



Little Life-Ruinners

How we came to see children as a burden—and how to stop

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What reasons does Fisher give for why young people might decide to forgo having children? Are there other reasons she doesn't discuss? Do you think she responds persuasively to young people's concerns?

2. "As a Catholic mother of six, I am often asked if I have six children because I am Catholic," Fisher writes. A "delicate question," indeed. What is the "Catholic" outlook on children and the family in your experience, if there is one? How does it compare with or differ from secular perspectives?

3. Fisher points to TikTok influencers as examples of parents who instrumentalize their kids for economic ends, and seems to imply that today's culture is particularly susceptible to "putting children in the service of economic demands." But is this true? What of the parents in older eras who had large families in part to have more farm hands? Do you think the instrumentalization of children is a uniquely modern phenomenon?

4. Fisher explains that declining birth rates can be attributed, in part, to couples prioritizing financial stability over children. One could argue that this isn't a bad thing—perhaps couples today, out of care for their children, want to make sure they are in a position to provide for their kids' well-being. Is delaying the choice to have children for economic reasons sometimes responsible?

5. "The fear of the immigrant has, at its heart, the same structure as this fear of the child," Fisher writes. "We're barely getting by as it is. We're maxed out—we can't fit anyone else. They will ruin everything." Do you agree? What are the political implications of her posture?

6. Fisher's piece might be described as pronatalist, but she distances herself from the type of technological pronatalism that focuses on birth rates. Nonetheless, natalism is closely associated with the political right, including figures like J. D. Vance. Is Fisher's piece pronatalist? If so, could it help legitimize a right-wing cultural project? Is there such a thing as a liberal or left-wing pronatalism in today's political climate?

7. As Berg argues, "People say that having a child is a gift, but if that's true, it's not because it's like getting a gift. If having a child is a gift, it's because it's like giving one." Does this model create any reciprocal obligations on children, many of whom feel pressure to "return" the gift, often by material success? Why do so many kids feel that pressure—and how should parents address it?

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

Rachel Wiseman and Anastasia Berg, "How to Talk about Having Kids," *The Commonweal Podcast*, June 13, 2024: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/podcast/how-talk-about-having-kids>

"Better Off Without Us?: A Symposium on Post-Humanism," November 2023: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/posthumanism-symposium-transhumanism-antihumanism>

Jennifer Banks, "Reckoning with Birth," May 2023: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/nativity-mortality-banks-arendt-children-india-feminism>

Eve Tushnet, "Why They Call Us," July/August 2022: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/why-they-call-us>