

# MOTES from the Dust Bin

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### THE POPULATION ISSUE

“Issue” is a nice word that avoids the word “problem,” or “dilemma,” or other such terms that might suggest that action is needed (or the commencement of *inaction* in certain areas, as the case may be). That has been the situation since Thomas Malthus pointed out so forcefully the expectation—no, the certainty—that overpopulation would be the final blow, first to human dignity, then to civilization.

The first thing that must be understood and faced, is that overpopulation does not mean inadvertently rubbing elbows with your neighbors. Nor does it indicate a solid mass of flesh from coast to coast with contractors working on a second or third story to your continent. Nor does it necessarily imply Japanese train packers or families living in such crowded conditions that they have to sleep in shifts because there is insufficient space for all of them to be in prone position simultaneously. All of these certainly are examples, but remember: one person, alone, in the middle of a whole continent, if it were barren, could be considered overpopulation.

While conditions previously described would be a pretty good indication of overpopulation, it should be understood that they are symptoms (in these cases very late symptoms) of procreation madness. This is very like a disease by which what should be a natural instinct for sexual diminuendo (or at least a lower birth rate, or higher mortality rate) in concert with a situation of diminishing resources in a certain area or among a certain ‘folk,’ is overwhelmed by increasing technology in regard to production of staples and ease of distribution from elsewhere. In short, the population growth alarm is stifled in a given area, or among a particular culture (ultimately this will be true for the entire globe) so growth continues to increase due to improving technology. Simply by the division of labor: the organization of society into farmers and others, overpopulation begins to set in. As farms produce more and more using fewer and fewer workers and families, and as supermarkets replace local markets, huge numbers of people (many of them former farmers) become dependent on such artificial means for sustenance.

In prosperous times, growth is no problem. An increase in the number of consumers is seen as economic expansion and is desirable. Improvements in production and delivery can easily keep up with growth—in fact they are driven by growth. Food storage, preservation, and delivery technology, all accomplished through artificial constructs, are accepted as permanent features of your world. When the population exceeds the number that can be supported naturally, that is without depending on these artificial technological improvements, it goes unnoticed. If water is in short supply in an arid land—pipe it in from some less ‘developed’ area; or drill for ground water; or build a dam. Is the soil lacking in fertility? Chemistry is at our command. Is the sun too hot or the winter too frigid and lengthy? Ship in oil and gas and coal, and build power plants—more fuel is the answer in creating the energy necessary to ignore the climate.

These are all wonderful things. Through just such science and industry, more people are alive today than the total number of humans that ever lived on Earth before the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. This, in and of itself, is not a bad thing. Some bad things, however, do come along with prosperity—meaning that you can actually reach a point of excessive prosperity. Those who are

intelligent, disciplined, and productive (at least in regard to their private income and property—and considering that many are professional parasites, such as lawyers and politicians and most bureaucrats, producing nothing but their own wealth and that of other lawyers, politicians, and bureaucrats through fees for their redistributing of real wealth actually produced by others) have time for leisure and luxury and travel, thus engendering a false sense of security about the future being ever better and brighter. Infant mortality decreases (a good thing) due to diet and improvements in medical science, age expectation increases (a good thing), and population burgeons (becoming less of a good thing as it approaches the point of diminishing returns).

Not everyone is rich and comfortable, of course. No matter what the gross national product, or the mean income, or the readiness of venture capital for reinvestment, there are always the disadvantaged. Some are disadvantaged by nature: a physical handicap or mental debility; others by sheer attitude or tradition or the trickle-down effect of some philosophical notion—or even religion. But now the advantaged have time on their hands; time to notice the inequality of conditions. In increasing numbers, under a democratically oriented governmental system and its underlying philosophy, some of them begin to feel guilty instead of proud. It is not their fault, of course. They only lived according to prevailing social memes, trapped, as it were, in an era of fabulous prosperity and freedom. They were expected, even urged to take advantage of the system into which they were cast. The government is in charge of the system, aren't they? So the government gets the blame and is charged with correcting the situation. In their guilt over their very success, they are willing to be inordinately taxed to make the problems go away. They come to see taxes actually as an opportunity to buy their way out of guilt. Through government programs, then, the productive elements of the society provide the disadvantaged (and inadvertently and invariably the lazy and the fraudulent, too) with funds sufficient to make it unnecessary for them to support themselves.

This is well-meaning. The attempt is laudable to a degree, and in the best spirit of the Christ who is the tap root of the modern notion of equality. No doubt, it saves many lives. Furthermore, it promotes increasing consumption, which spurs the economy. So, in a sense, and to a limited degree, tithing through taxation does engender economic expansion, as does raising the wages of workers—though it is difficult to convince any particular businessman that increasing his payroll without increasing his production will somehow lead to greater profits. Taxation creates growth in another way, too. Increasing taxes makes hard working folks work harder. Fathers begin working extra hours, then extra jobs; then mothers begin working just to pay a portion of the taxes generated by the father's income. The family, especially a large one, becomes more costly. Soon it becomes difficult to afford a family at all, let alone a large one, so birth control becomes a factor in restricting the growth of the otherwise productive folk, which is adverse to economic growth. But it does not have the same effect on the non-productive, because they actually get raises as their families grow. The productive folks cut back in spending and jobs are lost. Taxes, it seems, must be increased on the dwindling workers to cover the cost of government expansion (partially due to more collection and redistribution agents) and to preserve the lives of idlers. Poverty (though not in the sense of primitive style squalor and starvation) becomes a way of life for a noticeably increasing minority, encouraging evermore individuals toward what might seem an easy, if empty life of victimization instead of a hard-working and productive life that is rewarded by the ruthless but legal thievery of the tax collector—eventually sounding the death knell of capitalism. Why take risks or work hard only to lose half your earnings (or more) to the tax thugs. When capitalism goes, so goes freedom, for the very foundation of freedom is that of economic opportunity. Without that freedom, all the other freedoms will be either lost or rendered ineffective, if not meaningless. That is why there is

no success in socialism. Once economic incentive is lost, economic ruin ensues. When competition is eliminated, so goes winning. If you can no longer win, what is the point of playing? That is why egalitarianism (however beautiful that word sounds to the Christ-indoctrinated modern souls, so many of whom desperately despise Christianity) must be tempered and blended with liberty. Society operates within two interpenetrating spheres: the political and the economic. They can be separated conceptually but not actually. In the political sphere, social justice requires legal equality. In the economic sphere, overall prosperity depends on financial freedom.

In any case, eventually, due to ever increasing prosperity and resulting growth, however it is achieved, consumption will outrun production capacity and resources. Despite all that science and technology can do, production and distribution and/or sources, ultimately, will become insufficient to meet demand. Before reaching that point, you will have passed through a von Neumann-like barrier, through which return is impossible (actually you are already beyond it and cannot go back).

An example is pertinent. Let us say you are approaching the barrier. You are in the pre-electrical era of horse-drawn transportation. The age is prosperous, generally, for your society, and you are enjoying economic expansion, but at a horse & buggy rate and everything seems in synchrony for your nation of, say, 10,000,000 people and 12,000,000 horses. Then railroads are built, autos are invented, electrical power plants go on line, medical science extends life expectancy and drastically reduces infant mortality, industry booms and food production and distribution make possible heretofore undreamed of expansion, and horse farms become obsolete. In a few generations, with added immigration from less prosperous lands, your country boasts a population of, say, 50,000,000. You soon run out of fuel, but you can buy it elsewhere. The rest of the world figures out how you became so prosperous, they industrialize, and now they need fuel too. The reserves are restricted to a few holders, the world gets nervous, speculators and holders drive up the price, your economy lags, terrific inflation occurs, oil grows too expensive for you to continue your decadent life-style. But you can't go back to horses and whale oil. Now you have less than a million thoroughbreds and pets. Even if you could raise more horses, or buy them, you have no way of keeping them, feeding them, or cleaning up the droppings on the necessary scale to match the demands of a 50,000,000 person economy that was based on trains, planes, autos, and diesel trucks. Even if you could deport 80% of your population, perhaps by selling them into slavery in China rather than let them starve or euthanize them (and what would you use for fuel to cremate 40,000,000 of your friends and relatives?) and scale back to 10,000,000, it would be many years before you could re-establish the old self-sustaining system, and such a transformation would be an unspeakable horror.

Once past this point of no return, the interruption of the system of production and distribution, for even a brief period, will cause heavy and irreparable losses. The further you progress beyond that level without the interruption taking place, the more severe will be the reaction when the break does ultimately occur.

Let's pretend, now, that just before the unthinkable occurs, you find a new source of energy. You discover that by passing radio waves of a certain frequency through salt water, you can separate the hydrogen and oxygen and burn them (actually this has already been done on your world [a beautiful flame of 1500 degrees coming from a test tube of sea water], but few people know about it, and it will never be used because there is no way to tax it or make money from it). Now we have oceans of energy, an inexhaustible supply. Now we can just drive down to the beach and fill up with salt water, the water passes through the radio waves in our fuel

system, which separates the gases. The gasses are then compressed and released, as with natural gas, into an engine hardly any different than what you are driving today. Trucks and buses and aircraft and electrical power plants all will run on salt water. Of course you will have to invent this fuel system and build it yourself. The government will never allow such a thing due to the expected upheaval in your national economy from the collapse of the oil industry, and electric companies won't be able to sustain their huge work forces with the tiny amount they would be forced to charge for supplying electricity. Besides, when you take your vehicle to the DMV to register it, they will tell you it doesn't comply with motor vehicle codes and you cannot drive it legally. [But you will drive it illegally anyway, get arrested, and have it confiscated and scrapped so the state can get carbon credits for a car that produced not a speck of carbon beyond what it took to manufacture its parts, and used less than a quart of oil in 10,000 miles only for lubrication.]

In spite of its unlikelihood, let us imagine that the government miraculously is enlightened, or becomes inexplicably responsive to the needs of its people, and helps develop this new energy source, and it works, and you're back to normal—except it's beyond normal. You can see no end to the good times now, so the population of the Earth burgeons to 100,000,000,000 people. The Atlantic Coast of America and all across the Gulf Coast states and through Texas all the way to Los Angeles and up the coast to Seattle and through British Columbia and along the inland waterway to Southern Alaska becomes one continuous megalopolis, and New York stretches to Philadelphia and Pittsburgh and through Cleveland and Detroit, spreading out to take in Indianapolis, all the way to Chicago. Europe becomes but a single city. The entire Mediterranean coast is developed; China has several cities of over 100,000,000 people, etc., etc. But where are the farms? How will the tiny Earth possibly produce enough food for all those people. There won't even be space to bury the dead, let alone the garbage. At some point (you surely must be able to understand this by now) growth will be curtailed by natural impediments. But by the time that occurs, you will be in for a horrible retraction of population, economic collapse of a magnitude beyond setting off a nuclear bomb, and a relapse into barbarism that will make the Vikings seem merciful and Genghis Kahn look like a candidate for the peace prize.

You simply *must* find a way to level off—and soon.

--Mythokrates