

Overpopulation: A Deadly Disease?

by Aaron D. Wolf



Is overpopulation a genuine problem? The United Nations thinks it is, and so does Stephen Hawking, who is known to be a very smart person. In December, he listed (in the U.K. newspaper the *Guardian*) “climate change, food production, overpopulation, the decimation of other species, epidemic disease, [and] acidification of the oceans” as proof that “we are at the most dangerous moment in the development of humanity.”

Hollywood agrees with this assessment, and apparently we are buying it.

Our American fascination with space travel has moved beyond beating the Soviets and the *speciesist* (yes, that’s a word now) boast of *Star Trek* to “boldly go where no [hu]man has gone before.” Christmas 2016 gave us *Passengers*, about a ship loaded down with colonizers of a faraway planet circling a distant star. Whatever the trajectory of the story arc of each of these, they all assume that we movie consumers will take one thing for granted: Life on earth will be unsustainable at some time in the future, and it is up to wise men (*Homo sapiens*) to figure out how to relocate elsewhere, or our species, the pinnacle of earthly evolution, will die.

It goes a step further. Bill Gates, who is known to be a smart and very rich person, joins a host of environmentalists and activists in insisting that overpopulation is the mother of all problems, the driver of every global crisis on Hawking’s list, the catalyst that drives the imaginations of earthlings into the final frontier. Solve that problem, and you begin to solve all others.

Too many for what?

Overpopulation means, quite simply, “too many people.” Too many people for what? Earth’s supply of natural resources, we might assume, and sometimes that’s what we’re actually talking about. What fool would deny that there are starving people in the world today? Or folks who lack potable water? Are there not homeless people right here in the United States? Doesn’t the increase in greenhouse-gas emissions grow when there are more people doing things that increase greenhouse-gas emissions? And given the fact that natural resources — food, water, land — are finite, doesn’t it follow that, if we had fewer people on Planet Earth, there would be more resources to go around?

If overpopulation is a problem, then the solution is to reduce the populace. ... Kill people, or prevent them from being born in the first place.



Let’s pause for a second. The answers to those questions are complex. On one hand, there are upwards of 7.4 billion people alive today and more than enough natural resources to accommodate all of us and many more. No one is debating that. Even *National Geographic* admits that “Standing shoulder-to-shoulder, the entire world’s population could fit within the 500 square miles ... of Los Angeles.” Of course we know that people cannot live standing shoulder to shoulder in Los Angeles, but such an observation puts into perspective the size of the earth, the scale of human populations in light of available land and the relative scarcity of our natural resources in relation to both. But scarcity is attributable to many things — tyrannical regimes, unpredictable natural disasters, war, agricultural practices, stupidity and one thing you won’t see on Hawking’s list: sin.

(Re)framing the question

Christians are obliged to begin every inquiry into these matters by confessing that God “made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place” (*ACTS 17:26*). That reality causes us to challenge the framing of the entire question, particularly when it comes to the word *overpopulation*. If overpopulation is the problem, then the solution is to reduce the populace. I’m no scientist, but I think I know what that means: Kill people, or prevent them from being born in the first place.

And looky there! That’s exactly what Hollywood, Bill Gates, Stephen Hawking, the United Nations, and most other overpopulation hand-wringers want to do. (Note: I’m writing this on the 44th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*.) Specifically, these folks are interested in spreading contraceptives and abortifacients the world over. Governments that do not allow for, or cannot afford these creation-defying technologies, as C.S. Lewis described them in *The Abolition of Man*, are on the U.N.’s naughty list.

America is not on the naughty list, because Planned Parenthood is funded by our tax dollars,

at least for now. The U.S. Census Bureau recently reported that the U.S. population is now at a growth rate of 0.7%, which *Bloomberg News* described in a piece called “Make America Mate Again” as “the lowest rate of growth since the Great Depression years of 1936 and 1937.” The trend is worse in Western Europe, where in many countries the rate of population growth has been below replacement levels for decades. Thus, overall, the growth rate of the world’s population is actually *decreasing*.

Gifts from God

Christians, who by faith believe that “clothing and shoes, meat and drink, house and homestead, wife and children, fields, cattle, and all [our] goods” are gifts from God are called to be good stewards of these gifts and to be thankful for them. We are also called to be charitable toward our neighbor — to “help him to improve and protect his property and business,” rather than steal from him. Indeed, instead of coveting what belongs to our neighbor, “We should fear and love God that we may not estrange, force, or entice away our neighbor’s wife, servants, or cattle, but urge them to stay and [diligently] do their duty.”

Overpopulation means, quite simply, “too many people.” Too many people for what?

Oddly enough, that duty does not involve eugenics. Moses records for us in Genesis that the Lord God gave man and wife the gift of fertility, to reflect the image of the Creator through procreation. Then He charged them with the duty to “multiply.” That same Lord God reaffirmed His blessing and command after the flood to our father Noah.

Those who wish to capture our imaginations with apocalyptic warnings about overpopulation have a very different sense of the meaning of *duty*. Their doomsday scenario does not involve the Lord Christ’s judgment of all mankind according to His own commands, nor faith in a Heavenly Father who “did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all” (ROM. 8:32). Instead, it is a cover for the worldwide spread of their own virus of sexual libertinism to the human populace, a deadly disease that like a cancer eats away at the fear and love of God. **LW**

Aaron D. Wolf (editor@aarondwolf.com) is the managing editor of *Chronicles: A Magazine of American Culture*.

