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Neomalthusianism

Isaac Puente

1930

Neo-Malthusianism is a new idea that openly clashes with the morality and interests of today's society. It is opposed by agitated prejudices, obfuscating protests, and specious objections. They hardly deserve to be taken into account by someone who has judged society before his conscience and condemned it to total subversion. But let us mention the arguments with which it is opposed.

Challenge. It is considered an immoral idea from start to finish. Because it demands that sexuality be shed light on, an obscene thing that has always been kept in darkness. Because it imposes premeditation on an act that has always been considered unclean; for the same reason it is considered immoral to divulge the means of prevention from venereal diseases. And because it gives man a power previously reserved for divinity: control over the number of children. It goes without saying that religion, always obscurantist and always retarding, is involved in this concept of immorality.

It is considered an antisocial idea. It is feared that if the means of avoiding pregnancy are made public, no one will want to have children. Individuals are offended by believing themselves to be worse than they are. "If they do not steal or

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steal, it is because they are afraid of falling into the nets of the Code and the sanction of Justice, before the guns of the guardians of order." "If they reproduce as much as they can, it is because they do not know the resources to avoid it." These are the simplistic ideas, discredited by experience, professed by the people who direct society. It is true that the birth rate would decrease considerably, but not so much that it would entail a danger for the conservation of the species. It would, however, reduce cannon fodder and the number of arms, and because of social organization the false national interest would be harmed.

But there is no reason for alarm, because contraception is already practiced, with greater or lesser success, by the educated classes. And this should not be just another privilege.

There is no lack, even, of open-minded men of liberal prestige who combat neo-Malthusian practices as dissolving ideas proper to exalted brains, of unbalanced beings who take it upon themselves, with their own ideas, to eliminate themselves by evading reproduction. Nor are there meticulous opponents who combat it in the name of divine blindness and the charming impulsiveness of instinct, to which we must surrender ourselves with complete abandonment of mental activity.

Defense. Instead of entertaining ourselves in refuting this argument against it, we are going to expose the reasons that our concept supports neo-Malthusianism.

From the point of view of biological morality, the only one worthy of respect at this point, everything that contributes to the well-being and happiness of the individual is good (the well-being and happiness of the community is very difficult to interpret), and everything that causes misfortune or human pain is bad. Therefore, a large family is immoral, because it involves the slavery of the mother, the destruction of her organism, the lack of care for her children, and even their defective or bad upbringing. The lower the economic position of the mother,

the mission to the disinherited. In order for the former to rest or reproduce sparingly, the latter must work and reproduce without limitation.

Realization. Once the idea is accepted, its importance and goodness recognized, all that remains is to overcome the obstacle of the effectiveness of the procedures that allow its realization. Medicine needs to have resources that are easy and safe to use, to avoid the transmission of diseases and the serious risk of many pregnancies and births and lactations. Eugenics also requires an effective resource to avoid the generation of defectives and abnormals. The proletariat, which has it as an individual tactic of struggle to temper its economic poverty and rise up against the State, needs to have means that are affordable because of their cheapness and simplicity. Women need the guarantee of control if they are to shine in the cerebral exaltation of super-maternity.

Given their clandestinity, forced from more to less in all nations, contraceptive remedies have not yet reached the perfection that would be desirable, but nevertheless they already offer guarantees of harmlessness and safety, which it is hoped will continue to increase and progressively improve.

This motherhood that wants to extend beyond breastfeeding, surrounding the child's childhood with tenderness and pampering, is the one that needs and demands control over the generative act: the power to avoid unwanted conception.

But motherhood also has its prose, its lamentable aspects, which neither poets nor moralists usually manage to see. There is the mother who is dry of affectivity, irascible and without tenderness; even the mother brutalized by poverty or alcoholism. And there is, with her muted tones of disappointment and disgust, the mother who is a mother in spite of herself, through ignorance or through lack of forethought; who receives the child with contained animosity, which does not usually disappear even through the gentle emotional incitements that breastfeeding supposes.

Nothing is gained by accusing these mothers of being outcasts and forcing them to have a love that they do not feel. If no virtue is necessarily good, the virtue of motherhood can only bring havoc.

Women have been educated in this reproductive slavery. By becoming a mother, women renounced the enjoyment of life and devoted themselves fully to the mission of giving birth. Thus the slave-owning husband was freer to go alone and even had more pretexts to replace the woman. The woman placed her hope of happiness in the next life, her hope of enjoying this one having been dashed, and became the nucleus of religiosity in the home. The influence of religion must be seen in this, as in all social aspects, since it has exercised its domination for many centuries. Of the emancipatory awakening of women from their condition as pariahs, reproductive, as of the emancipatory awakening of the worker from his economic servitude, no enemy is more jealous or has less apparent foundation than religion.

The privileged sing the praises of work, but they have placed its weight on the proletariat. In the same way they sing the virtues of motherhood, but they take care to entrust

the more immoral it is. It is moral, on the other hand, to limit oneself to having only the children that can be well raised and educated.

The quality of highest zoological rank, the most worthy of human superiority, is the control over one's own actions, and, above all, the control over one's instincts. To be the master of the reproductive act, instead of a slave to it, is a noble aspiration and very worthy of the human. Logical consequence of his desire for progress and perfection. Taking advantage of the best conditions for reproduction, avoiding the risk of perpetuating oneself when conditions are not favorable, knowing how to avoid having a sick child, limiting reproduction to the possibilities and aspirations of the individual, are elementary desires that the individual must conquer. If there is no act of greater gravity and transcendence than reproduction, none should deserve more serious meditation than it.

But there is more. Man has a physiological need, on whose normal fulfillment depends the balance of sexuality and often that of the spirit. The reproductive act depends on him, but it is not in accordance with his needs. That is to say, not every time that the need to fulfill the imperative of the sexual instinct is felt, the source — the most generous of sensory pleasure — is felt nor can the reproductive net be satisfied at the same time. Then, if they disagree, and there are times, many times!, in which the sexual act cannot be reproductive, but it must be ensured that it is not, contraceptive practices are already justified. The modern spirit has already affirmed the right to non-reproductive intercourse, the right to enjoy love for love itself.

Then, there are concrete reasons, of cold reason, such as those of a medical order and eugenics. Cases of women who cannot procreate due to illness or poor organic conformation. Cases of individuals who should not reproduce because they suffer from hereditary diseases, or transmissible morbid defects. The list is long and many of them are easily appreciated

by the doctor, who is obliged to provide the necessary details. As there are still many doctors bound by prejudice, if not incapacitated, by their ignorance on the subject, it is often the case that the doctor relies on everything to “divine will”, and this usually allows the death of the mother in an impossible birth and the conception of beings condemned to suffering and to serve as a painful burden to the community.

Genesis. We cannot omit the suggestion that gives the system its name. Malthus, an English Protestant pastor, demonstrated in masterful and documented books that are still relevant today, the disagreement that exists between the increase in population and that of food. While the former progresses in geometric progression (1, 2, 4, 8, etc.), food does so in arithmetic progression (1, 2, 3, etc.), from which it follows that there will come a day when food will be insufficient to sustain the population of the globe. The increase in population is stopped by epidemics and wars, which are all the more propitious the greater the excess of population. The production of the land is increased by intensive cultivation, but it has a limit, both in the productivity of the soil and in the conditions that food must meet so that it does not harm man’s health. Today we can already see the serious disadvantage of intensive farming and the use of chemical fertilizers, due to the mineral deficiency in food, which causes various diseases. To avoid this conflict between overpopulation and insufficient food, Malthus advised restricting reproduction, without advising any other procedure than chastity. Although the problem is still posed today in the universal terms in which Malthus wanted it, this conflict exists with different nuances in different nations and because of their special economic system. Everyone knows that the number of unemployed workers increases day by day. Thus, capitalist society proclaims the surplus of mouths, and the worker with a large family sees that the salary is manifestly insufficient to provide for the indispensable food.

In this way a new conception of Malthus’s idea was born, neo-Malthusianism, affirming the right of the worker to improve his economic position and the right of the proletariat not to increase the number of unemployed. And this system, which has been enriched by the contribution of arguments and scientific facts, has proclaimed the legitimacy of contraceptive procedures as the most effective remedy to limit births.

The two forms of motherhood. But from no point of view is neo-Malthusianism more defensible than from that of conscious motherhood. The right of the mother to be fully a mother and to stop being one. The emancipation of women from the slavery of their sex: incessant giving birth.

When poets and moralists sing the praises of motherhood, it would be useful to know what kind of motherhood they are referring to: whether it is the kind of motherhood that bears and brings up children with the unconsciousness of an animal, which is measured more by number than by class, or whether it is the kind of motherhood that conceives them in the mind rather than in the womb and devotes oneself to their education and cultivation with the fervour and enthusiasm of a supreme ideal. The latter is revealed in the select quality of the only child, or at most, of the model couple. If they refer to the former, the praises can, with equal or greater justice, be directed to any animal. Insects are often models of this kind. Rats and rabbits would also deserve all kinds of praise. But if they refer to motherhood of a human rank, spiritual as well as physical, and transcending beyond nursing and even childhood, they must necessarily be on our side. Because of its intensity and the absorption it implies, it cannot be given too much. A new child forces one to neglect and sometimes abandon the previous ones. The mother who is a mother of many cannot, even if she wants to, fully exercise her maternal concern for her children, watch over their sleep, monitor their health, take care of their first and fundamental education.