off Saturday work in the arrogant belief that their unblessed coworkers are happy to fill in for them.

The childless also bear the brunt of the tax burden, while parents get a $500 tax credit per child, a $1,500 tax credit for college tuition, a child-care tax credit, and extended unemployment insurance to stay home with a newborn. Moreover, companies skimp on benefits to the childless while lavishing on parents such perks as 12 weeks of unpaid maternity/paternity leave, adoption and foster care leave, on-site day care, breast-feeding rooms, paid absences for school plays and PTA conferences, and even "bonding time."

In short, writes Burkett, the childless subsidize the fecund in "the most massive redistribution of wealth since the War on Poverty." Burkett, a history professor turned journalist, approaches her subject with the shrinking timidity of Carry Nation. She calls family "the F-word" and thinks family-friendly policies are a "welfare program for baby boomers" and "affirmative action based on reproductive choice." She also considers them profoundly reactionary. Rewarding parents at the expense of nonparents, she maintains, is no different from the old practice of paying men more than women because they had families to support.

"Parents," of course, is a euphemism for frazzled working mothers. With a fine impartiality, Burkett blames the family policy rip-off on conservatives obsessed with motherhood and liberals obsessed with women's rights. They have met their common enemy, and it is the childless. Feminists, who used to rail against the family as a patriarchal institution, must now support profamily legislation or else admit they were wrong when they told women they could have it all. "Feminism has become the ladies' auxiliary of the parents' rights movement," Burkett writes acidly, "and the words woman and mother have become synonymous once again."

This no-holds-barred book will upset many, but it marshals a wickedly funny compendium of evidence of America's child fixation: the 1988 presidential election, when George Bush and Michael Dukakis both campaigned in daycare centers; the peanut butter-free zones established in daycare centers when parents panicked over the allergy scare; the trial lawyer who found a right to breastfeed in the Constitution; and the $375 breast pump that plugs into a car's cigarette lighter, allowing lactating careerists to milk themselves while driving to work.

Burkett's most controversial point is her suspicion that the real impetus behind the baby boon is the demographic forecast that minorities will be in the majority in the near future. Showering tax breaks and benefits on affluent whites rewards fertility and encourages "birth by bribery," a ploy not unlike the Nazi practice of awarding the Mutterkreuz to Aryan supermoms.

—Florence King

THE NATURE OF ECONOMIES.

By Jane Jacobs. Random House. 190 pp. $21.95

Jacobs burst on the scene in 1961 with *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, a book that helped prevent the destruction of Manhattan's SoHo manufacturing district by highway builders. Before moving to Canada in 1969, she was deeply engaged in stopping Westway, another monster highway project in New York. She arrived in Toronto only to find the Spadina Expressway bearing down on her home. She stopped that, too.

Death and Life and its successors, *The Economy of Cities* (1969) and *Cities and the Wealth of Nations* (1984), were works of economics by a journalist. The community of technical economists, accustomed to writing in highly mathematical language, ignored her (with the honorable exception of Robert Lucas at the University of Chicago). So, giving up on them, Jacobs switched to a different form.

Systems of Survival (1992) and, now, *The Nature of Economies* are Platonic dialogues among a handful of imagined citizens who inhabit a civilized New York quite like the city

Jacobs left: Armbruster, the retired publisher; Kate, the science writer; Hortense, the lawyer; Hiram, the fundraiser for students of "biomimicry" (which is really Jacobs's topic); and Murray, Hiram's economist father. These books are amusing to write, fun to read, but perhaps also confusing to, say, people flustered by the fictional narrator of Edmund Morris's memoir of Ronald Reagan, *Dutch*.

Though it is a short book, *The Nature of Economies* is intended as a *summa*, an attempt to state three overriding principles of economics in terms of ecological and evolutionary processes. First, economic development is differentiation emerging from generality (the log used as roller becomes a wheel). Second, successful differentiations ordinarily are not final; they become generalities from which further differentiations emerge (the cart wheel becomes a spoked wheel, a waterwheel, a windmill, a propeller, a food processor). And, third, all differentiation depends on codevelopment in the ubiquitous competition for resources (the wheel becomes a gear and then a hundred different types of gear). Illustrations drawn from history and nature spin out like kittens chasing their tails.

The idea that economics and ecology have much in common is not new. The great Victorian economist Alfred Marshall was famous for his opinion that "the Mecca of the economist lies in economic biology rather than in economic dynamics." But biological analogies were complex and little understood, while one could say something concrete using dynamic models, such as three balls in a bowl to demonstrate equilibrium.

Jacobs hasn't solved the technical problem of developing biological models either, but she does succeed in explaining her view of economics with astounding clarity, probably because she never acquired the carefully wrought blinders of the professional economist. To the well-known "law of diminishing returns" she opposes the "law of responsive substitution," meaning that people contrive substitutes for resources that have become too expensive. In contrast to the ordinary postulate of universal self-seeking, she observes that the oldest economic generality of all may be the practice of sharing. One of our sharpest observers for the past 40 years, Jacobs is more acute than ever.

—*David Warsh*

WHAT PRICE FAME?

By Tyler Cowen. Harvard Univ. Press. 256 pp. $22

Two years ago, Cowen, a young economist from George Mason University, marched into the cultural minefield arguing that capitalism fosters great art. *In Praise of Commercial Culture* was an energetic paean to the free market as well as a show-and-tell of the author's erudition; from the Greeks to Rodchenko to Skinny Puppy, there wasn't much Cowen hadn't stumbled upon. Asking everyone to join him at the table, lefties and neocons alike, he invoked British novelist John Cowper Powys on the purpose of culture ("to enable us to live out our days in a perpetual undertide of ecstasy") and ended with a secular prayer: "Let not the differences in our personal tastes or political views dim the chorus of this ecstasy."

Two years later, the world is still Cowen's boom box. His new book analyzes the organizing principle of commercial culture: fame. "Fame has become the ideological and intellectual fabric of modern capitalism," he writes. The key to our culture is "the commodification of the individual and the individual image." Everyone wants to be famous. In the first two pages, Katharine Hepburn, Isaac Newton, Princess Diana, Beethoven, Proust, David Hume, and Adam Smith get hustled in to back up that point. Certainly Cowen himself wants to be famous—the Oprah of economists, why not admit it? A free market, he calmly explains, has little room for shame, or for morals.

Cowen tries to find the good in this marketplace of renown. Fame draws "forth a dazzling array of diverse and creative performances," and "mobilizes the human propensity to talk in support of great achievements." Still, he cannot deny a growing suspicion that all is not well. "A culture saturated with overfamiliarity becomes less hopeful, less interested, and less erotic," he acknowledges. People become jaded; "cynicism and debunkings" displace intellectual curiosity. Fame also discourages innovation: the quest for renown makes scientists and other creators more secretive and less cooperative; desire for reputation encourages fraud; and people take fewer risks when they're being watched. For the famous, in addition, fame can carry an onerous price. They may, like John Lennon, literally die of exposure. As he recites these terrible truths, Cowen often leans back on the pre-