

Common initial ideas improve chance of solution to overpopulation

Goldwin Emerson gandjemerson@rogers.com

The London Free Press, June 6, 2020

We share our world with over seven billion people according to The United Nations Economics and Social Affairs Department. Unfortunately, one-seventh of the total population is malnourished, as indicated by reliable sources including Doctors Without Borders. Approximately one billion people are at risk of dying because they lack adequate nourishment to resist diseases and ailments that may lead to their demise. One billion is a difficult number to comprehend, but it may help if we think of 2500 cities approximately the size of London, Ontario. No ethically-minded citizen can be happy with this situation of undernourishment. Are there solutions to this moral dilemma?

One approach may be to implement equitable food distribution. It's possible that our planet can presently produce enough food for everyone provided our leaders are willing to support equal distribution of food among those in need.

Another solution is increased production. Using the best seeds, the best irrigation and fertilizers, and selecting favourable climate and soil locations, more food can be produced. One difficulty with this approach is that it requires farming in large units of production. Already, huge agricultural operations exist which monopolize food-production. Small farming operations are unable to vie with huge conglomerates. Home-grown seeds are unable to compete with the production of genetically altered seeds, vegetables, and meat or the expensive machinery required to sustain larger food production.

Difficulties of producing adequate food are exacerbated by the fact that world population, according to demographers, will continue to increase to approximately nine billion by the year 2050. Agronomists are not certain that maximum food production will be adequate, even when all factors are optimally favourable. Even if nine billion people could be fed, we will not have solved the problem. Most experts on food production believe there are finite limits to the number of people who can be fed, whether the limit is nine billion or up to 20 billion. Even with the best intentions, there will likely come a time when the planet's capacity to feed everyone will be surpassed by continued population growth.

So we come to yet another attempted solution. Can we decrease the growth of our world population or at least hold it to the present seven billion? Wars, disease, coronavirus and starvation limit the rate of population growth. The unfortunate moral effects of war, diseases and starvation are usually agreed upon as horrible solutions. So let's look closer at birth control.

There are ethical concerns involved with the use of chemical and surgical means of sterilization including condoms and birth control pills. A significant number of Christians, as well as those of some other religions, are troubled by the use of birth control pills, which they believe are unnatural means of terminating life in its earliest stages. For them, life is a God-given gift which they hold sacred, and hence the use of birth control pills is regarded by many as unethical. Abstinence and the use of the rhythm method are seen as more natural and morally acceptable. The number of people world-wide who are convinced that the rhythm method is appropriate is probably too small, though significant, to affect the overall problem of over-population.

Ironically, those who believe in the use of birth control pills and condoms think it is unethical **not** to use these methods. Since they are effective in reducing and controlling world population and moreover are convenient, they will likely have increasingly more users. Thus the solutions to the population crisis face humanity with differing approaches.

For convenience, let's call non-users of birth control pills the "X" position and users of birth control pills the "Y" position. Can these two simplified positions be brought closer together? Let's start with ideas on which both X and Y may already agree:

- * Problems of malnutrition and starvation are likely to increase in the future.
- * Abortions are one of the worst forms of birth control.
- * Venereal diseases such as HIV can be deadly.
- * Baby girls are of equal value to baby boys.
- * Adoptions are acceptable ways of couples creating families.
- * Human beings have the capacity to solve human-made problems.

Readers may know of further areas of agreement between X and Y on matters of over population. The more ideas on which we initially agree, the better the chances of solving future population problems.