

18th December, 1918.

Dear Fisher,

Thanks for all your letters, which have made me think over again certain problems. I am writing them down here mainly to clear my mind, so don't answer unless the spirit moves you.

As long as it is in any degree easier to bring up a small family than a large one, small families will have advantages over large families, and there will remain a tendency for the well-to-do to become more infertile. But is it possible to remove all the disadvantages attached to larger families without removing all checks on the rate of multiplication? I do not see how. And if there were no checks on multiplication should not we be on the high road to a catastrophe? Malthus was on the whole right, only that the check on population now begins to act long before the starvation point is reached. The check has, unfortunately, little or no effect on state supported slum dwellers.

We are on the horn of a dilemma. We must face either a tendency to produce infertility amongst the well-to-do, or the unknown consequences of unlimited multiplication. Of these, the latter/

latter is by far the worst alternative. All we should do is to somewhat lessen but not remove the disadvantages of large families whilst applying those stimuli to multiplication which affect the more fit, more than the less fit.

It has been suggested that parents should have powers of forcing their children to contribute to their maintenance in old age, etc. I agree that this would be beneficial. It would, however be attended by practical difficulties. Moreover we want the power to be even more easily exercised by well-to-do than by poorest; and we want the assistance given by children to vary with social status or income. I suggest that parents should be able to obtain rebates or returns of the income tax paid by their children. The children would raise no objection to this. This would act as a state premium on early marriage and therefore on fertility.

Many other state aids to parenthood have to be considered some of which would be dysgenic and some eugenic. A layer at the bottom would generally be unaffected by any state aid; e.g. the feeble-in-mind. A layer at the top would also be unaffected by many forms of help, as being too trifling to affect their actions. Whether the result would be eugenic or dysgenic would depend entirely on whether the affected middle group was above or below the average in innate qualities. A dole of money at child birth would only affect, I believe, a group below the average and it would therefore be dysgenic. Aids to secondary education might affect/

affect foreseeing parents, and might be eugenic. The more substantial, the less immediate, and the more enduring the help to parenthood, the more it would tend to be eugenic; because this is the kind of assistance which would be more appreciated by the higher than the lower types.

Yours sincerely,

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