

6-1-2012

# Review of *The Morning After: A History of Emergency Contraception in the United States*, by Heather Munro Presc.

Dennis G. Hodgson  
*Fairfield University*, [hodgson@fairfield.edu](mailto:hodgson@fairfield.edu)

Archived with permission from the copyright holder.

Copyright 2012 Wiley and Population Council.

Link to the journal homepage: (<http://wileyonlinelibrary.com/journal/padr>)

---

## Repository Citation

Hodgson, Dennis G., "Review of *The Morning After: A History of Emergency Contraception in the United States*, by Heather Munro Presc." (2012). *Sociology & Anthropology Faculty Publications*. 51.  
<http://digitalcommons.fairfield.edu/sociologyandanthropology-facultypubs/51>

## Published Citation

Hodgson, Dennis. Review of *The Morning After: A History of Emergency Contraception in the United States*, by Heather Munro Presc. *Population and Development Review* 38, no. 2 (June 2012): 381-382.

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Sociology & Anthropology Department at DigitalCommons@Fairfield. It has been accepted for inclusion in Sociology & Anthropology Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Fairfield. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@fairfield.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@fairfield.edu).

chapters discuss national and international policies, health and nutrition, food security and demand, poverty, market exchange functions, production and supply, natural resource management, globalization and international trade, and ethical issues. Numerous examples illustrate how inappropriate policies and practices have made agriculture less productive and more environmentally destructive, and how effective and legally binding policies can improve the situation. The authors contend that sustainability can be achieved by giving the right economic incentives to farmers, consumers, and other actors in the food system, by making polluters pay, and by subsidizing environmental services. While the discussion covers all aspects of the food system, the absence of discussion of population policy is surprising because population growth is a main driver of demand for food, and widely accepted approaches to reduce birth rates (e.g., voluntary family planning programs) have demonstrated their effectiveness.

The lead author is a highly respected food policy researcher and the winner of the 1995 World Food Prize. He and his coauthors use methods and insights from a range of disciplines including economics, nutrition, soil science, sociology, anthropology, political science, demography, environmental science, and geography. A vast literature on food and agricultural issues already exists, but this textbook makes a unique and valuable contribution by presenting a comprehensive, balanced, and in-depth analysis that avoids alarmist views and focuses on practical solutions. Although its main audience is graduate and undergraduate students, food policymakers will find the discussion rich and insightful.—J.B.

**HEATHER MUNRO PRESCOTT**

*The Morning After: A History of Emergency Contraception in the United States*

New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2011. 184 p. \$22.95.

Many people think that emergency contraception has a short history, but in fact it has a long one. Experiments in the 1920s and 1930s documented that estrogen compounds could act as a postcoital contraceptive for rats and rabbits. Soon after the US Food and Drug Administration approved “the pill” for contraceptive use in 1960, physicians began giving estrogen compounds to rape victims in emergency rooms and to women in university health centers. Studies showed that giving women who had unprotected sex a high dose of the synthetic estrogen diethylstilbestrol (DES) or multiple birth control pills significantly reduced the chance of pregnancy. This “off label” use of estrogen compounds continued through the late 1990s as political controversy and liability concerns kept major pharmaceutical companies from pursuing FDA approval of a properly labeled emergency contraceptive. Eventually “Preven” was approved in 1997 followed by “Plan B” in 1998. More recently there was a contentious struggle with President George W. Bush’s political appointees in the FDA before the over-the-counter sale of “Plan B” was permitted for women aged 17 and older. Last December, too late for this history, President Obama’s Secretary of Health and Human Services, Kathleen Sebelius, overruled the decision by FDA scientists to allow its sale to women under 17. Heather Munro Prescott chronicles these ongoing battles with conservatives who equate emergency contraception with abortion and who contend that it fosters promiscuity, and she also traces the

evolving position taken by feminist health activists toward this technology and hormonal contraceptives in general. Early on, health feminists decried the use of coeds as “guinea pigs” for this new drug regime and contended that the use of DES as a postcoital contraceptive was unethical since DES could cause a rare vaginal cancer in daughters whose mothers had taken it while pregnant. But when the political climate during the Reagan years turned hostile to both abortion and birth control, feminist health activists reassessed their position. Getting the FDA to approve a dedicated emergency contraceptive brought together radical feminists in the National Women’s Health Network and more moderate reproductive health professionals, an alliance that continued through the long effort to get it approved for over-the-counter sale. This is an interesting history of the shifting roles played by multiple actors in the emergence of this contested technology.—D.H.

**NORIYUKI TAKAYAMA AND MARTIN WERDING (EDS.)**

*Fertility and Public Policy: How to Reverse the Trend of Declining Birth Rates*

Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2011. 283 p. \$29.00.

Sub-replacement fertility has characterized many countries in Europe and East Asia for several decades, and political leadership and public policy scholars in most of these countries have regarded this as an undesirable situation over the longer term. Whether there exist feasible and affordable public policies to raise fertility closer to two births per woman is the subject of this edited volume, which had its origins in a conference held in Munich in February 2008. The policies considered include schemes that provide financial benefits to parents, policies intended to reconcile employment and childrearing (e.g., parental leave policies), and child-care provision and subsidization. The volume contains both conceptual pieces and case studies. The conceptual pieces include a review of economic theory that bears on the formulation of policies to raise fertility (Werding), and a review of existing social policies that either deliberately aim to influence fertility or might have this as an unintended consequence (Bradshaw and Attar-Schwartz). A further conceptual piece by Cigno, which proposes a pronatalist public pension system, closes the volume. All three conceptual chapters are marked by skepticism—about the rationale for deliberate policies to raise fertility and about the potential impact of such policies. And, further, the chapters raise concerns about the scientific challenge of evaluating policy impact. The volume also contains case studies of six countries: China, Japan, and Korea in East Asia, and France, Germany, and Sweden in Europe. Including the East Asian countries, and according them equal attention in the case-study chapters, is a feature of the volume that sets it apart from the many discussions of fertility and public policy that consider Europe alone. The editors’ introduction provides a concise overview of the volume and poses some probing questions about the current state of knowledge. Index. Bibliography. —J.C.