Is Reproductive Solidarity Possible Under Laissez Faire?

Modern children...appear to be valued for similar reasons that modern pets appear to be valued.... A household pet...rarely disappoints its owner-investor; and if it does, it can be given up without paying high penalties in the form of guilt or social disapproval.1

This final chapter explores contemporary family policies and policy debates from the perspective of their impact on overall social solidarity. The analysis focuses on attitudes and practices that foster or hinder the development of fissures between the material conditions and perceived interests of those with current parental responsibilities on the one hand and those who have definitively discharged such obligations, those who intend to or at least will become parents, and those who reject parenthood, on the other.

As the example of several European countries demonstrates, even capitalist societies can, through family allowances, parental leave payments, and other horizontally and vertically redistributive programs, make a significant contribution to mitigating the economically impoverishing impact of, if not physically and psychologically equalizing, the burdens of producing the next generation. None, however, has proved capable of moving beyond indirect financial incentives to the creation of mechanisms for direct macrosocietal guidance of demographic development.

To the extent that capital has colonized formerly seemingly independent socioeconomic domains so that “[w]e have become a nation of employees,” the narrower question of the size of the proletariat has tendentially merged with that of the overall population. In that sense, the political-economic tradition, to which both Smith and Marx belonged, that could abstract from the laws governing the demographic development of non-working-class strata might appear antiquated at a time when the U.S. Department of Labor makes occupational employment pro-
jections of the number of physicians, fashion models, judges, rabbis, and stockbrokers. This universal quasi-proletarianization explains why even procapital policy-formulating entities like the Rockefeller commission can speak of population in general without needing to identify class-specific subgroups.

Capital-specific population policy today embraces two areas recognizably continuous with classic nineteenth-century cyclical demographic interests of employers (although stylized accounts of multigenerational AFDC paupers have created the trope of a secular problem): the first joins the public costs of alimenting the surplus population generated by AFDC families, calibrating the size of the surplus population to discipline the labor market, and the appropriate cost-benefit analysis to gauge the point at which growth of pauperdom becomes dysfunctional; the second involves regulating immigration to act as the more controllable aspect of the exogenously given supply of labor. In contrast, the perceived demographic problems of age-specific underpopulation and disproportionalities conjuring up an old-age pension crisis and environmentally catastrophic overpopulation are not commonly analyzed as specifically capitalist phenomena. Fortunately, for capitalism, pauperage is still constructed, albeit contestedly, as rooted in personal rather than systemic defects, while the labor supply dimensions of immigration policy can be conveniently submerged beneath the humanitarian concerns of reuniting families and admitting selected Third World people to the First World lifeboat.

CHILDREN'S IMPACT ON PARENTS' CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

He that hath wife and children hath given hostages to fortune; for they are impediments to great enterprises.... Certainly the best works, and of greatest merit for the public, have proceeded from the unmarried or childless men; which both in affection and means, have married and endowed the public. Yet it were great reason that those that have children should have greatest care of future times, unto which they know they must transmit their dearest pledges. Some there are, who, though they lead a single life, yet their thoughts do end with themselves, and account future times impertinences; nay, there are some other that account wife and children but as bills of charges.... Certainly wife and children are a kind of discipline of humanity....

The birth-strike controversy raised, with great intensity, the issue of the effect of raising large families on the class consciousness and political activity of mothers. Advocates of small families argued that proletarian women with many children to care for were simply too overburdened and fatigued to devote themselves to the class struggle. Others have maintained that having children to care for gave workers an even greater stake in the struggle against capitalism. One of the chief architects of the Australian family wage and family allowance after World War I, for example, articulated a structure of differential political consciousness based on relative deprivation:
Dilemmas of Laissez-Faire Population Policy

[A]ll the propagandist material either for strikes or for evolutionary change comes invariably from the privations of the family. It is the wives and the children, who as they suffer most, so they furnish the readiest and most poignant illustrations of industrial injustice in the matter of the living wage awarded. Workers without family obligations may feel resentment at the unequalness of fortune; they do not know the year-long bitterness of the underpaid family man.5

Considerable empirical evidence corroborates the existence of relative deprivation rooted in the so-called family-cycle squeeze, which is shaped by the financial pressures of supporting a large number of children. Regardless of the ultimate impact on parents’ consciousness, the crucial initial effect is the compulsion toward multiple jobholding.6 Preoccupation with making ends meet plausibly preempts mental and physical energy that could be directed toward political or social activities or movements organized to deal with the underlying causes of poverty.

The more modern argument, deemphasizing individual economic hardship, runs to the effect that children give parents more of a stake in the (future of the) world so that they are more concerned, for example, about pollution than are childless adults, who may take an après moi le déluge egotistical stance. The childless (and especially the potential mothers among them) may be inspired by popular writers who urge them to choose either “Housework and children—or the glamor, involvement and excitement of a free life.” This view is hardly new. Three centuries earlier the complaint was also voiced that a “Free and Generous Way of Living” was “maimed” by children. The emergence of a post-baby boom protoantinatalism was perhaps presaged by the appearance in 1965 in that arch-pro-family magazine, The Saturday Evening Post, of a piece entitled, “Children Are a Waste of Time.” Five years later, both Redbook and Look unleashed unprecedented torrents of letters to the editor by publishing articles that irreverently pooh-poohed the notion of motherhood as biological destiny and promoted childlessness as a sensible way of life.8

A very different view of the political ramifications of large families goes back to the early nineteenth century and continues to inform public debate. John Bray, for example, a Ricardian socialist in the 1830s, pondered the consequences of parents’ anxiety for their offspring’s well-being: “how long and patiently does the workman toil—how many of the insolences of upstart authority does he silently receive—how enduringly does he bear the galling of every chain which the present accursed system fastens upon him?” The remedy that Bray proposed for such parental diversion was the socialization of childrearing. At the time of the German birth-strike debate, Fritz Brupbacher, the Social Democratic physician, charged that a father, whose fears for his family made him a tractable employee, “must become a bad soldier in the proletarians’ army....” He therefore easily concluded that “the less baggage we have to carry in the social war, the more strength we will have left to fight campaigns in forced marches against our traditional enemy capitalism.” Similar sentiments were common on the left in the United States too. The International Socialist Review, for example, published a neo-Malthusian manifesto.
on the eve of World War I asserting that: “It does not take a philosopher to see that having many children renders working class parents almost helpless in the hands of their masters. When they go on strike the children’s cry for bread drives them back.”

Unlike these socialists, employers have appreciated and at times sought to encourage multiplication of the family obligations that bind workers to the paternalistic firm. In proposing that the French legislature introduce family allowances for the low-paid civil servants, “un prolétariat de fonctionnaires,” a member of the Chamber of Deputies observed that even for private employers such benefit payments were

a good deal, for the workers burdened with families are generally very conscientious, very faithful to their agreements; they are steadfast...; they remain attached to the entreprise because they must be stable in order to receive their wages regularly, in the interest of their wife and their children; they cannot follow the law, sometimes capricious, deceptive, and shimmering, of supply and demand; these workers burdened with families cannot move so easily as the others, they remain attached to the industry, bound...by their heart; they are the best reserve of an industry.

Jacques Bertillon, one of the leaders of the pre-World War I French repopulationist movement, synthesized its rhetorical charge by asserting that both strike agitators and the families most prone to follow them generally had few children. At the time of the birth-strike controversy, the Alliance nationale pour l’Accroissement de la Population française, a repopulationist organization supported by French firms and the state, distributed a circular, *Un grand péril industriel—la dépopulation*, to employer circles warning of the close connection between birth strikes and industrial strikes and including a fulsomely invidious comparison of parent-workers and childless workers. How, it asked, could the workers’ spirit not become worse and worse when more and more, not having “young mouths to feed...spend more at the tavern, [and] having no fear of being rapidly plunged into misery if their employer dismisses them, are always disposed to lend an ear to the labor union leaders’ incitements”? It was, therefore, in order to avoid strikes, in employers’ interest to “urge their workers to have children....”

A century and a half after Bray wrote, many, especially child-rich, parents continue to put up with degrading substandard conditions in order to feed their children. The blunt postmodern sociological version reads: “He who has a wife and two children to feed does what he is told.” Standing for many parents, a truck driver exposed to a high daily risk of being murdered by teenage robbers observed: “I have two kids, bills. I can’t say, “Forget this job.” You keep working.” Others are reluctant to participate in strikes or engage in other kinds of workplace resistance for fear that a sharp fall or cessation of income or loss of a job would adversely affect their children’s welfare. As a 45-year-old formerly unemployed worker remarked on his decision to take a job as a strike-breaker: “I turned the
corner and saw there was a strike in progress,' he said. 'But my family is more important...so I went to work.'

Dispensation from meeting children's urgent nondeferrable daily needs enables the traditional breadwinner to refrain from taking the highest-paying steadiest job: "Not having a family to support almost certainly reduces a man's willingness to take a job he does not want." Occupational risk-taking becomes a more plausible life choice. Thus whereas childlessness permits women to devote themselves singlemindedly to their professional careers in a manner that was once possible only for men whose wives devoted themselves to the reproductive mission, men can regard elimination of the economic costs of parenting as a partial liberation from rigid adherence to customarily prescribed career paths. Such subjective willingness may, however, become impotent as parents find that they cannot underbid those with only a single mouth to feed. Indeed, in the mid-nineteenth century, the socialist Louis Blanc viewed this displacement as the representative case: a competitive compulsion inherent in the labor market prompted employers to prefer the childless, who could afford to work for less, thus supplanting proletarian parents, who, together with their children, could then starve or steal.

The extent to which familial financial obligations serve to press men into employment is presumably reflected in table 23, which compares the labor force participation rates of single and married men of various ages in 1960 and 1993:

Table 23: Labor Force Participation Rates (in %) of Single and Married Men, 1960 and 1993

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>16-19</th>
<th>20-24</th>
<th>25-34</th>
<th>35-44</th>
<th>45-64</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>80.3</td>
<td>91.5</td>
<td>88.6</td>
<td>80.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>91.5</td>
<td>97.1</td>
<td>98.8</td>
<td>98.6</td>
<td>93.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>52.5</td>
<td>80.5</td>
<td>89.2</td>
<td>84.5</td>
<td>68.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>91.2</td>
<td>95.0</td>
<td>96.6</td>
<td>96.1</td>
<td>82.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The considerable gaps in labor force participation rates between single and married men in all age groups strongly suggests that the assumption of financial responsibility for a family significantly reduces the freedom to abstain from employment. Data on married fathers would presumably show an even greater spread of participation rates. Conversely, some self-selection appears to take place as only 43 percent of men in their 30s earning less than $10,000 annually were married in 1990 compared to 83 percent of their counterparts with income in excess of...
The fact that married women's and mothers' participation rates, which were formerly much lower than single women's, have begun to converge with them, underscores the labor-compulsive impact of parenthood.

Unlike the birth-strikers, however, adherents of the hostages-to-fortune position do not imply that childless adults are more likely to be activists. On the contrary: whereas as late as the 1950s and 1960s few married couples in the United States wanted to be childless, a spate of press reports beginning in the late 1970s, when the two-earner childless couple had replaced the employed husband, housewife, and two children as the typical American family, suggests that a new wave of relatively well-paid double-earner (including working-class) spouses, believing that even *Three's A Crowd*, choose not to procreate precisely in order to dedicate themselves to expensive adult consumerism.17

Malthus himself provided the strongest imaginable evidence in support of the claim that an ideology promoting procreation may be a prerequisite of capitalism by arguing that contraception or any other procedure that would enable people to control their fertility to the point of volitional childlessness would be highly undesirable because it would remove or at least dull the incentive that compels them to work. In the late twentieth century this admonition might be framed more plausibly in terms of consumerism than work-shyness. As a soon-to-be Secretary of Labor noted in the mid-1970s, the “higher” standard budget for a family of four that the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) compiled, which was “more in line with the popular conception of American affluence, carried a price tag” that exceeded husbands’ median income by 69 percent; filling that gap motivated millions of wives to enter the paid labor force.18

The extent to which parents have succeeded in achieving an idealized standard of living by virtue of mothers’ paid labor is striking. The Consumer Expenditure Survey compiled by the BLS shows that in 1991, the average husband-and-wife couple whose oldest child was 6 to 17 years old and who had a total of 2.2 children reported a before-tax income of almost $48,000—18 percent higher than that of the average childless husband-and-wife consumer unit. Although the detailed breakdown of expenditure items does not include any exclusively adult luxury commodities that would make possible a comparison of the higher reaches of per capita conspicuous consumption between the two groups, in absolute terms, the two-child family outsends the childless parents in virtually every category.19 For 1993, data reveal that even with regard to luxury goods, the childless spend less in the aggregate if not on a per capita basis. In that year, the same average 2.2-child family reported both before- and after-tax income 20 percent higher than that of the childless couple, while its annual expenditures were 26 percent greater. The only consumption items on which the childless outspent parents were coffee (11 percent), alcoholic beverages (8 percent), owned vacation homes (33 percent), lodging on out-of-town trips (12 percent), mattresses and springs (14 percent), refrigerators/freezers in owned homes (26 percent), cooking stoves and ovens in owned homes (33 percent), lawn and garden equipment (10 percent), men’s coats and jackets (118 percent), men’s sweaters and vests (14 percent), all women’s
apparel (1 percent), new cars (30 percent), airplane tickets (9 percent), pets (41 percent), boats (without motor) (420 percent), motorized recreational vehicles (219 percent), gifts to persons outside the consumption unit (655 percent), charitable contributions (50 percent), church contributions (11 percent), contributions to educational organizations (22 percent), newspapers (23 percent), magazines (16 percent), and gifts of goods and services (17 percent).20

Regardless of the original motive for childlessness, once couples become accustomed to the standard of living that the nonreproductive state makes possible, the decline in material wealth that sharing their income with progeny may entail can convert opportunistic nonparenting into a permanent way of life. In West Germany, where despite very marked differences in per capita private consumption levels between childless couples and families with children—in 1973, for example, the gap ranged from 17 percent in one-child families to 44 percent in three-child families—the proportion of households with various major appliances varies very little according to the number of children, an official family commission nevertheless took the position that if parents raised a claim to achieve the same material consumption chances as the childless, then either child care would have to be socialized so as not to interfere with the parents' labor force participation or a much more decisive distribution of income in favor of families with children would have to be instituted.21

CONFLICT AND SOLIDARITY BETWEEN PARENTS AND THE CHILDLESS

There would be two classes, not of exploiters and exploited, but of makers of children and of makers of sterile love! For the celebrated formula: “Workers of the world, unite!” it would be necessary to substitute this other motto: “Workers of the world, buy Dr. Mascaux’s contraceptives at 3 francs 50 a bottle.”22

Beginning several decades before Malthus published his Essay on the Principle of Population and extending well into the Victorian age, the “chaotic period of large-scale industry” swallowed up enormous numbers of very young children. Looking back a century later, Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, a laissez-faire advocate, asserted that: “The man of the people would not, in general, run any risk in setting up house and having children without calculating....” Workers could “[d]uring their rare hours of leisure indulge in what one has sometimes called the pleasure of the poor without fearing the consequences.” From Leroy-Beaulieu’s perspective, the poor man could combine pleasure with business because children already by the age of six or seven years were paying their own way and by eleven or twelve were receiving wages in excess of the very modest costs of maintaining them. Malthus and others may have conflated natural fertility with an enhanced fertility brought about by the transitory “indirect bounty on the production of children” associated with the social customs of the industrial revolution. After all,
proletarian parents in Britain and elsewhere during the latter part of the eighteenth century and the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century made a major contribution toward the achievement of a capitalistically optimum population. While bourgeois parents contradicted the allegedly rational principle of individualism by preserving irrational or altruistic motives, workers were, according to the founding father of the Frankfurt School, subject to a new set of forces:

That something was wrong in the society of free and just exchange was not coincidentally revealed first in the working-class family, whose children at the time of the industrial revolution were pressed into the production process as labor slaves. Bourgeois society could perpetuate itself only by strengthening the compulsion of the principle of exchange through immediate forms of dependence, and the family was its agent also in the sense that the autocratic father took care of this business so much more thoroughly the more he himself was under economic pressure.

Once the movement to reduce the scale and scope of child labor had removed the economic advantages accruing to working-class parents of large families, their incentive to overreproduce faded. Indeed, as early as the 1830s, British economist Robert Torrens recognized that except in areas of new settlement, such as North America, where insufficiently dense population and the concomitant flagging division of labor made the large family a lever of wealth, “a family deprives the working man of the ease, and comfort, and independence which he enjoys in the single state.” Since the demise of the kind of child labor that made procreation a quickly paying proposition, economists and demographers have recognized that those with few or no children enjoy great advantages on the labor market vis-à-vis those carrying the burden of supporting a large family. This differential has, in the wake of the feminization of poverty, become particularly prominent among single (including divorced custodial) mothers.

The fact that an owner of the income source “labor” who has children must withdraw time that could be used to earn additional income to raise children disadvantages her or him vis-à-vis childless competitors. Even a lawyer surmised that one reason the fathers of dual-professional families may earn less than male professionals with children whose wives do not work outside the house is that child-care activity makes them less alert, rested, flexible, and concentrated. The uneven distribution of the burden is manifest. A social fact supporting the enactment of Canadian family allowances during World War II was that 84 percent of that nation’s children under 16 years of age were dependent on only 19 percent of the gainfully employed adults. In Britain, one-quarter of the families were raising three-quarters of the children in 1944. A decade later, one-third of the civilian labor force in the United States carried the burden of supporting more than nine-tenths of those under 18 years of age. To be sure, these disproportions in part reflect life cycles: adults not supporting children today may be past or future reproducers. By the same token, the assertion that a working man’s earnings tend to rise and decline in synchronization with the life cycle of family responsibilities under-
scores how hopeless it is to depend on market forces to eliminate poverty associated with above-average reproduction.26

Depending on which end of the spectrum of demographic policy they occupy, policy analysts call for state intervention to accentuate or diminish such handicaps. As early as 1952, the U. N. Department of Social Affairs stated that the movement in most countries to equalize the standard of living of the “family group” with that of persons without dependants had not only become the driving force of postwar social thinking and planning, but had implemented “the principles proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that ‘the family is the natural and fundamental unit of society [and] that everyone has a right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family....’” In contrast, Paul Ehrlich, the discoverer of the population bomb, has urged a reversal of the tax advantages for richer parents on the ground that “the plush life would be difficult to attain for those with large families—which is as it should be, since they are getting their pleasure from their children, who are being supported in part by more responsible members of society.” Instead, Ehrlich proposed prizes for the childless.27

In contrast to the tradition that has bemoaned the labor-market disadvantages attaching to parenthood, in recent years organized groups of the childless have formed to attack what they see as the discrimination to which they are subjected at work (such as requests to give their accumulated vacation time to co-workers who are facing childbirth or being refused time off to see an accountant when parents are permitted absences to care for sick children). Unless these militants are end-of-the-worldists, they fail to see the main point—namely, how large the next generation should be and how the burden of creating that population should be shared. Perhaps fortunately, but surely inadvertently, such antiprocreationists are complying with Hannah Arendt’s admonition that “[a]nyone who refuses to assume joint responsibility for the world should not have children....” Yet even some of those who understand that adults were once children aspire to a balkanized society bereft of cross-linked ties of solidarity. The founder of ChildFree Network urges that parents should shoulder the cost of workplace day care whereas she, as a single person, does not expect families to subsidize her long-term disability insurance.28

This movement must be seen in the context of an increasingly childless society. The proportions of adults and children living in three-child-or-more families in the United States have declined significantly since 1959, when they amounted to 20 and 60 percent respectively, and only 46 percent of adults lived in childless families. By 1992, only 8 percent of adult and 38 percent of children lived in households with three or more children; in contrast, 60 percent of adults lived in childless households. If in 1960 married couples with children and single parents accounted for 48 percent of all households while childless couples and one-person units accounted for 43 percent, by 1988 the two childless groups surpassed those with children, accounting for 54 percent of all households compared with only 35 percent for those with children. The growing preponderance of childless adults in the United States cannot, however, by itself explain the emergence of aggressive organizations dedicated to the maximum privatization and internalization
of the costs of childrearing by parents while accepting externalization of the benefits in the form of fresh contingents, inter alia, of Social Security taxpayers. After all, other advanced capitalist societies have experienced the same quantitative inversion between parents and the childless during the same period (or, as in the case of Sweden and the United Kingdom, even earlier) without giving rise to similar movements. The 1981-82 European Community (EC) censuses, for example, revealed that 62 percent of all households in the 12 countries were childless—West Germany reaching the highest level at 72 percent. Three or more children lived in only 6.5 percent of EC households—West Germany, again, reaching the lowest level at 2.9 percent. It therefore seems more plausible that the recent increase in the childless in the United States merely created the opportunity for giving vent to yet another expression of the peculiarly American lack of social solidarity. In this particular setting, the individualists fail to appreciate that the gap between the macro- and microsocietal consequences of procreation for living standards can be closed by subsidizing the costs either of raising children or of old age (or both).

States have been using positive and negative financial incentives for at least 2,500 years in an effort to guide population change. Until the impoverishing effects of the Industrial Revolution made themselves felt in Britain at the end of the eighteenth century, state power had largely been used to promote population growth. Eighteenth-century English mercantilists believed that the population was, in spite of massive poverty, too small; based on the ideology of the utility of poverty and the disciplinary consequences of dense population, they placed a premium on "a numerous population of unskilled laborers, driven by the very competition of numbers to a life of constant industry at minimum wages...." In parts of pre-capitalist Europe, however, including Austria-Hungary and Germany, the state into the nineteenth century denied men permission to marry unless they could prove that they could maintain a family.

As early as 403 B.C., Roman censors allegedly fined old bachelors for having failed to perform their duty to the state. Actions against bachelors were known in ancient Greece, especially in Sparta but also in Athens. Spartan legislation encouraged citizens to have as many children as possible: fathers of three sons were exempt from military service and fathers of four from all state burdens. Plato would have subjected men who were still unmarried at age 35 to an annual fine graduated according to their wealth. Caesar prohibited women who by the age of 44 had neither husband nor children from wearing jewels or being carried in a litter—a measure that Montesquieu called a "méthode excellent d’attaquer le célibat par la vanité." Caesar also partitioned farm land among fathers of three or more children. The Lex Papia Poppaea of A.D. 9 required men and women to produce a certain number of children by a certain age. Throughout the Middle Ages, European states imposed taxes on bachelors and conferred awards on those with many children. In France in 1666, Louis XIV ordered pensions for those with ten or more children to support the propagation of the species; as late as the 1920s, employees with 10 or more children were exempted from rent and income taxes and had the privilege of free matriculation at all official educational institutions.
Bachelor taxes, which are a counterpart to the construction of child raising itself "as a form of tax," have abounded in modern states as well. Britain introduced an abatement of income taxes for parents in 1799. It amounted to 5 percent for each child for persons with incomes between £60 and £400, and tapered off to 2 percent for children over six years of age and 1 percent for those under six for persons with incomes in excess of £5,000. Both the French Revolution and Napoleon made extensive pronatalist use of bachelor taxes and political fines (such as greater vulnerability to military service) in addition to providing tax exemptions and financial assistance to economically needy worker-parents. Fascist Italy in 1927 imposed a tax on bachelors between the ages of 25 and 65, exempting priests and war invalids. When the United States finally enacted a national income tax in 1913, the $1,000 exemption for married couples was debated as "amount[ing] to the taxation of bachelors."32

Even before the Nazi regime introduced the system, an SPD social policy expert in the Weimar Republic proposed a tax on bachelors and on parents with a below-average number of children in order to finance social insurance to compensate for the burdens of childrearing. The Nazis, impelled by alleged biological dangers to the race—the introduction of children’s allowances in the form of subsidies to families with five or more children under the age of 16 and with a monthly income of no more than 185 marks was announced the same day that the Nuremberg Laws were promulgated—undertook great efforts to eliminate financial impediments to large families by equalizing economic burdens between child-rich and childless families (Familienlastenausgleich). In order to finance marriage loans, which were granted to couples who married after the statute went into effect if the wife had been employed between June 1, 1931 and May 31, 1933, and obligated herself not to be employed again so long as her husband's income remained below 125 marks, marriage aid was raised by taxing the unmarried. The latter were defined to include widowed or divorced persons whose marriages produced no children, but exempted those over 55.33

In seeking to eliminate the economic privilege of the childless or child-poor, the Nazi regime was painfully aware that reducing basic wages to finance family supplements could not act as a work incentive for the childless. But the supreme principle read: "There is no such thing as equal right for all. Right protects only him who is of some value to his people." Not even the involuntarily childless had ground for complaint: they had to be weaned from the "liberalistic" attitude that they were being punished when in fact they should have been "proud of being able...to contribute to Germany’s again becoming a country of laughing children and laughing parents."34 Beneath the mendacious Nazi bombast lay an insight into one of the bases of a solidary society which liberal-capitalist formations have indeed found it difficult to foster.

A half-century later, Germany again debated bachelor taxes. The economic-demographic occasion is unmistakable. Complaints are voiced by the governing conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the oppositional SPD that "children in Germany have become the number one poverty risk"—specifically,
Reproductive Solidarity Under Laissez Faire?

That even a second child places a family with an average income in Germany at risk of falling into poverty. The virulence of the debate is not coincidental since Germany has experienced long-term below-replacement-rate fertility.35

This economic-demographic complex must be analyzed in connection with the history of comparatively small state-redistributed children’s allowances in West Germany. When first introduced in 1954, the family allowance, which was financed by employers’ contributions, was 25 marks and applied only to families with at least three children. The dominant political figure of the period, the CDU chancellor Konrad Adenauer, himself the father of seven children, regarded the subsidies as superfluous: “One needn’t pay the people for having kids. They’ll have them anyway.” In 1965 an allowance, which was now financed by the federal government, was introduced for the second child. Although since 1975 the German Social Code has expressly conferred on every person who supports children the right to a reduction of the associated economic burdens, the amount set for the first child was only 50 marks per month, for the second 70 marks, and for every higher birth-order child 120 marks; at that time the subsidy was thought to amount to 25 percent of the cost of one child, rising to 50 percent for six children. When the amounts were raised to 100, 220, and 240 marks for the second, third, and fourth and all additional children respectively in 1986, they were subject to graduated reduction in higher-income families. By the time the children’s allowance was raised to 70 marks for the first child in 1992, it amounted to only 8 percent of the 830 marks viewed as the minimum monthly cost of a child.36

Rather than being financed by the rich or even the childless, children’s allowances have, according to one jaundiced view of the German tax system (“transfer exploitation”), in fact been financed by parents themselves. As a result, parents’ per capita income is only 40 percent of that of the childless. A CDU member of parliament therefore called child-rich families “‘the idiots of the tax system.’” Despite the fact that the German constitution places the family under the special protection of the state, the Federal Constitutional Court has acknowledged and held constitutional the systemic disadvantaging of child-rich families for the benefit of the childless in the tax and social security systems.37

As the parliamentary parties began floating proposals to provide existing and potential parents with an economic incentive to stave off perceived ethnic suicide, federal Family Minister Hannelore Roensch urged imposition of a 7.5 percent wage and income “solidarity surtax” on the childless, which would be used to raise children’s allowances to 200 marks for the first child, 300 for the second, and 400 for each higher birth-order child from the current 70 marks for the first, 130 for the second child, 220 for the third child, and 240 for the fourth and higher birth-order children. Her plan would have limited payments to low-income and child-rich families, higher-income families being taken care of by increasing the dependent child exemption for income tax purposes to the level of the so-called existence minimum. Its most sensational provision would have defined parents whose children have been financially independent for five years as taxably childless.38

The proposal gained some public support from those outraged by the fact that
Dilemmas of Laissez-Faire Population Policy

children heftily cofinance the old-age pensions of that half of the adult population that is childless or has only one child. After all, as reproduction faltered, German public debate has included plans to reduce procreators’ old-age pension contributions to reflect their in-kind contributions or to reduce pensions of the childless. Nevertheless, the bachelor tax met with almost universal denunciation from the major political parties, including Roensch’s own ruling CDU, one of whose leading parliamentary members remarked that Germany needed a tax on the childless as much as one on beards or bald heads. Rejecting the tax, the SPD instead proposed abolishing the tax exemptions for dependent children altogether as disproportionately benefiting those with higher incomes and introducing a uniform monthly children’s allowance of 250 marks. In a surprising pre-election move, the CDU, which for years had complained that its demands for additional support for child-rich families had inspired the SPD to attack the CDU for seeking to shift the question of distributional justice between rich and poor to that between child-poor and child-rich, essentially adopted the SPD’s proposal.

In the end, the CDU and the SPD enacted compromise legislation. The 1995 amendments to the Bundeskindergeldgesetz both eliminated the graduated reductions for richer parents and increased the allowance to 200 marks per month (and to 220 marks beginning in 1997) for the first and second child, 300 for the third, and 350 for the fourth and higher birth-order children. To be sure, the necessity of choosing between income-tax dependent exemptions and children’s allowances under the new amendments means that the economic situation of two-child families with average income may remain unchanged.

Arguably the most interesting insight to be gleaned from this German debate for the question of how to mobilize broad-based support for the collectivization of reproductive costs refers to public perceptions of redistributional fairness. The SPD had also proposed a children’s or family fund to be financed by a 5 percent tax on all income recipients; parents would then be entitled to 600 marks monthly for each child. A public opinion survey revealed that 40 percent of the childless supported the plan and only 30 percent opposed it. More than half of the childless, however, opposed a tax to be imposed only on them.

Macrosocietally self-destructive solipsistic parental behavior has, according to James Coleman, become critical as parents’ liberation from dependence on their own progeny for an economically secure old age has made them lose sight of the fact that collectivized pay-as-you-go pensions merely shift their dependence onto other people’s children. Being trapped in a race to the bottom of the socialization process deprives parents of any motivation “to bring up their child to maximize the child’s value to society.” Not coincidentally, then, the United States has witnessed a resurgence of interest in the functional equivalent of bachelor taxes after a crisis atmosphere developed over a potential gap in financing the pay-as-you-go social security old-age pension system as the ratio of younger contributing workers to older retired former workers has declined. Ben Wattenberg, who did much to popularize the notion of a “birth dearth,” depicted the childless as “free riders” who receive “full pensions paid for by children who were raised and reared—at a
large expense—by children of other people. That’s not fair. Couples without children have extra discretionary income while they are young, which they can invest for their retirement.” He therefore proposed that more Social Security taxes be withheld from the childless or, to make it politically less unpalatable, that parents be exempted from already enacted future Social Security tax raises.\textsuperscript{42}

At the same time, however, legislators have become solicitous of the 62 percent of the labor force without any children living at home. In connection with the abortive health care bill of 1994, for example, the Subcommittee on Health of the House Ways and Means Committee expressly considered and rejected the notion that the childless should subsidize the cost of providing health care coverage for other people’s children. Such arithmetically popular political decisions overlook the possibility that the increasing workplace labor-intensity to which more and more parents are subjected as mothers’ rate of employment reaches ever newer highs in an attempt to maintain family living standards may be undermining their physical, mental, and emotional substance while interfering with their capacity for socializing their progeny. At some point parents but especially mothers may begin to be used up, like the natural environment, by those who are not required to pay for the costs of restoration.\textsuperscript{43} This analogy is, to be sure, complicated by one subjective difference: unlike humanity as a whole, which is never heard to complain that it can do without the air, water, and soil it has destroyed, many childless protest that some (quantitatively or qualitatively indeterminate) proportion of procreativity is not a social benefit on which they are free-riding, but rather an externalized cost, which should be internalized or, better yet, never created in the first place.

Proposals for redistributing the costs of producing the next generation of social security old-age pension pay-as-you-go payors have not been the exclusive preserve of pronatalist men. Feminist economists have also used the specter of a twenty-first-century Social Security crisis to urge an alleviation now of the collective burdens one-sidedly borne by parents. Shirley Burggraf, for example, takes as her point of departure two assumptions that seek to assimilate to the market phenomena that economists have heretofore failed to incorporate into their models. On the one hand, “Femina Economica” has at last emerged who “understands the concept of opportunity cost” and must “balance gains and costs at the margin.” On the other hand, now that women, liberated by neoclassical economics, have rationally made their cost-benefit analysis and collectively depressed the fertility rate below replacement level, society has grasped that “starting a family involves as much effort, investment, and risk as starting a business....” The question has therefore become how to “reverse the current disinvestment in family” that has resulted from the heavy financial penalties imposed on parents.\textsuperscript{44}

At stake is no trivial issue for Burggraf: “The essential question for our culture in the twenty-first century is whether...to socialize or privatize the roles and functions of family.” These two modes correspond to tax-financed redistribution to families and strengthening incentives for parents to invest in families. Burggraf criticizes the new home economists for their preoccupation with children as private
consumption goods and their failure to see that, although children as private investment goods may belong to the past, “[c]ollectively, we are just as dependent on our children for old-age security as families used to be.” The obvious question is therefore: Who will produce the producers and how will they be induced to do so? Putting “economic rationality at the center of the family decision process,” Burggraf cautions that before embarking upon a socialization of the costs of parentage, feminists and economists should give privatization of benefits a chance. As Adam Smith and the male chauvinist classical school would have put it had women’s reproductive labor not been invisible to them: Give parents a contractual claim to whatever wealth they individually succeed in generating. Specifically, Burggraf targets the enormous wealth transfer system ($16 trillion) embodied in Social Security, which requires each current recipient of earned income to support everyone else’s parents who are retired former recipients of such income rather than reimbursing her own personal procreators, who contributed most in labor and commodity and service expenditures to the creation of the labor power that is the foundation of her current earning power. Burggraf instead proposes “using the market system to promote family values” by creating a “parents’ dividend” to be earmarked and collected, like the Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA) tax, from their own children’s earnings.45

Burggraf wants it understood that her system solipsistically privatizes both costs and benefits: it appears to do away with the safety net. Because “economic rationality means consistency between the costs and benefits of individual choices, according to their social productivity,” if, for example, the human output of a “single, career-tracked parent...turns out badly,” “her choice” would become her problem. Like the former Soviet-bloc countries, the parent must understand that a choice must be made “between two major economic systems....” Burggraf fails to sketch what the fate of the voluntarily or involuntarily childless would be in the wake of this atavistic secular reprivatization. But since she wants to subject parents to the rigors of the market, it would only be fair to place the childless in the same regime. Thus if the existing Social Security system were terminated and nonprocreators were free to dispose of what they were formerly required to pass on to retirees, they would finally regain their Friedmanesque “freedom to make their own mistakes.”46 Opting for this type of dissolution of the compulsory, paternalistic, solidary, somewhat redistributionist Social Security system might, ironically, undermine Burggraf’s refeudalization of the family, which in effect garnishes procreators’ earned income in perpetuity. For if parents observed that the emancipated childless invested their former FICA taxes in private annuities that yielded more than the fixed share of their own children’s wages, parenting would remain a substandard investment and socialization of the costs of procreation would once again advance on the agenda.

Irrationality, contradication, and dysfunctionality must abound in societies that continue to commit childbearing and childrearing to unfettered private initiative while collectivizing the social security system. To the extent that parents withdraw from the market in order to carry on reproduction, they lower not only their
standard of living contemporaneously, but, through reduced earnings, also their old-age pensions; at the same time, the fact that their children are legally obligated to transfer part of their income to finance the old-age pensions of the members of their parents’ generation, including many who made no procreative contribution, may render them financially impotent to subsidize their own progenitors’ retirement. This hybrid system partially reproduces a striking phenomenon of the turn-of-the-century U.S. poorhouse, a very high proportion of whose elderly male inmates spent their last years there precisely because they had no children. While European societies have been struggling for decades toward a system that harmonizes reproduction and social security by moving toward greater socialization of reproduction, both U.S. state policy and even many of its critics insist on maintaining a rigidly outdated private-public divide.

Nancy Folbre, a Marxist-feminist economist, is also concerned about childless Social Security recipients’ “free-riding on parental labor”—especially mothers’ unpaid labor—because children are fiscally positive externalities. Folbre is nevertheless torn by Burggraf’s proposal. She welcomes its rewarding of parental labor, but presumes that it would reduce the level of income security. Folbre recognizes that eliminating pay-as-you-go social security would put an end to free-riding by nonparents, but the worst consequence she mentions is that dissolution “would impose stringent and inefficient limits on macroeconomic and social policy.” What Folbre finds most unsatisfactory, however, is the Burggraf plan’s potential for “encourag[ing] parents to treat their children in instrumental terms,” which would be “inconsistent with liberal principles of individual autonomy....” Against the history of hundreds of millions of parents who have created children for nonpecuniary, psychologically instrumental reasons, this fear, however, comes somewhat late in the day. For Folbre, then, the “best alternative” is to compensate parents “through a greater tax exemption or credit....”

This preference for the tax system unites strange bedfellows since it has also become a favorite of the religious Right, which promotes atavistic patriarchy and gender roles while rejecting state-redistributed cash allowances as propelled by an “egalitarian impulse”: as soon as recipients come to embrace them as entitlements, “the positive incentive effect is lost.” Consequently, such authors call the “[p]ro-family tax...that distinctively American form of crafting social policy....” Contrary to a widespread misperception that family allowances and tax deductions or allowances are different because one is a cash transaction and the other merely an accounting procedure, their impact on family purchasing power is the same. Indeed, in Britain the introduction in 1909 of income deductions for tax purposes based on number of children is viewed as “even more revolutionary” than that of family allowances after World War II. Although the reduction in tax liability may not be observed as an income flow, “the State is sharing in the responsibility of caring for each taxpayer’s family just as certainly as if it were paying cash allowances....”

The problem with dependent child exemptions as a welfare measure is that they benefit parents in higher income tax brackets more than those whose incomes are taxed at lower marginal rates (and whose incomes may be so low that part or
all of the exemption is wasted). In Britain, for example, socialist critics complained in the 1950s that dependent child exemptions were costing the state three times as much as child allowances; consequently, this segment of the welfare state, like others, benefited the middle class more than the working class. A man with £20,000 of annual income and two children received 13 times as much from exemptions and allowances as one earning only £500. For reasons of fairness, Sweden had already eliminated the exemptions in 1948; for budgetary reasons, other countries with family allowance programs, such as Denmark, Britain, and Canada, have also reduced, phased out, or eliminated the exemptions, which the SPD has opposed since 1950 and still characterizes as a "bitter social injustice."50

In the United States, the money value of dependent child exemptions exceeds the cost of the entire AFDC system and is double that of the federal share of AFDC. In 1991, almost 73 million exemptions for dependent children were granted on almost 41 million returns. The exemption, which amounted to $2,150, was worth $322 to taxpayers in the lowest (15 percent) bracket, $602 to those in the middle (28 percent) bracket, and $667 to those in the highest (31 percent) bracket. For joint returns of married persons, these brackets encompassed adjusted gross income from $0 to $34,000, $34,000 to $82,000, and above $82,000 respectively. The total value of these exemptions was almost $34 billion. The richest taxpayers, who accounted for about 10 percent of the exemptions, obtained about 15 percent of the value of the exemptions. The poorest taxpayers with 55 percent of the exemptions obtained only 38 percent of their value.51

The exemption reduced the tax liability of a jointly-filing working-class married couple with two children, vis-à-vis a childless couple, by $644 or $1,204 depending on whether they were in the 15 percent or 28 percent bracket. These sums amount to 2 to 3 percent of the annual income of families earning $20,000 to $50,000. In contrast, children's allowances for a similar family in such welfare states as Australia, Germany, Denmark, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Sweden represented 4 to 9 percent of the average production worker's annual wage in 1990. This quantitative comparison significantly understates the gap in state support between the United States and European countries inasmuch as the latter is embedded in a complex of family policies including housing allowances, prenatal and postnatal allowances, birth grants, paid maternity leave, and day care centers. The Swedish reproductive subsidies were significant enough that the prospect of an austerity-driven 15 percent reduction in child allowances (from $114 to $97 per child per month) and the complete elimination of additional benefits for child-rich families in 1996 purportedly prompted the sharpest decline in births in 70 years.52

A number of children's advocates in the United States have begun to press for the establishment of a refundable child tax credit as a means of creating income security for families with children without having to embark upon the politically more difficult task of proposing that the United States join Western Europe in enacting a universalist communitarian welfare state. Instead, the National Commission on Children, for example, suggests that new initiatives "build upon the mo-
momentum of pro-family tax reform begun in the 1980s." Specifically, it proposed replacing dependent child exemptions with a $1,000 inflation-adjusted refundable tax credit, which would entitle a low-income family to a cash payment from the Internal Revenue Service if its tax liability were less than $1,000. Although this credit would, unlike the exemption system, operate progressively by creating the equivalent of a $6,666 exemption for families in the lowest income tax bracket and only $3,225 in the 31 percent bracket, it would still not restore the inflation-adjusted value of the $600 exemption from 1948.53

The political direction in which such proposals appear to drift is revealed by the Democratic Party’s and Clinton administration’s initiative to compete with a right-wing Republican Congress by offering additional regressive nonrefundable tax credits to all but the wealthiest taxpayers. The $500 tax credit embodied in the American Dream Restoration title of the Republicans’ proposed Contract with America Tax Relief Act of 1995, in Newt Gingrich’s words, “categorically rejects...class warfare” by creating a supraclass tax code which recognizes that “the cost of raising children...is consistent across all economic boundaries.” By treating “every child equally” and excluding only 1 percent of all taxpayers, the bill purports to view tax issues “through the prism of family” rather than that of class. One-third of all children who live in families too poor to pay federal income tax would not benefit at all from the nonrefundable credit; an additional 10 percent live in families that would receive only a fractional benefit since their total tax liability is less than $500.54

In addition to providing dependent exemption subsidies, the United States has been operating a refundable tax credit system for low-income parents for two decades. The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), dating from 1975, was originally designed to compensate for the regressive impact of the employment taxes on low-income families. As the FICA taxes became increasingly burdensome in the wake of the increase in old-age pension benefits during the 1970s, pressure grew to provide relief to low-paid workers from a tax that was not only flat regardless of income level, but did not apply at all to wage or salary income beyond a middle-class level (which was raised from $7,800 in 1971, to $14,100 in 1975, and $60,600 in 1994). As a result of recent increases and differentiation for families with more than one child, a multichild family with earned income between $8,425 (the equivalent of full-time year-round work at the minimum wage) and $11,000 in 1994 is entitled to the maximum credit of $2,528. This program cost the federal government in 1991 about the same amount as AFDC ($10.5 billion), but subsidized about three times as many families (13 million); three-fourths of the credit is refunded. Some on the Left, however, object to the EITC on the ground that it functions as a Speenhamland-type wage depressant and subsidy to low-productivity and/or low-wage firms, since wage offers and acceptances are made with background knowledge of the supplement.55

In light of this recent interest in the tax system, it is intriguing that as mainstream an economist as Victor Fuchs finds family allowances financed by the childless to be efficient and equitable. He points out that between 1960 and 1988, child-
less households increased as a proportion of all households from 49 percent to 62 percent; in the prime age group for parentage, 25 to 44 years old, the shares rose even more markedly, from 20 percent to 37 percent. Because childless households have considerably higher average incomes than those with children, redistribution from the former to the latter would promote equality; similarly, children’s allowances financed out of general revenue would also have a progressive redistributional impact because children are overrepresented in low-income households.56

The primary tension inherent in a system of family income security exists between universality and progressivity: How can the stigma of means- or income-testing be avoided without wasting too much of the redistributed income on richer families that arguably do not need subsidies? Is a blunting of the drive toward equalization of conditions by means of the distribution of equal amounts of benefits to the poor and the nonpoor the price that must be paid to secure abiding political support for an income security plan that does not degenerate into a poorly financed and staffed poor law? If even at the moment that the solidaristic welfare state triumphed, the “social utility of targeting benefits was a virtue against which the dilemma of squandering scarce resources on the well-off in the name of national solidarity had to be weighed,” the resurgence of market-knows-best ideology and policy in the last two decades of the twentieth century has reinforced the dilemma. That even European societies permitted the value of family allowances to be significantly eroded during much of the post-World War II period casts doubt on the strategic assumption that universalism offers the kind of political protection that programs targeted on the poor lack.57

Nevertheless, if the origins of welfare universalism had more to do with the self-interest of the middle classes desirous of the benefits already afforded the working class than with incorporating the working class into full social citizenship rights, then arguably a frank reorientation of children’s allowances toward overall systemic egalitarianism to the exclusion of the rich from whose income and wealth the redistributive wherewithal would derive might be a sound political program. It is noteworthy, for example, that in the Netherlands, a society with a well-developed social wage and a long tradition of family allowances, the left-wing parliamentary opposition and the trade unions have advocated the introduction of income-related benefits in order to generate some vertical income redistribution. By the same token, framing the debate in terms of a policy choice between universalism and target efficiency may itself be misguided if it is in fact the overall societal context that is decisive. Thus in a society such as Sweden where almost as many people are recipients of state aid as are taxpayers, income testing may engender so little stigmatization that the alleged functional division between those two groups does not become an axial line of cleavage grounding fundamental political conflict. Although it might prove possible to destigmatize income-dependent family benefits in the United States by conceptualizing them as equalization of family burdens rather than as welfare, the by-product of such a step would be the creation of a new hierarchy of public assistance recipients, depressing the status of the childless.58

That even the United States, which has developed a Social Security system
remote from if not hostile to universalism, can create a targeted benefit to families with children that does not stigmatize is shown by the National School Lunch Act. Passed by Congress in 1946, it was designed "as a measure of national security, to safeguard the health and well-being of the Nation's children...." It provides free lunches to children from families with incomes below 130 percent of the federal poverty guidelines and reduced-price lunches to those from families with incomes between 130 percent and 185 percent of the guidelines. For the school year 1994-95, these guidelines meant that children from four-member families with incomes below $14,800 were entitled to free lunches, while those from such families with as incomes as high as $27,380 received lunch at reduced prices. What is particularly interesting about the school lunch program is that, in response to the "humiliating discrimination" to which many poor children had been subjected, in 1970 Congress wrote an antistigmatization clause directly into the statute: "No physical segregation or other discrimination against any child eligible for a free lunch or a reduced price lunch...shall be made by the school nor shall there be any overt identification of any child by special tokens or tickets, announced or published lists of names, or by other means." U.S. Department of Agriculture regulations further specify that "children shall not be required to use a separate dining area, go through a separate serving line, enter the dining area through a separate entrance, or consume their meals or milk at a different time." As the major judicial vindication of the right to nonstigmatizing receipt of benefits glossed the statute: "many youngsters are ashamed to have it [poverty] seen, and federal lawmakers...have decreed respect for their feelings." Almost 25 million students, more than half of total U.S. school enrollment, participate in the program, of whom 11 million receive free, 2 million reduced-price, and 12 million full-price lunches (which receive a small subsidy). Even if there is no such thing as a free school lunch, at $4 billion for 4 billion meals, nonstigmatizing and perhaps even invisible support for poorer families with children need not be expensive. Unsurprisingly, the profamily market-knows-besters of the 104th Congress bent on undermining the rudiments of the U.S. welfare state targeted this program for extinction.59

One way of resolving the tension between selectivity and substantive equality on the one hand and universalism and formal equality on the other is to abolish general children's allowances and to replace them with income-dependent programs. Italy instituted this change in 1988, eliminating payments altogether to families above a certain ceiling and providing allowances to lower-income families (depending on the number of children), in part as an austerity measure but also to anchor redistribution for the purpose of reducing social inequality as the basis of Italian family policy. For somewhat different reasons, a similar program was implemented in 1992 by the Conservative government in Canada—where the demise of family allowances through neglect had been predicted two decades earlier—when it eliminated universality and increased payments to the poorest families. The center-right coalition government in Germany at one time announced legislative plans for a similar transformation. The communitarian spirit underlying social security systems could be better preserved by a progressive subsidy, as in
Italy and Australia, that tapers off or is phased out at higher income levels, or clawbacks, as in Britain and Canada, which recoup payments to the rich families through a progressive income tax system. The Reaganomic flattening of marginal tax rates would, to be sure, make the latter plan infeasible in the United States. By the same token, however, as President Johnson’s Commission on Income Maintenance Programs observed, clawback financing, “[h]owever cleverly disguised,” as based on a postpayment means test will erode the supposed benefits of universalism. The Commission ultimately rejected child allowances in favor of a minimum supplementary income for the poor regardless of whether they had children; it foresaw a role for children’s allowances only as a French-style horizontally redistributive program between families with and without children with similar incomes once the United States had created a higher statutory income floor.60

MALTHUS REDUX, OR THE END OF THE POOR LAW AS WE KNOW IT?

Nothing symbolizes the vacuity of serious political thinking more than the resurgence of popularity of theorists as irrelevant to the modern world as Smith, Locke, Malthus.... Malthus, like an ancient talisman, is brought out whenever liberal society is in trouble.61

The Reagan-Bush administrations brought to bear on the formulation of public policy a recrudescence of political Malthusianism that would have been inconceivable just a few years earlier. Its most prominent social welfare analyst was Charles Murray, who offered a quick solution to the problems of hard-core unemployment among the young, procreation among single teenage girls, and the breakup and immobilization of poor families. To this end, his “most ambitious thought experiment...consists of scrapping the entire federal welfare and income-support structure for working-aged persons, including AFDC, Medicaid, Food Stamps, Unemployment Insurance, Worker’s Compensation, subsidized housing, disability insurance, and the rest. It would leave the working-aged person with no recourse whatsoever except the job market, family members, friends, and public or private locally funded services.”62

Once his patrons were out of office, Murray sharpened the focus of his Malthusian misogyny, and discovered to his surprise that right-wing politicians espoused it. First in the Wall Street Journal and then before Congress, he announced that rising (white) illegitimacy, “the single most important social problem of our time...because it drives everything else,” signaled that “the sky really is falling.” Although “the constants are that boys like to sleep with girls and that girls think babies are endearing,” Murray trained the penalties for procreating without the financial wherewithal on single mothers. Their growing numbers, a persistent Ricardian-Malthusian echo resounds, “must destroy the community’s capacity to sustain itself.” Murray’s only innovation is that “the government should spend
lavishly on orphanages" where a "warm, nurturing environment" will be provided for the children whose single mothers abandon them. This "stern, self-selection process...increases the chances that the child will survive." Without offering all that Murray demanded, the proposed Real Welfare Act of 1994, a right-wing Republican congressional bill that would have eliminated AFDC benefits for the children of single mothers under the age of 21, pointed in his direction. The Right's gender-specific attack on teenage procreators is illuminating in view of the finding that the impregnators of high school girls are 2.5 times as likely to be men over the age of 20 as high school boys and four times as likely to have impregnated junior high school girls as the boys in those schools.63

The Clinton administration, despite having at its disposal several of the most liberal social policy analysts ever to have advised a president on poor-law reform, itself began the march down the Malthusian road. Its most visible step was to authorize states to impose a so-called family cap on AFDC recipients that eliminates additional payments for any children born after the mother becomes a recipient. Although the $67 average monthly increment is so far below the incremental cost of another child that it can scarcely qualify as an economic incentive to have more children, President Clinton apparently shares the conviction of the governor of Mississippi "that mothers on welfare became pregnant precisely so that they could collect the $24 a month in extra benefits offered by the state." Ironically, however, when officials of a state that had implemented the cap were later forced to concede that the restriction turned out to be less efficacious than originally claimed, they promptly denied that lower birth rates were the goal; instead, its purpose had always been to make poor-law beneficiaries take responsibility for their procreative decisions and nondecisions.64

The Republican capture of the 104th Congress brought about the legislative embodiment of neo-Malthusianism as the Personal Responsibility Act of 1995 featured the prohibition of AFDC payments with respect to a child born to a woman already receiving such aid. The current fascination with AFDC caps represents another turn of the Malthusian wheel, which has attracted conservatives and liberals alike over the years. At the height of agitation over population and the poor law during the Nixon administration, the American Bar Association's Committee on Law and Family Planning opined that "a salient reason for indifference to birth control...on the part of the many-offspring welfare mothers is that...since they are supported by public assistance, which is of course increased for each offspring, they do not fear the need to divide the same loaf of bread among more mouths—a fear which may motivate birth control among self-supporting parents." It therefore proposed that the new Work Incentive Program for AFDC mothers "be programmed to provide a specific economic incentive to birth control. The amount the welfare mother keeps from her wages without deduction from her public assistance grant, should decrease a small amount with each additional child. That is, she should contribute more from her wages to the family budget as her number of children increases. Such a policy would bring her economic situation into some conformity with that of self-supporting parents for whom more children mean
increased economic stringency.\textsuperscript{65}

Politicians who have promoted the cap and rushed to implement it have resurrected the same arguments that Malthus introduced against miscegenation of wages and poor-law payments. In announcing that the Clinton administration’s Department of Health and Human Services had granted a waiver to Wisconsin—New Jersey, Arkansas, and Georgia had already received waivers—to cap cash benefits to women who have additional children while receiving AFDC payments, Governor Tommy Thompson justified the change on the ground that across “society, wages are not increased when families have additional children. They shouldn’t be in the AFDC program either.” Yet this right-wing politician with an unparalleled record of ejecting recipients from the AFDC and food stamp rolls was merely repeating what James Florio, then the liberal governor of New Jersey, which imposed the cap in 1992, had told Congress earlier: “If...a working poor woman...chooses to make that decision to have a child, she does not go to her boss and demand that she get a pay increase.” This response soon assumed the status of a mantra in other state campaigns to eliminate additional benefits for additional children born to AFDC recipients as government officials hastened to personalized the issue: “If my wife and I have another baby, my salary does not go up.” In upholding the constitutionality of the New Jersey provision against claims that it denies due process and equal protection of the laws to needy children based on their parents’ behavior, a federal judge joined the chorus by agreeing that the cap merely “puts the welfare household in the same situation as that of a working family, which does not automatically receive a wage increase every time it produces a child.”\textsuperscript{66}

Senate Finance Committee Chairman Moynihan joined the issue by first conceding that indeed “in a working-class family, when another child comes along, they put more water in the soup,” and then observing that nevertheless the United States is the world’s only industrial democracy to fail to provide child allowances to avoid that predicament. The debate was broadened when a New Jersey legislator, a descendant of slaves, argued to Moynihan that people had to bear the consequences of their personal decisions to use condoms, or to have a child or an abortion: “I am trying to prepare my people for America. And, therefore, American values; not some other country, because this is where they have to survive. In America, we do not automatically add income as you add family members.” Governor Pete Wilson of California gave the debate a divisive intraclass point by charging that it is “‘unfair’” to make a hard-working young couple, who must save to afford a child, “‘pay taxes to provide a greater stipend to a woman on welfare who continues to have one child after another out of wedlock’”—an issue that his rival for the Republican presidential nomination, Senator Phil Gramm, reiterated in a losing effort to mobilize Senate support for retaining the family cap in the Family Self-Sufficiency Act.\textsuperscript{67}

Despite the politicians’ generally correct characterization of the U.S. wage system’s lack of an express reproductive component, they have overlooked a venerable tradition of paying variable sums to families with unequal numbers of
moutns to feed. As long ago as the 1920s Paul Douglas catalogued the precedents for the family wage. During World War I, for example, the United States Government provided family allowances graduated according to family size to enlisted men. The so-called mothers’ pensions that most states afforded mothers who had lost their husbands’ financial support were also largely graduated according to the number of children. The death benefits provided by numerous state workers compensation programs also varied according to the number of dependents.68

One important area in which the United States has followed the European model of family allowances is unemployment insurance. Fourteen state unemployment compensation systems do provide for additional benefits in the form of dependents’ allowances. Congress itself was the first legislature to enact such a program when it created the District of Columbia Unemployment Compensation Act immediately after passage of the Social Security Act in 1935. The statute set the insurance payment at 40 percent of the worker’s wage plus 10 percent of the wage for a spouse and 5 percent for each dependent relative up to a maximum of 65 percent. In Florio’s own New Jersey, the unemployment insurance statute provides for an additional 7 percent of the worker’s weekly benefit amount for the first dependent and 4 percent for each of the next two. In other states the number of dependents is not capped. In Massachusetts, for example, the unemployed worker receives an additional $25 per week for each dependent up to a maximum of 50 percent of his or her weekly benefit rate.69

The introduction of procreative allowances in the unemployment insurance programs has, to be sure, not taken place without controversy. Significantly, the debate mirrors that surrounding wages and family allowances. Congress, which regarded the whole benefit system as a compromise between providing subsistence and preserving workers’ former standard of living, noted that: “Benefits are based on normal earnings but at a very low rate for the single man, which may be supplemented if an employee is married or has dependents.” The chief argument against dependents’ benefits has always focused on their injection of the element of need into a non-needs-tested program. Advocates, accepting the framework set out by their protagonists, argue that the need in question is merely presumptive: the state agency does not conduct an individualized inquiry into the worker’s particular circumstances to determine whether he or she in fact needs the additional amount to support the dependent. This conclusion derives from sample studies showing that weekly benefits for single persons equaled or exceeded nondeferrable expenditures for food, shelter, utilities, and health care, whereas benefits for even four-person families fell far short of the cost of necessaries.70

The clinching argument in favor of dependent-adjusted unemployment compensation benefits, however, is the same one that has historically attracted employers to family allowances:

Dependents’ benefits can also be a means of providing total benefits for the family head without raising the basic benefit to a level that would weaken the incentive of workers without dependents to find jobs. [I]f basic benefits were
increased to 80 percent of gross weekly wages in order to provide adequate ben-

efits for heads of families, a working wife who is laid off while her husband is
working might be strongly tempted to “take it easy” in looking for work. Also,
a single man who averages almost as much as male heads of families might lack
incentive to work, particularly since a benefit of 80 percent of gross wages
would provide an income more closely approximating his former net wages.71

Like many European employers during the period before the enactment of
mandatory family allowances who saw private allowances as a way of fending off
general wage increases, some states introduced dependents’ allowances into their
unemployment compensation systems as a lower-cost method of enhancing benefits
than an across-the-board increase. And although there is no evidence that allow-
ances have depressed basic unemployment benefit levels, states with dependents’
allowances tend to provide low basic maximum benefit levels in relation to average
wage levels.72

Dependents’ allowances have also been adopted in supplementary unemploy-
ment benefits that some unions have negotiated with large firms. Then, too, some
states have included dependents’ allowances in workers’ compensation awards for
total and partial incapacitation. The chief benefit that some employees receive
from some employers that is differentiated according to the number of children is
probably health care, although many workers must share the cost of the premiums
for dependents. Other major elements of the social wage in the United States also
contain a reproductive component. The Social Security Disability Insurance pro-
gram includes a child’s insurance benefit. And the death benefits provision of
many state workers compensation programs pay amounts to children.73

Thus although politicians have understated the extent to which the principle
of reproductive need has penetrated the social wage even in the United States, the
positions that they have staked out have come to mold the politically and rhetori-
cally plausible field of discussion in a society characterized by ever thinner public
opinion. Stripped of its Malthusian ornamentation, the argument that what is good
enough for the working class should also apply to poor-law beneficiaries must,
therefore, be addressed. It may be sufficient to reply simply that it is unacceptable
to permit the latter’s children to suffer irreparable harm, but it is evasive to argue
that an AFDC recipient, like middle-class women, may reproduce to satisfy “the
desire to give a grandchild to one’s own mother” (to whom she has by definition
already given at least one).74

It is inaccurate and politically perilous to insist that the assumption underlying
child-cap programs “is that middle-class people are intelligent enough to refrain
from having children when they cannot support them and that poor women should
do likewise.” Rather, such programs are predicated on the empirical reality that
anarcholiberal ideology and policy condemn working-class procreators and their
children, by and large, to suffer the untoward consequences of the parents’ lack of
self-discipline, poor judgment, or bad luck. The appropriate response to the argu-
ment that AFDC recipients should not be exempted from this fate cannot lie in
reciting the altruistic and selfish reasons that motivate rich and poor alike to have
children, but in criticizing the atavistic foundations of the overall pseudoindividualistic, antisolidaristic reproductive and demographic policies of the existing poor-law state.75

How difficult it might be to muster outraged majoritarian opposition to implementation of a reproductive cap on AFDC payments can be gauged by the extent to which the U.S. Supreme Court cut off such discourse a quarter-century earlier. In *Dandridge v. Williams* it rejected an equal protection challenge to a Maryland regulation that imposed a cap on the total AFDC grant that any one family could receive regardless of the number of its dependent children. Because the case involved merely “the most basic economic needs of impoverished human beings” rather than commercial free speech or some other right deemed protected by the U.S. Constitution, the Supreme Court subjected the cap not to a standard of strict scrutiny, but only a reasonable basis standard. And here it found such a basis in “the State’s legitimate interest in...avoiding discrimination between welfare families and the families of the working poor.” If Justices Marshall and Brennan were unable to persuade a majority that it was unconstitutional for a state to inflict a deprivation on the children of a large family in order to “wield its economic whip” in the form of a work incentive for the parents, it is improbable that the current Supreme Court would come to any conclusion other than that of a liberal legal commentator two decades earlier, who argued that “a sound birth planning rationale” would also support *Dandridge*: “such a regulation creates an incentive to limit births in welfare families closely analogous to that which exists in non-welfare families, and thus is neither discriminatory nor unduly harsh.” And indeed, the federal judge who upheld New Jersey’s cap found it analogous to the maximum family payment that passed statutory and constitutional muster in *Dandridge*.76

The sea change in political discourse on poverty and reproduction that has taken place during the last quarter of the twentieth century can be measured by an argument that plaintiffs’ legal services attorneys made in their brief in *Dandridge*, deployment of which in the post-Reagan era seems inconceivable. They attacked the cap on the ground that “by penalizing families of seven or more for the birth of additional children the regulation’s harshness falls heaviest upon those who do not believe in artificial means of controlling birth.” The Attorney General of Maryland, who had turned the tables on the underdogs by submitting a remarkable sociologically oriented Brandeis brief replete with quotations from Alva Myrdal, Daniel Moynihan, and E.H. Carr, directly joined the issue by replying that: “What plaintiffs seek in this litigation is essentially a judicially conferred family allowance system limited to welfare recipients.” Asserting that European family allowance systems had originated in response to concerns about inadequate population, Maryland argued that at “a time of rising concern with population increase it would...seem unwise to...require the state to eliminate the normal checks on population increase on behalf of” large AFDC families but not with regard to “the ‘working poor’ or the public at large.” Although the Supreme Court chose not to rule on this dispute, even the dissenters obliquely acknowledged the socioeconomic and legal constraints circumscribing their arguments: “It is true that government in
the United States, unlike certain other countries, has not chosen to make public aid available to assist families generally in raising their children."

An earlier libertarian proposal to install a pure laissez-faire regime of procreation by eliminating as many externalities as possible underscores the aporia of the child-cap for AFDC recipients. Singling out welfare payments (together with public education) as the main subsidies to childbearing, David Friedman proposed making procreation a "losing proposition" for the Banfieldian lower-class parents with short time horizons rather than for the family as a whole. "It can be made so by making the welfare payments received by a family independent of the number of children. In terms of calculations of 'need' this procedure would oversubsidize small families, undersubsidize large ones, or do both. But it would also impose the cost of an additional child entirely on the parents." Apparently oblivious of the 200-year-old debate over family wages, all Friedman succeeded in doing was reproducing within the poor-law sector the dilemma of the so-called productivity-oriented wage system that abstracts from individualized needs such as family size. As Friedman ultimately acknowledges of his own proposal: "The disadvantage of this imposition is that the... [parents] may transfer the costs to the child, thus thwarting the purpose of the program."78

No capitalist society has yet discovered how to penalize guilty overprocreators without visiting their sins on their innocent overprocreatees. To be sure, a resurgent Republican Party inspired by Charles Murray and led by Newt Gingrich purports to have found the holy grail in the form of the abolition of the poor laws altogether for miscreant reproducers and the consignment of millions of their now lucky offspring to lavish neo-Lockean and neo-Malthusian orphanages. Somewhat less preposterous and mean-spirited alternatives are also imaginable. The state could, for example, wait to impose special penalty taxes on its overreproductive citizens until all of their children had reached the age of 18, thus making their older age as miserable as possible. Such a system would be unlikely to act as a deterrent to the rich unless it were steeply progressive; and how many poor people have at age 18 the requisite quarter-century time horizon to engage in the necessary procreatively evasive action to avoid the taking? The implausibility of these scenarios is rooted in the lack of a consensus that any advanced capitalist society is suffering from general overpopulation.

Nevertheless, to assert, in spite of this renewed Malthusian onslaught, that perceived "irresponsible reproduction...in the face of overpopulation" among the poor is not a source of such proposals as requiring welfare mothers to use Norplant is naive. After all, even the black U.S. Surgeon General at the time asserted that: "'Medicaid...must have been developed by a white male slave owner. It pays for you to be pregnant and have a baby, but it won't pay for much family planning. White male slave owners wanted a lot of healthy slaves, people to work. We don't need slaves any more. We need healthy, educated, motivated children with hope.'" The labor-recruitment metaphor is disorienting since the illegitimate births that Dr. Joycelyn Elders wanted to reduce reputedly contribute relatively little even to the reserve army of the unemployed. Eighty percent of the children of unwed, teenage
high school dropouts will themselves be poor, and single teenage- mother-headed families in the United States are said to cost taxpayers $34 billion dollars to support. Indeed, the Republican Party expressly motivated its Malthusian Personal Responsibility Act of 1995 by reference to the $120 billion in AFDC payments, food stamps, and Medicaid that births to teenage mothers cost between 1985 and 1990. A capitalistically dysfunctional lumpenproletariat is a pure cost, which confers no benefits on whomever the Surgeon General views as the structural successors of the slave owners.

To be sure, the initial impetus for the population control movement in the United States as the post-World War II baby boom came to an end was not the perception of a general overpopulation crisis—although the Nixon-Rockefeller Commission on Population Growth declared that a larger population would confer no benefits—but rather overpopulation among a distinct subpopulation. “The importance of high fertility among the underprivileged,” according to the National Academy of Sciences, “lies not so much in its contribution to the national birth rate as in the difficulties that excessive fertility imposes on the impoverished themselves.” If, for example, in the mid-1960s families with incomes less than $4,000 had produced the same average number of children as those with more than $4,000, the total number of children ever born to women 40 to 44 years of age would have been reduced by only 4 percent.

Indeed, the connection between Norplant and Malthusian overpopulation-cum-poverty has been made clear by proponents and opponents of state-provided contraception targeted at the poor imagined to be largely black ghetto residents. The Philadelphia Inquirer, for example, noting in 1990 the happenstantial appearance of two news reports the previous day that the Food and Drug Administration had approved Norplant and that half of black children lived in poverty, wondered editorially whether “foolproof contraception” could “reduce the underclass.” It made the link the cornerstone of a trial-balloon proposal that “welfare mothers” be offered a larger benefit in exchange for using Norplant or that it be made available free to poor women. Bombarded with accusations of racism by its own reporters and editors, the Inquirer apologized profusely for having “hastily and foolishly juxtaposed” contraception, poverty, and race. In resuming the 200-year-old debate over the direction of causality between procreation and poverty, or, seen from the perspective of the birth-strike controversy, over whether poverty can be avoided or eliminated by individual action or only by macrosocietal changes, the editorial board moved toward what had once been an orthodox Marxist position but has now become the adoptive shared rhetorical patrimony of an otherwise politically heterogeneous front of anti-Malthusians and anti-blame-the-victimologists: “It’s true that many single young women lessen their chances of escaping poverty by having children too early in life. But it’s also true that the very hopelessness of their circumstances often underlies the decision not to postpone childbearing. Creating hope...must be the main tenet of any effective war on poverty.” The newspaper even accepted its antiracist critics’ charge that “to dangle cash...in front of a desperately poor woman is tantamount to coercion,” although the offer
the link between contraception and demographically caused poverty is so prominent among some on the Left that they view proposals such as state payments to AFDC recipients to undergo Norplant implants as "gas-chamber economics...." According to Alexander Cockburn, racist "child disincentive" programs such as the caps on benefits to women who have additional children while receiving AFDC payments will permit "Nazis" to impose Norplant as a condition for conferral of any social benefit on poor black teenagers. Nevertheless, a refurbished version of the birth strike in the form of state-aided technological contraceptive solutions to proletarian poverty has not met with monolithic resistance even among blacks. Former Surgeon General Elders, for example, enthusiastically welcomed Norplant as a means of preventing teenage pregnancies, bemoaning only its high price.

LAISSEZ FAIRE OR SOLIDARITY FOREVER?

In a life where the only thing that counts anymore is money, young people are beginning to see children as a handicap.

The laissez-faire underpinnings of the state's and capital's implicit policy that population is unimportant for capitalism are, ironically, supported by leftist historical research arguing not only that "working-class men and women accurately gauged the relation of family size to their own interests," but that such conscious and deliberate fertility behavior is "simply not susceptible to very much direct control." Michael Katz and Mark Stern, for example, believe that workers' procreational "choice makes sense in terms of their class situation...even if its consequences in the aggregate seem to contribute to problems such as the imbalance between people and resources." The pull of microprocreational and macro-demographic individualism even on the Left can be gauged by the indignation with which Katz and Stern reject the possibility or propriety of public policy's or education's influencing fertility: "Rather, people will determine for themselves the family size that seems most appropriate to their lives." How individual proletarian couples could be acting in conformity with their class interests and yet uncoordinatedly unleash macrosocial consequences that may weaken their class, strengthen the capitalist class, or perhaps even undermine the ecological vitality of any society remains unclear. After all, if the working-class standard of living is controlled by the typical family with the average number of wage earners, incorporation of additional family earners into the labor force does not in the long run necessarily raise the average family's aggregate real wages, although it may immediately increase the individual family's income; "instead, the intensified competition in the labor market and the lowering of...wages simply spread the family wage over more workers [and] the degree of exploitation would be increased." At the very least, even if members of advanced capitalist societies have voluntarily reduced their fertility in response to overall economic pressures,
a question still remains as to how close they have come to exhausting the potential for a societally optimal adjustment.\textsuperscript{85}

The logic of left-wing demographic laissez faire is reminiscent of Harvey Leibenstein’s rejection of the claim that fertility behavior in underdeveloped countries was irrational because it is based on conventions uninformed by capitalist rationality or technology. Yet the advantages that might accrue to the economy as a whole from a smaller population do not necessarily create the requisite micro-incentives to induce macroeconomically sound decisions: “For what may be appropriate when viewed from the standpoint of the economy as a whole may be most inappropriate when viewed from the position of an individual.... This error involves something...akin to the fallacy of composition.” Specifically, Leibenstein means that subsistence-level families may be acting rationally in maximizing births despite their detrimental impact on the larger economy. What is most striking here is Leibenstein’s inversion of the vantage point: he appears almost to be saying that rationality is the result of spontaneous aggregation of individual decisions. Missing is any sense of the independent existence of a macrosocietal plan with which individual procreators could democratically interact in order to mediate among and inform people in their collective and individual roles. But whatever the exigencies of Third World impoverishment, hunger, and starvation, they afford no basis for upholding laissez faire in societies possessing the manifold resources to eliminate poverty. Procreational individualism should be even less unquestioned where the behavior is not rational even from the individual economic perspective and parents instrumentally create offspring as a “valued asset,” “investments in parental status,” or “a hedge against loneliness.”\textsuperscript{86}

By the same token, however, the fear expressed by the British Royal Commission on Population in 1949—that “a community...in which birth control is generally accepted can only...survive, if its members think it worthwhile to have families large enough to replace themselves”—underscores the heavier burden that ideological conformity has been made to bear in modern capitalist societies. The question of whether “the cult of childlessness and the vogue of the one-child family” were symptoms of “decadence” during the interwar period and whether the widespread failure to reproduce in capitalist societies in the last quarter of the twentieth century reflects a similar phenomenon is, here at least, subsidiary to the fact that it has become politically more difficult for capital and the state to correct demographic course if such a change were necessary.\textsuperscript{87}

By promoting moral and cultural understandings that elevate individual over collective rationality, capitalist societies foster attitudes and behavior—adequately captured or at least reproduced by the market-beholden “new household econom­ics”—that treat children, that is, humanity’s future, as fungible consumer commodities, between which and nonhuman commodities individuals or couples are free to allocate their scarce time and monetary and emotional resources. This conception contrasts sharply with the frameworks of traditional societies in which reproductive behavior was “guided by norms embedded in a cultural-institutional superstructure that overwhelmed rational choice at the...household level and sub-
stituted a time-tested, survival oriented group rationality [that] left the individual couple (particularly the wife) with little or no discretionary control over completed family size." The obviously progressive enlargement of freedom associated with modernity's vindication of women's liberation from collectivist prescription of reproductive fate has less obviously annihilated and superseded the collective rationality that regarded children (perhaps instrumentally) as unique, since they guaranteed survival of the community in a way that transcended whatever individual interests procreators may have managed to nurture in such societies.

Against the background of the need to consolidate that liberation from pre-modern forms of gender oppression, even the most reflective women's organizations have difficulty transcending the bounds of liberal individualism in vindicating reproductive rights. Thus the "Women's Declaration on Population Policies," which was drafted by an international network of women's health advocates in preparation for the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, stated that: "Women have the individual right and the social responsibility to decide whether, how, and when to have children and how many to have...." How women qua atomized individuals would ever have the knowledge to exercise that responsibility the authors of the Declaration failed to explain. That a feministically gendered invisible hand, like any other Smithian system, must generate collective irrationality is itself an invisible problem to those who reject "the idea that individuals in the present generation will not, left to their own free desires, make sound decisions...for the good of future generations...." Only the theoretically most sophisticated feminist population discourse problematizes the "mystical 'harmony of interests' between individual women and public authorities [or] conflicts between 'private' and 'public' interests...." Sônia Correa and Rosalind Petchesky, for example, while conceding that the existence of a biologically based fundamental right to procreate "is clearly more complicated than whether one has a right, as a matter of bodily integrity, to prevent or terminate a pregnancy," nevertheless insist that the recognition that childbearing has third-person and collective consequences does not necessitate the conclusion that women have a societal duty to refrain from reproducing. Their reasoning, tailored to the situation of women in underdeveloped countries, carries pregnant implications for the advanced capitalist world and beyond: "Such a duty could begin to exist only when all women are provided sufficient resources for their well-being, viable work alternatives, and a cultural climate of affirmation outside of childbearing so that they no longer depend on children for survival and dignity." To the extent that such societies do provide the material resources and degendered social structure and values that deprive single- or absent-minded devotion to the creation of large families of any collectively or even individually rational basis, feminists may then come to accept the need for the formulation of joint collective-individual demographic and hence fertility goals. The 1994 United Nations Conference on Population and Development took a step in that direction by declaring that couples and individuals, in exercising "the basic right...to decide freely and responsibly the number...of their children...should take into account the needs of their living and
future children and their responsibilities towards the community.90

To the extent that the invisible hand proves to be as inept at guiding billions of self-regarding decision-makers toward a collectively rational demographic outcome as it has been in so many other areas marked by "market failure"—that is, if procreators fail to identify, measure, and balance the collective costs and benefits of additional children now and 20 years hence and to refrain from producing them when the former exceed the latter—the state's visible hand may have to intervene to steady it. The sanctity shrouding procreative choices, which ironically has reached its apotheosis in social formations that reify children, has, at least in the United States, added its ideological weight to the inevitable rearguard struggles against decommodification—in this case in the form of family or children's allowances. But regardless of how warranted such subsidies are as a matter of social welfare and social justice, bribing people to multiply or to limit their fertility cannot substitute for the creation of an objective and felt community: "We cannot, in a democracy, appeal to parents to bear children as part of their democratic responsibilities whilst at the same time they are forced to serve their own economic interests at the expense of the rest of the community."91

A profound demographic dilemma, which is presumptively inescapable in any society riven by class, racial, ethnic, gender, generational, or religious cleavages, lies in developing within the individual procreators a sustained psychological identification through the current and adjoining generations with the larger community as a living and life-giving collectivity that has a past as well as a future—a project that can hardly be fulfilled merely by establishing, as France has done, a ministry for "solidarity between the generations." Creation of a quasiuniversally perceived identity between personal and collective interests so that individual and societal reproductive needs can mesh and be harmonized is a task that is difficult enough in a tabula rasa microcommunity such as a kibbutz, where the generational existential context is palpable, but becomes almost impossibly heroic even in a relatively homogeneous nation, and barely imaginable on an international level. The social-psychological and moral delicacy of the dilemma is captured in the need to nurture both an abstract analytical and a felt emotional commitment to solidarity with the collectivity and the other people, past, present, and future, who compose it—a commitment that never collapses into a merely repressive and ultimately feckless procreational duty to the state.92

If these desiderata of an intergenerational demographic solidarity appear not to extend beyond vague generalities, the reason lies in their purely aspirational character in a society grounded in individualism, competition, privacy, exploitation, greed, indifference and, at best, mutual toleration. Where virtually no one reproduces for the sake of the preservation of the human community but only for various self-regarding reasons, it is perilous to impute changing macrosocietal goals to changes in overall fertility rates. Nevertheless it is plausible that a kind of demographic Zeitgeist speaks, for example, through a massive shift toward childless or one- or two-child families. Whether, however, the fact that millions simultaneously decide, for personal economic, psychological, or cultural reasons,
to limit their procreativity means that they have been guided by a vision of the long-term collective outcomes of those decisions is doubtful.

Articulating a collective judgment as to the appropriate future size of the population presupposes a structure of democratic planning that no capitalist society has ever undertaken. Although the Nixon administration and the Rockefeller-led Commission on Population Growth and the American Future spoke vaguely about the need for foresight in this area, the state shrank back from taking any concrete initiatives. How, after all, should a society that is quasi-religiously opposed to planning something as mundane as how many automobiles or pairs of socks it will produce next year suddenly be able to lay down a framework as to how large the population should be and how many new members of the human race should be born. To be sure, Congress is deemed to possess the organizational capacity and administrative expertise to determine how many B-1 bombers should be produced and how many already existing human beings from other countries should be admitted as immigrants annually, but, given the intensely personal character of procreative decisions, governmental intervention would, without more, be perceived merely as intolerable fiat. Societies are imaginable in which even such decisions could be integrated into an interactive process between the democratically formulated needs of the community at large and those of each potential individual procreator, but a militantly competitive capitalism in which a Spencerian wall divides the family that “exists to protect...the weak” from the society that “exists to reward the strong,” is not one of them.93

NOTES

4. See above ch. 7.
believe that nonparenthood permits them to lead more “glamorous” lives.


19. U.S. BLS, Consumer Expenditure Survey, 1990-91, tab. 5, 47, 56 at 30-33, 194-96, 221-23 (Bull. 2425, 1993). Since heads ("reference person") of the childless couples were on average 55 years old, most of them presumably had already discharged their reproductive duties. On the inconsistencies of this survey resulting from the fact that expenditures may be financed from sources not reflected in income data, see Nicholas Eberstadt, "A Poor Measurement," Wall Street Journal, Apr. 22, 1996, at A22 (Westlaw).


21. Veevers, Childless by Choice at 86-90; Die Lage der Familien in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland—Dritter Familienbericht, tab. 16 at 37, tab. 10 at 191 (appendix), 57 (Deutscher Bundestag, 8. Wahlperiode, Drucksache 8/3121, 1979).


23. Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, La Question de la population 45-47, 52, 258 (1913); Amo Herzig, "Kinderarbeit in Deutschland in Manufaktur und Protofabrik (1750-1850)," Archiv für Sozialgeschichte 311-75 (1983); Jürgen Kuczynski, Studien zur Lage des arbeitenden Kindes in Deutschland von 1700 bis zur Gegenwart (1968).


25. Robert Torrens, On Wages and Combinations 29-30 (1969 [1834]); Rudolf Goldscheid, Hoherenwicklung und Menschenökonomie: Grundlegung der Sozialbiologie 417 (1911); Diana Pearce, "Welfare Is Not for Women: Why the War on Poverty Cannot Conquer the Feminization of Poverty," in Women, the State, and Welfare 265-79 at 267-69 (Linda Gordon ed., 1990). An extreme example of child labor among white working-class and professional families suggests that parents benefit by having their children finance their own discretionary consumption. In Aroostook County, Maine, the entire school system, which has to be "'empathetic to the farmers' needs,'" shuts down for three weeks so that all students 12 and older can pick potatoes in lieu of their mothers, who now work part-time outside of agriculture. Sara Rimer, "School Can Wait, but Potatoes Can't," N.Y. Times, Oct. 7, 1994, at A9, col. 1 (nat. ed.).


Reproductive Solidarity Under Laissez Faire?


31. Susan Treggiari, Roman Marriage: Iusti coniuges from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian 58 (1991); Theodore Mommsen, The History of Rome 2:65-66 (William Dickson tr. 1895) (mentioning the aes uxorum of the censor Camillus in 351 B.C.); Valeri Maximi, Factorum et dictorum memorabiliun, II, 9, 1; John McCullough, The Principles of Political Economy 165 n.1 (5th ed. 1965 [1864]); Theodor Mommsen, Römisches Staatsrecht 2/1:395-96 and 395 n.6 (3rd ed. 1969 [1887]) (although the censors had the right to increase the self-declared estimation of the wealth subject to taxation in part by reference to personal reasons such as unmarried status, there was no separate bachelor tax as was once assumed); Pollux, Onomasticon VIII, 40; Aristotle, Politica 1270'1-4; Plato, Leges 774a; Montesquieu, De l’Ésprit des lois, liv. 23, ch. 21 (quote); Suetonius, De Vita Caesarum, Bk. I, ch. xx; Ludwig Elster, “Bevölkerungslehre und Bevölkerungspolitik,” in Handwörterbuch der Staatswissenschaften 2:703, 705-706 (1899); Wilhelm Roscher, Grundlagen der Nationalökonomie 823 (Robert Pöhmann ed., 1906 [1854]); Montesquieu, De l’Ésprit de lois, liv. 23, ch. 27; U.S. BLS, Handbook of Labor Statistics 1924-1926, at 167 (Bull. No. 439, 1927).


45. Ibid. at 50, 52, 54-55.

46. Ibid. at 55, 52; Milton Friedman, Capitalism and Freedom 188 (1964 [1962]).

48. Nancy Folbre, “Children as Public Goods,” *Am. Econ. Rev.* 84 (2):86-90 (May 1994). The argument concerning positive externalities maybe difficult to reconcile with Folbre’s belief that the current system of parental impoverishment is inherited by their children in the form of below-average educational investments and social capital; perceiving a small chance of success, such children “have less incentive to try hard and greater incentive to subvert the rules.” Regardless of this claim’s empirical validity, it creates an inconsistency: if such children exist in sufficient numbers to constitute a social problem, they are not good candidates for FICA taxpayers and may represent negative externalities.


51. Calculated according to Internal Revenue Service, *Individual Income Tax Returns 1991*, tab. 2.3 at 48 (Pub. 1304, 1994). The figures in the text are subject to error because the published adjusted gross income size classes do not coincide exactly with the maximum bracket amounts. For more detailed estimates, see Steven Pressman, “Child Exemptions or Child Allowances: What Sort of Antipoverty Program for the United States?” *Am. J. Econ. & Sociology* 51 (3):257-72 (July 1992); *idem, “Tax Expenditures for Child Exemptions: A Poor Policy to Aid America’s Children,” J. Econ. Issues* 27 (3):699-719 (Sept. 1993). The total value of the exemptions as well as that accruing to the lowest-income group are overestimates because about 28 percent of the exemptions appeared on nontaxable returns, which constituted about 28 percent of all returns with these exemptions. The brackets for unmarried heads of household were somewhat lower, but the published data on dependent child exemptions by size of adjusted gross income do not distinguish between married people and heads of household. Married persons accounted for 72 percent of all such exemptions. IRS, *Individual Income Tax Returns 1991*, tab. 2.4 at 49. The bulk of these returns were presumably in the lowest-income group, whose income fell below the tax threshold. The cost in lower tax revenues to the Treasury was estimated at $21 billion. National Commission on Children, *Beyond Rhetoric: A New American agenda for children and Families* 84-85 (1991). Total AFDC benefit expenditures in 1991 were $20 billion, of which the federal share was $11 billion. U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Ways and Means, *Overview of Entitlement Programs: 1994 Green Book: Background Material and Data on Programs Within the Jurisdiction of the Committee on Ways and Means*, 103d Cong., 2d Sess., tab. 10-1 at 325 (Comm. Print, WMCP 103-27, 1994).


Reproductive Solidarity Under Laissez Faire?


75. *Ibid.* at 739, 737. Yvette Barksdale, “And the Poor Have Children: A Harm-Based Analysis of Family Caps and the Hollow Procreative Rights of Welfare Beneficiaries,” *Law & Inequality* 14 (1):1-71 at 68 (Dec. 1995), merely reproduces those obsolete foundations by asserting that: “Although the birth of an additional child increases a working family’s need, the increased need should not affect the individual’s salary, because that
salary is not determined by...need."


85. Jane Humphries, "The Working-Class Family: A Marxist Perspective," in *The Family in Political Thought* 197-222 at 211 (Jean Elshtain ed., 1982) (quote); Richard Easterlin, "Does Human Fertility Adjust to the Environment?" *Am. Econ. Rev.* 61 (2):399-407 at 406-407 (May 1971). The individual-class dynamic triggered by proletarianization of an above-average number of family members is the mirror image of that created by individual family decisions to have smaller families so that the same nominal wage can be converted into a higher standard of living for a smaller number of family members regardless of its impact on the working class.
86. Harvey Leibenstein, *Economic Backwardness and Economic Growth: Studies in the Theory of Economic Development* 160 (1957) (quote); Irwin Garfinkel & Sara McLanahan, *Single Mothers and Their Children: A New American Dilemma* 85 (1986) (quote); Judith Blake, “Is Zero Preferred? American Attitudes Toward Childlessness in the 1970s,” *J. Marriage and the Family* 41:245-57 at 247, 251 (May 1979) (quote). The trend toward absolute privileging of a woman’s decision to reproduce extends to those with AIDS because in “poor black and Hispanic communities...women often depend entirely on men and their babies for both pleasure and their self-esteem.” According to the director of obstetrics at a state medical institution, “‘Reproductive and sexual relations are a very important part of their lives. It’s not like they can say, ‘I’m depressed so I’ll go to Bloomingdale’s.’” Jane Gross, “The Bleak and Lonely Lives of Women Who Carry Aids,” *N. Y. Times*, Aug. 27, 1987, at 1, col. 2, 14 col. 3-4 (nat. ed.). See also Gina Kolata, “Debate on Infant AIDS vs. Mother’s Rights,” *ibid.*, Nov. 3, 1994, at A13, col. 1 (nat. ed.). Among the mothers with AIDS who believe that “the decision to have a child is so personal that no one has a right to pass judgment” is a pregnant doctoral candidate who believes that her decision to have a baby who might live only five years is “‘selfish’” but no more so than that of healthy mothers whom she sees “‘screaming and...hitting their kids....’” Felicia Lee, “For Women with AIDS, Anguish of Having Babies,” *ibid.*, May 9, 1995, at A1, col. 1 (nat. ed.).


88. Johansson, “Status Anxiety and Demographic Contraction of Privileged Populations” at 442.


