PART II

THE HISTORY OF INVISIBLE-HAND MALTHUSIANISM IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

The Age of Reason ended in the French Revolution. The Age of Stupidity began with Malthus.... Man is not a rational being—he is a being of passion and stupidity, who does quite the opposite of what his reason tells him to do. He therefore cannot be left free but must be coerced by government.

John Commons, *Institutional Economics: Its Place in Political Economy* 
1:244; 2:877 (1959 [1934])
The Invisible Hand Goes Demographic: Bourgeois Political Economy’s New Trope

Populousness, like opulence, will thrive best, if all is left to the *sponte acta* of individuals.... The apprehension of a deficiency of population for want of regular intercourse between the sexes in the way of marriage is altogether upon a par with an apprehension of the like result from a general disposition in mankind to starve themselves.1

Even if a societally or capital-logically optimal population size or rate of change could be theoretically quantified, what are the concrete individual and collective processes that would bring about optimality? If parental altruism can be relied on to internalize potential intragenerational externalities, and if “in a stable culture, it is not unreasonable to expect that family size norms embody reliable information about the economic conditions that will be faced by the next generation,” then it becomes plausible that “reproductive rights are ceded to the family in almost all societies, even though population size has important collective consequences.” But if even altruistic parents who consciously adjust fertility decisions with their offspring’s future welfare in mind may find that “[b]ecause of the scope and speed of the social and economic changes... [they cannot] correctly anticipate the impact on the family of an additional child,”2 how can they possibly anticipate the aggregated impact on society of all other procreators’ fertility decisions? This conceptualization of parenthood choices is made even more complicated by the fact that “self-regarding and other-regarding motives are inextricably intermixed.”3

If human beings engaged in copulation may not even be exercising conscious control over their output, then they can be said to be planning aggregate national (or international) population size even less than they plan national income or automobile production when they individually decide on a particular occupation or car. At the very least, by externalizing some of the costs of childrearing onto society at large and/or particular others, parents are presumed by orthodox
economics to be procreating or engaged in conferring benefits on their children beyond the level that would be associated with full internalization of costs. If society had democratically decided and planned to allocate resources for this higher level of fertility, then the dichotomization of the cost burden would arguably be moot. But as long as procreational decisions remain committed to the individual-private sphere and some significant part of the consequences is borne by those who did not participate in the decision-making process, micro-planning (or spontaneity for that matter) must result in macro-irrationalities.

This conclusion is warded off by economists for whom it is axiomatic that the antipaternalistic “central tenet of welfare economics—that people are the best judges of their own welfare”—both means that reproductive decisions are presumptively rational for the procreators and is paired with a disbelief that children are a source of external diseconomies in spite of overwhelming and obvious evidence that much of the cost of childrearing is borne collectively rather than individually. Glen Cain, for example, sees in “the willingness to assume” the high costs of raising children “convincing evidence for the proposition that children provide them with a great deal of utility.” He also regards externalities as “minor.” With equal force it could be inferred that the huge number of abortions that women (and or couples) seek each year demonstrates how unwilling producers are to assume these costs. When the manifold and rising economic, political, legal, and moral impediments to abortion are taken into consideration, the voluntary character of reproduction appears in a much darker light. And if the putatively rational procreational decision-making process is understood to be honeycombed with the deep deposits of internalized coercive parentage norms, then it becomes unclear whether even individual reproducers—let alone society—can, as Cain believes, avoid the fate of laboratory rats who “end up with a revealed preference for a way of life that we...abhor.”

This market- and father-knows-best-propelled denial is also made possible by the subsumption of the children under the will and judgment of their procreators; instead of considering the possibility that children are themselves autonomous persons, orthodox economics automatically assumes that, if the parents deem the returns to be at least as large as the costs of childrearing, no independent judgment is permissible as to whether some children’s standard of living and opportunities for self-development and societal contribution are optimal or whether redistribution is remedially required for this generation and/or a different demographic norm should be established for the next.

Against the background of these systemic constraints, it becomes a “gigantic, utterly unwarranted assumption that the sum of all these separate desires will always work out providentially to a practically manageable birth rate.” And even if procreators’ decisions are rational for them individually, absolutely privileging all of their choices as to “the number of children they want...evades the basic question of population policy, which is how to give societies the number of children they need.” Conversely, although a smaller aggregate population may be beneficial to the economy as a whole or capital in general, this fact or possibility
alone does not necessarily create "the appropriate motivation for any individual to limit his family size." After all: "There is no evidence that any considerable number of married couples at the end of the 19th century decided to have smaller families because they thought that the country might be over-populated—any more than there is evidence that an argument of the converse kind enters into decisions of married couples today..." Nor did Malthus or any of his followers ever demonstrate that humans orient their fertility toward the relationship between population and resources "even when they know about it (which is seldom)."

How, then, does the invisible hand ever get a grip on reproduction?

This chapter initiates the exploration of this question by examining the origins of demographic invisible-hand rhetoric in Adam Smith and its self-contradictory development in the fountainhead of economic demography, Malthus. For although Malthus presupposed the existence of a process of demographic self-equilibration, his lack of trust in the invisible hand's genital grip prompted him to contest the working class's autonomous control over its fertility and to favor state intervention to limit paupers' reproduction. Finally, the discussion turns to the surprising and little-studied advocacy of a state-interventionist course by that arch-liberal John Stuart Mill and how such discourse ultimately shaped the currently influential authoritarian social policy of such anti-invisible-handers as Garrett Hardin. The analysis reveals that whereas invisible-hand economic demography is incoherent as an account of how a societally optimal population could be achieved, the proposals of prominent advocates of a visible state hand are discontinuous with democratic norms.

Chapter 4 then resumes the discussion by embedding the new eco-demographic theory in the transformations that British poor law policy were undergoing in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. That significant aspects of that policy in part still guide the U.S. approach to controlling what is perceived as procreation-related poverty and sanctioning poverty-related population growth enhances the importance of studying this formative period.

THE ECO-DEMOGRAPHIC INVISIBLE HAND

[How often have we read in Malthusian benefactors of the species: 'The working people have their condition in their own hands; let them diminish the supply of labourers, and of course the demand and the remuneration will increase!' Yes, let them diminish the supply: but who are they? They are twenty-four millions of human individuals, scattered over a hundred and eighteen thousand square miles...; each unknown to his neighbor.... Smart Sally in our alley proves all-too fascinating to brisk Tom in yours: can Tom be called on to make pause, and calculate the demand for labour in the British Empire first? Nay, if Tom did renounce his highest blessedness of life, and struggle and conquer like a Saint Francis of Assisi, what would it profit him or us? Seven millions of the finest peasantry do not renounce, but proceed all
the more briskly; and with blue-visaged Hibernians instead of fair Saxon Tomsons and Sallysons, the latter end of that country is worse than the beginning. O wonderful Malthusian prophets! Millenniums are undoubtedly coming, must come one way or the other: but will it be, think you, by twenty millions of working people simultaneously striking work in that department; passing, in universal trades-union, a resolution not to beget any more till the labour-market become satisfactory?12

Demography has answered the question as to what mechanism might enable the invisible hand to guide human procreativity with what it views as an unproblematic sociological extension to humans of the Darwinian principle of the balance of nature. Labeled “unconscious rationality”13 or the Theory of Demographic Regulation, it asserts abstractly that: “Every society tends to keep its vital processes in a state of balance such that population will replenish losses from death and grow to an extent deemed desirable by collective norms. These norms are flexible and readjust rather promptly to changes in the ability of the economy to support population.” For technologically advanced societies, the theory states more specifically that “high birthrates come to be perceived by the collectivity as dysfunctional because they cause the size of the family to be larger than that deemed desirable by the prevailing norms.” Reproductive regulation therefore becomes identified with both group and individual welfare. In contrast to the Darwinian model, the theory of demographic regulation thus posits that the human species “has a norm that implies, at any given time, what constitutes ‘good’ or ‘desirable’ population trends....” It is here that the invisible hand makes its (invisible) appearance. For the collective norms are said to function as transformers of self-regarding individualistic notions into macrodemographic outcomes: “These norms are not explicit opinions about desired population size.... Instead, they are opinions concerning what constitutes the ideal size of completed family...an entity that may be translated directly into population growth and is therefore a cultural value reflecting the ‘demographic cultural policy’ of the society.”14

Regardless of whether this theory of “demographic homeostasis...operat[ing] beyond individual consciousness” is descriptively accurate, the question here is whether a societal process so conceived generates optimal results or whether the societal norm should be articulated openly as the collective-ecological policy of society as a whole rather than unconsciously.15 The utilitarian defense of a laissez-faire procreative regime is ultimately based on circular reasoning. While conceding that decisions to “buy” children may differ from and be qualitatively more complex than those involving run-of-the-mill commodities, invisible-handers believe that they would be even more difficult for the state. Thus even if the state can collect and process infinitely more information much more cheaply than individual parents, the problem that it seeks to solve is also proportionately more complicated:
Each parent need only decide on the costs and benefits to himself and his child of having the child. The effects of increased population on the welfare of the poor...or the climate of the earth and the effect of different age distributions...on the social structure...are almost irrelevant.... It is precisely this sort of division of labor, under which an unmanageably large problem is divided into a multitude of parts, each to be solved by the individual that the part affects, which makes the free market such an efficient mechanism for solving economic problems.16

This Smithian approach to reproduction, which overlooks the fact that the individual, despite her self-interest, is as little able to foresee future market conditions as the state,17 misconceives the problem by illicitly assuming it away. The mere dispensation of individual procreators from a duty to incorporate other-regarding considerations into their decisions does not make the anarchic and dysfunctional societal consequences of their acts more manageable let alone solve them. There is no doubt that a collective decision-making process taking numerous macrosocietal factors into account is much more complex than an individual’s self-regarding decision. The reason obviously is that a planned process is seeking to avoid or remedy the untoward ramifications created by billions of societally blind micro-decisions. The free-market approach to reproduction also misstates the nature of the decision made by the collectivity. Whereas individual procreators presumptively make their decisions based on personal financial and emotional capacities, the state would not need to offer individualized prescriptions of family size by reference to (potential) parents’ unique psychological characteristics. All the state would have to do is establish a dynamic economic-demographic framework within which individual family sizes should fit.

This demographic application of the invisible-hand trope is a result of the discipline’s traditional commitment to methodological individualism, which orients it especially toward psychological facts—decisions and attitudes—of individuals.18 Indeed, doctrinal Malthusianism has been characterized as accounting on the national or global level for the attitude of the household that limits family size in order to improve its own standard of living without regard to the national repercussions. Although this political-epistemological position biases demographers against explanations in terms of collectivities such as capital, capitalism, or class, substantively they have been forced, as are all methodologically conscious individualists, to deal with the phenomenon of the unintended and unwanted societal by-products of countless individual actions. Since, as that arch-methodological individualist, Karl Popper, observed, Marx was the first to conceive of social theory as the theory of such repercussions,19 it is unsurprising that the beneficial outcomes associated with the invisible hand emerged as a counterpole to Marxism’s focus on systemic self-contradiction as a motor of societal development. As a French socialist anti-Malthusian observed in 1910:

The theoreticians of capitalism maintain that social well-being should result mechanically from the free combinations of personal
interest; foresight and calculation were recommended to all the individuals, but forbidden to the collectivity. All social history of the 19th century is nothing but a series of direct denials given to this doctrine; depopulation consummated the fiasco. It has appeared that even the reproduction of the species, which seemed to depend only on instinct alone, depended, on the contrary, narrowly on social conditions whose commonality should have kept a close watch on the development.20

Adam Smith’s immortal allusion to the invisible hand is tucked away in a chapter of *The Wealth of Nations* devoted to the uselessness or injuriousness of state restraints on imports of goods that can or cannot be bought more cheaply domestically.21 Assuming that the profits of domestic trade were as great as those yielded by foreign trade, Smith argued that individuals would employ their capital at home because security was maximized and risk minimized. Since capital employed at home gave employment to a greater number of inhabitants of the home country, permitting individuals “to find out the most advantageous employment for whatever capital he can command...naturally, or rather necessarily leads him to prefer that employment which is most advantageous to the society.” Under these circumstances, then, although a merchant, by engaging in the home trade, intended only his own gain, he was “in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention. Nor is it always the worse for society that it was no part of it. By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it.”22 Smith’s argument was coupled with the claim that capitalists are in a better position to advance both their own self-interest and the societal interest than an intervening state:

What is the species of domestic industry...of which the produce is likely to be of the greatest value, every individual...can, in his local situation, judge much better than any statesman or lawgiver can do for him. The statesman, who should attempt to direct private people in what manner they ought to employ their capitals, would...assume an authority which could safely be trusted, not only to no single person, but to no council or senate whatever....23

Smith almost expressly applied the virtuous invisible-hand analysis to procreation. Earlier in *The Wealth of Nations*, before using this trope, Smith had noted that the “liberal reward of labour” not only widened the limits that “the scantiness of subsistence can set...to the further multiplication of the human species,” but “that it necessarily does this as nearly as possible in the proportion which the demand for labour requires.”

If this demand is continually increasing, the reward of labour must necessarily encourage in such a manner the marriage and multiplication of labourers, as may enable them to supply that continually increasing
demand by a continually increasing population. If the reward should at any time be less than what was requisite for this purpose, the deficiency of hands would soon raise it; and if it any time should be more, their excessive multiplication would soon lower it to this necessary rate. The market would be so much under-stocked with labour in the one case, and so much over-stocked in the other, as would soon force back its price to that proper rate which the circumstances of the society required. It is in this manner that the demand for men, like that for any other commodity, necessarily regulates the production of men.... It is this demand which regulates and determines the state of propagation in all the different countries of the world.24

For Smith, then, both categorically and empirically wages “must be such as may enable [workers], one with another, to continue the race of journeymen and servants, according to the increasing, diminishing, or stationary demand of the society may happen to require.” Noteworthy here is that Smith, like Marx a century later, was committed to a labor-force-centered theory of population change: nonproletarian demographic development was, for Malthusian reasons, of little practical or theoretical interest to him: “Every species of animals naturally multiplies in proportion to the means of their subsistence.... But in civilized society it is only among the inferior ranks of people that the scantiness of subsistence,” or, in terms of primary income distribution, “poverty...is extremely unfavourable to the rearing of children.”25

Equally significant, however, is that neither Smith nor his followers accounted for how the invisible hand calibrates wages and worker-replacements in a labor market that does not take family size into account. In other words, they failed to “explain by what force labourers of one generation are impelled to ask, and employers to concede, the rate of wages needed by the small minority of labourers who are at any one time responsible for the size of family needed to keep up the population of the next generation.” Farthest-reaching of all Smith’s arguments is the implication that human beings or at least laborers were no more than commodities themselves.26

Regardless of the truth-content of Smith’s claims about the salubrious effects of the invisible hand on the production of commodities, what warrant did Smith have for asserting that the same mechanism applied to the macro-demographic outcome of billions of acts of sexual intercourse very few if any of which were motivated by the goal of perpetuating the human species let alone securing an optimal labor force for capital? After all: “People have children to please themselves, not to advantage the State....” Even if the successful trading-member of capitalist societies enlists his brethren’s support by interesting their “self-love in his favour” and thus “by treaty, by barter, and by purchase...obtain[s]...the greater part of those mutual good offices” everyone requires, how did Smith imagine the demographic market where traders could bargain for the fertility that would translate into the societal population most beneficial to their individual economic interests?27
Even a cursory investigation into the relationship between individual procreation decisions and macrolevel demographic outcomes would have revealed insuperable obstacles for Smith's invisible hand. First, without a strong government presence the laissez-faire environment would lack the appropriate individual incentives and assurances, and second, the enforcement and information costs of providing these missing elements would, given the vast numbers of independent decision-makers involved, be enormous. In light of this generalized prisoners' dilemma involving billions of individual uncoordinated decisions, how could Smith have expected to assimilate children as public goods to the fungible commodity model? What evidence, moreover, have orthodox economists offered that, by matching their family size to their income, individual families quasi-automatically insure that aggregate population size will be optimized? Have they analytically transcended Smith's epistemologically naive conversion of the fallacy of composition into a tenet of social theory and policy—namely, that: "What is prudence in the conduct of every private family, can scarce be folly in that of a great kingdom"?28

MALTHUS AND THE VISIBLE HAND OF THE STATE

Had Adeline read Malthus? I can't tell;
I wish she had: his book’s the eleventh Commandment,
Which says, 'Thou shalt not marry,' unless well:
This he (as far as I can understand) meant.
'Tis not my purpose on his views to dwell,
Nor canvass what 'so eminent a hand' meant;
But certes it conducts to live ascetic,
Or turning marriage into arithmetic.29

Early nineteenth-century economics divided into two camps on the issue of proletarian misery: the optimists, who claimed that capitalist misery was a temporary phenomenon and that the condition of the working class would improve both absolutely and relatively; and the Malthusians, who asserted that misery was necessary and inevitable in the absence of a limitation of child production, which was the only solution of the social question.30 Crucial to an understanding of Malthus's rigid position on state abstinence vis-à-vis the material fate of poor large families is the fact that it was an integral part of his view that inequality was an essential motor of progress: "If no man could hope to rise or fear to fall, in society, if industry did not bring with it its reward and idleness its punishment, the middle parts would not certainly be what they now are."31 That the particular progress Malthus had in mind was the accumulation of capital he revealed in the appendix to the fifth edition of his Essay on the Principle of Population. In this crucial passage, published two decades after the first edition—itself "nothing but an anti-socialist pamphlet"32—Malthus let the cat out of the bag as to why contraceptive freedom could not be reconciled with the sociopsychological microfoundations of
a system predicated on a production of surplus that was in principle limitless:

I should always particularly reprobate any artificial and unnatural modes of checking population, both on account of their immorality and their tendency to remove a necessary stimulus to industry. If it were possible for each married couple to limit by wish the number of their children, there is certainly reason to fear that the indolence of the human race would be very greatly increased; and that neither the population of individual countries, nor of the whole earth, would ever reach its natural and proper extent.33

Such pure Malthusianism survives only among economists who believe that the individual systematic implementation of contraception, by eliminating the pressure of population, also removes "most of the stimulus to economic development."34

Malthus’s rejection of contraception is of a piece with his opposition to old-age pensions for workers and their families. The suggestion by one of Malthus’s chief foils, Condorcet, that such aid, financed from the workers’ own savings as well as of those who die before retirement age, could help eliminate inequality, dependence, and misery, prompted Malthus’s scathing rebuke that “if the idle and the negligent are placed upon the same footing with regard to...the future support of their wives and families, as the active and industrious, can we expect to see men exert that animated activity in bettering their condition which now forms the master spring of public prosperity?” Malthus regarded any kind of breach in the terroristic labor regime driven by fear of starvation as undermining the viability of capitalism. Rather than analyzing the prohibition of economic security in terms of the antagonistic class society it undergirded, Malthus opted for a biodemographic description akin to an ecological carrying capacity: “Were every man sure of a comfortable provision for a family,...and were the rising generation free from the ‘killing frost’ of misery, population must rapidly increase.”35

Malthus’s brutal frankness about the political-economic functionality of what appeared as a morally or religiously motivated prohibition of contraception undermines Kingsley Davis’s epistemological critique of Malthus’s population theory. Davis sees Malthus’s “confusion of moral evaluation with scientific analysis [as] a weakness of his conceptual framework” as a consequence of which his theory was inadequate scientifically even during his own era.36 Yet, as an ideological holding action—until contraceptive means became cheap, effective, and well-known—Malthus’s proscription of birth control as antithetical to indolence control may in fact have revealed deep insight into the psychosocial underpinnings of class governance during the transition period before the behavioral requirements of capital had been internalized as second nature.

Capitalism has, to be sure, shown itself to be flexible enough to live with, if not to require, contraception. In the 1920s, for example, a group of British Liberals led by Keynes even gathered under the watchwords Capitalism and Contraception.37 Exasperated by “the Capitalist leaders in the City and in Parliament” who were “incapable of distinguishing novel measures for
safeguarding Capitalism from what they call Bolshevism, " Keynes shocked some of those attending the Liberal Summer School at Cambridge in 1925 by asserting that birth control and contraceptives

interlock with economic issues which cannot be evaded. Birth control touches...the liberties of women, and...the duty of the State to concern itself with the size of the population just as much as with the size of the army or the amount of the budget. The position of wage-earning women and the project of the Family Wage affect not only the status of women, the first in the performance of paid work, and the second in the performance of unpaid work, but also raise the whole question whether wages should be fixed by the forces of supply and demand in accordance with the orthodox theories of _laissez-faire_, or whether we should begin to limit the freedom of those forces by reference to what is "fair" and "reasonable"."

One reason for capitalism's eventual turn toward a less rigid demographic approach is the fundamentally different basis of the industrial reserve army in the early nineteenth century and developed capitalism. In Malthus's time, the reserve army originated in the relatively slow rate of and thus insufficient capital accumulation; later, accelerated or overaccumulation of capital generated a surplus of workers. Moreover, when the limits of extensive exploitation ("absolute surplus value" production) became visible as the length of the working day hit against a physiological ceiling and the employment of ever younger children against a biological floor, capital accumulation had to become primarily reoriented toward intensive exploitation ("relative surplus value" production). The requisite rise in productivity presupposed both an increase in the qualifications of the working class, achieved in part through longer years of education, and a further intensification of the labor process. Because neither of these prerequisites was reconcilable with massive reliance on child workers, such labor became tendentially obsolete. With the economic depreciation and ultimately the legal prohibition on the use of their labor power, children lost most of their revenue-generating value to their parents; concomitantly, they became more valuable to capital as future skilled workers—especially insofar as the burden of financing the acquisition of these skills could be imposed on the parents. Since parents could no longer, to use the model implicit in classical political economy's theory of population, regard their production of children "as a means of investing in 'capital goods' for the sake of a future return," that cost-shifting would have to—and did—bring smaller families in its wake.

Modern capitalism is also more dependent on high rates of working-class consumer spending than in 1800, when Malthus justified the existence of a so-called third class of nonproducing strata by reference to the urgency of the realization (or effective demand) problem confronting capitalism. What Malthus did not foresee was the rise of a stratum of relatively well-paid, intentionally childless workers who were devoted to spending more on themselves than many
working-class parents can spend on large families. Malthus was nevertheless correct in emphasizing the importance of a critical mass of population: even if lavishly consuming workers could sustain effective demand, if they were too busy shopping to reproduce, the next generation would be severely drained as a source of surplus value.

Malthus mixed mundane economics and the social-psychology of status with idealized romantic love in explaining class-specific procreational proclivities. Assuming that only married humans indulged passion, Malthus divined that population growth had remained below its theoretical limits in part because “a foresight of the difficulties attending the rearing of a family acts as a preventive check...in some degree through all the ranks of society in England. [S]ome men, even in the highest rank...are prevented from marrying by the idea of the expenses that they must retrench...on the supposition of having a family.” Considerations that might be trivial at this level took on “much greater weight...as we go lower.” Thus a “man of liberal education, but with an income only just sufficient to enable him to associate in the rank of gentlemen,” knew that the cost of raising children would thrust him down to the ranks of “moderate farmers and the lower class of tradesmen.” Such a descent “at this round of the ladder, where education ends and ignorance begins,” was not a “chimerical, but a real and essential evil,” which induced such men to delay marriage. Where passion caused them to break through the customary restraints, a calculation underlay such actions; for “it would be hard indeed, if the gratification of so delightful a passion as virtuous love, did not, sometimes, more than counterbalance all its attendant evils.”

At the other end of the English social scale, Malthus identified an even greater scope for the field of operation of the preventive check:

The labourer who earns eighteen pence a day and lives with some degree of comfort as a single man, will hesitate a little before he divides that pittance among four or five, which seems to be but just sufficient for one. [H]e must feel conscious, if he thinks at all, that should he have a large family, and any ill luck whatever, no degree of frugality, no possible exertion of his manual strength could preserve him from the heart rending sensation of seeing his children starve....

That such low-paid workers, whose poverty concedely preceded and therefore was not caused by their large families, failed to listen to reason was, in Malthus’s opinion, in no small part due to the poor-law system, which weakened the sense of independence that would otherwise also have operated to deter imprudent marriages. Since many would never receive wages in excess of a “pittance,” that is, since even the bachelor-proletariat was mired in poverty, and since the institution of marriage was quasi-natural for Malthus, it is misleading to characterize workers as having behaved irrationally in failing to conduct a cost-benefit analysis of each procreational act. It was not a matter of being “fatalistic, feeble, irresponsible, without a belief in the future....” Indeed, if Weberian Zweckrationalität means “consciously choos[ing] among known alternatives on the
basis of their probable effect,\textsuperscript{46} then penurious laborers may well have been rational—given their Hobson's choice between the prospect of a life without familial relationships and of conferring on their children the same poverty to which generations of workers had become accustomed.

Rather than having "advocated a public effort to foster the embourgeoisement of the poor," Malthus in fact perceived and approved of a societal structure that preordained such poverty.\textsuperscript{47} According to his version of the asocial contract ushering in the transition from Godwin's egalitarian utopia to capitalism, with the establishment of private property and marriage, "these two fundamental laws of society,"

inequality of conditions must necessarily follow. Those who were born after the division of property, would come into a world already possessed. If their parents, from having too large a family, could not give them sufficient for their support, what are they to do in a world where every thing is appropriated?... The members of a family which was grown too large for the original division of land appropriated to it, could not then demand a part of the surplus produce of others, as a debt of justice. [F]rom the inevitable laws of our nature, some human beings must suffer from want. These are the unhappy persons who, in the great lottery of life, have drawn a blank.... All who were in want of food would...offer to work for a bare subsistence, and the rearing of families would be checked by sickness and misery.\textsuperscript{48}

Although Malthus "always" assumed the efficacy of a process of demographic self-equilibration, his counterintuitively optimistic position derived from the structure of his theory of population, within which, "[s]trictly speaking, over-population was impossible...."\textsuperscript{49} That Malthus, however, self-contradictorily did not trust the invisible hand's grip on the genitalia to promote some kind of optimum population, emerges from the fact that whereas on the one hand he opposed entrusting to individual workers or working-class families autonomous control to limit their fertility, on the other he urged state intervention to curtail pauper procreation.\textsuperscript{50} In one of his boldest and harshest public policy interventions—which gainsays all efforts by Keynes and others to cast Malthus's \textit{Essay} as "profoundly in the English tradition of humane science [and] marked by...an immense disinterestedness and public spirit"\textsuperscript{51}—Malthus urged power-holders "formally to disclaim the right of the poor to support." To that end he proposed that no child born within a marriage that took place more than a year after the enactment and no illegitimate child born two years thereafter "should ever be entitled to parish relief." Thereafter:

if any man chose to marry, without a prospect of being able to support a family, he should have the most perfect liberty to do so. Though to marry in this case, is in my opinion clearly an immoral act, yet it is not one which society can justly take upon itself to prevent or punish; because the punishment provided for it by the laws of nature, falls
directly and most severely upon the individual who commits the act, and through him, only more remotely and feebly, on the society. When nature will govern and punish for us, it is a very miserable ambition to wish to snatch the rod from her hands, and draw upon ourselves the odium of executioner. To the punishment therefore of nature he should be left, the punishment of want... He should be taught to know, that the laws of nature, which are the laws of God, had doomed him and his family to suffer for disobeying their repeated admonitions; that he had no claim of right on society for the smallest portion of food, beyond that which his labour would fairly purchase.

If this system were pursued...the only difficulty would be, to restrain the hand of benevolence from assisting those in distress in so indiscriminate a manner as to encourage indolence and want of foresight in others.

It may appear to be hard, that a mother and her child, who had been guilty of no particular crime themselves, should suffer for the ill conduct of the father; but this is one of the invariable laws of nature.... In the moral government of the world, it seems evidently necessary, that the sins of the fathers should be visited upon the children....

This extreme biological-naturalistic turn Malthus appropriated from Joseph Townsend, an English clergyman, whom he failed to acknowledge until the second edition of the Essay in 1803. In his Dissertation on the Poor Laws, which formed a watershed dividing Adam Smith’s belief in progress from the Malthusian preoccupation with overpopulation, Townsend had urged the state to refrain from seeking to improve upon the disciplinary powers of nature, by which he manifestly meant the class-bound assets endowment consequent upon the accumulation of capital:

The wisest legislator will never be able to devise a more equitable, a more effectual, or...a more suitable punishment, than hunger is for a disobedient servant. Hunger will tame the fiercest animals, it will teach...obedience and subjection, to the most brutish, the most obstinate, and the most perverse.... It seems to be a law of nature, that the poor should be to a certain degree improvident, that there may always be some to fulfil the most servile, the most sordid, and the most ignoble offices in the community. [T]hereby...the more delicate are not only relieved from drudgery, and freed from those occasional employments which would make them miserable, but are left at liberty...to pursue those callings which are suited to their various dispositions, and most useful to the state. As for the lowest of the poor, by custom they are reconciled to the meanest occupations, to the most laborious works, and to the most hazardous pursuits; whilst the hope of their reward makes them cheerful in the midst of all their dangers and their toils. [W]hat is it but distress and poverty which can prevail upon the lower classes...to encounter all the horrors which await them...?... There must be a degree of pressure, and that which is attended with the least violence will be the best. When hunger is either felt or feared, the
desire of obtaining bread will quietly dispose the mind to undergo the
greatest hardships.\textsuperscript{55}

By infusing political economy with Townsend's naturalization of class
contlict and his conversion of economic laws into a biotheodicy, Malthus, whom
the economist Nassau Senior called "our most eminent living philosophical writer,"
enabled the ruling classes both to deny responsibility for the poverty of the new
proletariat—by assigning the blame to the workers themselves—without
undermining the legitimacy of their power and to inculcate in the poor "self-
dependence without developing in them a dangerous independence."\textsuperscript{56} Both
Ricardo and Malthus grasped enough of the incentives for wage labor required and
furnished by capital to cast significant doubt on Polanyi's extravagant claim that
neither "understood the working of the capitalist system"; after Townsend had
introduced nature in the form of scarcity and hunger as the great regulative in lieu
of government or laws, Polanyi argued, political economy had recourse to
naturalism to explain the misery of the masses.\textsuperscript{57} It is, to the contrary, far more
plausible that Ricardo's adaptation in his \textit{Principles} of Malthus's tenets of
population enhanced the value of political economy in the eyes of its "prosperous
readers [who] saw the Malthusian theory employed to amend the deficiencies in the
doctrine of Smith which had...limited Smith's usefulness to the middle class.\textsuperscript{58}
Malthus himself made it clear that workingmen whose "impulses of
passion" were out of control had only themselves to blame for their impoverish-
ment. Anticipating culture-of-poverty theorists, Malthus emphasized the circum-
cstances that made "the lower classes...unable or unwilling to reason from the past
to the future, and ready to acquiesce, for the sake of present gratification, in a very
low standard of comfort and respectability...." Among the prerequisites for
imbuing workers with prudential habits he listed civil and political liberty. The
former enabled people to plan for the future by assuring free scope to their industry
by securing their property to them; the latter, in turn, enforced the former in part
by "obliging the higher classes to respect them...." How disfranchised proletarians,
whose only species of property, their highly perishable labor power, rarely
permitted them to accumulate any other species, could ever acquire bourgeois
habits, Malthus never explained.\textsuperscript{59}

As if preparing the working class for compulsory relegation to Procreators
Anonymous, Malthus insisted that:

\begin{quote}
When the wages of labour are hardly sufficient to maintain two
children, a man marries and has five or six.... He accuses the
insufficiency of the price of labour to maintain a family.... He accuses
the avarice of the rich, who suffer him to want what they can so well
spare. He accuses the partial and unjust institutions of society, which
have awarded him an inadequate share of the produce of the earth.... In
searching for objects of accusation, he never adverts to the quarter from
which his misfortunes originate. The last person that he would think of
accusing is himself, on whom...the principal blame lies....\textsuperscript{60}
\end{quote}
The advice that Malthus offered the working class and the state poor-law policies that he sought to influence presupposed the forever-lastingness of capitalism: "The structure of society...will probably always remain unchanged. [I]t will always consist of a class of proprietors and a class of labourers...." Against this dehistoricized background, Malthus issued a warning to workers: "A market overstocked with labour, and an ample remuneration to each labourer, are objects perfectly incompatible with each other. In the annals of the world they never existed together." If, then, workers, whom Malthus identified with the poor, wished to avail themselves of the high wages that capitalism made possible, Malthus counseled, "we" would have to explain to "them" "that the withholding of the supplies of labour is the only possible way of really raising its price, and that they themselves, being the possessors of this commodity, have alone the power to do this." It was this lockstep logic linking procreation, labor market, and poverty that set a reformist-ameliorist framework that would both enrage and attract labor unions and socialist parties into the twentieth century. Thus it was also in this narrower sense that Malthus's "extraordinary achievement [was] to have formulated the terms of discourse on the subject of poverty" well beyond his death.

Malthus was very careful to argue that whatever advances labor might achieve would be secured only through individual procreative behavior in conformity with the eternal laws of population; collective action was doomed to failure. Thus Malthus was, to be sure, willing to concede that, in light of the considerable amount of unnecessary labor:

if the lower classes...could agree among themselves never to work more than six or seven hours in the day, the commodities essential to human happiness might still be produced in as great abundance as at present. But it is almost impossible to conceive that such an agreement could be adhered to. From the principle of population, some would necessarily be more in want than others. Those that had large families would naturally be desirous of exchanging two hours more of their labour for an ampler quantity of subsistence. How are they to be prevented from making this exchange? It would be a violation of the first and most sacred property that a man possesses, to attempt, by positive institutions, to interfere with his command over his own labour.

Apart from the obvious issue as to why the principle of population is inconsistent with uniformly small families decided upon voluntarily, the answer to Malthus's question as to how to avoid a working class race for the bottom is equally obvious: family allowances. Such subsidies would make it unnecessary for workers to sell as much as possible of the only property they have to sell—their and their numerous children's labor power. Indeed, allowances might even arrest the "seemingly irrational" proletarian strategy of high fertility in order to produce more wage labor per household.

Remarkably, Malthus grasped this logic and inconsistently even advocated
its implementation as policy. With a view toward a more enlightened future, Malthus envisioned "such prudential habits among the poor as would prevent them from marrying when the actual price of labour, joined to what they might have saved in their single state, would not give them the prospect of being able to support a wife and five or six children without assistance." But, Malthus conceded,

even this degree of prudence might not always avail, as when a man marries he cannot tell what number of children he shall have, and many have more than six. [I]n this case I do not think that any evil would result from making a certain allowance to every child above this number; not with a view of rewarding a man for his large family, but merely of relieving him from a species of distress which it would be unreasonable in us to expect that he should calculate upon. And with this view, the relief should be merely such as to place him exactly in the same situation as if he had had six children.

Even more implausibly, Malthus approved of a law that would bestow pensions on those with ten and twelve children on the ground that it "might relieve particular individuals from a very pressing and unlooked for distress, without operating in any respect as an encouragement to marriage." This view is just one example of the kind of confused thinking that led George Stigler to conclude that Malthus "had one great weakness—he could not reason well. He could not construct a theory that was consistent with either itself or the facts of the world." Malthus was much less confused with regard to the taxing mechanism for a family allowance: he categorically rejected bachelor taxes. In view of the inadequacy of wages to support large families and the number of poverty-induced deaths, if many newborn were not "greatly thinned" by premature mortality, impossible demands would have to be made of the wage-fund. Consequently, those who remain unmarried do not reduce the actual population but merely premature mortality and therefore deserve no punishment.

Whatever the inconsistencies in his reasoning, Malthus was even more wedded to the wondrous notion that even reproduction was controlled by an invisible hand that also swatted away would-be free riders. In order to achieve improvement, according to Malthus:

It is not necessary of us to act from motives to which we are unaccustomed; to pursue a general good which we may not distinctly comprehend, or the effect of which may be weakened by distance and diffusion. The happiness of the whole is to be the happiness of individuals.... No co-operation is required.... He who performs his duty faithfully will reap the full fruits of it, whatever may be the number of others who fail. This duty is...merely that he is not to bring beings into the world for whom he cannot find the means of support.

Here Malthus overlooked the free riders, who can develop an individualist
strategy at the expense of the rest of their class comrades.\textsuperscript{71} For poor-law administrators since Malthus may have counseled the working class that higher living standards are unattainable without limiting fertility: “Yet while an abstract ‘working class’ may suffer, any specific family may benefit. It must take the labor market as it finds it; in past centuries more children per family have usually meant more income per family.” In fact, whereas macroeconomically an increase in population led, during the preindustrial period, characteristically to a decline in per capita income, the enormous productivity advances unleashed by the Industrial Revolution broke this link. Nevertheless, even later, once child labor was suppressed, “within any individual family matters were much as they had previously been for the society as a whole.”\textsuperscript{72}

Malthus’s position resembled the argument advanced at the beginning of the twentieth century by some “birth-strike” advocates to the effect that regardless of the impact on the proletariat as a class, individual working-class parents could promote their own welfare by limiting family size.\textsuperscript{73} Schumpeter’s disqualification of Malthus applied to these individualistic birth-strikers as well. He asserted that “a surface observation...greatly facilitated” the survival of Malthus’s “fundamentally untenable or worthless” doctrine:

clearly, the most obvious reason for misery and squalor in the individual proletarian family was size. The inference that all would have been better off and happier if all had restricted the number of their children follows by means of the same fallacy that led people to infer from everyone’s tendency to make the best of his situation that, if all are left to their own devices, a maximum of “happiness” must result for all.\textsuperscript{74}

An extensively and minutely articulated cultural, institutional, psychological, and ideological context must be and has been created to sustain (working-class) parents’ interest in quantitatively adequate levels of procreation. The reason that it is unfruitful to contrast individual motivations and macrosocietal outcomes and to be baffled by “supra-intentional causality” such as invisible hand tropes\textsuperscript{75} is that:

The point does not consist in the fact that inasmuch as everyone pursues his own private interest, the totality of private interests, that is the general interest is attained. The point is rather that the private interest itself is already a societally determined interest and can be achieved only within the conditions posited by society and with the means provided by it; hence it is bound to the reproduction of these conditions and means. It is the interest of private persons; but its content, as well as the form and means of its realization, is given by societal conditions independent of all.\textsuperscript{76}

This programmatic mediation of a methodological individualism that reduces the explicability of social phenomena to individuals only and a
methodological collectivism that assumes the existence of supra-individual entities with higher-order explanatory power may be illustrated by reference to the private production of wage laborers. Here it is crucial not to collapse methodological collectivism into models of unconscious rationality or invisible-hand-induced demographic homeostasis. Socioeconomic forces and mechanisms operating beyond the level of individual consciousness or choice can nevertheless bring about disequilibria and crises.77

People do not have birth rates, they have children. Their willingness to bear and rear children—to expend their human and material resources in this manner—cannot be taken for granted. Rather, childbearing and child rearing take place in an organized context which strongly influences people to do one set of things—reproduce—and not to do other activities that would conflict or compete with reproduction.78

In other words, subtle and unthinking internalization and not-so-subtle imposition of norms may inculcate the attitudes and induce the behavior required to transform biological reproduction into material and ideological reproduction of the social order. Precisely because neither Malthusian nor utilitarian attempts to link fertility to economic factors attend sufficiently to the way people "give meaning to the situations in which they find themselves and base their actions on such meanings and interpretations," even some economic demographers have found them wanting.79

JOHN STUART MILL AND THE AUTHORITARIAN SIDE OF CLASSICAL LIBERALISM

In the absence of state intervention population will not assume the size consonant with whatever set of communal ends is generally subscribed to by the population. This lack of consonance is traceable primarily to the fact that in a completely free enterprise economy it is apparently impossible...to establish such a set of relationships among the individuals composing that economy as will assure to each reward or punishment in proportion to his contribution to, or subtraction from, the sum total of communal welfare.80

Despite his status as the fountainhead of modern political-economic liberalism, John Stuart Mill developed a coherent body of policy regarding state intervention into procreational decisions and conduct that would surprise, if not embarrass, his late-twentieth-century followers. Already as a 17-year-old, Mill was arrested for distributing Francis Place's verbotene pamphlets encouraging the working class to limit its reproduction through the use of contraceptive sponges.81 As an economist, Mill early on expressed his admiration of Malthus's achievements on behalf of workers. In contrast to Adam Smith, who believed that in the
stationary state—"towards which things must be at all times tending"—workers "must be pinched and in a condition of hardship," Malthus, paradoxical as it might seem, forged the insight that the laboring classes' condition was "susceptible of permanent improvement." For the period of semibarbarism, when "it probably was not desirable that population should be restrained," Mill credited "the pressure of physical want" with having created the "stimulus...to the exertion of labour and ingenuity" necessary for the formation of industrial society. Contemporary Europe, however, no longer needed such privation "to make men...better workmen...." Nevertheless, he was contemptuous of do-gooders who sentimentally "ignore[d] totally the law of wages, or...dismiss[ed] it...as 'hard-hearted Malthusianism,' as if it were not a thousand times more hard-hearted to tell human beings that they may, than that they may not, call into existence swarms of creatures who are sure to be miserable, and most likely to be depraved...."

In the chapter of *On Liberty* designed to illustrate the book's maxims—namely, that the individual is free to do anything that does not "concern the interests" of anyone else, and that society may intervene against actions that "are prejudicial to the interests of others"—Mill, revealing how much of Malthus inhered in neo-Malthusianism, dealt extensively with the state's obligation to control any person's power over others, including procreational freedom. However:

This obligation is almost entirely disregarded in the case of the family relations.... It is in the case of children, that misapplied notions of liberty are a real obstacle to the fulfilment by the State of its duties. One would almost think that a man's children were supposed to be literally...a part of himself.... It remains unrecognized, that to bring a child into existence without a fair prospect of being able, not only to provide food for its body, but instruction and training for its mind, is a moral crime, both against the unfortunate offspring and against society.... [T]o bestow a life which may be either a curse or a blessing—unless the being on whom it is to be bestowed will have at least the ordinary chances of a desirable existence, is a crime against that being. And in a country either over-peopled, or threatened with being so, to produce children, beyond a very small number, with the effect of reducing the reward of labor by their competition, is a serious offence against all who live by the remuneration of their labor. [L]aws which...forbid marriage unless the parties can show that they have the means of supporting a family, do not exceed the legitimate powers of the State: and...they are not objectionable as violations of liberty.... Yet the current ideas of liberty...would repel the attempt to put any restraint upon his inclinations when the consequence of their indulgence is a life, or lives, of wretchedness and depravity to the offspring, with manifold evils to those sufficiently within reach to be in any way affected by their actions. 

The policy consequences of Mill's application of his principles of freedom
to procreation were very restrictive because reproducers may have a prejudicial impact on others. Mill therefore denied that anyone had "a right to bring creatures into life, to be supported by other people.... If a man cannot support even himself unless others help him, those others are entitled to say that they do not also undertake the support of any offspring which it is physically possible for him to summon into the world."85

To suggest just how far liberalism has departed from Mill's vision, it suffices to look at a recent major economic-demographic study of the United States by a liberal economist whose "simple welfare rule of thumb" is: "If the social costs of an extra child are borne only by his parents and older siblings, the extra birth is the family's business and not society's."86 Contemporary liberalism thus privileges biological paternalism; for when it assigns procreational decisions to the discretion of "the family," experience suggests that the decision-makers—if indeed any conscious decision to procreate lies behind the next birth—are not the totality of affected family members, but at most the parents. Yet society intervenes in all manner of ways after birth to increase the welfare of children—including the drastic step of removing children from the control of abusive parents.

Why has post-Millian liberalism become libertarian with regard to procreators' power to determine the size of their realm? The only plausible defense of state abstentionism is that the state is no better at predicting the future in general and the life of these individual children in particular than are the parents.87 Although much speaks in favor of permitting human beings to enhance their autonomy by making as many decisions as possible affecting their lives and perhaps the lives of the children whom society authorizes them to shape, it is disingenuous to assert that a board or group of people using an actuarial base containing millions of life histories has no greater perspective than a single person with little or no overview of how successfully others have managed to support large families.88

Uninhibited by such doubts, Mill, out-Malthusing Malthus, expressed astonishment that some contemporaries saw "hardship in preventing paupers from breeding hereditary paupers in the workhouse itself." Mill's strictures on procreative freedom culminated in this astounding super-Malthusian antiliberal proposal: "It would be possible for the state to guarantee employment at ample wages to all who are born. But if it does this, it is bound in self-protection, and for the sake of every purpose for which government exists, to provide that no person shall be born without its consent."89 Even Mill's employment of last resort had its limits. For although Mill did, to be sure, support state-mediated redistribution to aliment those children who have already been born to poor parents,

it is another thing altogether, when those who have produced and accumulated are called upon to abstain from consuming until they have given food and clothing, not only to all those who now exist, but to all whom these or their descendants may think fit to call into existence.... The attempt would of course be made to exact labour in exchange for support. But... [w]hen the pay is not given for the sake of the work, but
the work found for the sake of the pay, inefficiency is a matter of certainty: to extract real work from day-labourers without the power of dismissal, is only practicable by the power of the lash.\textsuperscript{90}

A straight line descends from Mill’s framework—which can be traced back to French proposals that workers be adopted, as it were, by their employers, who would, together with the obligation of maintaining them, have the right to forbid them to marry—to biologist Garrett Hardin’s neoauthoritarianism: “If the community has the responsibility of keeping children alive it must also have the power to decide when they may be procreated.”\textsuperscript{91} Advocacy of the anti-invisible-hand position in the United States has, during the last third of the twentieth century, been most prominently associated with Hardin’s antidemocratic, overpopulationist version. In his immensely influential piece, “The Tragedy of the Commons,” he admonishes the world to “exorcise the spirit of Adam Smith in the field of practical demography.” Once it was discovered that the assumption that, guided by their own lights, “men will control their individual fecundity so as to produce the optimum population,” was wrong, reexamination of the defensibility of “our individual freedoms” advanced to the head of the global political agenda.\textsuperscript{92}

The tragedy of the commons is a subset of the type of irrationality associated with an invisible but broken hand. The latter, larger field encompasses individually rational actions producing a result that no one desires. The tragedy of the commons is narrower in that it would not include the depopulationist version. If, for example, individuals act rationally in limiting their fertility because they want to minimize the restrictions of child rearing, the unintended and undesirable decline in population would not constitute a commons ruined by overexploitation.\textsuperscript{93}

Hardin’s model can be better understood by studying his self-professed inspirational source, William Forster Lloyd, the Drummond professor of political economy at Christ Church, Oxford University, in the 1830s. The year before the New Poor Law was enacted, Lloyd published his \textit{Two Lectures on the Checks to Population}, which makes the foundations of Hardin’s approach transparent. Taking as his starting point the conventional Malthusian assumption of the impossibility that increases in food production would keep pace with natural population growth, Lloyd examined the contribution of the preventive checks to population to the inexorable restoration of equilibrium. Because “[s]ystems of equality, with a community of labor and goods,” allegedly impeded the action of preventive checks, he began with these institutions.\textsuperscript{94}

Lloyd justified his animus against equality by reference to private property in land, which served two purposes. Productively it gave individual owners an incentive to produce and to avoid wasteful destruction; demographically it allocated definite shares of produce large enough to provide for “the comfortable maintenance of a family.” This method of determining the number of families to be supported by means of the prior division of land was superior to granting admission to the table to all who are born and then determining each person’s (insufficient) share by the number of admissions. The beneficial consequences of
private productive wealth justified inequality without which exertion would be
dulled. The hierarchy of riches associated with inequality induced men to engage
in the behavior that would enable them to rise in the world. Inequality could,
however, become excessive in relation to its demographic function. Where too few
appropriated too much property and "the class of mere labourers is great, the
principle of population would...justify the appropriation of the field of
employment, and a monopoly of labour." Since the latter monopoly was much
more difficult to sustain than one of property, its equivalent was "the diffusion of
a sufficient degree of property throughout...society."95

Such was the big picture sketched by Lloyd, familiarity with which,
according to Hardin, might have spared Marx "his worst errors...."96 In analyzing
regimes of equality, Lloyd supposed the case of two people who labored jointly,
agreeing to share the product as common property. By combining forces, they
transformed their motivational structure, which in their prior Robinson Crusoe
existence had been guided "by the magnitude of the personal consequences
expected by each individual...." Now, in contrast, each obtained only half the gain
of his additional exertions and bore only half the loss of his shirking. Once the
number of partners became large, the personal consequences of the individual's
work effort or wastage became so minuscule as to lose its purchase on his will.97

Lloyd's joint producers or joint commons users are gritting their teeth as
they enter into relationships with others. At bottom they remain rugged individ­
ualists with no conception of the larger progressive sociocultural transformation
wrought by the division of labor and cooperation. They continue to compare only
the narrow advantages of joint production with some mythical natural state of
loners into which they may retreat at the slightest perception of a quantitative
advantage. Even after their plunge into sociability, they remain "fundamentally
autonomous, self-serving, irresponsible creatures, as radically alienated from each
other as they are from the grass on which they feed their cows." Consequently,
Hardin is merely refuting a self-made caricature when he asserts that Lloyd offered
the "definitive disproof of the Marxist imperative"—the communist "to each
according to his needs," which, "where each person is free to judge his own needs,
necessarily leads to tragedy in a world of scarcities."98

The demographic function of Lloyd's parable was simply to illustrate an
action-consequence structure in which present and future are opposed to each
other—in which actors must compare a present individual pain and a future
collective benefit or a present individual pleasure and a future collective pain. In
a large society, in which the individual's share of the future collective good or bad
is evanescent, it is rational for the individual, even where he is fully aware of the
collective consequences, to ignore them. Projecting this scheme onto the theory
of population, Lloyd inserted marriage as the present pleasure and the financial
burdens of reproduction as the future pain. Alluding, perhaps, to the old poor law
system, Lloyd argued that if the collective paid for the children, everyone would
choose the present pleasure, leading to the dreaded Malthusian denouement.
Nevertheless, the ensuing overpopulation, far from being the fault of the imprudent
people themselves, might be caused by "the constitution of society...."99

Ignoring the complex contradictory movements of the accumulation and profitability of capital, Lloyd posited that the only impediment to full employment was a lack of subsistence for the entire potential working population. But assuming that "those who have the food of the country at their disposal" have enough to support all, Lloyd asserted that employment then entitled each to "a proportional share of the general stock of subsistence." Thus if the labor of an unmarried man commands 1/10,000,000 of the food stock, as soon as he marries and produces children capable of immediate employment, their labor will command 2/10,000,001 of the stock. The total burden that reproduction imposes on him "consists in the difference between one out of ten million, and one out of ten million and one parts," which must remain individually "imperceptible." Consequently, the defective motivational structure that he had already identified "under a community of goods" reproduces itself even under capitalism: "there is a want of appropriation to each person of the consequences of his own conduct. All suffer through the act of one, and no encouragement to moral restraint is offered to individuals." Nor would the procreational micro-calculus change if Lloyd relaxed his assumption of full employment in favor of an equal chance of employment. For even if a potential father knew that employment was a game of musical chairs, he could rationally believe that the risk of unemployment was equally and randomly distributed among the childless and the child-rich: "Being himself exposed to it...from the increase of population resulting from the marriages of others, he will not anticipate any sensible increase of danger to himself, from the competition of his own children."100

In order to suggest the universality of the logic, Lloyd constructed two parallel cases. The first involved two societies: in one parents assumed the entire burden of child support, whereas in the other the children began maintaining themselves at an early age; the second case was characterized by enclosures and commons. The parallel consisted in the density—of the population in the one and of the stocking in the other. Both enclosed and common fields or pastures have a "point of saturation...beyond which no prudent man will add to his stock," but that point is different in the two. In the privately owned field, the owner would not knowingly stock beyond the saturation point because all that the additional cattle consumed would be deducted from what was available to the original stock. In the privately appropriated commons, however, since losses are shared, the individual appropriator would gain more than he lost. Lloyd then asserted that employment is also a common open to the born and unborn and thus "constantly stocked to the extreme point of saturation." Thus neither in the real world of the English working class nor in Lloyd's fictitious community of labor and goods—where the increase in resources still mandated prudent procreation, yet that obligation was insufficiently divided and appropriated—would the prudent alone reap the benefit or the imprudent alone "feel the evil consequences." And even in the best case, where new-born maintained themselves immediately, it would not be the case that "nobody else is the worse for their being brought into the world" since Lloyd
assumed that beyond the saturation point diminishing returns had already set in.  

Finally, the same defective point of diminishing returns prompted Lloyd to cast doubt on the plausibility of Malthus's hope that moral restraint would reduce the supply and raise the price of labor. Since "among laborers who have only the sale of their labour on which to depend for their maintenance...there is no individual benefit to be derived from abstinence," whereas the benefits of marriage were palpable, the outcome was clear. And even if workers did abstain, Lloyd could see no hindrance to the emergence of free riders, who would use the new higher wage level to raise a large family; the few material hardships that such a decision would entail vis-à-vis the childless would never suffice to recommend celibacy or even delay in beginning reproduction "since, among laborers, the natural age for marriage coincid[es] nearly with the time when their income is the greatest, and when...they are best able to endure privations...."

Hardin has added but little to Lloyd's analysis. Adopting the analogy of the earth to a commons, Hardin insists that unimpeded access to a pasture inevitably induces each individual herdsman, as "a rational being," to let as many of his own cattle graze there as possible. Since he privately appropriates "all the proceeds from the sale of the additional animal," whereas the negative effects of overgrazing are shared by all herdsmen, eventually "[f]reedom in a commons brings ruin to all." Why Hardin has chosen to style the cattle farmers as market-maximizers subject to the inexorable compulsions of capital accumulation rather than as members of a community which regards the products of nature as sources of concrete use values, which are not subordinated to limitless self-expansion, is unclear. Hardin's implicit capital-logic leads him to assert that cattlemen who owned rather than leased ranges would in fact have a profit-oriented incentive not to undermine the viability of the basis of their livelihood: "The tragedy of the commons as a food basket is averted by private property," which generates this beneficial result because the owner-entrepreneur is individually responsible in the sense that he is the immediate victim of his own bad decisions.

Others have demonstrated, however, that just as a private owner of a resource may micromanage destroy a rain forest for short-term profits from ranching, conversely, some historical and contemporary collectively controlled commons have been well maintained for centuries. Hardin has failed to consider the possibility that the transition from more communal societies to capitalism undermined that function of social systems that had helped integrate individual members' understanding of their short-run personal advantage with the whole community's long-run benefit.

The remaining question is why the working class in advanced capitalist societies, whose reproduction is free of capital-logical incentives, would reproducively foul the global commons. It is clear why the compulsions of a capitalist economy force firms to create externalities. Hardin merely assumes, however, presumably by modeling humans as capitalist maximizers, that individual potential procreators are as hopelessly caught up in larger forces as are individual capitals. But whereas laws of accumulation condemn firms to compete or disappear, and
humans of all classes in advanced capitalist societies may be subject to various societal compulsions, there is no evidence that they are trapped by analogous reproductive laws. Consequently, they could achieve, through a process of mutual and self-education that is unavailable to competitive capitals, collective demographic decisions.

For Hardin, however, the tragedy of the demographic commons originates in the fact that the world does not function as Malthus imagined it: because of society's deep commitment to the welfare state, the vice of human overbreeding no longer brings "its own 'punishment' to the germ line...." Consequently, that state must ask: How shall it "deal with the family, the religion, the race, or the class...that adopts overbreeding as a policy to secure its own aggrandizement?" Although Hardin fails to explain in what sense individual above-average procreation rises to the level of a policy let alone an act of self-aggrandizement rather than of ignorance or carelessness, he is certain that collective education is powerless to reform the conscience of those who accurately perceive their (microsocietal) self-interest. And because reliance on mere moral appeals would counterproductively lead to overbreeding by the asocial, he opts for "mutual coercion mutually agreed upon by the majority of the people affected." He concedes that "coercion is a dirty word to most liberals now, but...by saying it over and over without apology or embarrassment," it can become acceptable. If abandonment of the "freedom to breed" is urgently required, Hardin neglects to explain how a democracy can save the world in the absence of majoritarian support for mutual coercion, which for him represents "a spectrum, ranging from tax incentives to detention camps."

Recognizing the authoritarian comer into which he had painted himself, Hardin has logically shifted to the establishment of a dictatorship of "[f]ortunate minorities [who] must act as the trustees of a civilization that is threatened by uninformed good intentions." To be sure, he is referring to Third World "over-breeding," which he sees as tempting Americans to share their food in a disastrous "'one mouth, one meal'" policy, to which he opposes an "allocation of rights based on territory...." In principle, however, having come this far, Hardin must be prepared to defend an analogous allocation of rights within a national territory as between the recalcitrant who "emulate the rabbits" and the trustees of the commons.

An even more radical demographic approach that exactly tracks the tragedy of the commons surpasses Hardin's tolerance for authoritarianism. It was outlined by a congressman in 1854 during the debate over the Kansas-Nebraska bill. Mike Walsh, a Democrat from New York, availed himself of a common southern trope portraying the northern wage worker as a slave of the employing class (rather than of an individual owner), who, after having "added wealth, by his labor and his toil, to the community...is turned adrift without any, among all the different employers whom he has aided in enriching, to give him a mouthful of victuals or a night's lodging." The slave owner, in contrast, "has to" provide for his slave in sickness and old age. Walsh then characterized the difference between
slavery and capitalism as

simply this: If a dozen of us own a horse in common, we want to ride him as much as possible, and feed him as little as possible. [Laughter.] But if you or I own a horse exclusively, we will take good care to feed him well, and not drive him too much to endanger his health....

The tragedy of the proletarian demographic commons could therefore be overcome by converting labor power from a regime of common exploitation and private ownership by the worker to exclusive private use and ownership by a single slave owner, whose firm would self-sufficiently produce its own labor inputs. But even if individual slave owners had the economic incentive to promote the volume of procreation that would result in an optimal microdevelopment of labor power, an invisible hand would still have been required to coordinate thousands of plantation-level decisions to generate an optimal macrodemographic outcome. Such a state-slave society would be more coercive than even Hardin proposed.

The prominence of Hardin’s demographic anti-laissez-faire stance must be understood in a broader context. Beginning in the 1950s, when First World social scientists and state officials charged with coordinating international economic relations constructed a case for the existence of overpopulation in the Third World, demography recognized as never before that microlevel procreational sovereignties did not necessarily generate a collective optimum. The emergence of below-replacement-level reproduction in Europe and North America from the 1960s forward reinforced this insight. But the resurgence of market-knows-best economic theories and policies in the 1980s resurrected invisible-hand demography.

NOTES


21. Earlier Smith had described an even more perspicacious invisible hand:

The rich only select from the heap what is most precious and agreeable. They consume little more than the poor; and in spite of their natural selfishness and rapacity, though they mean only their own conveniency, though the sole end which they propose from the labours of all the thousands whom they employ be the gratification of their own vain and insatiable desires, they divide with the poor the produce of all their improvements. They are led by an invisible hand to make nearly the same distribution of the necessaries of life which would have been made had the earth been divided into equal poritons among all its inhabitants; and thus, without intending it, without knowing it, advance the interest of the society, and afford means to the multiplication of the species.
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42. Marc Linder, *Der Anti-Samuelson: Kritik eines repräsentativen Lehrbuchs der bürgerlichen Ökonomie* 2:150-60 (1974); below ch. 10.


44. *Ibid.* at 27.

45. *Ibid.* at 27-28. For such workers it would not have been the case that: “To bring a large number of children into the world...is to give that many hostages to fortune.” James Bossard, *The Large Family System: An Original Study in the Sociology of Family Behavior* 106 (1956).


50. As E. Penrose, *Population Theories and Their Application: With Special Reference to Japan* 28 (1935 [1934]), pointed out, Malthus implied that the purpose in postponing marriage was merely to secure a sufficiently high wage to create a self-supporting family—not to obtain the maximum income that would be consistent with later economists’ notion of optimum population. Angus McLaren, *Birth Control in Nineteenth-Century England* 143 (1978), argues that early nineteenth-century theories of population were modeled on laissez-faire economics insofar as they accepted that demographic laws “could not be countered by institutional interference.”

51. John Maynard Keynes, “Robert Malthus,” in *idem, Essays in Biography* 81-124 at 101 (Geoffrey Keynes ed., 1963 [1933]). Yet Keynes also acknowledged that: “The work begun by Malthus and completed by Ricardo did...provide an immensely powerful intellectual foundation to justify the status quo.; and it was just recompense that they should have thrown up Karl Marx as their misbegotten progeny.” J.M. Keynes, “The Commemoration of Thomas Robert Malthus,” *Economic J.* 45 (178):230-34 at 230-31 (June 1935).


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57. Polanyi, *Great Transformation* at 114-15, 123. See also McNally, *Against the Market* at 220.

58. Harold Boner, *Hungry Generations: The Nineteenth-Century Case Against Malthusianism* 81 (1955). Boner’s specific claim that Smith exempted labor from the operation of supply and demand is inaccurate since Smith, as noted above, did begin to apply supply and demand to the production of workers.

59. Thomas Robert Malthus, *Principles of Political Economy*, in *The Works of Thomas Robert Malthus* 5:184 (E.A. Wrigley & David Souden ed., 1986 [1820]). Nevertheless, a century later, the American dissident, Scott Nearing, portrayed Malthus as a democratic savior of the Western world from catastrophe, “telling the men at the margin whose families were either unregulated in size or else regulated only by subsistence, that they were free and equal to every other man and had a like right to ‘rise.’” The thought was new. ‘How can I rise?’ asked the laborer. ‘Stop having children,’ replied the economist.” Scott Nearing, “‘Race Suicide’ vs. Overpopulation,” *Popular Sci. Monthly* 78 (1):81-83 at 83 (Jan. 1911).

60. Malthus, *Essay* at 497 (7th ed.).

61. Ibid. at 593, 501, 500.


63. Nevertheless, Malthus favored repeal of the antiunion Combination Laws on the laissez-faire ground that they “operated against the general principle of wages finding their natural level.” However, since he also favored severe punishment of workers for intimidating “masters, or other men,” and since nineteenth-century Anglo-American courts developed an extraordinarily capacious notion of unlawful intimidation by unions, it is unclear how significant Malthus’s concession was. *Sixth Report from the Select Committee on Artizans and Machinery* 601 (House of Commons, 1824).

64. Malthus, *Essay* at 107 (1st ed.).


67. Malthus, *Essay* at 585-86 (7th ed.).

68. Ibid.


70. Malthus, *Essay* at 496 (7th ed.).


73. See below ch. 7.


76. Karl Marx, Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie 74 (1953 [1857-58]).


82. John Stuart Mill, “The Claims of Labor,” in *idem, Dissertations and Discussions: Political, Philosophical, and Historical* 2:260-96 at 264, 262 (1864 [1845]).


88. Friedman, Laissez-Faire in Population at 5.


Gertrude Himmelfarb, On Liberty and Liberalism: The Case of John Stuart Mill 119-22 (1974), in her discussion of “this very considerable departure from his principle of liberty,” fails to present its scope and consistency.

90. Mill, Principles of Political Economy at 363 (Ashley ed.).


95. Lloyd, *Two Lectures on the Checks to Population* at 71-75. In a later set of lectures on the poor laws, Lloyd recurred to this theme by arguing that “[t]he true method of promoting moral restraint...with respect to marriage, and diminishing the pressure of population against subsistence, consists in elevating, and in giving security to, the condition of...a number of persons limited by reference to the number of families which the country is...competent to maintain in comfort....” W.F. Lloyd, *Two Lectures on Poor-Laws* 71 (1836), in Lloyd, *Lectures on Population*.


100. *Ibid.* at 26-29. In order to simplify his demographic point, Lloyd assumed that the workers’ “power of labouring shall commence from the moment of birth” at which time it can provide the same proportion of the infant’s necessities as the parent’s labor power can of his. Amusingly, Lloyd saw only the following difference between his hypothesis and British industrial reality: “whereas the discoveries in manufactures seem to render it possible to turn to account the labour of children at an earlier age than formerly, and we may expect that with the progress of discovery it will be possible to turn it to account at a still earlier age, I now, for the convenience of argument, assume the progression to have advanced up to the very beginning of life.” *Ibid.* at 24-25.


105. Hardin, “Tragedy of the Commons” at 1246. Hardin’s collaborator, John Braden, creatively adapted his sociobiological approach: the fact that as between two noninterbreeding populations that occupy the same ecological niche the faster breeder will displace the slower may not be completely transferrable to interbreeding human beings, but it sufficed to prompt Braden to express grave concern over a breeding war allegedly propagated by Black Power advocates in the United States—at precisely the time when suspicion was rife that the state-sponsored birth control and population control initiatives were designed to curtail the growth or perhaps even the stock of poor blacks. John Braden, “Population, Ethnicity, and Public Goods: The Logic of Interest-Group Strategy,” in *Managing the Commons* at 252-60 at 253, 255.


