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Creation, Procreation and the Gift of Life

Richard Sherlock

This essay arises out of a concern with a certain noticeable trend in current discussions of proposals to limit population. The vast majority of the proposals and material that I have studied are concerned essentially with the elimination of procreation for either the whole of mankind or



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selected groups such as "underdeveloped" societies, poor communities, etc. Most of these proposals and the supporting reasons involve a teleological orientation to the production of increased good, much the same as in classical utilitarian theory. The right or the obligatory is defined in terms of the maximization of the good and once the element or elements preventing such maximization are uncovered the moral path is clear. Overpopulation prevents the maximization of the good "the greatest happiness for the greatest number" was the classical utilitarian formulation) and hence population reduction becomes the overriding obligation. Almost anything may be and often is sanctioned in its behalf by those who keep forecasting catastrophes. This is utilitarian theory at its boldest. To use Kierkegaard's famous phrase this involves a teleological suspension of any ethical considerations other than the pursuit of beneficence. Anything that stands in the way of maximization of the good is either ignored or condemned.¹

I propose to sketch an alterna-

tive that centers around a notion of procreative obligations and is based upon a fundamentally different view of moral obligation and of the relation between the right and the good. To do this I shall use some of the central cosmic symbols of the Jewish and Christian religions. However, this does not presuppose the necessity of being a believer for this argument to be persuasive. I have used these symbols because I find them helpful in presenting the argument and in making clear the case being made; but I am fully persuaded that this case can be made without any explicit reference to Christian or Jewish theism.

As a starting point for my argument I will present the utilitarian conclusion on procreation from one of its boldest contemporary defenders. On this basis it will then be clearer just where these views are different and what the difficulties of the utilitarian position are.

In a pair of recent articles Jan Narveson has argued vigorously for the utilitarian conclusions on procreative issues, particularly with respect to those issues I am directly concerned with — obligations to procreate.² I have a number of difficulties about Narveson's arguments, most of which I will not detail here since the purpose of this article is to argue for a completely different approach. What I will do is present the basics of his arguments against procreative obligations. Following this, we shall be in a position to

see the difficulties in this argument.

Narveson's position, when stripped of the verbiage that inevitably accompanies philosophical work, involves the rejection of any positive moral significance for procreation. To arrive at this overall result Narveson has two essential sub-results: 1) the rejection of procreative obligations vis-a-vis the unborn child on logical grounds, and 2) the rejection of it vis-a-vis overall societal happiness on considerations arising from utilitarian theory.³

The first objection is fairly simple. Although it would seem certain to pose serious difficulties, I shall not argue it here. Narveson accepts a referential theory of meaning from Strawson and Quine and proceeds to argue that statements about an unborn (or unconceived) child make no sense. For example, the statement "Jones will be happier when he is born than he is now" is logically nonsensical since "Jones" does not refer to anyone. Narveson tries to show that such considerations rule out talk about the right of the unborn to be born (since this involves rights without bearers); furthermore, he argues, this does not allow us to posit any obligation to procreate based on the happiness of the child since it would always involve at the same point the idea that X's happiness will be increased and this involves precisely the nonsensical statement above.⁴

Having thus supposedly ruled out any attempt to argue that the

child's happiness or rights can be invoked Narveson's next move is to show that considerations of general social happiness would not produce these results from a utilitarian premise. To begin with Narveson seems to dismiss those views that focus their attention on total social happiness. Such positions as this can be very hard on minorities. For example, suppose we could increase total social happiness a hundredfold with certain forms of slavery. Total happiness arguments do not give one very much support for countering such a venture; it can be argued persuasively that they provide no reason at all to protest such a program.⁵

Furthermore, Narveson argues against the notion that the particular happiness of the members of the society will be directly increased. Adding new people to the society, even if these newcomers are happy, will not add anything to the happiness of the members already there. If there is a society of 100 members each with X happiness, then adding another 100 people will not logically increase the individual happiness from X to X-plus-1 or something greater.⁶ The only possible alternative would be a "total happiness" or "lump sum" view that, as we just saw, has a number of serious difficulties attached to it. Thus Narveson draws this conclusion: "the argument that an increase in general happiness will result from our having a happy child involves precisely the same fallacy as he

had just given in an example. If you ask 'whose happiness has been increased as a result of his having been born?' the answer is that nobody's has. Of course his being born might have indirect effects on the general happiness but that is quite another matter. The general populace is just as happy as it was before."⁷

'Indirect Benefits' Cited

Narveson is willing to entertain the notion that some spillover benefits (he calls them indirect benefits) may come from increased population. Some benefits that he lists are industrialization and its attendant social advancement which he says may increase social happiness. Narveson does not really develop this argument very far, and for good reason. This argument about indirect benefits does not seem to get away from the difficulties of total happiness views, or if it is meant to, Narveson never explains how.

Finally, Narveson is unwilling to posit any independent moral value to the existence of life itself. To do so would involve his teleological system in difficulties that he is trying to avoid. For him to stress the intrinsic goodness of life would on the face of it force him to argue for continued unlimited procreation since his utilitarian theory posits obligation in terms of the maximization of the good. This is precisely what Narveson is trying to avoid in his essays. An admission that life itself is an intrinsic good

would open up the argument all over again.

The result of his discussion is that he cannot find any positive moral obligation that could lead one to procreate: "Is it ever one's duty to have children? I can think of only one case where it might. If it can be shown that the populace will suffer if its size is not increased then it seems to me that one could perhaps require efforts in that direction and punish those who could comply but do not. But I am inclined to think that such a situation is exceedingly rare."⁸ There are a number of difficulties with this conclusion, particularly in light of Narveson's earlier arguments, that I cannot discuss here. Particularly crucial are the difficulties with minorities that were pointed to earlier, a difficulty that is explicitly opened up here. What I am concerned with is that Narveson's utilitarian ethics does not give any positive moral significance to the procreation and nurture of new life. This will be the focus of our discussion.

Narveson, and those who think as he does in the discussion of population problems, operates with the view that the only moral obligations that anyone has are teleologically oriented duties to produce future benefits. The only relation in which we stand to others is that of benefactor to benefited. The duty to increase the happiness of others is our only duty (Narveson is never clear about duties to oneself). Since

talk of increasing the happiness of the unborn child is meaningless to him and since it is very problematic to argue for the increased happiness of the society except in a morally dangerous way, procreation is not an obligation that one could have; it is reduced simply to a matter of taste or personal enjoyment much like eating candy or going to the movies.⁹ It is my contention that this line of reasoning, which focuses only on future benefits, is widespread in the current literature on the "population problem" and in programs to prevent population growth. Furthermore, I think that it displays a somewhat unsophisticated analysis of the nature of moral obligation and the various obligations that each of us is confronted with. In the remainder of this essay I want to suggest an alternative view that is better equipped than Narveson's to handle these issues.

An Alternative View

One of the central affirmations of the Jewish and Christian traditions is that life is a gift. In a recent important paper, Talcott Parsons has written, "In the Judeo-Christian tradition and especially in the Christian phase life for the individual is defined in the first instance as a gift."¹⁰ The first act of God as recorded in the Bible is that of creation; a free act unmerited by anything that His creatures may have done previously. The creation of man is seen as the pinnacle of this creation; to him is given the gift of

life in a most profound sense. Human life is the greatest gift of God. Furthermore God is presented as centrally concerned with the creation of those social and communal supports of human life that are basic to its preservation. As Parsons and his collaborators have noted, God creates both the biological life of man and the sociological life of man, the community of Israel. In both of these cases the basic elements necessary for the continuation of life on this planet are seen essentially as gifts given to man which he never earned and never was given as a reward.

That each of us exists at all as independent selves is not any of our own doing. Our lives are in a very real sense not our own; we did not purchase them or demand that they be given to us as rewards or medals. Our lives are the result of the gifts of others: parents who gave us birth and who nurtured us when we were young; teachers, friends, associates who have all nurtured and sustained us. An interconnected network of persons, institutions and cultural systems that make up our society has brought each of us into being and continues to nourish and support our lives. Without this massive bio-social matrix none of us would exist. This overarching bio-social organism has made life possible for us and for the millions who have gone before. In a rich and suggestive passage, the great English political theorist Edmund Burke provides a superb picture of this bio-social matrix that nur-

tures and sustains human life:

Society is indeed a contract. Subordinate contracts for objects of mere occasional interest may be dissolved at pleasure — but the state ought not to be considered as nothing better than a partnership agreement in a trade of pepper and coffee, calico or tobacco, or some other such low concern, to be taken up for a little temporary interest and to be dissolved by the fancy of the parties. It is to be looked upon with other reverence; because it is not a partnership in things subservient only to the gross animal existence of a temporary and perishable nature.

It is a partnership in all science; a partnership in all art; a partnership in every virtue and in all perfection. As the ends of such a partnership cannot be obtained in many generations it becomes a partnership not only between those who are living but between those who are dead and those who are to be born.

Each contract of each particular state is but a clause in the great primeval contract of eternal society, linking the lower with the higher natures, connecting the visible with the invisible world according to a fixed compact sanctioned by the inviolable oath which holds all physical and all moral natures each in their appointed place.¹¹

The Bio-Social Matrix

Society is not simply an atomistic collection of individuals each relating to one another as benefactors and benefited. It is an elaborate matrix of social, cultural and biological elements that has given each of us the gift of life, for which we owe the most profound debt of gratitude. If life is seen as a gift then each of us are debtors with respect to the bio-social matrix that has given

that life. The result of this view is that we stand in a relation to this societal matrix that Narveson and those who think as he does are unable to take account of adequately. Classical utilitarian theory of Narveson's variety is only able to see morally significant relations to those whom one may benefit. Obligations then arise out of a possible future bestowal of benefits to others. In this scheme a morally significant relation, or further, a definite obligation cannot arise out of a situation of a gift or a debt. These are obligations that have no particular reference to any future benefits which may accrue from the fulfillment of them. These obligations stress the continuity of present not only with the future but with the past. But in the utilitarian framework in which Narveson operates, obligations arising out of gifts that one has been given in the past are simply not accounted for.

In this way Narveson and those who think as he does cannot account for one's relation to the bio-social matrix that has nourished him as morally significant except insofar as one may benefit in the future by reducing population. The good has been determined as the reduction of population and obligations simply follow along. The overriding concern for the maximization of the good does not allow any other conflicting obligations to temper the pursuit of supposed beneficence. Narveson, as we saw, allowed some exceptions where

positive harm to individuals may result but in the process he allowed for a dubious outcome in relation to minorities.

Narveson and those who think as he does are thus unable to see the profound debt of gratitude that the gift of life creates for all those who have received it. It is my contention that a closer examination of the many morally significant relations that impinge on persons in society will reveal a far greater range of such relations than simply that of benefactor to beneficiaries. Persons stand in many relationships to each other — debtor to creditor, promiser to promisee, etc.—which simply cannot be understood in the framework of utilitarianism. It is this inability to deal adequately with a number of *prima facie* duties that is the center of our difficulty with Narveson and other utilitarian population theorists.¹² Lacking this perspective, utilitarians can find no independent basis for any obligation to repay the debt of gratitude created by the gift of life. Past actions of others or ourselves can never create moral obligations; only the possible production of future good can do that. An excellent example of this line of thought is from Dr. Edgar Chasteen, a sociologist who is on the Board of Zero Population Growth:

We live in a finite world. Whatever the number of people it is capable of supporting there is a limit. We do know that our world is doing a pretty poor job of supporting its present population of around 3½

billion. How long can we expect to double world population every 35 years? To what end? In what ways will we be better off with 7 billion people than with 3½ billion? What possible advantages are there in even minimal growth? Scores of disadvantages come readily to mind but not a single benefit. The stork is not the bird of paradise.¹³

Aside from the dubious factual assumptions and perhaps errors made by this author, this is pure utilitarianism at its boldest. The calculus of benefits and harms is the measuring rod of all moral obligations. Once the proper calculations have been made, which Chasteen thinks are obvious, population growth limitation can be endorsed with full vigor.

'Duties of Gratitude'

But this position is unable to see other sources of moral obligation in human life. One of these that has been separated and analyzed by certain moral philosophers are duties that arise out of previous services that have been rendered to us. Gifts or services that have been rendered to us create what W. D. Ross has called "Duties of Gratitude."¹⁴ For example, suppose my neighbor saved my child's life by pulling him out of the path of an oncoming car. My gratitude for that act may make it morally incumbent on me to spend time helping him repair his house, during which time I otherwise would be playing tennis or maybe helping someone else toward whom I had no particular debt of gratitude.

These duties of gratitude are neither obscure nor complicated.

In fact the obligation to receive gifts and, more significantly, to repay gifts is very widely recognized in less advanced cultures.¹⁵ It was, for example, basic to the moral thought of the Old Testament and its emphasis on the covenant.¹⁶ Furthermore, these obligations are not equatable with any generalized obligation to do good. They are independent right-making characteristics of action that enable us, for example, to see the obligation to repay a debt as more binding than a general duty to help others. For example, suppose someone had ten dollars to give away to either of two friends, A or B, but that he had promised the money to A. It makes a great deal more moral sense to say that one's obligation is to give the money to A than it would to say that it doesn't matter at all since the benefit of the outcome would be equal, i.e., someone will have ten dollars he did not have. This last position is where Chasteen's unvarnished focus on benefits and norms would leave us. More significantly, suppose one had a television set to give away and several neighbors to consider as recipients. But suppose that one of them had just saved your life. Chasteen's (and Narveson's) utilitarianism would find no special sense of moral obligation to give the gift to the neighbor who saved your life. All neighbors are in the same relationship to you; they are possible recipients of your benefit. One might as well

draw lots for the gift. Unless we can see a range of obligations a good deal more complex than that, we are unable to account for the sense of obligation felt by a great many to give the gift to the neighbor who saved one's life. Without this we will simply miss a good many of the moral obligations sensed, encountered, and fulfilled in common human experience.

This analysis of independent *prima facie* obligations that arise out of past gifts and services enables us to see the place of procreation and the gift of life in our moral lives. Narveson was unable to see the independent moral significance of procreation because he could not see an obligation that was not specifically linked to future benefits. By seeing a source of duty independently arising out of past gifts we can argue, in a way that Narveson was unable to, for the *prima facie* obligation to procreate. Furthermore we do not need to involve ourselves in the logical complications which Narveson suggests surround any attempt to speak of the unborn in these contexts.¹⁷

The life that each of us has as independent selves is the most profound and meaningful gift that each of us has been given. Without it all else would be useless. The procreative powers of man are not just another pleasure producing biological mechanism. They are the deeply personal way in which this gift of life is repaid. They are the way in which our

obligations of gratitude are fulfilled and human life is sustained on this planet. Without the morally judicious use of these powers the bio-social matrix that nurtures and sustains human life would cease to exist.¹⁸ The sense of gratitude for the gift of life is a powerful source of obligation to sustain the bio-social organism that makes human life possible at all.

The Procreative Act: Sustaining Human Life

The procreative act is basic to the maintenance of human life and community; the "order of creation," to use a theological phrase, could not be sustained without it.¹⁹ The obligation to procreate is thus neither obscure nor fundamentally mistaken. In the procreative act men affirm their willingness to sustain human life on this planet. They bear witness to the goodness of human life and the matrix that makes it possible. In the procreative act men profoundly commit themselves to the future of the human community in general and of the society in which they live.²⁰ They have become, as Burke put it, "a clause in the great primeval contract of eternal society." The great religious traditions of the west have said that procreation is sacred. By this they have expressed their recognition of the irreducible moral significance of the procreative act. Narveson's failure to see any deeper significance to procreation than the pleasure some people derive from

young children attests to the failure of his brand of utilitarianism to explain adequately the moral significance of the procreative act.

Perhaps the most immediate objection to this view is that it contains no check on the procreation of unlimited numbers and surely such a position is wrong. Two points, however, strongly mitigate this objection. First, it must be insisted that this has only established the *prima facie* obligation of procreation. It has not and by its nature could not have argued for the actual duty of procreation in every single case.²¹ For example, a couple who has already had two or three children may find that the commitments they have made to those children preclude any other commitments to new children because these new commitments could not be fulfilled in a satisfactory manner. In another case, a soldier in a just war may find that his prior moral commitments preclude having any offspring at all. Thus in important ways the *prima facie* nature of the case made here does not necessarily mean that everyone will have unlimited offspring.

Secondly, one must keep in mind what was said earlier about the creation of new life. The creation of viable new life occurs in a bio-social matrix. Certain pro-natalist arguments have forgotten this and end up in great difficulty by advocating continued biological reproduction at an unhindered rate while neglecting the social matrix that is

equally important for the procreation of viable new life. I am prepared to argue that if the social matrix is seen as an equal part of the procreation process, then a theory of procreative obligations will not lead to unlimited population increase but will require precisely the opposite.

Procreative obligations stem from the obligation to nurture and support human life as a repayment for the gift of life that each of us has been given. Thus one has obligations toward the bio-social matrix that creates new life. In this fashion one could very easily support family planning programs whose purpose is to maintain and foster viable family units and socio-cultural units whose stable presence is necessary to the procreation of new life. Whatever the precise nature or dimensions of the population problem, a subject which is open to wide dispute, it does seem likely that some form of population limitation must be encouraged in the decades ahead. From the moral perspective outlined in this essay such programs could be supported insofar as vastly increased population threatens the viability of the bio-social matrix to which one owes such a profound debt of gratitude for the gift of life. For example, a great deal is coming to be known about the necessity for emotional support in the development of young children and especially for the development of loving concern for others.²² A family thus might find it morally obligatory

to limit its offspring rather severely in order to maintain a high level of emotional support for already present children as a prerequisite for their growth into morally sensitive adults. In this way, the argument that I have sketched above does not pose any obstacles to family planning programs that are acceptable on other grounds, both moral and factual. It would, however, have a real effect on the acceptability of certain specific proposals and on the way in which the problem is stated and debated in the public arena. Let us consider some of these impacts in the last section.

Moral argument in the social arena concerns not only the particular proposal being supported but the method of argumentation that is being used to marshal the populace on its behalf. This is because a pattern of thinking about moral issues that blots out significant elements of the moral calculus in support of noble ends can easily be transferred to less noble goals where the inability to see the full range of moral elements may be harmful or worse.

The position advanced above calls into question the kind of reasoning so obviously manifest in the quotation above from Chasteen and which could be echoed by reams of other quotations from the literature on the "population problem." By failing to take account of obligations other than the obligation to produce benefits one can easily move to less than desirable means of population limitation. For exam-

ple, schemes for forcible sterilization of certain target groups become legitimated because the positive moral significance of procreation is not taken account of by those who see population limitation as the way to the maximization of the good. The argument advanced above will call into question certain specific proposals advanced on behalf of population limitation. As an example let us examine one such proposal.²³

Hardin's Proposal

In a recent publication Garret Hardin advances an interesting proposal for changing public attitudes toward marriage and procreation. In order to avoid misrepresenting him I shall let him speak for himself:

Another useful step we might take is to start putting new ideas into the heads of young people especially young girls. By young I mean first, second and third graders. We need to teach them that it is not necessary for them to become mommies when they grow up, and that if they do become mommies they need to introduce into the Dick and Jane readers some characters other than Jane's mommy and daddy and the couple next door whose children are named Carol and Jack and Tom, and the neighbors across the street with their three or four children. Perhaps we need to know Dick and Jane's Aunt Debbie, a swinging single of 40, who's as pretty as a picture. Now we don't have to tell these first graders what kind of fine time she is having. They need only to see her with a smile on her face, see that she likes children and is comfortable with them. Aunt Debbie isn't a sour old maid who hates kids. She loves young-

sters but doesn't want them around her all the time; it's enough for her to visit her nieces and nephews. And when she isn't visiting them, she lives a different kind of life — and it's a good life.

There are too many now who marry because they think they have to. Some of these people in their heart of hearts don't want to have children, but they cannot resist the social pressure. So it is important to get into the schools the notion that there are alternative goals to marriage and parenthood. If we can get this message across we not only can diminish the birth rate but we can diminish also a great deal of heartache; because semi-reluctant parents statistically speaking tend to become only grudgingly reconciled parents. We want to make it possible for them to live a good life, respected by the community, that does not involve having children. While such education does not coerce the children, we may have to coerce the educators. We may have some serious battles ahead when we introduce Aunt Debbie into the first grade reader for the first time, but I think we've got to face this. I think we can win this battle.²⁴

To begin with, there are some entirely praiseworthy aspects to this proposal. The legitimization of smaller families is sound and perhaps desirable. It is also undoubtedly true that many may feel overly guilty for remaining single; perhaps some early examples may help to lessen the guilt and the anxiety. But I am concerned here with the deeper implications of Hardin's proposal. What this proposal implies is that there is nothing morally different between procreation and parenthood, and singleness. So long as Aunt Deb-

bie is happy it's just fine. Hardin admits that many people do feel compelled to procreate and maintain families but he can see nothing more significant in this than social pressure. He seems to be unable or unwilling to recognize that the obligation to procreate felt by many can be grounded in a moral perspective that is entirely laudable and a good deal more substantial than mere social pressure.

What this proposal overlooks is the idea that procreation and singlehood are not necessarily morally equal. Under the proposal as he has presented it there does not seem to be any reason to avoid simply drawing out to determine whether to become a parent or remain single. Admittedly there may be laudable reasons for remaining single. But Hardin parlays reasons that may be good in some situations into a general theory, and here he proves too much. In the earlier sections of this essay I argued at some length the difficulties of utilitarian moral theory; the argument does not need repeating. What Hardin's proposal entails is precisely the kind of position that Narveson took; there are no moral reasons independent of the production of happiness or pleasure that could lead one to procreate. We saw the difficulties of this position earlier.²⁵

But suppose Hardin's proposal was adopted somewhere. A young person confronted with two attractively presented role models

asks how he is to choose the pattern of his life. What criteria is he to use, what morally sensitive guidance is he to receive? Hardin's proposal seems to say to him that he is to follow his desire, or "seek your greatest happiness." But under his own ground rules Hardin could not object if everyone chose not to procreate as the way to enhance their own happiness. The nurture of the young is not an easy task; often it takes great personal sacrifice — physical, emotional, and material. Parents sometimes die for their children, or forego great material goods on behalf of their offspring. But under Hardin's proposal Aunt Debbie would be wiser than any of these: she would be following her own desires, seeking her own happiness. It does not seem very difficult to see how Hardin's Aunt Debbie and her ethical theory would be a great deal more appealing to the young who are only in the process of developing their moral sensitivities beyond a concern for self. At a critical period in the life of the young, Hardin seems to want to inculcate them with a rather inadequate moral theory.

Sensitivity to Ethical Issues

If the argument presented in the first sections of this essay is correct then the moral perspective of Hardin's proposal is quite unsatisfactory. As I suggested before, however, there are excellent elements in Hardin's proposal. What Hardin's ideas lack is some sensitivity to the idea that there

are *prima facie* obligations for procreation that cannot be equated with Aunt Debbie's utilitarianism. In order to handle the difficulties I have suggested, Hardin could modify his proposal. One fruitful approach might be to have Aunt Debbie engaged in some occupation that precludes, on morally laudatory grounds, her having a family. For example, Aunt Debbie could be a military officer manning vital defense installations, who comes to visit once in awhile. She could tell the children at home about her exciting work and how important it is, etc. Grade school readers are not textbooks on moral philosophy; but if the worthwhile goal of suggesting other alternatives than marriages and large families is to be pursued it should be done with a great deal more sensitivity to the ethical issues involved than simply showing Aunt Debbie as a happy person. What my suggestion does is to add some specifics that qualify Aunt Debbie's singleness. They give her some morally supportable reasons for being single that do not undermine the growing moral sensitivity of the young. They provide an example that could be useful in later moral education and in the development of those moral sensitivities which must be included in any serious moral theory: sensitivities which cast a great deal of doubt on the kind of utilitarianism seemingly advocated by Aunt Debbie and through her, Hardin himself.

Conclusion

The moral issues surrounding the procreation of new life are many and complex. One essay cannot hope to mention all of the problems. Questions of distributive justice, of individual rights, of social welfare all impinge on the procreative process and upon what has been variously termed "the population problem." This essay has attempted the modest task of suggesting a morally sensitive alternative to certain views of the procreative process that seem to be widely held in certain circles. I have been concerned here to argue that there are profound sources of the obligation to procreate that are being overlooked by those discussions of the population problem that follow the foundations of teleological-utilitarian ethics.

If the argument advanced here is fundamentally sound, then a fresh look at state control or coercion in the procreation process as advocated by many will be necessary. Moreover a more sophisticated and sensitive discussion of the decisions of individuals to procreate or not to procreate will also be a result of moving the discussion out of the utilitarian arena. To these ends this essay is only the first step. It is hoped that more serious work will follow.

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problem are Daniel Callahan (ed.), *The American Population Debate* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1971) and Howard M. Bahr, Bruce A. Chadwick and Darwin C. Thomas (eds.), *Population Resources and the Future* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1972).

2. Narveson, Jan, "Utilitarianism and New Generations," *Mind* 76:301 (Jan. 1967), pp. 62-72, and "Moral Problems of Population," *The Monist* 57:1 (Jan. 1973), pp. 62-86.

3. The clearest statement of his views is contained in his first article, "Utilitarianism and New Generations," where these two points are explicitly made. This, however, does not exhaust Narveson's argument. I attempt to argue that one could have reasons not to procreate but that one could never have reasons to procreate. The essence of the argument is that if you knew of difficulties in the future of any course of action, that could constitute a reason not to undertake that course of action; but the mere absence of these difficulties does not constitute a reason to follow that course of action. It seems to me that Narveson is contradictory in this argument, for any statement about future difficulties in the procreation process will either refer to the child's future unhappiness, or to society's future reduction in happiness. Both of these seem to me to involve precisely the problems that Narveson has shown with respect to the positive production of happiness in the procreative act. What Narveson seems to have done here is to call into question some of his own reasoning about the impossibility of references to the child's future state influencing present action (see footnote 4). This is perhaps wise since there are difficulties here but then Narveson's scheme for refusing to talk about the child's future happiness as a moral reason for procreation will come crashing down around him. Some of these difficulties have been very ably explored by Timo-

thy Sprigge in "Professor Narveson's Utilitarianism," *Inquiry* 11 (Autumn, 1968), pp. 337-341.

4. I have serious reservations about this line of argumentation. Narveson's arguments about the status of future beings negatively affecting decision to reproduce seems to me to confirm the difficulty of refusing to consider the future state of being of the newborn. But if this is the case, then given Narveson's considerations it does not seem to be based on any other considerations than the differential between the present and future state of the newborn. But this seems clearly not to escape the problems that Narveson has pointed to in this line of argument.

5. Narveson's later statements about "indirect benefits," however, seem to explicitly leave this issue open.

6. Even within his own utilitarian framework, I think that Narveson is on very shaky ground here. It can be plausibly argued, and Narveson admits this, that increased population may bring many benefits of increased educational opportunity, increased health care, etc., that benefit all the members of a society. If this is the case then it may be possible, on utilitarian grounds, to make some case for procreative obligations. But I think that Narveson is right in seeing that the fundamental intuitions of a strict utilitarian system do not lead in this direction. They especially do not lead in this direction when considered from the point of view of those who will have to make considerable sacrifices for these children, parents for example. If a couple saw that they would sacrifice considerable personal happiness and also perhaps a chance to render some social benefit by having children there does not seem to be a very strong sanction in regard to having children in a utilitarian framework particularly if this couple is rendering some form of "social service." I do think that Narveson's point is well taken in regard to utilitarian theory generally; he simply may not have

seen all the nuances that could be added to handle objections of the kind I am raising.

7. "Utilitarianism and New Generations," *op. cit.*, p. 67. I think Narveson may have overstated the case here since many parents or relatives may get a great deal of happiness or satisfaction out of young children. But I do not think that the deep sense of obligation that parents feel toward their children or that many couples feel for having a family can be reduced to the idea that these children will make them happy or are making them happy. The sacrifices of parents for children cannot be adequately reduced to a utilitarian calculus and in this sense Narveson's points about utilitarian theory and the procreative bond are correct.

8. "Utilitarianism and New Generations," *op. cit.*, p. 72.

9. In his second essay, Narveson explicitly draws this analogy. See Narveson, "Moral Problems of Population," p. 74.

10. Parsons, Talcott; Renee Fox and Victor Lidz, "The Gift of Life and its Reciprocation," *Social Action* (Fall, 1972), pp. 367-415.

11. Burke, Edmund, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1955), p. 110. It should be noted that classical utilitarianism would not have had very much sympathy with this idea of an organic bio-social matrix. The individualist pre-supposition in which society is seen as simply a collection of isolated individuals is central in the utilitarian scheme. Cf. Jeremy Bentham, *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (New York: Hafner Press, 1948), p. 3 ff. Also see the superb discussion of this issue in Jacques Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good* (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1947).

12. The notion of *prima facie* duties is taken from W. D. Ross, *The Right and the Good* (London: Oxford Uni-

versity Press, 1930), pp. 16-47. What it denotes is that which tends to be our duty in a given situation. Barring any other complicating factors in the situation it would be our moral duty. What this notion does is to suggest the range of our moral obligations in any situation and give us a way of sorting out the various duties that impinge on us in various situations. *Prima facie* duties are always duties that impinge on us but they may not be our actual duty in this situation since another more significant moral obligation may override it. Our *prima facie* duty may be to keep a promise to take our children to a ball game but the actual obligation may be to stop to aid a victim of an auto crash and thus fail to fulfill the promise to the children. The distinction between actual and *prima facie* obligation will be important later.

13. Chasteen, Edgar, "The Case for Compulsory Birth Control," in Callahan (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 275. One very important article in recent years makes most of these same errors; cf. Kingsly Davis, "Population Policy: Will Current Programs Succeed," *Science*, Vol. 158 (Nov. 10, 1957), pp. 730-739, reprinted in Callahan, *op. cit.*, pp. 227-258.

14. Ross, *op. cit.*, p. 21. This concern with the subject of gratitude and the inability of utilitarianism to give an adequate account of it appears also centrally in the works of the major eighteenth century critics of utilitarianism, Joseph Butler and Richard Price. See Richard Price, *A Review of the Principal Questions in Morals* (new edition, London: Oxford University Press, 1948), pp. 253-254, and Joseph Butler, "Dissertation Upon the Nature of Virtue," *Five Sermons* (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1950), p. 87.

15. For this insight I am indebted to the brilliant monograph by Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*, trans. Ian Cunnison (London: Cohen & West, 1954). In her excellent book on Japanese cul-

ture Ruth Benedict suggests a similar insight on the part of Japanese culture in its emphasis on obligations to one's children.

16. A standard interpretation of these issues is G. E. Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant in Ancient Israel and the Near East* (Pittsburgh: The Biblical Colloquium, 1955). This monograph has important insights for the moral philosopher. A very good discussion of recent research is Dennis McCarthy, *Old Testament Covenant: A Survey of Current Opinions* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1972).

17. I have already suggested that there are severe difficulties which surround Narveson's analysis on this issue, difficulties that Narveson seems to be aware of. It is important to realize, however, that the analysis presented here does not entail any references of the kind that Narveson thinks are meaningless. Even in Narveson's analysis of references to future persons is entirely correct the argument presented here could be maintained with very little modification.

18. This has been recognized by Hermann Vetter as the logical outcome of Narveson's analysis. "Utilitarianism and New Generations," *Mind* 80 (April, 1971), pp. 291-302. Vetter professes not to be alarmed at this proposal. Narveson in his second article, "Moral Problems of Population," tried to extricate himself from this difficulty. This was difficult since he still maintained that there is no moral point to existence as such. In order to argue that life itself would not cease under his scheme Narveson was forced to argue that having children is simply pleasurable for many people, like playing games, and hence many people would still have children even if no moral value could be found for it. This seems a good deal like throwing out the baby with the bath water in order to preserve a weak argument.

19. Bonhoeffer's analysis of the mandates which are part of the "order of

creation" is fundamentally sound at this point. His discussion of marriage and procreation as one of the basic elements (he calls them mandates) of the "order of creation" is an important insight on the vital link between human procreation and the sustenance of the created world of man as a gift from God. Cf. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (Eberhard Bethge, ed.; tr. by Neville Smith, New York: Macmillan, 1967), pp. 207-213, 173-183.

20. On this point of relation with the future there is some sound analysis in Arthur J. Dyck, "Population Policy and Ethical Acceptability," Callahan *op. cit.*, pp. 351-377, and Arthur J. Dyck, "Procreative Rights and Population Policy," *Hastings Center Studies* 1:1.

21. The distinction between actual and *prima facie* duties (footnote 12) is important at this point.

22. On this, see Darwin L. Thomas, "Family Size and Children's Characteristics," in Bahr, Thomas, Chadwick (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 137-157. Also the excellent work by John Bowlby, *Child Care and the Growth of Love*.

23. It should be recognized that many of these proposals can be analyzed in the framework of procrea-

tive rights that couples have vis-a-vis the state or the community. Dyck, *op. cit.*, has done this. My argument is different and as a consequence I have selected a proposal for analysis which is not as readily and analyzable in terms of rights but one which would seem to me to be questionable as presently formulated, when considered in light of the argument advanced in this essay.

24. Hardin, Garrett, "Multiple Paths to Population Control," Callahan, *op. cit.*, pp. 264-265. This essay appeared originally in *Family Planning Perspectives*, Vol. 2:3 (June, 1970).

25. Hardin's utilitarian moral theory is evident throughout the essay and in his other work. His inability to see any independent moral significance to procreation is seen in his willingness to sanction almost anything on behalf of population limitation. He thinks that abortion should be used as a backstop when other methods fail to eliminate unwanted birth, and he is even willing to sanction "involuntary methods" if present voluntarism fails. For more information on Hardin's views see his book *Birth Control* (New York: Pegasus, 1970).

The Obstetrician's Prayer

Almighty God, Creator and Giver of life, through the merits of Thine only begotten Son Jesus, and His Immaculate Mother Mary, grant a safe delivery to this mother and her infant.

O Holy Spirit! Give me good judgement and direct my hands in the performance of this task. May this child be reared to know, love and serve Thee and thereby gain everlasting life. Amen.

Mother of Mothers, pray for us.

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