

Letters

Choices of Parenthood

While I agree wholeheartedly with the general theme of Hardin's editorial (31 July, p. 427) that parenthood should be considered more as a privilege than a right, I disagree with his statements that "in every nation women want more children than the community needs" and "control must be exercised through females." As far as we know, in most nations with overpopulation as a recognized problem, men are no less desirous than women of having children. Women are rather more inclined toward the restriction of the number of children because of the sufferings and inconveniences caused by child-bearing and child-rearing. The method of control advocated by Hardin, namely sterilization, is more suitable for men than for women from medical and economic points of view. There is no reason to suppose that population control has to be exerted through women only.

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In "Parenthood: Right or privilege?" Hardin says: "It should be easy to limit a woman's reproduction by sterilizing her at the birth of her n th child. Is this a shocking idea? If so, try this 'thought-experiment': let $n = 20$. Since this is not shocking, let n diminish until population control is achievable. The Women's Liberation Movement may not like it, but control must be exerted through females. Divorce and remarriage play havoc with assigning responsibility to couples or to men. Biology makes women responsible."

... Perhaps Hardin should review his biology, for men are just as responsible for producing children as women! I cannot find a biology textbook which states that men have a right to father more children than women may mother. In spite of divorce and remarriage, it would be just as effective in limiting population to sterilize all men as to sterilize all women. Since men are

easier to sterilize, it would make more sense to sterilize men than women if you are going to sterilize anybody.

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... Compulsory sterilization is shocking at any n . I am certain large numbers of Americans would sooner reproduce unofficially than submit to it. The apparatus of police, informers, and punishment which would follow could be as nightmarish as a standing-room-only world.

Before such Draconian measures merit consideration, the following conditions should exist: (i) Abortion should be available on demand, and with no wait, in every state. (ii) Severe tax liabilities should be imposed on both couples and individuals with children. (iii) A federal campaign for population stability should be undertaken in the media. This campaign should be at least as visible as the war bond or highway safety programs, and should express a continuing government commitment to limit population. (iv) The welfare class must be reconciled to the universal imposition of financial penalties for excessive reproduction. Fear that welfare patrons, particularly black, will opt out of a national population policy is reasonable, since a society whose racial proportions are changing is inherently unstable. The situation is far from hopeless, however, and many incentives, as opposed to coercive policies, remain to be tried. For example, welfare benefits for excess children could be paid entirely in kind, rather than in cash. Women on relief, and their female children, could receive a cash bonus for every year in which they do not reproduce. Considering the actual costs of medical care, schooling, and crime control associated with children on welfare, this bonus could be as high as \$1000 per year for each female between the ages of 12 and 45, and still be of no net cost to the agencies paying it.

The fact that people want large families is of little relevance if they have to pay for them on a cash-and-carry basis. After all, most people also want expensive cars, but defer buying them from month to month for reasons of economy. . . .

JAN BERKHOUT

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The blatant but possibly unconscious male supremacism expressed by Hardin brings out an important consideration about institution of limitations to the right of parenthood. I can see no justification for a reproductive limitation applicable to the female alone, since a number of equitable plans can be devised with respect to male parental responsibility. For example, I suggest that male parental responsibility might be established, at any time from before conception to shortly after birth, by mutual consent of a male and the female bearing the child. Both persons would then have equal responsibility and rights with respect to the child, and both would approach by one their individual reproductive limits, attainment of which would result in mandatory sterilization. If the mother failed to establish paternal responsibility, she would lose her right to the child (to be taken over by a governmental agency for adoption or rearing) and would have her reproductive allowance reduced by one. Such a plan would promote responsibility in parenthood on the part of both sexes.

Although any form of mandatory reproductive limitation would meet with considerable resistance, discriminatory application of such limitation to any selected segment of mankind (as proposed by Hardin) would guarantee and, in my opinion, justify tremendous additional opposition.

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... Modern medicine seems to convey the following message: Surgical sterilization in the female terminates reproduction nearly entirely since restoration of the tube passage does not restore the tube's vital function for early embryonic life. In the male, surgical sterilization can be revoked by recanalization with only slight chances of regaining full fertility, but this is not necessary. Ample numbers of sperm can be obtained by puncturing the epididymides, suitable for artificial insemination. Does it still

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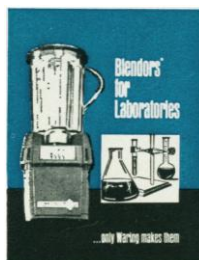
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make sense to hold women solely responsible? If the privilege has to be granted, or if the right for a child can be claimed, does it not make sense to take advantage of the semen depot readily available in sterilized men, samples of which can even be checked for their biological value by numbers, morphology, and biochemistry? Artificial insemination is highly successful, as long as the mother's genital tract can function unimpaired. How successful the procedure will be to gain eggs by laparotomy, to fertilize them in vitro, and transfer them to the mother's uterus in time, nobody knows. And even if successful, cost and procedures involved are highly in favor of artificial insemination to an unimpaired female.

If it is true that mankind is entering the age of equal rights and responsibility for both sexes, it is inconceivable to put burdens on one sex or the other as long as alternatives exist. The widely discussed and proposed punitive actions any elected government or society can impose on those breaking newly established laws or moral codes should leave the choice of the method open to responsible parents, but should give them all possible advice and tell them of the other side of any method involved. Any method with the assurance of reasonable safety and true reversibility should have priority.

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Garrett Hardin is to be commended for recognizing that appeals to conscience are self-defeating as a means of population control, and that the concept of a right to have children is responsible for our inability to control our population ... [but he] seems to discount the value of economic pressure exerted through the tax structure. It is true that under a system of tax incentives "noncooperators" will outbreed "cooperators." But this is less important than might be thought, since parents of large families will, through their taxes, be defraying the government's cost of caring for and educating their children. What is important is the overall effect, which will be a reduced birthrate.

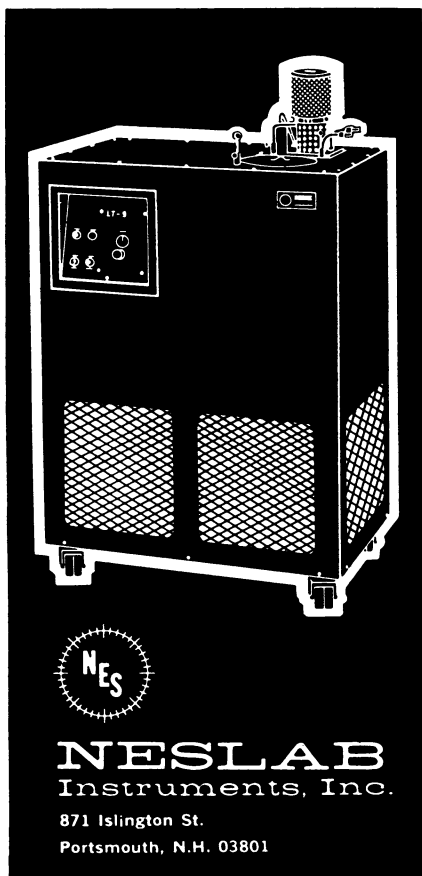
Not only is taxation less obnoxious to a libertarian than compulsory sterilization, since it influences the individual's freedom of choice rather than superseding it, but it is also more flexible. The versatility of tax law as a policy

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instrument can be seen from many ingenious ways in which powerful and greedy persons have redesigned it for their own benefit. It can equally be written to serve social needs.

ROBERT MCCLENON

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... If parenthood is only a privilege, then choice in general is only a privilege, and if choice is to be the special advantage of government bureaucrats and Garrett Hardins, pulpy bipeds may continue to roam the earth, but there is little hope for the continued existence of a free, thinking, striving, rational mankind.

CHARLES S. REBERT

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... Hardin could benefit the world much more if he would concern himself with the quality of parenthood. Problems of crime, moral dissent, and lack of convictions to help society could be corrected, in my mind, through better home life and by better-qualified parents. Divorce and unhappy homes to me are critical problems in terms of human suffering and welfare. Should not the criteria of training people to be better parents and to care properly for their children be more important than whether they have one, two, or three children? In fact, in my association it has often been the parents of larger families that seem to concentrate more heavily on caring for the children and instilling in them a sense of responsibility to society... parenthood is not a question of right or privilege, but a problem of responsibility.

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We will not achieve population control overnight. Progress will be made in stages, and I agree with Berkhout that abortion should first be made freely and instantly available to any woman who wants it. Contraception, never perfect, always leaves open the possibility of an "accident"; freely available abortion eliminates both the tragedy and the excuse. Since 1963, I have been heavily engaged in writing and speaking in favor of elective abortion.

Cash rewards for nonreproduction are also a fine idea. I believe R. B. Cowles was the first to propose a non-baby bonus, in 1959. It would not be

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necessary to continue it until the climacteric, as Webb implies: probably to age 25 would be far enough. Young women are dangerously fertile for both physiological and psychological reasons; they often seek to solve their psychiatric problems by conceiving. By the time they are 25 they have a better understanding of the costs of motherhood, and are less tempted by this "solution."

Tax penalties for excessive reproduction may help, but they have several shortcomings. (i) They cannot have much effect on people who pay no taxes anyway. McClenon rather surprisingly assumes that parents of large families are necessarily taxpayers. (ii) Insofar as taxes hurt the parents this hurt may be passed on to the children, whom the community does not want to harm. (iii) Highly "philoprogenitive" parents will be less affected by such measures, and will produce more of their own kind, thus instituting an unwanted selective system, as Charles Galton Darwin pointed out in 1959.

Positive control is distasteful to everyone, including me. But I think we will someday have to accept it as the price for other changes already made. Two centuries ago there was no need for the state to interfere with family breeding because the community allowed surplus children to starve. [See, for instance, Linnaeus' account of the acceptance of such starvation in K. Hagberg's *Carl Linnaeus* (Dutton, New York, 1953), p. 118.] The family was responsible for making the correct breeding decision. Now, welfare economics has freed the family of much of the responsibility, while leaving it the full power of breeding. Power without responsibility produces an unstable system, always.

Twenty years ago I was sterilized after my wife and I had produced what we regarded as our n th child. I watched the doctor perform the vasectomy; I found nothing horrifying in the operation. I have since recommended sterilization to thousands of people. Rational couples usually settle for male sterilization as the cheaper and simpler of the two possibilities. I think this is usually the best *individual* decision.

Population control would probably be least irksome if it involved two steps: (i) a directive to have no more than n children, control to be achieved by whatever means individual couples preferred; coupled with (ii) positive community action after $n + 1$ children have been born to prevent the appearance of

$n + 2$ *et al.* Our experience with Prohibition has taught us that positive control is not feasible unless the *vast* majority is convinced of its necessity; when this stage is reached the recalcitrant minority that would have to be sterilized would be small.

If community control ever comes—and it may not—it will be far easier to build the controlling mechanisms around the female than the male. The reasons for this conclusion escaped many of my critics, so let me spell them out.

Whether control is exerted by sterilization or by punitive taxation is of secondary importance. The point is, we want to make it difficult or impossible for a person or a couple to produce more than their share of children. Suppose we decide that it is the couple's joint responsibility, that each child counts against their quota. How should we deal with the following cases?

1) Mary and John get divorced, after having two children. Mary takes the children. Both remarry, their new partners having had no children previously. Suppose Mary's new husband wants a child "of his own"—can he have one? If so, Mary must exceed *her* quota. What if John's new wife wants to be a mother—is she forbidden to do so because John has twice fathered children? If she promised to conceive extramaritally, would that make it all right?

2) A young woman has intercourse with several men in one month and becomes pregnant. She doesn't know who the father is, and "paternity tests," which can only exclude some of the candidates, do not tell us. Should each of the nonexcluded men be charged with one child? Or only a fraction of a child?

3) Five men and three women join in a group marriage. If a quota is to be assigned to the group, what is it? $3 \times 2 = 6?$ $5 \times 2 = 10?$ $[(5 + 3) \div 2] \times 2 = 8?$

We haven't even considered the complications introduced by extramarital affairs, and the legal consequences of condonation. I'm afraid there are more patterns of marriage and sex than are dreamt of in Doris Day's philosophy. The law ignores this variety at its peril.

The chain of legal evidence that establishes maternity is really quite good. The evidence for paternity is always shaky, and putting a policeman under every bed really wouldn't help. "It's a wise father that knows his own child," said Shakespeare, and the science of immunology hasn't helped much.

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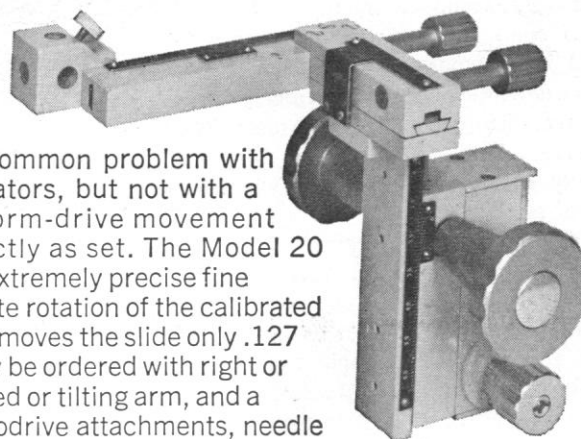
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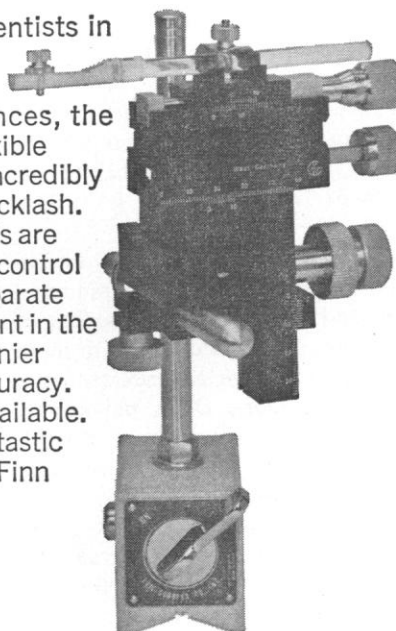
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To achieve community control of breeding, would it "be just as effective," as Webb says, "to sterilize all men as to sterilize all women"? *By definition*, yes; but there has been no proposal to sterilize *all* of either sex. If only some are sterilized, and those only after they have had children, the effectiveness of the two alternatives is not the same.

Debaters tend to forget that we are not a perfectly monogamous people. Extramarital intercourse is not rare; and divorce and remarriage create what has been called "serial polygamy." For these reasons the sterilization of *x* men can be expected to be less effective in reducing births than the sterilization of *x* women.

My statement that women "want more children than the community needs" was based on the evidence assembled by Kingsley Davis [*Science* **158**, 730 (1967)]. But it must be admitted that "wants" are not permanent facts of life like chemical valence and specific chromosome numbers. We may be able to modify wants; we should seek to do so.

I do not think my identifying women as the intrinsically responsible sex in reproduction is the result of "blatant but possibly unconscious male supremacy," as Butler put it. Once women have at their command a perfect system of birth control (contraception plus elective abortion as a backstop), they will have almost complete power over the reproductive process. A woman who wants a child can easily find a man to furnish spermatozoa.

When women can completely avoid having children they do not want, men become powerless to "have children" by a unilateral decision. The sexes are not equal.

Power and responsibility need to go together; there really is no defensible reason why women should reject responsibility once they possess—and realize they possess—power.

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Wasting Waste

In "Waste-water treatment: The tide is turning" (31 July, p. 457), Robert Holcomb comments on the problems of disposing of the sludge produced by sewage treatment plants. He writes that the "sale [of sludge] as fertilizer or soil conditioner . . . will probably decrease