

Margaret Sanger, "The Eugenic Value of Birth Control Propaganda," *The Birth Control Review*, October 1921.

Seemingly every new approach to the great problem of the human race must manifest its vitality by running the gauntlet of prejudice, ridicule and misinterpretation. Eugenists may remember that not many years ago this program for race regeneration was subjected to the cruel ridicule of stupidity and ignorance. Today Eugenics is suggested by the most diverse minds as the most adequate and thorough avenue to the solution of racial, political and social problems. The most intransigent and daring teachers and scientists have lent their support to this great biological interpretation of the human race. The war has emphasized its necessity.

The doctrine of Birth Control is now passing through the stage of ridicule, prejudice and misunderstanding. A few years ago this new weapon of civilization and freedom was condemned as immoral, destructive, obscene. Gradually the criticisms are lessening—understanding is taking the place of misunderstanding. The eugenic and civilizational value of Birth Control is becoming apparent to the enlightened and the intelligent.

In the limited space of the present paper, I have time only to touch upon some of the fundamental convictions that form the basis of our Birth Control propaganda, and which, as I think you must agree, indicate that the campaign for Birth Control is not merely of eugenic value, but is practically identical in ideal, with the final aims of Eugenics.

First: we are convinced that racial regeneration like individual regeneration, must come "from within." That is, it must be autonomous, self-directive, and not imposed from without. In other words, every potential parent, and especially every potential mother, must be brought to an acute realization of the primary and central importance of bringing children into this world.

Secondly: Not until the parents of the world are thus given control over their reproductive faculties will it ever be possible not alone to improve the quality of the generations of the future, but even to maintain civilization even at its present level. Only by self-control of this type, only by intelligent mastery of the procreative powers can the great mass of humanity be awakened to the great responsibility of parenthood.

Thirdly: we have come to the conclusion, based on widespread investigation and experience, that this education for parenthood and of parenthood must be based upon the needs and demands of the people themselves. An idealistic code of sexual ethics, imposed from above, a set of rules devised by high-minded theorists who fail to take into account the living conditions and desires of the submerged masses, can never be of the slightest value in effecting any changes in the mores of the people. Such systems have in the past revealed their woeful inability to prevent the sexual and racial chaos into which the world has today drifted.

The almost universal demand for practical education in Birth Control is one of the most hopeful signs that the masses themselves today possess the divine spark of regeneration. It remains for the courageous and the enlightened to answer this demand, to kindle the spark, to direct a thorough education in Eugenics based upon this intense interest.

Birth Control propaganda is thus the entering wedge for the Eugenic educator. In answering the needs of these thousands upon thousands of submerged mothers, it is possible to use this interest as the foundation for education in prophylaxis, sexual hygiene, and infant welfare. The potential mother is to be shown that maternity need not be slavery but the most effective avenue toward self-development and self-realization. Upon this basis only may we improve the quality of the race.

As an advocate of Birth Control, I wish to take advantage of the present opportunity to point out that the unbalance between the birth rate of the "unfit" and the "fit", admittedly the greatest present menace to civilization, can never be rectified by the inauguration of a cradle competition between these two classes. In this matter, the example of the inferior classes, the fertility of the feeble-minded, the mentally defective, the poverty-stricken classes, should not be held up for emulation to the mentally and physically fit though less fertile parents of the educated and well-to-do classes. On the contrary, the most urgent problem today is how to limit and discourage the over-fertility of the mentally and physically defective.

Birth Control is not advanced as a panacea by which past and present evils of dysgenic breeding can be magically eliminated. Possibly drastic and Spartan methods may be forced upon society if it continues complacently to encourage the chance and chaotic breeding that has resulted from our stupidly cruel sentimentalism.

But to prevent the repetition, to effect the salvation of the generations of the future—nay of the generations of today—our greatest need is first of all the ability to face the situation without flinching, and to cooperate in the formation of a code of sexual ethics based upon a thorough biological and psychological understanding of human nature; and then to answer the questions and the needs of the people with all the intelligence and honesty at our command. If we can summon the bravery to do this, we shall best be serving the true interests of Eugenics, because our work will then have a practical and pragmatic value.