

## Introduction

Nearly 200 years have transpired since the economist Thomas A. Malthus' famous "Essay on the Principle of Population" was first presented to a skeptical British reading public. The world population at that time was somewhat more than 1 billion people. Malthus argued that since the human population increased geometrically (rapidly) and the means of production of food increased arithmetically (slowly), the destiny of the human race was to be one of misery and poverty--too many people, too little food. It has been little more than two decades since Paul Ehrlich's book "The Population Bomb" made its appearance on the New York Times bestseller list. The world population at that time was about 3.5 billion people. Dr. Ehrlich pointed out that millions upon millions of human beings--primarily children--were dying annually of starvation or its effects--too many people, too little food. Most of the starvation was occurring in the undeveloped countries which harbor the majority of the world's people. At the present time, only two decades after Ehrlich's publication, the world population stands at roughly 5 billion people. Despite all of our well-meaning efforts, starvation is still killing large numbers of people in the Third World. Although starvation is not as yet a major problem in the developed countries, the spectre of worldwide pollution as a by-product of technology has emerged as a major threat.

These problems are so pervasive that the majority accepts them as a necessary evil. Attempts are being made to feed the starving millions and to salvage the environment, but only the symptoms are treated; the problem remains the same. With so obvious a problem and so obvious a solution, why has no meaningful progress been made? Quite simply, most people refuse to accept overpopulation as the root cause of many of the problems facing us today. Industry is blamed for pollution; government is blamed for allowing pollution to occur and not forcing industry to clean it up. Overpopulation is seen as a problem foreign to the United States and other modern industrial nations who are experiencing lower fertility rates than less developed nations. In one sense, both statements are true. Industry does pollute and government agencies do not effectively monitor waste disposal. Starvation painfully makes visible the population problems of countries such as India and Ethiopia. Because we do not have a highly visible problem with hunger, it would seem that we in the developed countries have no population problem. Most of us are well fed, at the moment. However, the demands of an ever-increasing population make effective pollution control impossible and preclude the possibility of solving the problem of world hunger.

Most pollution results from large-scale demand for products (which requires large-scale manufacture, use and discard). Starvation results from large-scale demand for food in excess of its availability. Both are inevitable consequences of an ever-expanding population base. Without being a mathematical wizard it is not difficult to understand that finite resources cannot support an infinite population. Although there are many complex reasons for starvation including inadequate distribution systems, unstable political situations, etc., it is still true that finite resources will not support a continually expanding population and that famine will have a greater effect in a larger population. No amount of rhetoric or symptomatic treatment of the problem will change this fact. Although we humans distinguish

ourselves from other members of the animal kingdom as a unique species, we are governed by the same natural laws. We are all therefore subject to the same forces of population control: famine, disease and aggression or any combination of these forces.

These forces are negative in the sense that they are generally undesirable from the human standpoint, yet they have been the predominant forces acting to limit the human population increase. It seems more positive to point out that our present health technologies and scientific research are eradicating or ameliorating the impact of diseases that once were high on the list of population control factors. This admirable race to remove disease from the face of the earth is, unfortunately, not matched by a commitment to control population worldwide. Such a commitment is made even more crucial by our ability to save and lengthen human life.

Considering the lack of progress in dealing with world pollution and hunger, it is reasonable to assume a profound absence of urgency for solutions. This absence of urgency is most likely related to one of the following attitudes:

\*\* Indifference

--- *There is no point in thinking about it because I can't do anything about it*

--- The problem is not affecting me personally today.

--- I have problems of my own.

--- If I ignore it, somebody will find a solution.

--- I don't care what happens in the future because I'll be dead.

\*\* Predestiny

--- The Armageddon mentality or the idea that our self-destruction is inevitable.

--- Such things are the will of God; or God will provide.

\*\* Faith in science

--- Expressed by the belief that technological solutions can and will be found.

\*\* Ignorance

--- What I don't know won't hurt me.

All of these attitudes detract from the urgency of our situation. As long as population continues to expand, the general quality of life will further deteriorate. There is no doubt that people's behavior (reproductive and otherwise) will change due to circumstances. But rather than wait complacently for change to overtake and overhaul us, we could actively promote solutions.

We think that the problems that face the United States and the world have solutions. A better life for human beings and all species on this planet is possible and is something to which anyone can and should contribute their efforts. The people have the power to change the

course of history, each of us. Although we feel powerless over what is happening in the world today, we actually hold the key to the changes that will make it a better world in the future.

Cooperation is an ideal that can be achieved. People are a product of their social and natural environment, and one way to change behavior is to change environment. If this sounds like starry-eyed idealism, look at the present situation on the planet. Optimism does not abound for our future as a species, or even for the future of any species. But we can influence the future for the better if we take responsibility for our actions. We must stop blaming others for world conditions that are appalling. The time is long past due to begin an assessment of the consequences of a continually growing population. It is time to act upon the evidence.