contrary to expectations, to say ‘I hope so’ implies an awareness of the limits of human powers, and as such is intrinsically connected to a sense of humility, and openness to the unforeseen. An ultimate, abstract, and many-sided ideal aim such as flourishing ‘requires’ such humility and flexibility, therefore we argue that an attitude of hope captures better how parents should relate to it.\textsuperscript{63} Even when flourishing is mistaken for a goal, humility requires to bear in mind the fact that realisation of the goal is not certain. Second, an attitude of hope embodies an important characteristic of the idea(l) of a flourishing life, namely that it is always a combination of effort and good luck.\textsuperscript{64} In other words; something that cannot be

\textsuperscript{60} This does not mean though that the hope of the parent is necessarily good; that a parent desires that something be the case does not mean that it is desirable (from a more objective standpoint). If for example the parent hopes that the child gets into trouble, because the parent desires ‘to get back at’ the child, because she is angry with or disappointed in her child, her hope would not be desirable, as this hope is harmful for the child.

\textsuperscript{61} Downie 1963, p. 249.

\textsuperscript{62} Eagleton 2015, p. 69.

\textsuperscript{63} Although we see a difference between (reasonable or proper) hope and expectations, it is possible that parents express such strong ‘hopes’ towards their children, that such hopes are really more like expectations. In such cases parents may use the word ‘hope’, but in fact hold expectations.

\textsuperscript{64} Aristotle 2009; Nussbaum 1986.
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...Third, we think that hoping that one’s children will do well is beneficial for the parent-child relationship. To have hopes regarding the flourishing of one’s children expresses a belief in the possibilities of children, which encourages the confidence children have in themselves without expecting them to succeed in achieving flourishing lives.

5.3 Concluding remarks

The theoretical claim that parents ought to aim for the flourishing life of their children leads to the question in which way parents should do that. This article explored what it means for parents to aim for a flourishing life for their children. We started off by showing what it meant for Jason’s parents to strive for a better life for their son. Most parents tend to wish their children well, and seem to have some kind of view on the ‘end-product’ of their upbringing, and (implicit) ideas about how they should contribute to their children coming closer to a flourishing life. We have shown that aiming for flourishing can be done in various ways, and that it need not, but can be, a deliberate or active pursuit. We have argued that it is problematic to aim for flourishing as if it were an achievable goal, of which it is known how it can be effectively reached. We think it important that when parents aim for the flourishing life of their children, this ought to be associated with an attitude of hope, as opposed to an attitude of having expectations, even though there is also a place for expectations in their parenting.

Why is it important to theorise how parents should (not) aim for the flourishing of their children? As said in the introduction, philosophy of education is limited to making claims about parents, and is usually very careful not to give advice to parents. Ramaekers and Suiissa argue that claims argued for in what they call the dominant languages of parenting, such as psychology and neuroscience,

become blurred in the sense that the claims that are made about and on parents can eventually become claims that are made by parents themselves, as parents gradually come to see themselves in the ways implied in the predominant languages of parenting.65

We think that the (theoretical) claim that parents should pursue a flourishing life for their children (and related claims about how they should do this) might also be susceptible – eventually and

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indirectly – to what Ramaekers and Suissa describe, in the sense that it raises expectations held by parents with regard to the flourishing of their children. Flourishing as an aim of education doesn’t necessarily imply more than parents having their children’s well-being ‘at heart’, but parents might be inclined to attach much further-reaching conclusions to such a claim. For example, the title of this article might evoke the expectation of a much more precise description of how parents should pursue a flourishing life for their children, which – when for example referred to in a popular magazine, or used as an inspirational source to develop a method (‘the hope method’) – can easily be turned into a claim made on parents, and subsequently internalized by parents.

Moreover, we argue that claims can also ‘become blurred’ in a second sense, namely where in texts it is, or has become, unclear whether flourishing as an aim of education should be seen as a goal or as an ideal. The title of a section in Martin Seligman’s (founder of positive psychology) book reads: ‘flourishing as the goal of positive psychology’. As noted before, the book title itself suggests the same: *Flourish: A new understanding of happiness, well-being – and how to achieve them*. It appears that flourishing is seen as a goal, although the concept itself is explicitly a conception of Aristotelian *eudaimonia*, in which flourishing is unequivocally seen as an ideal.

A different example of how claims can get blurred (in both ways), is when it does not become clear from a certain text at all how to interpret its claims. Wolbert for example saw herself cited as a proponent of education for flourishing in a report on a popular discussion on future education in the Netherlands, in which it was completely unclear who the intended audience for this publication were, and as what kind of concept (ideal, goal, or else) flourishing was proposed. If parents were to read this report (which is quite probable), what should they make of it, other than that they are told that they ought to aim for the flourishing of their children? In addition to contributing to recent theory on education for flourishing by exploring carefully how parents should aim for the flourishing of their children, we also hope that this article contributes to an awareness of how (both theoretical and empirical) claims about child-rearing can turn into claims internalized by parents, with accompanying (problematic) strategies of fulfilling these claims.

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