Massimo Livi-Bacci

Too Few Children and Too Much Family

I

THE WELL-BRED, SOPHISTICATED, and cultivated Anglo-Saxon traveler of past centuries, usually ecstatic in Venice's Piazza San Marco, amidst the ruins of Rome or Pompeii, ascending Vesuvius, or facing Botticelli's *Primavera*, could not ignore the hardships and inconveniences of Italian daily life. For all the culture and the charm that the greatness of the past and the liveliness of the people would generously dispense, there were also poor roads, unreliable services, dubious hygiene, greedy merchants, astute thieves . . . and children, plenty of them, some rich and well dressed, most of them poor, some in rags, swarming in the streets, playing in the open spaces, helping in shops and taverns, laughing, crying, singing, peddling, soliciting, claiming the attention of the adults, unrestrained by their parents. Too many children, indeed, an unequivocal sign of the irresponsibility of the parents who—in the words of Malthus—"are bringing beings into the world that they cannot support,"[1] a fact not unexpected in a society dominated by a backward clergy and superstitious beliefs.

Today, the descendants of those same cultivated travelers are surprised to hear that the abundance of children is only a pale reminiscence of the past and that modern Italians bear every year a number of children that, in relation to the size of the population, is the lowest in the world. Indeed, the transition to the new millennium means also a transition from plenty to scarcity: a scarcity of human resources, particularly of children

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and of the young, but not of material ones, since Italians are now more prosperous than they have ever been except perhaps for the *cives romani* of two thousand years ago. Since my professional trade is based on numbers, allow me to give you some in order to illustrate the dimensions of the transition.

During the 1990s the Italian population, currently at 57 million, was practically stationary, the excess of deaths over births being compensated for by immigration. In the thirty years between 1960 and 1990 the population had increased by 6 million, and in the preceding thirty years—between 1930 and 1960—9 million Italians had been added. So what had been a plentiful growth has been reduced to zero at present. And what about the future? Considering the next thirty years—this is a convenient time-measure because it coincides approximately with the length of a generation, or the time span between parents and children—the Italian population may decline by 7 million. What is more relevant is that this figure is the algebraic sum of an increase of 5 million for those above age sixty and a decline of 12 million for those below. The assumptions behind this forecast are that fertility will remain at the low levels reached in the last fifteen years and that survival will further improve. To put things into perspective, the Italian case is not an isolated one, because Europe, from the Atlantic to the Urals, is experiencing a similar transition: in spite of two bloody wars and mass emigration, its population increased by 150 million in the first half of the last century, and another 180 million were added in the second half to reach 727 million in 2000. But if we are to believe current United Nations projections, in the year 2050 the European population will be 124 million below the present level (this compares with a *growth* of identical dimensions in North America).[2] One-eighth of this decline could be due to the negative growth of the Italians, who represent less than one-twelfth of the European population.

Let us stop for a minute and reflect on the meaning of this change. The Italians and the Europeans of this century have been used to living in rapidly developing societies in which people, demand, consumption, investment, and production have been in continuous expansion in spite of periods of crisis and trauma. Anyone fortunate enough to have reached old age and

who looks back to her or his youth remembers a society less numerous, cities smaller and less crowded, landscapes emptier and less built-up, a life less filled with material goods. This image of a dense and affluent contemporary society and a comparatively empty past is the consequence of more than a century of demographic and economic increase and is deeply embedded in Western psychology. In the last two hundred years the size of the economy of the United Kingdom, measured in real terms, has increased about fifty times, its population four and a half times, its real GNP per capita twelve times: more or less a doubling of the economy in every generation, a doubling of per capita product in less than two generations, and a doubling of the population in less than three.[3] In Italy during the twentieth century, the size of the economy increased eighteen times, the population almost doubled, and per capita income increased tenfold. Changes of the same order of magnitude have happened in the rest of Europe—a relatively small continent, where space had been densely settled long ago and natural endowment has suffered great stress. Let us also consider another aspect: Europe, and Italy particularly, is on the eve of a historical phase of declining human resources—and this is happening for the first time since the industrial revolution and will be a totally new experience with no guidance available from the past. There are only two exceptions: Ireland, in the eighty years after the Great Famine, lost half of its population, while East Germany lost one-third of it in the forty years of its history—both countries through emigration to more fortunate parts of the world. But their cases—the first with an economy linked to agriculture, the second in the straightjacket of the socialist system—can offer little guidance to postindustrial, postmodern, postmillennium societies.

II

Before I come to the heart of the matter, I wish to discuss briefly another aspect. Is a sustained population decline really a bad thing? Many feel that Italy (and this would be true for other places in the world) would be a better place with a less numerous population, its landscapes less encroached upon, its cities

less crowded, its hills meeting the coastline unconstrained by human artifacts. There were about 14.2 million housing units in 1961, a number that the 2001 census will find about doubled; the land developed for nonresidential purposes has certainly more than doubled. Human activities do compete with natural amenities, and the notion that Italy would be better off with a smaller population is widespread. But the question is not whether there is an optimum population—indeed, this is a problem that theorists have often discussed but never solved—or whether this optimum might not be much smaller than the current size. Indeed, this is a philosophical issue on which the legitimate positions of those who value the greatest possible availability of open space and silence and of those who instead favor lifestyles in close physical association with fellow humans cannot be reconciled. Kostoglotov, the hero of Solzhenitsyn's *Cancer Ward*, remarked: "people have a wrong idea of what is beautiful and what is ugly. To live in a five-story cage, where people walk and stomp over your head and radios blare from all sides, this they consider beautiful. Instead, living as a peasant in the deep of the steppe, this is considered an utmost misfortune."[4] So the question is not whether Italy (or any other country) would be a better place with ten or twenty or thirty million fewer inhabitants—but whether a rapid population decline can be sustained for long without a general impoverishment of society.

In other words, the question is not whether small is better than large, but whether we can go from large to small without paying an unbearable price. A rapid decline, such as the one inscribed in current demographic trends, cannot be sustained for long in several realms—biodemographic, economic, social, or political. Under the biodemographic profile, the current fertility rate implies the halving of the Italian population every forty years. Thirty years from now, women over eighty would be more numerous than girls under puberty, and those over seventy would exceed those below thirty. Indeed, the hypothesized decline of six million in the next thirty years implies a very rapid aging of the population and will be the algebraic sum of an increase of five million for those above age sixty and a decline of twelve million for those below. This rapid aging process implies the economic nonsustainability of current mecha-

nisms of intergenerational transfers, a stream that flows from what will be the decreasing numbers of those who produce and pay taxes to the increasing numbers of the retired and ailing; it will also probably hinder productivity and retard growth. Finally, in the social and political areas, an inverted age pyramid would cause a tremendous slowdown of innovation and mobility; family networks would be weaker and with fewer strands; political decisions would be concentrated more and more in the hands of the old. Societies can, of course, adapt and adjust to changes—but in the Italian case these could be so rapid that adjustments would be ineffectual. Hence, nonsustainability.

III

How few are the few children Italians are having? A conventional measure employed by demographers is the so-called total fertility rate, or the number of children per woman on the assumption that no woman dies before the end of childbearing. Replacement fertility—or the number of children needed in order to replace exactly a generation with another, without gains or losses—is just a tiny fraction above the level of two children per woman, more or less the fertility rate of contemporary American women. Fertility is much lower in Europe, now between 1.5 and 1.6, but within Europe itself there is variation, and two groups of countries can be identified. France, the United Kingdom, and part of Scandinavia are about two- or three-tenths of a point above the average, while the rest of Europe (I will leave out Russia and adjoining states, deeply troubled by the after-transition shocks) is two- or three-tenths of a point below. During the last decade, Italy, Spain, and Germany have competed for the lowest fertility rate, with Italy winning the race most of the time. Among Italian women born at the beginning of the 1960s we estimate that at the close of their reproductive period (now not too far away), those childless or with one child will outnumber those with two or more children. Within Italy itself there is some variation: while the total fertility rates in the North and the Center hover around 1, the South stays around 1.5. It is interesting to note that the reproductive record of Neapolitan or Sicilian women—in spite

of their apparent religiosity and their devotion to the *Madonna di Pompeii*—is more Malthusian than that of the more secular and supposedly rational Scandinavian women of Viking descent: a true cultural revolution. We may also add that the development of very low fertility during the last thirty years has coincided with an increase of the age of childbearing: in Italy the mean age of women at the birth of their first (and often only) child has increased from below age twenty-five in the early 1970s to twenty-eight in 1997.

Italian children have thus been arriving in smaller numbers and later in the lives of their parents. I have already made the argument that the current situation cannot be maintained for long. But I would like to readdress the problem using a different approach. Between parents and children there is, approximately, a difference of thirty years; for the sake of simplicity, let us suppose that people aged thirty are parents of children below age one and that people aged sixty are parents of adults aged thirty and the grandparents of children below one. More precise calculations would not greatly change the substance of the example. In the year 2000 there were, in Italy, 520,000 children below age one; there were 920,000 parents aged thirty, and 730,000 grandparents aged sixty. For every 100 children, there were 177 parents and 140 grandparents. In the North and the Center of the country, where fertility decline took place earlier and has been steeper, for every 100 children there were 200 parents and an approximately equal number of grandparents. In order to maintain unchanged the "functioning" of society, each newborn, in the course of a generation, will, in effect, have to assume the role of two adults—in production processes, in the labor market, in social activities, in cultural life, in family relations. It is conceivable that thirty years from now one person might be able to perform the work of two in the manufacturing sector or in highly specialized tertiary activities, although this would imply an extremely high and sustained increase of productivity (2.5 percent per year) and of technical progress. But it is very unlikely that this might happen in the service sector—particularly in health, education, leisure, and so forth—where productivity growth is low and technology not of great help. It follows that a series of obligations and challenges

will fall on the generations born at the beginning of this century: they will have to take the place of the many more numerous adults currently producing the goods that conventionally form the much-revered GNP of the nation; they will have to bear the weight of transfers to the increasing number of the old; they might even be requested to redress the reproductive balance dangerously distorted by their parents, who had been too much in love with their one lone child, or *figlio unico*; finally, they will be called upon to support their own aging parents. And all this will take place in a much more competitive world, where the traditional stable "niches" in the labor market (for those who know Italian, the mythical *posto di lavoro*) will be fewer and fewer.

Many have also predicted that the new generations will have a standard of living below that of their parents, reversing a secular trend of continuous improvement from one generation to the following one. This is probably wrong. In a few years the new entries in the labor market will be substantially fewer than they are today (twenty years ago, fertility was higher than it is now), with very beneficial effects on the high unemployment of the young; the fewer entries, if more productive (as they must be), will also earn more. But the conservation or the improvement of the standard of living will have to be paid for, with more work, more competition, less security, less welfare, more ups and downs, and an increased number of winners but also of losers.

In order to win this challenge, there are two complementary strategies: more education for and investment in the young, and "less family"—or, to be more precise, less binding ties between generations of parents and children.

IV

It is now time to address a crucial question: why is Italian fertility so low? The reasons for the modern decline of reproduction are relatively well understood, and this is not the place for their further analysis. The economists—who are very good at economizing words and streamlining paradigms—will say that children are the results of the interplay of costs and ben-

efits and that in modern or postmodern societies their cost relative to that of competing goods and options has increased, while their economic benefit to parents (such as the help expected from them in old age) has decreased. We may well make this paradigm our own, provided we accept also the idea that the concepts of cost and benefit must include all facets of the relations between parents and children as they have developed in hundreds of thousands of years of evolution, and remember also that these concepts are a combination of biological, spiritual, and cultural elements whose definition and measurement are, to say the least, very imperfect. Indeed, a great economist and humanist of the twentieth century, Joseph Schumpeter, expressed this concept very well:

> . . . the greatest of the assets, the contribution made by parenthood to physical and moral health—to normality as we might express it—particularly in the case of women, almost invariably escapes the rational searchlight of modern individuals who, in private as in public life, tend to focus attention on ascertainable details of immediate utilitarian relevance and to sneer at the idea of hidden necessities of human nature or of the social organism.[5]

This said, what is so special about the Italian situation? There are at least two groups of not unrelated factors that are relevant, the first being the rapidity of social change in the last decades, the second the peculiar mechanisms that govern the slow departure of the young from the womb of the family—that "too much family" that forms the second part of the title of this essay. Both groups of factors are certainly familiar to those who know something about the country, but I will stress more the second than the first, because its connection with low fertility is less evident and more complex.

Italy—and this analysis holds also for the Iberian peninsula—has undergone a very rapid process of change in the last decades. I am referring here to social and cultural change rather than economic change. The political awakening of the young in the 1960s and the strength of the feminist movement in the 1970s have precipitated a series of changes in legislation—including much that had been enacted by fascism—in just a few years. It was only in 1969 that the ban on family-planning

activities was lifted and the free sale of contraceptives permitted, and only in 1970 was divorce introduced through legislation. But only a few years after, in 1978, abortion was legalized and liberalized, while in 1981 the popular vote rejected, by a large majority, the abrogation of that law as proposed by a referendum. All this happened under the relatively distracted eyes of the Vatican and with governments of Catholic observance. The increase of participation of women in the labor market has also been extremely rapid, and trends that had been slowly developed over a century in other societies have been compressed in Italy into two or three decades. Between 1970 and 2000, the female labor force increased 70 percent, while the male labor force remained unchanged; women now constitute approximately 40 percent of the total.

This revolution in values, attitudes, and behavior has taken place in a society that, under other profiles, has remained static or has adjusted slowly. The organization of time has remained chaotic, and school hours and school holidays are in contrast with working hours; getting around is difficult and costly; social investment (in libraries, meeting places, and structures for sport and leisure) for children and the young is neglected; the gender division of tasks in the family is still heavily asymmetric; the labor market offers few chances to the working mother who needs a flexible or part-time job. The lagging societal adjustment has increased the claims on parents'—and particularly on women's—time and energy. Postponement and reduction of childbearing can be seen, therefore, as an outcome of this set of forces.

The second group of factors explaining the exceptionally low fertility rate concerns the "too much family" that is the cause and consequence of what I have defined as the *sindrome del ritardo*, or "postponement syndrome," typical of Italian society. This syndrome has displaced until later in life the full assumption of those responsibilities that make of a person an autonomous and independent adult, able to make her or his own fundamental decisions, such as entering a stable relationship or having children. Reproduction is a process that begins with sexual maturation and ends with the loss of the ability to conceive. One of the main lines of the social and demographic

history of Europe in modern times has been the gradual postponement of the age at which reproduction takes place—from an age immediately following puberty, as was common among Tuscan girls in the Quattrocento, to a much older age that, for a majority of Italian women, approaches thirty years. This process of gradual delay has accelerated during the last twenty years, as is well documented by censuses, surveys, and demographic and sociological analyses, as well as by the common perception. This ample documentation—and I will refer here in particular to the 1996 fertility survey based on a large sample of women and men—unequivocally shows two important aspects. The first concerns expectations: almost all men and women expect and want to have at least one child, and, on average, they would like to have two; however, their reproductive decisions appear as the final result of a series of steps that have to be taken in sequence. The second is the gradual postponement, among recent generations, of the age at which education is completed, the labor market is entered, a stable job is found, a home is selected, the family is left, a partnership is initiated. Each step is a condition for the successive one, and all are necessary before the decision of having a child is reached.[6]

Let me come to the first aspect: if it is true that everybody feels the desire to become a parent, it is also true that this desire is subject to a series of conditions. Surveys show that young women and young men think that they must have completed their education; that they must have a full-time job and a real, comfortable house; and that they must be in a stable union, and almost invariably this means a marriage. The road to reproduction implies the gradual construction of stability. The great difference from the past does not lie in the fact that stability is required in order to have children, but in the fact that this stability is now achieved gradually, slowly, and, therefore, later in the life cycle. For the generation of Italians born in the 1940s, leaving the parents' house, initiating a career, experiencing sexual gratification, and commencing a marital union were often contemporary, coincident events. And here comes the second aspect of the question: surveys show that these step-by-step expectations are translated into practice. A few data,

comparing the experience of young women at age twenty-five in two different cohorts—the first born in the early 1950s, the second born in the early 1970s—are a convincing illustration of the premise. By age twenty-five, among women born in the early 1950s, two-thirds had a job, compared with one-half of those born in the early 1970s; in the first of the two cohorts three-fourths were independent from their parents and one-half had had a child, compared with one-third and one-tenth in the younger cohort. If the comparison is made at higher ages there are comparable delays, and so it is for men: 50 percent of men still live with their parents by the age of thirty.

One could easily cite other data that go in the same direction, but these are sufficient to make the point: in the last couple of decades a new model of life has developed. According to this model the completion of the education of both partners is a prerequisite for entering the labor market; a full-time job and a house (which requires resources, because three-fourths of Italian households own they house they live in) are prerequisites for leaving the parents' house; and leaving the parents' house is a condition for making decisions regarding partnership, marriage, and childbearing. Each of these steps takes more time than in the past: the length of education has increased not only because more young go into higher education but also because of the disorganization of the educational system and the excessive weight of the curricula; the waiting time for finding a job is longer because of the rigidity of the labor market and high unemployment; more time is needed for finding a house because of the cost of buying one; forming the decision to have a baby takes also more time because of the excessive and almost pathological medicalization of pregnancy. The combination of these delays implies, for an increasing number of couples, that the decision to have a first or a second child—no matter how much desired and planned—is taken in an advanced phase of the reproductive period, and that for some these plans are not realized because of the onset of infecundity or subfecundity, or because of the instability or rupture of the relationship, or because of the realization that the physiological or psychological costs of childbearing are heavier than expected.

V

The family plays an important role in the development of the "postponement syndrome": on one hand it makes it possible for the young to postpone the transition to adulthood, but on the other hand it is also a victim of it. In order to understand this, two elements are crucial: the first economic, the second behavioral. The economic element may be stated in the following way: public transfers for the young (for health, social assistance, and particularly for education) are among the lowest in Europe. Generational accounting shows the balance between the value of the taxes paid and the benefits received at each age: the balance is positive for the young and the old (they receive more than they pay) and negative for the adult and the mature. Net transfers become negative very early in life, at age eighteen, and return to positive at age sixty.[7] In the United States, for instance, net transfers stay positive up to the age of twenty-three, and there is evidence that this pattern occurs in other developed countries. The disadvantage for Italy is mainly due to the relatively low expenses in education, a mere 4.8 percent of GDP, as against 6–7 percent in the United States, Great Britain, France, or Spain. The average expenditure per student is significantly lower than in other countries with the same level of GDP per capita. Expenditure in infrastructures for children and young people—schools and playgrounds, libraries and social centers, sport and recreational facilities—is significantly lower than in other European countries. Whatever is not given by the community must be supplied, one way or the other, by the family, which fills the gap. Otherwise it is the piazza, the parish, the streetcorner café. On the other hand, the well-known rigidity of the labor market, the lack of part-time or seasonal jobs for the young, the high cost of labor for employers, and, in general, regulations that discourage precocious and often precious working experiences burden families with further responsibilities for their children. And when the grown-up child, sometimes balding or graying, is ready to go, it is often the family that draws on its savings for buying the house or providing the down payment for the mortgage (until a few years ago at least 50 percent of the total cost).

There are cultural and behavioral implications of what I have briefly discussed above. The young—I am not speaking of thirty-year-olds, but of teenagers or boys and girls in their early twenties—have reached a comfortable compromise with their parents, enjoying considerable freedom, very much in line with other modern European societies. They go out when they wish, take vacations with their fiancées, sleep out of the house, etc. Those who have a wage income and who stay in the parents' home get food, lodging, and a number of other services for free, so their standard of living is high. It follows that they do not leave the parental home until they are firmly established in a profession. The step into adulthood implies a drop in the standard of living that many are not happy to take. Sociologist Alessandro Cavalli has summarized the situation as follows:

> I believe that the most important consequence of protracted dependency will be on the attitude towards one's own future. Young people who are staying dependent on the family for a long time and are used to being supported by resources they are not committed to producing do not rely upon their own initiative. In interviews with young men and women, I came across a very peculiar way of thinking which can be summarized as follows. "I wasn't born out of my own initiative; my birth was the consequence of a decision taken by my parents: I wasn't asked if I wanted to come into this world; now that I am here, it is their responsibility to provide me with all I need in order to enjoy a comfortable life." I would call this attitude the *culture of entitlements*: as sons and daughters feel they have rights in regard to their parents, so citizens feel they have rights in regard to their collectivity. I would suggest the hypothesis that there is a sort of correlation between attitudes towards the parents and attitudes towards the welfare state. Prolonged dependency upon the parents feeds expectations that there will always be someone who is going to provide for what the children need.[8]

Families in Italy are traditionally strong, even among intellectuals. I have not yet come across statements as cynical as the one by Michel de Montaigne, "I lost two or three children who had been given to a nurse, with some regret but without grief."[9] Or Rousseau, who noted in his *Confessions*: "my third child was sent to the *enfants trouvés* (foundling hospital), and so

were the first two; the same I have done with the following two, because I have had 5 in all. This settlement appeared to me so good, so sensible and legitimate that if I never displayed my satisfaction in public it was out of regard for their mother."[10] But traditional Italian familism, under the pressure of social change, has taken a new direction: instead of "widening" and extending the support, allegiance, solidarity to a large number of children and kin, it is "deepening" its action, protecting, prolonging, supporting grown-up children and delaying their exit from the family nest.

The peculiar way of functioning of Italian families, at the end of the twentieth century, has contributed to depressing fertility further. Public investment in children and the young is low; the family is called upon to fill many gaps; the steps to independence and self-reliance are delayed; the time of decisions is postponed; plans and expectations concerning childbearing are revised downward. Because the dependency of children is lasting longer—making supporting them more expensive—couples have one or two children instead of two or three. So the economic balance of the family is restored to equilibrium: indeed, individuals in general know well what is good for themselves. Unfortunately, what is good for the individual is not always good for society, and I will now turn to this complex and delicate subject.

VI

The notion that current demographic behavior, if continued, will seriously damage the texture of Italian society is slowly being recognized. However, the fascist demographic policy of the 1930s still looms negatively in the public opinion, and many uphold the notion that it is better if public intervention stays away from population issues. But the mood is changing as Italians, like other Europeans, are recognizing that the crisis of the welfare state and the reduction of benefits generously dispensed by the public hand have much to do with demography. In Italy, and elsewhere in Europe, the generous welfare legislation was created in the quarter of a century following World War II, when the economies were developing fast, the number

of workers paying their contributions was expanding, and the number of beneficiaries was small. The fall of the birth rate and the rapid aging of the population in the last two or three decades have changed the background against which the rules were designed. Between 1970 and 2000 the proportion of the Italian population over sixty-five increased from 11 to 18 percent; in the year 2030 it will approach 30 percent. Public opinion begins to recognize that if the age at retirement goes up, monetary benefits are trimmed, and assistance is downsized, this has something to do with demography. But many still believe that spontaneous forces may emerge that will correct the negative trends. But is this true?

In his presidential address to the Population Association of America in 1986, Paul Demeny, a distinguished demographer and economist, cast into doubt the notion that the invisible hand—whose action Adam Smith recognized in human economic behavior—would also operate in population issues. The famous passage of the Wealth of Nations reads: "Every individual . . . neither intends to promote the public interest, nor knows how much he is promoting it. . . . He intends only his own security, his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention. . . . By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it."[11] But population is not a perfect market, in which we can buy, sell, or trade children according to need; indeed, the expectation that the "invisible hand" leads the individuals to a collective harmonious demographic behavior is illogical. Observed Demeny, "The issue is not how many children couples choose for themselves: we can take it as axiomatic that they will choose what is best for themselves, given the circumstances. The issue is how each of us would like others to behave with respect to demographic choices for our own good, however we choose to define it."[12]

Children are the consequence of private choices and generate private costs and benefits. But they are also a public good, because they will perform actions that will benefit everybody: as a whole, they ensure the continuity of society. This is the moral and political base that allows policies to be developed

within the framework and the limits provided by the liberal democratic rules of the Western world. We could also invoke that principle of responsibility developed by Hans Jonas with reference to human behavior and the natural world: "in your present choices include the wholeness of man among the objects of your will."[13] That "wholeness" would probably be compromised by a rapid population decline for the reasons I have already discussed.

Nobody knows how effective governmental policies can be in changing demographic behavior. The experience of the past century in the Western world is inconclusive. But this is not a good reason not to try to follow three principles. The first calls for more equity. As things stand in many European countries, and particularly in Italy, the way public transfers are distributed leads to a negative consequence: couples are better off if they have fewer children than the average couple. The consequence is what I would define as a "negative fertility drift" that holds fertility down to the present low levels and hampers a possible recovery. The second principle is linked to the first and calls for increased investment in and for the children and the young. Since they are becoming a scarce resource more has to be invested in supporting them, particularly, but not only, in education. The third principle requires a war on the "syndrome" that delays the steps leading into adulthood and postpones the full assumption of responsibilities, including parenthood.

VII

In Tomasi di Lampedusa's *Il Gattopardo* (The Leopard), the Prince of Salina says: "We may perhaps worry for our children and for our grandchildren, but we have no obligation beyond those whom we can hope to caress with our own hands, and I am unable to worry for what our descendents will be in 1960."[14] The Prince of Salina was wise, knew his world was crumbling, and had no wish or curiosity for the future. But we, who are not princes, must make an effort and worry about the year 2060.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This essay develops concepts presented in the Public Lecture 1997 promoted by "Associazione Il Mulino." See M. Livi Bacci, "Dall'abbondanza alla scarsità: Le popolazioni d'Italia e d'Europa al passaggio del millennio," *Il Mulino* (6) (1997).

ENDNOTES

[1]T.R. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970 [1798]).

[2]United Nations, *Population Prospects: The 2001 Revision* (New York: United Nations, 2001).

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[6]Paolo De Sandre, Fausta Ongaro, Rosella Rettaroli, and Silvana Salvini, *Matrimonio e figli: tra rinvio e rinuncia* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1997).

[7]ISAE, "I conti generazionali dell'Italia," *Rapporto trimestrale*, October 1999.

[8]Alessandro Cavalli, "The Delayed Entry into Adulthood: Is it Good or Bad for Society?" in J. Machado Pais and L. Crisholms, eds., *Jovenes en mudança* (Lisbon: Editorial do Instituto de Ciencias Sociais da Universidade de Lisboa, 1997).

[9]Philippe Ariés, *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1973), 60.

[10]Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Les Confessions*, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 101–102.

[11]Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, Everyman Library, vol. 1 (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1964), 400.

[12]Paul Demeny, "Population and the Invisible Hand," *Demography* 23 (4) (1986).

[13]Hans Jonas, *Il principio di responsabilità* (Turin: Einaudi, 1990).

[14]"Potremo forse preoccuparci per i nostri figli, forse per i nipotini, ma aldila' di quanto possiamo sperare di accarezzare con queste mani non abbiamo obblighi e io non posso preoccuparmi di cio' che saranno i nostri discendenti nel 1960." Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, *Il Gattopardo* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1958), 55.