

# The Population Problem

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Population in the form of overpopulation poses as a cynosure, an object of many eyes. Especially has this been true since the residential figure reached one billion persons on the world stage in 1830. Progressively this concern has been intensified by the population statistics of two billion persons and three billion persons in 1930 and 1960 respectively. The claimants of the dire consequences of population excess hold that food supply, air and water purity and sheer survival itself will be at stake.

The vital question is, does overpopulation serve an awesome notice to the general welfare of world societies? In trying to answer this question the writer wishes to explore problematical areas.

## LEADING THEORIES

Amidst a plethora of theories three essays stand out as analyses of the problem. These essays by Thomas Malthus, Julian Huxley and Frederick Osborn explore a critical world condition.

*Robert Thomas Malthus*, an early nineteenth century economist, is considered to be the father of population study as a field of scholarship. In 1798 he wrote the first edition of "An Essay on the Principle of Population." In essence, his theory was that human populations tend to increase geometrically while the food supply increases arithmetically. Expressed another way, the population increases at a much more rapid rate than the food supply necessary to sustain it.

The major criticism of the Malthusian theory is "that an increase in

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numbers indicates that the means of support is likewise increasing," according to Kingsley Davis. Second, the Industrial Revolution gave the impetus to greater food supply and ultimately to affluence. Finally, Malthus did not predict the effectiveness of birth control as the greatest check to the growth of human numbers.

*Julian Huxley*, in 1955, wrote an essay on "World Population." Malthus gave his famous theory to the world when one billion persons were seemingly crowding the planet. Huxley gave his when an apparently awesome two and one half billion persons appeared on earth. Huxley said, as others had said before, that population growth had come from a very slow beginning to an explosive process.

His thinking was that underdeveloped countries were, and are still, experiencing rapid expansion. He stated three facts to support what he thought to be an alarming thesis. First, the total world population has increased relentlessly, with a few minor setbacks since before the dawn of history. Second, the population of two and one-half billion persons is alarming. Third, an annual increase of thirty-four million people per year is a frightening figure.

Since, according to the World Health Organization, two thirds of the world's people are undernourished, Huxley recommended rational planning, a definite population policy. In this policy he advocated that science, which has been geared to increasing food supply, be geared to the reduction of the rate of people production. He urged that basic research and practical application be effected, and that research be conducted on methods of birth control and also on attitudes toward family limitation as well as on population trends in different parts of the world.

*Frederick Osborn*, in "Population: An International Dilemma," wrote demographically for the world of 1960. Osborn's paper, like Malthus' and Huxley's, coincided with a population promontory. Malthus wrote when the world population was approximately one billion, Huxley when the figure was two and one-half billion, and Osborn when the number of world residents was just below three billion persons. Thus statistical conditions prompted great public concern on the part of two Britishers and one American covering a period of one hundred thirty years. During this time, the populations of Britain and America grew five-fold and thirty-five fold respectively.

Like Malthus, and especially like Huxley, Osborn saw the need for rational planning and regulation of births. In detail he outlined historical conditions of developed and underdeveloped countries and steps necessary to cope with the problem of population excess. His analysis was that national numbers are affected by industrialization, urbanization, education and contraception. He held that the most effective means of control of

numbers is (1) at the family level where the producing couples must take into account the extreme social sensitiveness of the highly personal matter of family control, and (2) at the national level where the spirit of nationalism makes all countries unwilling to accept advice from foreigners.

### THE DEMOGRAPHIC EQUATION

The demographic equation or population balance is based on four interacting conditions: amount of available land, state of the arts of production, level of living and numbers of people. Each of the factors is dependent upon another and upon the whole of conditions. For instance, if the population is large the standard of living may be low, and vice versa. Technology, however, can heighten the level of living for a large population.

These factors listed in the preceding paragraph give us the structure of the problem of overpopulation mentioned in the opening paragraph in the paper. Closely related to the structure is the function or consequence of the structure in action. The reduction in infant mortality and increase of longevity have done much to raise the population level as a result of industrial and medical technology. Immigration, especially in the case of the United States, has accounted for forty-two million additional persons but has not been a major factor in world growth. As a result of lowered mortality and lengthening of average life expectancy, a number of possible danger signals have been flashing: numbers versus power, income, food, natural resources and death rates.

### METHODS OF COPING WITH THE PROBLEM

The white race wields the greatest power of any race, although it is a minority race. The position of the white in a superior power position is not racial but ideological. The developed countries of the world constitute thirty-five percent of the population and produce eighty percent of the income. It is not a tenable theory to believe that a restructuring of the power elite will come about. But international status differentials such as that between the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. aid in producing envy, fear and continuous uneasiness.

Increase in the supply of foodstuffs is essential in caring for the growing number of impoverished people of underdeveloped nations. Sometimes cultural or religious practices serve as a cultural inertia to prevent the utilization of livestock or vegetation. India, where the cow is believed to be sacred, is such an example. The pressure of population on food sources in certain sections of Asia is crucial. Food for the entire world can, however, be produced by progressively technological means and by fewer persons.

Industrialization helped to build the Western World and it is argued

that it can perform such miracles for the non-Western World. A simple division of labor cared for much of the pre-industrial world but a specialization of services is effected when industry, trade and education work together. It takes capital and time to accomplish a transition from agricultural folkways to industrial technicways.

We have not run out of living space. Our problem is, to a degree, the unequal distribution of the population, so migration from greatest centers of concentration is advocated. Migration would give temporary relief to some areas from which emigration takes place, but a selective immigration for most sparsely settled areas is called for in that technical and professional persons are needed to develop these areas. Most migrations are voluntary and economic in nature. Enticing advantages must be offered as incentives by sparsely populated areas if migration is to be employed as a functional technique.

These methods, which are socially sanctioned and more in keeping with the humanitarian ethos, may be thought of as external devices. Past methods are looked upon as deplorable, especially the restrictive policies of the ancient Romans and Greeks, who used infanticide as a control measure. Abortion was, and is still, a debatable method of keeping down the population.

## CONCLUSIONS

While there is not a consensus on the danger of overpopulation, the problem has always been one of potential danger. Specifically there are three danger zones: one extends from eastern Europe to the ever dangerous Middle East; the other is the Far East. There is another danger spot which extends from Hawaii to India and the Soviet East.

Although not in an international chain of nations, two countries loom as the centers of possible danger. The United States and Russia are heading toward a doubling of their numbers, a phenomenon which will call for increasing demands on world resources. These nations as well as industrialized European nations constitute the bulk of the haves. A grave economic and political struggle may ensue between the haves and the have-nots.

Specifically and generally the potential situation is grim. Unless a strong world organization (the United Nations has not been successful at this point) produces a balance between numbers and power, the world has cause for grave concern.