

# **The Modular Family:**

## ***Redesigning How Children Are Raised***

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Writing Began: July 19, 2019

Current Version: October 23, 2019 - *updated weekly*

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**Title:** The Modular Family: Redesigning How Children Are Raised

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**Keywords:** demography, economics, family, population, loss, modular family, eugenics, demographics, dysfunction, crash, doomsday, prediction, baddalailama, pronatalism, antinatalism, family structure

**Abstract:** Describing a new family structure, the "modular family" to address humanity's demographic decline.

# 1. Proposing a New Family Structure

In this manifesto, I am proposing a redesign of the family and the way children are raised. The essence of my plan is creating a much bigger family than today's average of 1-3 children per household. I want to see 9-18 children living under one roof. The children in this family would be evenly spaced, from infancy to adulthood, and the number would always be held within the range of 9 to 18. As one child enters adulthood, another is born. They would be parented by a dozen or more cooperating adults, drawn together by a common ideology but not living in the main household. Parents would have scheduled duties within the household but would spend most of their time leading independent lives outside it.

I call this structure the *modular family*, because it is a permanent module of society. It is an alternative to the nuclear family that you and I grew up in, where one or two adults raise a couple of kids and then quit. Once a modular family starts raising children, it never stops. There are always 9 to 18 children for as long as the family can sustain itself. Children are born, raised to adulthood, pursue careers, return to the family in their old age and eventually die, all within the framework of this stable family structure.

As I propose this scheme, you may consider it naïve, utopian, unworkable and unnecessary, and I am going to let you believe that for now. I am not trying to sell this idea to you; I'm only trying to describe it. This manuscript is the equivalent of a preliminary design study. There is a perceived problem, and I am offering an engineering solution. The

perceived problem is that most countries aren't producing enough babies to sustain their economies, and the virtual community you belong to—presumably the most intelligent and ethical members of society—is having even few babies. In the long run, this means your community will eventually vanish if you don't find a way to produce and raise good children. My role is that of an engineer who has been commissioned by people like you to come up with a solution.

Are you confused? Let me give you an analogy. Imagine a populated island just off the coast, and the only way to get to the island is a fleet of small ferryboats. The trouble with the ferries is they are all mom-and-pop operations, using rickety, expensive boats that can only carry a couple of passengers at a time. Furthermore, they take 18 years to get there, and each boat makes only one trip. Due to this inefficient system, people aren't going to the island very much and its economy is dying.

The local governing council comes to me, a social engineer from far away, and asks for solutions. "You could build a bridge!" I say. The bridge would let people cross the strait more efficiently and in greater numbers. Although it still takes 18 years to cross the bridge, the unbroken roadway means there can be a constant stream of travelers, not just the one or two that each ferry carries. The local council commissions me to produce an engineering study describing how the bridge would work and how it would be built, and that's essentially what this document is: a preliminary design study.

My position is: If you choose to build a bridge, this is how it would work; this is how it would be constructed; these are risks, and these are

the theoretical advantages over the ferry system. Then I step back and let you debate these options. Because building this bridge requires your resources, not mine, I am reluctant to push the idea on you like a salesman would; I am merely “offering” it.

The nature of engineers is that they love whatever bridge they have designed, and I am no different. I am passionate about demographic issues and love my modular family idea, or I wouldn't be putting so much effort into them. At the same time, I recognize that over-zealous engineers have been responsible for many boondoggles in the past, building expensive bridges where they weren't really needed. Maybe the ferry system already in place can be modified to solve the problem, or maybe the loss of the island's population and collapse of its economy aren't as bad as they seem. These are policy choices, not engineering choices, and as the engineer, I don't want to overstep my boundaries. I am merely telling the council, “Here is my best solution for the problem you have described to me. You must decide whether it is the right one for you.”

The core problem, as I understand it, is that your society is producing too few babies, and your population is aging. You once fretted about a population explosion, but the opposite is bearing down on you: a population implosion. Most developed countries aren't producing enough new workers to replace those who are retiring. This may seem like a benign change, even a positive one for the environment, until you consider the economic consequences.

Modern governments and economies have been built on the presumption of unlimited growth. When growth slows and reverses,

multiple systems become unsustainable, from pension plans to government budgets to asset valuations. Every banking system, stock market and individual investor is at risk in the coming reversal. Given slowing population growth and the huge debts held by governments, corporations and individuals, the world is heading for a reckoning on par with the worst economic crashes of the past.

Seeing the crisis ahead of them, many desperate governments are actively promoting childbirth to their citizens, hoping it will rescue their economy. From Russia to Singapore to Italy, citizens are being offered economic incentives for to have more babies and are being told it's the patriotic thing to do, but cash-strapped governments can't overcome the negative economics of parenthood. Fewer people are having children even when they want them because the numbers don't add up. Raising a child is frightfully expensive, horrendously risky, gets in the way of other things and offers little economic benefit to the parents. No matter what incentives a government may offer, they can't come close to the true cost of parenthood.

If you think the environment will be healthier if population falls, think again. Pollution and resource depletion depend not just on the number of bodies on Earth but how well they are organized, and if governments collapse, the environmentally friendly programs they have established will die with them. Without a viable economy and stable political system, people could go back to burning coal, cutting down trees and doing whatever they need to do to survive.

Enter the modular family, my theoretical solution to the high cost of raising children. I am proposing, in part, that by increasing the

number of children per family, you would be decreasing the per-child cost, but that's only the beginning. Increasing the standard family size has significant long-term implications. It changes the fundamental structure of the family and how knowledge is passed from one generation to the next.

I must warn you that the modular family won't do anything to avert the coming economic crash. This is going to happen no matter what we do. Around the world, debts are too large to lead to anything but financial disaster. The modular family is plan for after the collapse, when society is in the dumps, survival is uncertain and people start thinking long and hard about the kind of future they want.

The future is not your country, because your country may be doomed no matter what you do. The future is not your species, because humanity will continue in some form with or without your participation. The future is your way of life. Whatever you believe in, you can't be guaranteed it will continue beyond your own lifespan unless you build carriers for that belief system and train them from an early age.

If you don't believe in anything, you have no worries. If you've built nothing over the course of your life and are not part of any meaningful community, you've got nothing to preserve, and you lose nothing by dying without an heir. On the other hand, if you happen to care about something and want that thing to last beyond you, you need to be deeply worried about who will pick up where you left off. If you've spent a lifetime building or maintaining a castle and no one moves in after you die, it's going to fall to ruin. You would invest in children only if that castle meant something to you and you wanted to keep it alive.

If this is how you see things, I have a potential solution.

## 2. Benefits of the Modular Family

A large family with evenly spaced children has two main advantages over a small one. One is economy of scale. A large factory is generally more efficient than a small one because it can buy supplies in bulk and consolidate routine tasks. For example, even if there are 18 kids in a household, only one adult needs to be on duty to care for them. Compare this to the typical family of today, where one or two adults care for only one or two kids. A bigger family makes better use of limited resources, be they real estate, food, appliances or adult attention.

The second advantage of a large family is that older children naturally help care for younger ones. In large families of the past, older children have always participated in the raising of their younger siblings, and I propose reviving this tradition. Simple parenting tasks like changing diapers, preparing meals or talking baby-talk to a baby can be done just as well by older kids as by adults. Children make excellent teachers for relatively simple tasks, which saves adult attention for more important things. You still need adults to set the agenda, provide financial support, manage education and protect the family from outside threats, but once an appropriate culture is established, children can do most of the routine work of the household.

Children raising children isn't just a labor-saving device; it is a mission. It gives kids something meaningful to do and trains them to be responsible citizens. Instead of everything being provided by parents, children work for their keep, and if you grew up in this environment, it

doesn't seem like work at all. If this is all you have known, caring for your younger siblings is simply the way life works.

Imagine dinnertime in the modular household. Parents provide the bulk food, but they do not cook. The kids themselves decide what's for dinner, based on what food is in stock, and they organize themselves to get it made. Some things follow a relatively rigid structure, like the time of dinner and what happens during cleanup, while other things are more freeform, like the menu of the day and who performs what duty. Older teenagers are in charge, directed only occasionally by parents. The main concern of adults is whether the diet is balanced and nutritional needs are being met, and they can manage this in part by controlling what food enters the household. If the kids decide to have macaroni and cheese every night, maybe the macaroni supply should be restricted.

In the nuclear family of today, the family expires as a childrearing unity as soon as the youngest child leaves the nest. In the modular family, childrearing would be continuous and permanent, potentially outliving its members. The advantage of keeping things going is that you don't have to reinvent the wheel with each generation. When two adults today decide to form a family, they essentially start from scratch. They have memories of their own childhood but little direct experience in parenting. They might not figure out the necessary skills until their third or fourth child—or just about the time they are ready to stop having children. A permanent family means that you never have to lose that hard-won experience. It is retained as a sort of institutional memory, passed as much from child to child as from adult to child.

Where do the babies for the modular family come from? That's a

complicated issue, and it changes as the family matures. In the beginning, I envision 3 to 6 couples joining forces to raise their children in a single household. They make babies in the traditional way but coordinate with each other to produce them at spaced intervals. The resulting children are raised together in the same household. This system works until the fertility of the original mothers runs dry.

At that point, I propose an unconventional source of babies: They are borne by the young women raised in this family who have just reached adulthood. From a biological standpoint, the late teens and early 20s are the healthiest time to bear a child, so there is no reason to delay. These babies are conceived without sex, using implanted embryos procured by the community. In the modular family, childbirth is a thoughtfully planned act, determined more by a committee than by the passion of individuals. A young woman consents to having an embryo implanted, but she has no say on its source. Instead, the elders do the wheeling and dealing behind the scenes, deciding which genetic inputs would best benefit the family in the long run.

Inevitably, the selection of sperm and egg is a form of eugenics, or the deliberate breeding of humans. This is a messy business filled with potential pitfalls, but it isn't any messier than the romantic politics that produce embryos today. Today, a child's survival and emotional health is tethered to the vicissitudes of their parents' romantic relationship. Life is fine for the child if Mom and Dad love each other but can be disastrous if they fall out of love. In the modular family, both conception and childrearing are decoupled from romance. Embryos are chosen to achieve some community goal, while romantic relationships between

parents are conducted largely outside the children's view. If parents in the modular family get divorced, the children would hardly know about it.

I acknowledge that the eugenic element—elders choosing embryos and keeping mothers in the dark about it—is the most politically sensitive part of my plan, but I see no other way. Providing an embryo through a medical procedure is the least complicated way to assure pregnancy at an early age. Giving the mother too much choice could become a logistical nightmare. How would she, at age 18, know what genetic inputs are best for the long-term health of her community? Would she need to meet the egg and sperm donors to evaluate their suitability? Even if she retains her own egg and needs only a sperm, the selection is nearly impossible. It's like going into an ice cream shop offering 60 flavors so you need 15 minutes to make up your mind, except now there are 60 million flavors. How does anyone choose?

Family elders are presumably better equipped to make the choice, especially if they have training in genetics. Elders of past centuries once practiced *de facto* eugenics when they arranged marriages between families, and I propose letting them do it again. I can't say in advance what their criteria for selection will be, but from a modern scientific standpoint, they might start out with only two general goals: reducing genetic diseases and assuring genetic diversity. The dubious eugenics programs of the 20th Century tended to focus on genetic "purity", like promoting white skin and blue eyes, but modern eugenics might do the opposite: breeding a family with every conceivable skin and eye color.

The decoupling of childbirth from sex would not mean the end of

maternal love. Once a young woman receives an embryo, the child is hers, borne of her body. She bonds with her child at birth and may breastfeed if she chooses, but she also has plenty of help whenever she wants it. I foresee both mother and baby being lodged for a time in a special maternity room of the main house. The baby is surrounded from the beginning by fawning older siblings, and it is their responsibility to change diapers, run baths and perform every other tedious parenting chore. Mothers can be very possessive of their infants, which is fine in the beginning, but as the child becomes mobile, the mother is expected to pull back and let her own younger siblings do most of the work.

From the mother's standpoint, this can be seen as the best of all possible worlds. She gets to experience the joys of motherhood with only a fraction of the traditional work and hardly any of the risk. The siblings that she helped raise will, in turn, raise her child, so she knows exactly how they will go about it. As her first baby is integrated into the family, she will probably bear another and perhaps a third or fourth to serve her community's demographic goals. Then, while still in her early 20s, she is done making babies, and she doesn't have to raise the children she bore. She may remain engaged with them and will always be known as their Mom, but she is also free to pursue an intensive career knowing she doesn't have to be home for dinner every night.

In the nuclear system practiced today, an ambitious woman must go through a series of protracted steps before she has a baby. She completes her education, travels the world, pursues a career, finds a partner, gets married, and when everything is just right, she considers having a baby. Unfortunately, each of these steps can take years, and by

the time she is finally ready, her fertility may already be on the wane. Having a baby at 40 is considerably more dangerous than having one at 20, and there may not be enough time on her biological clock to have more.

In the modular system, the babies come first, as soon as the woman is physically ready. She can pursue her education while pregnant and nursing, but all the other pursuits happen later. If you have to wait for all the conditions to be perfect, as women do today, there's a good chance babies will never happen. If you know your own trusted family members will raise your baby and assume all costs and risks, then childbearing is relatively uncomplicated. You do your Family Service by having some children, then you move on to more exciting parts of your life.

The situation is also uncomplicated for the child. If they ask, "Where did I come from?" the answer is simple: "You came from your Mom's belly." Your mother will always be your mother, but as you get older you see less of her and more of your siblings. They are your guardians and teachers. Children don't learn about eggs and sperm until later, and only a few are likely to be interested. It's like learning where electricity and water come from before they get to your house: an interesting subject but not emotionally vital. A person's strongest emotional bonds lie with the people who raised them, which means in this case one's brothers and sisters.

So there you have my plan in a nutshell. I realize this proposal raises countless questions, which is why I have to write a long manuscript. I need to explain the rationale for each aspect of my plan,

and why someone would join, but before I address your concerns, I want to precisely define the plan.

### 3. The Modular Family Defined

As I see it, the modular family has the defining features listed below. While there can significant differences between families, I expect the characteristics below to remain constant across most of them.

#### General Structure

- 1) Children are raised in a permanent communal household of roughly 9 to 18 children supported by a stable community of adult “parents.”
- 2) Within the household, older children care for younger ones, performing most routine parenting tasks, like preparing meals, cleaning house, changing diapers and teaching young children basic skills. Each child is given as much responsibility as he or she can reasonably handle at their age and skill level.
- 3) Adults remain in charge, with at least one parent on duty during waking hours. This role rotates among the parents on a scheduled basis.
- 4) Babies are born into the family at spaced intervals of 1-2 years, depending on the population goals of the community.
- 5) Once a child is born into the modular family, they are a member for life—just like families today. They take the name of the household as their last name.

- 6) The initial group of parents are recruited from the general public, but eventually the children raised in this household become the parents.
- 7) Parents do not live in the same household as the children. Instead, they live nearby and come into the household as needed, usually on a scheduled basis.
- 8) All costs and liabilities of raising the children are borne by the parents as a group. They share responsibilities and are “taxed” in an equitable way to pay for the expenses of the household.
- 9) The family is governed by many rules, policies and customs, both written and unwritten. These rules evolve over time based on how well they work.
- 10) One modular family can ally itself with others to form a wider community to pursue their shared goals.

### **Parents and Staff**

- 11) When the family is created, the founding parents are drawn together by shared values and a written parenting plan.
- 12) Entry to this community is highly selective. During the recruiting phase, candidates are careful vetting process to identify adults with desirable skills who uphold the group’s values. This process must also identify people with personality traits that would disrupt the family (e.g. narcissism, psychopathy, etc.).

- 13) Everyone produced by this family is expected to become a “parent,” responsible for raising future children. Eventually, these native-born parents will replace the founding parents.
- 14) When parents visit the main household, they must obey the rules and policies of the house, providing a consistent environment for the children. When the parents go home, however, they can live their lives as they choose.
- 15) All of the time parents spend with the children is “quality time.” When they are within the confines of the main house, they are entirely focused on the needs of the children. Other personal and business interests are conducted outside the main household. This is not much to ask if the parent is on duty only one day a week.
- 16) There are only limited rules for how parents conduct themselves outside the main house. The few that exist relate to the functioning of the family. For example, pet ownership is discouraged among adults because it uses up parenting “energy” that should be devoted to human children.
- 17) Parents are “taxed” in an equitable way to support the family. The tax formula is simple, like a certain percentage of income.
- 18) Parents are not paid for their scheduled parenting duties, just as parents today are not paid. However, less time is required of them than traditional parents. No parent is on duty 24/7. They divide up their duties to minimize the burden on any one of

them.

- 19) Parents may be exempt from in-house duties if they are pursuing a career or education in a distant location, but they are still expected to pay their family taxes.
- 20) The household may employ paid adult staff members, who may or may not be parents. For example, a business manager could be responsible for paying bills, arranging medical care, ordering food and otherwise interacting with the outside world. An education manager (or “teacher”) might be responsible for directing the home-based education of the children. A member of one modular family can conceivably be a staff member of another.
- 21) Parents will have scheduled meetings to discuss policy and the specific challenges of the household. Since they are serving the family at different times, they need to coordinate their responses to various family events.
- 22) Parents will have their own internal government to modify the family’s rules and resolve disputes. Perhaps they elect a leader or a governing council. In the case of dispute, there should be a clear set of procedures for its resolution.
- 23) Most of a parent’s contribution to childrearing is made early in adulthood (when women give birth) and late in life (after “retirement”, when both men and women actively participate in childrearing). The intervening years are “career time” when

family members can pursue conventional careers outside the home, even moving away the family for years. As long as they continue to pay their taxes, they are still a member of the family and are expected to return to the family in their later years.

- 24) Permanent departure from the family is discouraged. Since no one can be held against their will, the family keeps its adult children connected by offering them a better deal than they can find elsewhere. This includes an emotional connection to the people they grew up with and a “retirement plan” of guaranteed care in old age.
- 25) As parents age and retire from their careers, they are expected to return home to live near the children. Instead of a life of leisure in their elder years, they are expected to play an active role in the raising the children for as long as they are healthy enough to do so. (This is equivalent to grandparents doting on their grandchildren but within the rules of the family.)
- 26) As parents become old or frail—or get sick earlier in life—they know their family will take care of them. Care may be provided by children or adults depending on the complexity of the tasks involved.

## **Education**

- 27) All children in the family are home-schooled using whatever methods are most effective and economical. These methods

might include online learning, book learning, exercises on paper, tutoring by older children, tutoring by parents, self-directed education and freeform mentoring by parents.

- 28) While most education takes place in the home, multiple families may join forces to provide specialized education to certain age groups. (For example, all 8-year-olds in the community can go on a field trip together.)
- 29) The family has a core curriculum that all children are expected to learn, defined by a written plan. Each student is expected to master key concepts in math, science, language, history, ethics and the ways of the outside world.
- 30) Other learning is customized to address each student's strengths and interests as well as the future needs of the community.
- 31) Higher education may be supported by the family to the extent that funds are available and there is a potential "return on investment" commensurate with the cost. For example, the family may pay for medical school, but only if the student promises to either serve in the community or pay a portion of their future wages to the family.
- 32) Electronic devices, like smartphones, computers and games, are closely regulated within the home so they do not interfere with social and educational priorities. In today's technology, smartphones might be banned, but walkie talkies could be

okay. There might be only one television, exclusively controlled by the parents, and computers could be restricted to educational uses. The terms of the electronics policy will change with technology, but most games and entertainment would be restricted or banned if they have little educational value.

- 33) The family has its own internal justice system, handling both “criminal” and “civil” matters. If someone breaks the family rules (criminal) or there is a dispute between children (civil), the case must be resolved in a manner that seems fair and just to all. How these matters are resolved is as much an educational process as any textbook lesson.

### **Childbirth**

- 34) During the start-up phase of the family, babies are produced by the founding parents in the traditional way. For example, the family may be formed by several couples who agree among themselves to raise their children together and evenly space their births.
- 35) In a mature family, new babies are carried to term by young women who grew up in the family. Having several babies at a young age is seen as a form of community service required of all young people. After the woman has produced her quota of children, she can leave them in the care of her siblings and pursue other goals.

- 36) Young men must perform their own community service comparable to pregnancy. For example, they could serve in a military service for the wider community or perform other labor required by the family.
- 37) In the mature family, most babies are conceived by in-vitro fertilization, using donated egg and sperm.
- 38) Egg and sperm are selected by a committee of parents, based on criteria that will evolve over time.
- 39) All healthy young women are expected to have babies as soon as they are physically ready. They have the right to refuse, but this is not expected. If a woman consents to having an embryo implanted, she has no say on the one she receives. If she declines or is physically incapable of a healthy pregnancy, she is expected to join the same community service program as the men.
- 40) A new baby is raised in the main household from their first day, perhaps in a special maternity room within the home reserved for new mothers and their infants. The baby is surrounded by older siblings from the beginning.
- 41) At her discretion, a mother may nurse the baby for a reasonable period, usually about a year.
- 42) As the child gets older, the mother may retain her special bond with the child, but she is not allowed to give her child any “material benefits” not granted to other children. (For example,

she can't give her child better clothes or special trips not granted to others.)

- 43) Children with disabilities are cared for within the household whenever possible, using the labor of both children and adults.

### **Romance**

- 44) Members of the family may pursue outside romantic relationships without interference from the family, so long as they continue to pay their family taxes, use birth control and avoid dangerous situations that require rescue.
- 45) Children born without the sanction of family elders are not automatically granted membership in the family. They *may* be admitted to the main household to be raised with the other children, but it is not a certainty.

### **Personal Space**

- 46) Each child gains more privileges and personal space as they get older. For example, they may start out life in a bunkroom with other young children, but late in their teen years, they may get a room of their own.
- 47) Adolescents are lodged separated by gender as they approach puberty.
- 48) All of a child's possessions must fit in their personal footlocker, which is the same size for everyone regardless of age. Anything

inside the footlocker is yours (assuming it was legally obtained), while everything outside belongs to the household. (Most toys and clothing are considered community property that you are only borrowing.) If your footlocker is full and you want to add something to it, you must get rid of something else.

49) Pets, since they can't live in a footlocker, are community property shared by all.

50) The main house has a quiet space. If you want to read or be alone, that's the place to go.

### **Family Expansion**

51) If the community wants to expand its population, one modular family can be divided into two by a system of "mitosis". If the starting family has 18 children spaced a year apart, it can be split into two families of 9 children, spaced two years apart. Parents are similarly divided. This preserves the existing family culture. Mitosis need not be traumatic if the two families continue to reside close to each other, at least for a while.

52) If the two new families continue to produce one child per year, they can potentially divide again in 18 years.

The characteristics above are based only on theory. None of this has been tested yet in real life. Some of what I list above could turn out to be impractical, while other essential characteristics may arise over time.

I am deliberately not defining how the adults should organize themselves, because this could be complex and fluid. Modular families can have many different parenting philosophies, just like nuclear families today, and each family will evolve its own “personality” over time.

## 4. Why Would You Join?

In the early stages of my plan, I am proposing nothing more than a “parenting collective.” Several couples, already in love with their partners, decide to pool their resources, space their births and raise their children together in the same household. That’s not so outrageous. It’s essentially *The Brady Bunch* with a bigger cast.

Would single people be allowed to join this collective? I don’t know. It depends on what they can bring to the table. The most important thing is that all of the founding members are aligned on key philosophical and parenting issues. They may argue about the details, but they are in general agreement on the kind of children they want and how to raise them.

The outrageous part comes twenty years down the line, when the founders decide to keep the family going. This decision assumes that what happened in the first 20 years was successful and the founders want to preserve the policies and traditions they have built. Now they will need a new source of babies and a coherent reproductive philosophy.

Some benefits of forming a collective are immediate. With large family housed in one building, only one parent needs to be on duty at any one time, giving all the parents more opportunity to pursue their own careers and outside interests. The parenting collective is way for people to become parents who otherwise could not afford it.

The price of this arrangement is that you can’t give your own kid any special treatment. You can still have a special bond, but you can’t

give them any “material benefits” not granted to other kids. For example, it would be highly disruptive if you took your kid to Disneyland but didn’t take the others. All the other kids would say, “Hey, that’s not fair!”

In forming this collective, you are creating an organism that is bigger than any founder and that has a life of its own. Rules are created, and then everyone has to live by them. As the rules become more sophisticated, individual parents become less important. The kids themselves enforce the rules and instinctively know the difference between “fair” and “unfair.”

You still need adults to move things forward, resolve disputes and adjust policies, but they are subject to the rules as much as the children. In every action they take, they have to ask themselves, “How will this be seen?” and “How will this contribute to the future of the family?” Disputes must be resolved in philosophically consistent way, so the resolution itself becomes a moral lesson.

As an adult, you would join this collective and commit the rest of your life to it because you want to permanently preserve something of yourself. Over the course of your life, you have gained some experience and built a moral system. The family is a way to pass that knowledge to the next generation so it doesn’t expire when you do.

You could have children in the traditional way, by yourself or with a partner, but the process is so frightfully expensive that it could draw you away from everything else. In the modular family, the personal cost of parenting is reduced, so you can still pursue a full career while investing in the next generation. The catch is that you have to find others who share your belief system.

The modular family is not concerned with preserving humanity or a national culture. It is concern with preserving whatever it is you believe in.

## 5. Advantages of the Modular Family

Assuming it is running smoothly, here are the potential advantages of the modular family compared to the traditional nuclear family of 1-3 kids, conventionally schooled.

- **Reduces the per-child and per-parent costs of raising children** — *Allows people to become parents who otherwise couldn't afford it.*
- **Distributes the risks of parenting** — *When bad things happen to family members, like birth defects, crippling accidents or serious illness, everyone shares the cost and responsibility of caring for that person, instead of the burden falling on only one or two parents.*
- **Improves the quality and consistency of parenting** — *The household follows rules and traditions honed by experience and often passed from child to child.*
- **Preserves the core values of the family's founders** — *The founding parents set the tone for the family's future by defining its central principles.*
- **Gives children a meaningful mission by having them care for their younger siblings** — *Apart from reducing costs, this teaches children social responsibility from an early age.*
- **Reduces narcissism and other personality disorders** —

*Since every child is responsible for caring for others, antisocial personality traits have less opportunity to develop.*

- **Encourages skills of social cooperation** — *In a large family, everyone must negotiate with others to get what they want.*
- **Instills habits of independent learning** — *Since education is focused on self-instruction, children learn early how to seek out their own information.*
- **Allows the development of a complex internal culture built over many decades** — *Since the family never ends, it has a chance to develop complex and subtle traditions.*
- **Makes the family independent of any one parent** — *If one parent becomes ill or unemployed, the others can take up the slack with little impact on the children.*
- **Makes the family independent of romantic relationships** — *Since parents conduct their personal lives outside the children's view, changes in their romantic status have little impact on the kids.*
- **Provides care for family members when they are sick, disabled or elderly** — *When family members need physical assistance, the family will provide it without cost.*
- **Provides a mutual-aid system for family members in trouble, with low risk of having it abused** — *When family members get in trouble, they know they can count on their siblings for help. At the same time, they have their pride to defend and are unlikely to seek help if they don't truly need it.*

- **Provides a resource system of family members to share information and advice** — *Whenever you need honest advice or information, you can probably call on a relative who has experience in that field.*
- **Encourages continued engagement after childhood** — *Adults who graduate from the family never really leave, even if they move away temporarily, because all of their most important relationships are centered there.*
- **Allows genetic variation to be inserted into the family** — *Since most babies are conceived from donated eggs and sperm, elders can bring genetic diversity into the family with little disruption.*
- **Allows population growth without disrupting the family culture** — *When a family divides by mitosis, all the existing structures and traditions of the family are preserved.*
- **Allows most of adult life to be unencumbered** — *The most productive period of adult life, from roughly age 25 to 65, is relatively free of burdens and obligations apart from the family tax. This allows members to pursue intense careers without worrying about the children.*
- **Allows adults to travel and live apart from the family** — *Once a young person has completed their Family Service (childbearing for women and comparable service for men) they are free to leave the family temporarily to pursue travel, career and other complex external goals.*
- **Makes good use of elderly family members** — *Older*

*family members are expected to return home, where they are put to work as parents.*

- **Allows babies to be born during the healthiest part of the mother's life** — *Since women have babies immediately upon reaching adulthood, their babies have the best chance of being healthy.*
- **Allows mothers to enjoy the pleasures of having a baby while experiencing few of the burdens** — *They can bond with their baby but don't have to change diapers or worry about the child's future.*
- **Assures that family members will never die without an heir** — *If they have invested in their family, members can face death knowing that some part of them will live on.*

## 6. Q & A

Now I'm going to discuss the various implications of the modular system. To make this go smoothly, the rest of this manifesto is a series of questions and answers. Although I'm writing the questions myself, I am trying to anticipate the questions you might ask if we were sitting down and talking in person

**Q. Why is there a maximum of 18 kids in a family? Why not 30 or 50? If a bigger factory produces products more efficiently, why not make the factory as big as possible?**

A. I want even spacing between children so there's a clear hierarchy within the family and children aren't directly competing with each other. If there were, say, three 8-year-olds, they would be competing for the attention of the older kids, and one of them—probably the most outgoing and charismatic—would probably end up winning, pushing the other two into the background. If there is only one 8-year-old, then he or she occupies a special place in the family, mostly free of competition. If someone is younger than you, you are more likely to guide them rather than compete with them for resources.

That's the theory anyway. Experience will tell us the optimal birth spacing, but one kid per year is as tight as I want to make it initially. That means roughly 18 kids, depending on when a child ages out of the system. Yearly spacing also allows the family to be cleanly split into two families of 9 kids each, spaced two years apart.

To achieve additional economies of scale I would have a bunch of 18-kid families form a larger community. If you had twenty 18-kid families, they could join forces on certain functions, like ordering food and mutual defense. With a number of families in this alliance, you could gather all the 8-year-olds together for certain educational purposes, like age-appropriate field trips.

### **And why can't there be fewer than 9 kids?**

At that point, you would be losing your economy of scale and parenting would get too expensive per child. I foresee the standard spacing being one baby per year. You would have a 9-kid family only immediately after mitosis.

### **What is mitosis?**

The term comes from biology. When a single-celled organism divides, all the genetic material in one cell is replicated in two smaller cells. It's like the family is a zipper and you are unzipping it and separating the two halves. Eventually, the holes in each side of the zipper are filled in by new births, one per year, and the whole zipper is reproduced on both sides. This is similar to what happens to chromosomes when a single-celled organism divides.

In this case, what we are trying to replicate is the family culture. Over time, a family comes up with all sorts of internal rules for how things operate—the family culture—and you want to keep that software intact. A family of 18 kids spaced one year apart becomes two families of 9 spaced two years apart.

The same unzipping could happen to the adults of the family. They split chronologically, with half the adults going to one family and half going to the other.

### **Mitosis sounds traumatic for the children, like divorce.**

It doesn't have to be. If the two families continue to live adjacent to each other, you still get to see your brothers and sisters, just not quite as often. The immediate bonus to everyone is you get more living space.

As each family becomes more self-contained, they can be moved farther apart.

### **What kind of house does a family live in?**

Ideally, a big one surrounded by plenty of land. The average new house in America is 2500 square feet (232 square meters). To house 18 kids, you probably want twice that: 5000 square feet or more. This is the size of an American McMansion of the 1990s. The market for these monstrosities isn't great these days, so maybe you can pick one up for a song.

Eventually, you might want to construct a custom-built house for 18 kids, which will have a different layout than a big home designed for five. Experience will tell you how to design this house to maximize family functions. Maybe you would want an industrial-size kitchen and a big dining area but also a cluster of smaller bedrooms for older teens. There ought to be a relatively cavernous space within the home where 18 kids and a dozen adults can gather for family events.

If you were to custom-build adult lodging, it could be an apartment

block close to the main house. You want parents to be “close but not too close” to encourage the independence of the main house.

### **Who are the parents?**

Basically, everyone in the family who isn't a child is a parent, responsible for helping raise the kids.

### **How many parents are there?**

Initially, you don't need many. Maybe five sets of couples, or ten adults total. As kids grow into adulthood, you'll have a lot more. If the family is producing one baby per year and it doesn't divide, then eventually you have one adult per year all the way up to age 90 or so when people die. That's roughly 72 adults for every 18 kids, which is a lot!

After mitosis, there's only 45 people in the family, or 9 kids and 36 adults, and if the family continues to divide every 18 years, the number of adults would drift even lower. The limitation on mitosis is whether the remaining adults have enough resources to raise the children.

Not all of these adults are living near the main household. Some of them may move away to pursue careers, so they aren't participating in the day-to-day life of the family, but everyone pays family taxes, and everyone is expected to move back home in their later years.

### **How are family taxes collected?**

It's on the honor system mostly, like a church collecting tithings from its member. Even today, when people from poor countries move to

rich ones to find work, they send remittances back home to support their families, and because they genuinely care about their families, they send as much as they can afford. Maybe there's a simple formula like you send home 10% or 20% of your income. There's no family IRS looking over your shoulder to measure your income and make sure your taxes are paid. You do it because you respect your family, and you don't want to be seen as cheating them.

### **What kind of jobs will family members get?**

It is impossible to say what employment will look like 50 or 100 years from now. Is everyone telecommuting, or are they living as subsistence farmers? Maybe the family as a whole has a shared business, and most adults work for this enterprise. Maybe the best option is to move away from home and pursue a conventional career elsewhere. I can't say in advance how people will generate income, but they are expected to devote some of it to their family.

10% to 20% of your income is still far less than what parents today spend on raising their kids, and it is much easier to absorb if you spread these payments over a lifetime.

### **How much is the family budget?**

I can't give you any specific numbers, but can give you a general outline of the income and expenses.

Let's start with the income side. The prime career years are between ages 25 and 65. In the 18-child-model, that's eventually 40 adults working to support the family, or 20 adults in the 9-child model. If

each of them sends 10-20% of their income back home, it should be enough to support the 18 kids and 10-20 elders, so long as they are all living frugally.

On the expensive side, you have the cost of the house and its maintenance. You have daily operating costs for food, heating, etc. There is the cost of medical care and medical insurance for the kids. You also have a couple of paid staff members: a full-time Educational Manager and a Business Manager, probably a part-time position. You're also caring for old and disabled family members who can't care for themselves. It is hard to anticipate these expenses because you don't know in advance what services that will be needed.

So one way or another, the inflow in taxes has to match the outflow in expenses. The modular family is at risk if expenses exceed income, so the family is always looking for ways to save money.

## **What happens when people get old?**

As family members reach traditional retirement age, they come back home, and the family puts them to work as active caregivers. This is the final phase of your Family Service. Today, due to the hard boundaries of female fertility, adults are expected to raise children at the height of their careers, which detracts from both children and career. In my system, adults who are winding down their careers will return home to devote themselves to the generation that will replace them when they are gone. These people are probably well motivated, since they know they are going to die soon, and they have accumulated a lot of life experience, so they could be good at parenting, not as uptight and controlling as

younger parents.

In today's world, people don't usually become parents at age 65 because women can't bear children at that age and they don't know if they are going to survive long enough to see their children to adulthood. Retired people today tend to occupy themselves with meaningless tasks, just waiting to die. The greatest joy of their lives is doting on their grandchildren, so I say let's make this more of a formal institution. In the modular family, you don't have to worry about children being left alone when you die, because other parents will pick up your duties.

When people get very old and need assistance with living, they would still remain close to home. Maybe they can live in a wing of the main house so the children can participate in their care.

Imagine you're a kid living in this household. Over your 18 years of childhood, you might directly witness several births, but you are also going to watch people get old and die. It makes you appreciate the cycle of life and your role in it.

### **Why should anyone sign up for your plan?**

People would form modular families main out of fear. Most people aren't afraid right now—in 2019—because the demographic crisis isn't obvious yet, but I think they will be afraid in the future.

### **Afraid of what?**

Afraid that their most cherished values will die. As you get older and realize there is no one to pick up whatever torch you are carrying, you might begin to panic.

That's kind of the place I'm at right now. I'm getting older; I've had a brush with death, and now I'm worried that I will die without an heir.

### **What was your brush with death?**

I got cancer last year and nearly died. I'm in remission, but I'm remain filled with the same existential dread. Whatever I've built, it's all going to collapse when I leave the scene.

### **How is the modular family going to help you?**

It probably won't. I may die of natural causes before any such family comes to fruition, but my own panic makes me realize that most people are facing a similar challenge: no suitable heirs to pass their knowledge, culture and values to. There will always be plenty of human bodies on Earth, just no one who cares about the things I care about. To have someone really understand you and the things you stand for, you have raise them from scratch.

### **What are you trying to preserve?**

Sanity. There isn't much of it in the world. Intelligence, logic and emotional discipline are pretty rare among the humans. It is like we speak a dying language, and there only a few of us left. Linguists can record a language and deduce its rules, but to really know the language and care about it you have to grow up with it. If those few remaining speakers want to preserve their language, they've got to get busy and make some babies. A lot of skills are like that. If you don't grow up in an environment that values that skill, you won't really know it.

# 7. Education

## **How does education work in the modular family?**

Education is the main purpose of the family. It's like children are little computers and you are filling them up with software over the course of two decades so they can do useful work in the decades that follow. This task is so important that you don't dare turn it over to some external institution like a public school. This is "industrial education," and it is soul-deadening. Don't get me wrong: Public education is better than no education at all, but it is horribly inefficient. Public education expects every child to proceed at the same pace regardless of their abilities and passions, which ends up killing their passions.

I don't believe education should be entirely freeform. There needs to be a core curriculum that everyone is expected to learn and a set of sequential steps for learning it. In math, for example, you start with arithmetic, then algebra, trigonometry, calculus and statistics. In traditional education, each of these subjects is taught with a graduated series of lessons and practical exercises. That's still the way you would do it when home schooling, but once a kid gets into the swing of things, they can race through all the lessons in no time at all, without being held back by grade level.

## What happens on a school day?

I envision school being a fixed period during the day when everyone studies—say 9 am to 3 pm, Monday through Friday, similar to public schools. Since the kids are different ages, they are studying different things, but they are all studying. From 9 to 3, they remain in the home, but all have their butts stuck to chairs doing something to further their education.

Directing all of this is a teacher, although I call them an “Education Manager” (EM). They are managing the educational plan more than they are teaching specific knowledge. Wherever possible, kids should do the teaching. The EM is keeping track of each student’s progress in the core curriculum and they are handing out assignments to further those goals. The main thing that differs from classroom education is that the curriculum isn’t pursued on a fixed schedule.

For example, the EM knows that by Age X, a child should be able to sing the alphabet and identify all the letters, and by Age Y, they should be able to write the alphabet. The EM assigns an older sibling to teach the younger one these skills. Ideally, this should be a child who has only recently learned those skills themselves. Tutoring is valuable to the younger child because they are learning a new skill, but it is also valuable to the older child because they are reinforcing their own knowledge by teaching it.

When the older child is satisfied that younger one had learned the lesson, they both appear before the EM for a test. Can the younger child sing the alphabet and recognize random letters presented to them? When the child passes the test, both they and their tutor get a gold star.

In the background, the EM ticks off this skill on the curriculum checklist for the student.

That's how education works at all ages, except that older children might get involved in online learning and not need the tutor. I can't say what computer-based education will look like in the future, but the family can make use of whatever is available. There are subjects like math and history that lend themselves to automated learning, while other things must be taught by humans. This is especially true of language, motor and moral skills. Children under a certain age—say 6—might never see a computer screen and are tutored mainly by older kids.

As long as a child is achieving all the appropriate benchmarks for their age, there doesn't have to be any fixed schedule for pursuing them. If a child is doing well in math and wants to complete a year of lessons in only a few weeks, they should be allowed to push ahead. Nothing should stand in the way of doing advanced work beyond their age level, but the EM also has to keep an eye on the rest of the curriculum. The kid may be doing great in math, but what about history or writing? If necessary, the EM can assert some authority to make sure the neglected parts of the curriculum are covered.

### **So this Education Manager should be a credentialed teacher?**

Not necessarily. They just have to be good at what they do. They could be a parent or an outside employee, but it's a full-time job, and they should be paid for it. While most parents drift and out of the household, the EM is a constant. They know each of the 18 kids and what their strengths and weaknesses are. They keep track of each child's

progress in the core curriculum and push them in certain directions as needed.

The EM is also aware of the special skills of each of parent, so they can pair students with parents for special mentoring or tutoring. Let's say a kid likes photography, so we pair them with an adult who also enjoys that hobby.

### **So education tries to enhance the special interests of each child.**

Within reason. Kids can have a lot of very expensive interests that don't lead to anything useful—skateboarding, video games, etc. Let's say the kid is a fan of skiing. That doesn't mean the family should buy him expensive equipment and lift tickets. On the other hand, if the kid is into biology and wants to become a doctor, the family might pull out the stops to support them. The family's response to a child's interests might range from indifference to enthusiastic support depending on its long-term priorities.

I don't mean that a child's interests should be discouraged, but family elders must decide what to support and what to ignore, because resources are always limited and you want to use them in a way that will best enhance the family's future.

### **What role do parents play in education?**

I see the Education Manager as a professional position—9 to 5, Monday through Friday. Parents come in later in the day, say from 4 pm to 10pm, and on weekends. The parents take turns managing the house,

and they know in advance what their schedule will be. There could be one parent on duty or perhaps several. This is quality time that is entirely devoted to the kids. Perhaps the parents can give some kind of presentation in the evening. This is an opportunity for freeform education without any firm agenda.

### **What would that presentation consist of?**

It could be anything. The most important thing is that it be fun and engaging, so the kids want to be there voluntarily. Whatever you're discussing, the kids are taking part, asking questions. Maybe you're talking about world affairs or recent developments in the family. Maybe a pet or an older family member has died and you're all trying to deal with it. Evening presentations could be about anything, and sometimes there's no plan at all, just a conversation. If the kids are well-trained in asking questions, maybe they set the agenda, and the parents are just there to make sure the discussion remains productive.

Parents control the one TV in the house, which is an incredible superpower. One night a week might be movie night, and the parents get to choose the movie.

### **Don't you believe in technology?**

I am wary of it. Computers can be important tools for learning, but they can also suck up a child's life in unproductive activities. I think that within the household, electronics should be tightly controlled. I can't say what the rules should be, because I can't predict the technology years from now, but there must be rules. One effective form of control is

geography. If the electronic device is in a certain room, you have to have access to that room to use it, and adults can control access.

In today's terms, I believe that kids should not have smartphones, at least before a certain age, but I love the idea of walkie-talkies. It lets everyone communicate and roam from home without it becoming a distraction to learning.

At the same time, kids need some exposure to state-of-the-art electronics because they will be using them as adults. Once a kid reaches adulthood, the family loses the power to regulate their electronics, so it has to instill good technology habits in the kids before adulthood.

### **Will the family pay for higher education?**

It's negotiable. I can't say what higher education will look like in 50 years, and I'm pretty skeptical of it, but I can see there are things the family might want to invest in, such as education leading to a medical degree. The family wants you to succeed, because they will be collecting taxes from you for life, but they also want a fair return on investment. If you want to become a theatre major, you are free to pursue your muse, but you can't expect your family to fund your interest. If the family is going to invest in higher education, they want it to lead to a job.

### **How do you know if education has been a success?**

As proof of success, kids ought to be able to test well on standardized tests, better than children their age taught by industrial education, but that's only a fraction of what's important. They should also be well-rounded, well-centered, conscientious people who can look

ahead and solve problems before they happen. There are no standardized tests for those things.

The whole purpose of raising children is education. You're taking these small computers and filling them up with software over the course of about 18 years. In the end, you've should have a productive citizen who is *not* a lot of things: They are not criminals, drug addicts, narcissists or sociopaths. They possess a lot of good traits like responsibility, initiative, curiosity and empathy. At the same time, they shouldn't be naïve about the outside world. They should have enough experience with it that they can protect themselves and not be traumatized by reality as soon as they encounter it.

At the end of the whole upbringing you've got remarkable young adults who will preserve the best parts of your legacy. The ultimate test is that you get to the end of your life and can say, "Okay, I can leave now. The world is in good hands."

## 8. Young Adulthood

As with young people today, adulthood is a transitional period, not a fixed milestone. Just because someone turns 18 doesn't instantly make them an adult. I see there being a transitional period of roughly 3-4 years between childhood and independent adulthood, and this is the Family Service period. For young women, this is the time when they produce babies, maybe three or four of them. During this period, they may continue to live in the same household they grew up in, moving into a special maternity room. Their main duty is to bear children and raise them through the child's first year.

### **What is Family Service for young men?**

I don't know. Males are a problem because they can't bear children. I imagine the family would find some sort of use for them. Perhaps they can serve in a traditional military capacity, defending the family or a group or families from outside threat. I can't anticipate what the world will look like decades from now, so I can't say what the family's needs will be.

### **What happens when Family Service has been completed?**

You're free! You're an adult now and you can do whatever you want. Of course, you may not know what you want, and you need a few years to figure it out.

I think this would be an excellent time to travel the world. The

family might even be willing to fund your expedition as an educational experience. Student-style budget travel is far less expensive than a college education, at least in America, and you might learn a lot more.

### **What if they never come back?**

Everyone has that option. You could move away to a distant land, cut your ties with the family and never come back. It's not what the family wants, because they have invested in you. They expect you to give back to the family for the rest of your life, and I think you eventually will.

After 20+ years of being surrounded by siblings, you may yearn to be alone and pursue your own goals for a while. At the same time, your siblings are part of your nervous system. You will always be performing for them and measuring yourself by them. It would be hard to tear yourself away and never see them again. Women would have an especially strong bond to their original family because they have borne several children in it, and they will want to keep in touch with them.

While an extended world tour may be a standard activity, I think most young people will retain a strong family bond. They are especially bonded to the siblings closest to them in age, but they are also bonded to their children and their adult caregivers. This loyalty is powerful.

### **What is expected of you in adulthood?**

As an adult family member, you are given a long leash to do whatever you want with whomever you want wherever you want. You are subject to only a few adult rules:

- 1) You keep in touch with your family, telling them where you are going and what you are up to. Among other things, this is a safety mechanism that helps the family come to your aid if you get in trouble.
- 2) You avoid doing dangerous things that might require the family to rescue you. For example, you don't go to dangerous places or take unnecessary risks.
- 3) You send home a portion of your income as "family taxes."
- 4) You avoid making babies outside of the family system.
- 5) You continue to participate as much as possible in the decision-making processes of the family, like family elections and meetings, which might be conducted by teleconference.
- 6) When you reach retirement age, you return to the family to resume your Family Service.
- 7) The family, or stewards of it, become your heirs. At the time of your death, most of your assets are transferred to the family.

These are modest expectations, and I don't think many family members will rebel against them. Among other things, the family is a mutual aid society, and you are paying a sort of insurance premium in exchange for its protection. Instead of putting 10-20% of your income into a personal retirement plan, you are paying the same amount to your family who will care for you in your old age. You don't get to "retire" in the traditional sense of spending your days on the golf course. Instead, you are raising children, but when you can't care for them or yourself, the family will step in to care for you.

Apart from those seven rules, the time between early Family Service and late Family Service is relatively unfettered. It's a time for career, outside relationships and self-actualization. You may not be living near the place where you grew up, but you are keeping in contact and, most importantly, you are paying your family taxes.

### **What are family taxes?**

Those are the remittances you send back home during your entire working life. Remittances are common for people who move from poor countries to rich ones—They send some of their income to their families back home.—but my system would formalize the process, which is why I call it “taxes,” not “contributions.” Family taxes are calculated according to some simple formula, like “X” percent of your income. You can always pay more, but “X” is the minimum. If you are travelling the world in your early 20s, you may not have income to send, but if you settle into a career and start earning a paycheck, your taxes will kick in. The tax structure should be simple, fair and not too burdensome, since you could be also paying taxes to the governments of whatever place you are living.

Family taxes serve two main purposes: to help raise the next generation and to provide care for the elderly and disabled. If you live close to home and are actively participating in the care of children or elderly, you may get a tax break. You could even draw a salary from the family if you are serving, say, as an education or business manager.

The notion of “taxes” in a family may sound crass, but it could prevent some of the resentments that roil families today. For example, in a traditional nuclear family, there could be four adult children of a now-

ailing couple, but one child who lives nearby ends up providing most of the parents' care. A fair tax system would assess higher payments from the three other children and might compensate the caregiver for their time. This avoids resentment in the caregiver and allows the others to pursue their careers without guilt.

### **Who enforces the taxes?**

Enforcement is subtle. It's on the honor system mostly. Maybe a family treasurer keeps track and publishes a list every year of who contributed what. You wouldn't want to hide income, because your siblings are your lifelong friends, and you wouldn't want to be caught cheating them. It's a lot easier to enforce a tax code if you have a personal relationship with every other taxpayer.

### **What do people do in adulthood?**

Maybe the same things they are doing now. The years between roughly age 25 and 65 are a blank slate. I can't predict what people will do any more than I can predict now what a baby will do when they grow up. They could stay close to home, or they could pursue a career far away. People will try to solve the same conundrums as today, mainly "How will I support myself while also doing something meaningful?" Since economies change, there is no fixed answer. There could be a family enterprise that most members work for, or you could have to go out into the world to find your own way.

The main thing expected of you in the prime adult years is that you send a portion of your income to the family. As you reach retirement age,

you are expected to return home, but even that isn't fixed. If you're 75, and your career is still going strong, the family won't demand that you quit, so long as you are still contributing.

## 9. Sex and Gender

**You say all babies are eventually going to be born by in-vitro fertilization. Is there no place for sex in this society?**

Sex will continue as it does today. Sexual attraction and bonding are deeply embedded in the human brain and are not likely to go away. People will continue to form and dissolve relationships as they choose, but children don't have to be the victims. Many people fall in love today with no intention of having children, and I expect this to become the norm. As long as you use birth control and aren't putting yourself in a position where you need to be rescued, the family shouldn't pass judgment on your choices.

**What if you fail to use birth control or birth control fails?**

That's a sensitive issue. If you or your co-conspirator choose to bring the baby to term, the family may accept the child into the main household, or they may not. The problem isn't the baby but the other parent. Since the modular family is always seeking diversity, they would probably welcome a new set of infant genes to the house. The problem is the other gamete contributor, who is presumably not a family member and hasn't been trained in the culture of the family. Having a baby with a family member doesn't automatically make you a family member. If it did, the family would be admitting someone who wasn't properly vetted and who could potentially be disruptive.

The presumption of the modular system is that you're not going to fully understand the family culture unless you're raised within it. It's like you can't speak a language without an accent unless you learn it from any early age. If a family member gets pregnant or gets someone else pregnant outside the family structure, it's essentially a shotgun wedding where the family is forced to consider admitting a new adult member. Shotgun weddings rarely go well. In the case of a daughter of the family getting pregnant, she can bring her baby into the household if she can get the father to relinquish his parental rights, which could be a challenge. In the case of a son getting a woman pregnant, it's even more complicated, because babies are normally born in the main household, and the mother usually hangs around for a year while nursing the child. I'm not sure you would want to admit an unacculturated adult into the household under this kind of pressure.

### **The modular family is beginning to sound like a closed society.**

It is. There are various kinds of firewalls protecting the family from the outside world while the children are being raised. Childhood, by its nature, is a sort of artificial Disneyland, and parents need to control its inputs. Over the course of their childhood, children learn a sophisticated internal culture, and you don't want it disrupted by chaotic forces from the outside. For example, the family would rarely adopt older children, because they haven't been raised in the family and they could disrupt its customs.

## **Does the family have no compassion for homeless children?**

The modular family is not a charity. It's not out to save the needy children of the world. It is designed to program children from birth with certain unique software. Even if you adopt a 3-year-old, that's three years of family programming they've missed. The proper groundwork might not have been laid for future learning.

I can't say with certainty that adoptions will never occur, but the overwhelming concern is the integrity and healthy functioning of the core family, not compassion for a homeless child. The annals of adoption are filled with cases where the new child caused great disruption to an existing family. If you have no clear record of the child's early life, you are taking a huge risk. One exception might be if a modular family had to disband for some reason. Other modular families might take in that family's children.

There is room for external compassion. The modular can engage in various outreach programs to aid non-family members, but admission to the family itself is sacred and has to be approached very carefully.

## **What happens when a family member falls in love and brings their boyfriend or girlfriend home to meet the family. How would this person be received?**

Warmly. Anyone can visit the family. At the same time, this person isn't a family member because they are not paying family taxes. They can't expect that just because they marry a family member, they are automatically admitted to the family. Admission to the family would require a long and careful vetting process and is not granted lightly.

Things might reach a decision point when a son or daughter of the family reaches retirement age and is ready to come back home. If they are bonded to someone and don't want to leave their partner behind, they have to do some negotiating with the family. "I'm ready to come home, but I want to bring my spouse with me." This is something that has to be resolved on a case-by-case basis. If this new person hasn't been paying family taxes, are they entitled to the same end-of-life care as the family member? I don't know.

**If most babies are born by IVF, the family also has the chance to choose their gender. Should there be a 50-50 mix of boys and girls, or should there be another ratio?**

That's a good question. I've given it a lot of thought, and I think we should keep it 50-50, with boys alternating with girls. This deliberate pattern helps maintain a consistent family culture. If you had three girls in a row followed by four boys, as random chance might give you, you'd have a less balanced family dynamic than boy-girl-boy-girl.

You could certainly argue for a higher female ratio, because this would ultimately mean fewer babies are needed per woman to sustain the family's population. In theory, if you have already banked a supply of frozen sperm, you could have 100% girls in your family. Each female would only have to produce one baby to replace herself and a second baby to increase the population. Males could always be reintroduced, but in the meantime, you could rapidly increase your population at minimal cost.

As male myself, I have some doubts about our necessity. Males

seem to be responsible for most of the aggression and violence of the world, and they win plenty of awards in the Pompous Ass department. An all-female society would remove the intrinsic unfairness of women having to bear children while males get away scot-free. If every citizen was expected to bear children upon reaching adulthood, no one would regard it as unfair.

But I am hesitant to monkey with something that could end up being an essential part of our humanity: the male/female dichotomy. While everyone should be given the same opportunities, males and females have different brain structures and tend to be drawn to different kinds of activities. Males, for example, tend to be good with mechanical things, like designing theoretical family structures, although they may be less suited to the social and political tasks of making those structures work.

An excess of females would also result, in the wider community, in a lack of male romantic partners in adulthood. While we won't be relying on sex and romance to produce babies anymore, these drives are deeply engrained in our brains and will probably persist. An all-female society would force its members into lesbianism. While I see nothing morally wrong with same-sex relationships, it would be presumptuous to require them.

A society with more females than males might work out just fine, but it is a risky experiment with many potential unforeseen consequences, and you won't know those effects until decades after you change the birth ratio. For the time being, I would stick with 50-50, alternating girls with boys every year. This further reinforces the family

hierarchy and the special place of each child.

I think tension between the sexes is built into our brains. On the playground, given the right of free association, boys and girls start sorting themselves by gender well before puberty. Boys play with boys and girls play with girls no matter how much their teachers try to be gender neutral. I don't think this is social conditioning but a hard-wired truth. Boys play with boys because their interests are similar, and the same for girls.

Likewise, boys and girls within a family tend to split into two tribes, and within their tribe, each child has a more unique place in the birth-order hierarchy, reducing internal competition. For an 8-year old girl, her next-oldest sister is 10 years old and her next youngest sister is 6-year old. I see this as a more optimal spacing than the one-child-per-year pattern of the whole family.

I am comfortable with boys and girls living together in the same room through the age of roughly 6. After that, I think they should be lightly segregated by gender: a boys' bunkroom and a girls' bunkroom. As space permits, teenagers might get their own rooms. In the boys' or girls' bunkroom, you have a mini-family with its own hierarchy where older siblings guide younger ones.

The modular family expects girls to have babies as soon as they reach adulthood. To make this seem fair, the boys should be required to perform some equivalent community task, like serving in the military. The exact task is less defined than it is for females, but I assume young men can do something useful.

By retaining a 50-50 mix, you are preserving many elements of our

current culture. Maybe it is not an optimal culture, but I'm reluctant to mess with gender ratio until the modular system is well-established.

# 10. Eugenics

## **If most babies are born by IVF, where do the embryos come from?**

I can't answer that in advance. This is a matter of family policy, and it's probably something that is covered in the family's founding charter. Maybe there's a committee of family elders specifically tasked with procuring eggs and sperm and deciding which of them should be combined. They can negotiate with other families and maybe an outside gene bank to obtain the genetic material they need.

To start, you want to harvest eggs and sperm from all your young adult family members. You can't just join them together because you'd eventually have inbreeding problems. You are going to need genetic material from outside the family to assure it's diversity. I'd say this is the most important factor at first: assuring genetic diversity.

The other main thing you want to do is to avoid obvious genetic diseases. If there is a family with a history of congenital heart problems, you're probably not going to continue that line. There's nothing particularly groundbreaking about this. This sort of selection is done today in prenatal screening for Down Syndrome, which is routine in most developed countries. When parents learn the fetus has Down's, they usually abort it.

## **Some people call this genocide. You're killing off the whole class of people with Down Syndrome.**

I know. Whenever you dabble in eugenics in any way, someone is going to cry, "Genocide!" To some people, all forms of abortion are genocide, no different than the Holocaust. If that is true, then is deliberately selecting one sperm or egg over another also genocide? I prefer to stick with the definition that genocide can be inflicted only on those who are already born.

In my mind, aborting a fetus with Down Syndrome is different than rounding up all people with Down Syndrome and sending them to death camps, which is the sort of thing that gave eugenics a bad name. When a modular family chooses what eggs and sperm to combine and what embryos to bring to term, it isn't saying that other people have no right to exist. It isn't restricting the right of people outside the family to reproduce however they choose. It is just deciding how best to use its own limited resources.

If the family is going to invest huge resources in a child, it wants to choose embryos that are most likely to be viable and that won't result in huge costs after birth. There are many people with Down Syndrome who go on to life productive lives, but we also know that the costs and risks of raising them are potentially huge and devastating. I think it is entirely reasonable for parents to abort these fetuses or, better yet, not conceive them.

## **Is the modular family trying to breed some kind of super race?**

That's a lot harder than it sounds. During the eugenics nightmares

of the 20th Century, people thought they had things all worked out. You just take blond-haired, blue-eyed males and mated them with blond-haired blue-eyed females and you somehow got a super race. “Genetic purity” was the rage back then, which is a merely racism shrouded in scientific jargon. It doesn’t create anything more “super” than the starting parents.

I’m not saying that genes are trivial. If you want evidence of how important they are, just look at dogs. Think of the many different kinds of dogs now living on Earth, from tiny Chihuahuas to giant St. Bernards. All of them emerged from the same Asian wolf species at least 10,000 years ago, mostly through deliberate breeding by humans. Not only do dog breeds have different body types; they also have different personalities. A Labrador retriever behaves differently than a pitbull. (“Mauled to Death by Pitbulls” is a common news headline, but when was the last time you heard “Mauled to Death by Labs”?)

It is entirely possible to breed humans the same way. You could select for body size or hair color or even general disposition, but think about how long it would take. A dog can bear puppies only a year or two after birth. For humans, it’s more like 15 years, and it takes even longer to see how your initial experiments work out so you can decide on the next breeding step.

Let’s say you wanted to breed a super soldier—a big man with great physical strength and a tough disposition who can tolerate pain and follow orders. You start with the toughest soldiers in your current army and breed them with comparable women. How many generations would it take to get the perfect soldier? If it takes five or six, that’s roughly a

century! No individual or organization has the resources or stability for that kind of long-term breeding program, and even if they did, they would end up with a “super soldier” designed for wars of 100 years ago. Technology is likely to change the battlefield so you don’t need a big muscular guy anymore. You need a guy (or gal) who can master complex electronics and push the right buttons at the right time. That’s a lot more difficult than merely selecting for body size.

With dogs, breeding is easy because you’re only focusing on one trait at a time, like a certain coat color or general disposition. Border collies, for example, have been bred for centuries to herd sheep, and they are very good at it. Breeding a human super race would mean selecting for more than one skill, and this is difficult on any workable timeframe. The fact is, you don’t know what skills will be important decades from now, so it’s hard to know what to breed for. It makes more sense to breed for diversity, seeking genetic material from all over the world. Then you have a lot of options available for unforeseeable future needs.

What does a government do today when it wants a super soldier? It goes out into the general population and recruits them. First, a candidate has to want to be a soldier and pass all the physical tests to be accepted into the military. Then they may be further selected to join some elite commando unit. In America, the military has a rich variety of physical specimens to choose from, because America is a melting pot of genes. In Japan, there are fewer options, because the Japanese tend to be small in stature and there is very little breeding with other races.

So if you are selecting embryos for your modular family, you have a pretty simple set of starting goals: Number One, you want to avoid

obvious genetic diseases, and Number Two, you want to seek maximum genetic diversity among your offspring. If no child in the family looks like any other, I'd say you have succeeded.

You can still call it eugenics, but it's the opposite of the purity goals of the 20th Century. In the 21st Century, I think mongrels will be all the rage.

### **Can you guarantee that the modular family will never try to breed a better human?**

No, I can't guarantee that. If the offspring are rich in genetic diversity, many of those experiments won't work out. Exposed to the same childhood environment, some people will excel and some won't. In choosing the next generation, it is natural for the family elders to focus on the specimens with the best record of real-world success. This a Brave New World with many potential pitfalls, but it's a centuries-long process that I think is decades away from even beginning. When you first form a modular family, the main thing you want is diversity.

### **What about the direct editing of genes with technology like CRISPR? Should it be used on humans?**

Not a good idea. It's just too expensive, risky and complicated compared to the relatively low-tech method of combining existing eggs with existing sperm. The first problem is identifying the genes to edit. If you want to select for eye color in fruit flies, it's no problem, because their genome is relatively simple and their life cycle is short. You'll know within days whether your experiment is successful. Modifying human

genes is orders of magnitude more complicated. Given a few decades of CRISPR experiments on the Island of Doctor Moreau, you can probably change human eye color but not create a better human. There is probably no single “smartness” gene you can modify to give the offspring an overall advantage in life, and if there was, how would you identify it?

The best you can hope for with CRISPR—were it allowed for humans—is fixing some obvious genetic defect, but in the process of trying to fix that one thing, you could break something else, in which case you could be crippling a child for life. To prevent a certain genetic disease, it is easier to just avoid the egg or sperm that carries it.

# 11. To be continued....

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