

The Illusion of Control

"Anytime you look at the long-range situation you come to the conclusion that, unless we can limit the population, the other problems are eventually going to become unmanageable." David Packard

The problems are unmanageable right now, and have been for some time. Having five billion people on the planet causes problems that are unmanageable, so it is difficult to imagine anything getting better with the new arrivals coming each day. Most people are unaware of the unmanageability of their lives that is caused by population growth. Actually, we are aware of it, yet unaware of it. We pay attention to the symptoms rather than the causes, allowing problems to continue, or to become overwhelming and crippling before confronting their reality. We are living in a world in which crisis management has become a common term to describe our style of coping with problems which are capable of being ameliorated, if not actually solved. There are fundamental wrongs, such as greed, which are generally not addressed. We do violence on a direct scale using weapons of war. We do violence on an indirect scale when we do not allow people to participate in the economy which should sustain them. We participate in this violence when we maintain the system in which overpopulation is an economic tool. We do violence to other species through our inevitable encroachment on their habitat.

In the United States many mourn the passing of the lifestyle of their youth, knowing that something is amiss when the orange groves and apple orchards are turned into car lots and fast food enterprises. Poor land use is cited as the cause of this phenomenon, but as the population increases, good intentions in land use fall by the wayside. It is inevitable when the population expands that problems increase, people get busier and development wipes out old and dear lifestyles. Changes in economic systems help to ameliorate some of the problems, but no economic system can withstand the continual onslaught of population increase. Arguments of national security are folly in the face of population expansion. Borders are indefensible.

We do not seem to recognize that it is we who assign values to each thing. It was we who originally gave gold and diamonds a value far beyond their utility. We have assigned a low value to wildlife, to forests undamaged by acid rain, to pollution-free air, to leaving something for the future inhabitants. We assign a high value to convenient personal transportation, to convenient, prepackaged throwaway everything and to instant gratification. And yes, we do try to compromise a little so that we can have "quality of life" and a "quality environment" and still have a booming economy.

We humans are having to absorb powerful blows to our collective ego. We were at one time the inhabitants of a planet which was extremely important--the sun revolved around it! Copernicus, in the face of extremely intense opposition, made public the awful news that the reverse was true. We now are on the verge of having to accept another truth which threatens our lofty position--that we are not meant to be the dominant species on the planet. It is only by recognizing that we are meant to live as one species in cooperation with all others that we will find our salvation. Morally, we should never have fallen from the state of grace which was ours when we respected the power and equality of all species, not just for their utility to humans but for their innate being. We now have to free our slaves, by recognizing that it is we who are enslaved, enslaved to the untenable notion that our mission is to rule the planet.

Our global problem is that of a flawed philosophy. Though we humans have been taught to take

ourselves quite seriously, we really are not all that important. We are an interesting species, full of exceedingly clever tricks and boundless imagination for all sorts of wonder and mayhem. We manage to keep ourselves busy, and it is very good that we have something to do, but our busyness has gone far beyond the bounds of merely making a living. We are now trying to ensure that we and our descendants have all the material wealth we can use into perpetuity. The cost of this drive for material security is endless, and self-defeating. It seems we can never have enough. Our objective has always been to establish a hierarchy, with ourselves at the top. From this lofty perch that few of us achieve, we speak of stewardship of the planet. The problem, if one believes that we are meant to be stewards of the planet, is that we are not managing things well. But that is an erroneous premise. We overrate our own importance. The planet will continue to exist, with or without human beings.

We cannot seem to give up the idea that we humans should be in control. We assume that we have a great deal of control over our destiny, that we will determine the future, that we are the obvious choice in the evolutionary sweepstakes to be the planet managers. We debate the benefits of "management style," trying to determine once and for all whether "hands on" or "hands off" management style is best employed to solve our problems. When we are exceeding the threshold of sustainability of our ecological systems, our governments suggest cosmetic responses, such as contingency plans to deal with oil spills, nuclear disasters and the like. Such thinking indicates that we merely have to allow better management to take over and save the day, not that our global activities are overwhelming our environment. We must have a "measured response" to all of our problems, compromising so that no faction or interest is too offended by the action.

If we take an honest look at ourselves, we can see we are ill-suited for such a management role. There is a better way. What we should do is give up managing as much as possible, and leave the management up to natural systems. We can reduce our own numbers and turn the control of the planet back to the natural systems that kept it going long before we showed ourselves. We have never had a situation where we knew the extent of the planet and had a small human population living on it. It would be fascinating to see what it would be like.

The authors have not kept it a secret that we believe reducing the population is an absolute necessity in solving our problems. We find this to be an inescapable conclusion. We believe that the world is lurching out of control due to our unthinking human proliferation. We believe that reducing our population radically would allow for a better existence for all life on earth. We think that adopting the Chinese policy of the one-child family as a worldwide goal would be the most extraordinary example of clear thinking that humans could achieve. This policy would have to be in place for at least 180 years. Assuming a 30 year generation span and a 60 year life span, in 60 years, the population would be reduced by half, to approximately 3 billion. In 120 years the population of the world would be reduced by 75 percent, to 1.5 billion. In another 60 years it would be reduced to 750 million, or actually, due to various other mechanisms which seem to reduce the population against our wishes, closer to the figure which we feel would be optimal: 500 million people. At that point in time, it would be simple to examine whether or not this was more beneficial than the population projection as of the year 2000--6 billion people. The figure of 500 million is not carved in stone, either. Perhaps a population of one billion people would be reasonable. Perhaps we would find that we were better off at a population of 250 million. And, of course, we must acknowledge that this perfect adherence to our plan is not likely. We could, however, make great strides if we change our thinking.

The authors are sure that the benefits of a greatly reduced population would easily outweigh any detrimental effects. We can force restructure of our socio-economic systems through the mechanism

of worldwide population reduction. With fewer children, the population will stop expanding--leading to less encroachment on overburdened ecological systems. We could get out of the nature management business. For example, what can we do for the panda, the dolphin and the hordes of other disappearing species? We can nurture them until we can leave them alone. But we cannot do that with an expanding human population, or even a static population of 5 billion. At present, we must "manage nature" by dividing up the spoils, rather than living in a state of abundance. We must "farm" the forests, the oceans, the biosphere. We must be in control of the apparatus of our lives, because we cannot rely on nature to do it right. We now have too many people to allow any natural processes to go unmanaged. Because of our relentless pronatalist traditions we look at everything backwards. If we live next to volcanoes and therefore get cooked or blown up when the volcanoes explode, our scientists say "better monitoring of volcanoes is needed." If we build our houses and office buildings on seismic faults and earthquakes crumble them and us, we think that we need to build stronger structures. What is needed is enough good land far enough away from the volcanoes and faults that no one would think of living on or next to one. But we seemingly will go to any lengths to deny that overpopulation requires immediate attention.

A common rationale for inaction is the assumption that population is self limiting. Industrial nations have declining fertility rates--people are adapting, this argument says. While this declining fertility rate--which should not be confused with negative growth--is true of some of the industrial nations and may be true in the future for undeveloped countries, its worldwide impact is yet to be felt in a substantial manner. It is certainly not happening fast enough to make much difference in our global concerns. We really haven't the time to casually make decisions about our ecological crises. We face a watershed in human history. We became enamored with nuclear technology, propelled by the glamour of the atom and the impetus of overpopulation. By our active pursuit of nuclear weaponry and energy we have put ourselves in a position that is untenable. By our concentrated determination to utilize all of our spectacular intellect to control our environment, we have invited crisis in the form of greenhouse gases, acid rain, toxic waste and ozone depletion. By our expansion we have made deforestation, soil erosion and all their attendant problems inevitable. Everywhere we look, we find that a rising population using increasingly complex technology is threatening the basis of life.

The solution to our problems, according to political thinkers of the past, has been that we must change the political system. There has always been a raging controversy over which economic or political system is best, be it communism, capitalism, socialism or any number of others. This controversy begs the question. The individual no longer feels much control over such factors as politics. Someone else makes the decisions about policy dealing with energy, foreign affairs, regulations and a host of other things that leave individuals feeling powerless. We are consistently reminded that the world is complex, so complex that few people feel they can understand its workings or subsequent problems. Those who think they understand often try to reform the present systems. At times these reforms are successful, but only the surface of our problems can be affected by minor adjustments.

We have seen countless groups formed to protect the environment, to reduce taxes, to protest nuclear power and weapons, to aid the needy and to attempt to reform human behavior in almost any area that could be mentioned. Many of these efforts are laudable, but they cannot succeed without including population reduction. Though we can seemingly mask the impact of our population by the illusion that we are increasing carrying capacity through technological wizardry, we only put off the time when we must face this issue. By ignoring it, we allow nature to take its

course and then are appalled by reports of starvation, malnutrition, pollution and war.

Numerous groups advocate revolution for the problems that besiege us. Change the powers that be and introduce a new millennium is the thrust of this school of thought. History has shown us the benefit of these revolutions. In many cases the despotic regime that is deposed is supplanted by a new despotic regime, espousing its own interests and oppressing the people who disagree. **The truly revolutionary change is within the power of the individual.** If we continue to boost the population of humans, the world will remain the same or, much more likely, get worse. If we as individuals reduce the population by non-violent means, the powers that be will have to fall in line. It would be the essential influence for the radical change in our political and economic structures that we are continually seeking.

Pollution is continuing day by day. The stories revealed by the news media leave little doubt about the damage we are doing to the environment in which we must live and make a living. If we continue to reduce the ability of our environment to provide for us, we must also accept a limited lifestyle--- if we are allowed that much good fortune. Already some economists are predicting that our affluence in the United States has peaked and our children will have to live with less. The dream of seeing the children have a better life in terms of economic status is fading in the industrialized nations, and has never been realized in many others. The United States has enjoyed the highest standard of living for the greatest number of people in history. That is admirable only as long as the costs to the rest of the world's population are not considered. For many countries on the earth the possibility of their people living with less is nil. They are already living on subsistence rations or starving. Each extra child brought into being--over one per couple--will aggravate this situation.

The present trend of economic thought holds that more jobs can be created and more people can be employed, but globally we are creating people much faster than we are creating jobs. As we create more humans we create more competition for resources, which ensures that wars and continual conflict go on day by day. Passive cultures are destroyed by genocide or absorbed by less violent means, so that the land they occupy may be developed to profit the more dominant culture. "Room to live" was one of the phrases that Adolf Hitler used to justify the last global war, and it is used as a compelling argument .to begin conflict today by leaders who seek a following. If we do not reduce the population by non-violent means, it should not be surprising that the aggravations of population pressures will continue to break out in deadly wars.

Last, and to some, least is the fact that pollution and demands for land destroy both the lives of other species and the natural beauty of the planet. In the past, the idea developed that as human beings we are worth more than other species, and this incredible arrogance has led to destruction of animal habitats so that more human beings can usurp the land. Animal welfare advocates should be aware of this issue, but little is heard from animal lovers on the population factor as a contributor to the extinction of species. It is much less popular to stress population control as a means of saving animal habitat than to bemoan the fact that it is disappearing.

There are solutions to the problems that we face, but they require an educational effort which will radically change our ideas about our human busyness on the planet. It will require an awareness that we do not master nature. Less "sophisticated" societies on the earth are continually aware of this. Those of us in the modern industrial societies are aware of it in the face of natural disaster, such as earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes and raging forest fires. We have been indoctrinated all our lives, however, that we can overcome any obstacles to our wants and needs. That we can feed the world, cure cancer, live in space, have world peace and still live an increasingly acquisitive manner is not just doubtful---it is impossible. Allowing the environment to deteriorate ensures futility in our

efforts to cure disease, end hunger and promote peace. It creates disease, hunger and war. And it eventually eliminates our "lifestyle" that we hold so dear.

In the past few decades we have been experiencing the ultimate "consciousness-raising" experience. If we were to have nuclear war we would all be equal for a short time. There would be no benefit to being rich, powerful, young, old, athletic, ethnic, intellectually talented, religious, radical, reactionary or any of the other means which we use to separate ourselves from our fellow human beings. In the same vein, if we continue to destroy our environmental support systems, we will become equal for a short time and then our species and, quite possibly, most other forms of life will be gone from Earth. The planet will continue to exist but life as we know it will cease. It is a depressing prediction, if one is attached to the idea of our human importance. It becomes more depressing depending on how much one has to lose. To those of you who are raising children, it would negate everything that you are doing to maintain their welfare. All the financial planning for their future, the effort to educate them from the time they are born, the care to see that they don't run in front of cars or get carried off by strangers---it all means nothing if we do not act. We have found the enemy common to all of us on Earth---it is us. To battle the common enemy requires cooperation, commitment and effort of all people.

Some people will obviously feel it is "unfair" that they cannot have all the children that they had planned, as people have done before them throughout history. Some people will feel that we are trying to remove those measures better left up to God. But even though people tend to take it personally when there is a suggestion that they should stop reproducing indiscriminately, the effects of indiscriminate reproduction are totally impersonal. The measures that we favor are mild in comparison with the harsh future we face if we continue on in our desultory fashion. As far as leaving it all up to God is concerned, we have been interfering quite some time with measures which were originally left up to nature, God, or what have you. We have made medical advances which seem to point to the goal of immortality. We have broken the bonds of Earth with our aircraft. We have tamed the wild land into submission. Our interference is assured when we carpet the planet with more people than it can maintain in harmony with other species.

So the answer to our most serious problems must be rapid and comprehensive population reduction. If we reduce the population, humanity has a chance of living in a future which could be very pleasant. If we do not reduce the population, we condemn ourselves to a subsistence-level existence or, possibly, outright extinction. We really have only two choices. We can either control the human population and engender a respect for nature or we can continue to let the population run amok and proceed with business as usual. If we choose the former we will:

** Stop subsidizing indiscriminate reproduction.

** Make the one-child family a worldwide goal.

** Educate to encourage understanding of benefits of population reduction and the necessity for it, changing our traditions accordingly.

** Fully fund and support United Nations environmental and population control efforts.

** Assist private environmental and population control efforts.

** Make conservation the test of all endeavor.

If we wish to continue the experiment to fill up every corner of the earth with human beings pursuing their important hobbies, we will face a bleak future. Increased competition for dwindling resources does not usually bring out the best in people. It is likely that military spending would be used to assist the rich in maintaining their status, and widen the gulf between the rich and the poor even further. The great majority of people will not be able to have much more than those currently living in the most poverty-stricken countries. Increased violence is likely. It is happening now in many parts of the world. The majority will face the hardships of rising costs, crippled economies, shortages of goods and food, environmental poisoning, chronic malnutrition and ill health. Those who could afford to have luxuries would still find a way to get them. But over time, the difference between rich and poor would disappear, because the global changes wrought by overpopulation and mass technology would mean that life itself would not be viable. Personal wealth cannot buy resources that are not available.

In writing this book, the authors have indicated our preference for the future we would like to see. But the truth is, we really don't have as great a stake in the future as most people do. We have no children, and therefore have not offered anyone the promise of the future by bringing them into this world. We have lived in the heyday of the most materialistically endowed society in history. We have been fortunate enough to share some of the wealth. In comparison to many of the inhabitants of Earth, we have been rich beyond their wildest dreams, though in comparison to many of our countrymen we have lived modestly. When most of the calamities we could avoid today will be at their peak, we will be gone. So, if after reading this book, you still wish to have several children, or remain silent when others announce their plans for more than one child, it is your life--and theirs, of course. But please have the decency to tell the children the truth. Tell them that you knew things might be extremely bad for them, but you just could not help yourself. Tell them that you did not really care much about their future, only your own present. Tell them that you never intended to fulfill the contract of love and caring that is implicit in bringing a child into life. Don't tell them that their birth was an act of love, because they will not be able to believe that once they are old enough to exercise reason.

In keeping with this policy of honesty, we can drop some of our facades of social concern. If we choose to continue our reproductive patterns as we have in the past, then we might as well stop concerning ourselves with side battles, like trying to stamp out racism and sexism. We can forget about world peace. Overpopulation creates instability which works against peace. Those who have control of the resources are not likely to become more gracious about changing the distribution patterns as the competition becomes more fierce. Though avarice is not caused by population growth, continuous population growth supplies ready fuel for those who fear that more equal distribution of resources will rob them of their opportunity to have it all. A quick scan of human history shows us that those who have the least power and few means to defend themselves often become the fodder for demagogues who make them the scapegoat for economic troubles. So there is no sense in pretending that we are working toward a kinder, gentler nation or world. We are not.

We can forget about eliminating world hunger. We discuss the ramifications of world hunger while millions of people starve each year, and we try to "solve" this problem, but we do not recognize the underlying premise that renders our efforts null and void over the long term. Whether it is a distribution problem complicated by conflict is not the point, ultimately. At some point in time, we have to face the fact that more people use more resources, and even if our goals were truly

humanitarian rather than profit-oriented, any gains are absorbed by a growing population. **Feeding eight billion people may be possible, and may be necessary, at the present rate of human population growth, but what is the point?** Ecological damage is still inevitable even if we were to immediately change our policies to include environmentally sound practices. If the point to human life is to see how many people can be properly sustained by our closed ecological system, we have already failed miserably.

Most of us are aware that living in overcrowded conditions is not a healthful state for human beings. It is obvious that humans can live tolerably in overcrowded settings when nutrition and sanitation are at a high level. The effect of overcrowding in settings where nutrition and sanitation are inadequate is equally obvious--disease and death. It does not require studies with rats to assess the effect of overcrowding on humans. Our large cities are gargantuan in comparison to the largest cities prior to the industrial age, which seldom supported more than 100,000 people. People seldom choose to live in overcrowded conditions unless it is the only possibility for them to participate in the economic system. Our overcrowded cities of the world are traffic-snarled, polluted, unnatural environments which threaten the sanity of their inhabitants every day. It is impossible to measure the erosion of mental health which is created by the stress levels in these urban environments--though highway shootings in traffic-plagued areas might indicate a problem to any observer. Once again, in fairness, we must point out that some people would miss the large cities due to the stimulation provided by the diversity they offer, but even those people are not overjoyed with the negative aspects that are a part of overcrowded situations.

Many like to think that the problem is not people, but their machines. We just have too much of a good thing, technologically. They blame the automobile, suggesting that rapid transit would solve the problem if only people would use it. But overcrowded mass transit systems are not terribly pleasant either, and people tend to prefer the isolation and convenience of their cars. And if there are a lot of people, there will be a lot of cars. A large part of our national wealth in the United States has stemmed from the sale of a great number of automobiles and a great number of products which support the use of automobiles. In turn, this wealth has supported growing numbers of people, and requires increasing, and staggeringly rapid, use of resources. The problem is not merely one of better management of our technology. The problem is incremental and cumulative. A few thousand people driving various types of vehicles would not add much to greenhouse gases or ozone depletion. The driving habits of a billion people add up to environmental apocalypse.

But we cannot support our large population without sophisticated technology. There is nothing wrong with most technology, per se, but when we have millions of copies of each technological marvel, we begin to see technology as evil. But in most cases the evil is in the proliferation, not the technology. Expanding population requires that we must increase the complexity of our technology to augment the carrying capacity of the planet. No matter how ill-conceived the application of that technology may be, we must employ it as soon as possible because doing the impossible immediately is necessary if we continue to expand. The evidence indicates that we have passed the zenith of our ability to stretch the limits of growth. And yes, we could turn our backs on our present technology and return to agrarian societies, but the genie is out of the bottle and it is unlikely that we will return entirely to the past. It is also difficult to tell whether or not we would be able to feed the numbers of people that we have without technological assistance. Even if it were possible to feed all of the people, could we do this without requiring the habitat of wildlife and causing other environmental damage? It should not be our purpose in life to see how many humans can be fed at the expense of all other life.

Even our current "environmental" crusades are powerless without accompanying population reduction. If we decide to replace materials that are causing disposal difficulties, such as plastics, we run into the problem of increments. Plastics can be replaced in many instances with metals, but billions of people require great amounts of metals, in that case, so an all-out effort must be made to mine more metals. Eventually, the environmental problems of acquiring and disposing of the metals must be confronted--or the environmental problems of acquiring and disposing of the paper or whatever resource is used in replacement.

Our attachment to environmental and humanitarian causes will have to be abandoned if we refuse to change our reproductive patterns. By acting as we do reproductively, we make absurd any battle to preserve the environment. We can leave no place untouched. There is no sense in putting any obstacles in the path of those who would cut down the old growth forests, drill oil wells on the ocean shelves, poach elephants, drive other species to extinction, slash and burn the tropics, create acid rain, manufacture large gas-guzzling cars and do any number of things that we who are "environmentally aware" find ignorant and threatening. If we could just stop "those people," it would solve the problem. But it wouldn't. It will only postpone the inevitable reckoning. We require land, and so any commitment to saving wilderness is absurd over the long term. Around the world over the last 400 years vast tracts of forests have disappeared before the onslaught of our human growth. The idea that we can save our wilderness, and expand our population at the same time is laughable. Given present conditions, trying to save wilderness is economically "irresponsible." In a similar fashion we "discovered" fire, and we have been burning ever since. Now our burning is causing problems which were unheard of until about a century ago, but we cannot just put out the fire. People require a living, even if that living will destroy the future, and our huge population burns huge amounts of materials. Putting out the fires that we have created would be economically "irresponsible."

Likewise, we can forget about humanitarian concerns, such as maintaining indigenous cultures, or our love for animals, which drives us to save the habitats of the more cuddly species. They'll have to go. If we continue to increase the population then we will be forced to use the oil, the coal, the wood products, the food, the land until each is gone, or until the by-products of our use create an environmental situation which we cannot tolerate. Perhaps, in the competition for resources we will kill enough of our fellow humans that we can still continue, or environmental disasters will reduce our population to the point where some remnant of our species will be able to continue. That sounds very harsh, but we seem to be willing to let that happen, rather than curtailing our growth. We should stop complaining about our population-related difficulties if we refuse to make changes.

This is the "alarmist" view, but if we reject planned population reduction there are no realistic alternatives. There is nothing alarmist about making a realistic assessment of what you have, and how you are using it. Humans use resources, in competition with other species, and we are, without a doubt, the winners of the competition by a technical knockout. The history of resource allocation shows that we are not going to put any concerns about wildlife above our insatiable requirements for human "progress". We will develop the resources because we must have them. We can quibble about the means by which we proceed with this development, but if we will not reduce our population there is no doubt that we will roll over the land like bulldozers, leaving varying degrees of destruction in our wake. Conservationists and developers will clash, and the developers will scream that environmentalists are trying to put them out of business, that stringent requirements such as one septic tank per 5 acres are "irresponsible" and will bring growth, and therefore economic well-being, to a halt. But even the most ardent developers will be hard put to maintain theories

which give economic expansion the nobility of a national crusade in the face of continual environmental decline. And the slow growth movements, which are working to keep their communities somewhat the same as they were before the boom, will be hard pressed to put the brakes on development without accompanying population reduction measures.

So, if we are unwilling to decrease our population and conserve in all ways possible for the future, at least we should be straightforward about it. We should stop all the hyperbole that says "The children are the future" because it is misleading, and means nothing. We should tell our children that we are not interested in their future or our own. We should stop all this sentimental drivel about ending world hunger and promoting world peace that is brought up consistently during the holiday seasons when we are feeling goodwill toward others. Let us admit that for our own greed we are willing to sacrifice our children's future. Let us admit that world peace, starvation and malnutrition are low on our list of priorities, far behind collecting all the material goods and having all the children that we wish to have. To quote Kingsley Davis, writing in 1972:

"The truth is that there is no mystery about population control. There is no special 'technique' required because the technological part is simple. If people want to control population, it can be done with knowledge already available. As with other social problems, the solution is easy as long as no one pays attention to what must be given up. For instance, a nation seeking ZPG (zero population growth) could shut off immigration and permit each couple a maximum of one child. Accidental pregnancies beyond the limit would be interrupted by abortion. If more than one child were born to a couple, the mother and father would be sterilized and the child given to a sterile couple. But anyone enticed into making such a suggestion risks being ostracized as a political or moral leper, a danger to society. He is accused of wanting to take people's freedom away from them and institute a Draconian dictatorship over private lives. Obviously, then, reproductive freedom still takes priority over population control. This makes the solution of the population problem impossible because, by definition, population control and reproductive freedom are incompatible.

Why are people so concerned with freedom in connection with reproduction? The reason why reproductive freedom is still regarded as 'a basic human right' regardless of circumstances is, of course, that it accords with traditional sentiments and established institutions. Thus the population problem is not a technological problem. It is not something the definition of which is universally agreed upon, and the solution to which awaits only the discovery of an effective means. It is not like yellow fever or wheat rust. It is a social problem in the sense that it involves a conflict of wants. People want families and children. If they did not want families and children it would be technologically easy to satisfy them. But they do want families and children. That being the case, they are not whole hearted about population control. They do not want runaway population growth either, but they want to avoid it painlessly. They want a solution that leaves them their freedom to have five children if they wish. In short, they want a miracle " (90)

It is not a medical problem or a technological problem or even a financial problem. It is a social problem. We do not want the responsibility of change. A woman in a documentary on Hunger in America says that she has six children and how will they be fed? We expect that the government will intercede in our behalf, and in some fashion it will, but it is absurd to assume that it will always be able to solve our problems. As we continue to grow in number we defy the ability of any political system to grant our needs, wants or demands. **We are expanding beyond the resource base, a dangerous thing for any organism to do.** Furthermore, we are diminishing the resource base by

the requirements of our expansion. So we can't blame society and government for our ills. Though they may be culpable in the short term, in the long term we are causing our own grief. We the people are having the children, providing the consumers and laborers, assuring that life cannot continue on as it has.

There are those who feel that the course of the future is already set, that we are probably doomed and that they might as well have the family that they desire along the way. After all, if only a few people try to reduce the population it will do little good. So they are adamant about having more than one child. To those who have this philosophy, we can only say that it depends on whether or not you wish to participate in ensuring the crises of the future. Are you willing to put your children at risk? It certainly seems incompatible with the idea of loving children to have more of them than can possibly be supported. In our present predicament, the odds are best for one child per couple.

As Kingsley Davis said "in short, they want a miracle" and a miracle would be necessary to extricate ourselves from the predicament in which we find ourselves---a miracle of good sense. We have been unwilling to listen to reason. Thomas Malthus was correct in his assessment of uncontrolled population growth. It has continually brought poverty and misery. Most people do believe the planet has too many people, but either they do not give it much thought or they feel no personal responsibility. It is time that we understand how population expansion drives this runaway train we are on. We have not chosen to listen to those voices, ranging from economists to ecologists, who keep impolitely bringing up the limits of growth in an attempt to interrupt our dream of constant prosperity, individual freedom and peace throughout the world. Most voices are not saying "reduce population for everyone's sake." They are endorsing pro-birth policies, behavior and traditions because they are institutionalized in our lives. But if you are against population reduction, you are for war, hunger, environmental destruction, extinction of species and brutality toward your fellow human beings. Nothing will change, no matter how many people put nails in trees to stop logging, kill harmless spotted owls, take hostages or blow up people with car bombs. The revolution is not in violent overthrow any longer. No leader is going to come forth to save us, and no economic or political system can change our course. We must radically change our way of thinking. Population reduction is the only revolutionary act which can change the world. We can boycott the present system in a simple, yet effective way. We can withhold our children.

Though there is much controversy and many schools of thought when it comes to population issues, it is easy to imagine the answers to these questions if our population continues to increase as it does at present:

- Will resources be used more conservatively?
- Will aggression between nations lessen?
- Will social systems function efficiently?
- Will crime decrease or increase?
- Will world hunger lessen or be eliminated in a world of six billion as it has not in a world of five billion?
- Will the overall standard of living become better?
- Will we control and/or eliminate environmental damage?
- Will animal habitats increase in area so that fewer animals will become extinct?
- Will equality be more or less likely?
- Will the future be better for the children of the present generation? As good? Worse?

The miracle will only happen if people recognize that a reduced population combined with stringent conservation measures would allow a plenitude of resources, and decide to make that a goal. Then such other goals as world peace, an end to famine and a restored environment would have at least a chance. We can make progress in social concerns, in instituting sound economic practices, in achieving individual freedom, in decreasing conflict and in maintaining a natural environment for all species. It will not happen through madly depleting resources, however. It will happen if and when we recognize our place in the natural scheme of things and take responsibility for our behavior