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# **A modest proposal for preventing the children of the poor from being a burden to their parents and making them beneficial to the public**

## **Plagiarized from Jonathan Swift and modernized by Y.S. Brenner**

A modest  
proposal

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Y.S. Brenner

*Utrecht University, The Netherlands*

It is a melancholy object to those, who walk through the larger cities, when they see the streets crowded with beggars, followed by three, four, or more children, all in rags, and importuning every passenger for alms. These parents, instead of being able to work for their honest livelihood, are forced to employ all their time in strolling to beg sustenance for their helpless infants, who, as they grow up, turn to drugs and thievery for want of work.

I think it is agreed by all parties, that this prodigious number of children is, in the present deplorable state of many countries, a very great additional grievance; and therefore, whoever could find out a fair, cheap and easy method of making these children sound and useful to the common-wealth, would fairly deserve the Nobel Prize for economics.

But my intention is very far from being confined to provide only for the children of professed beggars; it is of a much greater extent, and shall take in the whole number of infants at a certain age, who are born of parents not able to support them without taxing our public purse.

As for my own part, having turned my thoughts, for many years, on this important subject, and maturely weighed the several schemes of other projectors, I have always found them grossly mistaken in their computations. It is true a child, just born, may be sustained by the mother's milk for a solar year with little other nourishment above the value of the help which she may get from the welfare programmes of the state, or the value in scraps by her lawful occupation of begging; and it is exactly at one-year old that I propose to provide for them in such a manner, as, instead of being a charge on the parents, or the tax-payer, or wanting food and raiment for the rest of their lives, they shall, on the contrary, contribute to the feeding and partly to the clothing of many thousands.

There is likewise another great advantage in my scheme, that it will prevent those voluntary abortions, and that horrid practice of women murdering their

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bastard children, more to avoid the expense than the shame, which would move tears and pity in the most savage and inhuman beast.

I have calculated by the most advanced economic statistics the number of such children, which in the present state of affairs, is utterly impossible to sustain by all the methods proposed recently, for we can neither employ them nor house them. They can very seldom pick up a livelihood by stealing until they arrive at six-years old; except where they are of towardly parts; although, I confess, they learn the rudiments much earlier; during which time they can, however, properly be looked on only as probationers; as I have been informed by a knowledgeable professor of education who protested to me, that he never knew above one or two instances under the age of six, even in a part of the world renowned for the quickest proficiency in that art.

I shall now therefore humbly modernize Jonathan Swift's excellent proposal of the year 1729, which I hope will not be liable to the least objection.

I have been assured by a very knowing American of my acquaintance, that a young healthy child well nursed is, at a year old, a most delicious nourishing and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled; and I make no doubt that it will equally serve in a fricasie, or a ragout.

I do therefore humbly offer it to public consideration, that of, say, every 120 children, 20 may be reserved for breed, whereof only one-fourth to be males; which is more than we allow to sheep, black cattle, or swine; and my reason is, that these children are seldom the fruits of marriage, a circumstance not much regarded these days, therefore, one male will be sufficient to serve four females. That the remaining hundred may, at a year old, be offered in sale to persons of quality and fortune, always advising the mother to let them suck plentifully in the last month, so as to render them plump, and fat, for good table. A child will make two dishes at an entertainment for friends; and when the family dines alone, the fore or hind quarter will make a reasonable dish; and seasoned with a little pepper or salt will be very good boiled on the fourth day, especially in winter.

I have reckoned on a medium, that a child just born will weigh upward of 3kg; and in a solar year, if tolerably nursed, increased to 10kg.

I grant this food will be somewhat dear, and therefore very proper for the rich and others with large tax-deductible expense accounts, who, as they have already devoured most of the parents, seem to have the best title to the children.

I think the advantages by the proposal which I have made are obvious and many, as well as of the highest importance. For first, as I have already observed, it would greatly lessen the number of poor and later unemployed, with whom we are yearly over-run; being the principal breeders, as well as the cause of our large and growing government deficit.

Second, the poor will have something valuable of their own, which by law may be made liable to taxation, and help to pay the interest on their loans.

Third, whereas the maintenance of children from two-years old, and upwards, is costly, expenditure on consumption will diminish and savings will increase. It will reduce the rate of interest and stimulate investment for the

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nation's benefit; besides the profit of a new dish, introduced to the tables of the gentlemen of standing and fortune, who have any refinement in taste; and the money will circulate among ourselves, the goods being entirely of our own growth and manufacture.

Fourth, the constant breeders, besides the gain of money by the sale of their children, will be rid of the charge of maintaining them after the first year and make them free to choose how best to spend their time.

Fifth, this food would likewise bring great custom to restaurants, where the managers will certainly be so prudent as to procure the best receipts for dressing it to perfection; and consequently have their houses frequented by all the fine gentlemen, who justly value themselves on their knowledge in good eating; and a skilful cook, who understands how to oblige his guests, will contrive to make it as expensive as they please.

Sixth, it would increase the care and tenderness of mothers towards their children, and encourage competition. We should soon see an honest emulation among the women, which of them could bring the fattest child to the market. Men would become as fond of their wives, during the time of their pregnancy, as they are now of their cars and boats; nor offer to beat or kick them (as is too frequently a practice) for fear of a miscarriage.

Many other advantages might be encountered. For instance, the addition to our exports, and the proliferation of jobs for our economists who will certainly be very proficient in calculating the precise equilibrium demand for the new dish and its price, taking well into account that in some parts of our towns and in the poorer countries it may have to be sold somewhat cheaper. But many others I omit, being studious of brevity.

Supposing that several thousand families would be constant customers; besides others who might have the new dish at merry meetings, particularly at weddings and christenings; I compute that this new trade can solve all our current economic ills. I can think of no one objection, that will possibly be raised by serious economists against this proposal which will ameliorate our natural environment and reduce considerably the rate of population growth.

Therefore let no man talk to me of other expedients: of preserving the Welfare State by raising taxes; of not privatizing public assets but stimulating governmental works; of introducing a vein of parsimony, prudence and temperance to management; of cutting the cost of the military industrial complex; of reviving our education system; of selling our consciences for nothing; of teaching insensitive bureaucrats and the mighty to have at least one degree of compassion towards their fellow human beings. Last, of putting a spirit of honesty in society.

Therefore I repeat, let no man talk to me of these and the like expedients; till he hath at least some glimpse of hope, that there will be some hearty and sincere attempt by our leaders to put them in practice.

But as to myself; having been wearied out for many years with offering vain, visionary thoughts, and at length utterly despairing of success, I fortunately fell on this proposal; which, although it is not new having been offered by

Mr J. Swift in the year 1729 to solve the Irish problem, still has something solid and real, is of no expense and little trouble, whereby we can incur no danger in disobliging our political establishments.

After all, I am not so violently bent on my own opinion, as to reject any offer proposed by wise men, which shall be found equally innocent, cheap, easy and effectual. But before something of that kind shall be advanced, in contradiction to my scheme, and offering a better; I desire the author, or authors, will be pleased maturely to consider two points. First, how they will be able to find income and work for the many thousands of useless mouths and backs. And second, there being millions throughout the world; whose whole subsistence put into a common stock, would leave them in debt of many millions, I desire those politicians, who dislike my overture, and may perhaps be so bold to attempt an answer, that they will first ask the parents of these mortals, whether they would not, at this day, think it a great happiness to have been sold for food at a year old, in the manner I prescribe: and thereby have avoided such perpetual scene of misfortunes, as they have since gone through, and most inevitable prospect of entailing the like, or greater miseries, on their breed for ever.

If, however, some feeble minded Jews, Moslems, Christians, socialists or surviving Keynesians, should raise objections to my scheme, because cannibalism is lately out of fashion and the consumption of human flesh is out of vogue, let me remind them that with the new techniques of mass communication, and with our most excellent advertising trade, such disapproval will easily be overcome. Surely those postmodern philosophers who enlightened us that language is the be all and end all of reality, will soon provide a new word for naming the dish to make it most palatable. After all, we also do not eat pigs but pork, no farm cattle but beef, and know how to distinguish between a drunken worker and an intoxicated gentleman.

I profess, in the sincerity of my heart, that I have not the least personal interest in endeavouring to promote this necessary work; having no other motive than the public good of respectable society, advancing free trade, providing for infants, relieving the poor, and giving some pleasure to the rich. I avouch that I have no children by which I can propose to get a single penny from this plan.

Again with sincere apologies to Jonathan Swift.