



# EMPATHIC PARENTING

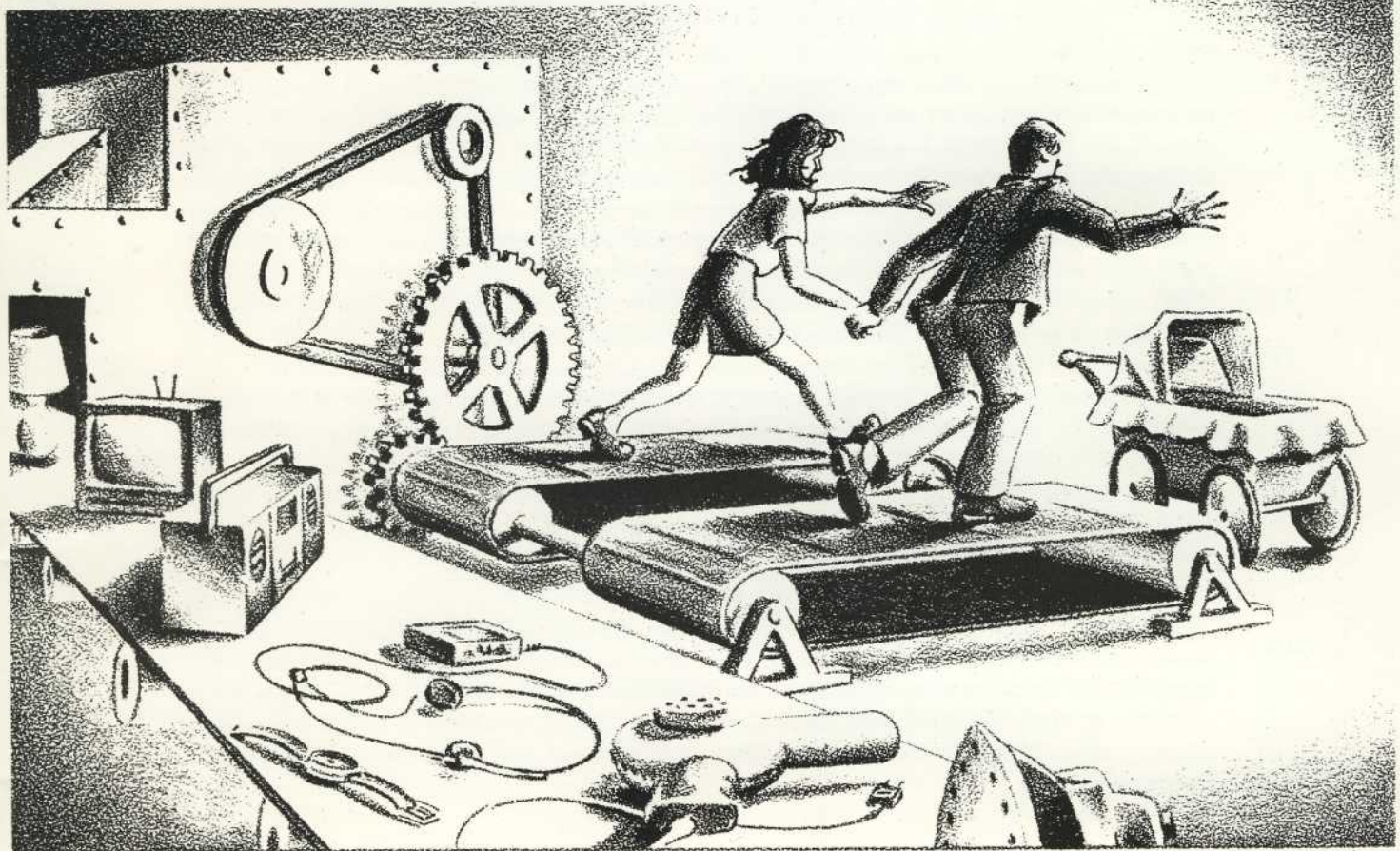
Journal of the Canadian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

Volume 13

Issue 2

Spring 1990

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Shawn Murphy

*"...It is consumerism that drives the 80-hour work week. When we learn that consumer goods don't make us happy, we can get serious about reconstructing the family. The critical question in America, at the end of the 20th century, is whether consumption or the family will prevail."*

**Christopher Lasch**

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## There is a Cover-up Going On

...Many people do privately believe that babies and small children need this kind of care (individual mothering). Many parents put the belief into practice. But the need is seldom stated, publicly and unequivocally, because spokespeople are afraid of upsetting the parents who do not. I am sorry for mothers who cannot look after their babies themselves, but I do not believe that it is helpful to conceal from them the fact that group-care is a bad alternative. They are entitled to the facts as we understand them and to help in finding alternatives to themselves rather than alternative forms of care. I am sympathetic, too, with mothers who could provide full-time care themselves but do not wish to. But they too are entitled to a true picture of the conflict between what they want and what their children need. Only when they have it can they make informed decisions and, when the decisions take them away from their children, seek 'good enough' solutions.

There is a cover-up going on and it is similar to the cover-up which used to go on over breast-feeding. It has been known for years that breast-milk was not only the best and safest baby-food but also an important protection against a variety of illnesses. But many mothers do not want to breast-feed. In deference to their feelings (and to the social arrangements which bottle-feeding makes possible) people have walked round and round those facts, dropping hints and indications but always building in comforting provisos for the bottle-feeders. With increasingly strong scientific evidence and a change in the climate of opinion, the wraps are at last coming off. It is now acceptable to state that it would be better if all mothers breast-fed their babies, at least for a few weeks. As a result, the women who already take breast-feeding for granted feel good about doing so; many waverers decide to give it a try and the number of mothers who are actually unable to produce milk drops dramatically. I believe that a similar brave clarity about individual care would produce similar results...

Penelope Leach  
see page 13

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### EMPATHIC PARENTING:

**Being willing and able to 'put yourself in your child's shoes' in order to correctly identify his/her feelings, and**

**Being willing and able to behave toward your child in ways which take those feelings into account.**

**Empathic Parenting takes an enormous amount of time and energy, and fully involves both parents in a co-operative, sharing way.**

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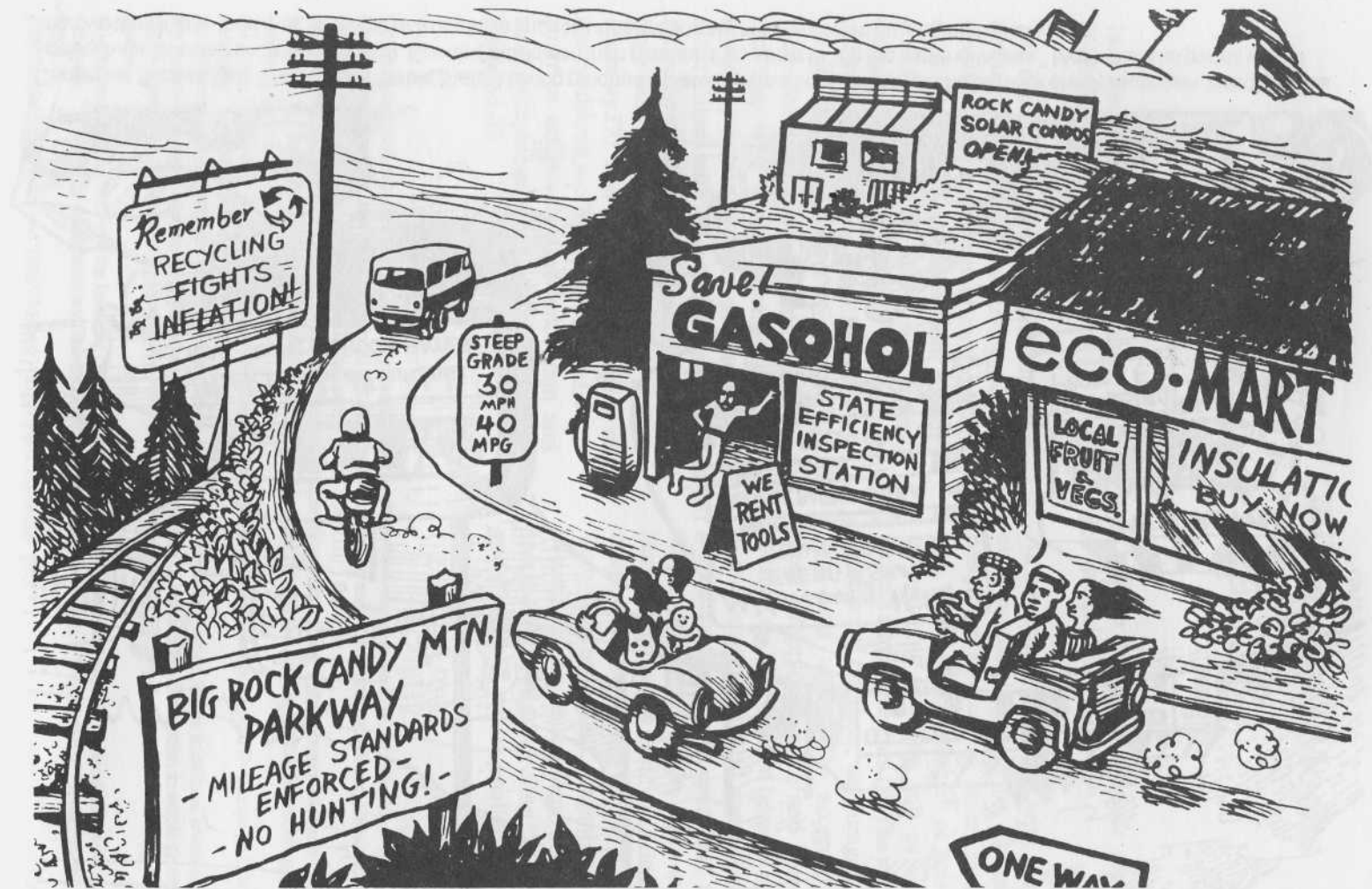
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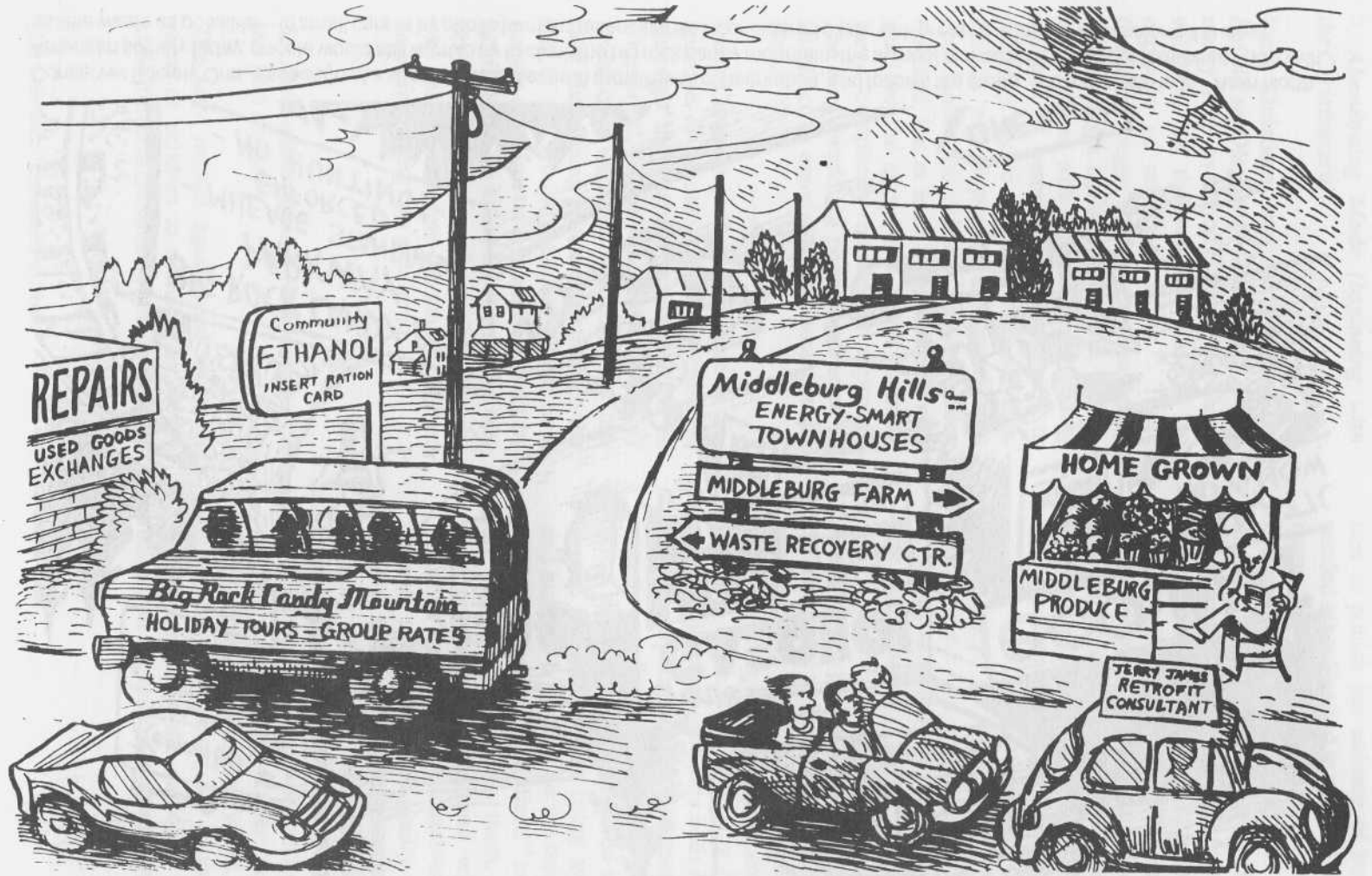
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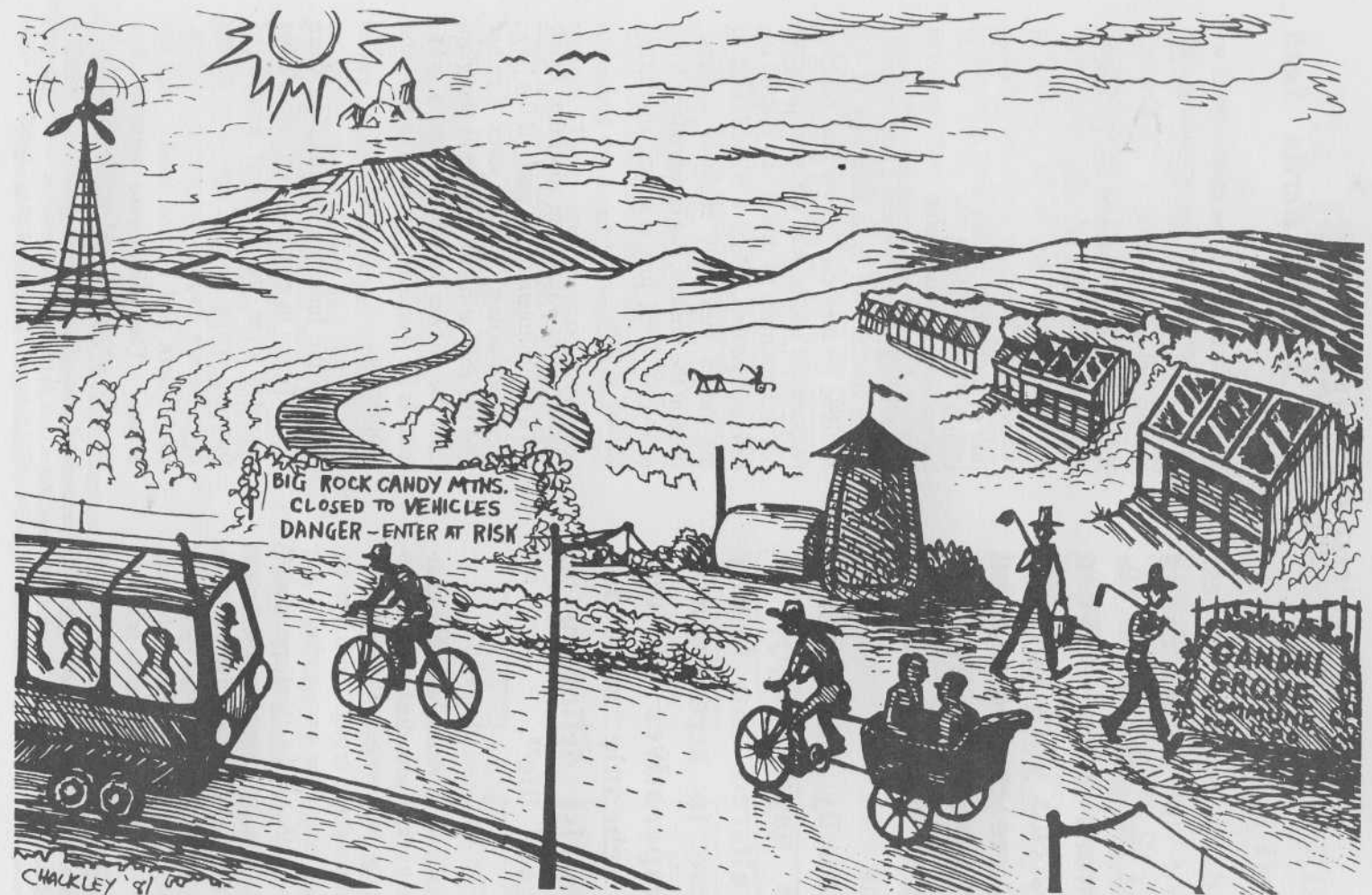
Huge cars race up the big rock candy mountain, carrying people chasing the dream of the Squander Society. These people live by the motto "do less with more"; their goal in life is to consume. Unfortunately, they can never quite catch their dream—it must be driving a car that's just a little bit bigger and faster than their own. But maybe next year's model will be fast enough to catch it. . . .



Conservator Society One, a scenario of a society that believes in growth with conservation, and follows the credo, "do more with less." As in North American society today, people would still want to try to climb the big rock candy mountain, the symbol of material plenty, but they would do it with as little waste as possible—in small cars or by public transportation, at a well-considered pace, with great care for the views along the way.



Conservator Society Two: The Affluent Stable State. Having reached a plateau of material comfort on the big rock candy mountain, people in this society have decided enough is enough. Content with life on their plateau, they strive to "do the same with less." More material goods will not improve their lives—and may in fact have a negative impact, undermining such values as environmental quality.



Conserver Society Three: The Frugal Society subscribes to values very different from those prevalent in North America today. People in this Conserver Society believe that happiness and satisfaction can't be bought with material things, so they "do less with less and do something else." They have actually given up many goods—and strive for harmony and unity with nature. They've descended from the big rock candy mountain, preferring contemplating it from the placid valley to trying to climb ever higher in the rarefied air.

# The Purge of Nurture

*Marilyn Berlin Snell*

**These days, even a modest standard of living comes to us at the price of an 80-hour work week. When both parents work full time away from the home, and when children are entrusted to day care operators, the idea of "family" is dramatically transformed. Almost imperceptibly, we have altered the family structure to accommodate the imperatives of our work schedule and our consumerist definition of the "good life".**

For the majority of Americans that managed to stay afloat with dual incomes, despite falling real wages, the economic boom of the eighties brought with it an escalation of consumer expectation. For most, the limits of the "indispensable" expanded from the mortgage and the car to such late-modern necessities of life as VCR's, another car, microwaves, CD's and Nikes. But this frenzied, "shop-til-you-drop" syndrome has had its price: In order to purchase the pleasures that insu-

*Marilyn Berlin Snell is Managing Editor of New Perspectives Quarterly, Los Angeles, California. Reprinted with permission from Volume 7, Number 1, Winter 1990, pages 2-3.*

*Special thanks to David Johnson of Odessa, Ontario, for drawing this article to the attention of the editor.*

late us from the world, we must work til we drop and contract out the care of our children to others.

A society in which parents can't afford to raise their children is not sustainable. Yet, the answer does not lie in a return to conservative values; it lies in the substitution of consumer values with conserving values.

Conserving values assume a commitment to the future: we must take care of our children so they can grown into healthy, responsible adults; and we must preserve our environment so that it can sustain future generations. Such a commitment to the future inevitably requires compromise in the present, but compromise from everyone - not just a select, disenfranchised group.

Conservative values, on the other hand, are a commitment to the past: If the "Father-Knows-Best" family stuck together and the stay-at-home mom was the glue, then the answer to current family problems is for women to get back to full-time mothering.

Prior to the Industrial Revolution, there was efficacy in gender-based roles. Men presided over the physical aspects of farming, while women's primary sphere of influence - where she reared children, wove cloth and canned food - was the home. The roles were separate, but equally necessary and valued equally.



## **A society in which parents can't afford to raise their children is not sustainable.**

It was this arrangement, where the work of both men and women revolved around the home, which cemented the traditional family. Contrary to popular myth, the "Father-Knows-Best" era, in which the husband left before the kids were awake and didn't come home until dark, signaled the break up of the traditional family far more than its quintessence.

History may be cyclical but it never replicates itself exactly. Indeed, due to the victories of the feminist movement, women will not be coerced, through guilt or employment discrimination, back into the home; and due to America's relative hegemonic decline and the consequent need for dual-income families, women cannot go back. However, many women, and a growing number of men, would like to have the option of taking care of their own children. In fact, a recent New York Times poll showed that two-thirds of those parents surveyed would take care of their own children if it were economically feasible.

Thus far, however, we have only succeeded in reorganizing the family to accommodate the consumer economy. Liberals, in their fight for freedom of choice, have mostly championed women's right

not to have children; there has been little discussion of our right to have children, and to take care of them ourselves, if we so choose. Additionally, the elevation of child care as the most acceptable of options has diminished the sense of family responsibility, allowing parents to work longer hours, relatively guilt free, away from home.

The conservative tack has been to advocate tax credits for the stay-at-home, middle-class mom while urging that poor mothers put their kids in child care and sign up for Workfare. Conservatives have also tended to subvert parental choice to the rights of the "not yet" - the innocent unborn - and to disavow any responsibility to those who have "failed to thrive": In the eighties, the fastest growing sector of the homeless were small children, as were four out of 10 people living in poverty.

In the 1990's, this short-sighted political agenda, not to mention the "battle of the sexes", ought to give way to the "battle for support structures". Parents need options: Parental leave, job sharing, telecommuting - the use of modern technology like fax machines and personal computers in the home - and, as a last option,

**The answer lies in the substitution of consumer values with conserving values.**

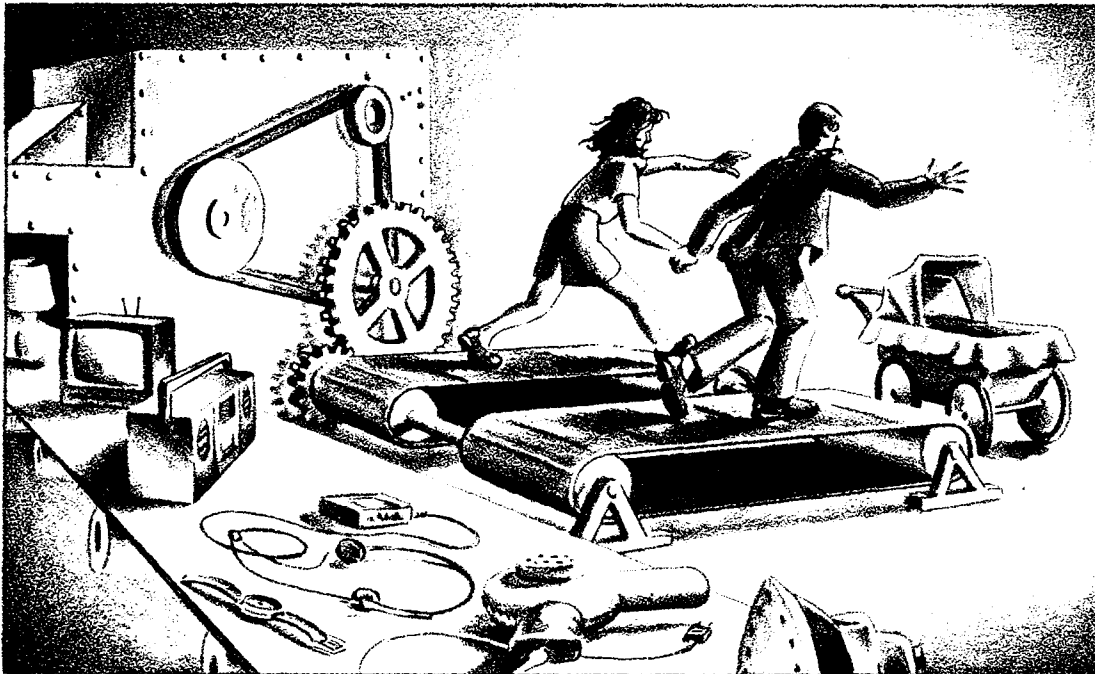
**Thus far, however, we have only succeeded in reorganizing the family to accommodate the consumer economy.**

universal child care.

Historically, one of the most far-reaching accomplishments of the American labour movement was the creation of the eight-hour work day. As the century winds down, with our parents and their children becoming strangers, and our ranks of the permanently unemployed growing, the six-hour work day could bring parents home and the unemployed into the work force.

Somewhere between materialism and uto-

pia lies a new set of possibilities rooted in conserving values: A mode of living based on intergenerational responsibility between parent and child with respect to the environment; shared responsibility between parents for work and child rearing; and a notion of productive endeavor that rejects the kind of social and economic hierarchy that reveres the work of stockbrokers and celebrities while it devalues the work of pregnancy, child birth and the nurturance of our children.



*Thomas Murphy*

## The Brave New World of Child Care

Charles N. Siegel

**The child-care debate strikingly reveals that all our wealth has left us more impoverished than ever.**

Imagine how sorry people would have been in 1906, or 1946, for a family that was so poor that one parent could not afford to take off a few years from work to raise the kids before they started school. That was rare four decades ago; now that we are so much wealthier as a nation, it is prevalent.

Nobody looking at economic history a few decades ago - with all the predictions of a "post-scarcity" society and of leisure time created by labour-saving technology - would have considered it "inevitable", as we do today, that in the 21st century parents would have to work so hard that they would not be able to take care of their own children.

In fact, the great civilizing advance of the early 20th century was limiting the working week to 40 hours; today, with both spouses working full time to make ends meet, the typical family works 80 hours a week. While most of us have two cars, a VCR, and a kitchen full of appliances, few of us have time left for raising children.

*Excerpted and reprinted with permission from a much longer article which first appeared in the New Perspectives Quarterly, Winter 1990, pages 34-45.*

*A househusband until his child was seven years old, Siegel currently writes computer software texts from his home. He is also author of the forthcoming book, Children of the System.*

*Special thanks to David Johnson of Odessa, Ontario, for drawing this article to the attention of the editor.*

Given this reality, the pervasive worry about "the family in crisis" and the demand, especially among liberals, for a "universal child care system" should come as no surprise. But before we enter Aldous Huxley's Brave New World and send an entire generation of children off to day care centers, we need to reflect a little more deeply on what such a radical departure in child-rearing practices would mean for the family and society.

If our concern is to strengthen the family as the locus of stable character formation in a liberal society, it makes little sense to weaken it further by taking from the family whatever responsibility it still retains. Unless our consumer society changes course, Huxley's nightmare awaits us: a society where there are no families and everyone is raised by a child-care system.

### From Traditional Family to Daycare

One often hears that only a minority of American households are still "traditional families", with fathers who go to work in the industrial economy and mothers who stay home with the children. Everyone takes it for granted that this is the "traditional family", but it is actually the early 19th century form of the modern family - now evolving into the late-modern family

**Most public pronouncements about child care are not based on critical thought about whether our compulsion for economic growth has spun out of control.**

where both spouses work in services or for the large corporation, live in housing tracts and eat at McDonald's. The actual "**traditional family**" existed up through the Civil War, when most families still lived by farming, or the small family business, and both the mother and father worked in the home.

Throughout the successive changes since the Civil War, families lost more and more of their capacity for self-provision - from mending fences, which men did, to canning goods, which the women did. Slowly, but thoroughly, the family became entirely dependent on the emerging industrial and consumer economy to meet "needs" they could no longer provide for themselves in an urban setting.

During the 1980's, our busy schedules led us to the point where the amount of money we spent on prepared foods exceeded the amount we spent on fresh food at the supermarket. Ultimately, not only transportation to the place of work, but entertainment for the non-work hours, had to be financed by earning wages and salaries in the marketplace. And, at about the same time, we reached a point where the number of families with pre-school children in day care exceeded the number of families who cared for pre-school children themselves.

Today, we are at the threshold of the last frontier of what remained in the traditional family: in order to finance dependence on the consumer economy, parents must work 80 hours a week, forcing them to

contract out the function of raising children.

At the beginning of this century, American social reformers who wanted to help immigrant families adjust to the new world called for "the century of the child." At that time, most children started school at age seven. Today, as the "century of the child" draws to a close, people do not even blink when they hear about parents putting their children in day care at the age of one or two months.

### **Social Limits to Growth**

Most public pronouncements about child care are not based on critical thought about whether our compulsion for economic growth has spun out of control. Although we are now coming to grips with the ecological limits to growth, we still haven't grasped that there are also moral and psychological costs of economic expansion - social limits to growth as well as ecological ones.

Instead, the policy experts take our usual, busy, "pragmatic" approach of accommodating the growth mentality: If the statistical studies show mounting child care "needs" because both parents must work, then the obvious solution is to spend billions to "provide" child care services.

The same sort of thinking was used to build our urban freeway system during the 1950's and 1960s. Automobile traffic

was becoming more and more congested every year; traffic engineers gathered the statistics, projected future traffic volumes, and used this objective methodology to determine the "needs" for new roads. The federal government then came up with the funding mechanisms that would accommodate those "needs".

By the end of the 1960s, however, it became clear that this huge program of freeway construction had sliced up the cities and had encouraged a form of suburban development that paved over the countryside, polluted the air and made cities less livable. In fact, it had become clear that the solution to automobile congestion had accelerated the trends that the traffic engineers had built the freeways to relieve, leaving the commuter no alternative to the jammed byways of the modern metropolis. As Ivan Illich pointed out, this is the key dynamic of industrial civilization: experts define a "need" in such a way as to standardize and monopolize the solution to be provided, thus creating a new and unprecedented dependence to which other alternatives have been foreclosed.

Liberal proposals on child care policy are based on exactly the same logic of "blind progress". Liberal policy-makers produce extensive studies to prove that the supply of child care centers is not keeping up with the demand. And, without thinking, they conclude that government

should invest billions to meet the projected child care needs - subsidies that will stimulate demand. While they cite the evidence that both parents in families with pre-school children find it necessary to work, liberal child care advocates rarely quote the surveys that show two-thirds of those families would rather care for their own children if that were economically possible. Thus, alternatives such as tax credits, which would subsidize parents staying home, are foregone in favour of the "provision" of universal child care facilities as the ultimate solution to the family crises.

A case in point is the child care plan that Michael Dukakis proposed during the last presidential campaign, which, as one would expect was a perfect example of the conventional wisdom of bland, middle-of-the-road liberalism. Dukakis proposed \$2.5 billion of federal funding for day care centers and nothing for parents who took care of their own pre-school children. The plan would have established federal health and safety standards for child-care centers, created a federal "Administration for Child Care" to oversee day-care programs nationwide, and given funding only to child care centers that met federal standards.

Of course, this sort of plan would raise the powerlessness of families and their dependence on those outside the family to new heights. If this approach were

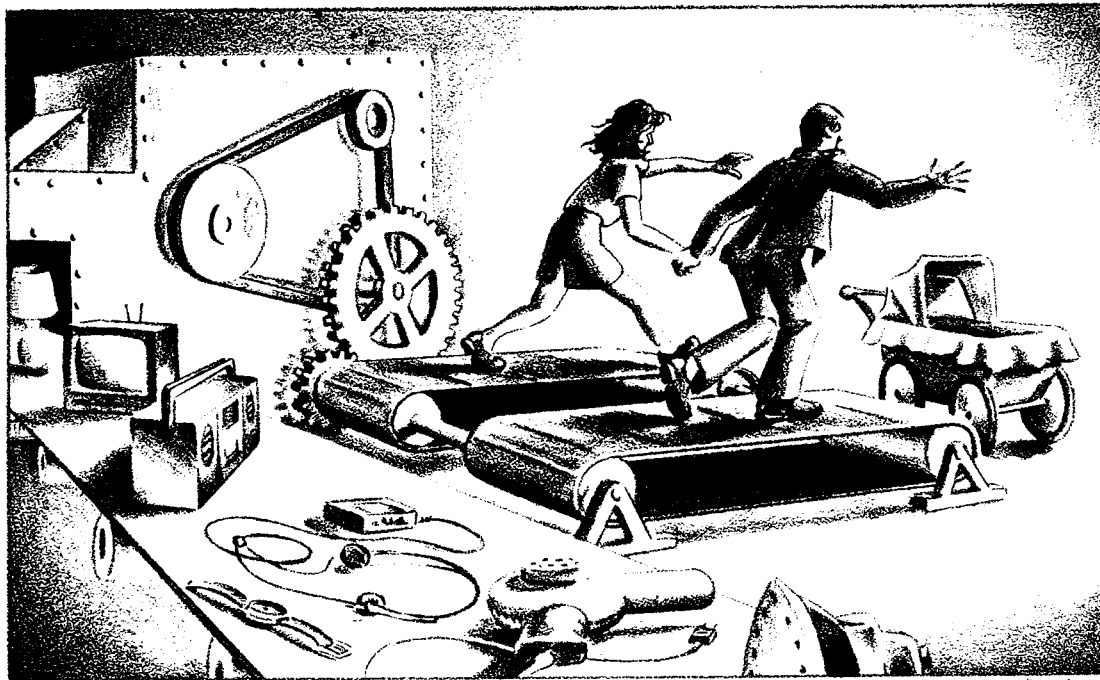
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widely adopted, most people would find that federally subsidized child-care centers were their only economically realistic option. Dukakis' program would have meant that, instead of deciding for themselves what sort of child care is best, most families would have had to accept the federal standards set up by the National Administrator for Child Care, with the help of developmental psychologists, public health planners, and economists.

Bit by bit, without ever looking at the big picture, the experts trained in our

"Schools of Social Welfare" seem to be taking us straight to Brave New World. They look at isolated social problems, such as working parents with pre-school children, or teenagers who hang out on the streets after school, then propose some "service" as a solution to each. They seem to try to avoid thinking about the inevitable final result of their logic: a society where all the adults are at nine-to-five jobs and where all the children are at day-care centers, schools, or after-school programs all day, every day...



# Who Cares?

Penelope Leach - 1979

**Because of our attitudes to women's rights and labour and our determined ignorance of the developmental rights of children, the comparatively little money which is spent on provision for the under-fives is almost entirely devoted to various ways of separating them from their mothers.** Some theorists (still, fortunately, well-divorced from the practical world) even believe that child-rearing should become an entirely professional activity, mothers being 'freed' from all but pregnancy and labour.

While I accept that there are, and probably always will be, some mothers who truly yearn to escape from the daily care of children they may have been unwise to have, I do not believe that the numbers are nearly as great as the work statistics or the media suggest. I think that many women need only social approval and support to enable them to settle happily to

full-time caring for their children. I believe that some of the women who are currently 'at work', part-time or full-time, are disillusioned with their multiply-complex lives and the concomitant guilty feeling of never doing any of it properly. If they could do so without losing cash and kudos, they too would take their children home.

If there is any truth in this, the most general help which could be given to mothers would be social 'permission' to mother wholeheartedly and clear confirmation to those who are doing so that they have their priorities right. Long-term changes in social attitudes can only be brought about by long-term education but I do not believe that we have to wait for the long-term. A great deal could be done, right now, by taking the wraps off the whole question of young children's need for individual mothering.

Many people do privately believe that babies and small children need this kind of care. Many parents put the belief into practice. But the need is seldom stated, publicly and unequivocally, because spokespeople are afraid of upsetting the parents who do not. I am sorry for mothers who cannot look after their babies

*Excerpted and reprinted with permission from the book "Who Cares? A New Deal for Parents and their Young Children" by Penelope Leach, published in England by Penguin Books, 1979. Dr. Leach has updated this 1979 article with the following article (pages 18-22) because of her feeling that the particular section of the original book from which this article is excerpted is too out of tune with current social trends to read well as anything but history. Dr. Leach is author of three popular books currently available in Canada and the United States, "Babyhood", "The First Six Months: coming to terms with your baby", and "Your Baby & Child" published in a new and updated edition for the 90's by A. Knopf, New York 1989.*

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There is a cover-up going on and it is similar to the cover-up which used to go on over breast-feeding. It has been known for years that breast-milk was not only the best and safest baby-food but also an important protection against a variety of illnesses. But many mothers do not want to breast-feed. In deference to their feelings (and to the social arrangements which bottle-feeding makes possible) people have walked round and round those facts, dropping hints and indications but always building in comforting provisos for the bottle-feeders. With increas-

ingly strong scientific evidence and a change in the climate of opinion, the wraps are at last coming off. It is now acceptable to state that it would be better if all mothers breast-fed their babies, at least for a few weeks. As a result, the women who already take breast-feeding for granted feel good about doing so; many waverers decide to give it a try and the number of mothers who are actually unable to produce milk drops dramatically. I believe that a similar brave clarity about individual care would produce similar results.

Since ours is an 'expert-ridden' society, the experts must start the ball rolling. Books on child-care tend to be packed with details of babies' physical development and their physical care. Each and every one of them should also contain information of the kind I have tried to summarize here, giving parents a clear picture of what is known of babies' emotional and social development and its relevance to intellectual functioning. The authors of such books tend to accept that many mothers will want to work and to quiet their consciences about the probable effects on babies by making totally unrealistic recommendations to the moth-

**If they could do so without losing cash and kudos, they too would take their children home.**



## Professionally concerned organizations pussyfoot, too...

ers on coping. One recent and popular book for example, does say that if a baby is not to have mother he will need someone in place of her. But it goes on to suggest nannies, mother's helps and au pairs. While these may be excellent solutions for the well-to-do, they simply beg the issue for the vast majority of families. Yet by putting them in, by implying that there are straightforward solutions available, the author blurs the issue. The reader is left with the impression that leaving the baby is acceptable, so if a mother's help is not available, but a day nursery place is, why not?

Professionally concerned organizations pussyfoot, too, both in consultations with the state and within their own areas. In the reports from which I quoted at the beginning of this book it is clear that **they see it as their rôle to comment on the way child-care is rather than the way it could, or, dare I say it, 'ought' to be. Their work is therefore concentrated on suggestions for improving day-care within the context of its existence being taken for granted. None of them dares to take the lead in describing that existence as unfortunate and improvement as a**

**matter of phasing it out.** I too have worked on working parties. I know how difficult it is to arrive at statements, for public consumption, which all members, representing diverse groups, can agree. But I believe that it has to be done. The National Children's Bureau's official statements are as wishy-washy as all the others. Anything 'controversial' would fail to get agreement. But its chairperson uses her position to speak personally and with courage for the rights of small children to individual care and of the rights of their mothers to give it. How much longer must she remain a solitary individual voice when she is at the heart of government-sponsored research into child development?

One way and another, the government sponsors the training-courses which produce all the professionals who concern themselves with small children, from nursery nurses and nursery teachers to health visitors and social workers. Yet none of these is trained to regard individual care as the ideal against which all solutions to problems in child-care must be measured. At a recent talk I gave to a group of nursery nurse trainees, one girl recounted her worries about the lack of individual attention received by children in her unit. She finished with these words: "I suppose it's true that they are better off with us. We are taught and we do know what we are doing. But when I have children of my own I shall use everything I know to look after them myself. I'd die rather than put a child of mine in the place where I work..."

When a mother gets fed up and complains to a health visitor or a social worker, perhaps suggesting that she would like to go back to the outside world of work, nobody tries to see how she could be helped to enjoy herself more where she is. 'Going back to work' is an accepted solution to maternal depression so people offer lists of day-minders rather than looking at the circumstances which are depressing her. She says that she is 'stuck in all day' and they suggest 'a little job'. They do not ask why she is 'stuck in' and discover that there is nowhere for her to go with her baby. She says that she is lonely and again a job is the obvious answer. They do not ask where her family, her friends, all the neighbours with babies, have gone to. If that mother is offered anything at all, it is a way out of rather than through her unhappiness. A way 'back to work', as if she was not working with her child. A way for her to feel 'useful and productive', as if a new person were not the most useful thing anybody could produce. A way 'to make friends', as if that baby were not panting to give and receive every aspect of companionship and as if there were not dozens of other nearby mothers who were lonely too. Because 'going back to work' is an accepted answer to moments of maternal distress, we offer a route into the guilty, harassed exhaustion of trying to do two jobs at once because doing just one of them was proving difficult. It is as zany as Alice; a 'solution' which makes things worse for both mother and child.

The media have a responsibility too. At present, mothers who are getting on with the business of caring for their own children full-time at home, are not interesting. They become so only when something 'unusual' happens - like giving birth to quads - or when they stop doing so to join the trendy world of the 'working mother', or become newsworthy because 'the authorities' take those children away. There is a vicious circle here. 'Just' being a mother is too tedious for media exposure. Because it gets no media exposure it continues to be considered tedious. So it gets no media exposure...

If as many viewing hours and column inches were devoted to home-mothering as to mothering-gone-wrong, mothering-avoided and mothering-alternatives, I think a number of important things might happen. The exposure of 'ordinary mothers' to public view would make them interesting; to themselves, to the unseen thousands who would identify with them and to the media themselves who, as we have said, first create and then believe their own mythology. Starting the ball of interest rolling would focus parents' attention on what was being done and allow them to see its importance. This would both increase the determination of those who were already giving their children full-time care and would inspire the waverers. As it became clearer to the general public that most mothers do in fact take care of their own children and that they are right to do so, the working-mother image would decline in glamour and come to be seen for what it really is: a necessity for some and a dicey option for others.

If that began to happen, all the various organizations which are dedicated to aspects of individualized care for small children, would receive new recognition and begin to be able to pursue their chosen

work in an increasingly accepting atmosphere. The Pre-School Playgroups Association, the National Association for the Welfare of Children in Hospital, the National Childbirth Trust's postnatal groups would all fit into a recognized social scheme of things. And because they would lose the faint atmosphere of 'crankiness' with which society taints them, they would gain in membership and strength. That vicious circle could be reversed so that in a few years' time working mothers of small children would feel it necessary to justify themselves for going out, just as full-time mothers now feel it incumbent upon them to prove they are not cabbages.

But 'permission', even social admiration, is clearly not enough to help for all mothers. Many women accept the need to stay at home with their small children, but wish they did not have to because they are unhappy, not only with the role but with the way of life. Still more stay at home only because they can find no way, individual or group, of having their children cared for elsewhere. **To help them through their child-caring years I believe that we need to bring about a massive redeployment of the financial and professional resources currently devoted to enabling mothers to get out.**

# Who's Care?

Penelope Leach - 1990

Women with young children are being selectively submerged in poverty by a kind of capitalism that cares only for the marketplace.

The current daycare debate is more about economics than children. Women with young children are being selectively submerged in poverty by a kind of capitalism that cares only for the marketplace. More daycare is to "free" them for that marketplace but nobody asks them whether they want to be free of their babies and toddlers, or whether they would still want that "freedom" if the alternatives were better than being broke, bored and regarded as boring.

The public image of daycare is of pre-school children: three and four year olds playing together in the nurseries, playgroups and nursery classes that should indeed be available to all. These are the images that inform campaigns for workplace nurseries, or the transformation of sessional playgroups into full daycare, but they do not reflect the reality which is that thousands of babies and toddlers are already in daycare and that thousands more will be placed in groups as they become available.

United States experience has some chastening lessons for all of us. In many areas and jobs six weeks is a long maternity

*Dr. Leach has provided this article as a companion piece to accompany and update the preceding article (pages 13-17) which was published over a decade ago in her book Who Cares? - A New Deal for Parents and their Young Children. Dr. Leach is author of three popular books currently available in Canada and the United States, Babyhood, The First Six Months: coming to terms with your baby, and Your Baby & Child published in a new and updated edition for the 90's by A. Knopf, New York 1989.*

leave; risky to ask for unless you are very valuable to your employer. Some maternity units will keep newborns while mothers return to work on day four and once they are taken home there are "lollypop wards" offering emergency daycare when children's fevers and colds would otherwise keep them (and a parent) at home. Once we forget that babies need their mothers or beloved mother-figures, it is easy to forget that to put a sick baby into a stranger's hands is cruelty. There are lots of illnesses. Some members of The American Paediatric Association reckons that under-ones in group-care have eight times as many colds and other infections as babies cared for in family environments. There is work going on to try and provide earlier immunization against the most serious - like H-flu, one cause of epidemic Meningitis. Nobody wants them sick, but nobody wants them at home where they are less likely to get sick.

If you don't mind his or her distress at being left, any well-meaning adult can give a baby adequate care for a couple of hours. That's the justification for using unknown babysitters and conference-

**Under-ones in group-care have eight times as many colds and other infections as babies cared for in family environments.**

creches. S/he may not like it but s/he will not suffer developmental damage. Full time care, day after day, is dramatically different. Babies don't have to have the "full time exclusive mothering" wrongly associated to John Bowlby and used to isolate women in the fifties. But in rejecting that, we are swinging further and further the other way, assuming that more and more mothers will wish to leave their babies for longer and longer days at younger and younger ages. The daycare debate is even less aware of infant needs than it was ten years ago.

Babies and young toddlers absolutely require continuous 24-hours a day care, consistently given by the same known and loving people. If those caregivers need not be parents, they do need a parent-like commitment that is rare outside the vested interests and social expectations of family roles.

A new baby has no concept of herself as a separate being. S/he acquires the foundations of self-image, self confidence and social competence by using carers as extensions of herself and as mirrors, reflecting her impacts back to her. It isn't "instinct" that makes her smile when she is pleased; it's the adult's consistent pleased

response that feeds back pleasure. If you are smiling and chatting to a three-month baby and you suddenly go silent and serious, she will quiet, sober, stare and then cry. Once a baby expects particular responses, not getting them is confusing and distressing. She will try for expected responses from strangers but given a succession, each with subtly different expressions and body-language, she will lose track of who she is and panic. Wouldn't you panic if every mirror showed you a different face?

Discovering her own separateness goes with recognizing other individuals and coping with it depends on managing them, now and through the autonomy-crisis of toddlerhood. She must accept that people can leave while she sleeps, but she needs to know she can get them back with cries or calls; that raised arms produce cuddles; attempted words are understood and all social advances are always answered. All babies are helpless, but the ones who feel damagingly helpless in the longer-term are the ones who cannot feel competent to get a consistent response from caring adults.

Only adults who know, have known, and will go on knowing the individual baby

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can provide that vital sense of growing empowerment. Not all babies who are brought up in their own homes or the homes of individual caregivers get it, but babies and toddlers in full-time group care cannot get it because group care means constant changes of staff.

Currently, childcare is low-paid, demanding work. In group settings employers fight to keep staff by improving conditions, but every concession to adult needs reduces fulfillment of childrens'. Split-shifts to cover the long nursery day reduce adult hours by doubling the number of people with whom babies must interact. Lunch breaks, sick leave, vacations and in-service training course, produce such constant staff movement that case studies suggest an average of seven different people a day and fifteen a week (some of them strangers "filling in") handling each child. And still they leave: the "mother figure" in charge of each "family group" may change three times in a year.

Individual carers are better placed to meet babies needs. They have only one child of any particular age and stage to cope with and this is vital. When you cope with two or three at once, there is no way you can simultaneously respond to messages about milk, cuddles, and dropped toys. (ask anyone who has triplets). That is not something our present society readily acknowledges, though. After all, one-to-one care by someone outside the family offers no economies of scale. If it releases anyone to fill the skill-shortage it

does so only by leaving babies with less-skilled - or at least less well paid adults, an uncomfortably colonialist thought. So acknowledgement of babies needs for individual care would mean admitting that where a parent wanted to be at home with a child, s/he was the obvious caregiver and should be economically supported in that choice.

Finding someone who will do, as a job, what we expect, but do not help, mothers to do for love, isn't easy.

The more hours a child has to spend with a caretaker, the more completely she will be in charge of his life and upbringing and the more she will impinge on other aspects of family life. Well-off parents hope to replace themselves for their children by spending on trained resident nannies, but they will not work all day and get up for night feeds and nightmares (let alone clean the house) and many leave when "their" baby becomes a toddler because, unlike mothers, professionals can choose to work with children at age-stages they find easier and abandon children they find difficult.

If parents are only out to work part-time or one is working at home with an eye on things, a much more informal arrangement, with a daily mother's helper, or nanny shared with another family, may keep a child entirely safe and happy even if the caregiver is not "trained" or is over-inclined to buy sweets. If the baby truly loves her, it may not even matter if the

**Finding someone who will do, as a job, what we expect, but do not help, mothers to do for love, isn't easy.**

parents do not, because they are keeping their household and their child firmly within their own control, using her help but not handing over to her. But few employers countenance or pay adequately for part-time work.

A close look at this business of individual baby care suggests that presently, the greatest hope for the small children who have least parent-care and no other family-member to serve as home base may lie with licensed childcare mothers who take them into their family homes. Most do it when their own older children's needs have changed, not as "just a job" but to use the skills they have acquired as mothers to finance their continued availability to their own children. It is their awareness of their own value as mothers that sometimes enables them to function as substitute mothers. But since these are extra market values that society does not recognize, childcare mothers are both undermined and underpaid as "unprofessional" and are therefore often the second choice of parents who need them most. Perhaps people truly believe that everyone who is employed in a daycare centre is a trained childcare worker, teacher or miracle worker...

Our society presently faces parents - or to be realistic, mothers, with an unenviable choice between leaving babies too early and for too long so as to meet their own need to go out to work, or abandoning work too completely and for too long, so as to meet children's needs for their care.

That choice is not necessary. If we had the will to give children's needs priority, we could design flexible childcare programs that would meet them from birth through grade school without condemning mothers to poverty and boredom. It would take good will from employers over flexible working; a lot of hard thinking about the real role of our communities, some public money and a belief that being mothered matters.

For example, well-staffed groups that combined care with pre-school education might be appropriate for most rising threes and over, but even for that age group alone, the advantages of siting them in a workplace would still be dubious. Can you imagine taking such a child on a packed computer train and bus twice daily? Or having his or her place dependent on a job the mother or father wanted to leave? Children would surely be better off if industry paid for community-based groups controlled by people (such as parents) who know about childcare.

Sited in community centers, such groups would become the obvious focal point for desperately needed and currently forgotten after-school and holiday care, giving brothers and sisters and local friends a shared base, separated from the different world of school.

The same setting that met the needs of the 3-11's without their parents, could meet the needs of babies and toddlers with them. Used as a drop-in centre or club by parents and caregivers, such a centre could improve the quality of life for all of them by taking the isolation and boredom out of being home-based. Adults of both sexes would get to know each other, each others children and the professionals (hopefully local residents and often parents themselves). Babies and toddlers would get to know them too and "promotion" towards daycare for those whose parents were eager to return to outside work could be gradual and individually paced. Most babies could be left for a couple of hours occasionally, especially in an emergency. Many toddlers could be left part-time, building their confidence and independence towards readiness for the pre-school care group. There are partial models available in the superb "family centres" run by various childrens' charities and local authorities, but where they are necessarily open to families in special difficulty, these would be available to all.

It is easy to imagine these centres in the middle of a wider and wider network; the obvious place for the local toy library, for childrens' book exhibitions and childrens' theatre; home base for a Home-start team; a source of hands-on experience for adolescent parents-to-be, childcare students, future playgroup leaders and teachers; even a sensible place for a prenatal class and a pre-school immunization clinic... Serving the local area and employing local people, such centres could play a major part in giving communities back some sense of themselves as places where people actually live and relate to one another.

If this is a pipe-dream, present arrangements are a nightmare. Which shall we choose?



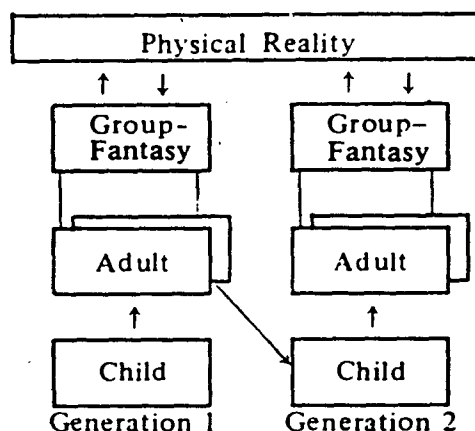
# The Psychogenic Theory of History

Lloyd De Mause

...In my earlier study, "The Evolution of Childhood," I posited that the central mechanism of all historical evolution was psychogenesis, a spontaneous force present in all adult-child relations that allowed adults to relive their own childhood trauma when caring for children and to satisfy the children's needs and strivings for independence somewhat better the second time around.(1) The process is similar to that which occurs in psychotherapy, which allows the reliving of childhood trauma in the transference. When this reliving occurs in historical families, it results in a slow growth in parental love that produces somewhat better childrearing in the next generation. This improvement in childrearing allows new kinds of historical personalities--I have suggested the word "psychoclasses"--to emerge. These new psychoclasses produce new directions in the economic and political spheres a few decades after the changes in childrearing. Childrearing innovation, therefore, always precedes political and economic innovation.

In my psychogenic model of historical causation, then, women and children are not merely passive pawns in men's historical chess game, as other historical theories portray them. Women and children are, rather, at the cutting edge of historical change, forming through their interper-

sonal relations all meaningful innovations of personality--the new psychoclasses--which then get translated into new political and economic systems. Since men have not been primary caretakers until recently, they have built their castles and fought their wars, but they have not as profoundly affected the psyches of the next generation--which end up determining the values of the future far more than the kind of castles that get built or who wins the wars.



## Psychogenic Evolution

This "generational pressure" for psychic change is, of course, not unaffected by economic and political conditions. It obviously is more difficult to care for children if a group has a severe famine or if Gh-

(1) DeMause, *Foundations*, p. 3. For additional mechanisms accounting for psychohistorical evolution, see "The Formation of the American Personality Through Psychospeciation" in *Foundations*, pp. 105-131; "The Psychogenic Theory of History" in *Foundations*, pp. 132-146; and Lloyd deMause, "The Role of Adaptation and Selection in Psychohistorical Evolution." *The Journal of Psychohistory* 16(1989): 355-71.

engis Khan invades their territory and kills a lot of mothers. Even so, the causal feedback loop from material to psychological conditions occurs through a rather limited range of traits. Furthermore, advances in childrearing modes can be made in times of economic stagnation--during the Renaissance, for instance--as long as the family gives adequate support to the parents, especially mothers, and to the emerging needs of the children.

On the other hand, it sometimes occurs that even in periods of prosperity small changes in the family can massively disturb the upbringing of successive generations of children and thereby produce a major slowdown in progress in the economic and political life of the group. This is particularly true if these family changes affect the crucial *mother-daughter* relationship and thus change future mothering patterns. For instance, ancient China until the early Christian era was far ahead of Europe in economics, political organization and learning, until the footbinding of women was introduced. This custom required mothers to bind their daughters' feet every night so tightly that the bones of the foot would be broken and the smaller toes forced under the foot, so that the big toe could be used as an erotic fetish by men.(2) Since these little girls cried out in pain every night for several years as their feet were bound, they understandably formed little trust in their caretakers and therefore had little ability to do better as mothers themselves--thus

freezing the historical personality and economic development of the Chinese for the next fifteen hundred years. The same kind of "freezing" of psychogenic and then economic development can be seen in those large areas of Africa which practice clitoridectomy of little girls, a custom that has crippled the sexual life of the 100 million women now living who have been mutilated in this manner.(3)

The central point of this psychogenic theory of history is not that all historical change is reduced to psychological change. Nor is it that only childrearing matters in history. The point, rather, is that since psychic structure must always be passed from generation to generation through the narrow funnel of childhood, a group's childrearing practices are not just one item in a list of equally important cultural traits. They are the very conditions for the transmission and development of all other cultural elements, and they place specific limits upon what can be achieved in the other areas.

The amount of child assault present in any culture is one of the most important indices of the cultural level of that group. In "The Evolution of Childhood" I suggested a list of six evolutionary stages of childrearing modes, along with the dates that I had empirically found were the earliest evidence of these modes in the historical record. They are as follows:(4)

(2) Howard S. Levy, *Chinese Footbinding: The History of a Curious Erotic Custom*. London: Neville Spearman, n.d.

(3) Hanny Lightfoot-Klein, *Prisoners of Ritual: An Odyssey Into Female Genital Circumcision in Africa*. Binghamton, N.Y.: The Haworth Press, 1990; Fran P. Hosken, *The Hosken Report: Genital/Sexual Mutilation of Females*. Lexington: WIN News, 1979; Tobe Levin, "'Unspeakable Atrocities': The Psycho-sexual Etiology of Female Genital Mutilation." *The Journal of Mind and Behavior* 1(1980): 197-210.

(4) DeMause, *Foundations*, pp. 60-63. The dates of each mode have been shifted somewhat earlier in this formulation because I have found evidence for the earlier onset of the modes in my research during the past two decades; see deMause, "On Writing Childhood History."

# The Evolution of Childrearing Modes

(most advanced psychoclasses)

## 1a. *Early Infanticidal Mode (small kinship groups):*

The central task of early infanticidal cultures was to find ways of living with the emotional consequences of mothers who used their children as poison containers.(5) Because the child was experienced as being unified with the mother, control was achieved more by body language than by severe physical discipline--leading anthropologists to imagine that they were more "permissive" than modern parents.(6) Later childhood was often filled with homosexual sex play, since the children were afraid to separate from their mothers and confront heterosexuality.(7) The infanticidal clinging of the symbiotic mother prevented individuation so effectively that innovation and more complex political organization were inhibited.(8)

## 1b. *Late Infanticidal Mode (early state to antiquity):*

As the child's symbiosis with the infanticidal mother began to be reduced, children were sent out to others at an early age, where men used them as poison containers--both sexually and as sacrificial victims and as warriors.(9) The sexual molestation of children, encouraged by parents, was universally accepted. Eroticized whipping, torture and homosexual assaults on boys by men became common, as men attempted to rid themselves of the guilt they felt for the increased material surplus generated by the early state.(10) Early states began child sacrifice, at first mainly to child-killing mother-goddesses, from Astarte to Kali. Organized warfare eventually played the same role as child sacrifice in killing the young "to satisfy the gods"--that is, the internalized parents.

(5) For sexual use, see deMause, "The Universality of Incest;" for body contact, see J. W. M. Whiting, "Environmental Constraints on Infant Care Practices." In R. L. Munroe, R. H. Munroe and B. B. Whiting, editors, *Handbook of Cross-Cultural Human Development*. New York: Garland Press, 1981.

(6) The best psychoanalytic description of this mode of childrearing is Paul Parin, Fritz Morgenthaler and Goldy Parin-Matthey, *Fear Thy Neighbor as Thyself: Psychoanalysis and Society Among the Anyi of West Africa*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980.

(7) Barry D. Adam, "Age, Structure, and Sexuality: Reflections on the Anthropological Evidence on Homosexual Relations." *Journal of Homosexuality* 11(1985): 19-33.

(8) Although my psychogenic theory is evolutionary, it does not rule out devolution, either in cultural levels or childrearing modes--although I have never yet encountered historical evidence of childrearing devolution in whole groups (only in family lines.) Nor do I suggest a necessary one-to-one correlation of psychological and cultural evolutionary levels for all groups.

(9) On the correlation between the breaking of the symbiotic bond by fosterage and levels of political complexity, see Lloyd deMause, "The Role of Adaptation and Selection in Psychohistorical Evolution." *The Journal of Psychohistory* 16(1989): 366-7.

(10) DeMause, "'Heads and Tails': Money As a Poison Container," p. 6.

## **2. *Abandoning Mode (beginning with the Christian era):***

Early Christians, says the author of the *Epistle to Diognetus*, were odd: "They marry like everybody else, they have children, but they do not practice the exposure of new-born babes." These Christians began Europe's two-millenia-long struggle against infanticide, replacing it instead with abandonment--sending children to wetnurse, to monasteries, to fosterage and to other homes as servants. Parents who physically and emotionally abandoned their children may have been resented, but at least those children who survived the experience didn't internalize a completely murderous superego. The long swaddling period also acted as an effective emotional abandonment device.

Early Christian penitentials began to disapprove of sexual assaults on children, although they actually continued to be widespread, even in monasteries.(11) Overt child sacrifice was ended by this new abandoning psychoclass through the use of the group-fantasy of Christ as a poison container--a son who was sent by his father to be killed for the sins of others--and religious warfare rather than direct sacrifice became the main approved ritual for killing one's children.

## **3. *Ambivalent Mode (beginning with the 12th century):***

The later middle ages ended abandonment of children to monasteries, began child instruction manuals, initiated legisla-

tion to punish the sodomy of boys, expanded schooling and in many other ways began to tolerate the child as an independent being with rights. I have termed this psychoclass "ambivalent" because they were able to tolerate extreme love and hate for the child without the two feelings affecting each other. The resulting individuation and reduction of cultural splitting defenses produced the advances in learning and technology associated with the Renaissance and Reformation.

## **4. *Intrusive Mode (beginning with the late 16th century):***

The intrusive parent began to unswaddle the infant and to bring up the child themselves rather than sending them elsewhere in order to allow closer emotional bonds to form. This increasing freedom and individuation--separate beds for children even became common--meant that new means of control had to be invented. Since infants were now allowed to crawl around free rather than being swaddled and hung on a peg behind the stove, they had to be formally "disciplined" to control the feelings injected into them, and so were prayed with, threatened with hell, punished for touching themselves and in general turned into the guilty Puritan child so familiar from early modern childrearing literature. Nevertheless, because intrapsychic problems of the intrusive psychoclass were beginning to be worked out internally rather than projected onto the external world, reality could be manipulated far more effectively, producing the explosive modern takeoff in scientific advance, technologi

(11) DeMause, "Universality of Incest."

cal progress and economic activity.

**5. Socializing Mode (beginning late 18th century):**

As parental injections continued to diminish, the rearing of the child became less a process of conquering its will than of training it, guiding it into proper paths, teaching it to conform to the parents' goals, socializing it. Hellfire and physical discipline disappeared and were replaced by more gentle methods of guidance. The socializing mode is still the main model of upbringing in the West, emphasizing the use of psychological rather than physical discipline, the mother as the perfect parent to both spouse and child and the father as reliable provider and protector rather than as being bonded mainly to other men. The socializing psychoclass built the modern world, and their values of nationalism and economic class warfare represent the goals of most people today.

**6. Helping Mode (beginning mid-20th century):**

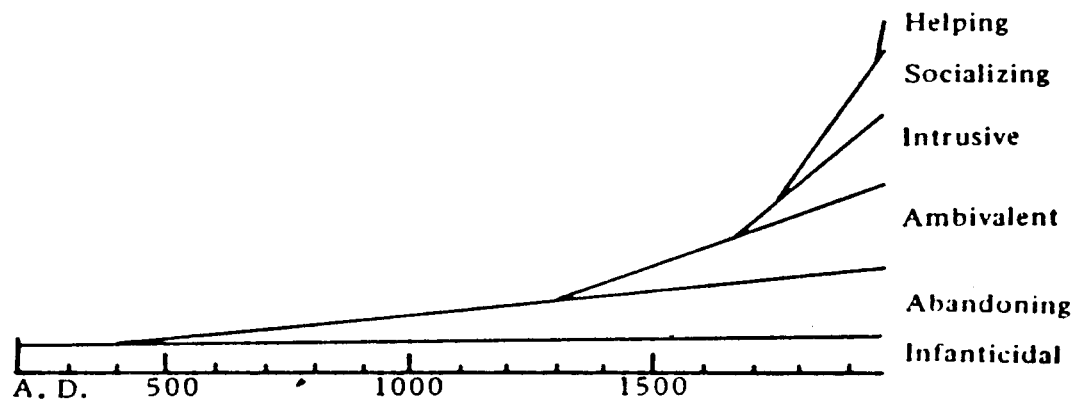
The helping parent tries to assist the child in reaching its own goals at each stage of life, rather than socializing it into adult goals. Instead of the emphasis being on forming "habits that are useful later in life," the child is empowered to explore its own capacities as it grows. Both parents are involved in relating to and empathizing with the child in order to help it fulfill its expanding and particular needs. The child is made to feel unconditionally loved, and its personal integrity, physical space and sexuality are inviolate to adult intrusion. The first few young adults who

have had helping mode childrearing whom I know are more empathic and less driven by material success than earlier generations were at their age. Nationalism, war and wide disparities in economic conditions seem to be tolerated less well by this helping psychoclass.

Each of these six psychoclasses co-exist in the modern world today. Indeed, much of the political conflict of modern nations occurs because of the vastly different value systems of the six psychoclasses. Cyclical swings between liberal and conservative periods are the outcome of a process whereby later psychoclasses for a time introduce more innovation, freedom and tolerance for pleasure into the world and then earlier psychoclasses feel they cannot stand this much freedom and pleasure and try to "turn the clock back" and reinstate previous conditions. Usually this intolerance of pleasure by the older psychoclasses leads to a sacrifice--a war and/or a depression--as an attempt to "cleanse the world of its sinfulness" through a blood bath or an economic cleansing...

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## The Child as Poison Container

The main psychological mechanism that operates in infanticide is the same as is present in all cases of child assault--physical, sexual or psychological. It involves using the child as what I have termed a *poison container*, a receptacle into which one can project disowned parts of one's psyche, so that one can manipulate and control these feelings in another body without danger to one's self. Psychoanalysts since Klein have termed this primitive projection process "projective identification," but the term is so unwieldy that I have begun to use the word "injection" instead, following the image of injecting poison with a syringe...

As one battering mother put it: "I have never felt loved all my life. When the baby was born, I thought he would love me. When he cried, it meant he didn't love me. So I hit him." ... The baby is expected to cleanse the mother of her depression, fears and anger and be her poison container.

Mothers who use their children as poison containers are actually *addicted* to them, since they solve so many of their intrapsychic problems through manipulation of their children.... In fact, the children are indulging the mothers, who use the children as "comfort blankets," poison containers into which they can inject their unhappiness, fear and anger.

Using children as scapegoats to relieve personal internal conflict has proved an extremely effective way to maintain our collective psychological homeostasis.

Ultimately, of course, the ending of child assault, like the ending of wars and depressions, will only come when each adult has experienced enough love in their family of origin to make the use of children as poison containers unnecessary.

Truly empathic love for children in the sense of wanting them to grow up as independent individuals is actually a late historical acquisition.

# PARENTS SENSIBLES

Journal de la Société Canadienne  
pour la Prévention de la Cruauté envers les Enfants

Tome 13

Numéro 2

Printemps 1990

## Il Existe une Dissimulation...

"...Nombreux sont les gens qui croient que les bébés et les petits enfants ont besoin de soins individuels de leur mère. De nombreux parents mettent en pratique cette conviction. Mais ce besoin est rarement exprimé publiquement et sans équivoque parce que les représentants craignent d'offenser les parents qui n'y croient pas. Je plains les mères qui ne peuvent pas soigner elles-mêmes leurs bébés. Mais je ne vois pas l'utilité de leur cacher le fait que la garde en groupe est une mauvaise alternative. Elles ont droit à de l'aide pour trouver une alternative pour elles-mêmes et non d'autres formes de soins. Je sympathise aussi avec les mères qui peuvent se permettre de soigner elles-mêmes leurs enfants mais qui ne le veulent pas. Mais elles aussi ont droit à un portrait réel du conflit entre ce qu'elles veulent et ce dont leurs enfants ont besoin. Seulement en l'ayant en vue pourront-elles prendre des décisions bien informées et quand ces décisions les éloigneront de leurs enfants seront-elles en mesure de trouver des solutions adéquates.

"Il existe une dissimulation semblable à celle qui existait par rapport à l'allaitement maternel. Depuis des années il est bien connu que le lait maternel est non seulement le meilleur et le plus sécuritaire des nourritures pour bébés mais aussi une protection importante contre une variété de maladies. Mais bien des mères ne veulent pas allaiter. Par respect pour leur volonté (et des arrangements sociaux que les biberons permettent) les gens contourment ces faits, font allusion et insinuent tout en construisant une clause restrictive pour les utilisateurs de biberons. L'évidence scientifique augmentant en force et le changement du climat de l'opinion publique a enfin soulevé cette couverture. Il est plus acceptable de dire aujourd'hui qu'il est préférable si toutes les mères allaitent leurs bébés, au moins pour quelques semaines. En conséquence les femmes qui négligent l'allaitement sont heureuses de le faire. Beaucoup de celles qui chancellent décident d'en faire l'essai et le nombre de mères qui sont réellement incapables de produire du lait diminue dramatiquement. Je crois qu'un éclaircissement semblable au sujet des soins individuels produirait les mêmes résultats dans ce cas..."

Penelope Leach

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Recognizing that the capacity to give and receive trust, affection and empathy is fundamental to being human.

Knowing that all of us suffer the consequences when children are raised in a way that makes them affectionless and violent, and;

Realizing that for the first time in History we have definite knowledge that these qualities are determined by the way a child is cared for in the very early years.

# CREDO



## WE BELIEVE THAT:

- The necessity that every new human being develop the capacity for trust, affection and empathy dictates that potential parents re-order their priorities with this in mind.
- Most parents are willing and able to provide their children with the necessary loving empathic care, given support from others, appropriate understanding of the task and the conviction of its absolute importance.
- It is unutterably cruel to permanently maim a human being by failing to provide this quality of care during the first three years of life.

## THERE IS AN URGENCY THEREFORE TO:

- Re-evaluate all our institutions, traditions and beliefs from this perspective.
- Oppose and weaken all forces which undermine the desire or ability of parents to successfully carry out a task which ultimately affects us all.
- Support and strengthen all aspects of family and community life which assist parents to meet their obligation to each new member of the human race.