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The Seed of a Good Life: Why Societies Should Support Parents

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Abstract

Most parents freely choose to have children, and do so with full knowledge of the significant costs involved. Yet, many societies choose to support parents through schemes such as parental subsidies, paid parental leave and taxpayer-funded education. The desire to have children is essentially an expensive taste of the kind societies usually do not support. In spite of this, I will argue, societies have good reasons to support parents. Such support cannot be justified based on the future economic value of children, or on a duty to procreate carried out by parents on behalf of non-parents. Instead, societies should support parents in their efforts to procreate and raise their children because the good lives that children may go on to live are intrinsically valuable. We recognise this value in our own lives, and it makes us wish that others might live such lives too. Parents provide their children with an opportunity to live a good life. This opportunity is valuable because it is a prerequisite for a good life. Because of the intrinsic value of a good life, I will argue, there is a moral need to bring about more of them. Societies are not justified in forcing people into reproduction or parenting because of the significance of the infringement of individual autonomy that this would entail. Instead, they should encourage reproduction and childrearing by supporting parents with measures such as parental subsidies. This can only be done, however, when all already existing people have the resources necessary to live a good life.

Introduction

Today, most developed countries support parents in their decision to have children. Many countries provide free schooling and childcare, and they may also support parents directly through monetary contributions. Often, this support is not means-tested at all; education and childcare, in particular, tend to be universally provided at the expense of the taxpayer, and some countries provide a universal child benefit too. Around half of OECD countries do not means test their main family benefit (OECD, n.d.). In addition, universally provided paid parental leave is becoming more common. The United States is now the only OECD country that does not have a statutory entitlement to paid leave for either parent (OECD, n.d.).

Many of these policies are highly popular; raising a child is widely seen as an activity that ought to be supported. This may seem a bit strange. After all, most parents freely choose to have children, with full knowledge of the costs involved. In essence, parents make an expensive choice. If we operate with an ambition-sensitive conception of distributive justice, such as that of luck egalitarianism, then the desire to have children appears to be a clear example of an expensive taste of the kind that the state should not pay for. I will seek to explain why, in spite of this, societies are right to support parents.

There are good reasons of equality and justice to support some parents. For example, there might be a standard of treatment that all children are entitled to as a matter of justice that some parents cannot provide without support. It may also be the case that, as Paul Bou-Habib (2013) argues, means-tested parental subsidies would be chosen in a hypothetical insurance market, enabling all who want to do so to become parents regardless of their levels of marketable talent. There may also be good reasons of gender equality to provide some forms of support for parents. The most obvious example is that of paid parental leave, which can have the effect of enabling women to take part in the workforce and to build careers, while also

leading to a more equitable distribution of care work between parents. In all these scenarios, means-tested free education and financial support, or support targeted at mothers or fathers, may be called for. I will not consider these justifications for support, but instead look at why all parents should be supported qua parents. Indeed, I will argue that there are no good reasons of distributive justice for society to pay for the costs parents incur as parents (as opposed to as women, or as people with less valuable endowments of talent and resources). In any case, much of the non-means tested support currently given to parents cannot be straightforwardly justified with reference to the rights of children or to gender equality.

Various attempts have been made to justify state support for parents qua parents. These, generally, justify such support with reference to the economic value that children go on to provide once they are adults, some kind of duty to procreate, or a duty to ensure humanity does not die out. These suffer from a range of issues but the most significant one, I will argue, is that they conceive of the value of children in the wrong way. We are happy to see more children being born and raised, and happy to support such activity, but not because these children might pay our pension in the future or because we feel guilty for not having children ourselves. Instead, we are happy because the child, once born and raised well, is in a position to live a good life; this, in turn, is something that is intrinsically good. I will argue that there is a moral need to create more of this good, and that subsidising the having and raising of children is the best way for societies to do this.

First, in section I, I consider existing accounts of why societies should pay for the costs parents incur when having children. I consider fair play accounts based on the future economic value of children, and accounts of procreative duties. These accounts, I argue, make dubious empirical assumptions about children's status as public goods rather than public bads, do not apply as long as humanity is not threatened by imminent extinction, or mistake the motives

people have for having children. Above all, however, all these accounts fail to account for the value of the life the child is able to lead once it has been raised well.

Section II is about this value. I argue that the opportunity to live a good life, that children can get once born and raised well, is instrumentally good because it is a prerequisite for a good life, which has intrinsic value. This value is reflected in our reactions to children being born. Because of the value of good lives there is a moral need to bring about more of these opportunities. Parents are, generally, the people who are in a position to do so. Section III argues that a duty on people to become parents and therefore bring about more of this good cannot be justified, as it would entail unacceptable violations of individual autonomy. Instead, the best thing societies can do is to create favourable circumstances for having and rearing children, including through financial support.

Section IV, finally, explores the limits of my argument. State support for parents cannot be justified, I argue, when the creation of a new life would entail an existing life ceasing to be a good life. In such a situation, which will occur in polities where population levels are unsustainable and resources scarce, parental subsidies would be counterproductive and not create any more of the good they are meant to promote. I go on to consider, more widely, the consequences of this argument in a world of environmental crisis and an unevenly distributed population. Throughout, I will refer to both biological and adoptive parents simply as "parents". I assume they both make an important contribution to enabling children to go on to live good lives, and that this contribution carries a high cost of both autonomy and money.

I – Duties, fair play, and the economic value of children

Parents, more often than not, voluntarily choose to have children. This is particularly true in countries with widely available reproductive health services, legal and safe abortion, and widely available and reliable contraception. Parents make these choices well aware of the costs associated with them; they know they will have to dedicate much of their time and energy to raising and taking care of their child, and that these efforts cost a lot of money. They may also reasonably expect to spend a great amount of resources on the education of their child.

The desire to have a child is the epitome of an expensive taste. As Eric Rakowski puts it, "babies are not brought by storks whose whims are beyond our control. Specific individuals are responsible for their existence." (Rakowski, 1991, p. 153) This, to him, means that parental subsidies are unjust. "With what right can two people force all the rest, through deliberate behavior rather than bad brute luck, to settle for less than their fair shares after resources have been divided justly?" (Rakowski, 1991, p. 153) Parents have caused the cost of raising children to exist – why should others then pay it? Compensating parents for the costs they incur seems unjust because doing so means we allow people not to face the consequences of their choices. For resource egalitarians, parental subsidies fail the envy test; after the final allocation of resources, non-parents will prefer the resource bundle given to parents. To remain envy-free, the distribution of resources must be choice-sensitive and parents must bear the cost of their choice to have children. (Bou-Habib, 2013, p. 203).

This problem is worsened because all children have basic rights such as those to shelter, food, and education. It falls to non-parents to ensure these needs are met in case parents are unable to ensure they are. Under non-ideal circumstances much of this support will be justified both by considerations of equality of opportunity and because of the need for the basic needs

of children born to poor parents to be met. Additionally, assistance to families may be motivated by gender equality, as a way of ensuring women are not left unfairly worse off because they do most care work (Olsaretti, 2013, p. 226). As such, some of the costs of children are socialised even without any support for parents qua parents. This becomes an issue of justice between parents and non-parents, who are forced to bear the cost of others' expensive choices. In a welfare state this injustice is worsened as more of the costs of children are automatically socialised. This apparent injustice is further worsened by the fact that children generate costs beyond those directly related to their upbringing and care. Serena Olsaretti (2013, p. 229) identifies two types of cost caused by children: the cost of care and the cost of additional adults. The former normally comprises the time and money spent by parents on caring for their child, while the latter refers to the share of natural resources and the fruits of social cooperation that the child is entitled to. Non-parents contribute to at least the cost of additional adults unless parents are taxed at a higher rate and thereby forced to bear the full cost of their choice.

It is in this context that subsidies to parents must be justified. There are two main options, which I will follow Patrick Tomlin (2015, p. 663) in calling "parents pay" and "society pays". The first position holds that parents should be responsible for the costs generated by their choice to have a child, whereas the latter holds that non-parents are liable for at least some of the costs, and should support the efforts of parents though schemes such as parental subsidies, paid parental leave and taxpayer-funded education. As discussed in the introduction, the society pays view is widely and implicitly accepted. Complete adherence to the parents pay view would require that parents are taxed at a higher rate than non-parents and that schools, for example, are funded entirely by parents – these are unlikely to be a viable policy proposals. I will defend the society pays view. First, however, I will seek to show that existing attempts to do so fail. I will begin by considering arguments from fair play that are based on the economic

contributions children go on to make, before moving on to arguments from a duty to procreate. I am concerned only with the morally required costs of raising children – those which are required to meet the just claims of children. I assume, with Olsaretti (2018, p. 424), that costs that are not morally required, such as the cost of any luxuries parents choose to give their children, should be paid for by parents.

I.1 – Positive externalities and fair play

The most common arguments for the society pays view are arguments from fair play (Olsaretti, 2013, p. 228). In essence, they hold that because non-parents receive some kind of benefit from children that are brought up by parents, they should contribute to the cost of producing that benefit. This may be right if the activities of parents produce positive externalities – effects that non-parents benefit from even if they do not contribute. Population growth may, for example, facilitate economies of scale that benefit everyone (Casal & Williams, 2004, p. 154). More commonly, the focus is on children as an economic asset, since they will become the workforce of the future (Olsaretti, 2013, p. 233). Without the efforts of parents there would be no one around to pay the pensions of non-parents as they age, or to maintain the key functions of the economy. Children, on this view, are a public good that both parents and non-parents benefit from, and their benefits are more effectively socialised than their costs (Folbre, 2008, p. 191).

This could ground a fair play obligation for non-parents to contribute to the cost. John Rawls, for example, argues that when people engage in a mutually advantageous cooperative venture according to set rules, then they are not to gain from the labour of others without doing their fair share (Rawls, 1999, p. 96). Based on this, a defender of the society pays view may argue that children create positive externalities that non-parents willingly enjoy and would be prepared to pay for if they were not receiving them for free (Casal & Williams, 2004, p. 157). Parents bear a great cost in producing these externalities but benefit from them no more than

non-parents do. As such, non-parents are engaging in morally objectionable free-riding, and the distributive shares of parents are wrongly smaller than those of non-parents. Non-parents should, therefore, contribute to the cost of raising children through mechanisms such as child benefits and paid parental leave.

There are a range of issues with this fair play argument which render it untenable. In addition to general objections to fair play obligations, such as the question of whether recipients should ever have to pay for a benefit they did not consent to receive (see Rakowski, 1991, p. 154), Paula Casal and Andrew Williams (2004, p. 159) doubt whether the principle of fair play, even if valid, can be applied to parents. After all, they argue, parents tend to have children not to help society or to ensure pensions are paid, but for their own benefit. Moreover, parents do not, on the whole, experience the activity of having and raising children as a costly one. Given this, non-parents have no obligation to contribute to the cost.

Serena Olsaretti (2013, p. 241) agrees with Casal and Williams in that for fair play obligations to be generated, the producers of the benefit must produce it intentionally, and that the producers must experience doing so as costly. Unlike Casal and Williams, however, she thinks this applies to parents, at least to an extent. Parents, Olsaretti argues, can simultaneously experience their child as not being a cost to them, on the whole, while at the same time incur great and morally important costs that could ground a fair play argument (Olsaretti, 2013, p. 242). In addition, it makes no sense to say that parents do not intend to bring about the outcome which brings external benefits – they usually intend to raise their child in a way which allows the child to eventually enter the workforce (Olsaretti, 2013, p. 245). Still, the pro-sharing argument remains in trouble. If children are public goods, then they must be both non-rivalrous and non-excludable. This, Olsaretti (2013, p. 250) argues, is not the case. The benefits provided by children are rivalrous; the monetary benefits produced by children's future participation in

society are limited, so if non-parents benefit from them the share left for parents is smaller.[1] They are also excludable, as non-parents could hypothetically be excluded from pension schemes and other schemes maintained by the children.

Regardless of whether children are public goods, what matters for the generation of fair play obligations is that parents intentionally contribute to a cooperative scheme that confers benefits upon people and that contributing to the scheme results in costs for the parents (Olsaretti, 2013, p. 247). This, Olsaretti argues, is true only in a welfare state, where institutions are intentionally structured such that the product of the parents' labour becomes beneficial to everyone through schemes such as pensions and universal healthcare (Olsaretti, 2013, p. 252). Parents intentionally contribute to this scheme, and the scheme makes it costlier for parents to have children as they have to share the benefits with others. In a welfare state, children are still not public goods, but they are socialised goods and generate obligations of fair play that justify parental subsidies. This is, prima facie, a persuasive argument, but it is worth noting that it only applies in a fairly advanced welfare state, where parents have some sense of collective endeavour.

All the arguments discussed so far are predicated on the assumption that children, on the whole, have positive externalities. This is a contentious assumption. In a world in which people in many countries (particularly, it should be noted, the most advanced welfare states) consume at an unsustainable level that is likely to lead to the depletion of important resources it is questionable at best whether non-parents in fact benefit from parents having more children. The policies European welfare states have in place to promote childrearing are straightforwardly harmful from the point of view of climate change, as they increase the

[1] It is worth noting that if these benefits were non-rivalrous, then the pro-sharing argument would be in even greater trouble. In this case, non-parents' free-riding would do no harm (as long as there is no danger of under-supply), so it would be strange to ask that they compensate for it.

population in a part of the world that continues to use up resources at an unsustainable rate (Broome, 2012, p. 169). Whether non-parents of this generation are, on balance, harmed or benefited by the presence of more children is an open question, but the case for the positive externalities of children becomes more difficult to argue the longer we go on without decisive action to reduce the environmental effects of populations in developed countries. Even if we accept that fair play arguments can apply in this situation it is not clear that non-parents, on the whole, benefit from others' children.

I.2 - Duties and value

This empirical problem could be avoided if there is a collective duty to procreate. If this is the case, then parents are fulfilling this duty on behalf of non-parents and may therefore be owed compensation. This argument does not depend on non-parents benefiting from the children in any way. Richard J. Arneson (2014, pp. 13-15), for example, argues that it is not morally permissible for humans to decline to reproduce as long as the earth can sustain more good lives. This engenders a collective duty to multiply. Since parents are fulfilling this duty on behalf of non-parents, non-parents have a duty to support them, even if reproduction has negative externalities. Anca Gheaus (2015, pp. 93-94), meanwhile, argues that a duty to procreate could arise from the need to prevent the frustration of basic needs that would occur to the last generation were humanity to die out.

A potential duty to procreate runs into serious problems with individual autonomy, which I discuss in section III. Even if these could be avoided, however, it is worth noting that Gheaus' view, for example, can support parental subsidies only if there is an imminent danger that humanity might die out. Such a danger is not now imminent, and if it became so this would probably not be because of a lack of willing procreators. As such, this argument cannot support the society pays view in our present world. Arneson, too, suggests that what is impermissible

is not merely to decline to reproduce, but to "let the human race die out." (Arneson, 2014, p. 13) If this is the case, it is not clear that parents can demand support when non-parents' failure to reproduce does not create a threat of extinction. In addition, it is worth questioning the mechanism by which a failure by non-parents to carry out a collective duty voluntarily means they should support parents. A more straightforward approach than monetary compensation, surely, would be to force those who can to carry out this duty, preventing the moral failure of non-parents from occurring in the first place. This option, of course, is highly problematic, as I will discuss later. It should already be clear, however, that a duty to procreate is unlikely to be able to justify the society pays view, at least as long as there is no danger of extinction.

Most accounts discussed in this section share one fundamental flaw, in addition to the ones I have already identified. They focus on the economic consequences of children or of their absence, and not on the non-economic value of children. They do so in an effort to justify parental subsidies as a matter of distributive justice, and fail to do so. Approaching this question in this way is a serious mistake. We react joyfully to the news of a child being born, and this is certainly not because we expect that child to go on to pay our pension in the future, or because we fear humanity might be in danger of extinction. When considering why societies support parents and why non-parents should contribute to the cost of parenting we need to consider the real reasons why it is desirable for us that others should have children. The answer, I suggest, is in the value of a good life.

II – The opportunity to live a good life

This section, then, will explore the value that is created when children are born and raised. I propose that good lives are an intrinsic good. By extension, the opportunity to live a good life is an important instrumental good because it enables good lives to be lived. Parents create such opportunities when they procreate, and when they adopt and raise children. To see this, I will begin by exploring why it is that people have children, and why we might want others to have them. After this I will discuss the nature of the good that is found in a good life, and the role of parents in bringing good lives about.

It is wrong to think of children primarily as economic goods, which provide a return as they grow up and become taxpayers. Not only is this not the primary value in children, it is also not a reason that anyone would provide when asked why they choose to have children or why they are happy to see other people have them. Parents do not have children for the benefit of non-parents, and non-parents do not expect them to. Still, choosing to have a child is not an entirely self-interested business. It is, for example, not analogous to the choice of getting a pet. People tend to get pets for largely self-interested reasons, for example as a personal project or to provide companionship. Children, of course, do also provide companionship, but it is implausible to claim that people choose to procreate for their own benefit. For one thing, it is impossible for parents to predict how much companionship, joy, economic and social support their child, who is (or at least becomes) an independent moral agent will go on to provide. If parents view children as an investment into their own future welfare, then it is a highly uncertain one. In addition, as Christine Overall (2018, p. 201) points out, it is wrong, "immature or even egotistical" for parents to have children only with reference to benefits that accrue to people other than the child. Parents who reason like this may be using the child merely as a means to their own projects. This may be permissible in the case of a pet, but certainly not in the case of a child.

Nancy Folbre (2001, p. 109) associates the view that children are there only to provide fulfilment and companionship to their parents, as if they were pets, with those who argue for the view that parents should pay for their children. It leads to a position in which "because parents don't conceive and rear children in order for them to become future workers and taxpayers, most of their efforts are taken for granted" (Folbre, 2014, p. 4). This is a situation we must avoid; children may not be public goods in the sense used by economists, but the fact that children are not pets and that procreative decisions also affect others (especially the child) means we still have good reasons to salvage the society pays view. Parents still provide some societal value, but this is not a straightforward economic one. This value can, however, provide a way out of the dilemma of expensive tastes. Ronald Dworkin recognises that egalitarian market processes, which normally demand that people pay for their expensive tastes, can be intervened in out of a concern with the achievement of intrinsically valuable impersonal goods (Dworkin, 1993, p. 154). If sculpture, for instance, provides some intrinsic good to society, then sculptors may be supported.

Does procreation and childrearing provide such an intrinsic, non-personal good? Folbre (2001, p. 50) suggests that parents who raise children generate good spirit in the community. This is plausible, but is this good spirit because of some intrinsic value in what parents do? I suggest that it is. When we hear of the birth of a child we react with joy, and this is true even if we do not expect to share in any of the joys of parenthood, or to benefit financially. It is desirable for us that others should have children because we recognise something of value in that activity. This insight manifests itself in a range of ways. One is that the very existence of children, even if they are unknown to us, can make us happy; as Richard J. Arneson (2014, p. 15) puts it, "[w]atching children frolic is fun". On a less superficial level, witnessing the creation of new life brings us joy and hope particularly in dark times, such as those of widespread disease or war.

II.1 - The intrinsic good of a good life

These reactions, I argue, are a consequence of the value we see in a good life. A good life, whatever it contains, must be intrinsically valuable. It is difficult to present an argument for why anything is of intrinsic value, but a good life seems an excellent candidate, because it is the lynchpin around which conceptions of the good, all our projects and our desires revolve. The good lives of others, moreover, are important to us in a way that does not appear to be instrumental. As discussed above, a new birth and the opportunity for a new, good life it brings is valuable to us even if it, in itself, does not serve any interests we have. Hannah Arendt thinks new births have this value because only they can "bestow upon human affairs faith and hope" because of "the action [children] are capable of by virtue of being born." (Arendt, 1958, p. 247) To Derek Parfit, new people are important because they may provide "reasons to be glad that the Universe exists." (Parfit, 2017, p. 437) Children represent something very important; they embody the prospect of more good lives being lived, a prospect that is clearly attractive. We find this prospect attractive because we ourselves live good lives, and recognise that this is valuable. These good lives are an impersonal good. Even if children who do not exist cannot be harmed by not being brought into existence, it is good that they are brought into existence and go on to live good lives. Even if it is the case that the child is neither harmed not benefited by being brought into existence we can still maintain that an impersonal good is created as the child is born and brought up.

Parents cannot create good lives or even ensure that they come about. They can, however, create opportunities for children to go on to live good lives. When parents procreate or adopt and then go on to raise their child well they fulfil a necessary but not sufficient condition for their child to live a good life. A great many other factors, including state policy, the availability of resources, brute luck and the traits the child is born with impact whether this, in fact, produces another good life. Still, without the opportunity to live a good life no one will

go on to live one. When a child is born and raised we are happy for the child, because it now has the opportunity to live a good life.

I am not here arguing that children are instrumentally valuable because they give us hope or make us happy. I think this is probably the case, but I am not sure this value can support the society pays view. Instead, I think the way children make us happy is often a symptom of the intrinsic value we recognise in a good life. Harry Brighouse and Adam Swift (2018, p. 400) argue that the carefree experience of childhood is intrinsically valuable. This, too, is not what I argue. On my view, there is not necessarily anything intrinsically valuable about children or about their experiences. Instead, what is valuable is the good life a child may go on to live throughout their lifetime.

A good life can take a great number of forms. Children, as they grow up, will develop a range of different conceptions of the good, and try to live their lives accordingly. As a consequence, any two good lives are likely to look very different from each other. Still, there are some things, such as sustenance and a level of safety, that are basic requirements for a good life. I will discuss some consequences of this in the final section. In addition to this, however, people need a capacity for autonomous reflection in order to be able to develop a conception of the good, and to live accordingly. Providing this is expensive, and much of the cost falls on parents.

II.2 - Parents are creators of good

There are two main prerequisites for a good life. First, in order to live a good life, a person must be born. Second, that person must be raised well. This includes, at least, sufficient sustenance and safety for the child to grow into a reasonably healthy adult. It also must include a level of basic education that does not need to be formal but must allow the child to become a social creature who relates to others in mutually beneficial ways, and allow the child to form

and pursue a conception of the good. The first prerequisite is met when the biological parents of the child procreate, and the second when the child is raised, whether by biological or adoptive parents or in some other institution. Most commonly, this is done by parents, whether adoptive or biological. Only if a child is raised well can procreation lead to the creation of a good life.

Both of these activities, procreating and raising a child, are costly. The costs are not merely financial; indeed, we should be more concerned with the autonomy costs that parents must pay in order to raise their children well. Pregnancy, even if voluntary, greatly restricts the freedom of women; childrearing responsibilities, especially if they are evenly shared, restrict the autonomy of both parents in addition to being expensive. If children are an expensive taste and do not warrant societal support, then they are likely to quite often be a prohibitively expensive one. This means that many people who could be parents will choose not to procreate or, worse, procreate but find themselves unable to raise their child well. As a consequence of this, fewer opportunities to live good lives will come about. Given the great intrinsic value there is in such lives, societies are justified in intervening in order to make sure more good lives come about. In the next section I discuss what this intervention must look like.

III – Societal support for the good

In the previous section I argued that good lives are intrinsically valuable. Parents make such lives possible by providing children with the opportunity to live a good life. Procreation and parenting are costly activities, which means that, without support, fewer good lives come about than otherwise would. This is not an ideal situation, because more of this good could be created. People instinctively recognise the value of a good life, and this gives us reasons to ensure that more such lives are brought about. Dworkin appears to think that art should be supported because otherwise not enough people will make the expensive choice of becoming an artist (Casal & Williams, 2004, p. 162). The concern here is similar; if there is no intervention by wider society, then we are likely to, as a society, produce fewer good lives that we would like to see. Given that this is an impersonal good and not merely a good for parents or children, efforts to bring more of it about can involve both parents and non-parents. In this section, I explore how society should try to ensure more of this good is produced.

Children are different from pieces of art; we are unlikely to find ourselves in a situation in which no one procreates or raises their children well, even in the absence of societal support. We will probably not run out of good lives entirely, and if we do it will not be because people decline to procreate. As discussed in section I, Anca Gheaus considers the possibility of a duty to procreate arising from the potential future frustration of basic needs that would occur to the last generation if humanity were to die out (Gheaus, 2015, p. 93). The last generation would likely suffer physically as they age due to a lack of resources as well as mentally, due to despair over the lack of a future for humanity (Gheaus, 2015, p. 95). Gheaus (2015, p. 97) uses this argument to justify societal support for parents in situations where there otherwise would be a risk of humanity dying out. Richard J. Arneson, similarly, argues that "it is not morally permissible for existing people to decline to reproduce and let the human race die out." (Arneson, 2014, p. 13) This kind of argument, however, does not support parental subsidies in

our present world, in which humanity is not threatened by extinction due to a lack of procreation. From Gheaus' point of view, humans today are having enough children (Gheaus, 2015, p. 102). Similarly, if people are already producing a sufficient amount of good lives, then there is no case for forcing or encouraging anyone to produce more. It is not clear, however, that there is such a thing as "enough" or "too many" good lives. The existence of more good lives does not make existing good lives less valuable. As such, producing more of them should, other things remaining equal, produce more value. The making of new good lives should only be stopped when it becomes counterproductive, that is when adding an additional good life means an existing life ceases to be good. This argument, of course, only applies if efforts to encourage the production of more good lives do not come into conflict with any other values.

III.1 - Autonomy and duties of goodness and justice

In practice efforts to encourage procreation are controversial and often difficult to justify precisely because they come into conflict with other values and with individual rights. Consider a duty to procreate. If there is a need to bring about a high number of good lives because they are of intrinsic value, then it may be the case that we all have a collective duty to bring about a state of affairs with many children. If this is an enforceable duty, then there are two ways in which it could be met. First, it may be that, with societal support, enough people will be willing to be parents, and the optimal number of good lives are brought about. In this case, the duty to procreate is carried out by parents on behalf of non-parents, who may owe these parents support as a matter of fair play. Second, it may be that even with societal support not enough people will voluntarily choose to procreate. An enforceable duty to do so would provide us with a means to force them to procreate anyway, thereby ensuring that, in any case, we produce as many good lives as we can.

This is an unacceptable proposal. Forcing people to procreate and to raise children involves serious infringements of their autonomy. As long as pregnancy is necessary for procreation women, in particular, would have their agency undermined in a way that cannot be justified when weighed against the achievement of an impersonal good. Even if procreation were decoupled from the human body, raising a child is a profound commitment, and being forced into it would radically alter the lives and undermine the agency of parents. This worry applies to all duties to procreate, even limited ones. If, for example, people decline to reproduce so that extinction becomes a real possibility, then they, according to Arneson (2014, p. 14), are acting in a way that is not morally permissible. It still seems quite wrong to force them to procreate – indeed, it is difficult to conceive how any value gained from an enforceable duty to procreate could outweigh the violation of individual rights and bodily autonomy it entails. The value of individual autonomy, as Christine Overall (2012, p. 58) argues, gives us good reasons to think we might all have a right not to procreate. Further, grounding a duty to procreate in an impersonal good like this risks treating parents merely as a means to an end (Overall, 2012, p. 70). Ultimately, it is not right to demand that individuals always create as much good as they possibly can. As Overall puts it, "[if] we were constantly trying to create the largest possible amount of good, we would be forced to lead very different lives, sacrificing ourselves almost to the point of collapse and ignoring many of our basic human rights." (Overall, 2012, p. 74)

The issue here is that any duty to bring about good lives can only ever be a duty of goodness. John Broome (2012, pp. 52-53), defines duties of goodness as duties to improve the world, or to bring about particular states of affairs. Any duty to bring about more good lives must be of this kind. Duties of justice, on the other hand, are owed to particular people. If you fail to carry out a duty of justice you are doing an injustice to a particular person, and have violated a right of that person. There is no one whose rights are infringed if a person chooses

not to reproduce – as Overall (2018, p. 195) argues, it is implausible to say a duty to reproduce is owed to a potential child who does not exist and will not exist unless the duty is carried out. The value of a good life, in addition, is an impersonal one – this good is not lost to a particular person when people decline to reproduce. To clarify, particular people may suffer because of a lack of reproduction, but this is not because not enough potential good lives are created – it may instead be, for example, because not enough future workers are born for pensions to be paid in a generation's time. I do not argue that this kind of potential injustice, if it is one, could ground a duty to procreate or even parental subsidies. One reason why such an argument is difficult to make is that it treats children, wrongly, as a means for parents to fulfil duties owed to others. This argument also ignores the most important value children have, and the reasons why people really have children, as I have argued above. I also do not argue that non-parents should support parents financially because parents have a claim of justice against non-parents. Such an argument runs into the issues faced by arguments from fair play, as discussed in section I.

Duties of justice generally take priority over duties of goodness. As Broome (2012, p. 53) puts the underlying intuition, "[m]orality does not normally permit you to act unjustly even for the sake of the greater good." Because of the significance of the autonomy violation that coercing parents entails, this lexical view of justice over goodness must apply to the question at hand. The right not to reproduce and not to raise children takes priority over any potential duty of goodness to do so. It would be wrong to violate people's right not to have or raise children in order to bring about more good lives. Doing so would also be counterproductive; we would be creating more opportunities for good lives by threatening to remove one prerequisite of a good life, autonomy, in existing ones. As such, there is no enforceable duty to procreate, and no such duty can be used as a means to promote the impersonal good I am interested in. Still, the fact that we should not force people to procreate or to raise children does

not mean we need to give up on the idea of having more good lives in the future. We must, however, look for strategies that are not coercive or at least do not violate the basic rights of would-be parents.

III.2 - Favourable circumstances for goodness

Creating more opportunities for good lives to be lived remains important. Living good lives ourselves makes us recognise their immense value and wish that more of them were lived. As such, societies have good reasons to try to ensure that more people choose to procreate and raise children. This cannot be done by forcing people to do so, or indeed by appealing to a moral duty to procreate. There can be no such duty, for it is not right that we sacrifice our bodily autonomy and a large part of our life plans for this kind of impersonal good. In her argument against a duty to reproduce Christine Overall summarises the dilemma we find ourselves in:

> If the work of procreation and rearing were the product of God's effortless magic, then the absence of good (happy people) would be bad, and we might readily assent to the creation of entire planetfuls of happy people. In the real world, however, to assume that a galaxy of happy people must be created is to put unconscionable requirements on women. (Overall, 2012, p. 194)

It is indeed the case that, if we could create many more good lives simply by lifting a finger, then we ought to do so. In reality, however, the need to create this good comes into conflict with the realities and the rights of those who are expected to perform the work needed to bring about opportunities for good lives. Parental efforts represent a profound moral and financial commitment; without support, many people will find themselves unwilling or unable to become parents. At the same time, they should not be forced to be parents.

The best possible solution to this problem is to create favourable circumstances for procreation and childrearing. This makes these activities more affordable and attractive and will lead to more opportunities for good lives. This may include measures ranging from support for parents to changes in society which make it likelier for people to go on and live good lives once they have the opportunity to do so. The former kind of policies, such as parental subsidies, free day-care and education and paid parental leave can, as Anca Gheaus (2015, p. 98) points out, not only make more people willing to become parents, but also increase the autonomy of those who would have become parents anyway. Procreative decisions are significantly impacted by the material context; how willing women are to have children depends on a variety of features of the healthcare system as well as on the social policies in place. Parents are also more likely to raise their children successfully, and to embark on the project of doing so, when there is societal support available. The burdens incurred in the making of good lives can be better shared, which may lead to more good lives but also to a more just society. Policies of the second kind, aimed at making opportunities for good lives more likely to turn into good lives, simply make the future world a better place, where more of those people who live can do so well.

Parental subsidies very directly make childrearing easier and reduce the autonomy costs paid by parents. If society pays the economic costs involved in raising children, then more people will be able to make this choice. This is the case, too, if the autonomy costs involved in having a child are reduced through the provision of care and publicly funded education. Parents should receive this support, because without it they produce an insufficient amount of an intrinsically valuable good. Parents should not be subsidised because they are owed subsidies as a matter of distributive justice, but because subsidies are needed to ensure that more good lives come about. Subsidies support those who make a valuable choice. Because of this, parental subsidies are not neutral between the different life choices people might make – they

treat people who choose to have children more favourably than others. This non-neutrality is justified because of the intrinsic value produced by the choice to have and raise children.

IV – The limits of state support

So far, I have focused on only one way the state can bring about more of the intrinsic good of good lives – through encouraging reproduction and childrearing. This, however, is not the only way we can ensure that there are more people living good lives. This section is about how other ways to produce more good lives come into conflict with the promotion of childrearing, and how such conflicts might be resolved.

The most straightforward way to bring about more good lives is to ensure that more existing opportunities for good lives translate into good lives. This is possible as long as there are people who, after being born and raised well, still do not go on to live good lives. I am not here going to speculate around how common this is, or indeed define a precise threshold for what counts as a good life, but it is fair to assume that such people exist around the world. Because they need their share of resources, having more children in a society may also make existing lives less likely to be good. It is intuitive, I think, to give priority to improving these existing lives ahead of creating new opportunities through childrearing, especially given that these new opportunities may not turn into good lives anyway.

Given this, then, societies face a new dilemma. They should prioritise spending resources on those who do not live good lives, ahead of measures such as parental subsidies. At the same time, there is no reason why a society could not do both. Trying to improve people's lives is, beyond a point, a highly uncertain business. Of course, a society should as a priority ensure that all its members have access to food and shelter, healthcare and some opportunities; without these, living a good life becomes much more difficult. Beyond this, however, there is much less a government can control. Resources and wealth alone do not make

a good life, and other potentially effective measures, such as cultural change and societal restructuring, do not come into direct conflict with the provision of resources to parents. As such, once the material prerequisites for a good life are available to all in a polity, there is no reason why the state should not shift its focus towards encouraging the production of more opportunities for good lives.

This question becomes more difficult if we adopt a cosmopolitan outlook, and assume that it is of equal concern that good lives be lived outside of our state as inside it. In this case, a wealthier nation cannot be satisfied when it is simultaneously putting in place policies within the nation to make existing lives better and to encourage the production of new ones. From such a cosmopolitan point of view, it cannot be right that a society invests resources into encouraging the production of new children, who may go on to live good lives but will certainly demand resources, while existing people abroad do not lead good lives for want of resources. To be justified, then, policies that encourage childrearing must be coupled with policies that not only ensure good lives can be lived domestically, but abroad too. This is likely to include, at least, much more extensive foreign aid than wealthy countries provide today. A nationalist, of course, does not face this problem, and indeed states today do not act on the principle that improving lives abroad is as important as improving them domestically. If societies think this is right, then they will find it easier to justify parental subsidies.

IV.1 – Overpopulation, environmental degradation, and scarce resources

Throughout my argument I have assumed that since good lives are of inherent value, it is better to have more rather than fewer of them. If this is not true, then my argument does not justify the society pays view. My view is not self-evidently true, as the fact that something is intrinsically valuable does not automatically entail that there should be more of it (Overall, 2012, p. 196). Indeed, John Broome (2012, pp. 171-173) thinks most people intuitively disagree

with this kind of view. Intuitively, Broome says, most people are neutral about the amount of people in the world, unless those people live exceptionally good or bad lives. Broome argues this intuition is wrong because it cannot fit into any coherent theory of goodness. I am not sure, more generally, whether people on reflection would hold on to this intuition in the specific case of having more good lives. Consider two worlds: one with two people living good lives, and another with four people living lives of the same quality as the two people were before. If we recognise that good lives are valuable to those living them, I think it would be strange to be neutral between these worlds. I do not think the situation changes if the numbers in this scenario are increased, either. This is because we recognise the value not just of having good lives, but the value of specific, additional good lives. We see value in our own lives and recognise that this value is independent of whether there already is some specific number of people living good lives. At any rate, I will assume that it is better if more people enjoy the good of a good life. I am not sure what I can do to convince those who do hold on to the intuition of neutrality. If we could create a world full of happy people without any cost, then we ought to do so.

This, as discussed in the previous section, does not mean parental subsidies should always be provided. Once their provision leads to a level of childrearing that causes overpopulation and a shortage of resources so serious that some existing lives cease to be good they should be stopped. At this point, supporting parents is counterproductive, as it leads to fewer good lives being lived. We still run the risk, however, of reaching Derek Parfit's (1984, p. 388) repugnant conclusion: that for any global population there must be some much larger imaginable population with lives barely worth living that would be better because there is more of some cumulative value. Christine Overall (2012, p. 194), for example, thinks that any view that involves a moral need to create new people with happy lives must endorse a version of the repugnant conclusion. If we replace "worth living" with "good" in Parfit's statement of the conclusion it is possible to see how this could apply to my argument. Plausibly, it may be

argued, global or national populations could increase to a level completely unfamiliar to us before existing lives cease being good as a consequence, given how minimally I have defined the good life.

I do not think my view entails any such massive increase in global population. My view may entail a less serious version of the repugnant conclusion, but we are in fact already at a point where many people struggle to live good lives. Some parts of the world suffer from overpopulation in a way that leads to shortages of resources needed for good lives, such as water and food. We know there are people who struggle to live good lives, and places where doing so is difficult. We may, perhaps, have reasons to find our existing world repugnant. My view is a lexical one; no number of new opportunities for good lives can justify making one existing life no longer good. One consequence of this, already highlighted, is that societies that support parents must also ensure that the circumstances remain such that existing lives stay good or retain the opportunity to become good. In reality, some parts of the world suffer from overpopulation and a lack of resources, and others do not. To nationalists, this is no problem. Wealthier and less populated societies can support parents domestically, and not make any relevant lives not good as a result. For those who subscribe to global principles of justice, however, this is more complicated. It cannot be right that societies support the raising of new children who will require resources while there exist people who cannot live good lives unless they also do something to help these people. Moreover, as Richard J. Arneson (2014, p. 13) argues, it may well be that our global resources are at our disposal only provisionally, and that we have a duty to ensure that a number of future generations can exist.

Given that I think we ought to conceive of justice globally, I will briefly discuss how parental subsidies can be justified in a cosmopolitan framework, even if some places suffer from overpopulation. The answer here is similar to that to the problem of weighing existing lives abroad against new ones in wealthier countries, discussed in the previous subsection.

Here, however, it may not be enough to make lives abroad better through measures such as foreign aid. The problem is that some people may live in places that cannot sustain their present populations such that all people there have an opportunity to live a good life, even with more resources sent in from abroad. For a society to be justified in supporting parents it must also provide opportunities for good lives for these existing people. This is a consequence of the lexical priority given to existing lives over new ones.

This can be done in several ways, but in effect those living in overpopulated areas must be given the opportunity to move somewhere else, where the resources necessary for a good life are more readily available. Societies cannot consistently promote the creation of more opportunities to live good lives at home while denying such opportunities to people living in overpopulated areas abroad. On the cosmopolitan view, if a society is to have parental subsidies, then it also ought to provide opportunities to immigrate from overpopulated areas, thus creating opportunities to live good lives for existing people who may find living such lives difficult. These societies should also mitigate the effect their population as well as populations abroad have on global resources through environmental policy. Through these measures they can avoid parental subsidies having the perverse effect of fewer good lives being lived rather than more, and the unjust effect of additional good lives at home at the expense of good lives abroad. As Overall (2012, p. 179) argues, planetary population capacity is a matter both of how many people there are, and of how they live. It seems unlikely that the present population of the world, or indeed a greater one, would be unsustainable if it was more evenly distributed and societies made their ways of life more sustainable. Moreover, the rate of global population growth is already decreasing rapidly and may reach zero as soon as the 2060s (Vollset et al., 2020, p. 13). If we, in order to reduce resource depletion, must choose between population controls and living more sustainably, then I think we must choose the latter. It is worth changing how we live if doing so enables more good lives to be lived. The main cost of resource depletion

is found in the number of lives that exist and in their quality. The remedy should not have the same consequences.

IV.2 An objection

Finally, I will address an interesting objection I have not yet touched upon. Parents should be supported, I have argued, because they provide their children with the opportunity to live a good life. What, then, of those parents who are unlikely to do so? I have two responses to this worry. First, it is unpractical and difficult to provide services such as monetary payments, free education and paid parental leave only to parents who are likely to do well. Moreover, it would be very difficult to determine which parents may go on to provide an opportunity to live a good life. Parents often change as their children grow up, and may separate or even find new partners to co-parent with. Some people who do not initially show much aptitude towards parenting may turn out to be more than capable. Given all this, restricting parental subsidies only to parents judged to be good would be inefficient and lead to fewer opportunities for good lives. Many societies, additionally, have separate measures for ensuring that parents who prove to be entirely unfit or negligent are no longer allowed to care for their children. There is no reason why this could not be done once it becomes obvious that a parent cannot treat their child well. Second, if support is withdrawn from parents who are judged likely to be poor parents without taking their child from them this will only make them even less likely to give their child an opportunity to live a good life. Such a policy becomes counterproductive.

Conclusion

The question I have sought to answer is why it is so desirable for us that others have children that we are willing to pay for it. This is not how we react to most expensive choices. Generally, we expect people to face the consequences of their free and informed choices, even if those consequences include significant monetary or autonomy costs. Having and raising children produces both. Parents, however, are aware of this when they choose to procreate, and decide to do so anyway. In doing so, they force wider society to carry the costs of added adult members – the demands their children will make on scarce resources.

Non-parents do not demand, and should not demand, compensation for this; instead, they should help reduce the costs borne by the parents. This, I have argued, is because they see value in the opportunity for others' children to live good lives. We all recognise this value because we ourselves live good lives and think them valuable. It is better if more good lives are lived, and this is why we are happy to hear the good news of a child being born.

This, ultimately, is the most important reason why it is good that others have children, and why we should be willing to pay for them to do so. Non-parents do not, I have argued, owe subsidies to parents as a matter of distributive justice. It is highly doubtful whether children are public goods rather than public bads in terms of their economic consequences, and there can be no enforceable duty to procreate that parents carry out on behalf of non-parents.

There is, however, a need to bring about more opportunities for good lives, and parents do this as they have and raise their children. The autonomy cost implied by forcing people to procreate or to raise children is unacceptable, but this does not mean a society cannot do anything to increase the number of good lives that are lived. Parental subsidies, free education and paid parental leave can be important tools for this, and this is why societies should support parents.

This support should only be provided when certain conditions are met. Support that is intended to encourage the creation of more opportunities for good lives must not be counterproductive, leading to existing lives that would otherwise have been good no longer being so due to increased competition for scarce resources. Societies should also not support parents in creating more opportunities for good lives at home without also making sure existing people abroad have opportunities to live good lives. Existing lives must have priority, but societies should support parents as long as they also support good lives at home and abroad.

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