

THE GREAT DENIAL PUNCTURING PRONATALIST MYTHS

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A remarkable feature of human population growth is the abundance of people who deny that human numbers count. Across the spectrum of public opinion, there is near unanimity that the notion of overpopulation is either a silly fantasy dreamed up by a few ecofreaks or a temporary phenomenon, affecting only a few places in the Third World, and one that will dissipate of its own accord. In the latter case, incantation of the phrase “demographic transition” is usually thought sufficient to dispel the specter.

Examples abound of the mental and moral affliction that might best be christened the Overpopulation Denial Syndrome (ODS). At the time of the first Earth Day in 1970, for example, there was considerable concern about population increase, partly due to the writings of ecologist Paul Ehrlich. Since then, the global population has shot up by 1.6 billion people (a 43 percent increase), yet on Earth Day 1990 there was virtual silence on the subject.

The 1992 Earth Summit largely ignored population problems. Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, and most mainstream environmental organizations hardly address the issue. The political parties, “green” ones included, are silent. None of the green lifestyle guides mention overpopulation, even though giving birth to children is the most significant environmental choice any couple makes.

Beyond silence or ambivalence lie the antiabortion groups, the progrowth economists, the right-wing “libertarians,” and the like, who militantly deny the problem. The right-wing economist Julian Simon,

with his view that humans are the ultimate resource, argues that in the longer run, “additional people lead to less pollution.” And there are religious baby boomers. The opposition of the Catholic Church (or, rather, powerful groupings within it) to “artificial” birth control is well known, but other religions—including the Mormons, Orthodox Zionists, Rastafarians, and Muslims—share its commitment to procreation.

Unfortunately, these folk are not alone in their delusions. The scientist and former U.S. presidential candidate Barry Commoner argues that “it is a totally spurious idea to claim that rising population anywhere in the world is responsible for the deteriorating environment” (*Utne Reader*, January 1988). Many social ecologists, ecofeminists, and liberation ecologists now focus on “reproductive rights,” arguing that a woman should have complete freedom to choose how many children she has (rather than concentrating upon, say, the provision of free contraception and sex education). The left-wing world development magazine *New Internationalist* even argues that “with population due to stabilize at merely twice the current numbers, there would appear to be little cause for concern” (October 1987, emphasis added). Third World charities like Oxfam vociferously denounce those who dare to suggest that population growth might be a factor in the rising level of human misery across Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

Many ecofeminists share this stance. The Women’s Environment Network in the United Kingdom circulated a pamphlet that discusses the “myth of overpopulation.” Some go further. Farida Akher’s *Depopulating Bangladesh* even suggests that there is a sinister plot by family planners to depopulate the country. Ynestra King similarly claims that “overpopulation is a hoax by wealthy, privileged white males” (*Utne Reader*, January 1988). *Whose Common Future?*, a special issue of the leading green journal *The Ecologist* published in 1992, implied that overpopulation was a myth promulgated by technocrats (needless to say, white and male ones).

Add to the ranks of the pronatalists the many governments

around the world that actively promote population growth. In 1988, for example, the Quebec government offered a \$500 premium for the first child, \$1,000 for the second, and \$4,500 thereafter; there was a 6 percent increase in the number of babies born in 1989. In Zimbabwe, which experienced one of the highest population growth rates in the world after independence, the government’s health minister attacked family planning as a “white colonialist plot” to limit black power.

Sometimes population growth takes the form of a demographic race, as in the case of Israel trying to squeeze in as many Jews as possible in order to keep pace with the rapidly growing population of Arabs within and around its borders. At other times, stabilized or even falling birth rates are perceived as a sign of national weakness, a fear that often takes the form of warnings about an aging population. Occasionally individuals or groups take up the campaign. In the Czech Republic, for example, there is an anonymously financed billboard campaign urging Czechs to produce more children. It depicts, erroneously, the composer Bach with twenty male children.

ODS sufferers cross the political spectrum: Marxists, social democrats, conservatives, and liberals share the same basic faith in industrial growth. They may quarrel bitterly about the best means—collective planning versus private enterprise, for example—but at their core lies the same vision of technoindustrial progress, and the same hostility to the thesis of overpopulation.

MISCONCEPTIONS

The delusions of ODS sufferers are sustained by a rich diversity of false assumptions and non sequiturs. These misconceptions about population problems pop up in everyday conversation, are recycled by commentators and analysts in the mass media, and make regular appearances in learned textbooks.

Some of the popular fallacies and half-truths underlying the syndrome are based on bad ecology and a failure to take the mathematics

of the situation seriously. Others stem from a focus on only part of the picture—birth rates but not death rates, for example. Sometimes, blind optimism leads people to treat decreases in population growth *rates* as if they were actual decreases in population *levels*. The following ten myths are pernicious in that they do contain a measure of truth. The pronatalist lobby uses these snippets of truth to conceal or deny more important truths.

Myth 1: Affluence is the answer.

The classic myth, argued by social scientists and many others, is that the population problem will solve itself as a result of economic and social changes collectively known as the “demographic transition.” This theory suggests that as people become healthier and wealthier they will parent fewer children. This, it is argued, explains the decrease in family size in Europe over the past two hundred years. Poverty begets large families, they argue. Affluence, it is said, is the best contraceptive.

No matter how popular and pervasive the theory, it is still a simplistic, one-sided view of reality, building unrealistic hopes of a demographic “happy ending.” The global environment simply could not supply the volume of resources nor assimilate the attendant pollution required to generalize the level of affluence characteristic of materially richer countries. For example, if the world’s population rises to 11 billion before stabilizing, as predicted, and if each person were to live like today’s North Americans, almost half of our twenty-four key minerals would be exhausted within thirty-five years. Environmental degradation and pollution would rise to catastrophic levels.

The same story repeats itself at the level of individual countries. Average annual income in Ethiopia today is \$120; at a 3 percent growth rate, it would take sixty years to raise it to \$700 per annum, by which time there wouldn’t be a crumb of fertile soil left in the country as a result of population pressure in the meantime. Contrary to the demographic transition theory, family planning is beginning to succeed in

poor countries like Bangladesh, even though there has been no general rise in affluence.

Furthermore, the postwar baby boom took place during an unprecedented increase in per capita consumption, when parents could afford more children. A switch to smaller families took place later—as opportunities for easily accessible education, careers, and wealth decreased. In Britain, a decrease in family size was more pronounced among working-class than among more affluent middle-class couples in recent decades.

More generally, there are no automatic links. In Sri Lanka, average per capita income is about \$400 and average family size is 2.5 children. In Libya, average per capita income is much higher—over \$3,000 per annum—yet most women have more than five children. In recent decades, France has gone from nongrowing to a growing demographic situation. In Sweden, too, there are signs of a return to larger families.

Contrary to the demographic transition theory, extremely affluent individuals often parent more children than those lower on the economic ladder. Britain’s Queen Elizabeth is apparently the richest woman in the world, but she and Prince Philip ignored the demographic theory and conceived four children. The late corporate raider Sir James Goldsmith was one of the world’s richest men . . . and father of eight children.

Finally, in the short period of two generations, improved health and income in countries such as India and Turkey has led to faster population growth. It may level off, but in the meantime, it will have quadrupled the size of these countries’ populations, and therefore quadrupled every problem they face. As Garrett Hardin and other scientists have shown, increased supply of resources tends to be converted into a larger population. In the 1950s, for example, land redistribution in Turkey (in itself a good thing) encouraged formerly landless peasants to increase significantly the size of their families. Among African Sahel pastoralists, deep-water wells drilled by donor countries in the 1950s

and 1960s prompted larger herds of cattle and goats, earlier marriage (because bride-prices were paid in animals and the required number became easier to accumulate), and, thereby, higher fertility. But disaster soon followed because the basic ecological constraints of the region had not changed.

Myth 2: Affluence is the problem.

A popular way of evading or denying the population problem is to blame the world's woes on overconsumption by the richer sections of global society. It is certainly true that the small segment of the world's population in the overdeveloped industrial states consumes a grossly large slice of the world's resources, and therefore has a disproportionate impact on the global environment and economy. However, this simply demonstrates that such countries are overpopulated and, using the metaphor of cancer, even more cancerous than less profligate nations. This reality does not alter another fact, namely, that most other people aspire to the level of affluence of that minority.

Furthermore, the not-so-affluent already are creating unsustainable impacts that most figures underestimate because official statistics like the gross national product record quantifiable data, especially monetary transactions. The not-so-affluent often function on the edges of, or outside of, the formal economy; their activities go underrecorded. The biggest cause of deforestation, for example, is the cumulative impact of small-scale nibbling at forests by settlers and peasant farmers. Most data, however, report the impacts of the timber trade, dam construction, cattle ranching projects, and other aspects of the formal economy. Often myths surround these issues, especially the exaggerated "hamburger" connection to deforestation (an observation not intended to let the burger barons off the hook).

Myth 3: Country X has a high population density but it isn't starving.

Pronatalists often point to densely populated but nonetheless affluent countries like the Netherlands or Britain, and sometimes to newly

rich localities such as Singapore, arguing that population density does not produce ruin. Yet the populations of such places can survive only by exploiting the resources of other lands, both as "wells" of raw materials and as "sinks" to dispose of their wastes and excess peoples. *If not for the new worlds of the Americas and Australia, the population of the United Kingdom would have reached 70 million by 1900.*

The density argument is in fact rather dense, overlooking the fact that the resource base drawn upon often does not coincide with the political boundaries of a given population. The British, Dutch, and other such peoples escape poverty and starvation largely because they use "ghost" acres and fisheries beyond their borders as well as draw down the natural capital (soil fertility, naturally regenerating forests, healthy fish stocks, etc.) that responsible people would leave intact for their successors. Furthermore, they have eliminated both the richness and the diversity of flora and fauna once characteristic of their lands for expanded agriculture and housing. These societies' ecological footprints, or rather bootprints, are huge, both geographically and temporally, and hugely unsustainable.

Myth 4: Malthus got it wrong, so neo-Malthusians are wrong.

The Reverend Thomas Malthus was the father of modern fears about population growth exceeding resource supply. The population-induced starvation he predicted did not happen, for he did not foresee refrigeration and other technological developments that make possible long-distance food shipments from colonized lands.

Malthus did get a number of things right, though. From his analysis of population and food resources, for example, he predicted that over the next 200 years human numbers would not grow to more than seven and a half times that of his own time, the 1800s. The actual increase was some five and a half times the population of 1800, a remarkably accurate prediction for someone widely reviled for getting his sums wrong. His real triumph, however, was to recognize that our

species is just as dependent upon Earth's biogeophysical systems as any other species, an insight many people still fail to heed.

Myth 5: There are more than enough resources to go around.

Among "progressive" folk, including major pressure groups and charities, it is an article of faith that the real problem is *misallocation* of resources. The world obviously is a very unfair place, with the comparative few hogging most of the world's resources. To an extent, the proposed solution—redistribution of land, food, and other resources—can buy vital breathing space.

Yet an equitable distribution of available resources does not make the population problem disappear. Ongoing expansion, be it in human numbers or per capita consumption, must eat up the benefits from any sharing of wealth. Studies in Guatemala, for example, show that the benefits of land redistribution would disappear within a generation simply because of population growth and increased demand for land. Even in the frequently praised Indian state of Kerala, where there has been genuine social progress and the growth rate of the state's population has been cut to 1.7 percent, the population will still double on that basis in just forty-seven years. In other words, the population-resource crunch would reappear within half a century.

Part of this myth is the notion that since resource prices haven't risen as rapidly as predicted (and even have fallen in some cases), there is no need to worry about resource availability in the future. However, the environmental crisis is not simply a shortage in the near future of specific resources, though already there are growing conflicts over water rights and certain minerals in some regions. In the short term, greater efficiency and the substitution of more abundant resources for scarcer ones are likely to keep factories running.

Prices only reflect the interaction of buyers and sellers in a given market. Timber may sell for a pittance, but its low price doesn't mean that forests are abundant and healthy. Our economic system ignores

the preferences of those without spending power, those yet to be born, and those physically unable to join the bidding (spotted owls are not known for their intervention in the timber market). This system also discounts many intangibles, things on which no price can be put: a stable climate, an intact ozone layer, water retention on forested slopes, the existence of species that cannot be eaten or otherwise directly used, human health, and so on. Economists may try to put "shadow" prices on such priceless assets, but normally the exercise is an absurdity. In short, trends in energy, food, and mineral prices are no sure guide to future prospects. Basic geology and ecology give better guidance. Furthermore, one day geologically finite and nonrenewable resources must run out or become too expensive to tap; we are now "mining" supplies of freshwater, fish, fertile soil, and forests to such an extent that we are likely to exhaust them long before we run short of coal.

A more formidable resource barrier is the depletion that would result from attempts to spread across all countries the lifestyles prevalent in affluent regions like western Europe. If the rest of Asia, for example, were to achieve the same ratio of cars to people as Japan (which is not high compared to America), the number of cars in the world would double. Yet the planet is already choking on present traffic levels. To give China the same number of computers per head as in the United States in 1993 would require some 315 million more machines. Yet even now, computerization is causing many serious ecological problems, such as water pollution around circuit board plants.

The fundamental ecological problem is not short-term scarcity but the degradation resulting from resource extraction, processing, manufacture, consumption, and disposal of goods and services. Our concern about coal, for example, should not be the size of untapped deposits but the consequences of continuing to burn them on anything like the current scale.

Earth's crust may contain large quantities of useful minerals. The crunch would come from attempting to tap them. Mineral processing

usually consumes vast amounts of energy and water while producing equally enormous amounts of pollution. The extraction and processing of currently worked deposits is already causing great damage to soil, water, wildlife, and human health around the world, and such damage will only worsen as miners attempt to exploit less-accessible and poorer-grade sources. The production of one ton of copper from an open pit site, not a deep mine, creates over 500 tons of waste. Annual world production of gold and silver produces some 900 million tons of rock waste. The annual fueling of a typical nuclear reactor with uranium requires 100,000 tons of rock to be brought to the surface, most of which is dumped as waste tailings, where 90 percent of the original radioactivity in the rock remains. In the main, the horrific damage to nature is not the product of mismanagement but the inevitable entropic by-product of energy and material throughput in the human economy.

Myth 6: If waste were eliminated, there would be adequate resources for everyone's needs.

This is an extension of myth #5. People rightly point to the colossal waste of resources on war and preparation for war, among many other follies. If the energy and raw materials squandered on such destructive activities were diverted to socially useful things such as food production and health care, the argument goes, there would be enough for everyone's needs.

Again, there is much truth in this argument yet it contains a deadly fallacy. It thoroughly muddles the ecological and thermodynamic accounts. For example, although health spending is doubtless more beneficial to the human good than arms expenditure, building ambulances clocks up the same debts in nature's accounts as building tanks. Similarly, ecological processes do not distinguish between fertilizer spread on golf courses and that used on farmland.

It might be added that the term *needs* often goes undefined. One person's luxury is another's necessity. Different people have their eyes on that same military budget as the means to resolve the health care

crisis, to fund more education, boost the arts, abolish homelessness, eradicate poverty, and so on.

Myth 7: Putting food production first can cure hunger.

A close cousin of the Redistribution Fallacy is the belief that there is more than enough food to feed everyone if only the cake were cut evenly. This argument is powerful and pervasive, with high-profile advocates such as Frances Moore Lappé. They argue that hunger could be eradicated and any danger from overpopulation dispelled if land were devoted, first and foremost, to food cultivation. Some go further and argue that much more food would be available if meat consumption were to be reduced. They correctly note that the more conversions a foodstuff undergoes (grains fed to cows, for example), the more energy is lost, en route, to the dinner table.

Again, this argument touches a responsive chord. Its influence is aided by the sight of food surpluses being burned and otherwise dumped simply to maintain market prices. Many people rightly find it obscene that good farmland is being used to satisfy the indulgences of the rich while, nearby, people starve. Countries such as Britain and the United States have neither need nor right to use "ghost acres" in the poorer countries to supply themselves with exotic fruits and vegetables, cut flowers, or downright dangerous substances like tobacco and opium.

The Food First argument is persuasive but erroneous. It wrongly takes for granted current levels of food production. High-output agriculture is fast undermining its very foundations via soil impoverishment and erosion, aquifer depletion, dependence on chemical inputs, and other unsustainable impacts with which it is inescapably linked. The needed adoption of organic and other less destructive farming methods will initially reduce yields, since fewer inputs (synthetic fertilizers, for example) must mean lower output, at least until soil fertility can be restored.

The Food First argument also ignores the likely diminishment

of future food supplies due to increased pollution and ultraviolet radiation and climatic disruptions associated with global warming. With global warming, a rise in sea levels may engulf some of the world's most productive cropland.

Current, let alone projected, increases in population make even a basic diet for everyone a difficult target. The official goal of the Chinese government is to raise annual egg consumption per person from 100 to 200. Soon there will be 1.3 billion Chinese. Assuming that a hen can lay 200 eggs a year, that goal would require 1.3 billion additional birds. Feeding them would require more than the total grain output of Australia.

Moreover, land devoted to cultivation of any crop (staple or luxury) produced conventionally or organically means fewer natural forests, wetlands, and other wildlife habitats. China's Hunan Forestry Research Institute estimates, for example, that the country's annual growth rate of 28 million additional people leads to the destruction of 1 to 1.4 million hectares of forest annually. Such habitat conversion is disastrous for biodiversity, of course; but in the long run, it is also bad news for people, since wild or comparatively unmodified ecosystems are vital to a healthy Earth, the prerequisite of all human activity—agriculture included.

Myth 8: More people means more workers and more production.

This myth has taken many forms. One manifestation was Marx's Labor Theory of value. More recently, Julian Simon has revived it as the theory of People as the Ultimate Resource. The underlying fallacy remains the same, however. The simple fact of life on Earth is that humans do not create wealth. They transform what is made available by Earth's biogeochemical systems and by external solar energy. Humankind depends on green plants for the process of photosynthesis. The wastes inevitably created by human activities are not eliminated by people but are reabsorbed by those same ecological systems. There are

geological, thermodynamic, and ecological limits to all stages of what we arrogantly call wealth creation and those limits are now being transgressed. More people only increase those transgressions.

This "extra hands" myth also confuses what might be true at an individual or household level, especially in the short term, with overall gains and losses, especially in the long term. A family of farmers might gain from an extra worker in the fields. However, this additional pair of hands might lead to increased forest clearance, the grazing of more cattle and goats, or intensified tillage, which, on balance, will lead to greater soil erosion as well as fewer resources for nonhuman species.

Myth 9: Technological innovation makes population growth irrelevant.

A pervasive fallacy is the assumption that science and technology have exempted humans from the influences and constraints to which other species are subject. Virtually all problems are soluble, it says, mostly by technological innovation. The nineteenth-century radical writer Friedrich Engels, for instance, did not hesitate to claim that the progress of science "is just as limitless and at least as rapid as that of population. . . . We are forever secure from the fear of overpopulation." This myth was more recently popularized by the American biologist and socialist Barry Commoner in his book *The Closing Circle*.

While some people see technology as salvation, others perceive it—or the forms it has taken—to be a source and an amplifier of our ecological problems. Think of technomonsters like nuclear power, ozone-depleting and cancer-causing chemicals such as CFCs and PCBs, or mundane technologies like cars and computers, and contemplate the vast disruptions to the natural world they have wrought.

Reformers will tout increased efficiency and appropriate technology but fail to recognize that all technologies have an environmental impact, so a rising population with the same per capita consumption must eventually cancel out the benefits of more resource-efficient and less-polluting technologies. The potential for technological reform is

usually grossly exaggerated. Many studies of life-cycle, cradle-to-grave impacts of different goods—virgin/recycled, “natural”/synthetic, nonrenewable/renewable—have shown that the differences are not as great as commonly supposed. Pollution control does not make pollution go away: it just changes pollutants from one form, place, or time to another, perhaps making them safer but often at the expense of increased energy consumption. Pollution is simply the by-product of energy and material conversions and processing, so ultimately it too is related to population levels. Moreover, the impacts of a growing human population are not limited to the depletion of finite resources or the generation of pollutants. Also important is general environmental degradation (soil erosion, deforestation, wetland drainage, hydrological disruption, introduction of exotic species, and so on), for which pollution filters and the like provide no cure.

Myth 10: Reproductive rights are the most basic of freedoms.

The very mention of population policy spotlights one last myth employed by pronatalists—namely, that freedom to reproduce is the most fundamental of rights. The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights assumes that the individual has an unqualified right to parent as many offspring as desired. In many countries, this has been socially underwritten, with welfare benefits not limited to, say, the first two children.

Yet rights are not abstractions, divorced from contexts and consequences. *Rights have real meaning only if the conditions in which they are exercised can be sustained.* Otherwise, they are just license to create ruin for everyone. With regard to procreation, the failure to adopt reasonable goals and policies has opened a dangerous chasm between power (to reproduce as well as to move and settle freely) and responsibility (to control family size and to avoid overcrowded areas).

The pretense to a right to reproduce without limits is an arrogant presumption. In effect, it makes unlimited claims on this and future

generations of people, on other species, and on Earth’s natural habitats and processes without their consent. Furthermore, an open-ended right to reproduce in a finite, interconnected world can only mean the reduction of other rights. Freedom in a finite world is not indivisible. In other words, there are many other liberties, most of which decrease as human numbers increase.

For instance, the democratic “weight” of each voter goes down as the number of voters in an electorate goes up. Or, to take a more fanciful example, if everyone in the United Kingdom exercised the “right” to go to the coast on the same hot summer day, each would enjoy ten centimeters of seaside. (Of course, they would not get there because of the traffic gridlock their numbers would cause.) The trade-off between population and liberty can be seen most clearly in cities, where all kinds of planning controls and other restrictions are necessary simply because so many people are packed together.

With extreme examples of population limitation measures such as China’s one-child policy, it should be remembered that however distasteful they might be, and no matter how odious the possible side effects (female infanticide, for example), the alternative—mass starvation and social breakdown—would be far worse. It should be noted as well that if China had encouraged family planning much earlier (instead of denouncing it as an imperialist trick, as happened under Mao), there would have been no need for such drastic steps.

PROGROWTH PREJUDICE

Though it is possible to refute with reason every delusion experienced by sufferers of Overpopulation Denial Syndrome, unfortunately we are arguing with deeply held beliefs, not evidence. Assertions that Earth’s life-support systems cannot sustain current (let alone projected) human population levels run counter to the core, often unspoken articles of faith of modern society. Ours is a civilization addicted to the notion that unlimited growth is both possible and desirable. As American

biologist Garrett Hardin puts it, “growth, change, development, spending, [and] rapid turnover [are] viewed as goods without limits.” Such ideas have been all-pervading in modern times. The futurist Herman Kahn, coauthor of the study *The Next Two Hundred Years* (1976) had no doubts that endless growth was possible and that, in 2176, people would be “numerous, rich and in control of the forces of nature.”

Such notions of progress and human potential have at their heart a virulent individualism. Egotistical gratification is central in contemporary culture. Symptomatic is the rhetoric about personal choice that is invoked by all kinds of individuals and groups from the gun lobby to supermarkets that defend their sale of environmentally unfriendly products on the grounds that it is a matter of consumer choice. Correspondingly, there is a pathological hostility to anything that threatens the right to do one’s own thing. No threat cuts to the quick more than the idea that individuals are subject to ecological constraints, since it affects every space of our being and none more so than reproductive preferences. The right to parent without limit—aided by technology if necessary—is deemed to be an inalienable personal right that, it is widely believed, only ecofascists could question.

A CULTURE OF DENIAL

There are other reasons why so many people refuse to countenance the ecological case, including the decay in general awareness and understanding. But perhaps the most significant reason for human blinkeredness was originally christened by Garrett Hardin as the Tragedy of the Commons (though perhaps a better name might be the Tragedy of Commonplace Decisions). People generally discount the effects of their own individual choices and actions on the common welfare: “I’m just one person. What difference does my car, computer, child, etc. make?” Most people do not actively seek to create a world overflowing with humankind. Nor is there some sinister organization, a global

Pro-People Hive, brainwashing and otherwise manipulating people into producing more offspring. Population growth is the product of myriad single, everyday actions whose result is childbirth, planned or otherwise.

Whatever the motivation, whatever the circumstances, the result is the same: more people. In the next three days, the net increase in human numbers will be enough to fill a city the size of San Francisco. Each year there’s another Mexico of mouths to feed and in nine years’ time another India. Yet few people see that the gestation of the macrocosm—overpopulation—takes place in the microcosm of individual procreation.

At this writing, there are roughly 5.9 billion people in the world. Some 7 to 8 percent of all humans ever born are alive today. More humans have been added to the total world population in the past forty years than in the previous 3 million years. In the year 2000, there will be over 1.5 billion women of childbearing age, the highest number in all history. And it is probable that such figures are underestimates.

It is no wonder that we are called the human race. There is overwhelming evidence that we must reverse these trends if the Earth is to retain its capacity to sustain both our lives and those of the thousands of other species now threatened with extinction. Population limitation policies will benefit women whose health is threatened, opportunities restricted, and rights violated by all the economic, social, and cultural pressures to produce more offspring. Similarly, unemployment, homelessness, traffic congestion, demands on education and welfare services, ethnic rivalries, urban sprawl, rural land use conflicts, resource depletion, pollution, wildlife destruction . . . all these problems and more would be less severe and more solvable if human numbers were not so great. To paraphrase Paul and Anne Ehrlich, whatever your cause, it will be a lost cause without, first, the stabilization and then reduction of human numbers.

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