

It does not pay to have no ties.

Tacitus, *G e r m a n i a*

The condition of the population.

Last time I was in Spain or rather in Barcelona only a few weeks ago, I spoke of a pattern of feral reproduction that is emerging in the UK, where women – often very young women – have children by a sequence of men who play no role in their upbringing or support. Our bare statistics show a catastrophic fall in marriage rates and a continuing climb in out of wedlock births - from 8% of all births in 1970 to around 45% now. One result is that a quarter or more of children now have lone parents. It is probable that the majority of births among the indigenous population are now to unmarried women. There is little or no difference whether a child is born outside any `live in` arrangement or born into cohabitation, since cohabitations are nearly six times more likely to dissolve than marriages -with the result that three quarters of family breakdowns affecting young children now involve unmarried parents..

Not only ago, even unwed childbearing was a temporary condition, since it was often quickly followed by marriage and marital childbearing. Now, a new boyfriend, live in or not live in, often means a new baby, and a larger lone parent family when the relationship breaks up – which it is very likely to do. So a new term has entered our demographic terminology. It is `multi-partnered fertility`. Men enter into temporary liaisons with women, impregnate them and move on. The men neither care for nor do they pay for the children. This is what my cats get up to.

A big surge in men living alone is the accompaniment of the rise in lone parenthood. These two sides of the same phenomenon have meant one person households reaching nearly one third of the total number of households in the UK today. This more than doubles the figure for the 1960s, and it is projected to increase to 40% just by 2021. More than a half of those living alone are below pension age when, in the past, old people predominated. The increase

among men in their 30s has been particularly pronounced; once the smallest group of men living alone, they are now the largest, with a majority predicted to be living alone in ten years time. Not so long ago, social or council or public housing (I do not know what term you use here) was seen as something for young couples with children unable to afford to buy their own home. Now, nearly three-quarters of council house acceptances in England involve lone parents or single, childless men or women.

It is this aspect of family disintegration that I will concentrate on today, or the fragmentation of households, the atomisation of the way we live and its momentous implications for men, women, children, future generations and the planet.

What we well know now- unless we wilfully repudiate or twist the data – is children born or adopted and raised in an intact marriage are, on average, more apt to avoid criminal and psychiatric trouble, achieve more educationally, become gainfully employed and, in turn, to successfully raise the next generation, compared with those reared by single or cohabiting parents, step-parents, foster parents or in institutions. A multitude of studies now tell us this. Their findings are in one direction and have altered little, if at all, over time. Adverse outcomes usually have double to treble the prevalence among children not with their original and married parents. The exceptions are abuse and homelessness, where they are enormously increased.

Shrinking Investment in the Young.

As people increasingly rear children across multiple households, there are circumstances that diffuse the level of parental investment in terms of the time, emotion and resources that children will receive. Fathers` allegiances shift when they leave one family and move one to have children with another `partner`, and these circumstances are fraught with conflict and insecurity. Outcomes for adults living alone are not brilliant either. Married people are consistently better off in terms of longevity, mental and physical health, and suffer lower levels of violence and addiction. As the foremost reformatory,

marriage also lightens the load of law enforcement and turns predation into contribution. The longest running study of criminality, which has traced its subjects from 17 to 70, found that marriage had the greatest effect of any variable on reducing criminality.

The Increase in Welfare Dependency: the mothers and children.

There is a growing emphasis - which we have seen in the UK anyway - in the media and elsewhere – on the benefits of solitary living; almost as a fashion accessory. This ignores the ways in which family disintegration and household fragmentation is closely bound to endemic welfare dependency and increasing inequalities. There was a big growth in the proportion of children in low-income groups in the last quarter of the twentieth century, growing to a high of over a third in 1995/96 on the half average income measure. There was an incidence change due to more economic insecurity for families generally. At the same time, a group with a high poverty rate, or with lone parents, grew disproportionately (a compositional change) and the overall rate was pushed up by more poverty-prone households. Couples with children account for the majority of individuals in poverty at any one time, but an important entry event was becoming a lone parent.

Over the same period, welfare receipt vastly increased. The main recipients of income-related transfers became lone parents, and the upward trend in lone parenthood most influenced the level of welfare receipt. After 1970, the numbers claiming income support or public assistance tripled, and those receiving in-work benefits rose elevenfold by the end of the century. With the rise in the overall level of welfare receipt has, understandably, gone a vast increase in expenditure. Spending on child contingent support more than doubled between 1975 and 2003 alone and still continues to grow. Two thirds of this increase, owes itself to changes in the type of households rearing children - or the increasing proportion with one adult and (as so often follows) none in paid work. In the 1970s, 92% of British children lived with two

parents, of whom at least one worked. By 1995/96 the proportion outside such families was 29%, the highest in the European Union.

Less than half of lone parents, and only two-thirds of unattached, childless adults had any employment. This shows how lone parenthood has a double connection to a `workless household` phenomenon, similar to the one it has with the one adult household phenomenon. Increasing male drop out from the labour force has followed the increase in welfare dependent lone parents. Like lone mothers, lone men are much more likely to get all their income from state benefits compared to married men.

Since the late 1990s, the Labour administration has been running an ambitious campaign to end child poverty. To this end tens of billions of extra £s have been spent. In recent years at least 50% more child contingent support has gone to (mainly poor) families than in 1997. The state has become the principal or sole breadwinner for more and more children. Never has so much money been spent - not just on welfare benefits - but schools, health and social services. Pre-school services have been provided through the multi billion £ Sure Start program and a multitude of other early intervention programs and social services for parents and children.

Lone parents have been the main targets of its policies, with hope that – if there are big enough bribes and plenty of child care – they will go into work, even if it is just for a few hours. Even if they do not (for there is no compulsion), there are substantial welfare packages available. Support that is far higher for single than for couple parents. Indeed, the anti-poverty policy has only really recognised the existence of lone parents. An `invisible second adult` principle applies in the UK welfare system. Poverty is measured in relation to the number of people dependent upon an income. But poverty is relieved by ignoring the costs of a second adult and sometimes by giving extra allowances for one adult. At the same time, a lone parent can keep all the income households it only really recognised the existence of lone parents. This means that most lone parents are subject to marriage penalties because they are

receiving benefits or welfare income. Only when joint incomes reach £50,000 per year is there no loss from being a couple. Many fake lone parenthood.

The results of the anti-poverty drive?

Unsurprisingly, poverty has declined for children with lone parents, while that for children with couples hardly budged and is now increasing. More lone parents have gone out to work, but nothing like the 70% or even 90% that feminist politicians predicted and usually only for a few hours anyway. We still have a growing proportion of working age men who have never worked and have very low prospects of ever working. The situation is familiar in Sweden, where single men make up about a third of the welfare caseload. In the UK, around 17 to 20% of working-age men (25–64) are inactive and concentrated in one-person households; compared to around 5% in 1971. There is also a sharp growth in the number of young people under 24 who have no contact with employment, education, or training. Many of the young men end up in prison. People of working age who live alone are more likely to be in high-paying jobs than the average, but they are also more likely to be unemployed or inactive, or mainly inactive and out of the labour force entirely. Like lone mothers, lone men (including non-resident fathers) are much more likely to derive all their income from state benefits compared with married men.

The campaign to end child poverty was undertaken partly on the basis of claims that money was the essential tool for improving child development and, it followed, solving or reducing social problems. Every time the subject came up, it was - and is still - loudly proclaimed how the recorded limitations of lone, compared to two, parent families were due to the poverty of lone parents and would disappear if they had more money. Money, it has been insisted, programs children's life chances. Therefore, increased spending on children must be a magic bullet.

So have children's outcomes and social problems got better? No, if anything they are both worse.

There is also more, not less, intergenerational transmission of disadvantage. Being in poor circumstances as a teenager is now even more closely linked to the likelihood of being out of work in your 30s, to men suffering from ill health and to women becoming early and lone parents. Income is not the main cause. Instead, what has become really important is the higher risk of lone parenthood. Non-marital fertility and family disruption mean downward mobility . It acts through the transmission of low human capital and low social capital down the generations.

However, those lone parents who are taken out of poverty are only out of poverty because they are super dependent upon the state. Trying to push down child poverty while, at the same time, underwriting lone parenthood is a difficult and very expensive business. To do so, the state must take over the upkeep or the care of children – or both. Either the parent is a full-time mother and the state the breadwinner, or the parent becomes a secondary or supplementary earner to the state as primary provider. Massive subsidies must, moreover, continue into the long term to keep lone parents poverty-free as, at the same time, their numbers grow. Their numbers grow, because lone parenthood has been progressively made a less and less unattractive option.

How do people support themselves?

It was calculated some time ago how a family with two or more children needs two adults if basic earning and household tasks are to be covered. In this way, the family functions as an economic unit in which earnings can be distributed to those caring for children. If you are poor, additional household members significantly increase the chances of leaving poverty, with a strong relationship between household income and the number of economically active people.

It is one way in which marriage performs critical social tasks and produces valuable social goods that are far harder or impossible to achieve through individual action, private enterprise or alternative civic institutions, and which cannot be replicated by public programmes.

Marriage is a reliable means of attaching fathers to children and provides for regular paternal involvement over the long term, and brings together under one roof the two people who have brought the children into the world and who have a mutual interest in their well-being.

Marriage embodies a set of norms, responsibilities and binding obligations for its members, which channels the flow of resources and care between generations and within communities.

Marriage connects men to the larger community and encourages personal responsibility and altruism. Economic responsibilities for family members provide the push that makes men seek work, keep work and work full time, and to earn more.

Marriage provides an efficient way to pool resources, combine individual talents and recruit support from a network of relatives, friends and community members, to share risks and mitigate disruptions and losses. In modern societies, it facilitates the acquisition of social capital, which is generated as a by-product of relationships, or in bonds of mutual trust, dependability, commitment, shared values and obligations.

How to get out of poverty: cooperate.

The evidence is that, while couples with children may numerically make up more of the poor at any one time, they tend to exit poverty sooner, are better able to capitalise on any assistance that is provided, move farther up the income distribution and are likely to stay in higher income groups. Work decreases poverty, but marriage may be the most important influence on poverty status in the long run. If we do not encourage circumstances where the exit rate from poverty is highest and reinforce these exits, we have more entries into poverty than we have exits. Clearly, we do not encourage these exit circumstances in the UK. Instead, disadvantages or handicaps are imposed at the starting line on married people. The result is that short term gain is long term loss, with the role of marriage or re-marriage in exiting welfare dependency and poverty for lone parents now falling. This is to be expected when there are huge financial

penalties in the system for families with two adults, or for families with two adults who declare their relationship to the authorities.

Advantages of collaboration.

There is an enormous financial cost to the state or the taxpayer of subsidising the one adult household, with or without children. In contrast, the multi adult household is very cost efficient. When people live with others and pool resources or share goods and services, such as housing, heat, lighting and cars, the cost per individual of a given lifestyle is lower. Because of specialisation and collaboration, division of labour, economies of scale and risk pooling, people can also provide or produce more between themselves than would the same people on their own. In multi-person households the value of general well-being is higher than the market value of goods, since home economies add value through their own production and cooperation – something that is not included in measures of national income based on traded goods and services. If we do include it, then added value through home production adds substantially to household living standards.

These factors apply to all types and conditions of people worldwide. The likelihood of low-income for working-age disabled people is very much lower both for those in paid work and those in multi-adult, rather than single-adult, households. Similarly, the likelihood of income improvement in old age is positively associated not only with having educational status, home ownership, but moving to live with someone else. While poverty for older people has greatly decreased for elderly people around the Western and Central Mediterranean as pension provision has improved, those living alone have seen less of an increase in their economic circumstances compared with those living with their children. It suggests that those living alone would have enjoyed higher levels of economic well-being if they had continued to live with others. In the US, recent census data reveals how household extension is associated with greater employment and access to income for lone mothers and their

children, in all ethnic groups. Employment is encouraged not just by greater help being at hand, but also through close contact with other workers. Extended households were effective in reducing overall racial-ethnic income inequality.

Saving together

Asset accumulation and saving is far more efficient in larger households, and married people are much better than lone adults at building up wealth. The longer a marriage, the greater the assets: the longer a separation or divorce, the lower the assets. Cohabitation does not create wealth to the same extent – probably because of the lack of interdependence, lack of mutual responsibility and lack of a long-term perspective. Higher savings ratios, as a proportion of GNP, are evident for Asian countries such as Japan and Singapore, which are more marriage-friendly and family-oriented societies.

The declining proportion of married households and the increase in single living may have much to do with falls in private sector savings rates in many Western societies. Even couples without work save more than similar lone parents and are less likely to get into debt.

Falls in the married proportion of the adult population will have an impact on income at older ages. Divorced women and unwed mothers are at the bottom of the pile for income in old age. In the UK, over 70% of lone parents have no savings, together with over 40% all single-adult households, a position which appears to be worsening. The elderly generally have high asset holdings, but being married is a basic factor which determines the variation in wealth holdings, and drives not only the level but also the trend in what has come to be called `asset poverty`. In the UK, the state has entered the savings business, or is trying to develop asset accumulation along with income maintenance as a way to security and enhanced life chances for poorer people.

How we help each other.

Support in old age not only comes via pensions, but from access to non-market services. Much of the direct help for the frail and dependent elderly comes

from spouses, who often provide round-the-clock attention or care. And, if not spouses, it comes from children who either live with the parent or close by. Other people provide not only assistance, but pressure that encourages and helps the ill or handicapped to function better, for longer, and at a higher level than they would otherwise do. In contrast, people living alone are often more likely to be socially isolated.

What about the time in between childhood and old age? We must remember that important stages in parenthood occur when children become adults, and move into the world to establish themselves or need support as new parents. While, in the public welfare system, money goes up the generations from young to old people; often causing considerable resentment in the process – resentment that will probably get worse as populations age – in private, wealth goes down, from old to young people.

Marriage brings two groups of people or relatives into this intergenerational exchange, and it changes not only how the spouses behave, but their relatives. Again, cohabitation is weak in connecting people to others. Divorce also reduces the quality of relationships between adult children and their natural parents and weakens obligations, children of divorce and separation are less likely to see parents as sources of assistance and receive less help, financial and otherwise, than children from intact families. This cuts both ways. The non-resident father is not only less inclined to finance his children, but those children are disinclined to help their non-resident father.

Across cultures, customs of young people living with their parents, elderly people living near or with their children, high marriage rates and low divorce rates are all factors that foster redistribution within extended as much as conjugal families. Small groups can muster more information, energy, resources and assistance than their members could on an individual basis.

Who would otherwise do kin work? It has to be professional social workers and care institutions. Any trend towards atomised living means ever-increasing demands on public services to fill in the gaps resulting from lower levels of spousal and generational support.

More collaboration = greater equality.

The demographics of fragmentation not only affect the personal fortunes of the people involved and impact on the public accounts, but also have considerable macroeconomic and distributional implications. Growing household income inequality in the UK as well as other Anglophone countries is not to be explained simply by changes in the demand for skills or educated labour or changes to norms regarding top pay. It is also a proxy for changes in family structure. From the 1980s, the UK shows one of the highest ratings among OECD nations for increasing inequality in household income distribution. Simultaneous rises in both no-worker and two-worker households both widen the income distribution and cause poverty to rise as overall income rises. This pulling apart of the income distribution is itself symptomatic of the decline and reproductive collapse of what would once have been termed the middle and respectable working classes. It has been accompanied by the rise of a welfare-dependent class, with the children of welfare mothers very likely to become welfare dependent themselves. Greater equality has been the norm in East Asia and, while this is now receding somewhat, how it has been achieved helps us to understand the processes involved. This has not required huge public transfers and high taxation. Enterprise has been supportive to families. Civil laws have required people to support their family members, limiting the scope of public assistance programmes. With low divorce and little lone parenthood, there are few workless households and few with double incomes. The key to a low degree of income inequality without higher public taxes and public transfers is that they have ensured how people out of work - whether from child rearing responsibilities, youth, sickness, age or disability benefit from private income transfers within the family.

Saving the planet by getting together.

Even wider than the impact upon income distribution and inequalities, is the impact of household fragmentation and atomisation on the planet itself. In the

twenty years between 1995 and 2016, the number of English households will grow by almost a quarter. The causes: immigration and the increase in 'stand alone' singles households. There is virtually no increase projected in the domestic indigenous population. More, but smaller, households absorb more land and materials, with lower efficiency of resource use per capita. There are more emissions, more fuel consumption, more cars, more roads, more pressure on water supplies, more degradation and fewer flood-water sinks.

Environmental pressure groups have advocated incentives to be single and childless in order to save the planet, yet reductions in average household size more than offset the potential reduction in resource consumption, even with declining fertility. The worldwide growth in households in biodiversity hot spots (defined as areas rich in endemic species and threatened by human activities) was twice the rate of population growth between 1985 and 2000. The most important factors for environmental sustainability are actually population distribution and household size. These are foremost determinants of environmental pressures and relatively unaffected by population size.

As household size shrinks, this changes the economics of households. As I have already mentioned, bigger households have less consumption per person from given aggregate resources. Two-person households use a third less electricity and gas per person than one-person households. Four-person households use nearly two thirds less per person. Multi-person households generate less waste per person than lone-person households, not least because of the higher ratio of packaging involved in producing for one. When people live with others and pool resources or share goods and services, such as housing, heat, lighting and cars, the cost per individual of a given lifestyle is – as we have seen - lower.

If nothing does, this should all argue for governments to encourage us to live together. Unfortunately, the more fragmentation or disintegration there is, the more Government can interfere. Without families, we have politicians and bureaucrats. When families are reduced to the basic mammal biological unit of mother and young, they are wide open to outside intervention. 1 Because they

are inadequate vehicles for socialisation and 2. Because they present no barrier to interference and external control. The 10 hour day care regimes, the early intervention programs, the special visitors, and other help focused upon children are some of the many spheres of Government intervention to deal with the collapse of parenting. Fatherhood outside marriage also generates an increasing mass of legislation and regulation of provisions for custody, access and support, as well as noisy pressure groups. When parents divorce or never marry, the state becomes involved in requiring or regulating childrearing obligations that married parents perform voluntarily. We are progressively losing our freedom as well as despoiling our planet and undermining our living standards.

However, it is exceedingly doubtful if any public services can make up for the missing private investment in children, or for the demise of informal social controls. The management of politicians and bureaucrats is notorious for failure.

The disintegration of families and increasing single parenthood has provided the state with reasons or excuses to be more involved in people's everyday lives and the care of children. Another view says that this is about extending state power, eroding freedom and dissolving intermediate institutions. It is certainly so in the UK that the state's activities may be a factor driving family disintegration and that is was the expressed objective of many strategically placed and powerful people that it must do just this. Disintegration is no accident.

The appalling effects of that disintegration – on children, women, men, human well being and the planet are accumulating. Is it not time that the pressures were put on the side of human cooperation and interdependence, rather than on the side of social disruption and decay and environmental degradation? Are we not a social species after all? Should we not stop pretending that we are self sufficient – as if, in the words of Aristotle, we can be gods, while reducing ourselves to solitary beasts?

He who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god.

Aristotle