

Swimming? Smoking? Solving? Intellectual History of the Population Control Movement

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“Author meets his critics”: Matthew Connelly, *Fatal
Misconception*

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Intellectual History Helps Us Understand Puzzling (Horrifying?) Events of the Past, Disentangling Three Possibilities:

- *Swimming*: Fish don't know what they are swimming in, individual actions might be the result of a common, more or less unquestioned milieu or *zeitgeist* which is now not understood as "the past is a foreign country"
- *Smoking*: What *were* they smoking? Individual actions were the result of the commitment of a few individuals to a set of beliefs which, *at the time*, seemed aberrant and unsupported by "evidence" (e.g. abolitionists, early Christianity)
- *Solving*: Actions which seem to us disturbing and horrific were the best action given the difficult situation the individual actors faced (e.g. slavery in the Constitution)

There were Four Strands/Factions of The Population Control Movement—which have had diametrically opposite evolutions over the 20th century

- Eugenics
- Population Bomb
- Women's Rights
- “Sexualityism”

Eugenics and Population Bomb went from swimming to smoking

Swimming: Widespread racism,
Ethnic and class prejudice,
Xenophobia



Eugenics

Smoking: socially unacceptable to attribute any differences to genes

Swimming: Onset of rapid population growth, rising environmental concerns (e.g. 1970s), Malthusianism, Economic Planning Models (how to meet “needs”)



Population Bomb

Smoking: Only so many times you can cry “wolf!” (including today over price spikes)

Love means never having to say your are sorry, but c'mon

Wolf!

Oops

- Japan is overpopulated
 - Famines
 - Running out of resources
 - Pollution will overwhelm us
 - Planetary crisis
(e.g. climate change)
- Population from 83 mn to 127 mn, GDP per capita goes up 10 fold.
 - Food glut
 - Commodity prices fall
 - Environment got much better in rich countries in nearly every dimension
 - $C=(C/P)*P$ —why focus on P?
P is stagnant/falling where C/P is high

What happened in growth theory/development economics to cause us to lose interest

- Massive *deceleration* of growth in the 1980s—after decelerations of population growth were already well underway (e.g. Latin America)
- Emphasis on the volatility of growth rates over time in countries—sharp accelerations and decelerations—that slowly moving variables (e.g. demography) cannot explain.
- Decreasing importance on “factors” and more on “productivity”
- Advent of theories (the “new” or endogenous growth) with agglomeration or scale economies
- Clearly differential impacts of equivalent demographic shifts on savings, investment, output per worker (e.g. the supposed demographic “bonus” in East Asia was a demographic “bogus” elsewhere)

*While population might be (or might not) be related to economic growth and overall prosperity it clearly was not a **primary** phenomena*

The other two strands of the movement were going the other way—from fringe to mainstream

Swimming: Unacceptable to even question that men and women are equal and gender discrimination a major social ill.



Women's Rights

Smoking: Women are obviously the weaker sex, need protection, bedrock of family, etc.

Swimming: Limiting any individual's expression of sexuality or sexual identity is *in and of itself* a bad thing.



"Sexualityism"

Smoking: Sexual behavior had to be limited to monogamous marriage for the good of society, encouraging sexuality is bad.

What do the new zeitgeist think about “population control”

- If *voluntary* contraception is sufficient to reach demographic goals they are for it.
- If *voluntary* contraception does not have any impact on demographic goals—they are still for it.
- If reaching demographic goals requires *involuntary* contraception they are against it.
- If reaching demographic goals requires *incentives* in population control motivated programs—they are leery of it.

Simple story of Cairo in 1994: Current swimmers dump current smokers and “population control” is over

- Women’s rights and sexualityism no longer need the upper class eugenicists and population bomb types to justify contraception and “reproductive health”
- If “development” is “engendered” then “development is the best contraceptive” is OK by them (and the evidence)
- The embarrassing aspects of the movement—India’s emergency period, China, sex selective abortion, etc.—can be pushed off the boat—“yea, what *were* they smoking”
- Contraception “meets population targets and is also good for women” becomes “is good for women, full stop”

But, who really beat the Catholics?

- The eugenics and population bomb types alone never could.
- The easy and fun story is that “women’s rights” did
- But the intriguing story, in but underplayed in the book, is the *phenomenal* rise of “sexualityism”—rivaling religion as a force—something we are now truly swimming in

Teaching sex education to 8 year olds...



The strange rise of “sexualityism”

- The expression of human sexuality is *in and of itself* a positive good and limitations on that expression are *in and of themselves* bad.
- From banning “Lady Chatterley’s Lover” *in 1960 (!?)* in the UK to pornographic movies in every hotel room (thanks for being here anyway)
- The rise of “sexual orientation” as a *protected* category of human behavior (like religion)
- The split of major religious denominations over whether *in principle* one can classify sexual practices as sin—that sexual behavior is a “private” matter that religion should not intrude